If there’s anything Taehyung dislikes more than writing pop songs, it’s writing songs for Jungkook: rising idol, CF magnet, and one of the biggest douchebags Taehyung’s ever met.

But hey, it pays the bills.
Chapter Summary

that's a real hot album homie
i wonder who wrote it
— kyle

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Why was he here?

“He” being Taehyung, man who had about five hundred other things he’d rather be doing than sitting here and enduring this. And “here” being BigCube Entertainment’s nicest conference room, sitting in a swivel chair across from Seoul’s most promising candidate for Most Punchable Face of the year.

It’s simple. Because it pays well.

“It” of course referring to Taehyung’s job of penning four-chord, vaguely-EDM inspired pop songs with catchy hooks, chantable choruses, and most importantly—

“It’s gotta be a banger,” Jungkook smirks at him, his timberlands propped up on the table in the definition of disrespect. “I want girls to—”

“Alrighty then,” Taehyung internally cringes at what the next possible verb could be and cuts Jungkook’s show of bravado off before he can say another word. He sweeps up his stuff into his bag, cueing his exit, “I think I’ve got the picture. I’m running a little short on time, so I’ve got to get going.”

“Great,” Jungkook gets up, hands jammed in his designer varsity jacket. “When can I expect a draft by?”

“Sometime next week.”

“Nice.”

And like that, without so much as a thanks, Jungkook and his accompanying entourage file out of the door are gone. Jin shoots Taehyung a look of apology before he slips out the door, and Taehyung takes it as a cue to sigh with relief and head back to his studio, tucking his pen behind his ear as he shuffles down the hall.

If Taehyung had taken risks and followed his dreams, he’d maybe be on Music Bank, singing Adele-esque power ballads in an artistic dress shirt and tie. But for many reasons, he hadn’t. So here he was instead, sitting pretty at a stable 9-5 job desk job producing tangible products and earning a respectable salary.
Well sort of. He’s a music producer. Which, was risky by it’s own rights. But he had already front-loaded the difficult part of 1) getting into an reputable entertainment company and of 2) having a knack of churning out Top 10 hits on the regular. So here he was, a bonafide producer for BigCube Entertainment, slouched in his gaming chair and leafing at his notes from the brainstorm session an hour ago.

Jungkook, or his team at least, wanted a dance title track for his third album. Fresh into his second year of going solo after the disbandment of his boyband Beyond the Direction, he needed a solidifying statement piece distancing himself from his adolescent image and establishing himself as a young-adult idol act. Simple enough. The topic: love. The genre: house. The vibe: cool. The chorus: simple, clean, catchy. Special notes: danceable, stream-friendly, and “it’s gotta include a sick hook” (Jungkook had insisted).

Without interruptions, with proper communication, and with a more compliable client, Taehyung could knock this out in an hour. And ordinarily he would, digging into his box of beats and finessing a song from fragments in the blink of an eye. With some iteration and a little back and forth, Taehyung could have the artist in and out of the studio and be raking in royalties as the song sits pretty on top of the charts within the same week.

But that was the catch.

Working with Jungkook was a bit like death by a thousand paper cuts. Or at least that was what Taehyung’s experience of working with the rising tweeny-bopping star had been for his sophomore album.

To get a feel for his pain, imagine this:

Getting a request for a Calvin-Harris esque EDM track for a title. Writing a draft of a song, having Jungkook listen to all of two seconds of it before he approves it. Getting a call the next day from his poor manager, Seokjin, at some ungodly hour in the morning insisting that, per Jungkook’s orders, the track needs to be done in a week instead of the two months initially planned. Frantically sending him follow ups as you carefully rush to layer details onto the song, pestering your best friend to sing the guides on short notice because his range is identical (and also who’s damn good at singing by has some sort of built up inferiority complex about it), sweating it out on 30 minutes of sleep and energy drinks until you basically have a final track. Showing up at the meeting right on time, and your lovely client sauntering in maybe an hour later without a single apology, only for the piece of shit himself to listen to the beginning, on his phone’s speakers mind you, not studio-quality headphones, and immediately say:

“I wanted a ballad.”

“What?”

“A ballad, this is a dance track. I wanted a fucking ballad.”

“No, no, you did not. Here’s the email, ‘Calvin-Harris styled track.’ What about Calvin Harris screams ballad to you?”

“Well, fine. Now I want a ballad instead.”

Client work was just so fun.

But he’s a professional, so he grits his teeth and cranks the machine up again, this time a little more feverishly because he’s just lost a week and he still needs to churn out the second title and the ten B-
sides within a tightening timeframe. This time, he pulls out a generic piano beat that’s been sitting collecting dust in his file of half-baked ideas, and his bestie finds out Jungkook didn’t even get to the part with his voice and so he straight up refuses to sing this time. And so he has to pull out his own shaky and underdeveloped vocals instead and sing almost an octave out of his range. It sounds shitty, but he’s only got about a day left and no options and so he sighs to no one about how this isn’t his best work as he wraps it up and fire it off in an email. He refuses to waste any more his blood, sweat, and tears with an in-person meeting this time around, and so he instead watches a grainy video-call version of Jungkook review it as he’s lounging with his feet propped up in a bathrobe in some five-star hotel in Osaka.

At least this time, Jungkook uses a proper speaker and gets past the first minutes before he opens his goddamn mouth, and if there’s any expression on his face, it’s flattened by the quality of the video which looks like it has so few pixels that it plausibly could have been taken by an actual potato. Of course any relief Taehyung feels is immediately quashed by the next few words that will come out of his mouth:

“What sang the guide?” Jungkook says through a mouthful of instant ramen.

“Does it matter?” Taehyung can feel his face start to heat up with impending shame and embarrassment. Why was Jungkook asking about the guides? He usually never cares.

“No. But I’d like to know.”

“It’s not important,” Taehyung just knows his face is a full-blown red at this point and just prays Jungkook doesn’t notice. “Are there any adjustments I can make the the song?”

Jungkook notices. “Was it you?”

“Me for what?” Taehyung was completely ready for Jungkook to drop it.

“Did you sing the guide?”

“Yes,” Taehyung pinches his nose bridge, closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. Supposedly that does wonders for keeping tempers in check.

Jungkook was silent for a moment, music still playing in the background. And for a moment Taehyung thinks he’s let it go, and maybe Jungkook wasn’t as trying as he gave him credit for.

Then Jungkook ruins it, “You need to work on your stability.”

Taehyung, who’s never had a strong grasp on his emotional control is almost about to tear Jungkook a new one when Jimin, aforementioned bestie, stumbled into his studio.

“Wanna get lunch?” Jimin whacks the back of Taehyung’s chair.

“Oh, yes, please,” Taehyung jumps out of his chair and envelops Jimin in a hug. He whispers, maybe a little louder than necessary, “Get me the fuck out of here.”

“Um,” Jimin awkwardly pats Taehyung on the back. “You okay?”

“No wait,” Jungkook protests, sliding his feet off the desk and scrambling to sit up straight. “We’re not done.”

“Oh shoot, you’re working?” Jimin craners his neck in the direction of Taehyung’s screen. “Is that Jungkook?”
“Yeah,” Jungkook waves. “Hey.”

“What’s up,” Jimin nods.

“Just going over my next single.”

“Oh,” Jimin points at Taehyung. “Can I borrow him for like an hour for lunch? I’ve only got that much time until I need to coach Astro X.”

“Um,” Jungkook bites his lip and runs his hand through his hair. “No.”

“Why?”

“Hyung, I’m super busy—”

“You liar,” Jimin snorts. “Jin told me you have a free day today.”

“I’m spending it working—”

“You’re a chronic liar, you’ve been playing Overwatch.”

“Wait seriously?” Taehyung finally untangles himself from Jimin and glares at Jungkook. “Bye, I’m actually leaving. We can start again at one.”

“Um, Taehyung, wait—” Jungkook’s brows are furrowed as he leans in towards the camera the moment Taehyung ends the call.

“Fuck him,” Taehyung rolls his eyes as he slips on his jacket. “He made me cancel coffee with Hoseok for this shit. Insisted this was the only time he could do it.”

“Did he know?”

“Yeah, I told him that was my only constraint. Then he proceeds to insist on that timeframe.”

“What an ass.”

“You can say that again.”

“What an ass.”

“I didn’t mean that literally. But he was so cute when he was a trainee. I remember when he used to follow us around, and was super shy and stuff,” Taehyung complains with a huff. “What happened?”

“Celebrity disease,” Jimin snorts. “Get’s even the best. Probably doesn’t help that since debut anything he’s touched has been at least Platinum.”

“True,” Taehyung rolls his eyes. “Still.”

“Honestly though,” Jimin snickers as they amble out into the hall, “I feel like he’s only like this to you.”

“Seriously? He doesn’t give you this much trouble?!”

“Nope,” Jimin shakes his head. “He shows up, listens, and works hard. I mean he’s slightly cocky, but nothing like what he puts you through.”
“What’s his fucking problem with me?”

Jimin shrugs, “If I could tell you I already would have.”

“I’m never working with him again after this.”

“Both you and I know that’s a lie.”

“I’m serious.”

“The money is too good.”

“...okay, that’s true.”

Jimin snickers, “I know you too well.”

“Still,” Taehyung raises a middle finger into the air. “Fuck him.”

Chapter End Notes

ayy lmao

title from ayokay's Too Young
Burn Break Crash

Chapter Summary

yeah, i wanna burn, break, crash, explode
every time you look at me, i know
— aanysa
burn break crash

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s a bit of a joke to himself that for the title and chorus of every single one of Jungkook’s tracks, Taehyung will find inspiration from a random word he finds on the back of a bathroom product bottle. It’s a bit of petty revenge he enacts to make himself feel better for the shit Jungkook pulls him through, and he gets a kick out of it every time he looks over Jungkook’s previous tracklist (which is not often, mind you).

To most people, Jungkook’s album looked like this:

Against the Clock (BigCubeE)

1. Needed
2. Try This
3. Make it Last
4. Layer on Layers
5. Vital
6. Disclaimer
7. Even After
8. Complete You

To Taehyung, it a was litany of his product labels. Specifically, it looked like:

Against the Clock (BigCubeE)

1. Needed [Hand Moisturizer]
2. Try This [Hair Mask]
3. Make it Last [Conditioner]
4. Layer on Layers [Face Wash]
5. Vital [Cleanser]
6. Disclaimer [Contact Solution]
7. Even After [Dry Shampoo]
8. Complete You [Shaving Cream]

For this cycle’s title song, the word is “Remember,” as in “Remember, beautiful hair, beautiful you,”
a tagline Taehyung finds at 2AM while brushing his teeth, which he tweaks it a bit to become “Remember Me,” a timely trophouse thumper with the vaguest lyrics possible about a failing love.

It’s not really Taehyung’s best work, but Jimin, at least, loves it.

“Fuck,” Jimin pleads, ripping off his headphones. “Give me the guides, I can’t wait another month for this.”

“Sure,” Taehyung laughs. “But it’s got my shitty voice over it. I’d wait for the studio version”

Jimin smacks him on the arm, “Stop cutting yourself down.”

As confident as it makes Taehyung feel, Jimin’s also one of the most basic people Taehyung knows. And so he runs it past someone with an actual taste in music: Namjoon, also known as RM, producer and possibly the source of biggest mancrush Taehyung’s ever harbored in his life.

“It’s good,” Namjoon says, bopping his head along with the beat. “I can see it being a summer hit. Especially with the machine behind Jungkook.”

“Really?” Taehyung’s got enough stars in his eyes to form a galaxy.

“Yeah, ooo,” Namjoon whistles as the beat drops. “That was sick. The pause right before the bass kicks in, especially.”

“Oh,” Taehyung’s chest puffs out slightly in pride. “You noticed?”

“Yeah, nice work. When are you showing him?”

Taehyung checks his watch, “In fifteen minutes.”

“Good luck.”

“I’ll need it,” Taehyung rolls his eyes. “He usually has a million and one changes he wants to make, and usually we end up with something really similar to what we started with.”

“Creative work in a nutshell,” Namjoon shrugs, “Perils of a subjective industry.”

“He’s definitely something else though, have you worked with him before?”

Namjoon shakes his head, “Nope.”

“Seriously?” Taehyung blinks in disbelief. “You’re like the face of the company.”

“Yeah,” Namjoon shrugs. “Funny story actually. Upper management really wanted my name on it, and so I was actually supposed to work on this album. But then someone his team filed a request to have you on it instead.”

“Wait what?”

“Yeah, I don’t know. Honestly, it worked out because I promised Hoseok I’d help produce his mixtape.”

“This is the first time I’m hearing this. Do you know who?”

“Nope,” Namjoon shakes his head. “Didn’t come up. But I’d ask Jin, he’d probably know.”
Hey, apparently Namjoon was supposed to work on the album?

Who's album

My boi's

Who?

Jungkook

who the fuck else lol

Rude

Who told you that?

Namjoon

Oh

Yeah
Interesting.

Unfortunately can’t confirm or deny that.

So who made the call?

Don’t know.

You do know.

lol

Yeah.

I do.

Tellll meee

Can’t lol, confidential.

Was it a team decision?

Can’t tell you that.

So it wasn’t.

Who was it?

Can’t tell you that.

Why are you like this
Wow.

Figure it out yourself.

Was it you?

Oh god no.

You’re so mean to me.

Who could it be? The answer may surprise you.

Hmm.

Jungkook?

Hhaha

Ofc not.

That’d be hilarious.

*read at 3:14AM*

It’s not often that Taehyung finds himself down in the dance practice rooms. It’s more of a choice than anything. Besides gaining Jimin as a best friend, there weren’t any remotely good memories made in these mirrored dungeons. Even though they had gone through several dramatic remodels since Taehyung had last been figuratively locked down in them, the sound of squeaking sneakers, the color of the hardwood oak floors, and the undercurrent of sweaty odor still gave Taehyung more than mild PTSD.
For a hot minute, almost a decade ago now, Taehyung as a tween with big dreams had tried his hand at the idol lifestyle. Actually, that was an exaggeration. He had been a trainee, and for a multitude of reasons it hadn’t worked out. But that’s really a story for another day, and for benefits including general freedom and the ability to eat things other than chicken breast at any given point in the year, Taehyung had little to no regrets about switching career paths. Except maybe his wasted childhood, but again, you know, story for another day.

He finds Jungkook in the second to last practice room, and lets himself in as he slips through the door. Jungkook’s so engrossed in practice that doesn’t notice Taehyung as he slips through the door. To Taehyung’s surprise, Jungkook’s dancing to one of his B-sides, a borderline indie thing Taehyung had churned out at an early morning jam session with Yoongi that he had been totally taken aback that Jungkook had liked. It was Taehyung’s favorite piece of work on the album, and he had been a little a more than a little upset that it had slipped off the charts first out of the entire album. Infact, Taehyung was surprised Jungkook even had a routine to it at all, given the lack of hype around it.

He takes a seat on the ground, in a dark corner just out of Jungkook’s line of vision and just watches him dance. He’s graceful and strong at the right moments, and moves in a way that just screams a lifetime of practice. Taehyung would never admit it, but Jungkook dancing is really lowkey one of Taehyung’s favorite things to watch out there in the industry right now, and if Taehyung had not known Jungkook on a personal level, he’d probably have been a fan.

For as much as Taehyung dislikes Jungkook as a person, he gets the appeal. It’s mesmerizing to watch him perform. And it makes perfect sense why he was selected by the boy band gods as the breakout member of the group, the Justin Timberlake, if you will.

Looks, on-camera personality, dancing, singing, pretty much in that order. That was the recipe for a solo act. And Jungkook had it all, which is precisely why he was the darling of agency.

Well that, and his insane marketing pull. His brand was pretty much heroin for marketers.

Despite only selling a little over 100,000 albums last cycle, Jungkook consistently ranks in the top five for brand marketing value regardless if he’s actively promoting or not. It’s an odd phenomenon that compounds on itself. As more CF deals piled in and reinforced Jungkook’s informal title of idol CF king, other companies launched themselves on the bandwagon and so on until it ended up at this point, where Jungkook probably makes more on a 30-second clip of himself pulling a ridiculous o face after a bite of fried chicken than he does on his entire tour.

Jimin knows exactly what commercial Taehyung’s talking about, because at a party last month that Taehyung browned out at, apparently he had let one of his deepest darkest secrets slip out.

“Wow, Jimin, just wow,” he had pointed at the TV, eyes glazed and plastered to the screen. “The new CF model is really fucking hot.”

Jimin had apparently taken one look at the TV and blinked, “That’s Jungkook.”

Taehyung had squinted. “Do you know him? Can you give me his number? Can we go buy that chicken? Holy fuck, he’s like my ideal type.”

Someone had apparently captured the whole exchange on video, eliminating any plausible deniability, and Jimin had never let it down since.

Sue him. He thought Jungkook’s face was ridiculously attractive. Why was that funny? He had eyes, and it didn’t stop him from detesting his personality.
Okay, okay, if their roles had been reversed, he’d totally be beating it into the ground too.

It was all probably funnier for everyone not named Taehyung because when Jungkook was a trainee, he was notoriously baby-faced. And he had been pulled onto Beyond the Direction indisputably because of it, because they needed a token cute member and Jungkook had the other minimum skills required for the job. It actually had helped that he was almost crippling shy at the time. He had a tendency of hiding behind the other members during interviews, or answering questions in the least number of words he could manage. But he had always had incredible stage presence, exploding with confidence whether he was dancing or singing and something about the duality of his personality drove his fans crazy.

Of course that was all before he had turned 19, when the stars aligned, he switched makeup artists and the gods of puberty had laid out a red carpet for him. Suddenly Jungkook wasn’t the cute one but the hot one, and that’s when Taehyung people started taking notice.

It coincidently also happened to be around when fuckboy Jungkook started showing up, and Taehyung suspected it was byproduct of his rapid rise in popularity. For whatever reason, Jimin and Hoseok remained unconvinced for a reason they refused to let Taehyung in on, and Taehyung had long since given up trying to get it out of them.

Jungkook suddenly notices him in the corner, eyes flicking towards him in the mirror. It takes him a little more than a second to realize it’s Taehyung, and it amuses Taehyung how quickly his expression flips from neutral to shock. He missteps to the beat and almost trips over his shoes. Taehyung holds back the laughter, professionalism is unexpectedly his forte, and gets up, dusting off the seat of his pants.

“How’d you get in?” Jungkook whips around, almost defensively, eyes wide as he quickly dabs his face with his shirt and fixes his hair. He’s breathing hard, sweat shining on his neck as he interrogates, “How long have you been here? No wait, what are you doing here?”

“Calm the fuck down, someone left the door open and I’m mostly done with the track,” Taehyung sighs as he heads towards the door.

“Okay?” Jungkook looks confused.

“Did you want to listen?” Taehyung stares apathetically at him.

“Sure?”

Taehyung opens the door and takes a step out before he realizes Jungkook is not following him. He sticks his head back through the door, “Aren’t you coming?”

“Where are you going?”

“To my studio. I’m refusing to let you listen to the track on your shitty speakers, there are some details you need to hear on industry-grade equipment.”

Some expression flits across Jungkook’s face, but the punchable one settles back into its rightful place before Taehyung can figure out what it was.

“My speakers are not shitty.”

“You saying it doesn’t make it true,” Taehyung shrugs and pauses. “You coming?”

“Yeah,” Jungkook takes a towel and hangs it over his neck. “Wait, can I shower first?”
“Sure. though I’m not going to wait down here in that case, you can just come up whenever,” then Taehyung turns around and ambles down the hall.

Maybe it would be a constructive session that wouldn’t end with Taehyung never wanting to be in the same room as Jungkook again.

Haha, who is he kidding. He's going to hate himself.

Chapter End Notes

mic drop though :’)}
Some

Chapter Summary

starting from today,
i’m gonna have something with you
— bolbbalgan4

some(____)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When you hate someone, it starts being about the little things.

Like normally, Taehyung probably wouldn’t think twice about someone not holding the door for him, but because it’s Jungkook who does it, suddenly it’s suddenly the biggest offense committed against him. Possibly ever.

Of course he doesn’t say anything and just stews about it instead as he tosses his bag on his couch and taps the trackpad on his laptop to wake it up. If Taehyung’s ever learned anything from group project work from his university education, it’s that you don’t want to piss off someone you actually want to get something from.

Thanks college, for broadening his horizons.

In this case, that “something” that he wanted from Jungkook was signing off on Remember Me. And if Taehyung was lucky and Jungkook was feeling cooperative, they could possibly knock out the recording as well.

Surprisingly, it wasn’t a pipe dream goal. It’s happened before, a few times, just never on a title track.

Taehyung takes a deep breath he opens the file and immediately starts spitting disclaimers, “So it’s not complete, there's some things that are off, also the bridge needs fixing, and there’s an underlying drum beat that I haven’t—”

“Just go already?” Jungkook flicks a hand in his direction, head slumped on the other, upmost boredom written all over his face. “I’ve got other things to do.”

Taehyung was nervous. After Jungkook’s previous comment on his vocal stability, Taehyung had been working on his voice more than he’d like to admit. Somehow, through a lot of begging and rain-checked coffees, he had convinced their best in-house vocal coach to give him special after-hours lessons. And so, unbeknownst to Jungkook, playing the song meant more to Taehyung than just getting the song approved, he wanted Jungkook to have nothing negative to say about his vocals.

So it’s not that he wants validation from Jungkook, okay? This is just a benchmark for improvement. Whatever that means.
He hits play and immediately looks down at the floor and picks at the hem of his pants. Jungkook’s silent for the duration the whole song, swivel chair creaking slightly as he swings back and forth in it.

Then immediately after it’s over, he speaks.

“Yeah,” Jungkook shrugs. “It works.”

“That’s it?” Taehyung snipes before he can contain himself.

“Yeah?” Jungkook looks up as he picks his nails. “I mean it’s like a standard summer hit. The beat is nice, I guess. Oh and your vocals got a lot better.”

“That wasn’t me—” Taehyung feels his face heat up as he impulsively lies.

“Yeah. It was,” Jungkook rolls his eyes at him. “Even though you pitched it, I can tell by your pronunciation. Were you taking lessons? You improved pretty fast.”

“I, yeah. I had to beg Luna for lessons. I owe her about 10 coffee dates now.”

“Luna? Really?” Jungkook snorts as he fidgets with his shorts. “You could have just asked me, you know.”

It’s a crazy statement for a couple of reasons including their current nemesis status and, well, the fact that Jungkook had vastly more valuable things to do, and his eyes seem to widen with realization at the inconsistency of his personality the second Taehyung chokes out, “Um.”

“So, um, recording? Let’s record?” Jungkook stands up abruptly. “I can do that now. I have some time.”

“Oh, yeah,” Taehyung points to the door. “We can use that sound booth. How long do you need to practice?”

“Give me half an hour,” and Jungkook disappears into the room.

+++ 

Jungkook seems distracted by something as he sings, and so maybe it’s that swirled with a lack of discipline that causes him to sound like he was reading off something mundane, like a grocery list.

“Stop, stop, stop,” Taehyung waves his hand for what’s probably the 14th time. “You’re singing monotone and with zero expression, it’s putting me to sleep. Come on,” Taehyung snaps his fingers. “Focus Jungkook.”

“I’m fucking trying,” Jungkook grabs a fistfull of his hair in frustration.
“Just like,” Taehyung drums his fingers near his MIDI. “Sing it like you would have to your girlfriend. Or boyfriend. Or whatever, significant other, this is a judgement free zone. Or more like a judgement apathy zone.”

“Oh, uh,” Jungkook freezes. “I don’t—”

“Don’t tell me you’ve never gone out with someone,” Taehyung deadpans. “I won’t believe you. It’s an animal kingdom out there.”

“No, it’s just, it’s uhm, been a while,” Jungkook squirms.

“I’m not the public, you don’t have to lie. Or even tell me, I really can’t work up a fuck to give.”

“I’m telling the truth,” Jungkook insists. “I mean I go on dates, and like I, like—you know—but—”

“Excellent,” Taehyung flips through the lyric sheet. “That works. This is all generic bullshit, and I can say this as the lyricist. I mean, come on: You’re my everything. I want you to stay, here with me. When it’s over, I want you to remember me, remember me, and so on, ten more times. There’s some situation you’ve gotta be able to apply this to.”

“I mean those lyrics sound completely meaningless, full offense intended,” Jungkook glares. “It’s hard to sing it with any sort of sincere feeling.”

“That’s the point, it’s a pop track,” Taehyung rolls his eyes. “It’s non-specific enough where anyone can relate to it if they want to. So do the same.”

“The same?”

“Relate to it,” Taehyung sighs, “You’ve got to be interested in someone.”

Jungkook’s blush is an interesting thing to watch.

“Oh?” Taehyung raises a brow. “Now just imagine you’re singing to that person, and channel those emotions while you sing. Ignore the words for the most part, just capture the feeling.”

“I’m trying.”

“Try harder? I think you’re just getting nervous,” Taehyung sighs. “Relax a bit, and let’s start from the top.”

“Okay,” Jungkook gets up and stretches. “Give me a moment.”

After a few deep breaths, he tries again and, well, nails it. And then he’s out of the studio as soon as Taehyung gives the cue, bolting out the door with his backpack without so much as a goodbye.

As Taehyung’s sound mixing the track later, adjusting beats and adding the final touches, inadvertently listening to the way Jungkook’s voice cascades with melancholy over runs again and again, he can’t help but wonder who was able to draw that much emotion out of his voice. It was natural curiosity, right, like what kind of person did it take to soften a douchebag’s heart?

In any case, clearly, Jungkook cherished that individual a lot.
The next few weeks are a flurry of activity, as everyone associated with the release rushes to complete the album.

Jimin's tearing out his hair over the choreography, he lets Taehyung know over a cup of coffee.

"Normally, working with Jungkook is great—"

"I would like to raise an objection," Taehyung interjects.

"—on the dance side," Jimin qualifies. "But this time, upper management really wants me to incorporate new trainees. Did you know they're releasing a new group in October?"

"News to me, but not surprised."

"Same, anyway they're under-qualified to dance at a debut stage. They're completely sloppy and get this, they get wiped out after Remember Me. That's the first song! And even worse, they're cocky, like being associated with BigCube makes them celebrities already, it's so, the disrespect, it's so, ugh—"

Jungkook, by some grace of the industry gods, does not give Taehyung that much trouble this time around. And he wonders if it's because Jungkook's stretched a little thin this time. One of the major music programs agreed to give him a debut special stage, and so instead of the two song load he would normally have had to prepare, he's had to prepare for five.

Surprisingly, Jungkook finds time for his album. And maybe it's a requirement, because the marketing team recommended he try to sell himself as a producer-dol this time around. Normally that meant idols would write lyrics for a verse or two, send it in remotely, and Taehyung would tweak them to fit the song. So it catches Taehyung by surprise when he hears a knock on his door and finds Jungkook warily peering around the doorframe.

"Hey," he says, fidgeting, the bags under his eyes apparent even under dim lighting. "Can I come in?"

"Why?"

"I wanna help."

"With what?"

"Song composing. I want to learn."

Taehyung blinks, "Uh, sure. Pull up a chair. Maybe just watch me today? It's a little complicated, and honestly watching is faster than me verbally telling you how."

And Jungkook diligently complies. He comes back the next day, and the next, until it becomes a routine. He usually only shows up for about an hour at a time, Taehyung’s not really sure what he
gets out of it, but Jungkook keeps out of his hair and so he finds he doesn’t mind it. He’s got larger things to worry about, anyway.

They talk sometimes, about random things, mostly because Taehyung’s got a condition where he can’t stay quiet for more than a few minutes. And he finds that Jungkook’s actually somewhat fun to converse with because he’s got interesting opinions and they share more than a few common interests. Somewhere along the way the hate Taehyung used to feel any time he saw Jungkook’s face simmers down to a cordial tolerance. And while he’d never say he’d ever want to explicitly spend time with Jungkook, he does find himself looking forward to their daily meetups.

Anybody is pretty much better than nobody. It gets lonely in the studio, you know.

At some point, he sees Jungkook itching to play with the MIDI and digs out an old one and points him to an old computer. It takes more than a week, and in what feels like an applied case of the infinite monkey theorem, Jungkook manages to produce an underlying drumline for the title track that’s of passing quality. It’s pretty close to the standard kick-snare, and while it’s not terribly creative, it works. And honestly, for a first effort, Taehyung’s impressed. He includes it and lets the marketing team know, fans, after all, love singer-songwriters and this was enough to qualify.

The only real surprise that happens is Taehyung coming back from the bathroom to find Jungkook listening to a personal project piece he forgot he had left on his old computer. It was titled *Cozy Conversations*, and it was an experimental Folk piece he had written after dreaming of a beat. Although at the time he had worked on it pretty extensively back when he was gearing up for a potential solo run himself, he had never shown anyone it (honestly he had forgotten it existed), and the embarrassment hits him almost immediately.

“Where did you find that?” Taehyung reaches over Jungkook’s shoulder and hits the pause button.

“On the desktop,” Jungkook knocks Taehyung’s hand away and presses play again. “Did you write this?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung presses pause again. “But it’s shitty, so I wouldn’t listen to it.”

“Stop, I want to hear,” Jungkook hits play again and Taehyung’s left to awkwardly squirm as Jungkook laces his fingers together and bobs his head to the music.

“So?” Taehyung asks, nervously, hand resting on the back of Jungkook’s chair.

“It’s good, I like this. Could I,” Jungkook pauses. “Use this on my album?”

“What?”

“You heard me,” Jungkook taps his fingers against the desk. “I could sing over it, make it into a duet thing. I actually like this song a lot.”

“Oh, um, yeah,” Taehyung scratches his ear and tries to stop his expression from revealing that this exchange actually meant quite a bit to him. His face heats up anyway, and he uses his hand to try to cover it, “Clear it with Jin, but I’m fine with it.”

Jin approves, and Jungkook records over it and adds a few of his own lyrics. It sounds great when Taehyung hears it, their voices match surprisingly well. And Taehyung has high hopes when he sends it off to the producer board.

They like it, a lot actually, and approve of it almost instantly. But they also point out that the tone doesn’t match the rest of the album, a singular folk song on a dance-heavy tracklist. And so it’s
decided that it’ll be added as a hidden track, a gift for fans for purchasing the album.

They take it a step further and suggest taking Taehyung’s vocals off of the track. A few reasons fly behind it, including the emphasis should be on Jungkook and Taehyung’s vocal color was unorthodox in a not-so-public-friendly way. And honestly, Taehyung’s so used to getting run over and put down by decision-making boards he doesn’t even think twice when he stammers out his verbal agreement.

Someone else, later down the road intervenes, and the final version includes Taehyung’s voice, although pitched up quite a bit, to his surprise.

He finds out from Jin that it was Jungkook who had put his foot down. Maybe, Taehyung begins to think, he wasn’t such a bad guy after all.

+++ 

Remember Me, the song and the album, drops with much fanfare. The fans go crazy over it, and the single enters the charts at number one and stays there for a personal best of two weeks. It beats out a full house with some pretty solid acts with strong fandoms to boot, and that’s when Taehyung knows he’s truly made a public-friendly hit. It’s great, he’s bombarded with congratulatory texts, but Taehyung honestly feels a little bit empty about it because he’s pretty sure the weight of Jungkook’s name was doing most of the hard carrying.

At this point, Jungkook’s at the level where he can probably get a Top 40 hit with a five second soundbite where he just farts in a can. (Speaking of which, Taehyung just had a new idea for Jungkook’s next single: Breezin’.)

The music critics are divided on it. The ones that give actual critiques hate it more or less (5/10, it’s a snooze of a song), but they’re more inclined to unorthodox indie and hip hop anyway and Taehyung’s never seen a pop tune get higher than a 7. The EDM blogs are conflicted and oscillate between calling it a well-executed track (9/10) and criticizing the fact that tropical house was a summer genre pop copout and did nothing to move house music forward (7.5/10). The pop magazines rave about it (11/10, Jungkook’s best song yet), but the writers tended to be brown nosers looking to appeal to the most popular opinion of the minute and Taehyung’s never seen a song get lower than an 8.5.

The consensus? If you love generic EDM and/or Jungkook, you’re probably going to love this song. If you don’t, it’s not changing any hearts or minds.

Taehyung’s at peace with it. At the end of the day, the royalties are amazing, and Taehyung puts himself on the waitlist for the newest exclusive electric sports car and treats everyone in the agency, from the CEO to the sound guys to the cleaning staff, to a congratulatory dinner where he books out an entire Michelin star restaurant for the night.
The vibe is great, everyone knows the company is on the rise, and Taehyung probably gets a few hundred pats on the back. He gets commended by upper management, roughly thirty or so forgettable trainees introduce themselves to him, Namjoon keeps refilling his drinks, Yoongi pushes his face into a cake, Jin videocalls in, Hoseok pops champagne a little too close to his face, and Jimin boasts about him to anyone willing to listen.

Jungkook does not show up, but it’s a show night and so Taehyung’s hardly surprised. What does surprise him is the apology text Jungkook sends his way.

---

Fuckboy 6

Hey
Sorry
Can’t make it to the thing
MuBank appearance tonight
Thanks for the invite though

It’s chill
Come thru next time

read 7:36PM

---

Jimin reads the exchange over his shoulder, and when Taehyung asks what time MuBank’s on that night, he tells him 11pm, an amused grin decorating his face.

+++ 

“He really fixes up for the cameras well,” Jimin comments after Taehyung flips to the channel with MuBank to catch Jungkook’s debut stage. “From punchable fuckboy to idol heartthrob in less than three hours. It’s amazing what stylists and image coaches can do.”

They’re back at Taehyung’s apartment, a glitzy flat in the heart of Gangnam, lounging on his
custom-made couch as they watch the show. They catch Jungkook right when he’s in the middle of a side-stage interview, shiny and bright, reciting pre-planned answers awkwardly as Relevant Teen Actress of the Year (RTAOTY) giggles next to him. Taehyung can tell that her words are scripted, but her interest in Jungkook is not, and for some reason the giggles, the glances, the blush, it all kind of bothers him.

The fact that it bothers him, well, also kind of bothers him.

“Boo,” Taehyung calls to the screen, cupping a hand around his mouth as he drapes himself over the couch’s armrest and snaps a unflattering pic of Jungkook with SNOW. He mutters, as he captions it (REMEMBRE MEH) and sends it to everyone relevant on his list. “Save yourself, he’s an asshole.”

“Why did you send something to me? I’m sitting right here,” Jimin shakes his head at him.

“Just open it.”

Jimin does and chokes on his laugh, “Oh this is beautiful, I’m sending it to Jin.”

“So Jungkook,” RTAOTY giggles again, beautifully manicured fingers covering her lips. She’s really pretty, and Taehyung’s sure Jungkook notices,

“I heard you helped produce parts of your album.”

Jungkook nods and gives the camera his best classic closed-lip grin, “I did.”

Both Jimin and Taehyung erupt in laughter at that.

“Okay, okay,” Taehyung wheezes. “He did actually contribute a beat here and there, got to give him some credit.”

“Oh he did? Here I was thinking that just meant adding like a line to a song.”

“Well, he did that too.” Taehyung snickers into his curled fist as Jungkook performs his “skill,” a shitty impression of some old-timey actor that really only required a specific face contortion and lowering your voice a few octaves. Honestly, though, if they weren’t self-proclaimed nemsises, he probably would have found it cute.

“Wow that was amazing,” RTAOTY claps, a little more enthusiastically than necessary. God fucking damn, why was this bothering Taehyung so much, “So what’s your favorite song off the album?”

“I’m putting my money on Remember Me,” Taehyung points at the screen and yawns. “His team really wants to cement it in the weekly Top 5.”

“The followup’s fair game too,” Jimin looks up from his phone. “Isn’t he performing Look Here today too?”

“Oh yeah. It’s slipping out of the streaming Top 20. I could see it happening.”

“It’s the hidden track, Cozy Conversations.”

Taehyung’s jaw drops.

“It was written by TAE, and really it’s so good it should have been the title. But, it didn’t match the themes of the rest of the album, so I decided to keep it as a little treat for fans. It’s a slower song than what I usually put out, but I hope people enjoy it as much as I have.”
“Can you sing a bit for us?”

“Dang,” Jimin whistles and Jungkook belts a few lines. “Well that came out of left field. And he gave you a shoutout.”

“There’s a reasonable explanation,” Taehyung immediately realizes. “They want to sell more albums.”

“Oooh. Amazing!” The MC claps delicately and beams at Jungkook. “Thanks Jungkook, and good luck with your stage. We’ll be back after the commercials.”

Jimin mutters into his phone, “Compelling theory, I’m not sure that’s it.”

“How can you tell?”

“Jin’s freaking out right now, apparently Jungkook went rouge,” Jimin points at his phone. “He was supposed to say Remember Me, you were right with the whole Top 5 push.”

“Really?” Taehyung stares at the TV in confusion. “What is he trying to pull?”

“Who knows,” Jimin shrugs before snicker. “Hey it’s that chicken ad you’re obsessed with.”

“Park fucking Jimin I will end you.”

Jungkook’s stage for Remember Me is flawless, especially the chorus. It sends shivers down Taehyung’s spine, the way he looks at the camera and croons. It’s weird, but Taehyung’s really into it and if Jimin notices, he thankfully doesn’t give Taehyung shit for it.

And oddly, Taehyung can’t help by feel a bit of envy for the person Jungkook was singing it for.

+++  

Fuckboy 6

Lmao you were watching?
My Mubank interview

Wait how did you know

Jin showed me that pic
You took of my face
During my interview
Lol

Oh shit really
Uhhh
I’m super sorry
Please don’t kill me
Lol
:(

What? It’s fucking funny

Oh
LOL
Sorry not sorry then?

What’s your SNOW?

Huh?

I want to add you

Oh, uh, I mean sure
But all I send are bad food pics
Or shitty pictures of ppl’s faces
I’m down

Uhh
Are you sure?
It’s very low quality

Just give me your goddamn username already

Okay, okay, sheesh
It’s [redacted]
You can’t say I didn’t warn you

read 2:47AM

Chapter End Notes

oops it turned out kind of long LOL
See You Again

Chapter Summary

twenty-twenty vision, cupid hit me with precision
i wonder if you look both ways when you cross my mind
— tyler the creator
see you again

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Taehyung evidently was not the only one who noticed Jungkook’s outpouring of emotion, and the online rumor mills begin to churn out fresh gossip the next day. Jungkook trends high as a result, and to a lower extent, so does Remember Me.

Cozy Conversations, surprisingly, has some people talking about it too, and it starts with his fans.

11111jk979797
Omg, he’s improved so much. <3 <3 <3

jung_forever
Did you guys see his interview?
I need a full live of Cozy Conversations
or I’m going to die.

bunny_jung_lve
Those thirty seconds were a m a z i n g.

Kooks9834
Have you guys read the lyrics?
They’re so romantic.

_r3membrKook

He looks like he’s in love when he sings it.

thiskookiemonster

Do you guys think he’s dating?
His ideal type is a lot more specific now.

lovely98

I don’t know what I would do if he was.

Someday931

He’s got to be, who wouldn’t in his situation?

beautifulm0rning

Omg. I think he’s in love. 😂❤️

Jk_bdirection

With his music and the fans!

juuuuuungguk

Stop being delusional.

Shining__st4r

Look, he’s wearing the same bracelet as Jihyo, couple items???

Mrsjeon19

If it ends up being true
I think I need to take a break from fandom.

+++ 

Taehyung, by the benevolence of Jungkook’s fans, manages to trend on Naver too. Or at least his stage name TAE does, and he gets a little bit of buzz on social media platforms. He’s not terribly comfortable with it, he’s been a private citizen debatably by choice for all of his life, but Hoseok tells him any chatter is good chatter in showbiz in the long term, and so he resigns to tolerating people scouring the internet for any of his personal details.

It’s not like he could do anything about it anyway.

They don’t find anything damning, but in their troweling, they do churn up enough dirt to let a thing from his past float to the surface. It’s not the worst, but it just happens to be the one of many memories he’d rather forget.

---

_jk_____129_

O m g have you guys seen TAE?

I found this old headshot of him back when he was a trainee:

[image attached]

_taeteatae (formerly: jkj_kjk_1209)_

My god, I think I’m in love

_theJjkHypeTeam_

Holy shiiiiit. Is there more recent pic?

_yoopac_11_

Yeah, I dug up this gem on BigCube’s twitter

I think it’s the release party? He’s in the back right anyway
Once upon a time, there was a young dreamer named Taehyung who spent 4 years slaving it out in the idol trainee machine, until he realized he valued musical freedom, emotional sanity, and a college education a little too much at the ripe age of 15 and gracefully exited the system by his own accord. At least, that’s the version of the events he will tell you.

The truth was a little closer to this: devoting the whole of his formative years to dancing, singing, and personality lessons for years with no concrete future in sight, and making it to the last round of
consideration for BigCube’s last-ditch effort at a boy band, only to suffer a massive nervous breakdown right before the final evaluation. It was a combination of unfortunate factors that triggered it: lack of sleep, lack of food, high stress, and a particularly brutal training session where the vocal coach of the hour sat him down and told him his chances were slim because of his voice. He did, in fact exit the system by his own accord, but very few people would describe tearfully breaking his trainee contract in a sterilized bed in Seoul’s most sophisticated hospital as “graceful”.

It’s a sad story. But it does have a happy ending.

Because it had worked out for the better. That year was the lowest of his lows, but after a bit of soul-searching, TLC from multiple directions, getting lucky, and yanking himself up emotionally by the bootstraps, he had gotten healthy mentally and physically, dug deep, found purpose again and rose up from the ground (like a skyscraper). He threw himself into song craft as form of therapy, and turned it into a profitable skill. Namjoon helped him out from there, believing in him since Day 1 and securing him a spot at BigCube as a music producer two years later. He went further, bringing Taehyung onto a career-launching title track ironically for Beyond the Direction’s debut album, and well, the rest is history.

As it stood now, Taehyung wouldn’t trade his job for the world, much less for that of an idol. He jokes a lot that he does what he does for the money. But at the end of the day, he’s genuinely in love with music and he has fun making songs a majority of people love to listen to.

Even if the cost is writing formulaic songs and working with the occasional Jungkook-like client.

Speaking of which, how does that kid enter this story?

As a timid 14 year old trainee a year before Beyond the Direction drops their hit of a first album, dressed in his mother’s idea of street fashion, lost and wide-eyed in BigCube’s shabby-at-the-time lobby on his first day, clutching his messenger bag to his chest. He’s raring to start training--singing and dancing is all he knows and cares about--but he’s not sure what to expect. It doesn’t help his nerves that his company-issued key card doesn’t work, and he’s left staring blankly at the frosted glass doors guarding the training rooms wondering if this whole thing was a scam with no one to call and nowhere to go.

Taehyung doesn’t remember this part, but he bursts out of those doors a heartbeat later, high and giddy off of his first big break of signing his first producer contract, his days ahead looking sunny and bright for the first time in a long time. He knocks over Jungkook in the process, and apologizes as he helps him up.

“Hey, sorry man,” Taehyung unintentionally blinds Jungkook with his dazzling smile. “Wasn’t looking.”

“S’fine,” Jungkook breaks his gaze and brushes the seat of his pants off. “I shouldn’t’na been standing so close to the door.”

“Were you trying to get inside?”

“Yeah,” Jungkook pulls down his knock-off basketball-branded cap lower over his eyes. “But my card doesn’t work.”

“Oh I got you then,” Taehyung taps his own against the scanner and holds the door open and winks. “You’re a new trainee?”

“Yeah.”
“Good luck.”

“Thanks,” and Jungkook slips through the door and scurries down the hall, heart racing for more reasons than one, marveling about how Seoul sure was something else.

And that’s how chance sets things in motion.

+++  

Jin

Hey so Cozy Conversations is hype as fuck rn
OK to use for this weeks Inkigayo?

Sure
   It’s whatever
Since it’s his song now
   No need to ask

Cool
Jungkook wanted to make sure

Fuckboy 6 being considerate?
   Get out of here

Ikr? Crazy, took me off guard

What are you putting in his water?

LOL
Also would you be interested in performing it with him
Show champion, wednesday

Wait
Corporate wants it
Saw you were trending
Wanted to capitalize on it

What?

Oh my god
Do I have to break it down for you?

Yes please

Song
You
Jungkook
Sing it together on show
Show = show champion
Yes or no

Are you this mean to Jimin too?
Or just me
b/c I'm feelin really attacked right now

Yes

Oh okay

So yes or no?
I need to let them know in a hr
Namjoon thinks it's a good opportunity for you

I mean, yeah, I guess I'm down
I’m surprised they signed off on it tbh

K I’ll let them know
I’ll send details in an email

Great
Also what did he have to say about it?

Who’s he?

Fuckboy 6

Haha, rhetorical question, are you curious?

No
Well
Maybe
Slightly
Almost not at all
tbh

I’m telling Jungkook

You wouldn’t

hahahaha

Hyung
Please
Do not

Hah
...you told him didn’t you.

H a h

+++ 

Fuckboy 6

Hey so why’s my nickname Fuckboy 6?

Hahahahahahahahah
Tell Jin I’m going to destroy him

Why can’t I be at least be Fuckboy 1?

Uh
Because
There are five ahead of you
Lol

Who’re 1 through 5 then?
I’ll fight them
There can only be one
Lol what

read 1:26PM

Chapter End Notes

if you're in LA, stay safe!! those fires look crazy ﹏;

also omfg they're so cute

+ this might be last the update for the week, ahha i was hard-pushing but finals are staring me down so yeah.
Go Flex

Chapter Summary

i wouldn't give one if i could find a fuck
— post malone

go flex

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So when Taehyung was maybe five or so, his older brother made an offhand comment that had more impact on Taehyung’s life than he would ever know.

“Singing’s just one of things you can’t train to do, you either have it or you don’t,” he had said, as they watched the first round of some long-forgotten singing competition together, wincing as the current contestant struck the high note a full half-step flat. “And most people don’t.”

And in doing so, he had planted seeds of insecurity in Taehyung’s impressionable adolescent mind, which later flourished as an incredible voice complex he was sure he could never shake. He was not a chosen one and so he would never be good no matter how hard he tried, was the general gist of the mental cap set on his ambitions. It was a textbook case of the butterfly effect, a shower thought eventually setting off a career-derailing insecurity complex that was very much coming back to bite Taehyung right here, right now, as he stood outside of the practice room, hand hovering over the handle, and trying to convince himself that this was all a good idea.

That agreeing to sing on stage with Jungkook in three days was a good idea.

It was hard, because nothing about it seemed appealing to Taehyung at this moment. Not singing, not singing in public, definitely not singing in public with Jungkook, and most definitely not singing in public with Jungkook on live broadcast.

So why had he said yes? Because it seems like a good idea in theory, and Jin’s got pact-making down to an artform. He had been caught up in the moment, a little too high off Cozy Conversations success, to consider the actual logistics of the event.

Like practicing. Which he was doing right now. Or at least will be in a moment, as soon as he wills himself to go inside. And he’s just about to close his hand around the handle when--

“Did you forget how to open a door?”

Jungkook materializes out of nowhere, hand jammed in his soccer pants pockets, fingers slipping his earbuds out of his ears as he leans against the wall next to Taehyung. He looks good—really amused with himself and with Taehyung’s dilemma, and all it does is provoke Taehyung’s desire to punch things.

“Yeah, actually,” Taehyung backs away from the door and gestures it with an open palm. “I need some help.”
“I got you,” Jungkook rolls up his sleeve and swaggers to the door, tongue poking at his cheek. He dramatically shoots out a hand, hooks his index finger on the door, winks at Taehyung, “Let me show you how it’s done,” and pulls.

The door doesn’t budge. He pulls again, using his whole hand this time, the door still resists, and he frowns.

Taehyung does his best to swallow his laugh and manages to deadpan with a struggle of a straight face, “I believe you’re supposed to push.”

“Oh,” and the door easily opens. Jungkook’s face tinges with the slightest shade of pink.

Taehyung breezes past Jungkook, shaking his head, “Thanks for showing me.”

“Anytime,” and Jungkook follows him in.

The room’s deserted, and Taehyung frowns as he goes and sets his stuff down by a table, gingerly placing his coffee next to his bag. He feels a bit dumb, he had thought someone was already inside, and tries to push down the thought that he could have saved himself a bit of face outside and had his crisis contained inside here instead.

“Where’s Luna?” Taehyung asks Jungkook, who’s expertly fiddling with some knobs on the stereo. “Isn’t she supposed to be here?”

“She can’t come. Did you not see her text?”

“No,” Taehyung fishes his phone out of his pocket only to be greeted with a group text from her with the same information (“Hey sorry for the last minute notice, but can’t make it. You guys can just practice together though, I’ll be around to help refine things tomorrow.”). Then to Taehyung specifically, she had sent a sly face emoji and a drumstick emoji.

Taehyung grimaces and puts his phone away. He had forgotten she and Jimin hang out.

“Oh, I see.”

“Yeah. It’s whatever though, we can still practice.”

And Taehyung doesn’t really know how to feel about it. There’s a bit of dread, honestly, that it was going to be awkward that it was just going to be the two of them, and also because Taehyung knew he had to still work out a lot of kinks. He had been relying on Luna to be a bit of a buffer, he really liked her because she was nice when she provided feedback, and now it was just him, Jungkook, and his voice. No kindness to soften the blow, and his nemesis was going to be the one with the free reign to rail on him for the next two hours.

Seems super enjoyable. Not.

Jungkook finishes whatever he was doing with the stereo and strides over to a cabinet, opening it and rummaging through the contents. He starts loudly warming up his voice as he pulls things out of it, running over some scales and effortly transitioning to something in the western hemisphere’s Top 40 before he finds every thing he’s looking for and strides over and dumps some stuff into Taehyung’s hands. When Taehyung sorts it out, he’s got a microphone in one hand and an in-ear monitor in the other.

Jungkook nods in his direction, “Just hang onto the in-ears for now, we can work our way up to those.”
“Alright,” Taehyung jams them into his pocket. “So where do we start?”

“From the beginning.”

“Hilarious.”

+++ 

Sometimes, Taehyung surprises himself.

Today was one of those days, when in a blink of an eye he finds himself singing into the 118th minute of the practice session, not exactly having what he’d traditionally call fun, but not having a terrible time.

Time flies when you’re having an alright time, apparently.

It turns out Jungkook wasn’t a half-bad teacher. He had some good tips that definitely made improvements faster, and once he had stopped making a few snarky comments at the beginning, he had actually been pretty helpful. It turns out he has a bit of a switch, Taehyung observes, once Jungkook got into the swing of things, his usual personality faded in place of a super professional one.

“The note’s a bit high for you, so I’d just take it down to your range, like A3?” Jungkook sings out the note and waves, “Try that?”

Taehyung does, and it works.

Jungkook shoots him a thumbs up and marks it on a score sheet, “Great. Sounds a lot better. Run through it again one more time?”

And Taehyung can comply the door opens with a hesitant creak, and a handful of trainees poke their heads in. The boldest is the first to speak up.

“Hi, sorry to bother but are you guys almost done?” He blinks through his eyebags.

Jungkook glances at the clock, “Oh do you guys have the room?”

“Yeah, sorry again,” the guys dips his head into a bow. “Ordinarily we wouldn’t interrupt but evals are tomorrow, and so--”

“Yeah no problem,” Jungkook turns to Taehyung. “We can start again tomorrow. Good job, you improved a lot.”

“Thanks,” Taehyung modestly scratches his ear. “Still have a long ways to go.”

Jungkook shrugs, “There’s always room for improvement.”

The rest of the trainees file in, dumping their bags in the corner as they begin to stretch. Most of them are all looking a bit starstruck at the sight of Jungkook, watching him as a herd as he packs stuff up. They’re whispering to themselves for a bit before one strikes up a conversation with Jungkook--something to do with general eval advice--and eventually they all crowding around him and begin bombarding him with questions. They’re tentative at first, but as Jungkook responds positively, they
let the formalities fall away and eventually it turns from a stiff mentorship lecture to something more like a back-in-forth between brothers.

Taehyung’s watching it all out of the corner of his eye with amusement thinking a loose collection of thoughts that included something something, good with kids, as Jungkook cackles about some inside joke about the way Yoongi looks like he’d rather sleep forever during evaluations even when he likes a trainee and the trainees burst out laughing, shouting their own anecdotes for Jungkook to hear. And Jungkook laughs hard at all of them, clapping like a seal in appreciation.

“I’m going to tell Yoongi you guys said this, it’s hilarious,” Jungkook wipes a tear from his eye as he grins. “I thought I was the only one he did that to.”

“I can’t believe he still does it to you.”

“Since predebut, it’s just his thing, I guess” Jungkook snickers, and without a warning, his eyes flick over and meet Taehyung’s.

A bit of a zing zips up from Taehyung’s chest and bursts with pop in his head, and prompts him to break eye-contact, looking down to watch his finger pick off imaginary lint from his shirt as if he had meant to be doing that in the first place. When he looks back up, face a little warmer than normal, Jungkook’s already got his eyes back on the trainees again, joking about Jimin and his tendency to compulsively rake his entire hand through his hair.

“Hi, uh, Taehyung?” a voice comes out of nowhere, and Taehyung jolts, a bit startled.

He turns to find a trainee leaning against the table with him. Non-imposing and clearly “the pretty one” archetype, he looks like he has a question on the tip of his tongue as he looks expectantly at Taehyung.

“Uh, hey--” Taehyung tries to pair a name with the face, he’s definitely seen this guy around a few times, but he comes up with nothing. He should probably either start trying more or not at all, really, half-assing courtesy was starting to be a pain.

“Jihoon,” the guy fills in smoothly, like he didn’t expect Taehyung to know in the first place. “I just wanted to let you know I’m a huge fan of your songs.”

“Oh thanks,” and Taehyung feels a bit bad, but he crosses his arms and immediately tries to assess what this guy wants from him. The path to successful idolship is a big fat pyramid, and almost no one lands at the top by chance. Everyone who gets to the top has strategy, and for some people, it’s befriending the gatekeepers.

“Remember Me’s a certified banger, they won’t stop playing it in the dorms,” Jihoon laughs. “But I like Cozy Conversations myself. I’m going to sing it during evals, actually.”

“Really? I’m honored,” Taehyung dips his head in a show of humbleness. This guy was going to have to try harder than just mentioning the most recent things Taehyung’s released lately.

“Were you guys practicing it earlier? Heard it out in the hallway.”

“Yeah, going to go perform it on Wednesday.”

“Wait no way,” Jihoon’s eyes sparkle a bit. “You’re going to be singing?”

“That’s the plan.”
“I’m like a huge fan of your voice,” Jihoon speeds up, hands waving a bit animatedly. “Oh wow. Yeah, like, I was so psyched when I saw you were singing on Jungkook’s track. Honestly, I downloaded Soundcloud just so I could listen to To My Youth—”

And that’s when Taehyung lets his guard drop, this guy was just a legit fan. How rare. To My Youth had been a free single he had dropped back when he was gearing up for his solo run. The idea at the time had been to generate interest in him to give numerical proof back to the marketing team that he was a investment worth betting on. But it had kind of backfired in the sense that it didn’t take off, and while it was something of a cult favorite among people who had stumbled across it, the marketing team had interpreted it as a sign that he was not great at generating hype.

But, whatever, that was the past.

“Wow, I didn’t think I’d actually meet someone in person who’d heard that song,” Taehyung uncrosses his arms and leans against the table with his hand. “Kind of forgotten it existed actually.”

“It was my anthem back in middle school,” Jihoon continues enthusiastically. “Honestly, you’re what inspired me to get into singing, and well, join BigCube. I really want to become a singer-songwriter as well.”

“Oh wow, uhh, I’m honored, again,” Taehyung sheepishly scratches his head and grins. “Didn’t think it made an impact at all. And I’m not exactly a singer.”

“You should be,” Jihoon says before someone calls his name. He looks up at the huddle of trainees and sighs, “I probably have to get going with practice. But it was great talking with you.”

“Yeah, anytime.”

“Cool,” Jihoon hesitates, “Actually, could I take you up on that and talk to you more about producing sometime later? I’m really interested but it seems really hard to get started. I can treat you to coffee or something.”

“Sure. I’m busy this week, but just give me your number and I’ll let you know if I’m free next week,” Taehyung extends his phone out, contacts input open on the screen.

Jihoon’s about to take it when Jungkook decides to show up, abruptly shoving himself between the two of them as he grabs a water bottle off the middle of the table. Jihoon gasps as Taehyung’s phone drops to the floor with a nerve-wracking clatter.

“Jungkook!” Taehyung yells as he scrambles to pick up his phone and check for cracks. It miraculously survived unscathed, “I just got a new phone!”

“Sorry,” Jungkook shrugs as he uncaps the bottle and takes a swig from it, apology devoid from his expression.

“And that’s my water bottle,” Taehyung tries to snatch it away, but Jungkook moves it beyond his grasp. “Get your own.”

“Don’t be stingy, I ran out of water.”

“There’s like a refill station right there.”

“I’m lazy.”

“It’s literally by the door, it’s like 12 steps away.”
“Too lazy.”

“It would have taken you less steps to get to the station then it took you to get to my water bottle.”

“Fake news,” Jungkook blinks.

And Taehyung gives up, throwing his hands into the air.

Jihoon, evidently noticing their conversation had come to a Jungkook-induced end, excuses himself, “Well I’ll see you around then Taehyung. Looking forward to next week.”

“Yeah, good luck with evals Jihoon,” Taehyung waves before glaring at Jungkook. “You interrupted a good conversation.”


“Yes, well, when you put it that way, no. He wanted mentorship.”

“Ah,” Jungkook turns and watches Jihoon dance for a bit, and shrugs, “He’s whatever. Maybe he does need help.”

“Why are you being so mean? He’ll be fine.”

“I’m being a realist,” Jungkook sniffs. “There’s a lot of really solid trainees this year.”

“Like you would know.”

“Hey, I keep myself up to date with the future artists of this company.”

“Name five.”

“Uh. I know their faces but not their names.”

“Name one.”

“Jihoon.”

Taehyung just gives him a look.

“Anyway,” Jungkook shoulders his bag and taps his foot on the floor expectantly. “You leaving now?”

“I guess,” Taehyung shrugs and collects his stuff. As a bit of a joke, he raises his voice up an octave and bats his eyes, “Sorry, were you waiting for me for long?”

Jungkook pulls his phone and stares at it, casually scrolling through the notifications, “It wasn’t that long.”

“Oh,” Taehyung blinks in surprise, “You didn’t actually have to wait for me.”

“Yeah, I know,” Jungkook shrugs as they walk out. “But I did.”

“Oh,” Taehyung blinks again, pausing as the door swings shut behind them. “Thanks?”

They pause for a moment awkwardly outside. Jungkook looks like he has something to say, but for some reason he’s decidedly mute and not looking him in the eye, and so Taehyung just waits, shifting from foot to foot in the silence.
Eventually, unable to stand the awkwardness any longer, Taehyung speaks up, “I guess I’ll see you-”

“Actually,” Jungkook starts speaking at roughly the same moment. “I wanted to ask you if you wanted to go get something to eat--”


“Cool,” Jungkook dazzles Taehyung with one of his photoshoot-grade smiles before sliding his facemask on. Celebrities, they were something else.

As they walk out of the doors and onto the busy street, and Taehyung clutches the back of Jungkook’s jacket impulsively to keep himself from getting lost in the crowd, he thinks about how they’re two normal coworkers going out to eat together at a normal time, at a normal place, for a normal reason.

And also, of the millions of reasons why this was not like that.

Chapter End Notes

hey im back
ahha finals won i’m dead but it’s okay :’)

highest of the keys jik giving tips to kth is the best tk moment and i’m ready to tussle over this lmao also kinda cracks me up cuz it reminds me of the crazy moms on toddlers and tiaras but that’s a different point
After what seems like a maze of left and right turns navigated at breakneck speed in the sweltering heat, Jungkook glances up from his phone and abruptly halts at a nondescript shopfront buried off in some sidestreet.

Taehyung, not looking forward, runs into his back. Already bent out of shape from the winding walk and from the heat, he groans as he wipes sweat of his forehead, “Fuck, don’t stop in the middle of the road.”

“My bad,” Jungkook squints at the door and looks back down at his phone. “Not 100% sure, but I think this it.”

“What’s the place called?” Taehyung cranes his neck at Jungkook’s phone. “Oh wait, I’ve been here before. It’s across the street.”

“Oh you have?”

“Yeah, I drag Jimin here all the time. It’s one of my favorite places.”

“Nice,” Jungkook blinks. “Uh, yeah, Jimin actually recommended it so I wanted to try it out.”

“What did he say about it?”

“That it was good,” Jungkook shrugs.

“Wow oh wow, no fucking way.”

“What did think he was going to say about it? That it changed his life?”

“Knowing him, I’m sure he was more specific about it.”

Jungkook shrugs as they jaywalk across the street. His ears are the slightest shade of pink, and Taehyung figures it must be the sun. “He also said, uh, the soup was good. Among other things. So I wanted to try it.”

“Yeah it’s like super spicy,” Taehyung says they jog across the street, barely dodging traffic. “It’s famous for it.”

“Oh it is?” Jungkook pales slightly and Taehyung notices.

“Yeah, like, I want to rip-out-my-tongue, tasting-nothing-but-pain, so-many-regrets, level of spicy,”
Taehyung licks his lips. “It’s great. Puts the fire noodles to shame.”

“Oh,” Jungkook says faintly.

“It’s not for the weak,” Taehyung, using all of his experience of taunting his younger cousins for the better part of two decades, drops the bait, “Think you can handle it?”

“Uh, yeah I can,” Jungkook says, a little more determinedly, lips thinning into a line. “I love spicy shit.”

“Really?” Taehyung’s like 90% sure it’s a lie. It’s all such a stupid charade, there was probably some underlying narrative behind this but he couldn’t be bothered to figure it out.

“Fuck yeah,” Jungkook balls his hands into fists as they enter through the door. “Let’s do this.”

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Jimin

Soooo how’s lunch with Jungkook

I don’t wanna know how you know about this

Hope you’re having fun ;)

We’re still nemeses, thanks for asking
This changes nothing

I heard the soup’s good

I now have reason to believe
You are a very large part of my problems

You know what else is good?

I can guess
So don’t say it
Chicken

Do you ever, you know, get tired of beating dead horses?

This is a horse worth beating
Oh wait fuck

Hello, animal rights police?
I’d like to report a Park Jimin for abusive behavior

That did not come out right

It sure did not

The restaurant is packed, Taehyung has to squeeze past a crowd to get to the front to put his name on the list, but luckily the owner sees Taehyung and gets them to the front of the line in a wink-wink-nudge-nudge regulars treatment special. It’s clear that she doesn’t recognize Jungkook specifically, but given his facemask, his designer apparel, and her knowledge on what Taehyung does for a living, she, with her knowing glance, probably worked out what kind of person Jungkook was.

She quickly seats them towards the back of the hallway near the kitchen probably as a result, in a booth tucked away out of sight from main entrance. Jungkook slips his facemask off with a sigh, pinching his nose as he mutes a sneeze, and looks down at the menu.

“So what’s good here?” He asks, scouring the list.

“Soup,” Taehyung grins. He was going to make Jungkook own this thing.

“Like which ones,” Jungkook recovers without missing a beat.

“Like the really spicy ones, they’re known for these,” Taehyung flips the page and points at a few items on Jungkook’s menu. “Look for the items with three flame icons, anything less is for bitches.”
“Oh, bitches, huh,” Jungkook blinks, looking blankly down at the friendly flame cartoon character gracing the corner of the laminated page with a wink and a wave.

“Yeah, you ready?” Taehyung asks as a waitress makes eye-contact and begins to head over.

“Uhh, sure,” Jungkook’s mildly concerned expression morphs eerily quickly into an easy public-friendly smile the second the waitress stops at their table.

She quickly whips out a notepad, poses a pen on top, looks at Jungkook and immediately goes red.

“Oh my god,” She whispers, covering her face with her notepad.

“Hello,” Jungkook smiles and waves, slightly awkwardly. He squints, clearly mentally calculating whether she was older and opts for a half-inclined head nod of a bow in what looks like compromise.

“Hi, I’m such a huge fan,” she bobs her head and tucks her hair behind her ears, still covering her face with her notepad. “But, uh, anyway, what did you want to order?”

“Wow, really? I appreciate it. Uh,” Jungkook squints at the menu. “Number 26?”

“How spicy?”

Jungkook hesitates for a moment and Taehyung takes the opportunity to help him out.

“As spicy as you can make it,” Taehyung winks and Jungkook looks at him, quite alarmed. “Like if your scale is 1-10, make it an 11. This guy can’t get enough of it.”

“Alright,” the waitress grins and Jungkook looks like he has a retort. “And for you?”

“Um, I’ll just have the jajangmyeon,” Taehyung snaps his menu closed and hands it back with a big grin. “Thanks.”

As soon as the waitress leaves (“Good luck with your promotions, hwaiting”!), Jungkook leans over the table with troubled eyes, “Wait, you’re just getting jajangmyeon? I thought you usually get the spicy stuff here.”

“What? I never said that. I said it was good, but I personally don’t enjoy the heat. Jimin’s the one who gets this stuff,” Taehyung snickers. Jungkook just got played. “But yeah, good luck, haha, you should be fine since you like it right?”

Jungkook stares down at his napkin, eyes wide and unblinking, and says hollowly, “Yeah. Love it.”

+++  

When the waitress places the dish down in front of Jungkook, he takes one glance at the way the vibrant red broth is bubbling angrily over the bowl and looks like he wants to faint. His spoon hovers hesitantly over the soup, and he looks like he’s in a deep negotiation with himself and his values in a soul-searching effort to try to take the first bite.

It’s really funny, Taehyung’s never seen someone clearly so unwilling to do something trying to look like they were owning the situation in an effort to flex. He hadn’t pegged Jungkook as the earnest type, and something about the unexpectedness of seeing a guy who had an image of being cool and
collected onstage get frazzled over soup of all things was amusing.

It’s a moment he wished he could share with the world, and if Taehyung were a little more shameless, he probably would have sent Jimin a photo. Okay, he had actually tried, just Jungkook had caught him red handed.

(“What are you doing?”

“Uh, taking a selca?”

Jungkook shields his face with his hand, “Sure.”)

After a good chunk of time watching Jungkook battle with his inhibitions, Taehyung honestly feels a little bad for goading him, and so wordlessly he reaches over and swaps their dishes, metal chopsticks clenched between his teeth as he hisses lightly in pain as his thumb skims the bowl.

“What are you doing?” Jungkook stares at the noodles in front of him in mild confusion.

“I’ll eat this, you can eat mine,” Taehyung grabs his water to soothe his burning hand.

“No I can handle it,” Jungkook reaches a hand across the table.

“It’s fine, I suddenly had a craving,” Taehyung waves Jungkook’s hand away.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung takes a bite without flinching and looks at Jungkook as his mouth begins to burn. “Just eat.”

“Thanks,” Jungkook mutters and digs in without another word.

+++ 

It’s not that Taehyung’s watching Jungkook specifically, but as they make small talk related to the general promotion cycle, he notices the small things.

Like Jungkook unhesitatingly stooping down to pick up a fallen sauce dish for the waitress when she flies by the aisle, or talking extensively to a young fanboy who stops by their table, or signing a takeout menu for the owner to put next to the myriad of celebrity autographs posted on her walls.

He even treats the more invasive fans with a degree of kindness, as more and more people stop at their table to gawk at him as word gets out. He rejects selca solicitations with terrifying patience, at one point repeating himself with his facemask on with the same temperate tone at least twenty times until the fan gives up. Eventually, the waitstaff gets tired of fighting through the crowd on their way from the kitchen to the main floor, and they post a busboy to guard the hallway, and peace resumes.

“Man,” Taehyung warily regards the growing crowd lining up behind the haggard busboy. “That was getting crazy.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook shrugs good-naturedly. “But part of the job.”

Even when they talk, he remembers small details Taehyung barely remembers sharing with him, and
brings them up like “how’s your brother doing,” “how was that Chet Baker documentary,” or “did you get your new stereo system yet,” and assuming this is what Jungkook was like to the rest of the world, Taehyung begins to understand why no one else on staff tends to agree with him when he rants about Jungkook’s douchebag tendencies.

He was actually a pretty personable guy.

Which makes it even more mystifying then to Taehyung why he’s only one singled out for the douchebag treatment special among the hundreds of people who interact with him on a daily basis. It’s not like he was particularly mean to Jungkook during his trainee years or beyond, in fact Taehyung had favored him as a trainee as much as a fledgling music producer with no street cred possibly could, and after Jungkook debuted, they barely interacted outside of work purposes. And so it makes it a bit surreal that they were here, sitting across from each other and having lunch like Jungkook didn’t spend the better part of the last two years yanking Taehyung almost exclusively by the chain.

Yeah, Taehyung didn’t really get it.

Maybe he said something offensive at some point and Jungkook had never let the grudge go. Or maybe not. Who knows.

Towards the end, Jungkook gets distracted by something on his phone. He takes a picture at an awkward angle, Taehyung just assumes it’s a photo of his food, and fiddles with his device underneath the table for the better part of a few minutes, a small grin gracing his face. It takes Taehyung a second to form an idea of what he could be doing, and when he does, he draws a creepy smirk on his face and raises a brow.

“Who’re you texting?” Taehyung drums his fingers against the table.

“Huh?” Jungkook looks up and then leans backwards, clearly unnerved by Taehyung’s expression.

“Who’re you texting,” Taehyung repeats. He exaggeratedly stares down at Jungkook’s phone and Jungkook pushes it further under the table.

“No one?” Jungkook says unconvincingly.

“Are you texting that person?” Taehyung smirks and points down at his phone.

“Who?”

“The person you’re interested in.”

“Oh, what? No,” Jungkook immediately shakes his head and immediately resumes looking back down at his phone, a little more flustered than before.

“Suspicious,” Taehyung says, unconviced, and more determined to aggravate Jungkook. “It’s gotta be what you’re doing.”

“I’m,” Jungkook rolls his eyes, ah the old Jungkook was back. “Not.”

“Who is it?” Taehyung leans forward. “If you don’t mind telling me. Or more importantly, is it someone I know?”

“Um,” Jungkook visibly stiffens, “I actually do mind.”
“Now I’m really curious.”

“You can stay curious,” Jungkook swipes a napkin across his face and inches down the booth, blush beginning to stain his cheeks. He really was starting to do that a lot these days, “Excuse me, I’m going to the bathroom.”

Jimin

Looks like you guys are having a cute date

What

[Link to: Instagram post by Jungkook Official]

The post is a rather unflattering image of Taehyung shoveling rice into his gaping mouth, spoon held at an awkward angle above his tongue to avoid nicking his lips with his utensil, eyes rolled upwards in mid-blink. It’s filtered rather nicely and captioned with a rather poignant “ᆪᆪᆪ born a model #taesInstagramDebut” and at ten minutes, it’s already clocked a healthy 20k likes.

Ostensibly, editing this is what Jungkook had been doing under the table. That fucking kid.

In the comments, he can see Jimin’s already left his mark (“wow that’s the most photogenic photo i’ve seen of tae, ever”) and Namjoon and Hoseok just commented with a smattering of “ᆪᆪᆪ”s. Some guy named Yugyeom from the group GotKids and a few other of Jungkook’s celebrity friends Taehyung can’t name off the bat leave a trail of tiger and bunny emojis, and clearly it’s some inside joke he and everyone else are missing out on. (The sharper eyed fans pick up on it too, and after much deliberation and analysis over Jungkook’s digital trail and past interviews, some hashed in breadth and scope that could be plausibly a pseudo-academic papers, the general consensus is that Jungkook maybe, with 7.65% probability, had become the new proud owner of a cat and bunny, respectively.)

The baseline of Taehyung’s reaction is this: Taehyung thinks it’s kind of cool that he’s been posted on a instagram feed with multiple million followers. What makes it grey is that 1) it’s Jungkook’s instagram and 2) it’s a really unattractive photo. And so when Jungkook gets back from the bathroom and sits back down, vinyl creaking underneath him as he scoots down the booth into place,
Taehyung slides his phone towards Jungkook, photo onscreen, and taps it twice with his index finger.

“Why?”

Jungkook takes one look and looks really proud of himself, “Because.”

Taehyung should have anticipated that. The waitress stops by and drops off the bill, and he sighs as he takes out his wallet and slips out his card, “Kids these days.”

“Oh, wait, I got it,” Jungkook fishes out his card.

“No, what the hell, I’m older,” Taehyung drops his card on the plate. “End of discussion.”

Jungkook immediately takes it off, puts his own card, and hands the bill off to the the waitress before Taehyung can react. Taehyung looks at him a little stunned as Jungkook turns to him as a triumphant smile.

“Yeah, I got it,” Jungkook winks at him and Taehyung feels his jaw go slack. Kids these days.

Also could his heart not skip right now? That’d be cool, thanks.
Bad Liar

Chapter Summary

with my feelings on fire,
guess I'm a bad liar
— selena gomez
bad liar

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Close to midnight the next day, slumped in an ergonomic chair in one of BigCube’s better practice rooms, chugging water as his vocal chords burn, Taehyung admits to himself that he never wants to hear another note from Cozy Conversations again. Especially that one run that he keeps stumbling on, and no matter how many times Jungkook or Luna try to coach him on approaching it (in a strange tagteam effort using carrot (Luna) and stick (Jungkook) method that Taehyung really does not appreciate), there’s no way he can see himself getting it right in the next 48 hours.

They’re taking a break from the singing at the moment, or at least Taehyung is, and using it as an opportunity to bring in Jimin to share his advice on choreography. He quickly determines that Taehyung lacks the will or fitness to learn a dance routine in a couple of days, and so he recommends they do something lowkey, like—

“Sit in some chairs, maybe?” Jimin suggests, as he grabs a folding chair and a microphone stand and places it by Jungkook, who’s standing slouched, with his hands on his hips. “Kind of boring, but comfortable, also gives off a good folk vibe which matches the song.”

“Hey, I’m not that out of shape,” Taehyung huffs out.

“It’s been like nine years since you last went to dance practice, and when you freestyle it looks like you’re searching for a bathroom, you’ve got like no moves,” Jimin snorts. “Also, you’re already out of breath from singing, I’m positive you’re not going to be able dance and sing at the same time.”

“Don’t underestimate me,” Taehyung, still slumped in his chair, head lolling to the side, raises a fist in protest as he huffs again.

“Real convincing, but yeah,” Jimin turns to Jungkook. “Are you comfortable enough to play the main melody on guitar? I know you’ve been working on it, and this could be a neat way to showcase that to fans.”

“Oh,” Jungkook scratches his ear underneath his beanie. “I mean, I could.”

“It’s like four chords, it’s not that hard,” Taehyung helpfully interjects.

“You learn it then,” Jungkook gripes. “Oh wait—you can’t. You don’t know how to play the guitar.”

“But he knows piano,” Jimin’s eyes sparkle with the possibilities of ideation and he motions for an
assistant to bring over a keyboard. “Wait yeah, that’d be cool, I know this is last minute but if you guys can pull it off, it’d really drive the indie schtick home. We could get someone on drums—Yoongi maybe?—and make the backdrop and the props be like a coffee-shop or something.”

“I’m cool with that,” Taehyung throws his agreement into the ring.

“Uh, I don’t know,” Jungkook looks down skeptically at the guitar shoved into hand. “I trimmed my nails.”

“Use a pick,” Jimin waves him off.

“I mean, I also haven’t played for a while. So I don’t want to embarrass myself.”

Jimin snorts as he looks down and shoves some cables out of the way with his foot, “I saw you practicing with Jin like two days ago.”

“Uh,” Jungkook’s eyes dark back and forth. “I don’t want to embarrass myself in front of people.”

“What? Your fans are going to love anything you do. Don’t worry—” Jimin looks up at Jungkook’s expression and realization falls over his own. “Oh. Seriously? That person is not going to care even if you mess up.”

Taehyung’s ears perk up in interest. This sounded like a conversation he wanted to be in on.

“Hey could you like,” Jungkook hisses, almost too quietly for Taehyung to hear. “Not, like, out loud.”

“You could say their name, and they wouldn’t get it,” Jimin whispers back. “They’re as dense as fuck.”

“Still,” Jungkook turns his back to Taehyung and as he and Jimin start bickering in low undertones. It piques Taehyung’s interest, prompting him to get up. And stalking like a bipedal panther, Taehyung creeps up behind to two of them to eavesdrop better.

“You’re like 23,” Jimin snipes. “Could you like grow a pair and be an adult about it already? It’s starting to affect your work, and that’s a problem. And you’re cramping my creative style, and that’s an even bigger problem.”

“Could you like,” Jungkook whispers, glaring. “Let me do it by my own terms? And could we not talk about this right now.”

“Because what you’re doing is working so well—”

“What are you suggesting instead?”

“Like, stop being weird about it, approach it normally, like how everyone else does it—”

“Yeah, like, do you really see that working out well as things are? Like, if I went up to them right now and was like, ‘oh hey, so I’m actually kinda into you, do you wanna do a date with me,’ do you think they’re gonna be all like,” Jungkook drops his tone into a parody of a deep voice, “Like, ‘oh fuck yeah, totally’—”

“Well, no, first, it’s your fault for pigeonholing yourself, and second, I said normally, who the fuck says ‘wanna do a date,’ that’s fucking weird—”

“Hey friends,” Taehyung blows his cover and throws his arms around the two of them while
grinning. “Who’s the lucky person we’re talking about?”

“Holy shit,” Jungkook jolts with shock and aims his glare at Taehyung. “Don’t do that. Also, no one, and get off me,” Jungkook shrugs Taehyung’s arm off and stalks away, ears blazing red.

“What was that about?” Taehyung, arm still slung around Jimin, watches with mild amusement as Jungkook struggles to push the door handle repeatedly before finally pulling it open with a fling and exiting the room.

“Jungkook being himself,” Jimin sighs as he shakes his head.

“Love drives people nuts doesn’t it,” Taehyung marvels. “Do you know who it is?”

Jimin hesitates, “Maybe.”

“So you do,” Taehyung leans in. “Got a name? Is it someone I know? Are they a celeb?”

“You’re unusually curious,” Jimin snickers. “What’s it to you?”

“Well I mean I can live without knowing,” Taehyung says defensively, cheeks growing slightly warm. “But it seems interesting. Like what kind of person is he into? I’d like to see them.”

“Sure,” Jimin looks to the side contemplatively, “But I don’t think I have the license to tell you.”

“Wow,” Taehyung pouts. “Are we even best friends?”

“You’ll probably figure it out soon anyway,” Jimin shrugs and pauses. “It’s someone in the industry. Oops, wait, did I say too much?”

“Ooo, how cryptic,” Taehyung wiggles his fingers. “I’ll keep an eye out.”

Jimin glances down at his fingers and gives Taehyung a look, “You and Jungkook are so alike.”

“How so?” Taehyung stops and frowns.

“You’re both dumbasses.”

“Offensive.”

“I only speak in truths,” Jimin taps the keyboard. “Anyway, while he’s gone, wanna practice your part?”

“Yeah sure,” Taehyung stretches his fingers and rips out a few scales for warm-up. “From the top?”

Jimin kneels down, propping his elbows on the keyboard and his head on his hands, “That’d be nice.”

+++}

Jungkook slips back in with the guitar a bit later, and after some tuning in one of the corners of the room, he slides into the chair next to Taehyung. After one of the instructors shows Jungkook the four chords he needs to play for the duration of the song, they’re on their way and practicing until the wee
hours in the morning. It’s pretty bad at first, either Jungkook slips up on a strum (and he stomps his foot on the ground in frustration each time), or Taehyung messes up another run, but eventually, by the beginning of dawn, they’re able to play the whole thing through. By the time Taehyung heads home, pulling his new car out of the underground garage, the sun is already peeking out between the buildings and casting the new day in a golden hue.

He stumbles into his apartment, and barely makes it to his couch before he crashes, snoozing the entirety of the morning away draped over the armrest. He wakes up in the middle of the afternoon with a pounding headache, a deep desire to murder his alarm (how does one go about killing a sound?), and at least 10 messages from Jimin telling him to get his ass back to work. So he wipes the drool of his face and somehow gets himself up and back at it again, and before he knows it, he’s back in the building, staring at the handle as he wills himself once again to open it.

Jungkook apparently had never left, against the advice of nearly everyone, he had skipped his break to opt to practice his part over and over again, and it seemed like it was paying off. He was shaky when they had first started, looking down at his fingers and he hesitantly plucked chords, but now, Taehyung observes as he shuffles across the room, Jungkook was strumming through the song like it was more or less what he was born to do.

He greets Taehyung with a stoic nod and an observation, “You look like shit.”

“You’re too kind,” Taehyung quips sarcastically as he plunks himself at the keyboard, rubbing his eyes. “Let’s get this over with?”

“Sounds good to me,” Jungkook counts off the start, and they’re on their way.

+++ 

A blink of an eye and day later finds Taehyung slouched awkwardly in a cushioned chair in front of an illuminated mirror, getting every stray hair clipped off his head, every blemish covered up, and the week’s latest names in high fashion draped over his shoulders. The makeup artist’s already stabbed him in the eye maybe 5 or 6 times, he’s already ruined one jacket with his foundation, and he can barely move his shoulders in fear of popping a thread in his dress shirt, but damn, he thinks as he checks himself out in the mirror, does he look good.

He takes a selca (“ayy it’s ya boy”) and selects contacts on SNOW pretty indiscriminately. He picks anyone’s he’s interacted with in the last two months, and doesn’t check twice before he fires the photo off. The first replies come within seconds, and he’s scrolling down his list checking names when he spots that somehow, by accident, he had sent it to Jungkook too.

And wow, Taehyung blinks in surprise. He had already sent a reply back.

He glances briefly at Jungkook’s direction through the mirror, at where he’s seated on the opposite side of the room, his back facing Taehyung, earbuds jammed in his ears as two people fuss with his hair before opening the chat with a swipe.

**Jungkook**
Lol nice shirt
Taehyung snorts, fingers hovering over the keyboard as he thinks about how to reply.

**Taehyung**
You’re wearing the same one

**Jungkook**
Yeah
I know
That’s what makes it nice

**Taehyung**
Wow
How humble

**Jungkook**
I’m humble as fuck

**Taehyung**
Hah.
That’s a good one

**Jungkook**
I’m so humble
I’m already sitting down

And Taehyung, conditioned by Jin over the course of several years to love even the weakest of jokes actually lets out a soft wheeze of a laugh into his fist against his will.

**Taehyung**
Lol lame

**Jungkook**
I saw you laugh
Taehyung looks up at the mirror to see Jungkook watching him, arm casually slung over the edge of the chair as one of the hairdressers splits his part with the handle of a comb. Jungkook winks before turning to talk to a coordinator who stops by, adjusting the bracelets on his wrist as he does.

And Taehyung rolls his eyes.

Taehyung
Save it for your crush

Jungkook
Lol

+++  

Some kid Taehyung’s pretty sure is Yugyeom stops by after dress rehearsals, and he immediately starts messing around with Jungkook. Taehyung’s watching a show on his tablet, and so he can’t see (and doesn’t care about) what they’re exactly doing, but their voices keep getting louder and louder by the minute, and Taehyung has to crack up the volume to max to drown them out.

He gets about two minutes of relative peace until his earbud is abruptly ripped out of his ear. Taehyung whips around to identify the culprit and finds an unamused Jungkook holding onto the earpiece, with Yugyeom hovering right behind him.

“What the fuck?” Taehyung clutches his ear. “A warning would have been nice?”

“Sorry,” Jungkook, with a frown stamped across his face, jabs a thumb in Yugyeom’s direction. “This guy really wanted to meet you.”

“Hey, I’m Yugyeom,” Yugyeom sticks his hand out and Taehyung shakes it. “Surprised we haven’t been introduced before. Nice to meet you, though.”

“Same,” Taehyung looks at him a bit warily. “I’m Taehyung.”

“Yeah I know,” Yugyeom says with no shame. “I’ve heard so much about you from—”

“Annnnd we’re good,” Jungkook begins shoving Yugyeom away, shooting daggers at him with his eyes. “Don’t you have rehearsal right now?”

Yugyeom glances at his watch, and begins heading out. “Oh shit you’re right. Anyway, love Cozy Conversations, good luck out there, and hope to see you around again Taehyung.”

“Sure,” Taehyung waves as Yugyeom exits the room. Then he turns to Jungkook, and asks dryly, “So what sort of shit about me have you been telling him?”

It’s a rhetorical question. It’s got to be just complaints. And if Jungkook ranted to Yugyeom about Taehyung nearly half as much as Taehyung ranted about Jungkook to Jimin, he’d have enough history to fill at least one textbook.
Taehyung just wasn’t weak enough to let Jimin expose him.

Jungkook looks grimly to the side, “Um, I’m going to go get some water.”

Taehyung smiles wanly, “Yeah, you do that.”

+++ 

RTAOTY and a second on-the-rise idol girl group member, stop by their waiting room for an interview. RTAOTY quickly beelines for Jungkook, who’s dozing off in a chair. She taps him lightly on the shoulder, and he frowns as he wakes up, glaring at nothing in particular until he sees her and recognition washes his expression into an easy-going smile.

Taehyung stops watching at this point, interest captured by the second MC as she steps into his line of vision and confidently introduces herself to him. Even though the first thing she does is hand him a signed copy of her group’s album as a gift, the way she speaks makes it clear that she’s gearing up for a solo career of her own, and from the way she seems like she’s looking through him and not at him, Taehyung can sense this is purely a networking moment.

But he doesn’t dismiss her. He knows she’s a good act to bet on, because she’s pretty, can hold a note, has a good onscreen personality and perhaps most importantly, a significant social media following, and so he exchanges contact information without a second thought (although he does somewhat disparagingly mentally dub her as Breakout Suckup). And as she walks away to socialize with the PD, he considers briefly about what sort of songs would go well with her image. If she makes her move by winter, a ballad would work pretty well, and maybe he could even tap Bogum to secure it as an OST for his next drama.

But, he was getting ahead of himself. He had other things to worry about. Like the performance, and well, the interview.

Before he knows it, he’s mic’d up and herded with Jungkook into the center of the room. They were already given the questions the day before, and so all they have to do is regurgitate the prepared answers. But Taehyung’s still nervous.

His mind goes a bit blank when the cameras start rolling, his smile frozen unnaturally on his face as he automatically nods at everything Jungkook says. The two MCs are so bubbly and bright, which helps bring the tension down, and they ooo and ahh at every word that comes out of Jungkook’s mouth, beaming so brightly they nearly blind Taehyung’s eyes.

As Jungkook finishes his last question, Taehyung tries his best to remember his lines. He really only has one part, a 30-second spiel where he talks about the point of the song, and he manages to stutter his way through it without having a major messing up.

“So yeah, the song is, um, about spending time with your crush on an autumn day and pretending you’re, um, like, having a really intimate conversation with this p-person while you’re entertaining the idea about confessing.” Taehyung explains to Breakout Suckup, who’s trying so hard to look engaged that she looks bored again. The hand that’s grasping the mic is shaking out of his control, he hates the way his voice is sounding, but he powers through it anyway, “This song is about t-that, like the will I, won’t I make-a-move type feeling that, um, you get for s-someone who’s really dear in my —no wait—your heart.”
“Oooh TAE, that’s so romantic!” RTAOTY claps and she glances cutely at Jungkook, who’s clenching his chest jokingly and got his typical interview smile plastered across his face. “Do you have anyone currently like that in your heart?”

Taehyung lifts up a brow suggestively, and laughs, he has no stan fans anyway, might as well have fun with the questions, and he grins straight at Breakout Suckup who’s looking expectantly at him, “M-maybe?”

“Ohoooh! She’s a lucky lady!” RTAOTY exclaims as both girls clap together and Jungkook looks down and fixes his hair with his pinky.

The rest of the interview goes smoothly, with 20 seconds left there really isn’t that much time for a catastrophe, and then, just like that, the interview ends. As the crew’s on their way out, RTAOTY stops to talk to Jungkook before she leaves, giggling as she smooths a crease on his shirt. And Jungkook’s got the same smile he had on earlier on his face too, a more genuine one than during the interview at least, and as he says something to her and poses as she takes a selca with just the two of them, the thought that she could be the one flits across Taehyung’s mind.

Well probably not, and it doesn’t really matter for him, and so he quickly shakes the thought from his head, not quite liking way an inkling of jealousy sprouts in his chest.

Jimin

---

So who’s this mystery love interest of yours
Is it that MC
Not the actress one, the idol

What?

From your interview

Wait that broadcasted already?

It was live

Oh yeah
Lmao no one

Really?
Yeah I was just going along with the flow of the interview

Great

Why are you asking?

Hmm

??

Someone wants to know

Wat

Just a PSA
You’re currently driving someone crazy
That someone for whatever reason
Is using me as an emotional sounding board
And you just kicked that person into overdrive
So before you spew lies like that
Please consider your best buddy Park Jimin

WAIT

I swear that person was freaking out about it over text
For like a minute straight
I’ve never had to read an essay over text before
I can put up with it sorta if it’s over something real
But not if it’s a goddamn lie

WHO
You’re a dumbass lol
Well they are too
So I guess you match
Just put two and two together, it’s not that hard

TELL ME

Nah
This is funnier

JIMIN

read 2:37 PM

DON’T LEAVE ME HANGING

read 2:37 PM

MY EGO NEEDS TO KNOW

read 2:37 PM

JIMIN!!!!!

read 2:37 PM

! !
!!!
!!!!
!!!!!
!!!!!!
The nerves don’t truly start kicking in until about midway through Jungkook’s performance of Remember Me, as Taehyung’s watching him kill it from offstage. It’s not like he had ever thought this was a walk in the park, but being able to experience the flurry of activity to put on a flawless show first hand gives him a deeper appreciation for performances. It was stressful enough doing this once, he thinks as he begins to pace back and forth to stave of the restlessness, belting out a few lines to keep his voice warm, trying to keep thoughts about people not liking his voice at bay, he’s really not sure how Jungkook coped with doing this for years.

It probably gets easier, or some conventional wisdom like that. But the tunnel vision of “now” and the way his heart was jackhammering against his chest was making it really hard for Taehyung to see how that would conceivably be the case.

Soon, much too soon, Remember Me ends, and the flurry for the transition begins, the lights dim, Jungkook disappears somewhere on the other side, stagehands rush to set up the props for Cozy Conversations, and the backup dancers file out.

Taehyung spots Jihoon in the middle of the stampede and he holds out a hand and hollers, “Hey, Jihoon!”

Jihoon looks up as just as he’s about to pass by, and a gigantic grin spreads across his face as he steps out of the flow to clasp Taehyung’s hand and bump shoulders, “Oh what’s up! You were watching?”

“Yeah, you killed it out there.”

“Thanks,” Jihoon waves, wiping sweat of his brow, as a coordinator begins to push Taehyung towards the stage. “Good luck out there. Also are you free Tuesday? We should get coffee again, that was really helpful.”

“Yeah, text me the time,” Taehyung says before he stumbles out onto the stage.

A few fans scream through the dark, and that only sets off his nerves a little more. Counting the signs and the lightsticks, it looks like most of the crowd is there for Jungkook. But scattered throughout the audience, he spots a few phones with TAE scrawled across and that gives him a small boost of confidence.

Jungkook’s already there, adjusting his sleeves over his guitar. He’s perched on the edge of one of
the two cafe chairs set out in front of the microphones. Yoongi’s somewhere in the back, swiveling around in his stool as he adjusts the drums.

“How’s your fanboy?” Jungkook looks up at Taehyung, face devoid of a smile.

“Great. He looked great out here during Remember Me, unlike, well, you,” Taehyung teases as he sits behind the keyboard. He takes a deep breath and tries not to think about messing up. “A little shaky out here, man.”

Jungkook grumbles as he plucks at his guitar, “Whatever.”

“Just kidding,” and Taehyung feels a bit bad. "You were fine."

“Whatever.”

One of the stagehands gives the signal for two minutes left, and it kicks Taehyung’s heart into overdrive. His fingers begin to shake as he ghosts them over the keyboards, and his arms begin to lock up. It gets harder to breathe, and it’s just straight fear coursing through his veins at this point, and he wonders briefly if he’ll be able to go through with this or if he could just bolt now.

There’s no question that he’ll make a mistake. He’s going to, he’s going to sound awful, and it’s going to be in front of a live audience on broadcast TV. Even if he sang well, by his own standards, people weren’t going to like his voice. Why did he think this was a good idea again? Because it wasn’t. It really wasn’t, and Taehyung had never regretted anything more in his life than this particular moment in time, and he would like nothing more than to get up and exit stage left.

He’s getting consumed by his thoughts, head slowly slumping over as he succumbs when a the tap of a hand against his back snaps him out of it.

“Hey,” Jungkook scoots right next to him and whispers, eyes glinting through the dark. “It’s going to be fine. Relax.”

“I’m okay,” Taehyung lies. He watches out of the corner of his eye as the guy offstage signals one minute.

“That’s good to hear,” Jungkook murmurs into Taehyung’s ear, and his hand feels warm and secure against Taehyung’s back. “But, still, just keep in mind it’s going to be fine. Even if you make a mistake, keep going. I’ll cover you.”

“Cool, okay,” Taehyung jerkily nods, and feels himself somewhat relax. Something about Jungkook’s voice, and the assuredness of his tone, that, through some magic, manages to calm down Taehyung to a manageable degree.

“Yeah, let’s do this,” Jungkook holds a fist up. “Hwaiting.”

“Hwaiting,” Taehyung breathes back.

Then the guy signals for them to go, Jungkook settles the guitar and his expression into place, and the lights flood the stage.

And before the first note is even played, the fans lose their goddamn minds.
happy holidays!

this is probably gonna be the last update until like early jan, i gotta go do holiday stuff LOL. i apparently have like 10k of future chap material for this thing written out on the doc, but idk if i'm even gonna keep a lot of it cuz idk if i like the original direction. but who knows LOL, since i'm just pulling this outta my ass writing this for fun, i'm not really dead set on anything.

but yeah! merry xmas to those who celebrate it, happy holidays to those who don't. and here's to a better year for everyone in 2018!

**Also, it's gayo season im excited**
The screams hit Taehyung like a wall.

Jungkook, not having the time to scoot back into position, had improvised and quickly twisted around, crossing his leg and leaning his back against Taehyung’s shoulder, as if he were some lovesick streetside guitarist and Taehyung was his wall, turning right as the camera panned towards him and splitting his face into a winning grin.

Taehyung can’t tell if the fans particularly liked that move, or if they were always this loud in general, but the volume is so unexpected and deafening that it breaks past his in-ears and completely disorients him. He doesn’t realize Jungkook’s already singing until about the fourth line, which granted him 10 seconds more of extreme panic than he would like.

Luckily his part doesn’t kick in until the second verse, but it’s not great that he’s already scrambling at the beginning, trying to figure out where exactly Jungkook was and what beat he was supposed to come in on. As the song marches inevitably closer and closer to his part, Taehyung begins to feel trepidation set in, keys swimming in front of his face as he desperately tries to come up with anything concrete that he was responsible for, like a particular note, word, beat, but to no avail. He keeps drawing big fucking blank after big fucking blank and a chill begins to run down his spine as trepidation is replaced with cold fear.

Then his part comes.

And, he slips into autopilot.

The hours of practice take over, and his body submits to muscle memory. He remembers Jungkook’s advice, he breathes, his vision clears, and he just plays. His fingers seem to know what to do on their own, even if he’s slightly behind the beat at the beginning, but he quickly gets on tempo. His heart is still racing, but it feels slightly exciting now, and as he leans into the mic, lips touching the cool metal of the windscreen, he spots a few of his fans spazzing out in the front, throws them a little nervous grin (they spazz out even more), and begins to sing.

His voice is weak at first, and cracks on the first line, but Jungkook supplements him, harmonizing in
the background as he sits up straight until Taehyung grows in enough strength and confidence and Jungkook fades into adlibs. The cheers of encouragement from the crowd give him a boost in energy, exhilaration serving as motivational spurs, and even though he forgets one line, smoothly, Jungkook steps in and sings it for him, and he keeps going.

He spends most of the song looking down at things, supervising his fingers as they skitter along the keys, glancing down at the mic as he leans in, staring at the scuff marks on the stage when he has a break. But when he finishes his last verse, he drops his hands from the keyboard, pure relief from being done washing all his tension away, looks up at the crowd and relishes for a bit in the screams from the fans. He waves to a couple of girls in the front, and even though they’re here for Jungkook, they start jumping up and down when he does. A grin spreads across Taehyung’s face as he spots someone holding up a sign with his name, he throws them a wink and they almost combust, and he laughs. He can see how people get addicted to this.

Then he turns to his right and his breath get swept away.

Jungkook has his eyes closed, fingers strumming the strings and foot tapping against the ground to keep the beat as he shines under the lights and sings with a shy smile about the way red leaves drift to the ground, really wanting to confess, and other vague cliches about harboring a first love during the autumn season. And something about the sight completely captivates Taehyung, his breath catching in his throat, heart thumping in his ears. The crowd and the audience fade into the background until it’s only the two of them in a moment Taehyung doesn’t want to end.

And in that instance, before he realizes what he’s doing, he’s pretending he’s the one Jungkook’s singing for.

He snaps out of it when Jungkook opens his eyes and glances smoothly over at Taehyung as he sings the last words. The eye contact rips Taehyung out of his trance, and he immediately looks away, jerking his head downwards as the stage lights dim and his heart beats louder than the fans’ cheers in his ears.

Jungkook sticks his hand out for a high five and Taehyung slaps it lightly, and tries to ignore how the way Jungkook’s looking at him, eyes half-lidded with a strangely soft smile, was pushing his post-performance high into straight euphoria.

It’s probably just left-over exhilaration from performing. Because it’s not the start of something, he thinks to himself, as he gets up from his chair and they hurry off the stage. It’s really not, he tells himself as Jungkook pulls him aside the second they reach the backstage and rustles the butterflies when he leans in and whispers “hey, you sounded great out there” into his ear. It really shouldn't be, he tries to convince himself, even if he can’t quite look Jungkook in the eye and has to mumble his “thanks, you too,” to Jungkook’s chin, and the way his heart pounds against his chest, the way his ears burn, the way he’d like to lean in closer are clear contradictions.

Because it really isn’t wise, he has to remind himself, as RTAOTY taps Jungkook’s attention away and he turns and greets her with a loopy smile, as Jungkook looks over her shoulder and shuffles to the side of the stage, peeking around the edge of the barrier and rousing his fans into a screaming frenzy, as Taehyung spots out of the corner of his eye a well-known tabloid journalist monitoring Jungkook like a hawk. There are so many reasons why even beginning to fall for this particular guy in this particular setting would be a terrible idea.

And Taehyung doesn’t do terrible ideas.

A minute later, Jungkook’s whisked away by some coordinators to go stand in the front of the awards announcement. Taehyung follows the rest of the artists who are beginning to stream out of
their waiting rooms and hangs out at the back, awkwardly loitering as the hosts come back on stage and begin MCing about the award.

The crowd’s restless, because this round’s a bit of a formality. The three songs that are competing are Jungkook’s two offerings: Remember Me and his followup, Look Here, and a rookie girl group’s catchy comeback song about a first love. The song has been a digital monster of a hit, charting in first place simultaneously across all real-time charts for the last week or so, which is how it was even contesting in the first place. But the group is new and from a mid-tier agency, and so their fan base was modestly sized at best. And against Jungkook’s formidable fandom force and the fact that Remember Me was still solidly cemented at 9 in most of the real-time charts, everyone has been aware from the beginning it’s been a lost fight since the moment Jungkook was nominated.

It’s goofy, for the announcement, they train two cameras on Jungkook from different angles, and he pulls faces at both of them as Yugyeom jumps up behind and his other friends take turns twisting his hair into strange shapes and poking his face, and Taehyung finds himself involuntarily grinning as he watches their antics in the monitors. He feels a bit bad for the girl group, as they stand awkwardly lined up on the other side as if it was still an up-in-the-air competition, decked out in identical white dresses, waving cautiously in the third screen in synchronization as their faces already set into the thinnest of lines of defeat, probably terrified of online retribution from an attitude controversy accusation.

RTAOTY emerges out in front, chatting with the other three MCs, Breakout Suckup and two guy idols who hail from a Big Three rookie group. She subtly sidles up to Jungkook and greets him with a bow that he returns. Then the cameras roll, the award music plays, she giggles, first-prize bouquet in hand, makes a remark to one of her male co-hosts about all of the great performances before kicking off the tally, and announces the winner to the symphony of bursting confetti.

“The winner is...Remember Me!” she hands the bouquet to Jungkook as the crowd of idols behind him dutifully clap and feign surprise, and the other guy MC delicately hands him the trophy.

Taehyung claps too, a big over-exaggerated grin slapped on his face as the camera pans across his section, and lets it slip once the camera moves off as his high quickly ebbs and a huge wave of exhaustion hits him. The crowd around him begins to disperse, filing away as credits roll and the confetti continues to fall from the rafters, and Taehyung takes a last look at Jungkook celebrating in the spotlight, throwing bits of paper up into the air as he sings portions of Remember Me for his fans.

Then suddenly he’s being pushed towards the front of the stage, Yugyeom gleefully strong-arming him as he marches towards Jungkook.

“What are you doing?” Taehyung stumbles backwards twice as he struggles to keep up with Yugyeom’s pace.

“You should celebrate too,” he laughs, looking over Taehyung’s shoulder. “Didn’t you write the song?”

“Yeah, but Jungkook’s the face of it,” Taehyung tries to duck under Yugyeom’s arm, sensing that they’re terrifying close to the range of the camera.

“He won’t mind,” Yugyeom laughs, grabbing a mic from a passing MC. He sticks that in Taehyung’s hand, flips him around, and gives him a solid shove in Jungkook’s direction.

Taehyung nearly falls, dropping the mic as he hops and tries to safely stop, before running straight into Jungkook’s back.
Jungkook turns, startled. And Taehyung apologizes as he folds his face into what he hopes is an incredibly apologetic smile, and lifts a hand, “Sorry, sorry, Yugyeom pushed me.”

“Oh. Yeah, uh, no problem,” Jungkook blinks before turning back to the crowd and crouching over and singing a few more words exaggeratedly.

Taehyung looks behind him, and Yugyeom’s already gone, and he realizes belatedly it’s just himself and Jungkook left on the stage. He feels really out of place, like he’s intruding on a special moment between Jungkook and his fans, and so he begins to clap as he makes his escape towards stage left, pulling confetti out of his hair as he shuffles away.

Then Jungkook appears out of nowhere, throwing an arm around Taehyung’s shoulders and all but hauling him back to center stage.

“Um, what are you doing,” Taehyung hisses as Jungkook drags him by the crook of his arm.

Jungkook ignores him and shoves the mic in front of his face instead.

“Um,” Taehyung reels from how loud his voice sounds. “Hi.”

More than few fans scream, and then scream some more as Jungkook twists his head and whispers into Taehyung’s ear, “You’re supposed to sing.”

“Oh,” Taehyung blinks down at the mic, tries to figure out where the background music, and hesitantly chants, slightly flat, “R-remember me, uh, remember me?”

Jungkook snickers and leans in again, hair brushing against Taehyung’s ear as he amusedly mutters, “Having problems remembering the lyrics?”

Taehyung pushes the mic away from his mouth, takes one look at the way Jungkook’s cracking up at his own shitty joke, and feels his face warm, “Shut up, it’s been a while.”

“If you say so,” Jungkook slips his arm off of Taehyung’s shoulder, sets his trophy and bouquet on the ground and bends down to scoop up some confetti.

“Seriously!”

“I think you’re just getting old,” Jungkook teases as he gets up, eyes glittering in the stage lights, his hand suspiciously concealed behind his back.

Taehyung’s about to protest when he’s hit full in the face by a fistful of confetti and by the time he’s spitting out paper and myler, Jungkook’s cackling and jogging to the otherside of the stage, lifting the mic to his face as he high fives some fans and giggles out more lines to the song.

Taehyung makes a face as he turns around to avoid the camera and tries to remove a piece of tissue paper that was beginning to rapidly dissolve in his mouth as attractively as possible. As he’s preoccupied with that, Jungkook manages to sneak behind him and dump another round on his head.

Taehyung whirls around, feeling bits of paper make their way down his shirt and complains, “Stop, Jungkook—”

And that’s when he feels a finger hook into his waistband and the sensation of confetti being quickly shoved down his pants and sliding down into places he’s never remotely wanted to feel a million of pieces of tiny paper before. The fans scream again as Jungkook begins backing up, shit-eating expression stamped across his face as a semi-murderous one begins crossing Taehyung’s own.
“Okay, now you’re gonna get it,” Taehyung shakes out his pants to the best of his abilities, bends down, and begins carefully amassing up a pile of arsenal.

Jungkook circles Taehyung from a distance, still grinning, and Taehyung gets up, ammo in hand, narrows his eyes in his direction, and begins stalking in his attack.

“You’ve gotta catch me first,” Jungkook laughs as he backs away from Taehyung, hands in front of him defensively.

“Easy,” Taehyung lunges, and Jungkook darts away.

He starts chasing Jungkook across the stage, fingers only barely grasping the edge of Jungkook’s shirt before Jungkook manages to twist away. Jungkook makes it look like he’s having the time of his life, bending down occasionally to scoop up paper to chuck over his shoulder in a pocket-sand esque fashion as he runs away with a giantass grin on his face. He gets a bit cocky at one point, twirling away from Taehyung in a hilarious ballerina-esque spin to the massive enjoyment of his fans and nearly trips himself. Taehyung almost catches up to him then, grasping at his belt, but at the last second, Jungkook manages to twist away.

He’s racing after Jungkook, one lunge away from grabbing his arm, when deja vu strikes and nostalgia hits him full in the face with a detail-frayed memory.

He’s eighteen and chasing a laughing 15-year old Jungkook around one of the practice rooms, probably a mere month before BTD’s debut, desperately trying to get back the beanie Jungkook had snatched off his head a minute earlier. He’s trying to do it in the most subtle way possible as well, throwing glances over his shoulder to gauge the reaction of some stylist noona who he had been crushing on hard enough at the time to overcome his crippling dread of practice rooms enough to come down and visit.

Ironically, now, her name and face were just recollective blurs.

He had been trying to pull moves on her, trailing her and chatting her up as she dressed up the final prototype team for BTD for their MV dance practice dress rehearsal. And she had finally stopped moving, leaning against a wall near the trainees’ piles of bags and he had gotten in about half an hour of good solid conversation with her before Jungkook, normally chill and probably his favorite trainee up until the particular moment, decided to start being annoying for whatever reason, and just would not stop interrupting Taehyung with a never-ending series of banal questions.

It had started out fine, with a relatively innocuous, “Hey hyung, what time is it?”

“Uh, 3:37,” Taehyung checked his phone before turning back to tell the girl another joke.

And then fifteen minutes later, “Is it raining outside?”

“I don’t know, I’ve been inside all day.”

Ten minutes later, “Hey, where’s the vending machine?”

“Um, wait, you’ve been here for a year, and you still don’t know?”

“Nope.”

“Oh. Uh. Down the hall, to your left.”

And then, literally like clockwork every five minutes:
“Can you pass me my jacket?”
“Can I borrow a few won?”
“Can you throw my jacket on my bag?”
“Which one is Yoongi?”
“Sorry, what time is it again?”
“Do you have food?”
“Where’s Hoseok?”
“Can you pass me my jacket again?”
“Actually, no, wait, can you throw it back on my bag?”
“What does RM stand for?”
“How many seconds are in an hour?”
“Is Jimin coming?”
“Did you know the ocean’s blue only because the sky’s blue?”
“Do you have a pen?”
“Can you pass me my jacket?”

The barrage of questions made it hard for Taehyung to really keep the conversation going with the girl, and sensing her interest starting to rapidly wane as he was beginning to spend more time talking to Jungkook than he was to her, he solved the issue by straight-out ignoring Jungkook. And maybe he would have felt bad, if it wasn’t for the fact that he hadn’t frantically made room in his schedule and overcome his inhibitions to drag himself to the practice rooms just to answer annoying questions from some teenage trainee. He had done it to get with the hottest girl currently on staff. Priorities, yeah, he had them.

Anyway, it was probably after the sixth question Taehyung had successfully ignored when something possessed Jungkook to leap out of nowhere yank Taehyung’s beanie off his head. The second his beanie slipped off of his hair, he was left with two less-than-great recovery options: 1) do nothing or 2) give chase. And he had a split second to consider the trade offs. One would leave him fugly. The other one would make him look childish. And well, with a hot girl now giggling potentially at him and not with him, the choice was pretty clear. The incredibly high threshold of unattractiveness of unruly hat hair combined with his natural four-finger forehead had left him with but one option of clamping a hand over his bangs and giving a desperate chase.

And so that’s how he found himself, an 18-year-old man, unamusedly chasing around a 15-year-old kid like his life depended on it.

“Hey, Jungkook, could you not, ” Taehyung hissed, as he made a grab for the kid’s shirt and clutched nothing but air as Jungkook nimbly twisted away. “Holy fuck, this is actually the worst time.”

In response, Jungkook, just laughed louder, eyes folding into little twin crescents, and darted away. Taehyung let out a frustrated yell, shot an arm out and snagged Jungkook’s skinny wrist, quickly anchoring him down as Jungkook tried to turn the corner.

“Give me it back.” Taehyung wrestles with Jungkook as he tries to get his accessory back.

Jungkook struggled to get himself out of Taehyung’s grip but to no avail as he tucked Taehyung’s beanie under his arm to protect it. And Taehyung was a hair’s breadth away from snatching his hat back when he heard a giggle behind him. Immediately, he whipped around, only to find the stylist noona talking to one of the dance choreographers, hand nervously covering the bottom part of her face, a blush clearly dusted across her face.

He’s pretty sure they got married a couple of years later.
It felt a bit like a punch to the gut at the time, and desperate to divert his attention to anywhere but there, Taehyung glared down at Jungkook, and even though he knew it wasn't not exactly Jungkook’s fault, he couldn’t help but feel extreme annoyance at the way Jungkook was looking up at him with his shitty baby face and shittier prepubescent smirk.

Then the memory stutters, the crowd roars back into Taehyung’s ears, and he blinks down at Jungkook’s wrist clutched in his hand in the present. He’s grown a lot, Taehyung realizes. His wrist was so much stronger now, spider veins running up from his hand to his elbow, and it felt like he was just humoring Taehyung and could break out his grip on a whim. Taehyung glances up, and feels his heart flutter at the way Jungkook’s looking at him with a smirk under the stage lights.

Height-wise Jungkook was now half a head taller than Taehyung, and somewhere along the years his baby fat had chipped away for more angled features. The makeup, the hairstyling, the brow job, and the celebrity-grade skin care routine of course did their wonders as well, but there was a layer of confidence too that hadn’t been there when he was younger, tooling the edges of his expression and body posture into something that just made Jungkook look, well, really good.

His heart thuds. It was kind of like Taehyung was seeing him for the first time.

“You’ve changed so much,” Taehyung breathes without thinking, hold loosening as the confetti flutters out of the palm of his hand, between his fingers and down to the floor, and briefly considers how this idea may not be such a terrible one after all.

And Jungkook laughs before saying something that gets garbled by the screams from the fans. It sounds strangely like—

“Good.”

+++ 

When they finally leave the stage, Jungkook’s instantly swarmed by staff to be prepped for and bused off to his next event, some talk-based variety show that he was scheduled to film with a couple of other idols until 6 in the morning. Strangely, he’s the one looking apologetically at Taehyung as he’s herded with his entourage into a caravan of vans, and Taehyung sympathetically waves and wishes him good luck.

Jin swings by just before they leave with a form to sign off on releasing Cozy Conversations as a single. Apparently there was a lot of buzz online, and BigCube was ready to capitalize on it. And unhesitatingly Taehyung approves with a stroke from the pen—his decision tree when it came to these things was pretty much just: will it make him money? then yes, otherwise, no—and Jin’s off with a thanks and a wave.

Taehyung gets shuttled home in a company car a little later and barely remembers the ride or climbing into the elevator or even opening his own door before he collapses on his bed. He checks his texts before he sleeps, sifting through for the important ones. They’re mostly congratulatory messages from family, friends, and associates (he’s on TV for a few minutes and suddenly everyone pretends to be on a first name basis with him). He answers a few without thinking, like from Jimin, Jin, and the group chats from his nuclear family and between a few BigCube producers, but hesitates for a moment before he answers the last.
Sorry, didn’t get a lot of time to talk to you after
But it was super chill singing with you
Hope we can do it more in the future

Haha same
Yeah for sure
Go Team Cozy Conversations

Hahaha

How’s filming going?

It’s aight
A lot of downtime
But I feel fucking dead
And they’re asking math questions, not my forte
It’s going to be rly embarrassing when it broadcasts
So don’t watch it

Rip
Lmao
Editing will save you though
Better start sucking up to the broadcast team

Lol getting on that
What are you doing up so late?

Good question
Bout to go to sleep actually lol

Am I keeping you up?
My bad
G’night

Bundled in his blankets, he slips into a deep sleep, as the wear and tear of the last few days catches up with him and knocks him out like a light. He dreams about nothing, and doesn’t wake up until almost evening of the next day, opening his eyes as the sun sets over the city skyline.

And it was probably for the best that he had a few more hours of reprieve away from the rest of the world.

Because the controversy erupts overnight.

+++  

Jimin

Hey  
When you wake up  
Avoid PANN  
It’s a shitshow  
Also call me

+++
Call me as soon as you wake up
We’re working on burying it now but need
to get your OK on some statements

+++ We Got Jamz

Namjoon
Hey @Tae did you get Jin’s text?

Hoseok
Let us know if you need anything when you wake up
We’re really worried for you

Yoongi
Holy shit, fuck them
Chapter End Notes

lmao so actually i lied in my last note and actually found time before the year ended

but yEAH happy new year (again) and happy birthday to taehyung (yesterday technically?)

also, just gonna leave this here
Chapter Summary

yeah, in the beginning it was all so easy
but I fucked up in the end
— wingtip

walls

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A common misconception people have about Taehyung’s nervous breakdown is that it was triggered by a fear of negative opinions and impending failure.

While not entirely false, it’s an oversimplification that doesn’t identify the true root of the problem. But it happens to be the typical first assumption listeners tended to make as well as an easy-to-consume reduction of the problem into something that Taehyung found to be marginally better sounding than the truth. In other words, pretty much because it was less work, he rarely bothered to correct people when they assumed these causes to be the case.

The real cause, he figured out with a bit of soul searching, was pressure. That was it. Just insane amounts of perceived pressure and chronic deprivation of food and sleep that had wore him down to the point where he barely got himself to leave his apartment the morning of the evaluation, and the second he entered BigCube’s lobby, a step behind Jimin, his mind basically went “fuck that,” and noped straight out of consciousness.

Jimin really doesn’t appreciate it when he jokes about how hard his head must have hit the floor. But whatever, Jimin doesn’t appreciate a lot of things.

The reason why he kept it on the downlow? Pressure, at least in his case, could be defined as the weight of expectations. And in a modern society where most people work together for a living, the expectation to deliver is pretty much unavoidable. Just imagine someone telling their potential future employer in an interview: “My greatest weakness? I can’t function under pressure.” Yeah. It doesn’t sound great. Especially in a cutthroat industry like entertainment where the ability to thrive under high-pressure situations is a baseline requirement and friends become enemies ready to sell your secrets depending on which way the wind’s blowing. It’s pretty much a one way ticket out the second someone higher on the food chain starts having doubts about his value to the company, and so the less people that know, the better.

If the fainting thing was going to happen anyway, it’s probably better that he passed out in the lobby instead of at the evaluation. Word and the subsequent opinions people had about it spread pretty fast regardless, even if the first thing anyone other than Jimin saw was the ambulance pulling out of the parking lot. It turns out shitting on people always is a reliable conversation starter, especially among trainees who weren’t as fond of him.
And Taehyung had the pleasure of overhearing such an exchange the day he returned to BigCube and dragged himself down the hall to finalize his contract termination, catching the voice of a unfortunately talented and confident and obnoxiously mouthy (former) trainee he fondly referred to as Fuckface McGee as it floated from behind a practice room door that had been left ajar.

“...Did you hear about how Taehyung fainted before evals? I heard it was right outside of the evaluation room and he concussed or something. He’s such a weakass bitch, man, I always knew he wouldn’t make it.”

“Shh, don’t talk so loud!” Fuckface’s buddy had hissed.

“It’s fine, who’s going to hear? It’s like 7 in the morning, no one’s here,” Fuckface McGee had snorted. “I can’t believe he’s even a trainee. Like what kind of idol is scared of crowds to the point where they faint? I can’t believe he made it to the final round. Not saying I would have made it, hahaha or would I have? But at least I wouldn’t have fainted before it started, you know?...”

Yeah. It had sucked in the moment, and he had hurried past as fast as he could before he could hear more, pulling his hood low over his face so a potential wayward passerby wouldn’t recognize him and further compound his shame. But, hey, he’s over it now. Let bygones be bygones.

Of course it was easy to take the high road when presented the fact that three years later, karma bit Fuckface wholly in the ass and he, too, missed the cut. But you know, the bygones are already gone. Or something.

So going back to the beginning, it’s a massive oversimplification to say fear of negative opinion was the cause, because he could actually deal with negative opinions. It was dealing with the “before” state of mind that messed with him, sinking into a terrible mental vortex where the only option he felt he had was success and nothing less. That’s what really got to him, especially when applied to a situation (i.e, making the cut for BTD) with impossibly high stakes and was completely out of his control.

Why he felt the Need to Succeed could be neatly summed up with this statement: he comes from a family of successful doctors.

At least when he still in the process of not “making it,” his parents didn’t disown him. Got close. But ultimately didn’t. Silver linings. He takes those.

He also found a pretty simple solution to his problems. He stopped himself from caring as much, to an almost chronic degree. Ignorance is bliss, and Taehyung liked going through life in a giant haze. Of course, sometimes the situation could break the dam, like if the feedback was immediate and in front of a large audience, say, for example, performing a duet on broadcast television, the nerves and the bad vibes would come creeping back.

But otherwise, day to day, he shrugged it off. His approach applied to everything, work, games, relationships, and as a side-effect, he went through life not paying close attention to other people’s opinions, or to people in general. He just couldn’t work up the damn to do so. It’s why he doesn’t care about first impressions, why he doesn’t bother remembering names, birthdays, favorite colors, why he can remain impassive during face-to-face confrontations, and why he doesn’t realize someone’s interested him until they spell it out for him slowly like he’s in second grade, syllable by syllable, before socking him in the face with it.

Yeah, he’s that kind of guy. He just refuses to give the two shits required to pay close attention to anyone other than himself. And maybe a select few of his friends.
Also why, staring blearily at the mass of notifications spammed on his phone, wiping the sleep from his eyes, his only reaction to the controversy is:

“Really?” He mutters to himself, two parts mildly amused, and one part kinda annoyed as he checks the trending articles. Of course something like this would happen. Murphy’s Law ordained it.

He takes a break from the fun and dials Jimin, putting his phone to his ear, and winces from the volume when Jimin picks up by the first ring.

“How are you feeling?” Jimin cuts to the chase, as Taehyung puts him on speakerphone. “Also PANN’s still got their pitchforks out, I’d still avoid it.”

“Fine. Just slightly amazed at how they were able to put together this campaign in 12 hours,” Taehyung muses as he ignores Jimin’s advice and begins browsing PANN.

“Don’t underestimate people with time on their hands.”

“Apparently. They’re accusing me of so many things, I can’t even keep track. Oh, by the way we can’t be friends anymore, since I’m reading a petition that’s telling you to cut me off because of my supposed iljin past,” Taehyung squints as he reads a post. “Wow, I didn’t even go to this high school.”

“Very funny but—”

“Amazing. They want to ‘stop me for good.’ What does that even mean? The hashtag is a fucking piece of prose: #StopTAEforGood. Like, again, what does that even mean? I guess I’m done for,” Taehyung fake sighs. “Looks like I’ve got to stop. For good.”

“Tae—”

“Let’s see, what did I do that triggered them?” Taehyung taps around the forum. “Did I get too close to an idol or something? Did I say something offensive? Did I look like I didn’t try hard enough? Oh wait, I found the main petition. Let me read it.”

“You shouldn’t—”

“Wow they have a whole case listed against me, if they’re going to put in that much effort, they should go to law school,” Taehyung’s brows lift above his bangs. “So it is an attitude controversy—“

“Taehyung—”

“Fuck,” Taehyung reads the text quickly, smile grinning. “This is hilarious, have you read this petition yet? I’ll send it to you.”

“—stop before—”

“Like who would even believe this stuff? It’s so stup—” And Taehyung sees the number of people who signed the petition, feels the smile slip from his face, and croaks, “Wow. That’s a lot of people.”

“Don’t worry about it, we’ll fix this quickly,” Jimin quickly says. “Everyone’s working on burying it right now. So just come in the the office ASAP, I think PR wants to release some statements for you before the evening news cycle starts but they need your permission. So yeah, everything’s going to be fine.”

Taehyung doesn’t respond, and just lets the numbers glow in front of his eyes and lets himself feel
numb.

“Taehyung?”

His thumb hovers over the refresh button, masochistically something in his mind tells him to press it and see just how fast this petition was exploding, but he thinks better last minute and moves his thumb away.

“How are you?”

And Taehyung lets the silence hang.

+++ 

Fuckboy 6

sent 11:38AM

Hey
Holy shit
Just woke up and saw
I feel really bad
On my way to ISAC rn but still
Let me know if there’s anything I can do

sent 6:12PM

Sorry, just saw my earlier texts didn’t send earlier
Just resent them
Reception’s been really bad
But yeah
Shit gotta go compete rn
Pls let me know if there’s anything i cn do

+++ 

The second he enters the conference room, Jin engulfs him a hug and eases him into things by telling him the positive news.

The immediate reaction after the broadcast had been, believe it or not, overwhelmingly positive. Fans thought it was cute that Taehyung was nervous, and that the performance was well executed. They also liked his chemistry with Jungkook at the end. The general public was impressed with their combined live singing abilities, and as far as they could tell, still thought the controversy wasn’t a problem, considering Cozy Conversations had leapt up to number 2 on the charts.
There was a moment that went viral (in a positive way) before the deluge of controversy posts began. It was a GIF of him winking at that fan in the crowd that gained a lot of steam when it was included in a PANN post titled “Heol TAE’S wink is so fucking heart fluttering,” and earned him quite a few new fans.

Then Jin swan dives into the negative.

While most of Jungkook’s fans still didn’t really care, the most hardcore were completely riled up and were the driving force behind spreading the controversy.

The crusade started a little after two in the morning, since the armchair armada never sleeps, and by morning the biggest thing in entertainment news had been that there are multiple competing petitions circulating various social media channels demanding that BigCube never force Jungkook to perform with Taehyung again. They each have at least 40,000 e-signatures and were growing with momentum, and one, for whatever reason, was even being filed towards the Blue House.

Considering it was an issue under private domain, incredibly inconsequential in the realm of public governance, and was, frankly, stupid compared to actual state affairs, the Blue House had not even bothered acknowledging its existence. Not that it was stopping people from signing it.

According to the PR team’s analysis, the problem exploded so forcefully for two reasons. The first is that as a producer, Taehyung doesn’t really have a fandom, his fans are casuals who like his music, and so there’s no street team to spar the rumors on social media and bury stray opinions the instant they hit. The second is that an incredibly influential fan started it, a fansite master who was a notorious hardcore akgae of Jungkook since his BTD days and who was famous for their no-holds-barred approach to “protecting” Jungkook, so to speak.

Their line of logic went something like this:

---

@heartking_jungkook
327,997 followers
Jungkook is the king of my heart <3

heartking_jungkook
Look!!
At!!
Jungkook’s!!
Hair!!

» Reposted from JJK_OFFICIAL
Getting ready for tonight’s stage, so excited to see you guys~
May or may not have a surprise in store - JK
[image of a selca attached]
heartking_jungkook
OMO and surprise?? WAHHHHHH
Jungkook treats us so right <3

heartking_jungkook
Omg, omg, omg, only two hours until the stage

heartking_jungkook
What if the surprise is a Cozy Conversations live
Holy shit shit shit shit laldjaldksj Falksdjfl
It must be
I stan the right person

» Reposted from JJK_OFFICIAL
≡≡≡
[video of Taehyung’s zoomed in face as he sleeps]
#backstageJK

» Reposted from JJK_OFFICIAL
Heok! He woke up
[img of Taehyung glaring at the camera]
#backstageJK

heartking_jungkook
Not a fan of TAE, but uwa~~ jungkook’s so cuTE <3 <3 <3

» Original post from rememberJJK_99
Wanna see a W H I P P E D  B O Y E? i give you our son staring at TAE for 30 seconds straight without blinking like he’s the best thing in the world :’) #omfg
#boyisinlove #datealready
[video of pre-inkigayo interview attached]

heartking_jungkook to rememberJJK_99
Lol @rememberJJK_99 are you a massive delulu?? There’s something probably off camera he’s looking at
heartking_jungkook
Smh, some people are stupid

heartking_jungkook
Jungkook’s not interested in dating, he said it on Star Show last week

heartking_jungkook
TAE’s super ugly anyway, Jungkook wouldn’t give him the time of day if BigCube didn’t force him to collab

heartking_jungkook
It wasn’t even 30 seconds, it was like a fraction of a second?

heartking_jungkook
This is what a real whipped boy looks like
[image of Jungkook playing with a dog]

heartking_jungkook
He’s def not whipped for tae smh

heartking_jungkook
So shut the fuck up delulus, you guys are fucking~ gross~
I really want to slap you guys~

heartking_jungkook
O m g it’s cozy conversations

heartking_jungkook
.@JJK_OFFICIAL when we get married, sing this to me at your wedding

heartking_jungkook
Wait there’s a second person?
heartking_jungkook
Oh fuck no, is that tae? =_=  

heartking_jungkook
Seriously??  

heartking_jungkook Lmao tae sounds like a horse  
Actually that’s an insult to horses  

heartking_jungkook
Stage actually ruined  

heartking_jungkook
Did tae just miss his line?  

heartking_jungkook
Why is the camera focusing on him? Jungkookie’s singing  

heartking_jungkook
tae’s so bad at singing, fuck  
Jungkookie does not deserve this  
What was BigCube thinking????  
#justiceFor  

heartking_jungkook
This stage was a mess  

heartking_jungkook
I heard tae has personality problems  

heartking_jungkook
Isn’t that what got him kicked off of BTD? Someone pls confirm.  
#justiceFor
WTF, TAE moved infront of JK THREE TIMES DURING THE ENCORE
Can’t tell if he’s being sloppy, or deliberately cutting off jk’s screen time
Either way, he’s harming jungkook and we will not stand for this
#justiceFor

Timeline of TAE’s trainee days + compilation of iljin accounts about his high school
days
He’s seriously bad news bears guys
[url redacted]
#justiceFor

Evidence of TAE hating on jjk, look at the way he’s side-eying our kookie during the
award ceremony
[image]
#justiceFor

God, TAE’s such a two-faced piece of shit

Fuck this, TAE’s probably just using Jungkook for his fame
#justiceFor

We need to stop him

#StopTAEforGood #StopTAEforGood #StopTAEforGood #StopTAEforGood #StopTAEforGood
#StopTAEforGood #StopTAEforGood #StopTAEforGood #StopTAEforGood #StopTAEforGood

Sign this petition guys
We need to stop TAE from taking advantage of Jungkook
#StopTAEforGood #justiceFor
[url redacted]
The root cause, if there was single one, was identified as that 30-second clip where Jungkook had unblinkingly stared at Taehyung while he was explaining the point of the song.

“I zoned out,” Jungkook explains, unprompted, over the phone, cheers in the background making his voice hard to hear. “My fault, was really tired.”

Something about it had irritated heartking and changed heartking’s apathy towards Taehyung into pure antagonism. At that point, heartking and their cohort started looking for things to bring Taehyung down, basically searching for problems during the performance and finding some in Taehyung’s mistakes, his unfortunate case of RBF, and the personality problems turned iljin rumors that had swirled up back during his first brush with trending fame.

Then they shaped it into a reasonable-sounding package of an accusation and told people to spread the petition. And the fandom, always looking out to protect Jungkook from the horrors of life, reliably trended it in five minutes.

That’s the problem with pace of the internet, right, if someone writes something convincing enough, people don’t bother to check whether or not it’s true, and misinformation quickly disseminates as a result. In the case of accusations, the tinder of “proof” is set with some sort of video or anecdotal evidence, the winds of anger in the form of rallying cries to action blow, and the idea spreads like wildfire on social media and morphs into an uncontainable force as retellings change the story, details get exaggerated and things get lost in translation. It’s easy to get people riled up when something feels like it makes sense and snap-judgements knock the truth by the wayside, and ideas move at the speed of light when all it takes is a click of a button to pass the message on. To make things worse, anything the accused says ends up looking like a backpedaling defense, especially if they’re muted for legal reasons, and voilà, the accuser has successfully nailed them to the wall.

Which works out great when the accusation ends up being true, poetic justice is served swiftly and brutally and the person gets a proper digital flogging for the irredeemable scum they are. But when it’s false, the damage is done often before the accused realizes the controversy exists and they wake up with their reputation publicly ruined for the foreseeable future. And often times it’s hard to judge which side is “right”, it’s a messy he-said, she-said fest with missing details and maybe a picture or video “evidence” taken woefully out of context. And the minute the accusation trends on any platform is the minute the court of public opinion has made its decision, and it’s usually guilty as charged, pretty much as long as people care to remember.

The StopTAEforGood campaign’s case against Taehyung went something like this:

**Thesis:**

TAE was a lime-light stealing whore and conniving fame-grubbing no gooder who was using Jungkook’s global star level renown to launch his own career. And BigCube should never allow him to share a stage with their infallible Jungkook again.

**“Evidence”:**
- **Case Example A:** A video of Taehyung “stealing” one of Jungkook’s lines.
- **Case Example B:** Two screenshots, one from the Inkigayo where Taehyung was smiling and clapping during Jungkook’s speech when the camera was one him, and a second one of his Resting Bitch Face that slipped through the moment camera moved off of him, clearly proving that he wished ill on Jungkook and was a certified two-faced *snake*.
- **Case Examples C.1, C.2, C.3:** The three times Taehyung moved right in front of Jungkook while the camera was on him for a closeup during the encore.
- **Case Example D:** Online anecdotes about how he was an infamous iljin at a high school he never even went to.

**Conclusion:**

Ban Taehyung from working with Jungkook ever again. And maybe fire him for good measure. Also, sign this petition if you agree.

As shitty consolation, it seems like no one outside of Jungkook’s fandom or the pop scene at large remotely cares, for every post accusing Taehyung of doing something negative (“Our Jungkook has suffered so much,” “Heol, this producer really does hate this idol,” “My friend has an account from the time she went to school with TAE,” “TAE’s dark past is something else ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ”), there are at least two more complaining about how Jungkook’s fans are making a relatively trivial thing an issue (“Can Jungkook’s fangirls stay in the fan section? Fuck, seriously no one else cares,” “I’m so sick of seeing Jungkook’s name anyone else agree? I don’t even know who this motherfucker is,” “Look at the stupid fangirls going crazy right now, study for your exams chodings ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ ᅌ,” “Is BigCube media-playing? Why am I seeing that nugu’s name everywhere” ).

But it still doesn't feel great, it’s a bit numbing, really. Especially since Taehyung can’t browse a single news site without seeing his name pop up in the trending chart.

Luckily, the PR department is pretty reliable, they have a proven record of dealing with all of BTD’s made-up controversies in the past, and their one and only goal is pretty much to stop the controversy by effectively pushing him out of the trending articles. And to do that, they came up with a four-step comprehensive defense plan:

1. Pay a comment farm to saturate all of the negative articles with highly upvoted positive comments.
2. Effectively bury articles about Taehyung by dominating the trending charts by sending some topical press releases to important journalists
   - The exclusive “breaking” announcement about the debut date for BigCube’s upcoming group, **WANNA TEEN**
   - Jungkook buying a new electric sports vehicle last week, in his fan club’s colors (“Why right now? I deeply care about the environment and just knew it was the time to go green. Also the colors allow me to think about my fans in my every waking moment, even when I’m on the road.”)
   - One of BigCube’s actresses being named the “Most Beautiful Woman in the World” on some video ranking countdown by an American Youtuber rando (“—she’s so fucking gorgeous. Anyway, that’s it for video. Don’t forget to, *schHuumAsH that like button*—”)
   - Jungkook being handsome at ISAC
   - Jungkook being handsome at the airport
   - Jungkook being handsome in the Show Champion waiting room
   - Jungkook being han—yeah you get it.

4. Have Taehyung release an apology where he promises to reflect and repent upon his apparent sins

5. Pray that a scandal from another act hits soon and the internet’s short attention span shifts to that instead

The point is pretty much to “naturally” push the news out of the cycle without offending Jungkook’s fans. Since the controversy originated from his fanbase, and from a particularly influential fan at that, it introduced an added layer of complexity where they needed to shut the controversy down swiftly without trivializing their "efforts" and further antagonizing his base. And so that included tiptoeing around them by not acknowledging the controversy on any of their official outlets, and having Taehyung, the main offender, offer them an apology.

And it goes without saying, but Jungkook should stay quiet about anything even remotely related to this.

They also recommend that Taehyung perform a few more times with Jungkook. It’s partly a powerplay move, as if to say the company was not beholden to the will of hivemind, and popular demand will be heard but not necessarily considered. There were a few other advantages to going ahead with this as well. There was an audience, since the public, and actually most of Jungkook’s fans, seemed quite receptive of the first collaboration, and the controversy combined with Cozy Conversation’s recent chart success could further stoke interest and take their view counts to new heights.

“So all that's left for Taehyung to do,” the PR rep says with an easy smile, “is apologize.”

And that should more or less cover it. They’ve already written a draft of the letter. Taehyung just needs to sign off on it, and maybe add a few lines to personalize it.

And at first, still a bit numb, Taehyung jerks his head into a nod of confirmation and thinks it’s fine. It’s easy to get swept in the flow when everyone else is bobbing their heads in agreement. Jungkook himself, as if he had any real stake in this particular plan of action, approves almost immediately, voice tinny over the speakers, and then before he hangs up, he tells them to call Jin if they need anything else since he was about to be pulled to compete for archery. It isn’t until Taehyung overhears Hoseok muttering to Jimin under his breath, “This sucks, he didn’t even do anything wrong,” that the thought that maybe this wasn’t fair even crossed his mind.

But the idea grows as the meeting wraps up, discontent simmering under the surface as he shakes hands with the PR team and promises to email the revised apology letter within the next hour. It begins boiling into fury as he walks down the hallway towards his studio and bids Jimin goodbye. And it erupts into pure anger when he stalks into studio, slams the door closed, and sinks into a huddle into his chair.

It wasn’t fair. He tried hard. He sang well. He watched himself. Fuck.

He smacks the trackpad on his laptop to wake it up. The trigger hadn’t even anything he explicitly did, that was the worst part. It had been a weird jealous spate completely out of his control that exploded into whatever this controversy was.

And now he was the one apologizing. Fuck, he grits his teeth as he bashes the keyboard with his password. It still amazed him at how fast BigCube threw him under the bus in favor of Jungkook, it
almost left him winded. He supposed he should look at things logically, it wasn’t like it was something personal, it was literally a game of numbers. There would be less damage if Taehyung admitted guilt rather than Jungkook potentially alienating fans with a rebuttal, especially since Taehyung’s job did not require him to maintain a likeable public personality. It wasn’t like he was in danger of being fired or something. And in fact, ironically, the controversy had given him more opportunities to perform live.

But apologizing for something he hadn’t done still felt fucking terrible.

He’s stewing more about it, bitterly thinking about what sentences to add to his stupid apology letter when a message lights up his phone.

**Fuckboy 6**

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Hey, super sorry about all of this again  
My team will take care of it  
So don’t worry!  
Let me know if there’s anything I can do

Oh no problem  
Social media age  
Shit happens, lol  
I understand that

Yeah, sometimes things can get blown out of proportion

Yeah  
Your fans went kind of rabid ngl  
Lol

:\  
Don’t say it that way  
That makes them sound super bad

But, that’s what happened?  
One of your biggest fans started this clusterfuck
Because you zoned out and stared at me for 30 seconds
That’s fucking crazy to me
I didn’t even do shit
Why am I getting burned at the stake
Lol

There are some crazy ones
But please don’t judge them by the most vocal

Can you tell the crazy ones to sit the fuck down then?
I’m sure they’ll listen to you
Cuz they’ve sure been vocal enough
To force me to write an apology for a made up controversy

You heard the PR team
It’s better if I don’t
And don’t worry about them
I don’t consider them to be real fans

But they still are your fans lol
“Fan • /fan/ • a person who has a strong interest
in or admiration for a particular person or thing.”
Looool that’s them all right

They’re not real fans though

Wtf? What does that even mean?
Like they’re not ones that you approve?
Maybe they’re not fans that you like
but they’re still fucking obsessed with you
And you and your team cater to them

What are you talking about?

The meeting? Hello?
The whole theme was how do we minimize impact
while not offending these “power fans”
BTW
“Real” means actual, not approved
You don’t get to decide what makes them real or not

I meant like real as in representative
Most of them are really great

That’s not even
Like
Lol fucking whatever
We’re just arguing about semantics
This is so stupid

Again, I’m really sorry

It doesn’t even really matter
Because the baseline is
They make it so that I never want to perform with you again
Like, actually.

No, wait, slow down for a second
I think you need to think about this more

Yeah I think I’m going to just not
It’s not worth it

Calm down, you’re not thinking rationally

You did not just tell me to calm down

I think it’ll help
I don’t want you to do something you’re going to regret

Wow
It’s so easy to say stuff like that
when you’re not the one getting slandered
I can’t even browse PANN without this
Being the first thing to pop up
People are literally making up false accusations
and framing me as some sort of terrible, selfish person
Making up a delinquent history that
a lot of fucking people apparently now believe
And I’m not allowed to do shit to defend myself
Still think it’s reasonable to tell me to calm down?

I feel super bad, I really do
It doesn’t translate over text how badly I feel about this
I wish there was something I could do
But getting worked up isn’t going to solve anything

Fuck
I’m so fucking done haha
With everything
Yeah, wait, actually
I don’t need this noise
I’m done
Tell Jin to take me off the other shows
I refuse to go if I’m going to be treated like this

Can we talk about this on the phone?
I have a few minutes before my turn starts
Are you free right now?
I really want to talk

There’s nothing else to talk about

Please

It’s pointless right?
This conversation has made it very clear where you stand
And that neither of us are going to change our minds
So talk to you later
I need to finish this shitty apology letter

Taehyung
And then I’m going to tell Jin myself
So peace
And good luck with archery

I still want to talk before you do
This is not a convo we should be having over text
Are you free?

2:03 PM
Taehyung?

2:54 PM
Taehyung

3:15PM

Missed call from Fuckboy 6 (5)

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TRENDING POSTS

1. Jungkook’s Message to Fans
2. One of Jungkook’s Biggest Fansite Masters Left the Fandom
3. What’s Going on with Jungkook at ISAC Today?
4. Share Cute Gifs of Your Bias~
5. Look at the Price of Jungkook’s Car
6. Seolhyun was Named Most Beautiful Woman in the World
7. TAE’s Universal Apology
8. WANNA TEEN to Debut in October!!
9. Chanyeol...Dyed His Hair?!?!??!
10. Heol, Jungkook Must Care about TAE a lot…
Chapter End Notes

LOL oops cliffhanger 2, promise this is still light angst

Chp was partly inspired by some of the psycho stan twitters from various fandoms i found during the awards season voting debacle. Lmao what a trip they were to read. Never change. Just kidding, please change asap, y'all need actual help.

Also l m a o “it’s you”

And finally, ummm outcast though :0
Intro

Chapter Summary

i’ll give you all I have and nothing less, I promise
[so] love me and don’t look back
— ariana grande

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[enter-talk] What’s Going on with Jungkook at ISAC Today?
Views: 121,392

There were a bunch of fancams that caught Jungkook pacing around and staring at his phone, and at some point he went to a corner and started trying to call someone before eventually giving up. Then during archery he wouldn’t raise his head until it was his turn and he left right after he was finished. I wonder if he’s okay? ㅠㅠ I’ve never seen him act like this before.

[fancam attached]

Fighting Jungkook ㅠㅠ

post reaction
[+987, -22]

TOP COMMENTS

1. Why is he looking upset? ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ TAE’s the one getting criticized.

2. Fighting Jungkook!!
3. He looks so upset, it makes me feel upset.ㅠㅠ Find strength Jungkook.

4. Poor Jungkook ㅠㅠ

5. Wow TAE caused such a mess, Jungkook doesn’t deserve this.

[enter-talk] TAE’s Universal Apology
Views: 101,392

TAE posted his apology a few hours ago:

Hello, this is TAE. I’m writing to apologize for the mistakes I made. I’m sorry for disappointing so many people since I was lacking, and I’m in the process of reflecting on what I did. From now on, I hope to show a better side of me to everyone, and I will work hard to make sure something similar does not happen again.

Haha, crazy, it sounds just like a form letter and it doesn’t even mention the controversy anywhere. He has no remorse. I admit I’m a stan of Jungkook, but even for non-fans, isn’t that a bit too much in a situation like this?

post reaction
[+1229, -902]

TOP COMMENTS

1. Well the whole controversy was fucking stupid, so you get a stupid response as a result.

2. You can tell from how he wrote it that he doesn’t believe a single word he’s writing

3. Those photos at the encore were no joke, you could see the hate in his eyes.
Hello Everyone,

I’ve thought long and hard about whether I should speak up, and things have gotten to a point where I think I need to intervene. I’d first like to thank everyone for worrying for me. I deeply appreciate it, and I am fine. Second, I’d like to share my own perspective about things.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to sing with a company senior of mine whom I greatly respect. I’ve looked up to him since I was a trainee, and truthfully he’s someone very special to me because he’s helped me out many times, even back when I was a nobody among nobodies. Last night's performance marked the first time he sang live, and so he’s been working really hard for the past few days to practice and put on the best stage possible. Because I witnessed him working so hard, I feel really proud about the performance we put on. But seeing the reaction online, I am aware that some of you felt differently. Since we have such different opinions, let me explain what I think.

TAE is not known for being a singer, he is known for producing. The scope he’s reached as a producer is far beyond anything I ever hope to achieve, and to give you an idea, at least 10 songs on the charts right now are written by him. This means in terms of fame I don’t have anything for him that’s worth taking. Since he doesn’t sing often, he is not used to performing on music shows. He was very nervous because he wanted to show you guys the best side possible. Some of these “ill-intentioned” actions I saw people accuse him of are really just the result of nerves. It’s hard to tell through pictures and videos, but I know this because I was actually there, and I saw it all with my own two eyes.

Let me share something I’ve been keeping quiet about. I was the one who made the
request to the company to sing with TAE. Cozy Conversations is a song that is special to him and so I wanted to give him the opportunity to share it with everyone the way he intended for it to sound. And so now I feel a great personal responsibility for the burden I’ve caused him. The online opinions make me sad because I think TAE has a rare gift for singing and songwriting that should be shared with the everyone, and I think it’s very unfortunate to see that so many people think differently for reasons that don’t really have merit.

To end this, though our opinions differ, I really thank everyone from the bottom of my heart for always looking out for me. I wouldn’t be anything without all of you. But if you’re supporting criticism of TAE just for my sake, please consider my actual thoughts about it first.

Jungkook

With one stroke, he ended the controversy 😥😥 amazing

But because of this, one of his biggest fansite masters got targeted and attacked by his other fans. People found out she started the petition and then harassed her until she closed. For those of you who don’t know Heart King, she was one of Jungkook’s oldest and biggest fansites. Her abilities are seriously top class, they make Jungkook look unreal. Her photos brought so many people into the fandom and most of Jungkook’s legendary photos come from her. Seriously, any fan of Jungkook knows about Heart King. But the second after people read the letter, they turned on her and attacked her until she closed. She was crazy but Jungkook’s fans still are scary for sure, they just switch sides like nothing and follow what he says without question.

And then probably combined with Jungkook indirectly disapproving with what Heart King did, she decided to leave.

To make things messier, Heart King’s closing message was a bit 😖

Hello. I started Heart King when Jungkook was just a trainee and have been by his side watching him grow up for the past eight years. Following him through his journey has created some of my happiest moments because he was my most important person. Making this decision has been really hard, but given the circumstances and the fact that so many people want me gone, I think this is for the best.

It all feels like a bit of a waste to be honest, worrying for so long and so much only to be dismissed so easily ≡ ≡ ≡ the night really does change so quickly. So I’m done, I’m so tired of this. Really, it’s advisable to not take your fans’ intuition and sincerity lightly.

So goodbye. Heart King is now CLOSED.

She sounds so disappointed in him, she’s going to become an anti for sure 😖;
This is so crazy, Jungkook probably knew that something like this was going to happen when he wrote the message. TAE must be someone Jungkook really cherishes a lot if he was willing to accept this to defend him.

post reaction
[+2123, -340]

TOP COMMENTS

1. Heol, even as a muggle with no interest in idols, I knew about Heart King. He must have really pissed her off.

2. Heol, daebak. This is crazy.

3. Even if Jungkook gets more fans and fansites, there will never be another one that did as much for him as Heart King. He exiled a true fan.

4. I’ve never seen something like this. I thought Heart King was a bit much sometimes, but she fangirled more than anyone and she really shielded him so hard and gave him so many expensive gifts. You never hear about any controversies because she buries them so efficiently. It’s not that Jungkook never had any. Also do you all remember that article about how he rotates through like 5 rolexes? ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ They’re all from Heart King for his birthday just last year, because he mentioned he liked the number 5. And all of his casual clothes during BTD’s debut album era when he was a total nugu, like even within BTD, he was last place in all the member polls, were from her too. She supported him when no one else did, she was that level. Say what you want about Heart King, but she did do more for him than any other fan. TAE must be someone really special for sure, for Jungkook to give up all of that for him.

5. People’s memories are really so short. ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ I know there are a lot of comments praising Heart King, but she crossed the line so many times. People are making her out to be some kind of saint, but she’s not one at all. Just because she followed Jungkook around, took nice photos, and threw money at him like an ATM does not make her a good person. ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ if that were the case every saesang would be mother Teresa by now ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ. Let me remind you guys, back when BTD was still together she told people to not support other members of BTD by not liking their posts on social media or not buying their goods so that Jungkook’s numbers could be the best. During voting she always blames and guilt trips fans who she thinks are not doing enough, even though they have lives to live outside of being a fan. And TAEs not even the first person that she’s tried to take down, this happens almost every time Jungkook works with anyone she thinks he gets too close to, this is just the first controversy she’s successfully trended. She pulls this shit all the time. She’s so tiring.

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The message, dropped at 2 in the morning, kills the controversy, and then the shocking announcement of some Big Three idol couple’s shotgun marriage a few hours later gives it a proper burial.

Taehyung wakes up in the early morning with a weight on his chest, to the sound of Jimin messaging him a few times in quick succession (“hey check PANN right now”, “seriously”, “tae”, “wake up”, “check it”, “check IT”, “CHEKC IT”). In the light of the morning, he sits up, hunches over his phone and dutifully follows instructions, reading the relevant trending posts. And at first, he doesn’t feel much, it’s so easy to feel detached when they’re just words, but by the time he starts the last, there’s a large lump in his throat.

Then, he finishes, and for the first time in maybe years, he cries. More specifically, he sits there wrapped in his comforter, eyes squeezed tight, fist covering his mouth, breath quietly shuddering, tears soundlessly sliding from the corner of his eye and down his face.

It’s an overwhelming wave of relief, regret, thankfulness, and a few other emotions Taehyung was going to have a hard time admitting to himself, much less other people, that pools up and slams him straight in the chest. It’s not this one moment that pulls him out of apathy, it’s the culmination of everything that’s happened the last few days, weeks, years. He can’t stop it, stress wore the floodgates down, and exhausted, emotionally and physically, he just lets go as it all crashes down on him.

And he sits there like that as he just thinks about things, like about fortune, about priorities, about motivations, about Jungkook, mostly about Jungkook and his character and the fact that he really wasn’t douchebag and other cliches about the kind of person he’s become, and gets lost in his thoughts for a while until a call from Jin shakes him back into reality.

Upper management, predictably, isn’t pleased with Jungkook, and they’re calling for an emergency meeting as soon as possible with everyone that morning. And Taehyung takes it as the cue to wipe his face off and start the day.

By the time Taehyung rolls into the office and cautiously slips through the conference door, Jungkook’s already sitting sullenly in a chair as Jin’s letting him have it.

“What were you thinking?!” Jin throws his hands up in the hair, yelling in that way where he’s almost at the highest point of his voice register. “We had a plan, the plan has been proven to work, why wouldn’t you stick to it?!”

Jungkook, looking down at the floor, hands curled tightly around ends of the armrests of his of his swivel chair, just shrugs.

“You can’t just do shit just because it fucking feels right. You’re in your seventh year already, I shouldn’t have to be telling this to you, but you gotta fucking think about the big fucking picture! Losing Heart King by itself is already bad, you just lost your biggest piece of free marketing, but did you even consider the other ramifications, like if she becomes an anti?! What if she releases anecdotes?! Or, worse, what if she or her friends have compromising pictures of you?! And for what?! The controversy was already on the way out, you cut it short by maybe at most a day even if the marriage clusterfuck hadn’t come out,” Jin slams the table with his hands. ”And the rumors are still attached to Taehyung! I hope you don’t actually think this has actually gotten rid of those, if anything, you just attracted more attention to them! You just saw how good Heart King was at spinning shit with no basis, and you know —”
“Hey, um, s-sorry to interrupt,” Taehyung knocks on the doorframe, and immediately knows what he has to do. “But—”

Jungkook looks up, smileless with bags under his eyes and hair unkempt, before quickly looking away.

“—but, um,” Taehyung swallows and many pairs of eyes turn towards him. His heart begins to hammer in his chest and he bites his lip, “T-this was completely my fault. I made Jungkook do this for me. So um,” he blanks out for a bit as a PR personale frowns at him. “Um, I-I’m the only one responsible.”

“No he isn’t,” Jungkook mutters to the ground as he bends his thumb with his other hand slightly backwards. “I did it by myself.”

“No, I am,” Taehyung points at himself. “So, um, I will take responsibility for this.”

“Oh, you guys,” Jin squeezes his eyes shut and runs his hand through his hair, “It...okay. It,” Jin breathes out. “Doesn’t really matter at this point why it happened. What matters is that the trigger was pulled.”

“Sorry,” Jungkook and Taehyung say at the same time.

“Sorry isn’t going to fix this, the worst part is that we can’t even do damage control,” Jin buries his face in his hands and mumbles through his fingers. “If she’s really intent on bringing Jungkook down, she’s going to bide her time until the impact or the evidence is greater. She’s literally just a ticking time bomb. And we’re shooting in the dark, we don’t know her intentions or what she has.”

“So what can be done?” Taehyung asks, forehead creasing. “What can Jungkook do?”

“Hope she’s got nothing or she loses interest,” Jin says grimly. “Longer term, try get Jungkook big enough to the point where a controversy can’t touch him.”

Since the shocking shotgun marriage announcement had completely dethroned Taehyung’s controversy (the girl involved had been the token “innocent” member and the guy was the center of a monster rookie group had just debuted last year. yeah. yikes.), the PR team determines that no further action from either Jungkook or Taehyung is needed and that both of them should decline to comment if the question is brought up by the press. They also opt to endorse Taehyung’s request from yesterday to remove him from promotions for Cozy Conversations with Jungkook for the remainder of the cycle, citing Taehyung’s own unwillingness to perform as well as the fact that the message killed the need indirectly rebuke overzealous fans.

Then, they say, all that’s left is to wait and see.

It sounds good to Taehyung, and he turns his head just in time to catch Jungkook nodding blankly in agreement, fingers hooked together. Then without so much as a glance to Taehyung, he gets up, offers a quick bow to everyone in the room and hands jammed in his pockets and head bowed down, he walks out of the door.

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and his philosophy is pretty much to let the sleeping dogs lie. So Taehyung resigns himself to looking at it like a lost cause and pretty much never talking to Jungkook again. Unless, of course, Jungkook wanted to man up first. He did have the freedom to and knew exactly where Taehyung worked.

But Jimin, good ol' Jimin who was always the bigger man in things, Jimin who never let a fight between the two of them end unresolved for longer than a few hours, Jimin who has zero enemies and actively keeps it that way, sends a few choice texts that help Taehyung change his mind.

Jimin

Hey, thank Jungkook
Oh and apologize while you’re at it

But

Just fucking do it
You owe him big time

Ok

And that’s how Taehyung finds himself hunched over in his studio chair, fingers quivering hard enough that he has to be careful while selecting Jungkook’s number from the list. He can’t remember the last time he was this nervous to make a phone call as he lifts the device to his ear, the cool of the glass grazing his skin and he listens to the dial tone. Then he waits. And waits. And waits some more.

Because Jungkook doesn’t pick up the first time. Or the second or third or fourth or seventh. And Taehyung, slumped over his hand and multitasking by scrolling through his email inbox, is already conditioned by the eighth try to expect Jungkook’s voicemail message that when he hears a click followed by Jungkook’s monotonous, “Yeah?” he slams his knee really hard into his desk when he sits up in surprise.

“Um, h-heyy this is Taehyung,” Taehyung’s voice cracks as he sits hunched over his knee, trying to process things the pain.

Jungkook’s quiet for a moment and then, “Yeah I know.”

“Oh yeah, of course, caller ID,” Taehyung quickly recovers. “I forgot.”
Jungkook remains silent as Taehyung starts rambling about trivial small talk as he thinks about the best way to phrase the wording for his apology. He really doesn’t get anywhere, in fact he probably makes himself more confused as he starts randomly winding around his tale of his mixed-up coffee order a week ago when Jungkook finally interjects.

“Sorry to cut you off,” Jungkook says, voice low. “But I have some things to do, so why exactly are you calling?”

“Hey, so, um. I-I’m, uh,” Taehyung takes a breath and tries again. “It’s to say,” Taehyung scratches his nose and squeezes his eyes shut. Here it goes, “T-thanks. A lot. Your message really got them off my back.”

Jungkook doesn’t respond, and Taehyung speaks up again to fill the silence.

“Also, I’m really sorry. For being so unreasonable. I didn’t think about the scope of the problem. I was mad at the time, not that it’s really an excuse, but I was running my mouth. It’s a bad tendency I have. And I didn’t realize I was forcing you to do something like that, that, um, was really shitty of me.”

Jungkook’s silent for a bit, then, he mumbles, “It’s okay.”

And relief floods into Taehyung’s chest.

“I’m,” Jungkook starts again. “I’m also sorry for not realizing how it was affecting you. That was really shitty of me.”

“No worries,” and Taehyung bites his lip. “So...we cool now?”

“Yeah,” Jungkook breathes out. “We’re cool.”

“Cool. Is there…” Taehyung takes a breath. “Is there anything I can do to make it up to you? I feel like I owe you way more than an apology.”

“Um,” Jungkook laughs lightly. “No, it’s fine.”

“No seriously. I want to make it up to you.”


“Yeah?”

“Um,” Jungkook hesitates. “Buy me dinner sometime.”

Not what Taehyung was expecting, but then again he doesn’t really know what he was expecting, “I’m down. When?”

“Oh. Uh, you free...tomorrow?”

“Yeah, uh, should be,” and Taehyung makes a mental note to reschedule getting drinks with Jimin. He’d understand, or rather he deserved it since he was the one who forced Taehyung to go through with this apology thing in the first place, “Got anywhere in particular that you wanna go to?”

“Hmm. There’s a place I’ve been wanting to try out for a while.”

“Which one?”
“Umm, it’s called—no wait. It’s a surprise. You’ll have to, um, find out when we go tomorrow night.”

“Uhh,” Taehyung squints and furrows his brows. “Okay?”

“Yeah.”

“So...how am I supposed to get there?”

“I’ll pick you up.”

“I mean I can drive if you just give me the address,” Taehyung rolls his eyes. “And I thought I’m the one treating you.”

“Consider it thanks for the trouble I put you through.”

“If we’re playing that game,” Taehyung teases. “I want more than a car ride to the next neighborhood.”

“Oh. Hmm. Then we can get drinks afterwards or something? I’ll buy.”

“Deal. See you tomorrow?”

“Well, yes but I’m also right behind you.”

Taehyung whips around, and sure enough, Jungkook’s standing in the doorway, phone in hand. He gives a little wave and a tentative smile and Taehyung’s heart does a little flip.

“How long have you been there?” Taehyung snorts, a nervous ugly-sounding snicker catching in his throat. “And did you want to come in?”

“Not that long,” Jungkook strides in, pulls out a chair, and straddles it backwards, arms folding over the head of the chair. “Can I chill here for an hour or so? I have an awkward gap of time before practice.”

Taehyung immediately nods. And for the entire time, they just talk, guards dropping, hesitation melting away, banter ensuing. And like that, everything feels like it resets to how it was before—or maybe to something even more. Jungkook looks down as he talks about something stupid his parents’ dog did recently and the ensuing smile spurs Taehyung’s heart to skip a beat. Yeah, fuck, Taehyung looks away, it was definitely something more.

Later, as he watches Jungkook step out of the door, he’ll marvel at how easily sixty minutes can feel like one.

+++ 

Fuckboy 6
Oh yeah
I just thought about another favor
Can I be Fuckboy 1 now?

Uhhh
Nope
LOL

Aren’t you supposed to be practicing rn?

It’s break time lol
And why not?

LOL why do you care about this so much?

I’m just overly competitive

I mean I know that
But it’s like
Just a name
Lol

I just wanna be number one in something

Loooooool
Well, if it makes you feel better
You can be my number one Fuckboy 6

I’m the only one though

Loool yeah
The only one in my heart
Only Fuckboy 6*** I mean

Small gains
I’ll take it
You’re a weird guy

Is that a bad thing?

Nah not necessarily

Nice

Stop making fun of me >:(
  it's a nervous habit

:'(

I’ll pick you up at 7 tomorrow?

Sounds good
  Is there a dress code?
  Or like, what kind of place is it.

Yeah
  Fancy
Were you eventually gonna tell me this or was I just supposed to guess

I mean you dress like
Good
All the time anyway
So I figured I didn’t have to say anything

Oh
Lool thanks?
But what if I had showed up
As a total slob tomorrow

That would have been your own problem

Wow

Lool

+++
“If you had blue eyes.”

“Not helpful,” Taehyung spins around on his heel and stalks towards a mirror to check himself out. He straightens out the creases as he looks at himself from different angles.

“If it helps, that’s your nemesis’ favorite color.”

“Oh really?” Then Taehyung catches himself. “Wait what does Jungkook have to do with this?”

“Aren’t you guys eating out tomorrow? Isn’t this what this whole,” Jimin gestures around, “...thing is for?”

“How did you know? And haha what, please, this is for myself.”

“We talk,” Jimin shrugs. “He tells me things, unlike you. Way to ditch me for a date by the way.”

“It’s not a date,” Taehyung adjusts his collar. “...also, asking for a friend, is his favorite color actually blue?”

“ Asking for friend, which friend would this be?”

“A...friendly friend. You wouldn’t know them.”

“Right,” Jimin shakes his head and sighs. “But, no idea, I made that one up. I can ask him though.”

“No it’s fine.”

“Too late, already asked him.”

“Jimin!”

“Oh he’s typing, let’s see what he says,” Jimin squints at his phone. “He wrote: ‘why’. Wow, this brat, just give me an answer. What should I write?”

“That’s on you.”


“No!” Taehyung leaps across the room and rips the phone out of Jimin’s hand, fumbling slightly with it at the end. Somewhere along the way, his palm must have grazed the send button, and the distinctive woosh of Jimin’s iPhone sending Taehyung’s dignity out with the text rings through the air.

“I wasn’t actually going to send it,” Jimin snickers and takes back his phone as Taehyung just gapes.

“But this works too. Oh he already replied: ‘funny.’ I guess we’ll never know.”

Taehyung rolls his eyes as walks back to the mirror. He hears the click of a camera and sees a flash and turns around in time to see Jimin snickering.

“Uh my bad,” Jimin says as the distinctive woosh from his phone sounds again. “Ignore me.”

“Did you just take a photo of me?”

“Maybe?” Jimin glances his phone. “Oh, um, he likes the shirt if you were wondering.”
“I was not.”

“Right.”

The fact that Taehyung ends up buying it, shamefully pulling out his credit card while Jimin gives him the look, is just a coincidence.

It’s still not a big deal.

+++ 

The next night, Taehyung feels kind of dumb but he’s sitting on his couch, completely ready to go ten minutes before Jungkook said he’d get here, browsing his phone and waiting for Jungkook to send some sort of indication that he was here.

If Jimin could see him now, he’d never let him live it down.

He gets up and checks his reflection in the mirror for what must be the 17th time in the last half hour, adjusting a few out of place hairs in his part before pacing back to his couch and sitting down with a huff. The clock ticks, and to kill time, he skims some random front-page news article, not even processing the words. And soon it’s two minutes past seven, and Taehyung, with a bit of panic, wonders if Jungkook forgot, got lost, or worse, Taehyung got the day totally wrong, and he’s just about to check their conversation when—

Fuckboy 6

I’m here
Sorry I’m late
Couldn’t figure out where the entrance
To the garage was lol

Looool no worries
Wasn’t waiting long anyway
Coming down now

—and Taehyung’s out the door in a flash.

Jungkook’s waiting in his car when Taehyung exits the elevator, window down and arm slung over the door of his car and looking impossibly good in black as he greets Taehyung with a two fingered wave.
Taehyung boxes out how that particular getup makes him feel more things than all the times he’s seen Jungkook’s chicken CF combined and comments as he gets into the passenger seat and buckles himself in, hoping the heat he could feel on his face wasn’t showing up on his face, “Nice car, I have the same one.”

“Thanks. And oh really, what a coincidence, it’s a quality car,” Jungkook starts the car and glances at Taehyung. “I like your shirt.”

“Me too,” Taehyung pitches the fabric and pulls. “Not going to lie, it was a struggle to pick it.”

“I’m aware, Jimin documented the whole thing for me in text.”

“He always has my back,” Taehyung sighs. Then they’re silent for a minute, and the music floats in the background. Taehyung squints, the song is familiar in a weird way, and suddenly Taehyung realizes why.

“Are you playing your own song?” Taehyung leans down and squints at the console. “Oh my god, you are.”

“Oh what?” Jungkook pauses for a moment and his lips thin into a straight line. “Well shit, looks like I am. Wow, um, it’s not what it looks like.”

“You are truly the humblest guy I know.”

“I—uh,” Jungkook looks out the window as he turns the car and turns a tinge red, “It’s just a Top 40 playlist, honest. Came on randomly.”

“Just a Top 40 playlist, so humble.”

“No wait,” Jungkook flails flusteredly for a bit. “That’s not what I meant—“

“Sure, and anyway, didn’t realize your taste in music was so basic.”

“I usually just put this on when other people are in the car. It’s inoffensive, you know?”

“Oh it’s for me? Oh, Jungkook, you shouldn’t have,” Taehyung gasps dramatically with his hand over his chest and internally snickers as Jungkook just grows progressively redder. It was amusingly easy to get him flustered with the right words, how Jungkook managed to operate smoothly during interviews with A-listers exaggeratedly fanning and fawning over him was beyond Taehyung, “You can play whatever you want, I listen to all sorts of genres anyway.”

“Like?”

“Anything. Like, Christmas songs. Yeah, actually, let’s go, play some Christmas music.”

“It’s way too early for that,” Jungkook shakes his head.

“Aw, really? Literally had my heart set on that and only that. Guess it’s on you to choose,” Taehyung waves a finger. “Also, I wanna see what you usually listen to.”

“Honestly, we can play whatever. I listen to random shit.”

“You can still pick. Consider it a reward because you’re driving.”

“Correction, you can pick because I’m doing you the favor of driving.”
“You can’t just flip the script like that.”

“Too bad, I just did,” Jungkook unlocks his phone and hands it to Taehyung. “Just choose something already.”

“Wow,” Taehyung takes it and begins browsing. “You’re just going to trust me with your phone like that? You might regret this.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I could just like, read your search history, browse your texts, post stuff on your social media, or whatever. Or, I could find out all your gossip, or like, oh yeah , find out who your crush is or something,” Taehyung snickers, ignoring how this was not nearly as funny of a concept as it had been a week ago. “Seriously, who is it?”

“Okay, please don’t do any of that,” Jungkook pales and he tries to swipe his phone back.

“I mean,” Taehyung moves it out of his grasp, “Have you been making progress recently?”

“Taehyung, seriously, don’t.”

“Okay, okay, I won’t.” Taehyung looks back down at the phone, blinking when he realizes he opened the browser on accident. “Oh my god, Jungkook, you have.”

“Have what?” Jungkook looks alarmed as he slowly stops for a red light. “What are you doing?”

Taehyung holds up the phone and laughs, slightly hollowly, “You searched up Top 10 Date Spots in Seoul? Wow, Jungkook here with the moves. So when is it?”

“Taehyung,” Jungkook leans his forehead against the steering wheel and loudly breathes in through his nose. “Could you, like, just pick some goddamn music already. Please. And then give me my phone back. You were right, I regret everything.”

“Okay, okay.”

Taehyung goes back to browsing songs when notifications from a chat labeled “97 Linerzzz” start popping up. They move fast, but he catches the gist, someone’s playing a game and wants people to join. Then someone asks where Jungkook is and Taehyung, feeling helpful, lets Jungkook know.

“Someone wants to know where you are,” Taehyung squints.

“Who and why?”

“Uh…” Taehyung squints. “BamBam? And he wants to play League.”

“Oh,” Jungkook wrinkles his nose. “Let him know I’m driving.”

“Okay,” Taehyung complies and waits as the guy types. “Now he wants to know why you were texting while driving. And he just sent a video of your traffic safety song. And called you, quote, ‘A bad example for the children.’ I like this guy.”

Jungkook rolls his eyes, “Tell him a friend sent it for me.”

“Okay,” Taehyung complies again, slightly surprised at the title. Guess they were friends now, he could roll with that, “Yugyeom’s typing...he says...‘Lmao hey whatuuuuuup Taehyung,’ oh wow, what, how did he know it was me?”
“I told him where I was going.”

“That makes a lot of sense,” Taehyung squints as the chat explodes with a bunch of rabbit and tiger emojis. “What does this mean anyway? The rabbit and tiger emoji shit, I mean.”

“Where did you see that?” The light turns green and Jungkook eases the gas. “And, um, it’s just an unrelated inside joke thing. You wouldn’t get it.”

“In the chat right now. And I saw it on your IG post a while back. Wait, I heard rumors that you got a rabbit and cat,” Taehyung’s eyes light up and he turns to Jungkook quickly. Jungkook glances at him in surprise for a second when Taehyung smacks the chair excitedly, “Are they true and if so can you bring them in one day so I can play with them—”

“Oh. No. I don’t have pets, but i-it’s like,” Jungkook pauses and covers his upper lip with a finger. “Code. For playing League. Like if people are down or something, you know.”

“I thought you said it was a joke.”

“Their skills are the joke. Also can you pick a playlist and give me my phone back?”

“Oh yeah I was doing that,” Taehyung thinks for a bit, gets a great idea quickly searches for a song, cranks up the bass, and starts snickering when it starts playing.

“Is this...Man’s Not Hot?” Jungkook wrinkles his nose, lips in a thin line threatening a grin as he tries to look unamused. “Really?”

“I tell her man's not hot,” Taehyung raps obnoxiously, waving his arms and jabbing his hands as he jumps in his seat. “The girl told me take of your jacket. And I said babe, man’s not hot!”

“I’ve made so many mistakes,” Jungkook glances up and raises his voice above the volume. “What the actual fuck, the bass is so high my rearview mirror is shaking to the point where I can’t see out of it.”

“The ting goes skrrrah, pap, pap, ka-ka-ka.”

“Get me out of here,” Jungkook grumbles.

“And a pu-pu-pudrrrr-boom, boom. Skyaaaah! Ah.”

“I’m going to skip the song,” Jungkook hits a button on his steering wheel, heaves a sigh in the second of silence before—

“Yo, ” Taehyung fishes Jungkook’s sunglasses out of the glove compartment and puts them on, upside down, pops his collar and points his index fingers into the air. “Big Shaq, the one and only. Skrrat, skidi-kat-kat”

“You look ridiculous,” Jungkook snorts. “And nooo did you put it on loop?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung cackles. “Two plus two is four.”

“You’re actually the worst.”

“Doesn’t matter because, man’s not hot.”

Chapter End Notes
Uhh have some fluff!! Also lmao, for the uninitiated, Man's Not Hot.

The response part from the beginning is somewhat based off a mixture of park hyoshin and taeyeon’s scandal (basically taeyeon got blasted for a bad performance and it got to the point where park hyoshin had to step in and write a letter defending her), jinnabit’s whatever that was (if you don’t know about it, it’s crazy, jinnabit was sulli’s only fansite cuz she terrorized other fansites but then went ballistic when sulli started dating choiza + doing #typicalSulliThings, basically), and many apology letters and responses for various scandals.

Also I binged watched End of the F***ing World and oh man, it was so weird but well done what the heck i loved it.

also omfg, when did this reach 1000 kudos. uhhh, that's amazing holy shit askfjasfd. thanks a bunch you guys ;u; for liking this thing <3 <3 <3 <3 <3
Chapter Summary

*it's bad enough we get along so well*  
— Ariana Grande  
*goodnight n go*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The restaurant turns out to be one of those places with no sign that requires a reservation seven months in advance, has a national treasure of a head chef who cooks for world leaders every time they make a diplomatic stop in Seoul, serves eight courses of artfully arranged compositions of food that are smaller than the palm of his hand and look more like something that should be locked behind a glass case at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art than something Taehyung should be stuffing in his mouth and shitting out in about 24-72 hours.

So, basically super casual. Also, RIP his wallet.

Of course, Jungkook managed to get them a table within a day, one by a window overlooking the skyline no less, because he “knows a guy,” privileges of being about two degrees from all of Seoul’s elite, and Taehyung has never been struck harder than now about how the world is such a wide open place ripe for the picking for people with connections.

“So what do you think?” Jungkook asks after the fifth portion is placed in front of them, some sort of fish ensemble resting on a piece of rock that looked like someone had cleaved from its natural place in nature five minutes ago.

“It’s nice, like really. Everything looks like art,” Taehyung blinks down at the Jackson Pollack-esque splattering of sauces as he tries to remember what region in Italy the waitress mentioned the olive on his plate hailed from. “How about you?”

“It’s great but,” Jungkook eats everything in three bites and winces as his stomach rumbles. “I, uh, might be slightly hungry after this. Practice was pretty brutal.”

“Yes, me too,” Taehyung hesitates, Jimin will never let him live this down for this suggestion if he found out, but fuck it, he had a craving, “Wanna get a shitton of fried chicken when we drink? I just need to stuff my face with something and not feel bad about it.”

“We think alike.”

The mistake that Taehyung makes is that he says yes to the wine. Because he has a habit of guzzling anything that’s liquid and near his hand when he really gets into a conversation (also, when he’s gets nervous, not that he is right now, seriously). Which he proceeds to do with the pairings, finishing off every glass as he debates with Jungkook about the best Overwatch hero (Jungkook could spew all the bullshit he wants about how it’s not about the hero it’s about the player’s skills and preferences even though he still thinks it’s uncontestedly a tie between Widowmaker and McCree, and it won’t
even rustin Taehyung’s belief that D.Va is by and far the best).

And so it’s not surprising that by the end he’s kinda shitfaced, snickering into the palm of his hand about something Jungkook said that was probably not even that funny as he signs off the check.

“How much did you even drink?” Jungkook takes Taehyung’s glass and tips it towards himself.

“All of it?” Taehyung frowns, wine lingering on his breath. “I’m kinda lightweight.”

“That explains it,” Jungkook gets up, chair legs scraping against the hardwood floor.

“I’m not that drunk,” Taehyung protests, tottering a bit when he follows Jungkook out the door.

“Whoa,” Jungkook quickly stabilizes Taehyung with a hand on his back. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung tries not to lean into his touch as they walk towards Jungkook’s car.

A young couple walks into view, and Jungkook immediately drops his hand and puts distance between them. Even though the two are clearly preoccupied with each other, Taehyung still pulls his facemask over his face for good measure. They pass without looking up, and Taehyung breathes a sigh of relief.

“So,” Jungkook says as Taehyung slides in the passenger seat and he starts up the car. “Where did you wanna go now?”

“Are we still gonna go drink?”

“If you want to,” Jungkook pulls out his phone, the glow of the screen lighting up his face in the dark.

“Sure,” Taehyung yawns, running a hand through his hair. “But maybe I should take a break first.”

“Can,” Jungkook shrugs. “Your choice”

“Know any good places to just chill at?”

“Yeah. Well, actually I haven’t been there before,” Jungkook starts some navigation app. “There’s a place along the river I wanna check out.”

“Is it one of your Top 10 Date spots?” Taehyung flicks his eyes over at Jungkook. “From the list?”

“Maybe?” Jungkook looks over his shoulder as he pulls his car out of the parking spot.

“How can it be maybe,” Taehyung snickers, even though it’s not that funny. “It either is or isn’t.” Jungkook looks out of the driver’s side window and mutters, “...okay, yeah it is.”

“Oh nice,” Taehyung leans back in the chair and watches the street lights as they pass by, eyelids growing heavy. “We can check it out in advance of your actual date.”

And Taehyung dozes off right before Jungkook can respond.
Taehyung wakes up when Jungkook pulls over on some road and parks, tires crunching on gravel at what looks like a tree-lined park.

“I’m not asleep,” Taehyung sits up and blinks blearily.

“Sure,” Jungkook shakes his head as he gets out of the car. “You were out like a light.”

“Sorry, I’m a sleepy drunk,” Taehyung yawns as he steps out and shuts the door.

“I figured out that much,” Jungkook rubs his nose as he strides over to a park bench and plunks himself down.

“Detective JK, coming through,” Taehyung settles down next to him, hands fisted into his pockets as he leans back in the bench. The park is empty except for them, the only sounds except for their voices were the rustling of the trees in the wind, the gentle lapping of water from the river, and the rumbling of cars off in the distance.

“I try,” Jungkook kicks a rock. “So what do you think?”

“It’s super pretty,” Taehyung takes in the scene, a beautiful view of the river under falling red leaves with the city lights twinkling off in the near distance, swallows the faint bitterness and grins. “I’m sure whoever your date is will like it. And I say that confidently, without knowing anything about them.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook shakes a few leaves from his head and turns to Taehyung slinging his arm casually over the back of the bench, the lights sparkling in his eyes, the slightest hint of a smile curving the corners of his mouth. “I think so too.”

It feels a bit like a dream, the wine’s still in control, the wind feels warm, Jungkook’s lips look so appealing, and Taehyung’s so close, he blinks as Jungkook’s next words wash over him, lets his eyes drop down to Jungkook’s lips, and thinks about how it would be so easy to go for it, how it would just take one little lean to close the gap.

So he does.

Eyes fluttering closed, heart racing, he stops thinking about consequences for a split second and tilts his head and leans in until their lips touch. It feels electrifying even through the haze of insobriety, and his thoughts start racing between a general range of things including, wow, this is nice, to Jungkook’s lips are as soft as fuck, to what the hell was he doing. The last point was a pretty good question so he leans back and cracks his eyes open to get a read on Jungkook’s reaction.

And Jungkook’s sitting there, frozen, wide-eyed, brows furrowed, mouth gaping and growing redder by the second.

It’s cute, Taehyung gauges with half lidded eyes, heart beating loud in his ears, but it doesn’t exactly come across as a ringing endorsement. So he starts wheeling out the excuses to cover up his tracks.

“Sorry,” Taehyung raises a hand and curls his other white-knuckle tight around the edge of the bench. He throws in a giggle to add to the effect, “Honestly I’m quite drunk right now. My bad, just rolling with the mood.”

“The mood?” Jungkook thaws, speaking swiftly and slightly higher than normal. He looks around quickly, before leans in until he’s close, so close, too close, and Taehyung’s getting intoxicated by
his cologne. “What does that mean?”

“I don’t know?” Taehyung giggles and pushes Jungkook away with a hand. “I’m having problems forming words, no wait, sentences? Correctly. Yeah. Ignore me, I’m not thinking.”

“Oh,” Jungkook blinks. “Okay?”

“Consider it practice for your date,” Taehyung giggles and goes on defense. “Here’s some advice, don’t gape after they go in for the kiss, you looked kinda dumb.”

“Oh shit I did?” Jungkook claps his face with his hands and snaps his mouth shut. “Shit.”

“Second piece of advice,” Taehyung rubs his nose and taps Jungkook on the shoulder furthest away from him. “Always be on guard.”

“Huh?” Jungkook falls for it and looks over his shoulder in that direction. After a second, he covers his face with his hands, “Oh my god, I can’t believe I fell for that.”

And Taehyung knows the idea he has is a bad one, but he can’t help himself. When Jungkook swings back to face him, Taehyung steals another kiss, this time off the corner of Jungkook’s mouth.

“Whoa,” Jungkook reels back in surprise, eyes widening again.

“Constant vigilance,” Taehyung snickers, because it’s funny, it’s a joke, and flicks the bottom of Jungkook’s chin. “Hope your date likes people who are kinda slow. Are you ever going to tell me who they are? I’m still curious.”

“Oh. My god. Ugh. Fuck. I,” Jungkook buries his face in his hands again, ears tomato red, and loses his next few words to mumbles “—reading things wrong, but,” Jungkook’s furiously blushing at this point, “Um yeah I’ll, I think, I’ll tell you. I’m in, no wait, fuck, um, restarting, how should I say this,” Jungkook takes a deep breath. “The person I’m i-interested in is—”

And suddenly Taehyung, fear seizing his chest, realizes he really doesn’t really want to know. From the way Jungkook looks totally out of his element, like a complete mess really, looking at the ground somewhere between his knees, flustered, red, hands clasped together, subtly shaking, it’s clear the individual of interest was taking up large swath of prime real estate in Jungkook’s heart. And perhaps even more clearly, there were no vacancies left for anyone else.

And it’s been such a fun night, he laments as he stretches, hands lacing together as he pulls his arms high above his head, he doesn’t really want to ruin it with the fallout from his own broken feelings. So he stands up abruptly, thankful that the alcohol is protecting his heart from his real looming emotions with a liquor-laced cushion, and pats Jungkook on the shoulder.

“It’s fine, you don’t have to tell me,” Taehyung cuts Jungkook off. And he grins for good measure to drive home that he’s totally cool, “Sorry I’ve been teasing you. I’ll stop now.”

“Wait,” Jungkook looks up from his hands, face still red, brows furrowed. “I mean—“

“You look super flustered, so worry about it,” Taehyung hopes his smile looks real and he shrugs. “Like I’ve just messing with you, honestly, I don’t really care about it.”

It’s a bald faced lie, but it’s for the better.

Some expression flashes across Jungkook’s face, but it’s gone before Taehyung can catch it and is quickly replaced with an easy smile. He pulls his facemask quickly over his face as a girl and her dog
scuttle by, and looks down at his watch.

“...alright,” Jungkook mumbles into his mask. “Wanna go pretty soon?”

“Yeah,” he was starting to sober up, and Taehyung was really going to need more to get through this night. “Let’s go now.”

+++ 

“Hey, can Jimin hang with us too?” Taehyung asks as they’re speeding off towards some chimaek place in Hongdae. “And a few of the other producers? Like RM, Yoongi, and Hoseok. I wouldn’t ask normally, but I did cancel on them last minute for this, and there’s a non-zero chance we’re going to run into them which is super awkward—”

“Oh yeah for sure,” Jungkook blinks. “You canceled for this? We could have just had dinner another day.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung scratches the back of his ear. “But this was more important.”

“It was?” Jungkook looks surprised.

“Yeah, it was an apology dinner right?”

“Oh,” Jungkook nods, expression unreadable. “Right.”

“Yeah, oh and Jin might come too. They said they’ll meet us there.”

“Cool,” Jungkook props an arm against the car door, one hand guiding the wheel. “It’ll be fun to see them.”

+++ 

Chicken. Beer. Friends. The perfect recipe to get wasted. And Taehyung finds himself doing exactly that as he laughs like it’s the funniest thing in the world as Namjoon fucks up the counting game for the fifth time in a row and he drains half a glass in solidarity because his throat feels dry.

One of the fun parts about being drunk is that everything slows down, his breathing, his thoughts, his movements. He relaxes, the edges on the world dull, worries are pushed aside, and life melts into a pleasant blur as he exists and just takes everything in. Jin and Yoongi are bickering about company politics in the background, and Jimin’s trying to convince Jungkook to say his CF’s catch phrase (“Crispy and Delicious~”) as Hoseok just shakes his head at it all.

But Taehyung doesn’t care about any of that because the only thing that matters is Jungkook, sitting by his side, facemask covering his face, with his shoulder looking like a really prime pillow right
about now. Taehyung thinks hard about just going for it, hard enough to not notice the way the glass in his hand was beginning to tip over onto the concrete below.

“Careful,” Jungkook mutters as he quickly swipes the pint in Taehyung hand and puts it on the table.

“Mmm,” Taehyung’s head flops to one side and he reaches towards the beer-filled glass with a grabby hand. “I want more though.”

“What pint are you on?”

“My…” Taehyung squints, a loopy grin set on his face. “…I forgot.”

“Yeah, time to stop,” Jungkook smacks Taehyung’s hand away.

“Okay,” Taehyung pouts. He stares at Jungkook’s shoulder for a moment longer before he decides to finally just do it, dropping his head into the crook of Jungkook’s neck abruptly. It’s not soft, but it’s just the right height, and so it’s about as comfortable as Taehyung had imagined.

And of course they fit together like a missing pieces, or some sappy shit like that, even if Jungkook stiffens on contact.

“Are you tired?” Jungkook murmurs, shifting a bit.

“Yeah.”

“You can sleep if you want.”

“Good idea,” Taehyung lets his eyes droop.

He’s not sure how long he’s out for when he’s lightly shaken awake, but when he opens his eyes, the size of their group has doubled. To his surprise, quite a few trainees have randomly joined them, he sees Jihoon and gives him a slight wave before he closes his eyes again.

“Hey, Taehyung,” Jungkook’s jostling his shoulder, his facemask still covering his face. “We’re gonna head to Jimin’s place, we’re attracting too much attention.”

“What? Okay,” Taehyung sits up blearily. “Have they recognized you?”

“I don’t think so,” Jungkook’s eyes flick over to the crowd. All of the phones are trained on the trainees and Jimin, “I kept my mask on.”

“Okay,” Taehyung yawns and stands up. “How are we getting there?”

“Probably a cab,” Jungkook wearily looks around. “Gotta shake them off our trail.”

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At some point, tranced by the moving lights, Taehyung falls asleep again. And he has what he passes off as an odd dream when he wakes up the next morning, slightly hungover and tucked in with a blanket on Jimin’s couch.
He was lying on that same couch in a setting that seemed to take place last night, eyes barely cracked open, listening passively to a conversation that seems crazy in the sobriety of the morning.

“So when’s the final evaluation?” Yoongi asked, nose stuck deep into his glass.

“Next Wednesday,” a trainee said, tapping his knees nervously.

“If you want any advice,” Yoongi claps Jimin and Jungkook on the shoulders. “You got two former BTD members here to answer any questions.”

“Jungkook’s a way better person to ask,” Jimin points. “I haven’t done this stuff since BTD disbanded.”

“What do you even do now anyway?” Jungkook turns to Jimin. “I feel like you’re just doing a bunch of random shit.”

“Officially I’m an Executive Creative Director,” Jimin sniffs. “It’s a very critical role that has responsibilities including—”

“Seems fake,” Jungkook cuts in.

“You seem fake.”

“Okay, you guys,” Hoseok smiles, aggressively sunny and bright. “Not in front of the trainees.”

“So, um,” Jihoon speaks up. “This is kind of generic, but what’s the best part of being an idol?”

“The fans,” Jungkook responds automatically.

“Textbook answer,” Namjoon holds out a thumbs up. “Nice.”

“It’s true,” Jungkook says defensively. “They made me who I am. I wouldn’t be anyone relevant without them.”

“Do you have any advice about evaluations? I guess I’m asking Yoongi specifically,” some trainee, Taehyung thinks his name is Daniel, suddenly asks.

“Do your best, pretty much,” Yoongi snorts. “Though if any of you are worried about your chances and want an edge, honestly follow Jihoon’s lead.”

“What do you mean?” Jihoon looks up.

“Buddy up with Taehyung,” Yoongi lifts his brows. “That guy can produce miracles.”

“Filters, guys,” Jin shakes his head. “We’re not supposed to give under the table advice.”

“No but, Yoongi’s right, if you were to say Jungkook’s fans made him into who he is,” Jimin laughs, glass clinking in the background. “Then you’d have to say Taehyung basically created him. He’s like, Jungkook’s god or something. He pretty much considers him as one anyway—”

“That’s way over-exaggerated. Also, shut up,” Jungkook hisses. “He’s like right there.”

Jimin cranes his neck, “Don’t worry, he’s passed out.”

“Why are you even bringing him up?” Jungkook glares.
“We’re turning this into an expose Jungkook night, that’s why,” Jimin whispers really loudly, hand cupped around his mouth and jabs a thumb in Jungkook’s direction. “If you guys didn’t know already, he’s Taehyung’s biggest fan.”

One of the trainees slaps Jihoon on the shoulder, and snickers, “Jungkook’s got competition here.”

“Could you not, Jimin,” Jungkook scoffs. “You’re making me sound like an obsessive.”

“You definitely idolized him as a trainee,” Hoseok coughs.

“Yeah, as a trainee. I was what, 15?”

Jin mutters something that Taehyung can’t quite hear and everyone except for Jungkook explodes with laughter.

“Whatever, that doesn’t matter,” Jimin waves a hand. “The point is, Jungkook probably wouldn’t be sitting here with us if it wasn’t for Taehyung,” Jimin holds his fingers an inch apart. “Did you guys know Jungkook was this close to not making it into BTD?”

The trainees shake their heads.

“He was like a mile from even being actually considered before Taehyung stepped in,” Yoongi snorts. “He had like no personality. And look at him now, the breakout member and BigCube’s biggest chance at cultivating a top star.”

“Jimin, Yoongi,” Jungkook reaches over whacks Jimin in the shoulder. “Could you guys not.”

“Why are you only hitting me?! Yoongi’s sitting right next to you,” Jimin complains as he squints. “At the end it was between him and one other guy, what was his name? I can’t remember.”

“Me neither,” Namjoon snorts into his glass. “But Taehyung calls him, or called him, Fuckface McGee.”

“Oh yeah.” Jimin scowls as he rubs his arm. “That piece of shit.”

“Didn’t that guy have a huge thing for Taehyung? That’s all I really remember about him,” Jin takes a sip before glancing over at Jungkook. He immediately bursts out laughing and points at Jungkook, “Look at his face right now.”

“He did, feels bad for Taehyung, man,” Jimin laughs and smacks Jungkook. “The only people he manages to attract are a bunch of weirdos—”

Jungkook punches Jimin in the arm.

“Honestly,” Yoongi shakes his head. “That was the most messed up shit though. Also felt hella bad for Taehyung.”

“What’d he even do?” Namjoon leans forward. “Taehyung never told me the specifics, I just know what he did ended up tanking Taehyung’s—“

“Now’s not the best time.” Hoseok frowns and waves a hand, “We’ll tell you later...”

Taehyung’s memory shorts out right about there, and he feels disoriented by how vivid and real it seems. But since his whole day is spent locked up in his studio, engrossed in engineering Breakout Suckup’s winter ballad solo debut title, it quickly slips from his thoughts and he forgets about it by the afternoon.
It was mentioned previously that karma bit Fuckface in the ass, and that was the reason for his fall from idol grace.

Taehyung would like to correct the record on that one, because it was not so much a product of chance as the wording implies, as it was a deliberately orchestrated takedown. And what he means by that is that he, personally, hand-picked karma, trained him, and sicced him on Fuckface McGee’s career chances a few weeks before the final cut.

Of course he’d never do something like that now, he’s like, super zen and shit about life and stuff. The greatest revenge, he’s found, is living well, and damn is it a wholesome way to exist. So he tries to not go out of his way to mention this story, because he does, to some extent, feel a degree of guilt about it at the end of the day, and it was 50 shades of moral grey. But Jimin, from time to time, likes to trot it out as an example of Taehyung’s wilder days and point to it as the reason Taehyung was cemented at as high of a position in the company as he was.

Which is probably true, and at some point career heights can only be achieved by stepping on the shoulders of others and knocking people to the ground.

Which is especially true with jobs where there can only be one.

Not entirely tangent, but idolship, it turns out, tends to be one of those jobs. The advantage of a boy band, when assembled correctly, is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Each member, usually unable to succeed on their own as solo star because of some lacking trait(s)—singing, dancing, visuals, personality, age, hype—adds their unique traits and abilities to the group so that the machine that appeals to a broad(er) spectrum of people. It’s the classically known advantages of teamwork applied to music, and it turns out it works really well. And to create the most robust team, each member needs to contribute something unique enough, since duplicate archetypes will only end up cannibalizing each other’s popularity.

In other words, there can only be one cute member, and Fuckface McGee was currently far and beyond the frontrunner in that category. And Taehyung needed to knock him the fuck down.

It was just really unfortunate. But unsurprising. Fuckface was cute and charismatic when he wanted to be, and flawless at singing and dancing, which further reinforced his advantages in the eyes of the evaluators. At this point, he was all but a confirmed member, and by the way he was prancing around the practice room and greeting the staff like they were his best friends, he fucking knew it.

And that’s why Taehyung was here, roughly nine months before BTD’s official debut, slouching on a bench watching the weekly evaluations, scanning the crowd of trainee hopefuls as they currently execute a dance routine to some generic western EDM song with a longcon plan to enact revenge by dashing Fuckface’s hopes in one of the most painful ways possible.

He’s got some grievances, yeah.

The group’s an interesting bunch of twenty or so guys though. They’re all within the top tier among all of the trainees, in either singing, dancing, looks, prior fame, or nepotism, and scanning the crowd, it’s easy to pick out who is who. The frontrunners are easily identifiable. Including Fuckface and
Jimin, there’s eight other guys out in the literal front with familiar names and familiar faces, each with a strong advocate behind them for a multitude of reasons that ranged from sheer talent to hailing from a chaebol family. Too bad there’s only five spots.

Fuckface makes eye contact at that moment and winks at him, and Taehyung does his best not to succumb to the flaring desire to drive his fist through the nearest wall. Jimin had only told him about what Fuckface had done only a few days ago, and if revenge was going to be as sweet as he wanted it to be, Taehyung was going to have to bide his time and pretend he knew nothing about it.

There were probably people out there who would give him the conventional wisdom ‘don’t dwell on it’ or ‘find the silver linings’ um coughHoseokcough and proceed to basically hint that he should cool his jets or something. But Taehyung’s just really sick of people thinking they could try and screw him over with no consequences.

And the fact that Fuckface had apparently done it because he had a thing for Taehyung, oh man yeah Jimin had shown him all of the text receipts, had just made it even worse. It’s such a stupid reason, Taehyung fumes as he cracks a few knuckles on his left hand with his thumb, it’s not like he would have considered going out with Fuckface in the first place, but this was just drilling screws into an already interred coffin.

Like, sorry, Taehyung doesn’t dig backstabbing pieces of shit. It’s kind of a turn off, to be honest.

But he gives Fuckface a smile anyway, he needs to keep his cover, and tries keep the bile down at the way Fuckface runs a hand through his hair and smirks back. Then he continues to scan the crowd until he spots the person he came here to watch. He’s a small kid who hangs out in the back, almost dead last in the rankings and a couple of years younger than anyone else. He’s clearly skilled if he’s made it into this final consideration group, supposedly through stellar recommendations from the dance and vocal teachers if Jimin was to be believed, but during evaluations, at least the ones Taehyung’s been to, it doesn’t show. He’s nervous and timid, his voice wavers and he makes simple mistakes when he dances. He’s also the same archetype as Fuckface, the cute type, and honestly looks like he could be a distant younger cousin, which places him in a direct competition with Fuckface for a debut chance that he’s currently losing in a landslide.

Because, for what it’s worth, Fuckface is amazingly talented, at least toe-to-toe with Jimin, maybe even edging him out slightly with singing. That’s his thing, he’s been a ready-to-go model of an idol out of the box since he arrived here as a trainee years ago. And he quickly caught the evaluators’ eyes with his charisma, perfect Seoul accent, and his ability to perform. Their only reservation was his personality—brash, cocky, and conceited—which many were convinced could be trained out of him or at least suppressed enough in the remaining months. And Taehyung would probably have agreed up until recently. But now? He’s pretty much an irredeemable piece of shit. And Taehyung would like to make his eventual failure as painful as possible by trouncing him with the darkest horse he can find.

Speaking of which, Taehyung winces as the kid misses a step and stumbles over his Timbs, breaking the formation in a way he’s sure even Namjoon notices. The kid, clearly rattled, scrambles to get back into position and continues, a fraction of a beat off. Fuckface starts subtly laughing at him from the sidelines, and Taehyung hopes the kid doesn't notice. He manages to get back on tempo by the end, but it’s not enough, at least for the evaluator to Taehyung’s right as she shakes her head and ticks off some boxes off a sheet.

He needed some work, to say the least. On that, and also on the fact that the kid is also woefully, woefully shy.

It’s to the point where he clams up when someone asks him a question in front of an audience larger
than five people, and it’s almost painful watching him eek out the least number of words possible to answer the question as he looks terrified out of his wits. Which is kind of what was happening now, as a dance choreographer calls him out specifically to ask him how much he’s practiced over the last week, stuttering with his satoori as he confuses hours with minutes, his hands clenching and unclenching as he corrects himself. He’s not going to lie, Taehyung may or may not see a bit of himself in the kid.

From snooping around, Taehyung’s found out that the general consensus among the decision board is that they’re not particularly impressed with him. And considering Yoongi keeps forgetting he even exists—

(“Hey Yoongi, do you know the name of the kid in the back?”

“Which one?”

“The one with the Timbs.”

“I’ve literally never seen him before. Is he new?”

“No, he’s been here for a few months.”

“Shit, really?”

“I’ll take that as a no.”)

—it’s pretty clear he’s currently not on the shortlist for BTD.

In other words, he’s perfect. A diamond in the rough buried deep in a backwater swamp, okay a bit of a hyperbole, but exactly what Taehyung’s looking for.

So when evals are over and the trainees are packing their bags, Taehyung brushes past Fuckface like he doesn’t even see him (“hey, you free—Taehyung, hey, I’m talking to you!”) and crouches down next to the kid.

“Hey,” Taehyung leans down and taps the kid on the shoulder. The kid whirls around in surprise, towel slung over his neck, and Taehyung grins, boxy and bright. “I don’t think we’ve met before.”

Up close, the kid doesn’t look like much either, features a little too big for his face, unchecked acne trailing across his skin, hair cut in a generic bowl shape. He probably has the makings of a visual in the future, since everyone here does, BigCube must have looked at his parents or something to get a gauge. But Taehyung’s not really into prepubescent teens and so honestly at the moment he can’t tell.

“Oh, um, hi?” The kid blinks, nervously adjusting his baseball cap, ears tipped with the faintest hint of pink.

“I just wanted to say I think you have a lot of potential, and so I just wanted to introduce myself,” Taehyung extends a hand and smiles gently, a bit like he how would approach a small dog. “I’m Taehyung.”

The kid looks down at his hand, quickly wipes his own on his shirt, and tentatively shakes it. His grip is limp, adding more to the overall pile of his unimpressive traits, and Taehyung mentally notes to train him out of that. Right after, Taehyung’s eyes flick down to the kid’s choice of clothes (an eyesore of a combo of some designer knockoffs and a basketball jersey), he fixes his choice of wardrobe.
Nine months until debut. He could make this happen.

“N-nice to meet ya,” The kid mumbles, staring at Taehyung with eyes opened wide, “Name’s Jungkook.”

Chapter End Notes

scale's nationwide

lmaoo did i mention this was slow burn?

anyways, yeah.

also uhh, i’m pretty sure i won’t be able to do weekly updates anymore ): i was pumping out chapters cuz i’ve been dicking around during break but yeah, not sure what the timing's gonna be like anymore
Today, Taehyung decided, as he strode down the hallway purposefully towards his studio, was going to be a productive day.

He had woken up by his alarm on the first ring for once, gone running for the first time in a while (okay half of it was walking), just arrived at the office at what appeared to be before anyone else, was on track to finish Breakout Suckup’s song by 10, going to get coffee with Jihoon at 11, have Breakout Suckup in on a call to review the song at 1, attend a producer meeting for BigCube’s annual artist-wide Christmas album at 3, and be be driven off to shoot a magazine ad for a brand of toothpaste at 5.

Funnily enough, even after the fiasco that happened after his Cozy Conversations performance, the viral gif of his wink had picked him up an endorsement. All he had to do was wink at a camera, and bam, royalties. Still probably easier said than done—he hasn’t had headshots done since he was a trainee—but definitely not the hardest he’d worked for that kind of money.

He opens his door with a creak, sets his backpack down by his Starry Night print, slips his laptop out of the bag, nods in greeting at a couch-slouching Jungkook, and sits down at the desk. Then he cracks his fingers and—

Wait.

He slowly swivels around, brows furrowed together and stares at the lump of an idol currently making himself at home on his new couch that he had just bought last week.

Jungkook evidently notices him staring. He looks up from his laptop, glasses perched on the end of his nose, “Yeah?”

“Um,” Taehyung blinks. He wasn’t supposed to be there. Or rather, Taehyung wasn’t expecting him to be there. Especially not at 7:30 in the morning.

“What?” Jungkook pushes his glasses up his nose bridge and grins with enough confidence that he makes it look like he belongs there.

The forthcoming ‘the fuck are you doing here’ dies on Taehyung’s lips, partly because he’s actually a bit happy to see Jungkook there (did he just admit that to himself? yeah, he did) and so he replaces it at the last second with a much more cordial, and as a result, vaguer, “Can I help you?”
Okay, not exactly what he was going for, and he probably wasn’t going to get the answer he wanted. Might as well ask Jungkook if he’d like fries with that while he was at it.

“Nope,” Jungkook shakes his head and looks back down at his laptop. “I’m good.”

“Um,” Taehyung says, trying to figure out a phrasing to suss out Jungkook’s reason for being here without going on the offensive.

Jungkook looks up again, “Can I help you?”

Taehyung blinks. Again. “How long have you been here?”

“Half an hour, maybe?” Jungkook checks his watch.

“And, you just let yourself in?”

Jungkook points at the entrance, “The door was unlocked.”

“Um okay,” Taehyung squints, it was kinda way too early for this. “Why here? I guess.”

Jungkook pats a cushion, “You have a nice couch.”

“Okay?”

“I had some time before practice.”

“Right?”

“Yeah, that’s it,” Jungkook looks back down at his laptop. After a moment, he notices Taehyung still staring and lifts his head again, “Anything else?”

“I guess not,” Taehyung turns back around and connects his own laptop to the monitor, slightly confused as to why he now felt like he was the one reacting strangely.

“Cool,” Jungkook pops his headphones back over his ears and resumes doing whatever he was doing before.

Jungkook gets up moments later, tossing his laptop and headphones on the couch. He pulls his sweatshirt over his head and picks up his duffel bag and pauses at the door, hand on the frame, with an announcement, “I’m going to go to workout.”

“Okay,” Taehyung points at Jungkook’s stuff on the couch. “Don’t forget your laptop and stuff.”

“I mean,” Jungkook doesn’t miss a beat, “I’m coming back.”

“Oh,” Taehyung feels his face warm at a time it really shouldn’t. This kinda felt like—yeah.

“See ya.”

“Um, alright,” and Taehyung turns back to his work, a bit frazzled, and still not entirely sure how he felt about what had just happened.

+++
Jungkook, true to his word, saunters back in, just as Taehyung’s making the final tweaks to Breakout Suckup’s song (now titled *December Love*, the combination he had Namjoon randomly pick out of a pile of the 10 most generic wintery ballad words he could think of in the shower).

Taehyung pretends to not notice. With his back facing his door and his headphones clamped over the hood pulled over his head, he has the perfect cover. But through the reflection in his decorative mirror, Taehyung watches him as he shoves stuff back into his duffel bag, and starts subconsciously taking note of things like Jungkook looks good when his hair’s a bit damp, his shirt’s clinging in a way that does wonders for his back, and—oh fuck, he just caught Taehyung staring.

“What up?” Jungkook raises his brows, lips thinned in a clear attempt to subdue a shit-eating grin. Then cheekily, he gestures at his torso, “Like what you see?”

Taehyung just rolls his eyes and shakes his head. He can see Jungkook’s bicep flexing unnaturally hard out of the corner of his eye as Jungkook folds a towel and stows it away.

What a show-off. Fuckboy material, indeed.

“No,” Taehyung finally retorts. “Just wondering if you even lift. Those look like chicken arms, man.”

“If these are chicken arms, what are yours?” Jungkook scoffs.

“Are you talking about these?” Taehyung points to his own arm. “Only the finest upper limbs sculpted by fast food and video games.”

“Right,” Jungkook slumps onto the couch with a huff and opens his laptop.

“You know it.”

“Mhm.”

And Taehyung takes it as his cue to go back to work. It’s all about the little things with the song at this point, adding touches to the background, adjusting the pitch ever so slightly, debating whether that one eighth note was even necessary. This part is the part Taehyung finds the silver linings of wrangled enjoyment when he works on blasé songs like these, layering on details that give the song a bit more depth and complexity than the template he hewed it from. The process of creating the song itself was pretty whatever, it was your standard ballad with a piano and orchestral instrumental with a touch of guitar and a (likely to be overdubbed) soaring money note at the end, with lyrics about having a broken heart (sad) while it’s snowing (sad on sad) in the middle of the lonely December night (sad x3 action, oh *baby*).

It’s what Breakout Suckup wanted, an inoffensive song that had mainstream popularity, and that sounded like the twenty other songs she had sent his way for reference (they all sounded about the same), and he thinks at this point, he’s delivered. It’s depressing song porn at it’s blandest, a glop of musical porridge listeners will spoon up, feel mildly sad about upon consumption, and think to themselves ‘*I feel like I’ve heard this song before*’, which meant it was also perfect for Bogum’s new drama ending song.

AKA perfect for end of the year OST awards.

He’s just about to come to a final decision on whether to eliminate that eighth note when he feels his headphones sliding off of his ears.

“Yes?” He leans back and frowns at Jungkook, who pulls the headphones over his own head.
“Shh,” Jungkook reaches over Taehyung, takes the mouse and clicks the play button, puts a finger over his lips and mouths exaggeratedly, *I’m listening.*

“Shh yourself,” Taehyung swipes at his headphones and Jungkook steps just out of his reach. “I’m not done yet.”

“It sounds good.” Jungkook ignores him and hums along with a few notes in a repeating line in the chorus. “Though I feel like I’ve heard this song before.”

“That’s the point.”

Jungkook hums some more. “So who’s it for?”

“Breakout Suckup,” Taehyung says automatically.

“Uh,” Jungkook’s eyebrows quirk in amusement, “Who?”

“Oh wait,” Taehyung pinches his nose bridge with his finger. “Oops. I fucked up, now you know I’m an asshole. Only Jimin and my producer buddies know I call her that.”

Jungkook just cackles, “Seems like you played yourself.”

“Wow, shit, what? I can’t even remember her real name, it’s in an email somewhere, this looks so bad,” Taehyung opens his email client and begins scrolling. He gives up after a minute, “Fuck, I can’t find it. Wow well this is bothering me now, but she’s that idol MC, from Show Champion.”

“Oh,” Jungkook sounds surprised. “The one that interviewed you about Cozy Conversations?”

“Yeah her,” Taehyung snaps his fingers.

“Interesting, it looked like you liked her,” Jungkook mumbles as he rubs his nose with his hand. He sounds oddly pleased, “During the interview.”

“I’m a pretty good actor,” Taehyung drums his fingers on the table. “But admittedly not her biggest fan. She’s a...go-getter. To put it kindly. Definitely knows what she wants.”

“Ah,” Jungkook, lips thin again, picks at the cable of the headphones before taking them off and heading back towards the couch. “Yeah, good job with the song though, will stream when I want to feel sad.”

“Wait,” Taehyung waves as he suddenly has an idea. He holds the headphones out towards Jungkook, “Tell me if what you think about this eighth note—”

A knock against wood interrupts Taehyung, and he swivels around to find Jihoon standing by the door.

“Hey,” Jihoon nods his head. “Am I interrupting something?”

“Oh, shit,” Taehyung glances at his watch. “It’s 11 already. This day is going by really fast.”

“Yeah,” Jihoon laughs. “But I can wait if you’re busy.”

“No, no, it’s okay, don’t want to keep you waiting,” Taehyung jumps up and gathers his wallet and keys. “I need a break anyway.”

Jungkook, small frown gracing his face, doesn’t look up as he nods as Taehyung heads out the door.
And Taehyung doesn’t know why, but he feels a bit guilty as he strides down the hall with Jihoon. And the feeling grows in his gut, until it’s almost unbearable as they’re standing by the elevator.

Why was he the one feeling guilty, Taehyung thinks slightly spitefully as he shifts while standing. Jungkook knew he was going to get coffee with Jihoon. Taehyung had given him a heads up like an hour ago.

(“Hey I'm supposed to meet Jihoon for coffee at 11.”

"Alright."

"So yeah."

"Cool, is that it?"

"...yeah.")

He basically gave him the hint to clear out. It wasn't his fault Jungkook hadn't gotten the message. But, still, Jungkook's displeased expression, imprinted in Taehyung’s mind, made it look he felt really left out.

Ugh, Taehyung gives in, fine. He’s always been too fucking soft.

“You don’t mind if I—” Taehyung points down the hall with his thumb.

“Yeah, no worries, it'd be super cool to talk to Jungkook too,” Jihoon laughs. “I was just about to ask.”

“Okay, thanks,” Taehyung jogs down the hall and bursts through the door.

Jungkook’s still laying on the couch, head propped on his hand with a deeper frown plastered over his face. He looks up in surprise as Taehyung nearly trips over a box on his way back in.

“That was fast?” He says, slightly confused.

“You wanna come with?” Taehyung blurs out.

“To what?” Jungkook looks up cautiously.

“Coffee. With me and Jihoon. Jihoon and I, whatever.”

“Oh,” Jungkook looks at him skeptically. "I don’t have to. It’s your guys’ thing right?"

“We don’t mind,” Taehyung shrugs. “Do you want to?”

“Don’t mind?” Jungkook scoffs. “Doesn’t sound like an enthusiastic invite.”

“Sorry, we’re absolutely dying to have you join us. It’s killing us that you’re not there. Better?”

“Yeah,” Jungkook snorts and gets up. “Sure. If you insist.”

+++
One of the great things about the location of BigCube’s headquarters is that it’s located across from the best hipster coffee shop in the city (in Taehyung’s opinion. Yoongi would beg to differ, but he’s a Starbucks loyalist so his opinion is invalid). It’s been there since Taehyung joined, and gives Taehyung direct access to the multiple cups of caffeine required to successfully get him through the day.

“You guys can find a table, I’ll order, what do you want?” Taehyung says as he stands, slouched, hands jammed in his pockets. “No wait I can guess. Iced coffee for Jihoon and hot...chocolate for Jungkook?”

“Yeah,” Jihoon nods.

“No,” Jungkook rubs his nose through his mask. “Get me an Americano.”

Taehyung feels his brows furrowing, “Really?”

“...yeah?”

“Really?” Taehyung repeats.

“Yeah,” Jungkook rolls his eyes.

“Like really—”


“Alright,” Taehyung looks at him skeptically. “If you say so.”

When Jungkook walks away with Jihoon, Taehyung orders a hot chocolate anyway.

+++ 

[ rewind—8 years ago ]

Roughly eight years ago, when Taehyung’s caffeine addiction was just a burgeoning craving rather than something he could debatably be sent to rehab for, after that practice where he had made the fateful first-contact, he had taken Jungkook to this very coffee shop.

His goal? To get close enough to Jungkook where showering him with a bunch of private lessons wouldn’t seem out of the blue. Or at least get the conversation to a point where Taehyung could present them as an option, which the kid would then ideally take.
It was step one in Taehyung’s four grand step plan to take Fuckface down, which went a little something like this:

1. Get Jungkook to agree to private lessons provided by some industry insiders Taehyung is friends with
2. Jungkook takes said private lessons
3. Jungkook Gits Gud™
4. Profit

Easy, straightforward, and minimal effort on Taehyung’s part. Basically the perfect plan.

This first step was the step Taehyung was worried the least about. It would likely be a walk in the park, the kid seriously needed all the help he could get. And free private lessons? Who wouldn’t say yes?

The only thing he really needed to determine is if this kid was going to be receptive to help. Because if he had too much pride or a giant ego, it would make things a little bit more difficult.

But looking at the way the kid was nervously fidgeting by his side, it was pretty unlikely that he had either.

“So, do you know what you want?” Taehyung stands with his hands stuffed in his pants and glances down at the kid. “I’ll treat.”

“Oh,” Jungkook scans the menu as Taehyung motions a few people to pass them. “Do they have hot chocolate?”

“Probably,” Taehyung squints at the menu and points. “Yeah, there. Not a coffee person?”

“No really,” Jungkook wrinkles his nose. “It’s like...bean...water.”

“Bean water,” Taehyung laughs. “Never heard it called that before.”

Jungkook doesn’t respond, but he visibly relaxes, a small smile tipping the corners of his mouth. Taehyung steps up to order to pay and they wait and get their drinks before finding a table, a wobbly setup squished in a corner.

“But actually, how do you drink this?” Jungkook pokes Taehyung’s cup. The table wobbles, and Jungkook stabilizes it apologetically.

“Acquired taste. It’s easy when you become old and bitter like me.”

“How old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

“You’re only like 3 years older—no wait,” Jungkook’s eyes flick up at the ceiling. “Two. You’re not that old.”

“You’re 15? Or wait, 16?”

“15.”

“That would be 3 years, and I’m still way older than you.”

“I’m turning 16 soon, not that much older.”
“Oh, happy birthday! How soon?”

“...eight months.”

Taehyung scrunches his face, “That’s not really that soon.”

“It’s soon,” Jungkook says stubbornly. “I’m really not that much younger.”

“If you say so,” Taehyung laughs. “Anyway, this place is really good, maybe the stuff you had before was badly made,” Taehyung pushes the cup towards Jungkook. “Wanna try some?”

Jungkook tentatively picks it up and takes a sip and immediately cringes.

“Looks like you’re still not a fan,” Taehyung takes it back with a grin.

“Not really,” Jungkook washes it down with his own drink. “I think I’ll stick to hot chocolate.”

+++ 

[ fast forward—*the present* ]

Jungkook at 23, it turns out, isn’t actually that much better at handling his coffee.

He’s just, Taehyung doesn’t even know, dumber about it? It’s so obvious he’s trying to flex on something, it’s just a drink is such an odd choice of vehicle to do it with.

Just like with the soup incident a few weeks ago, Jungkook looks like he’s at war with himself as he takes the tiniest sips possible. It’s really distracting (among other things) when Taehyung’s talking to Jihoon about his process for developing *December Love*, popping open his laptop and pointing as he comments on the layers, and when Jihoon excuses himself to go to the bathroom, Taehyung sighs and immediately switches their cups.

He kind of knew something like this would happen.

“Um,” Jungkook stares down at his new cup. “What?”

“You can drink mine instead,” Taehyung nods. “Save yourself a bit of misery.”

“What is it?” Jungkook uncaps it and takes a sniff.

“Hot chocolate.”

“Oh,” Jungkook pulls his beanie down over his ears, lifts the cup to his face and takes a giant gulp. “Thanks.”

“No problem,” Taehyung says into his coffee.

“I usually like coffee,” Jungkook insists. “Just today—“

“Do you really?” Taehyung raises a brow.
“You don’t believe me, do you.”

“No,” Taehyung snorts out a laugh. “Judging by the way you’re drinking that hot chocolate, not really.”

+++  

[ rewind ]  

Getting 15-year-old Jungkook to talk about himself was a bit like pulling teeth.

Taehyung had thought, based on their conversation in the beginning, that all Jungkook needed was some pointed questions and common ground and he would open up like a flower in bloom, no problem. But instead, it seems that the more Taehyung prods, the more Jungkook clams up.

Jungkook doesn’t ask questions, he answers the ones Taehyung throws at him with as few words as possible, and most frustratingly, he won’t make eye contact. And Taehyung realizes pretty quickly, that he was going to have to quickly figure out the art of getting Jungkook to spit out information if he was going to make this kid idol-ready.

Because right now he kind of felt like lightly slamming his head against the table.

“So,” Taehyung summons all of his patience and smiles his kindest smile. “Where are you from?”

“Busan,” Jungkook fidgets, stare still diverted downwards.

“Oh nice, my best friend is from Busan. Have you met Jimin yet? He’s a trainee too.”

“Yeah.”

“Um,” Taehyung was running out of small-talk questions. “What do you think about being a trainee?”

Jungkook shrugs, “It's okay.”

“Just okay?”

“Yeah,” Jungkook frowns slightly.

And Taehyung picks up on it like a hawk, “Anything wrong?”

“Um,” Jungkook hesitates.

Taehyung, relieved that Jungkook for the first time seems like he’s on the brink of saying more than three words grabs onto the thin shred of hope and pulls the lid open, “You can tell me, I’m here to
“I’m having a, um, hard time with training,” Jungkook finally admits after what looks like a bit of internal deliberation.

Nice, so he at least knows he needs work. Self-awareness of the situation, check.

“Oh no,” Taehyung furrows his brows and pretends like he’s surprised. “I’m sorry to hear that.”

“I know I need a lot of help, it’s like nerves, mostly, and it’s really hard to fix by myself.”

Sweet, receptiveness to charity, check.

“And so, um, I think all the signs are pointing to the fact that I’m not really cut out for this, being an idol I mean,” Jungkook diverts his eyes down and rips the edge of his cup’s sleeve. “It’s not really for me.”

Wait, what?

“Why do you say that?” Taehyung asks, panic rising a bit. Self-doubt wasn’t supposed to be factor.

“I, uh, dunno,” Jungkook clenches a fist and unfurls it. “I mean I know I’m not going to make the cut for BTD. And they told us already BigCube isn’t in a financial position to guarantee another boy band.”

“Don’t put yourself down like that, you’ve got a while until they make the final decision.”

“Yeah, but, I can just kinda tell?” Jungkook’s head drops a little further down and his mumbling gets worse. “My evaluation scores are really not that good, and I know I missed some sort of cut because I found out the top candidates are starting to get special lessons.”

“Don’t worry about that,” Oh, wait, a perfect segway actually, Taehyung just needs to slip his proposal in, “I can—“

“Also I’m,” Jungkook continues like he didn’t even hear Taehyung. “I’m not happy here. It’s been a few months, and I haven’t really made friends. I miss my family and I miss my friends back home. And Seoul is so different, I’m honestly not adjusting that well,” Jungkook bites his lip, his eyes glisten a bit and he blinks and he rubs the corner of his lid with the bottom of the palm of his hand. “Sorry, I’m not usually like this, I’m just really, um, tired.”

“It’s okay,” well no, this was bad. But Taehyung reaches over and awkwardly pats Jungkook on the head anyway, as he tries to figure out a way to salvage the situation, “It’s okay, um, you’re working really hard. Like I said before, you have a ton of potential.”

“Thanks,” Jungkook sniffs, and rubs his nose with his sleeve, eyes slightly red. “But honestly, I don’t really want to do this anymore. I’m thinking of quitting pretty soon.”

Well shit.

Taehyung chews on his bottom lip as he watches Jungkook miserably blink out the remnants of suppressed tears into his hot chocolate. This wasn’t going to work out.

Sure, Taehyung was kinda an asshole, but he wasn’t enough of one to manipulate a 15-year-old into heading back into a toxic environment against his own will. His whole plan had hinged on Jungkook being game with moving forward, and well, really wanting to be an idol. This was supposed to be a
symbiotic relationship. Which, it turns out, was not looking like the case.

It was kind of a pity, really. Both for the kid and Taehyung’s purposes. Especially since it sounded like he was having a bad time primarily because he was really lonely.

Jungkook had unfortunately entered the company at probably one of the worst times to make friends, when the debut date seemed just around the corner, and the competitive vibe was at a fever pitch. Every new trainee was pretty much regarded as a potential spot-stealing threat, and Jungkook, landing straight into the final-consideration group with his skills and his youth upon entry, probably had a giant target painted on his back.

Combine that with the fact that he seemed like an introvert—at least he’s comes across as one by the way he’s slouched over, gets nervous speaking to strangers, has a hard time looking Taehyung in the eye—it’s easy for Taehyung to see how he was beginning to fold.

Taehyung sighs internally, already feeling the sympathy welling in his chest. Fuck. He really doesn’t have the bandwidth for this. Taehyung could barely take care of himself at the moment, if the piles of laundry and unwashed dishes in his apartment were indications of anything, much less another person. His plan before had pretty much been to point Jungkook in the right direction to unleash his true potential, maybe provide a little guidance, and cheer him on from the sidelines as he ripped Fuckface a new one with his raw talent. There was zero intention to get even remotely involved with his life. Really, the most logical thing right now would be to cut his losses, drop Jungkook, and find a more compliant participant, stat.

But, Taehyung’s always been a little too fucking soft, and so he finds himself gesturing at Jungkook’s phone instead.

“Give me your phone,” Taehyung breaks the silence, holding his hand out. “And open it.”

“Huh?” Jungkook looks up, confusion written all over his features, but he unlocks and hands his phone over anyway.

“I’ll give you my number,” Taehyung navigates to Jungkook’s contacts.

“Oh. Um, why?”

“It sounds like you’re experiencing slight culture shock,” Taehyung says as he keys in his number. “I’m from Daegu myself, so I get it. The city’s big and can be a lonely place until you find your niche, but I can show you around and stuff until you get more used to things. If you ever need someone to talk to, hang out with, whatever, just hit me up.”

“Oh, um, thanks,” Jungkook nervously taps the table. “But again I’m—”

“Basically, I’m saying,” Taehyung slides Jungkook’s phone back. “I don’t think you should quit just yet. I mean, if you’re dead set on quitting, then that’s different. But, if you’re hesitating, I would give it a little more time.”

“Oh,” Jungkook stares at his phone for a bit, then nods.

Not really sure what that means, Taehyung waves Jungkook off as they part ways outside the shop, hoping for the best as he walks down the street.

He sighs to himself. This was already starting to be more work that he thought.

Hopefully it pays off.
Twenty minutes before he's supposed to have a meeting with Breakout Suckup, Taehyung wraps things up with Jihoon and heads back to his studio, Jungkook trailing half a step behind him.

Jungkook has mostly kept to himself during the whole time, playing on his phone or people-watching. He had answered some questions from Jihoon specifically with surprising thoroughness, and apparently had left enough of an impression to have Jihoon extend an invitation to their Coffee Thursday’s, which Jungkook had immediately accepted.

Taehyung lowkey felt like he was being replaced, especially since Jihoon started asking idol-specific questions towards the end but, whatever, the more the merrier, he supposed.

“You can stay here until one,” Taehyung says as Jungkook makes himself comfortable on the couch. “But then I’m going to kick you out.”

“What’s happening then?”

“Breakout Suckup’s coming by to review the song,” Taehyung sinks into his chair and scoots over to his desk. “Shit, I really need to find out what her name is. Do you know it off the top of your head?”

Jungkook shakes his head, “I forgot. Search it on naver?”

“What am I supposed to search? ‘Female Idol’? I can’t even remember what group she’s from.”

“That probably won’t get you much,” Jungkook snorts and he gets up, jeans sliding against the leather of the couch cushion. He wanders over and leans directly over Taehyung, taking control of the mouse. “Do you even use the internet? How do you not know how to search.”

“Of course I do, searching for people without a name is just hard,” Taehyung insists, trying to not think about how the Jungkook’s proximity is sending butterflies to his stomach.

Jungkook doesn’t respond, eyes trained on the monitor, and Taehyung’s head bumps lightly against Jungkook’s chest everytime he moves the mouse or types something on the keyboard.

In a matter of seconds, Jungkook points to the screen, Breakout Suckup’s profile successfully displayed across it, “Literally just did ‘Current Show Champion MCs’, and there you go.”

Taehyung leans his head back to retort, head lightly tapping against Jungkook’s chest, at the exactly same time Jungkook peers down.

Their eyes lock and inches apart, they both freeze.

Ah. The elephant on the room. Taehyung’s heart is spurred in his chest. Neither of them had brought up the kiss from other night at all since, or even remotely hinted at it, but if Taehyung remembered it through his stupor, Jungkook certainly had too.
By Taehyung’s limited deduction skills, he had determined early on that Jungkook most likely did not have a negative opinion about it, considering he had been hanging around Taehyung pretty much consistently since.

So at the minimum, Jungkook was ambivalent and had brushed it off as a joke or a mistake, or something. But, what if, Taehyung allows himself to dream, Jungkook had been okay with it? Or what if he had, in the slim chance, had actually been kinda down with it?

Taehyung tries to search Jungkook’s expression for clues, because he’s pretty sure he won’t be able to get a question out without horribly stuttering. But Jungkook’s face is unreadable, his eyes are kind of dark, and the only thing Taehyung can determine, with his head resting against Jungkook’s chest, is that his heart is beating quick and heavy like a drum.

Wait. Taehyung’s eyes widen. What if—no. It could just be a coincidence.

Jungkook suddenly breaks eye-contact, looking off to the side with a tinge of pink conveniently dusting his ears. A bit of exhilaration begins to swell in Taehyung’s chest. He doesn’t want to get ahead of himself, and maybe he’s trying to read too much into things but, it’s totally possible, Taehyung’s thoughts begin to churn, that Jungkook, maybe—

“Um,” Breakout Suckup’s voice cracks him out of it like a whip. “I’m here.”

“Oh, hey,” Taehyung stands up abruptly, hitting Jungkook in the chin. He shoots out a hand and haphazardly pats Jungkook’s face in apology without looking, “Oh shit, sorry.”

“Ow,” Jungkook winces and jerks his head away. “You just stuck your finger in my eye.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Taehyung puts his hands together.

“It’s fine,” Jungkook grumbles as he goes to gather his stuff, slinging his duffel over his shoulder.

Breakout Suckup cranes her neck. “Is that...? Oh, hello, Jungkook!”

“Hi,” Jungkook squints an eye shut and calls to Taehyung. “I’m taking off now, Taehyung.”

“Cool,” Taehyung wheels a chair over to his desk and motions Breakout Suckup over.

“See ya tomorrow?” Jungkook stops at the door.

Taehyung waves him off, “Yup, see you.”

He only realizes later, mind wandering as Breakout Suckup enthusiastically endorses the song and manages to promote herself in the same sentence, that his schedule tomorrow is pretty Jungkook-free.

So, wait, what did he mean—

“So yeah,” Breakout Suckup summons Taehyung back into reality by clapping her hands together. “I’m available tomorrow to record, if that works for you?”

“Um,” Taehyung pulls up his calendar and forgets his train of thought. “Yeah, that’d be perfect actually.”
The shoot for the advertisement goes better than expected, the model training Taehyung had undergone as a trainee comes in handy, and it wraps up a little ahead of schedule. He leaves after thanking and bowing to all of the crew, has drinks with Bogum afterwards (it was their semi-monthly get together, but he also used it to smoothly drop the OST suggestion, and Bogum had said he’s game but he’ll have to talk it over with the production staff, so good start), goes home, goes to sleep.

Then, rinse, wake up, and repeat.

The next morning finds Taehyung striding back down the hallway purposefully towards his studio the next day, deciding that today was going to be a similarly productive day.

He had woken up by his alarm on the first ring for the second time in a row, gone running again (okay third of it was still walking, minor gains though), just arrived at the office at what appeared to be before anyone else, was going to have Breakout Suckup in to record her song at 11 and booked out the rest of the day to start working on his Christmas jingle contribution for the album.

He had been assigned Jungkook’s song, which really wasn’t really a surprise to anyone, but part of him wanted a bit of variety. He was kind of jealous Yoongi got to work on Hoseok’s holiday rap (Cypher-mas was the working title, it sounded pretty dank), but with the tight deadline, he understood the need to play to their strengths.

Besides, getting a legitimate excuse to spend time with Jungkook wasn’t half bad either (not that he’d admit that to anyone), maybe this is what Jungkook has meant by seeing him tomorrow (now conveniently today). As long as Jungkook doesn’t return to his old form of yanking his chain, this could actually be something to look forward to.

But, he’ll see.

Taehyung opens the door to his studio with a creak, sets his backpack down by his Starry Night print, slips his laptop out of the bag, nods in greeting at the twin forms of Jungkook and Jihoon slouched on his couch, and—

Wait.

“Yeah?” they both say in unison as Taehyung turns around and stares.

“How—? Or wait—why? Or, whatever actually,” Taehyung sighs and says, somewhat sarcastically. “Please, just make yourselves at home.”

That couch probably needed to be broken in anyway.

Chapter End Notes

i pulled this out last minute LOL but yeah, not sure i can do the same next week. also, sorry it's mostly just setup LMAO
also wtf, the daesang sweep is insane :u;
Love You

Chapter Summary

i can’t express it
but you’ve been growing on my mind
— chung ha

love u

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[enter-talk] Producer who makes a toothpaste ad look freakin high-class

[image attached]

It’s TAE. He’s been getting more well-known since he performed with Jungkook. Recently, TAE shot an advertisement for toothpaste of all things ;;; but whoever designed the advertisement must be a stan, it looks like a high-class fashion advertisement. I was so shocked, he’s seriously model-class. I wonder why he didn’t become an idol, BigCube really has some hidden gems.

post reaction
[+213, -120]

TOP COMMENTS

1. Freakin handsome
2. What’s with our country these days, rewarding iljins with endorsement contracts ＝ ＝ ＝ ＝ ＝ hilarious
3. I opened this thinking, “what the, there’s no way a toothpaste ad can look like that good,” but he’s totally handsome. Crazy. The styling is super nice too, but his visuals are hard-carrying.
4. I can’t look at him the same way after his controversy, he seriously needs to reflect. I can’t believe he has no shame. It’s a good thing BigCube rejected him from BTD, his personality is so bad.
5. Too fucking good looking, I have an urge to go buy some toothpaste right now ＝ ＝ ＝
It’s Jihoon who sticks the post in his face, tapping his shoulder and shoving his phone in his face while excitedly exclaiming, “Hyung, have you seen this.”

And Taehyung’s not gonna lie, he’s sorta/kinda/actually irritated about getting interrupted because he had just gotten into the swing of things and was being productive and building Jungkook’s Christmas song (currently untitled, but it was basically everything Justin Bieber’s *Mistletoe* was without actually being *Mistletoe*) up from the layers like nobody’s business. It’s got nothing to do with Jihoon personally, Taehyung would even feel irritated at his family’s dog at this point, it’s just like, bruh, don’t touch him because he was in the zone.

“Nope,” he fixes a pleasant smile on his face anyway and takes the phone. “What am I looking at?”

“Reaction to your toothpaste ad. It came out today.”

“People reacted to that?” and just beyond Jihoon, Taehyung notices Jungkook shifting slightly, but he keeps his head down, the reflection of what’s probably an Overwatch playthrough glimmering on the lenses of his glasses.

He was so conscious of Jungkook now, like of where he was, what he was looking at, what his reaction was and was going to be. It stressed him out a bit, like he doesn’t really mind the concept of Jungkook hanging out in his studio but in practice he finds himself sure minding things (mostly related to himself) a whole lot more when he’s actually there.

And he knows things between them have changed, they’re friends now, right, but that doesn’t explain why he felt the urge to take half an hour longer today getting ready, the extra time spent mostly on his hair and choosing clothes to make himself look almost “going out” quality, when the only thing on his schedule today was to show up to work, hole himself up in his studio and get that holiday track done.

Usually that kind of sprint work called for a uniform comprised of some sort of a pajama-like ensemble, but this morning, he had felt compelled enough to deck himself out in trendy pieces from head to toe.

It was for himself, Taehyung told himself as he took some scissors and clipped some stray hairs off his head, the trick he picked up from the Show Champion stylist noonas. Absolutely, completely, and totally, he was treating himself and wasn’t doing this for anyone else. Then he briefly wonders if Jungkook would appreciate his beret look, remembers Jungkook offhandedly saying something vaguely positive about it a few days ago, and proceeds to curb stomp that thought into the oblivion. (He wore it anyway. For himself. Yeah.)

“They did to your ad.” Jihoon’s voices yanks him back into reality. “To be fair, it does look like a quality high fashion ad, which makes it kind of funny that it’s for toothpaste.”

And Taehyung reads the post somewhat bemusedly before handing the device back to Jihoon, sparing another glance at Jungkook, who still hasn’t looked up, “The response seems mixed at best.”

“Mostly positive though. It seems like you got some new fans.”

“True, but for my face,” again, Taehyung’s eyes involuntarily flick towards Jungkook again. He seriously needs to stop doing that. “Seems they’re a little fair-weather.”

“You’re probably going to get a bunch more though, especially if the buzz builds. Maybe one day you’ll be on the Hite ads,” Jihoon laughs. “Though, it’ll probably be Jungkook first, since he’s the CF prince.”
Taehyung’s just about to scoff, this must be Jihoon brown-nosing at his most transparent, *because Hite? Bullshit, you need to actually be a top star*, when Jungkook finally looks up.

“Hmm?” Jungkook pulls his headphones partially off of his ear, hair sticking up every which way as he does. “I heard my name.”

“Oh I was saying,” Jihoon repeats. “Maybe you’ll be sponsored by Hite someday.”

Jungkook snorts, “In my wildest dreams maybe. What are you guys looking at?”

“Taehyung’s toothpaste ad, have you seen?” Jihoon’s already striding over.

Jungkook shakes him head, and when he barely glances at it, monotonously says “very nice” before he looks back down again, Taehyung feels more than a little disappointment.

+++  

So the thing is, Taehyung’s studio was starting to feel like daycare.

At first, it had only been Jungkook and Jihoon, which had been manageable because they (mostly) kept to themselves. By the third day, he no longer does a double-take when he finds his studio already occupied, and by the fourth, he knows something is up when the couch is empty (it turns out there’s some meeting related to final evals that he totally forgot about, and he sprints in, half an hour late).

But otherwise, they’ve been pretty quiet, he’s honestly not really sure what Jihoon is doing there other than chilling between his precious few practice breaks, but Jungkook at least, takes over his old post at Taehyung’s spare desk and has been working on writing lyrics for his holiday song for the better part of the last few days. They’re fairly generic, the lines that Taehyung manages to glimpse (at least before Jungkook closed the document and glared at him) run something along the lines of ‘Christmas has got me these feeling these nonspecific feelings and oh yeah, I wanna spend it with you~♪’, (Taehyung’s paraphrasing, it probably goes without saying).

And so he finds he was chill with when it was just the three of them, even if he now trips over strewn duffel bags and water bottles on the regular, and he has to walk all the way down the hall to the spare conference room to take phone calls, and he can’t dick around so carefreely on the internet anymore because he’s got two pairs of judging eyes pointed in the direction of his screen. Because it’s honestly kinda nice, coming back to a place to someone who greets you, and it makes it a little easier to wake up in the morning and go to work.

Except he could have really done without that one awkward incident that occured because they were fighting over who got the spare chair. It was a weird fight to begin with, because it wasn’t like they wanted it for themselves, they were trying to out “nice” each other by passive-aggressively offering the other person the chair.

“Jungkook, you can sit down,” Jihoon had pulled the chair up after Taehyung accepted their joint request to watch him work.

“Oh thanks,” Jungkook briefly glanced down before shaking his head. “But I’m seriously fine with standing. You can have it.”
“No, I’m fine. You should really sit.”

“No, no, I insist.”

“No, I insist.”

And so on, or at least Taehyung assumed, because at that moment he had cranked up the volume to the point where he drowned them out.

He watches their reflections scuffling a bit before getting bored and turning his attention back to his work. He had gotten a few minutes of relative peace, before, out of the blue, Jungkook decides to plant himself directly on Taehyung’s lap.

“Um,” Taehyung had frowned, trying to look around his new, highly distracting obstacle. “Could you not?”

Jungkook had ignored him, and called over Taehyung’s shoulder, “So yeah, you can use it, Jihoon. I’m fine.”

“But I’m not?” Taehyung pushed Jungkook lightly, he didn’t even budge. “Jungkook, get off, I’m seriously trying to get work done.”

“Pardon?” Jungkook glanced down at him. “Oh, nice hat.”

Taehyung’s heart skipped a beat (per usual), he felt his face get slightly warm (starting to be the new normal), and then Jungkook’s face broke into a grin, his eyes folding into twin crescents, as he shifted a bit and pushed Taehyung straight into uncharted territory.

As in, fuckity fuckity fuck, the blood rushed south.

In a flash, he summoned the strength of Thor and shoved Jungkook straight off his lap, springing up and unhooking his laptop from its power source as Jungkook crouched on the ground, groaning about the pain from ramming his head against the edge of a shelf. Jihoon looked up, slightly alarmed, having missed most of the chaos, and Taehyung took it as a signal to put all of his focus on getting out of that door.

“Sorry, I’m sorry,” Taehyung, gingerly stepped over Jungkook, accidentally nailing him the skull with his own knee as Jungkook lifted his head at the exact same moment Taehyung pulled his back leg over him. “Oh shit I’m sorry again, also, I’ll be right back.”

“Where are you going?” Jihoon gripped the back of the chair and Jungkook continued to clutch his head.

“I got some stuff, important stuff,” Taehyung tried his best to inconspicuously adjust his pants by shifting a leg. It doesn’t work, and instead the out-of-place action draws Jihoon’s attention down closer to where he really did not want it to be, so he snapped and finger-gunned to distract him back upwards (it worked), his face practically blazing at this point, “But yeah, you guys can stay or whatever, also not expecting anyone, but let people know I’m out.”

And then he was off, fleeing towards Jimin’s office down the hall. He burst through Jimin’s door with a bang and flung himself into the nearest chair into a huddle, covering his lap with his laptop and pulling his hood over his head as he chanted a mantra of swear words.

“Hi?” Jimin looked over his shoulder. “Also why?”
“Jimin,” Taehyung groaned, “Fuck my life.”

“Why?”

And Taehyung told him. He’s cringing and speculating, fingers pulling down the skin on his face and exposing the whites of his eyes, as he moaned, like, what if Jungkook had fucking felt it when he—

“Wait,” Jimin shot out a hand. “I’m going to stop right there. And I know, we’re like, soulmates and all that jazz. And while I’m super happy for you and your apparent sexual awakening—”

“That’s a fucking creepy way to say it man, stop making this weird—”

“—but, like—wait. What, I’m the one making this weird now? Nonono. I’m not the one barging into my best friend’s office at 2 pm to rant about my raging Jungkook-induced—”

“—it wasn’t raging, what the actual fuck, it was barely even up—”

“I’m going to stop you right there. Like, why are you even fucking telling me this? See, if this,” Jimin gestured in the air, “is a beach representing our friendship,” Jimin drew a line in the air, “Then this is a giant line in the sand,” he gestured to one side, “This would be where I am,” Jimin gestured to the other side. “And this is where what you were about to say is. Dead-center in TMI land. And I so very kindly invite you to respect the goddamn line and to not fucking cross it.”

“But—”

“Respect it.”

“But Jimin, I need your moral support,” Taehyung groaned. “What does this mean?”

“I think you know exactly what it means. Good for you,” Jimin patted Taehyung on the shoulder. “And honestly? I don’t see the problem. In fact it solves a lot of my own problems—”

“He’s like, Jungkook?” Taehyung ignored Jimin. “That’s the problem? Giant red flag? And also he’s like so like...young. How old is he even? I feel like he’s been 18, like, for forever.”

“He just turned 23 like last month,” Jimin snorted. “Age shouldn’t be a problem, but let’s see, what’s the rule? Oh yeah, divide by two and add seven.”

“Is that the goddamn minimum age rule—”

“Yeah, the youngest person you can be with without going into ethical territory. You’re 25, let’s see,” Jimin looks up at the ceiling and starts tabulating with his fingers. “Twenty five divided by 2, that’s like—12.5, add seven—19.5? Oh yeah, dude, you’re totally in the clear. In fact, even if he were two and a half years younger, you would still be fine, congrats.”

“Oh sweet—wait, no, what,” Taehyung sunk his face into his hands. “Ugh, no thanks. Maybe it’s just, it’s been, I’ve been so—so busy? Like, it’s been so goddamn long since I’ve been with someone, that I’m, like, repressed, or something. Maybe I just gotta get it outta my system. Who was that person who was interested in me again? The one who was texting essays during my Show Champion interview? What are they out of 10? Because I’m thinking maybe now would be a good time to set me up with them—”

“Yeah,” Jimin snorted, “Like that will solve any of your problems.”
“Why not?”

“It just wouldn’t.”

“I don’t get it.”

“You don’t have to,” Jimin looked up from his phone. “Also, preemptively, I’m sorry.”

Taehyung paled, “What did you do?”

“I might have been trying to send a photo to Jungkook, and um,” Jimin had that look that he wears when he’s not even trying to hide the fact that he’s lying. “I swear that my finger slipped.”

“What did you send?” Taehyung menacingly lowered his voice.

“A video?”

“Which one,” Taehyung had a really bad feeling about this.

“Um,” Jimin’s eyes darted around, and his smile was breaking out of the thin-lipped hold he’s got it wrestled in. “Your favorite?”

“Which one.”

“It’s all good fun right?”

“Ji. Min. Which. One.”

“Um. You know, the chicken CF one, where you you called him your ideal type—”

“Oh fucking what?!” Taehyung flung himself into the couch, “I fucking hate you so much. Why would you do that? No wait, how do you even do that, it was taken like half a year ago?!”


“I won’t! He’s never going to let this go!”

“Yeah,” Jimin bobs his head in agreement. “That’s probably true.”

“Could you like, pretend to look more urgent about this?!” Taehyung groans. “My life is actually over now, you don’t understand.”

“Oh no, trust me when I say I understand more than you’ll ever know.”

“He’s my nemesis, Jimin.”

“Are we still playing that card? Really?”

“And you’re supposed to be my friend.”

“I still am.”

“I hate you so much,” Taehyung groans. In the background, a phone buzzed with incoming texts, and Taehyung rolled over and cracked open an eye. “Is that him? What’d he say to you?”

“Nothing yet, it’s your phone,” Jimin scooted over and flipped over the device. “Oh and it’s him, but it’s for you.”
Taehyung rolls himself deeper into the corner of the couch. “Do I even want to look?”

“It’s not that bad actually,” Jimin shrugged as he handed Taehyung his phone.

Fuckboy 6

LOOOOL
Jimin sent me this
[video attached]
So i’m your ideal type, huh?
(͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Uhhhhh
I was very drunk
Loool

Oh haha
Also wya

Still important business
Important businessing? *
Performing important business **
Completing important business ***
Wtf these don’t even look like words anymore
Attending to important business ****
Doing important shit *****
Better probably
Though honestly not even sure anymore

LOL
You tried

That’s the sad part

When are you gonna be back?

Eventually
“Okay if you’re going to pretend to still be enemies, at the minimum, don’t smile like that when you’re texting him,” Jimin scoffed. “Because it’s really unconvincing, also you owe me like 20 apologies—”

“What do you think this means,” Taehyung interrupted Jimin and held his phone up to his friend’s face as he buried his face into the cushions. “I feel like he’s like, trying to say something, but I’m like, not sure.”

“Uh, sounds like he wants to say bye to you before you leave,” Jimin dropped the device on Taehyung’s head. “How cute. Looks like you don’t have to worry about what happened earlier. Or the video. You’re welcome, by the way.”

“Ouch. Okay, but why would he want to do that?” Taehyung doesn’t want to hope. “We see each other like every day.”

“I think you know the answer, and if you don’t, I don’t have the cure to being a dumbass. Also, I need you to go somewhere else,” Jimin pointed a finger to the door just as his phone began to ring. “I need to take a call.”

“Oh, okay, okay, bye,” Taehyung carefully stepped out of Jimin’s office, taking the utmost care to close the door quietly, huddling over the handle as he eased it shut.

And then, in the worst coincidence, “Taehyung?”

Taehyung’s heart nearly jumped out of his chest and the door snapped shut at a loud enough volume that he was sure Jimin was going to complain about it later. He whipped around to find Jungkook (of course, destiny always kinda hated him) looking at him curiously, bag slung over his shoulder.

“Oh hey, I just got done with my, uh, important business,” Taehyung flattened himself against the wall. “Was just going to head back. Are you on your way out?”

“Yeah,” Jungkook craned his neck slightly to the side. “You were with Jimin?”
“Oh yeah, we were, uh,” Taehyung blinked and dug deep. “Going over some papers. Important ones.”

Jungkook’s eyes flicked back to Taehyung, and clearly he didn’t look convinced, “Oh, alright.”

“But yeah, good luck again, not that you need it,” Taehyung clapped his hands together and walked in his studio’s direction, which coincidentally happens to in Jungkook’s direction. He had his arms outstretched in what he realized a split second later could have been interpreted as a solicitation for a hug, which kind explained the expression now gracing Jungkook’s face.

“Oh,” Jungkook, confusion creasing his brows as he looked down at Taehyung’s hands. “What are you doing?”

“I’m, uh...hwaiting,” Taehyung tried to make up some use of his hands and ended up awkwardly clapping them on Jungkook’s shoulders. He fixed the most obnoxious fake grin on his face, squinted his eyes, and held up a thumbs-up inches away from Jungkook’s nose, “I believe in you.”

“Thanks?” Jungkook looked mildly weirded out. “Are you okay?”

Taehyung didn’t really know what else to say, so he settled for, “You’re welcome.”

“Okay, um, I gotta go,” Jungkook shrugged Taehyung’s hands off of his shoulder. “So see you tomorrow.”

“Yup, bye.” Taehyung walked slowly towards his office until he’s sure Jungkook’s out of sight, and then races back to Jimin’s room.

“So, yeah, I can get that to you by like—what the—” Jimin turned around, startled as Taehyung flings himself back into the chair. “Taehyung—please, I’m still—”

“Just let me stay here.”

“No, I’m on a call—”

“I ran into Jungkook and it was fucking awkward and—.”

“What? Fine, fine, just be quiet,” Jimin rolled his eyes and put the phone back to his ear. “Sorry about that, as I was saying, give me a week…”

+++  

Oh, yeah, so back to the daycare point.

Taehyung had already thought Jungkook and Jihoon had been a lot of people—and well Jungkook, anywhere within the vicinity (especially after the previous unfortunate series of incidents) seriously was really starting to put Taehyung on edge—and that had been roughly the first few days. Then Daniel had shown up, sandwiched between the two of them, and then the next day, some kid Taehyung’s not even sure he’s seen before (Mingyu? Was that his name?) and so on until they were here, with no less than ten people crammed into a room that was barely comfortable housing five.

The worst part is, they won’t stop bothering him. They keep distracting him with eval-specific questions that he doesn’t really have the answers for, and when he suggests they go to Yoongi, they
give non-committal grunts and don’t make the moves to leave.

The moment he knows he’s got to get out of there is the moment he rolls his chair back maybe an inch and accidentally runs over some trainee’s hand (“Ouch, fuck,” the bastard son of Leo DiCaprio hisses), and he excuses himself yet again, using “important business” and flees, first to Jimin’s office (“Taehyung, not today, I’m in the middle of a meeting.”) and then next door, to Yoongi’s office.

Yoongi himself is gone and so Taehyung makes himself at home, curling himself on Yoongi’s couch and popping his laptop up. He’s not even sure what he can reasonably get done in this position, maybe Yoongi will let him use his extra monitor and keyboard—he’ll ask when Yoongi gets back—and so he settles for playing some new indie game instead.

The TV’s on, playing the beginning of an episode of Running Man on low volume, and he cranks that up literally the second Jungkook steps out of a van on screen.

He watches as Jungkook dances the “iconic” part of his choreography for Remember Me in front of a semi-circle of awkwardly clapping celebs. They replay his breakdance move like five times, add in a bunch of ‘woo’ crowd sounds, and insert studio laughter as a female comedian clutches her chest exaggeratedly as Jungkook’s shirt rides a little too high. A few of the hosts try to mimic his dance moves behind him for laughs, and one barrels over exaggeratedly and nearly falls.

It’s some idol special, apparently, and several more vans pull up and unload a handful of other familiar faces. It leads to almost 45 minutes of intro that Taehyung mostly tunes out as every person gets their five minutes to shine in the sun with an intro neatly comprised of their identity, a plug for the current song they’re promoting, and any apparent special skills.

Jungkook’s not even the biggest name on the bill. Taehyung can spot at least two names that overshadow him with their popularity: Wrong Profession, a guy idol from a relative-failure of a group who was gaining a bunch of second-chance hype as a notable addition to the most current edition of the Reply drama series (though Taehyung’s pretty sure he lucked out in the sense that he only has one character he can play reliably, Surly Chaebol Boi, which word on the street was just basically who he was in real life), and Sings Gud, a ditz who runs tangent to some of Taehyung’s circles and who was famous as an unusually good vocalist of an A-list girl group.

He starts watching again once the cast starts pairing up. Jungkook’s pulled onto a team with one of the hosts and an idol Taehyung has dubbed as Industry Plant 2, a Very Nice™ girl from one of the Big Three whose marketed identity was a self-made guitar-strumming producer-dol who rose to prominence through talent, hard work, and coffee-shop-grade background music after her stunning survival music show run. While it’s a very heartwarming story, the reality was that she was pretty much verbally signed with her agency even before she even stepped foot on the show. And after it was over (she ended up fourth or fifth or something), she was heavily promoted and magically inserted into all of the top variety programs even before her debut album even dropped.

So, self-made success, eh, sorta. Let’s just say she had the pull of an incredibly powerful agency to help guide her along the way.

But that part wasn’t really important. What was important was that watching her onscreen at this moment made Taehyung feel irritated. Not even mildly. Just completely, flat-out irritated.

Not at her personally, Taehyung hasn’t actually ever met her. Nor at her situation. Singers needed marketing advantages wherever they could get them.

No, the part that Taehyung had an issue with was the ridiculous loveline Running Man was pushing between Industry Plant and Jungkook.
His frown deepens as two members of the main cast physically shove them together. He really wasn’t a fan of it.

It started like this: before Industry Plant had gotten out of her car, Haha had asked Jungkook which member from her agency he had hoped it was. And at first, he had given a neutral non-answer, saying he was a fan of all the agency’s artists. But as Haha pushed him, and claimed that they wouldn’t let the person out of the van until Jungkook folded, he gave Industry Plant’s name as the answer.

“At least,” Jungkook pauses. “I hope it’s her because I highly respect her as a singer, she’s the ideal for me as a vo—”

“Everyone,” Haha solemnly looks at the camera. “Jungkook has just announced his ideal type.”

“No wait—!” Jungkook yells as the van door opened with a bang and Industry Plant skips out. Almost Paradise plays in the background as she walked out, CGI flower petals floating down from the top of the screen, and Jungkook’s incredulous expression is zoomed in on and tinged with a cartoon blush.

It’s just all, Taehyung bites his thumb slightly vindictively, a little too much.

“He picked you as his ideal type you know!” Ji Sukjin shouts in a later segment as Jungkook and Industry Plant play the “of course” game, clearly trying to distract both of them.

“Oh,” she laughs cautiously, looking flattered and slightly shy.


“No?!” Kwangsoo yells and points an accusatory finger. “Oh, so you hate her!!”

“No!!” Jungkook, laughing as he waves his hands, “That’s not it! I like her but—”

“So you do like her!”

“I can’t win,” Jungkook groans and crouches on the ground, burying his face in the crook of his elbows. OH MY GOD is scrawled as a bottom caption along with a ‘cut me a break, please!’ that floats by Jungkook’s head.

“Why is your face red?!” Ji Sukjin goes and whacks Jungkook until he falls into a crumpled giggling heap on the ground ( “It’s not!” ), where Ji Sukjin proceeds to fake-kick him. “Yah! Focus on the game, not on flirting with the enemy!”

“It’s okay,” Yoo Jaesuk sagely says, waving his hand. “He’s in his prime. Also, to Jungkook’s fans, this is just for fun, please don’t send us death threats.”

Taehyung just would really like them to move on.

It’s on Industry Plant’s turn, when she’s having problems coming up with a statement to throw at Jungkook, when Haha gets an idea and whispers it in her ear.

She giggles suddenly, saying. “Wait, I can’t say this on broadcast.”

Haha waves his hand, “Do it, you’ll win.”

“Okay,” she takes a breath and cutely clasps her hands out in front of her. “Oppa~” she flutters her lashes at Jungkook.
The editing zooms in on Jungkook’s face as he takes a step back and his face is colored with that
cartoon blush.

“You like me, right?”

Taehyung bites the corner of his thumb again to distract him from the feeling simmering in his gut.

*Almost Paradise* plays again and the footage slows down as Jungkook turns around and flings a
hand in the air (cue studio laughter).

Taehyung doesn’t get to hear his response, because he switches the channel to news at that point, an
ugly feeling curling with a vice-like grip on his heart, his expression set in a deep-set frown now. It’s
supposed to be funny, and honestly, Taehyung usually finds these love lines at least snort-worthy.
But this one really gets on his nerves.

And he knows exactly why. Taehyung uncomfortably stares at the TV without really watching it,
letting the images flicker by as he slumps dejectedly on the couch. Was he really going to admit it to
himself? Probably. It had been a long time coming, and if he had it this bad, there was probably no
point in denying it if he was this bothered over a contrived TV love line. Okay, fuck it, he bites his
thumb for a third time, whatever.

He was catching fucking feelings. Fantastic.

What had it been? The late night practices? The pseudo-dates? The way Jungkook was managing to
somehow worm into every facet of his life? The smiles, the words, his face, the glances, the letter,
what, exactly, had it been?

Probably a little bit of everything, a series of tiny little battening rams that had been relentlessly
chipping Taehyung’s walls away since they decided to sing *Cozy Conversations* together without
him realizing until they finally crumbled down.

Taehyung slides his arm over his his eyes. Fuck, this was bad. The extra impending stress is
seriously not what he needs right now. He needs to pull the breaks now before he falls too far,
because given who and what Jungkook is, he knows there’s only way this ends.

With a *really* bad time.

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“So, what exactly did Fuckface do to you again?” Yoongi raises a brow.

Taehyung’s 18 again, illicitly chugging soju with Yoongi and Jimin in their shithole of a living room,
crouched on their unvacuumed carpet as the latest hot daily drama plays in the background.

“I mean,” Yoongi picks at the carpet absentmindedly. “I don’t like him either, but I’m curious as to
why you’re putting in so much effort to take him down.”

“He tanked my solo career,” Taehyung says simply as he toys with a bottle cap. “Sunk it like a
rock.”

“Do you remember those iljin controversy posts that cropped up like half a year ago? Around the
time they were seriously assessing my chances.”

“Yeah?”

“He and his friends were behind them,” Taehyung crushes the cap in his hand. “That and the lack of
hype on my soundcloud tracks were the two things the front office cited when they officially shut
down the project. Mostly the iljin accusations, though. They felt like the minefield of posts made me
too much of a gamble and would be too difficult to deal with since PR department’s super
understaffed due to budget cuts right now.”

“How do you know it was him?”

“Jimin overheard his clique talking about it after practice,” Taehyung grimaces, flinging the cap at
their second-hand coffee table. “As much as I’d like to take everyone down, I feel like I’ve only got
the bandwidth for one. And since he’s the head of this goddamn snake of a group, I’m going to cut
him the fuck off.”

“Yeah,” Jimin nods, curled up on the couch. “The most fucked up part? He just doesn’t want
Taehyung to get famous because he’s like in love with him or something.”

“Holy shit, what?”

“Yeah,” Jimin nods again. “He just like, wanted to lock Taehyung down. Basically.”

“Jokes on him,” Taehyung snorts. “I’m even more turned off than I was before I found out. Though I
suppose part of the joke is on me too, since my solo dreams were crushed. Whatever, being a
producer is cooler anyway.”

“That’s fucking disgusting,” Yoongi frowns.

“He asked for my number the other day too, the nerve. I think he was getting cocky because his last
eval scores were really good or something,” Taehyung makes a retching sound. “I mean, he was
basically saying ‘go out with me since I’m a future celebrity.’ As if I’m that desperate. So I gave him
Jin’s number instead, and he’s been having a field day with catfishing him.”

“Jin’s stopping, at least as of an hour ago,” Jimin interjects. “It got too creepy.”

“What’d he do?” Taehyung raises a brow.

“Apparently he sent dickpic, unsolicited too,” Jimin snickers. “The guy’s fucking thirsty for you, Jin
just couldn’t take it anymore.”

“Oh god,” Taehyung makes a face, “Why would he think I’d want that?”

“I’ll make sure to knock him down a notch, fucking gross,” Yoongi’s frown deepens. “I mean, hope
he doesn’t make it. But the other evaluators love him, so I’m not sure how much just me railing on
him will help.”

“Oh, Taehyung has a plan for that,” Jimin jerks his head. “Tell him.”

“Oh yeah,” Taehyung snorts. “I’m basically trying to train a protege to replace him—”

“Who?” Yoongi interjects.

“He’s the kid with the Timbs that you didn’t know.”
“Name?”

“Jungkook.“

Yoongi squints for a bit, before his eyes widen in recognition, “Oooh. That kid. Can’t put a face but I remember his scores. Skilled but can’t deliver during evals?”

“Yup, sounds like him.”

“He’s definitely not going to make this cut,” Yoongi sucks in a breath, “And part of the board’s got him marked for dismissal, you know, because of budget cuts and the fact that one member dead-set on thinking the kid’s a lost case.”

“I buy that.”

“Oh really? Interesting choice then,” Yoongi knocks back the rest of the soju. “So how’s that going?”

“Well, um.”

“The kid hasn’t committed yet,” Jimin cuts in and laughs. “So it’s not.”

“Oh, rip,” Yoongi raises a brow. “Good luck with that then.”

“It is going,” Taehyung insists. “Just slowly. Just talked to him yesterday for the first time, actually, we had coffee.”

“And?”

“...he wants to quit.”

“Sounds like a great start,” Yoongi snorts.

“I’m going for the long con.”

“Also, just reminding you, you’ve only got 9 months,” Yoongi scoffs. “So don’t take things too slowly. I’m also not convinced this confidence thing will be an easy to solve.”

“Yeah, I know,” Taehyung sighs. They peter onto silence, opportunely at a critical moment in the drama where the main leads are screaming at each other over the misunderstanding of the episode. He hasn’t been paying attention at all, and he’s trying to remember the plot when he feels his phone vibrate with an incoming text, and he looks down and immediately checks it.

Trainee - Jungkook

Hey!
This is Jungkook
Oh hey
What’s up

I just wanted say thanks for the coffee yesterday

No problem lol
It was fun
Should do it again some time

Oh yeah for sure!
Um also :o
Sorry this is a little random :|
But just wondering
Where did you get your ears pierced?
:o

Oh uh
Haha yeah that’s kinda random
Lemme find it online
It’s this place
[ link » ]

Thanks! xD

Are you planning on getting something done?

Yeah, just the classic ear ones
For now :0
Eventually I want more

Oh cool
Yeah, they’re pretty good
Painless + fast

Oh great!!
I’m kinda nervous, tbh :(  

Um, also
Are you free tomorrow?
:o

Yeah haha probably
Why, you need someone to go with you?

Yeah, if it’s not too much trouble!!
I’m not that good with directions :(  

Yeah, I can help you out

Oh wow really?
Thanks! ^^

“Guys, I’m finally making progress with my protege,” Taehyung waves his phone around. “Hope is not lost.”

“So he doesn’t want to quit anymore?” Yoongi mutters without turning around.

“No, we’re just hanging out tomorrow.”

“Um, okay?”

“I’m just helping him get his ears pierced, moral support or something.”

“What?” Jimin wrinkles his brow. “That’s it?”

“Yeah, small steps,” Taehyung shifts, wincing at the sensation pins and needles from his foot having fallen asleep. “Again, I’m going for the long-con.”

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He finds Jungkook at the station they planned to meet at, dressed acceptably in a nondescript sweatshirt and a beanie, sitting on hunched over on a bench with his arms braced against his legs as he plays some sort of mobile game.

Taehyung scares him a bit when he taps him on his shoulder, and Jungkook nearly drops his phone as he jolts and looks up.

“Sorry, you’ve been waiting long?”

“Not too long.” Jungkook shakes his head.

“Oh cool, wanna go?” Taehyung points to the station.

“Yeah,” Jungkook stands up and stretches. “I’m ready.”

The subway ride is short, it’s literally just one stop away, and the shop itself was one street from the station. So before it seems like Jungkook realizes it, they’re standing in the hushed lobby as the receptionist gives a wide-eyed Jungkook the rundown. A few decisions and signed papers later, and Jungkook’s being whisked to the back, hesitantly following a guy who introduces himself as the piercer as he leads him through a hallway. And Taehyung thinks for a second too long about how maybe he should be following Jungkook right now (because isn’t it what he was here for in the first place) before time makes the choice for him as the door closes behind Jungkook with a snap.

Then Jungkook’s back in fifteen minutes, looking slightly dazed with brand new studs embedded in the lobes of his ears, unconsciously reaching up to touch them as the receptionist finalizes his payment.

“You shouldn’t touch them,” Taehyung says as he gets up and stands by Jungkook. “It’s like an open wound.”

“Oh, yeah, oops.” Jungkook immediately lowers his hand.

“So what suddenly inspired you? To get your ears pierced, I feel like that’s not something you do every day.”

“I’ve wanted them for a while, my mom wouldn’t let me,” Jungkook shrugs. “And a lot of trainees seem to have them.”

“Oh, makes sense. Haha why this weekend though?”

“I liked the way yours looked,” Jungkook looks down. “Was kinda like a reminder to get them.”

“Oh,” Taehyung’s hand involuntarily flies up to his ear. “Thanks.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook says as he takes back his card and jams the receipt in his wallet. “You got anything else planned today?”

“Just in the evening,” Taehyung says as they leave and start walking down the sidewalk. He looks down at his phone and sees a few messages from Jimin he missed earlier, and starts to answer them.

“What are you gonna be doing?”

“Hmm?” Taehyung’s half listening and looks up for a moment before he fully processes Jungkook’s
question. “Oh. Going on a date.”

“Oh,” Jungkook shoves his hands into his pockets.

“Yeah, it’s actually at 7 and I mean it’s super casual, but he’s a model, so I feel like I should put in a little more effort than I usually do,” Taehyung pinches his bangs and stares at a few split ends.

“I see,” Jungkook blinks. “Is he, like, your...?”

“Hah, no. Not interested in anything serious with him either,” Taehyung scoffs. “Honestly, only said yes to network, since he’s from YG and it seems like he’s got a good chance of landing a few dramas next year. Might as well rub shoulders with a soon-to-be-A-lister when I get the chance.”

“Oh,” Jungkook repeats and wrinkles his nose. “I didn’t know people did that.”

“Can’t speak for anyone else, but I do it,” Taehyung shrugs. “But yeah, he’s too narcissistic. Kind of annoying to be around for long periods of time, not going to lie. The only things going for him are his acting gig and his face. He’s got really nice eyes,” Taehyung pulls out his phone and pulls up the guy’s instagram. “Wanna see a picture?”

“Sure,” Jungkook cranes his neck to see Taehyung’s phone. He rubs his nose, and shrugs, “He’s okay.”

“Jeez, just okay?” Taehyung whistles and laughs. “You’ve got high standards.”

“It’s n-not that, I mean I can see how he’s a model,” Jungkook blinks, brushing the bangs out of his eyes. “He’s just, um, not my type?”

“What’s your type then?” Taehyung asks, more as a way to keep the conversation going than genuine curiosity, not really paying attention to the answer as he fields a text from Jimin.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Jungkook awkwardly shrug, and so he drops it.

They decide to go shopping to fill the time until Taehyung has to leave, and he manages to convince Jungkook to buy some outfits that are way more flattering than his usual wardrobe. It mostly ends up being Jungkook trying on things Taehyung flings his way, but since Jungkook has no taste, it works pretty well.

He ends up buying five of what could be the same white shirt and a pair of jeans, but Taehyung still considers it a victory.

And when they part ways later that day with a wave and a promise to hangout again, with the sun just beginning to set over the horizon, Taehyung walks back to his place with a good feeling about things settling in his chest.

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What Taehyung realizes pretty quickly is that Jungkook’s a bit like the younger brother he never asked for.

It’s like, Jungkook’s cool. But for a 15 year old. There’s a bit of a generational gap, and Taehyung can feel it in the way in a week he’s already run out non-generic things to ask him outside of how’s
school and how are exams (although, now that he thinks about it, those were also pretty generic), and also in the way Jungkook uses some slang he’s never even heard in his life.

Like what the fuck is a lituation? Wait, don’t answer that, if he cared enough he would have looked it up.

Luckily, it seems like Jungkook likes his company still for whatever reason anyway, and Saturdays unspokenly melt over the next three months into Hang-with-Jungkook-Days by default since that’s the only day Jungkook’s really free. And those days are pretty chill, they do things that Jungkook comes up with on Friday nights, shooting a Taehyung a text with an invitation to go like visit a tourisy place or shop or hit up a noraebang place or something. And it’s cool because Taehyung finds himself exploring parts of Seoul he never bothered to make time to check out, particularly landmarks that he kept putting off a visit because they’re just a few blocks away and an activity for the perpetually distant “tomorrow.”

Yeah, he had thought, last week when he had stood in awe at the entrance of Gyeongbok Palace, hands jammed in his pockets, squinting in the sun, Jungkook enthusiastically snapping pictures to his left. Why hadn’t he visited sooner?

It’s just, if Taehyung had one complaint, he would really appreciate it if Jungkook could try keep the awkward silences to a minimum. Because there are plenty. Jungkook just doesn’t really continue conversations, and Taehyung usually ends up driving the whole thing out of the silence by talking about random shit. Jungkook’s a pretty good listener though, thoughtfully nodding and laughing at the right moments and making it seem like Taehyung’s telling an incredibly interesting story, even if it is something boring like how Jimin sat outside of their apartment last night for an hour because he forgot both his keys and his phone and Yoongi couldn’t be bothered to get out of his bed to answer the door.

So Taehyung puts up with it anyway, because ultimately, he still had something to gain. It’s how he was currently motivated to be here, at an arcade, playing air hockey with his protege and winning by a landslide. He’s here to observe Jungkook as much as he is here to befriend him, trying to figure out what makes him tick and what makes him freeze, gleaning context clues as to how best draw Jungkook out of his shell so he can get over his shyness and start taking names already.

One thing Taehyung notices almost instantly is that Jungkook is incredibly salty when he’s losing.

“I wasn’t even, guh,” Jungkook throws up his hands in protest, satoori hilariously exploding after Taehyung wins off of a serve. “Wasn’t even ready!!”

“You were totally facing this direction though,” Taehyung laughs. “Gotta keep on your toes if you want to beat me.”

“I woulda if you didn’t cheat!!”

“Sure,” Taehyung lowers the puck. “You ready now? It’s game point.”

“Wait,” Jungkook pinches his nose bridge and sighs, jokingly, before lowering himself into an exaggerated stance. “Okay now go.”

Taehyung wins off the serve again. And Jungkook just stares at the goal with thinned lips and blinking eyes.

“So what’s your excuse this time?”

“...wasn’t ready.”
“Right, I win.”

To some extent, Taehyung is not surprised by Jungkook's competitive edge. All trainees have it, especially the ones that have gotten as far as he has. What catches him off-guard is that this guy, who is supposed to be more or less down and out, is still *this* intense about winning.

“Let’s go again!”

“Jungkook, it’s like the twentieth round.”

“I’m gonna win this one.”

“Alright,” and because he’s getting bored, Taehyung lets him.

“You let me win,” Jungkook frowns at Taehyung. “That’s not fair.”

“No, I didn’t, it was entirely your skills,” Taehyung lies.

“Again, let’s go again,” Jungkook waves his hand and crouches again. “I want to beat you when you’re trying.”

And Taehyung groans.

It’s still kinda funny to watch because it’s unexpected, the fire that burns the uncertainty out of his eyes when he’s mad (only to still be crushed by Taehyung because, come on, it’d be embarrassing if Taehyung lost to a middle schooler). It’s especially hilarious to watch the way he reacts to taunts, voice cracking as he demands an additional chance after chance.

“You know the secret to this,” Taehyung laughs as they play the basketball game. He wins, by a large margin, “Is to *get good.* You’re a little shaky there, man. Do you even hoop?”

“Wasn’t tryin’,” Jungkook stares at the score, lips pursed, “But whatever. Let’s going again.”

“I thought you said the last one was the last round.”

“But now I wanna play again.” Jungkook jerks his head to get the bangs out of his eyes and repeats what Taehyung swears must be his catchphrase. “I’m gonna win this one.”

And to Taehyung’s surprise, he actually does. By a landslide. It’s interesting, Taehyung notices, Jungkook tends to do better when people doubt him to his face. It’s the fuel to his fire.

Taehyung tries it again, during DDR, for science, and says something along the lines of, “Not sure about your dancing skills, friendo,” right before they start.

And Jungkook proceeds to work up enough determination to crush his score.

It’s just, hmm, Taehyung thinks as he watches Jungkook crouch and fist-pump in celebration in an excessively extra fashion, interesting.

+++
into a state of semi-sleep, wakes up to Yoongi shaking his shoulder.

“Hey,” Yoongi says, a slight frown on his face. Not a surprise, Yoongi usually wasn’t pleased when people intruded his space unannounced, “You awake?”

“Now I am,” Taehyung says groggily, uncrossing his arms and wiping the drool off his face on his sleeve. “What’s up?”

“What are you doing here?”

“Um,” Taehyung squints and thinks. “There’s like literally 10 people in my studio right now, I’m not even sure how that happened. I got out because I’m pretty sure it’s a fire hazard.”

“And you just left them there?”

“Yeah, it’s just a bunch of trainees anyway,” Taehyung snorts. “And well, Jungkook. But they won’t stop bugging me with evaluation questions. I’m actually confused about why they’re even coming to me, I’m not even doing evaluations this year.”

“Oh, that might have been my fault,” Yoongi looks up at the ceiling while pursing his lips together. “I may or may not have let your miracle story with Jungkook slip that one night we went drinkinfg.”

“Wait for real,” Taehyung groans. “That explains why it feels like everyone’s hardcore sucking up.”

“Pretty much,” Yoongi sits down in his chair with a huff. “I’d feel bad, except honestly, I’m feeling that it’s better you than me.”

“Oh Yoongi, you’re so sweet,” Taehyung smiles sarcastically.

“I try. Also,” Yoongi says monotonously. “Jin’s looking for you. Text him back or something asap, he wants to talk to you.”


“Um,” Yoongi takes out his phone and starts fiddling with it, and that’s when the trepidation starts to raise hairs on the back of Taehyung’s neck.

“Um?”

“Not specifically? Just a post about you is making some waves on the ‘net,” Yoongi holds out his phone. “He wants to clarify some things regarding you and Jungkook. It’ll make sense if you see it for yourself.”

[fan-talk] It looks like Jungkook and TAE are actually really close? 🤔🤔🤔
The recent controversy made it seem like they were enemies, but just look at these photos from a week ago, hul, it’s probably the angle but it almost looks like they’re…

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Chapter End Notes

oops it ended a little longer than i planned LOL

also i just got around to downloading superstar bts and um, where did all of my spare time go LOL
Honey

Chapter Summary

all the pretty girls in the world
but i'm in this space with you
— kehlani
honey

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So, crushes.

They’re a lot of fun if you are:

- reasonably sure you have a chance
- optimistic
- a bit of a masochist

They’re less so if you:

- get stressed easily
- overanalyze things like crazy
- like an up-and-coming celebrity
  - who’s clearly whipped for someone else

It’s probably easy to guess which camp Taehyung falls in, and it’s why it’s a little difficult for him to look to his left right now, as he shows a growing crowd of trainees his process for constructing songs.

It was Jihoon who asked him to do it, and when he dropped the question, Taehyung’s studio, which a second earlier had been previously filled with medium-level murmuring immediately quieted. Pretty much everyone’s eyes were on them, save for Jungkook, who hadn’t even looked up from where he was slouched in his chair, nose buried in his phone as he types something. Of course Taehyung notices, and of course he starts wondering what Jungkook was doing and why was he smiling and who he was texting (was it his crush? Jungkook just laughed, holy shit it’s definitely his crush, rip) was just, so, fucking, tiring, that he’s

“Uh, sorry,” Taehyung shakes his head, “Could you repeat that?”

“Oh,” Jihoon repeats. “Like, for Jungkook’s holiday song, can you show…”

Yeah, fuck this, Taehyung gripes as he zones out again. It’s been a day since he admitted it to himself and he’s already over it. The constant self-awareness is one thing, the zero-chill curiosity of what Jungkook was doing and why was he smiling and who he was texting (was it his crush? Jungkook just laughed, holy shit it’s definitely his crush, rip) was just, so, fucking, tiring, that he’s
ready to call it quits.

Except even he knows that’s a lie, he’s just crying denial as he actively digs himself a deeper hole, because when Jungkook glances up at that moment and catches him staring, their eyes meet, Jungkook winks and Taehyung immediately looks down, adrenaline spurring his heart to start galloping away his chest, dopamine flooding his mind and drowning the logic away.

Seriously, what did that wink mean? Also, where the fuck did his standards go?

“Um,” Taehyung uses his answer to what he thinks Jihoon’s question is as a convenient excuse of a segway. “Honestly I’m not a very good teacher.”

“I’m sure you’re just being humble.”

“No,” Taehyung shakes his head and laughs. “I’m actually just not good at explaining things,” Taehyung glances at Jihoon’s expression and can immediately tell that he’s not about to take ‘no’ for an answer, so he resignedly sighs. “But I guess I can show you my process?”

“Yeah that’d be cool!”

“So like, you guys’ll find that everyone has their own way of doing things when they start,” Taehyung scratches his hair as people start to gather behind him. “Like, Hoseok gets inspiration from listening to his muse, Tinashe, Yoongi sleeps until he figures something out, RM’s really methodical, I can’t even really follow how he does things, but for me, uh, I just kinda vibe it out. Like, I just start playing around with things until I get something I like.”

“Can you show us an example?” Trainee H asks.

“Oh, wow, a live demo? Uh,” Taehyung bites his lip and thinks about what’s the nicest way he can phrase his ‘fuck no’ of an answer. But, Jungkook decides to pay attention at that moment, and the lizard part of Taehyung’s brain decides flexing is in his best interest right now and so he finds himself muttering, “sure, why not,” super casually instead.

That, of course, draws an audience, and Taehyung can hear the scuffle of sneakers from people gathering behind him as he sets things up, hairs rising on the back of his neck as he practically feels the crowd staring at him, which is super great. He pulls up the software and wonders briefly if Jungkook’s in the mix, checks the mirror and determines no, he isn’t, gets mildly disappointed and then proceeds to berate himself for essentially setting himself up for that one.

Giving a damn about useless shit like this was just so much fun.

“Usually I start with the drums? Starting with the rhythm always works out pretty well. For this example, we can do a generic on-the-beat thing, so, uh, for e-example,” Taehyung hits the record button, and taps his drum pad a few times. “Something like that. And then, next, I usually play around with the main melody until I find something I like, so we can just take what I did for the Jungkook’s holiday song,” Taehyung shakely sings a few notes and scoots over to his keyboard and hits the corresponding keys until he has a basic melody and puts it on loop. “And then layer it on. And then I start adding details. So, like, kind like, this, let’s add some guitar or something,” Taehyung changes the instrument to a guitar on the keyboard, hits a few notes and then throws up jazz hands as the segment of the “song” plays in the background on repeat. “And yeah, that’s how it comes together, or at least that’s how I usually do it. Roughly. It usually takes a lot longer, but for a five minute job, this is pretty much it. Yeah. Uh, so, any questions?”

He swivels around and immediately knows from the fifteen pairs of blinking eyes, he lost just about
everyone. Even Jihoon, who usually can decipher what Taehyung’s doing, looks pretty confused, Daniel’s brows are furrowed as he scratches his chin, Mingyu’s squinting really hard at the screen, and Jungkook’s...not even looking up, slumping back down in his chair and still grinning stupidly at his phone, and Taehyung really tries to not let that bother him.

“Uh, yeah,” Daniel raises his hand. “Can you, uh, do that again? But like, more slowly.”

“Any part in particular?” Taehyung scratches his head. “Or, like, just everything.”

“Oh, Yeah everything. If you don’t mind. It went by kind of fast.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Taehyung catches Jungkook picking up his bag and slinking out of the room.

“Uh, yeah, sure,” Taehyung hits the drum pad a little despondently. “So, uh, again. I like to start with the drums...”

Luckily, the second round goes smoother, he fields questions while he’s building the sound bite, and when he finishes, most of the trainees file away satisfied. Jihoon and Daniel stick around for a bit and ask him a few more questions related to his opinions on drum fills, which eventually devolves into their own debate about a song Taehyung isn’t familiar with. He yawns and scratches his back as they dispute, zoning out and letting his mind wander over to thoughts like where did Jungkook go, why did he care, and where should he eat, when his phone buzzes with a text.

Jimin

Lmao:
[image attached]
A dumbass in his natural habitat

Is that Jungkook?
Wait, are you guys getting lunch
Wow
Tfti
:'(

Sorry, would have invited you
But we’re discussing important business

I want to discuss important business too :):
Okay, I’m actually going to be a good best friend for once
Lmao i was gonna invite you
But then he told me i couldn’t LOL
Because we’re talking
About yo asldfuasd8fae
Yaosdsdfa9i
AKfdj uyo adsjf9e903

Uhhh
Are you okay?

No, I’m trying to tell yoasf09uweksfd
Ohmygod
Jungkooaksdf is rrkjweasdlkv
Trying fdkakdfjes
Take plfkskjfoesi
Phone aslkfajewo

__________________________________________________________

Fuckboy 6

__________________________________________________________

Ignore Jimin, thanks
Jimin

I'm just trying to help you guys, honest

Fuckboy 6

Ignore Jimin pt. 2, thanks

Jimin

I want my life back
I'm just gonna say it and end it all
He likes yo olifwu8 lwiojsd u

Wait what?

Fuckboy 6

Block him
Thanks

Jimin

If you block me, we’re no longer friends

Wait what were you trying to type earlier
I’ll tell you later
No I wpn’t
Won’t
^ That was Jungkook
No it wasn’t
Yes it was
NOpa
Asdfl
Eia
asdkl

Jimin, Fuckboy 6

Both of you stop
You guys are killing my phone
I forgot to charge it last night
Also
I’m going to go eat lunch
All by myself
I hope you guys are happy
Because I am not

Jimin
Sad
I’d totally extend an invitation
But someONE won’t let me

Fuckboy 6
LOL have fun
I fucking will

1:10 PM

Jk, going with Jihoon, he just asked
Haha, fuck you guys, I do have friends

Fuckboy 6
Actually lol
We’re here
[ location shared ]
Ditch him and come join us lol

Lol no thanks

Fuckboy 6
Why not?

I’m salty

Fuckboy 6
That’s a dumb reason

You’re a dumb reason

Fuckboy 6
Wtf is that even supposed to mean

Honestly iono
But I would like to share:
[ image attached ]
Mentor-mentee date
I’ve having the time of my life
Without you two
I’d like to emphasize

Fuckboy 6
Looks lame
We’re still here if you wanna join
I don’t

Jimin
I seriously hate you guys

Fuckboy 6
[image attached]
Look we’re having so much fun

Jimin
Jimin looks like he wants to murder you

Jimin
I kinda want to
You don’t even understand
He’s been obsessing over a pann
post tlkajdfkasf
All
Morn ksksnaosing

Which one?

Fuckboy 6
Looool not important
You should still come

... 
Lol you guys
Too late
I’ve moved onto better things
Jihoon’s my new best friend

Jimin
Smh
Over a decade of me putting up with you reduced to this

Shoulda thought about that
before you became a tool
Being serious though
He’s actually pretty cool

Fuckboy 6
Lol
Really now

Yeah, I mean
If he wasn’t so young
Would actually consider going after
Just saying

Jimin
LOL oh god
How old is he?

Nineteen? Aha i think, i don’t rly remember

Jimin
Cutting it real close there
Your threshold is 19.5, remember

Yes, I am aware

Fuckboy 6
For what?

Jimin
But, @Tae you know who’s in your range?

Don’t you fucking dare

Fuckboy 6
Wait what are you guys talking about
Stop right there

Jimin
Tae’s favorite boi

Can you not?

Lmao I’m helping you

But you’re really not

You’ll understand one day
Also:
[Image attached]
Look at what you did lmao

Why is Jungkook frowning so hard lol
Tell him he looks constipated for me

He says thanks
Also he’s frowning because you lkfospaej
Reject ed jdjosskx im
Lol ags am jihoon
Wjeuhsnwkw
I give up
I tried my best
Dumbasses
Both of you

What did I do?!

read 1:34 PM

+++ 

“This feels a bit like deju vu, doesn’t it,” Jin grins as Taehyung warily enters his office and takes a seat, defensively clasping his hands in front of him as he tries to read Jin’s expression. “To eight years back.”

But Jin’s always hard to read, and so the smile currently gracing his face was far from reassuring.

“Yeah, but not in a good way,” Taehyung grunts as he scoots the chair closer to his desk. “So what’s up?”

“I just wanna know how much of this post is accurate,” Jin slides his phone towards Taehyung, the pann post already pulled up on the screen.

[fan-talk] It looks like Jungkook and TAE are actually really close? 😊😊😊

The recent controversy made it seem like they were enemies, but just look at these photos from a week ago, hul, it’s probably the angle but it almost looks like they’re
kissing in one of them, their faces are really close. They were at a chimaek place in Hongdae with Jimin, some BigCube producers and trainees.

[images attached]

Look at the way TAE’s looking at Jungkook 😍😍😍 It’s so heart fluttering.

They were also seen at a super high-class restaurant before that.

[image attached, caption=”fanaccount tweet”]

(t/h: Crazy, I just saw Jungkook in a restaurant where I was eating dinner with my boyfriend. It’s the first time I’ve seen a celebrity in public. He looks so much better in real life, even my boyfriend agrees. I didn’t bother him because he was with someone else, but I wish I got his autograph or something because my cousin is such a huge fan. She got so mad at me 😞😞😞😞.special poke 😞😞😞😞 such a brat.)

The someone else is TAE. You can see it’s him in the photo below, but the original post has been deleted. This in the lobby of the hotel the restaurant is in. Their clothes are the same as they are in the chimaek picture, so it’s almost 100% them.

[image attached, caption=”tae, jungkook at restaurant”]

And then at some point, they were seen at a park. Someone was took a picture of their dog and caught them in the background, and didn’t realize it until she posted it online and one of her friends figured out it was them.

[image attached]

Again, it’s probably the same day, since their clothes are the same.

If I didn’t know better, I would say they were on a date. It really looks like one, doesn’t it?

post reaction
[ +102, -203 ]

1. Hul, looking at these, it really looks 100% like a date.
2. Stop making up rumors, ah fuck, this makes me so mad, I’m a fan of Jungkook and I don’t want to see him trend for something like this with an iljin like that.
3. Cut the bullshit already, this is such a reach. The photos are super blurry, you can’t tell anything from them. And it’s definitely the angle, haven’t you heard of forced perspective, OP-yah???
4. Isn’t this a huge invasion of privacy? 😓; Especially the last picture. Goosebumps. Also, it’s probably just the angle, fans are always so eager to pair up any two people who stand within a 100 ft radius of each other, it must be so awkward.
5. Know better? So funny. 😞😞😞😞 Whether it is or isn’t a date, how could you actually know anything about them 😞😞😞😞 You know they only share with you the parts of their lives that they want to show you, right? 😞😞😞😞
Honestly, Taehyung had looked at the post when Yoongi had shown it him earlier, but he reads it again to use the time to figure out what he was going to say.

The whole post made him uncomfortable. Even being as careful as they were, the armchair detectives were still able to string together most of their night, and it was just reinforcement to the idea that Jungkook was always being watched. The photos at the chimaek place somewhat bothered him, because without them realizing it, one of Jungkook’s fansites had indeed been watching them, and had taken a series of really high-definition photos. The park photo also put him on edge, since if the girl had taken it a few minutes earlier, this post probably would have had an entirely different narrative.

But it’s the photo in the lobby that really raises the hairs on the back of Taehyung’s neck. It captured a moment where they both had their backs turned and they were looking at a map trying to figure out where to go. And part of the reason why it’s creepy because he distinctly remembers the lobby being empty when they entered and exited, and so in the minute they had their backs turned, someone had slipped in, recognized them, took the photo and left before they ever realized.

The unease is further compounded by a detail that catches his eye, the watermark nestled at the corner of the photo in the form of a small “hk_info_2” stamped at the bottom, the same as the poster’s username up at the top. And the similarity wasn’t lost on him. Paranoid from the second he saw it in Yoongi’s office he had immediately tried searching the name to see if it was tied to another one of Jungkook’s fansites. But the only result he could find was this one pann account, which had been created only a few weeks ago.

It’s like, it can’t be, it’s too obvious. The naming was too close, the timing was too perfect, and she had been castigated by Jungkook’s fandom anyway. And if it’s not her, then this post wasn’t malicious, it was just theory post from a fan with too much time on their hands.

But if it is, then Taehyung knows exactly what this post’s about. It’s a warning shot. And it’s ringing loud and clear in Taehyung’s ears.

“The places,” Taehyung finally says and slides the phone back. “We went to are accurate, which is kinda creepy, but the fact that it was a date isn’t. It was just an apology dinner. Is that all you wanted to talk about? It doesn’t seem like a lot of people are convinced, I’m surprised the company thinks it’s even an issue.”

“It’s not one, really.” Jin drums his fingers on the table. “From BigCube’s perspective, it’s just someone shooting in the dark. But I wanted to talk to you about it as a friend. Ordinarily I wouldn’t get involved, but since I have a wider perspective on things than most people and this one’s a little tricky, I felt like I should give you some advice, for lack of a better word.”

“Okay, about what?” Taehyung takes a sip of his coffee.

“How do I start? I guess I can with this,” Jin tilts his head. “You know Jungkook doesn’t have a dating ban anymore, right?”

Taehyung chokes on his coffee, and weakly coughs as Jin reaches over and pounds his back.

“They officially lifted it a couple of months ago.”

“O...kay?”
“It’s like,” Jin continues. “From a business standpoint, it’s still PR suicide, for sure, or at least if he goes public with one, but he’s in this interesting position where he’s a seven-year industry veteran even though he’s so young,” Jin taps the table again. “A significant portion of his fans are still guaranteed to go ballistic, but many have matured, and so BigCube is being more lenient as long as he doesn’t go public himself. They’ve pretty much marked it as something they’ll have to inevitably deal with in the future anyway, so there’s a plan in place if he eventually gets exposed.”

“Why now?”

“A combination of things,” Jin shrugs. “He’s less of a focus now that WANNA TEEN’s fully greenlighted, he’s been pretty good about controlling his image, he’s slowly transitioning from being publicly considered as an idol to being a singer, corporate’s aware that they can’t actually stop him, and I suspect it’s also because his contract renewal is coming up next year.”

“What does his contract have to do with anything?”

“Don’t tell anyone this, but they’re slightly worried he might leave since he hasn’t verbally committed yet. And other companies have started making moves to poach him. So, this is like an inexpensive perk to keep him happy.”

“Oh, interesting,” Taehyung nods his head aimlessly, and then a thought strikes him. “Is he actually thinking about leaving?”

“Um,” Jin hesitates. “I can’t tell you much, but in short, no. Not at the moment. But keep that to yourself. He, um, wants to negotiate a higher compensation package, basically, so we’re keeping them in the dark until the last minute.”

“Oh, okay,” Taehyung feels a small wave of relief hit his chest.

“So,” Jin leans back in his chair and covers his mouth with a fist. “What do you think about all of that?”

Taehyung sets his mug down, thoughts racing at a million miles per a minute. “Um, I’m just confused I guess. I thought this was going to be about the pann post, but whether Jungkook can date or not doesn’t seem like something discussion-worthy, at least with me. I don’t really care.”

“Keep in mind I’m talking to you as a friend right now, not as a corporate representative,” Jin scrolls down the post and sets his phone on the table and pushes it forward. “Especially when I think you actually do care. We’ve been friends you since we were kids, I can tell.”

Taehyung glances down, sees the picture where he’s looking at Jungkook like he’s his goddamn world or something and freezes.

“Yeah, so I think I’m right in thinking this matters quite a bit to you.”

“Fuck,” Taehyung groans into his hand. “Is it that obvious?”

“Yeah, kinda, you were all over him at the chimaek place, even by your standards. Namjoon even noticed,” Jin takes his phone back. “I guess the gist of what I’m trying to say is, be careful going forward.”

“Okay let’s say I am interested, but makes you think I want to do anything about it?” Taehyung snickers nervously. “You know me, I don’t ever go after anyone.”

“Yeah, nothing in particular, but,” Jin pauses. “That’s not something that’s entirely up to you.”
Taehyung feels his heart skip a beat, “What do you mean?”

“Considering other factors, I think,” Jin says carefully. “You’re going to have to deal with this a lot sooner than you think.”

“How cryptic.”

“Just, again, be careful. Because the main thing I want to tell you, is while there’s no ban, I’m going to be honest and tell that in the worst case scenario, BigCube will shield Jungkook over you. They’ll throw you under a train if they have to,” Jin leans forward. “And if some of his more, um, enthusiastic fans catch even a whiff of this, they’re going to try to rip you apart, and you’re going to be on your own.”

“Oh.”

“And putting aside the fact that Heart King’s still a thing, posts like these,” Jin taps the phone. “Are bait for even the less intense fans, and they’re going to get dug up and used as evidence for slandering you. And I’m sure you’re aware, the reaction is going to multiple times worse than the one to your Cozy Conversations controversy. So, just, I guess my point is...” Jin taps on the table and peters off.

“Is?”

“...there’s going to be a lot of pressure going forward. And I’m slightly worried because it’s you,” Jin blinks. “So while I’m not explicitly telling you to stop, I disagree with Jimin in the sense that I’m not going to endorse this, because, well, Jungkook is impulsive—”

Taehyung’s breath hitches in his throat, because hold up, what did Jin mean by that—

“—and call me selfish, but I’d rather not watch you suffer again.”

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“You’re free tomorrow, right?” Jungkook kicks Taehyung’s chair later that afternoon, hands smashed deep in his pockets as he sounds bored out of his mind.

“Um,” Taehyung swivels around and glares at him. “What makes you think that?”

Jungkook shrugs, “I just assumed.”

“Bad assumption, I’m hanging out with Jihoon.”

Jungkook frowns, “All day?”

“...no.”

“Are you free in the evening?”

“...maybe.”

“Maybe?”

“Wanna go bowling?”

Taehyung grimaces, “Not really?”

“Let me rephrase that,” Jungkook scratches his head. “I’m celebrating the end of the promotional cycle, and I’m going bowling with me and a few friends, wanna come?”

Taehyung squints, “You go bowling for fun?”

“Yeah?” Jungkook looks at Taehyung’s expression. “What?”

“Uh,” Taehyung thinks about the energy required to socialize with a bunch of idols he doesn’t know while doing an activity he has zero interest in, and the answer’s pretty clear. “Thanks, but I’ll pass.”

“You don’t have to actually play.”

“So I would just be sitting there? Why would I even go?”

“I mean...they’ve got arcade games and stuff too.”

“At a bowling alley? Why don’t you just go to an actual arcade.”

“Because we’re bowling,” Jungkook rolls his eyes. “Everyone else is gonna be doing that.”

“And I’m supposed to play games by myself?”

“Well, no, ideally you’d be bowling with other people too, but since you—”

“I mean I already said I’d pass.”

“But I want you to be there.”

“Why?”

“Because, um, you wrote the song.”

“Uh,” Taehyung grimaces again. “Really?”

“Yeah. Also Jimin’s going.”

“Is that supposed to convince me?”

“Let me rephrase that: your best friend’s going.”

“Jihoon’s my best friend now, remember? You’d have to invite him.”

“Um,” Jungkook frowns. “I’m not doing that.”

“It would appear we’re at an impasse then.”

“Whatever,” Jungkook huffs. “Can you please just like, come?”

“Why do you want me to go so badly?”

Jungkook doesn’t respond and just frowns.
And Taehyung, feeling the guilt tug at his heartstrings, sighs and pulls up his calendar. “What time is it at again?”

+++ 

Part of the reason he didn’t want to go, Taehyung admits to himself as he walks down the sidewalk to the bowling alley, shoes crunching over slush as he gets there about half an hour fashionably late, is because he was pretty sure Jungkook’s crush was going to be there too.

It would make sense, especially if someone like himself was invited, as in someone who had only been on friendly terms with Jungkook for all of a few months. And Jimin all but confirmed it when Taehyung basically straight-up asked him and Jimin wouldn’t meet his gaze.

(“So like, is that person going?”

“Which one—oh, uh, haha, would you look at the time.”

“You have somewhere to be?”

“No, just, I’m just asking you to appreciate time. As a concept. For what it is. Just look at it,” Jimin smiles down at his watch. “Look at it go.”

“Oh, what are you smoking?”

“Time.”

“You know what? Nevermind.”)

The other reason why he didn’t want to be there, is because he figured that almost everyone else there was going to be an idol. And as he trots down towards the lanes and spots the group, his suspicions are immediately confirmed. It wasn’t that he had anything against idols, specifically, it’s just that he was already an outsider in the group by virtue of only knowing three people, and they were probably going to be talking about idol-specific things, which he honestly couldn’t relate to.

The thing that strikes him first when he gets there, apologizing for being late as he squeezes himself between Jimin and a guy from YG’s rookie boyband, i-Win, is that everyone there is a somebody. There isn’t a face that he hasn’t seen before, and probably the lowest profile person besides himself was the pro gamer chilling on the bench to his left.

“You made it,” Jimin punches him on the shoulder.

“Yeah,” Taehyung glances over at Jungkook, who’s talking to a model who was recently on the cover of Vogue Korea. “So what’s going on?”

“We already divided into teams, you’re on mine, but I’ve just been playing for you. And your turn’s next.”

“You can honestly just keep playing for me.”

“No, you should play,” Jimin pushes him forward before turning to the rest of the team. “Oh this is Taehyung by the way, the producer guy. Can introduce you guys more formally after, but yeah.”
There’s a chorus of “heys” and a few head-nods, and Taehyung spots Yugyeom grinning to who he’s pretty sure is BamBam like he’s sharing an inside joke.

“Um, hi,” Taehyung waves. “Also, just a disclaimer, but I’m really bad at this.”

“Don’t worry,” BamBam points at the score. “We’re getting destroyed anyway. Jungkook’s been showing off.”

“Oh he has?” Taehyung glances over, and decides he’s not a fan of how close Jungkook’s sitting to Vogue Model.

“Yes, but should have expected it,” Yugyeom snorts at BamBam. “Why do you think we’re bowling? That’s the only thing he’s the best at among our friend group, it’s literally just a platform to make himself look good.”

Well, that kind of made sense.

“How about you shut up Yugyeom, I fucking wreck you guys in League all the time too,” Jungkook calls over his shoulder. He suddenly spots Taehyung and nods casually in greeting before turning back to Vogue Model, whispering something before they both laugh.

And suddenly, a thought hits Taehyung, that maybe he’s here not so much because Jungkook wanted him to be here, but rather he’s here to be a background prop to boost up his street cred for his crush.

And man, if that was actually the case, Taehyung watches him as he makes Vogue Model laugh, that would fucking suck.

“I do what I want,” Yugyeom jabs back before glancing back at Taehyung and pointing at the bowling ball rack. “Feel free to help yourself.”

His turn goes about as disastrously as he expected, he uses both hands and flings it from between his legs and nearly falls. Of course he gutters both tries, and embarrassingly, somehow on the second, he manages to throw his ball so badly it lands in the gutter in the lane next to his. Jimin and Yugyeom howl with laughter as the rest of the guys laugh more politely, likely because they’re all still strangers, and Taehyung takes it into stride, slapping a peace sign over his face as he saunters back to his seat.

Jungkook, other than glancing up once, doesn’t even react.

That kind of becomes the theme of the night, being ignored as Jungkook continually surrounds himself with known names and faces. And it’s not even clear if the one is Vogue Model anymore, because Jungkook delivers roughly the same treatment to Idols A, B, C, D, and That One Actor Guy and by then, Taehyung’s already lost track of how many times jealousy flares up in his chest during the night.

And any inkling of suspicion that he, himself was the object of Jungkook’s affections is immediately crushed by the way Jungkook continues to ignore him. They don’t even talk except for that one moment, when they’re both reaching for the pizza and their hands brush.

“Oh sorry,” Jungkook retracts his hand like it’s on fire and waves it. “You can go first.”

“Oh thanks,” and Taehyung thinks about asking, ‘so how’s it going,’ but it’s too little, too late, and before he knows it, Vogue Model shows back up and easily steals Jungkook’s attention away.
What hammers in the final nail is the conversation Taehyung overhears as he’s heading to the bathroom, familiar voices floating around the corner. He immediately stops and leans forward, straining to hear.

“...know you’re sending mixed signals right?” Jimin murmurs. “If you give him any reason to doubt, he’s going to lose interest super fast. You’ve got a really narrow window and you’re just shoving it closed right now.”

“I know, I know, but I’m just so fucking nervous, I can’t even like...” Jungkook’s words get lost in the mumbles. “...I’m thinking about doing it tonight.”

“Doing what?”

“ Asking him out,” Jungkook mumbles again. “Like I wanna before the night’s over.”

“Oh, what, whoa, okay, that went zero to one hundred really quick,” Jimin pauses. “Are you sure?”

“Aren’t you the one who keeps telling me to go for it?”

“Yeah, but,” Jimin pauses. “I mean, I didn’t think you’d actually, like, so soon—I mean, I guess I want to say, even though I’m pretty sure it’s mutual, he still may not give you the answer you want. He’s still got a bunch of hangups. So just like, yeah, don’t get too disappointed if it doesn’t work out.”

Taehyung shrinks back further in the shadows, a sense of betrayal overtaking him. Jimin was supposed to be his best friend, and the fact that he knew this much about Jungkook’s dumb crush, and the fact that Jimin had been actively egging him on doesn’t really sit well. At the very least, Jimin could have given him a heads up, or a red flag, or just some indication that Taehyung was setting himself up for failure, but he hadn’t.

And fuck, that felt bad.

“I know.”

“And you’re okay with it?”

“I think trying is better than not trying at all. Even if he rejects me, I can finally move on.”

“Damn, so mature,” Jimin lets out a huge fake-ass sounding sniff. “You’ve grown up so much”

“I mean I’m saying that right now, but, fuck, I mean I still want him to reciprocate, god dammit I’m seriously so nervous, feel my hands.”

“Haha, holy shit, they’re so sweaty...oh augh, don’t touch me with them, that’s so gross—dude, no, stop...”

And with that, Taehyung slinks away.

When he gets back, he tries to put on airs and pretend like he’s still having a good time. He starts hardcore clowning when it’s his turn, not even trying and doing stupid shit like flinging it (more or less “accidentally”) two lanes over and somehow managing to knock over the most pins he has all night over there. But it’s hard to keep up, especially as Jungkook and Jimin return from the hall, and neither of them spare so much as even a glance at him. And things slowly begin to feel a bit like a countdown now for the funeral for his feelings, as the clock winds down towards midnight and Taehyung stops trying to play at all and nurses a bottle of soda instead as he masochistically waits for
Jungkook to whisk someone away. He wonders what kind of expression his face is twisted into, it must be bad enough for Jimin and Yugyeom swing by multiple times to ask him if he’s okay. But it’s hard to fix, because Jungkook, for whatever reason, still refuses to even meet his eyes, and dejectedness settles like sediment in his chest.

There’s regret, for sure, like if he realized sooner maybe he could have done something about it. But then he remembers that Jungkook’s infatuation had extended to at least before even before they became friends again, and how he would never would have gotten around to making a move anyway. And oddly, that brings a sense of relief.

Because maybe he can shed his regrets then, he thinks as he gets up with a stretch for his turn, given the circumstances, he wouldn’t have reacted any other way. Maybe he can start to forgive himself for how he dealt with things, and forget he was idiotic to even stumble for Jungkook for a minute. And in some sense, the finality is a blessing, it was a well-placed snip to the bud before it bloomed into something more. He walks up to the line once again and throws the ball, and it goes into the gutter. His team laughs, and out of the corner of his eye he can see Jungkook laughing too, and he wonders if he made a good enough foil for him.

It’s an hour to midnight when he decides he’s had enough, and Taehyung’s kind of bored out of his mind, limbs jittery from the trepidation of waiting for the inevitable. He shuffles over to where Jimin is chatting up a few guys, and mutters into his ear.

“Hey,” Taehyung grabs his arm. “I think I’m gonna head home now.”

“Oh,” Jimin looks surprised. “So early?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung mutters. “I’m not feeling great.”

“Oh no, do you need anything?”

“No, I’m just tired, long day.”

“Oh okay,” Jimin’s eyes flick over to Jungkook. “You should tell him you’re leaving.”

Taehyung follows Jimin’s eyes and Jungkook’s laughing really hard with some guy, and Taehyung briefly wonders if that guy’s the one.

“That’s okay, he’s been ignoring me all night anyway. I’m pretty sure he won’t even notice.”

“Sorry, he’s being a dumbass.”

“Why are you apologizing? But yeah, anyway, I’m gonna head out,” Taehyung jerks his head towards the door. “See you tomorrow,” and he turns to the rest of the guys and puts on his politest grin. “And it was super great meeting you guys.”

To a chorus of “yeahs” and “see yous” and a “wait, add me on kakao,” he leaves, briskly walking out into the cold and wrapping his coat tighter around him as he heads towards his car. Snow has begun to fall again, tiny flakes settling over his clothes and his hair, and it’s just as pretty as it is annoying, and Taehyung dimly wonders if the upholstery in his car will be able to handle the snowmelt.

It better, he paid good money for that shit.

He’s almost at his car when he hears the sound of running feet behind him, and he doesn’t register it fully until he hears a faint yell.
“Taehyung! Wait up!”

“Uh,” Taehyung turns around, spots Jungkook as he jogs cautiously down the sidewalk, and all it takes is the sight of his grin for the built up irritation from the night to melt instantly. Crushes, that shit really fucks with his emotions, “Hey, what’s up?”

“Why didn’t you tell me you were leaving?” Jungkook huffs, bending over slightly, out of breath.

“You looked like you were busy.”

“You could have interrupted me.”

“Nah, I’d see you tomorrow anyway,” Taehyung shrugs.

“Oh. Yeah. That’s true.”

“Do you need anything else?”

“Lemme, uh, walk you to your car.”

“Thanks,” Taehyung points with his keys and unlocks it for emphasis. “But it’s right here.”

“Oh,” Jungkook stares at the car. “Of course.”

Taehyung pops the door open, “Is that it? Because I really should get go—“

“Wait,” Jungkook blurts. “Can we, uh, take a walk first.”

“Um, why?” Taehyung steps with one foot into his car. “I’m kinda tired honestly.”

“It’ll be short, I just,” Jungkook scratches his head. “Feel like I haven’t gotten a chance to talk to you all night. And I wanted to tell you something.”

And that’s kind of his own fault, Taehyung thinks bitterly, “I mean unless it’s something important, then—“

“It’s something important.”

“What is it? And why can’t you tell me here?”

“I just, I, uh,” Jungkook fidgets. “It’s not something short, and since you’re like,” Jungkook motions to Taehyung’s stance. “Yeah, it makes it more difficult?”

“So wait, is it short or not short? And, you still haven’t told me what it’s about.”

“Um.”

And Taehyung’s not sure what compels him to ask, “Is it about the person you’re interested in?”

“Yeah, actually,” Jungkook’s face turns red. “How did you know?”

Taehyung sighs, “I overheard you and Jimin talking in the hallway—“

Jungkook looks up, startled, “How much did you hear?”

“Not that much,” Taehyung shrugs, keys clicking against the door of his car. “Just enough to know you’re confessing or something, haha. Good luck. If you wanted advice, I’m not really the right
person to ask. I’m a kind of a little bitch when it comes to these things, so I’ve never done it before.”

“I’m not looking for advice.”

Taehyung raises a brow, “Then what is it?”

“Um, I’ll tell you if you walk with me,” Jungkook shoves his hands into his pockets.
And he knows he really shouldn’t, but curiosity gets the best of him, and so he shuts the door.

“Fine,” Taehyung sighs before he follows Jungkook.

They walk a block or so, passing stores lit with Christmas decorations. And Taehyung preoccupies himself with staring at the windows, trying to ignore how in the reflection, they kinda look really good walking together.

“Did you have fun?” Jungkook’s the first to break the silence.

“Yeah,” Taehyung lies. “Free food was good. Soda, always good. The bowling, not so much.”

“I saw that one moment where you managed to knock over pins two lanes over.”

“That sounds about right.”

“Man, you’re terrible,” Jungkook laughs into his scarf. “That’s somehow more impressive than getting a strike.”

“Sorry,” Taehyung feels his face go red. “I don’t go bowling often.”

“I mean, that’s obvious.”

“Stop making fun of me.”

“But it’s so funny,” Jungkook laughs again. “Like, how can anyone be that bad?”

“You’re hurting my feelings,” Taehyung frowns. A wave of exhaustion hits him at that moment, and he yawns and checks the time. It’s getting late, and honestly, there was no way out of this, so he bites the bullet. “So,” he looks down at the slush-covered sidewalk. “What’s the deal with your crush?”

“Oh-h I, uh,” Jungkook suddenly stops under a streetlamp. “Just wanted, to tell you something.”

“Yeah, you’ve said that,” Taehyung looks up at him, “Like what specifically? Who it is?”

“Yeah. In a, in a way.”

“Were they there today?”

“Yeah, he was.”

“Did he,” Taehyung’s just biding his time at this point. “Have a good time?”

“He said he did, but I’m not sure he was being honest.”

“Oh.”

“I’m really happy he came though.”
“Yeah?”

“Because even though he hates bowling, he showed up anyway. And I thought he was going to go off and do something on his own, but he still tried to play with everyone, even though,” Jungkook snickers. “He was super bad, like—”

And Taehyung’s pretty sure he’s hardcore projecting at this point, because the person sounded awfully like—

“—knocking over pins two lanes over, bad—”

Taehyung’s brows furrow, because, wait what—

“—and it was hilarious watching him try,” Jungkook’s got this stupidly fond look on his face, and it’s making Taehyung’s heart do flips. “Because usually he’s so good at everything, just for whatever reason he’s just terrible at this.”

Coincidence? Definitely a coincidence, and so Taehyung wires his face into a grimace of a grin, “Sounds cute.”

“He kinda is.”

“Man, you’re not even with him yet, and you’re this whipped,” Taehyung snorts and fights the wave of nausea that hits him on the chest. “What are you even doing here wasting time with me? Go back and ask him already, I’m sure he’ll say yes.”

“I don’t really think that’s a guarantee.”

“What do you mean? I feel like,” Taehyung says without thinking. “You could get anyone you wanted.”

“That’s not true,” Jungkook steps forward, he’s maybe one pace away from Taehyung now. “This guy’s been out of my league since I met him. I’ve always been not enough. Not old enough, not famous enough, not interesting enough, not good enough.”

“Jeez, what kind of A-lister is this?” Taehyung can’t bring himself to look up and scoffs. “Did he tell you that to your face? Because he sounds kind of toxic, to be honest. You should...”

Find someone better.

“It’s not that, it’s just, like,” Jungkook trails off, “Who he is.”

“How descriptive.”

“I’m trying,” Jungkook clenches his hands. “Sorry, I’m kinda nervous. I mean he’s never told me this any of this, he’s just, I guess, always, had so many other options that I’ve never been considered one. But recently, it seems like things have changed.”

What kind of fucking guy was this? And how did Taehyung miss him at the party? Haha well, whatever, the important part was it was time to deliver the eulogy. Rest in pieces, all of Taehyung’s hopes and dreams, they were so alive for a total of two days. It was becoming ridiculously clear that it was foolish to think he even had a chance.

“Well, hopefully he finally notices you this time. He seems like an amazing guy, if he’s got you like this,” Taehyung laughs as he lays it on thick, bitterness renting out space at the back of his throat,
and he forces himself to look up and appear chiller than chill. “Introduce me, sometime.”

Fuck wait no, that’s chill overkill, he’d really rather not—

“That’s,” Jungkook bites his lip for a moment before he says, “Kinda, um, well, ironic.”

Wait, Taehyung blinks, “Ironic? Why do you say that?”

Jungkook takes a breath, takes a step closer, and leans in until he’s mere inches away from Taehyung’s face. And Taehyung forgets how to breathe, because suddenly the pieces are starting to fall into place, and because, well, no he should stop because there’s just no fucking way—

“It’s ironic because,” he murmurs, eyes hooded, gaze pointed down at Taehyung’s lips, “That person is...”

Jungkook suddenly glances up, their eyes meet, things click, and the world stops spinning on its axis. And in that moment, Taehyung’s heart thuds, his mind going a little fuzzy, breath hitching, blood pumping like bass in his ears, as he thinks, this can’t possibly happening.

“That person is—“

It’s surreal, really, standing under this streetlamp in Mapo-gu, watching this kid, this celebrity, this guy he’s kinda into, now just hair’s breadth away from Taehyung, take his heart out and easily stick it on his sleeve.

“—you.”

And Taehyung, for the life of him, can’t sort out how he feels as an overwhelming slew of emotions hits him straight in the chest. It’s what exactly what his heart wants, it’s what his mind really doesn’t, and he’s aware he’s been placed in the middle of a crossroads as he watches Jungkook hesitate for a moment.

Because there’s a few issues.

First, his crush was never supposed to work out. And as if waiting to be prompted, Jin’s warning roars to life at the back of his mind at that moment, furious at being neglected and spitting fear and panic, and Taehyung has to forcefully stuff it back in its cage for later just to cope.

Second, he realizes this as he nervously swallows as Jungkook leans closer, is that there are no excuses this time. He’s fully in control with all the cards lain face-up in front of him. There’s no alcohol to blame his decisions on, there’s no plausible deniability when it’s glaringly obvious what Jungkook’s implicitly asking for permission to do from the way he’s looking at him, his eyes searching for some sort of signal from Taehyung to stop.

And third, Taehyung still hasn’t given one.

He’s still deciding which way to go with the precious few seconds he knows he has left, but he doesn’t back away, and he holds Jungkook’s gaze steadily, his own expression calculatedly blank, his heart hammering hard, a torrent of feelings flooding his mind and his chest. And because oxytocin is a hell of a drug, the part of him that wants this is making an incredibly compelling argument right now, and perhaps more importantly, he’s listening. So he lets Jungkook incline his face even closer, lets Jungkook hesitantly hold him by the waist, and lets his reservations float away.

And the pounding of Taehyung’s heart is ricocheting around his head, making it hard to extrapolate what the real consequences will be, as in what really is best decision one, two, three steps down the
road, and with the way Jungkook’s eyes look so bright in the holiday lights, he really only feels drawn to one choice.

So there, under the streetlamp, he tilts his head up, and with the snow softly fluttering to the ground as the world fades around them, Jungkook gently leans forward and meets him halfway.

Chapter End Notes

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Sorry for the delay, it was just an ungodly combo of everything hitting me at once, also i ended up writing a hugeass chunk of the next chapter by accident.

On that note, preemptively sorry, next chapter is gonna be at least two weeks down the line if not more ;; because the reason i ended up bumping so much content is because I have to rethink how it plays out, because I scrapped what i originally had wrote, oops.

(Also thanks holy crap, when did this pass 20k hits, like actually what? Y’all the best :u;)
Not a Bad Thing

Chapter Summary

don’t act like it’s a bad thing
to fall in love with me
— justin timberlake
not a bad thing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It feels like lightning.

It feels like a beginning. It feels soft. It feels like a dream. It feels like every cliche Taehyung’s put into his lyrics, multiplied by a thousand and then some, and he really gets, for the first time, why love songs sell so well.

Jungkook breaks it first, leaning back for a bit, eyes half-opened and glittering in the lights, expression awash with so much happiness he looks positively punchdrunk, and if Taehyung thought his heart couldn’t beat harder, he was clearly wrong as it starts jackhammering it’s way out of his chest.

Holy shit, he thinks dimly, that crush was himself.

Holy shit, he thinks, lips tingling, wait really?


“Damn,” Jungkook finally breathes out with a wispy plume of white, grin nearly splitting his face in two. the tip of his nose red from the cold, “I’ve wanted to do that for so long.”

And Taehyung, a producer who gets paid to write prose for a living, gets deep with his vocabulary and responds poetically:

“Haha, nice.”

In his defense, he was still reeling and trying to sort out his thoughts, which included some nifty brainwork like, holy shit pt. 245 and did Jungkook just say ‘for so long,’ hold up, so wait for how long, and this sidewalk is a public place. Luckily, before Taehyung can gather enough shame to mentally kick himself, Jungkook breaks out into an easy laugh, tips of his ears red, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he covers his mouth with a curled hand.

“Same,” Jungkook snickers. He looks so good, so attractive, so naive, it seriously feels like a dream, and Taehyung lets himself forget and live in the moment for a second before reality zips by again and yanks him back by the collar. A group of giggling teenage girls hurry by, breath swirling up in wisps of white between the falling snow, and he panics for a moment, trying to deduce if they were close enough to see, and he steps behind Jungkook, before it’s clear they don’t even notice the two of them.
Then he remembers. *Jungkook is impulsive.*

It’s a wakeup call at the right moment, a sanity check against the momentum, a gentle push against the swing of the pendulum, right before the girls round a corner and Jungkook begins to lean in again.

*And I don’t want to see you suffer again.*

So this time, Taehyung backs slightly away, now quite mindful of how open and public of a space they were in, and mutters, bracing a hand against Jungkook’s chest, “Um.”

The grin instantly drops from Jungkook’s face and his brows twitch closer with confusion, steeping with a touch of dismay.

“Oh, i-it’s not...” a rejection. It’s just, “...it’s just, this is all, kinda, um, sudden? I just need some, um, more...” Time? Space? Honestly, both, to get his priorities straight. And he’s scrambling to figure out how to phrase it when understanding spreads itself across Jungkook’s expression, and so Taehyung just leaves it at that, “...to think. A-about it.”

“Oh, okay,” Jungkook hesitates, expression still slightly crestfallen. “Yeah, uh...no pressure. It’s just...it’s just, I wanted you to know.”

Taehyung doesn’t know how else to respond except for a slow nod. His face is probably burning bright red right now, and he can’t figure out how to stop his heart from galloping in his chest.

“Because,” Jungkook’s voice picks up with a hint of determination. “Starting from now on, you better start paying attention.”

Taehyung snorts, brushing the snowfall from his bangs, “To what?”

“To me,” Jungkook jams his hands in his pockets and says with a hint of a grin back on his lips.

Taehyung makes a face, “Why?”

“Cause,” Jungkook cocks his head, eyes folding into twin crescents. “I’m gonna make you fall for me.”

The line’s so corny that Taehyung snickers with surprise, but the way Jungkook’s looking at him from under the light, full of resolve again, kills the retort on his lips.

“You think I’m joking?” Jungkook says, raising his eyebrows, eyes sparkling again, air of characteristic cockiness back in his body language. “I’m serious, I’m gonna make you fall—”

“Uh, okay, yeah, I heard you the first time,” Taehyung says hurriedly, internally cringing as his face starts heating up. He begins walking down the sidewalk, arms crossed, heading back to his car.

“And?” Jungkook quickly follows him, easily keeping pace.

“Uh...good luck with that.” Taehyung says, pulling his scarf higher over his face to hide the blush, and deigning to mention how he’s already halfway there.

“Thanks,” Jungkook bites his lip as they turn a corner onto the sidestreet Taehyung’s parked on, pulling his hood over his head. “But I don’t think I’ll need it.”

Taehyung rolls his eyes, and mumbles into his scarf, “...cocky as fuck, I swear, kids these days—”
“First—I’m not a kid anymore,” Jungkook looks determined as ever. “Haven’t been one for three years.”

Taehyung looks away, ears beginning to get nice and toasty warm, because um, yeah, he’s actually been *really fuckin’ aware*.

“And second...” Jungkook suddenly hooks a finger on Taehyung’s scarf and yanks it down, revealing Taehyung’s blazing blush to the world. The shittest grin begins spreading across his face, “...again, I don’t think I will.”

“Could you *not*?” Taehyung coughs unconvincingly and tugs the scarf back up, “I have a...a cold.”

“Right.”

“I do,” Taehyung insists. He spots his car out of the corner of his eye, and walks quickly towards it. “Well, thanks for walking me back, that’s my car, *bye.*”

“Oh nice,” Jungkook blinks. “Say, could I get a ride back?”

Taehyung snorts, as he unlocks his car, “Why? It’s like two blocks down.”

“That’s more than one block,” Jungkook shrugs, opening the passenger-side door. “Considering I have to defrost my windows, it’ll actually be faster if you just start walking now.”

“It’s not about speed,” Jungkook says with a shrug. “Then why? It’s too cold? Because it’s not that cold.”

“No,” Jungkook leans against the car, sleep ooze oozing from every pore. “Even if it’s just for a minute, I wanna spend every second I can with you.”

Taehyung gapes as Jungkook shoots him a goddamn wink, steps into the car and closes the door with a snap, hints clearly tossed out the window and off of a goddamn cliff.

Defrosting the car takes as long as expected, the drive is as short as anticipated, and for the minute(s) that transporting Jungkook a few meters down the road take—most of it spent at an ill-timed redlight—Jungkook spends them buried with his nose in his phone. And even though Taehyung’s a bit curious, he’s more relieved that the silence gives him a moment to collect himself.

When he pulls up to the bowling alley, Jungkook immediately upclips the seatbelt, and steps out of the car, pausing for a moment with a hand on the door.

“Thanks for the ride.”

“No problem,” Taehyung nods his head. “See you tomorrow?”

“Yeah. Drive safe,” Jungkook pats the top of the car.

“Will do.”

“Also...” Jungkook trails off.

“What?”

“Let me know when you get back, shoot me a text or something, so I know you got home safe,”
Jungkook grins wide and winks for the third goddamn time that night, before he snaps the door shut, and then he’s hurrying back into the bowling alley, taking the stairs two at a time.

Holy fucking crap, with one gesture Jungkook unwinds all of the composure Taehyung’s managed to gather in the last five minutes, and Taehyung sinks down in the seat, feeling like he was on the brink of a heart attack, thinking about how Jungkook really needed to stop it with those winks.

(Because they were fucking working.)

+++ 

Fuckboy 6

I got back
Oh nice
That was pretty fast

I drive pretty fast

Looool clearly

How’s bowling

Fun
But
Less fun without you
Since there's no one to laugh at
Everyone’s actually good now
:P

Wow
Just kidding

No you’re not

Yeah, you’re right
You might actually be the worst bowler I know

Surprisingly, I can live with that

I could give you lessons
Like, tomorrow, even
I have some time at night

Um
Thanks
Lol
But as much as I love bowling
I’ll pass

Oh haha
Okay

We can do something else tho

Oh yeah, for sure I’m down
Got anything in mind?

No haha

Oh uh LOL

I’ll sleep on it
And let you know tomorrow
Right now?

Yeah, I’m already in bed haha

That was fast

Yea
I fucking love sleep

1:01AM

As much as me???????????
<33<#,3,33,<#<3,3,3

1:06AM

Haha holy fucking shit wait that was Jimin
I left my phone with him for like five minutes
Sorry, you don’t have to answer that lol

1:11AM

LOL sorry I fell asleep

Looool don’t be sorry
Just don’t scroll up

Hmm

Plz no
Oh okay
G’night
<3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3
<3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3
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<3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3
<3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3
Oh my fucking
That was
Not aoagiaie
Jimin
<3,
3,3,3<#<
<#,3,#<,#<

Sure :P

It was :( 

If you say so 
Haha

Taehyung, on the brink of sleep, drops his phone on his face at that moment. Nose smarting, he stares at the ceiling for a moment, contemplating life and the everything that just transpired with the last few hours.

Just like, holy shit, what a wild ride. He blinks as he reaches for his phone, he had so many questions.

But first, bringing the screen to his face, he glances at the text he sent on accident.
Oops.
Well, whatever.
It was just an emoji.

Jimin

Lmfao
[image attached]
You broke him
It was just an emoji
And you broke him
What the actual hell

The fuck
What is he even doing LOL

I dunno
But he hasn’t moved out of fetal position
For like the last five minutes
Not sure if he’s breathing
We’re a bit concerned
You can see in the corner how
Yugyeom's been trying to revive him
Looks more like he’s trying to stop Jungkook from breathing period
At least by the way he’s about to fuck him up with that bowling ball

Sounds about right
Also
It’s about time haha
Congrats on
You know
Whatever you got yourself into
Feel free to thank me whenever

Never
Also wait
How the fuck do you know
Wait
Shit
Is he like
Telling people

No
Just me
But
I’m pretty sure Yugyeom figured out something happened
Don’t worry tho haha
JK may not be the sharpest tool in the shed
But he’s not that dumb
Lol
Probably
Actually
You know what
Don’t quote me on that

Not really confidence inspiring lol
But not saying much
You never really are

Smh
Go to sleep
Aren’t you already supposed to be
Taehyung wakes up the next morning to the afterglow of a pleasant dream he can’t quite remember, a smile lining his lips, the sun peeking through his curtains, and a—holy shit, a goddamn good morning text from Jungkook.

It’s seriously the small things that get him, Toes curling as he pulls his comforter over his head, warmth blooming on his face, he tries to curb the ear-splitting grin threatening to take over his face.

It’s a wasted effort.

Besides that, even with Jungkook’s promise, nothing changes, dramatically at least.

It’s just the same old Jungkook, but at much higher dosage. He’s still there on his usual spot on the couch when Taehyung gets into work and he still keeps all of his crap littered around the studio floor and he still bugs Taehyung about random producing stuff.

The only difference is Jungkook now spends every spare second glued to Taehyung’s side.

It’s like, before, Taehyung thought he was getting a lot of Jungkook. But now he knows he was wrong, as he’s trying to finish off the details on Jungkook’s Holiday song (now titled Winter Breeze) with Jungkook standing next to him and using Taehyung’s head as an armrest.

Because this—
“Yeah, so if you wanna get some producer creds, I can try to get you on the track,” Taehyung picks at a hangnail. “The debut date for WANNA TEEN got pushed to January and they’re considering using their holiday single as a marketing opportunity by releasing it for free—”

“Yeah sure, I’m down, also speaking of free,” Jungkook cuts in as he leans a little more on Taehyung’s head. “Are you free tonight?”

—this was a lot Jungkook.

Taehyung blinks, “Uh what?”

“As in, wanna get dinner?”

Taehyung grimaces, “That...was possibly the least smooth transition I’ve ever seen.”

“It got your attention,” Jungkook shrugs.

“I mean, I guess.”

“So? Are you?”

“...I mean...I guess...”

“Sweet.” Jungkook says. “Then it’s a date.”

And Taehyung chokes on his coffee.

That moment turns out to be the beginning of a pattern, and Jungkook becomes a human Time Vortex, committed to sucking in Taehyung’s every waking free moment. And Taehyung, for the most part, lets him.

It’s like a return to the old days, and he lets Jungkook drag him to places around Seoul, now more like exclusive hotspots and boujee activities that require a name on a list as the minimum for entry rather than the basic shit they used to do before. But they do some of that too, when he ends up letting himself spending an entire day with Jungkook on a weekend, hiking around on the outskirts of Seoul before doing random domestic stuff like shopping and cafe-hopping (he keeps his distance and a wary eye out) and ending the day at a kickback with a handful of Jungkook’s closest idol friends.

It’s almost terrifyingly normal.

Terrifying, because Taehyung’s starting to trip and forget why this, as in them, is a bad idea.

“Oh hey, Taehyung!” Yugyeom’s eyes flick towards Jungkook as he opens the door. “Jungkook mentioned he was bringing someone, but didn’t realize it was you,” he jabs Jungkook with his elbow. “Why didn’t you just say so? We all know who he is.”

Jungkook shrugs, “Didn’t feel like it.”

“Right. How was the movie?”

“It was alright,” Jungkook shrugs again. “I fell asleep.”

“He was the one who picked it too,” Taehyung makes a face. “And he started snoring during a really quiet scene, fucking embarrassing—“
“Hey, I was tired from hiking.”

“Really?” Taehyung makes a face. “You’re preparing for your tour, you’re supposed to be at peak fitness.”

“Yeah, but, it’s still hard to keep going uphill once you stop, you know, like, loss of momentum—”

“That’s your own fault. Oh yeah,” Taehyung turns to Yugyeom and points at Jungkook, shaking his head. “We kept stopping every five seconds so that this fool could take a picture of the view. But it was the same damn view.”

“Yeah, I got like 50 pics on SNOW,” Yugyeom laughs. “It was basically the same photo, I was kinda confused.”

“I told you,” Taehyung glares at Jungkook.

“The lighting was different! You’re into photography too, you should know!”

“When you move 10 feet, it’s not really that different.”

“The shade from the trees changed it! I just wanted to make sure!”

“Fine, but you did the same thing yesterday too! I couldn’t start eating because you were taking like a hundred pictures of your damn food. And in that case, the lighting wasn’t different!”

“It was the angle! I just want the best—!”

“So um…do you guys wanna come inside?” Yugyeom interrupts, standing awkwardly in doorway. He shuts the door with a click as soon as they step inside. “Also, um, like, are you guys—“

Ah shit, Taehyung knows what he’s gonna ask he split second before he does.

“—like a thing now? Sorry, it just really looks like it.”

“Uh—“ Jungkook starts, eyes flicking towards Taehyung.

“No.” Taehyung says immediately, clearly, defensively.

And Jungkook closes his mouth.

“Oh, sorry,” Yugyeom holds up his hands apologetically. “Shouldn’t have assumed.”

“Probably not,” Jungkook brushes past Yugyeom, fixing his hair with a pinky, expression impassive, “Where’s everyone else?”

“In the living room playing 2K.”

The whole whether or not they’re dating is such a stupid semantic game that only racks up losses, it’s like, he knows it’s all bothering Jungkook—especially by the way he’s a lot more quiet right now than usual—the lack of response, the lack of anything definitive, the lack of ability to move on forward either in the direction Jungkook wants or just on a different path. And it’s like, what exactly is the difference between going on dates and dating, and why do people care? Neither of them, depending on the definition, are true commitment, and yet the chronic implication of one seems to make it weigh heavier than the other. And honestly, Taehyung knows he’s the hypocrite here, griping about labels while he’s probably the one bothered the most about it all between the two of them.
Jungkook just wants an answer, while Taehyung's still struggling with the definition.

Because at the end of the day, words are just a shorthand way to describe a concept, and even though there’s a definitiveness to sitting down and going, “yeah, we all agree, this is the rigid category our relationship falls into,” it doesn’t really make a difference when actions speak louder than words.

Because they just spent the day, or rather a week together in a way he probably wouldn’t have with anyone else, even without the binding base-instinct power of the bump and grind, and when Jungkook introduces him to everyone else like he’s someone special, it sure feels a lot like they’re something meaningful together.

And because ultimately, if his worst fears are realized, if evidence gets out and his fans cry foul, no one’s going to care what he personally calls it, they’re just going to go by what it looks like.

Maybe, honestly, then, it’s an excuse for himself to keep one foot out the door, to not have to decide, to let others carry the burden for him, to be that indecisive asshole who doesn’t want to think of consequences while reaping the benefits, to have his goddamn cake and somehow eat it too.

But for now, Taehyung wants to stop thinking about it period.

He's not in the mood. Although he never really is. Taken by how chill Jungkook’s friends are and not down for thinking holistically at the moment, he admits to himself when they’re all crowded in a circle, playing drinking game as some variety show plays in the background and Jungkook’s folded legs are pressed up against his own, that he kinda really likes this.

Maybe that’s why when Jungkook drops Taehyung off later that night, when he’s still buzzed and completely swept up in the momentum, Taehyung puts his trust in the tint of Jungkook’s windows, and quickly pulls him in by the collar for a shitty drunk goodnight kiss, giggling when he pushes a bright-red Jungkook away, before making his exit without looking back.

He completely regrets it six hours later in the cool blue of the morning, when he’s sober and there’s more than one fan account of them circulating the netizen currents. So he doesn't answer any of Jungkook’s texts that morning to put a bit of distance between them, and the Waltz of the Feelings continues, one step forward, two steps back, to the tune of Indécision Op.25 No.∞, pretty much the orchestral piece of his life’s soundtrack.

Jungkook’s certainly not dancing around though.

He makes it clear from day one he’s just going to charge forward as long as Taehyung’s still in flux with his feelings. And he really cranks things up when they’re alone in his studio, something that’s become really common now that Jungkook’s in the break between promotions and awards show season preparation and final evaluations for WANNA TEEN have officially kicked off and the trainees are gone.

It all pretty much comes down to space, and the fact that Jungkook is starting to refuse to give Taehyung any, in strangely assertive ways.

Just take this for example: Jungkook eschewing the spare desk in favor of balancing his laptop gingerly on the corner of Taehyung’s cluttered one instead, bulldozing his own clearing through the piles of stuff as he scoots his chair closer to Taehyung.

“You know there’s an empty desk over there, right,” Taehyung points over his shoulder, staring as Jungkook pushes junk around to clear space. “We don’t have to be this, uh, close.”
“I know,” Jungkook moves a mug out of the way.

“Okay,” Taehyung stares down as Jungkook pushes a pad of purple post-its into the range of his mouse. He tosses them carelessly onto a bookshelf, and wishes that Jungkook was better at taking hints, “Uh...what I mean is, this desk, as with most desks, was honestly built for one person.”

“How do you know that?”

“I mean,” Taehyung spreads his arms out, the tips of his fingers almost touching each end of the desk. “It’s not that big.”

“It still fits two,” Jungkook shrugs. “I don’t see the problem.”

“Barely? And I feel like people generally, like, don’t share desks if they don’t have to?”

“You’re a creative,” Jungkook rolls his eyes. “Think outside of the box. Stop conforming, don’t be part of the system, break the wheel—”

“It’s not even about conforming? People don’t, because, it’s like, uh, what, how would I even phrase this, it’s just like, you just don’t—”

“Rules,” Jungkook puts a hand gently on Taehyung’s shoulder. “Are meant to be broken.”

“What? That doesn’t make sense. I mean, first, technically,” Taehyung lunges forward and saves his cactus from toppling over as Jungkook shoves his laptop a little further onto the desk. “Ow. There isn’t even a rule against sharing desks, but—”

“So,” Jungkook blinks. “What’s the problem?”

“Like,” Taehyung frowns at his pricked thumb. “Why would you even—?”

“Why would you not?” Jungkook shoots back instantly.

“Because,” Taehyung swings his chair towards Jungkook, and their knees painfully knock together. “There’s no space.”

“That’s fine with me,” Jungkook says. “Because both figuratively and literally,” he says with zero hesitation, “I wanna be right by your side.”

Feeling the flush before it happens, Taehyung sinks his face into his hands. “Oh my fucking god, that is so…”

“Heart racing?”

A-bit. “Fuck no,” Taehyung turns back to his monitor, about ten times more flustered than before. “You know what, okay, yeah, just, like, it’s fine, stay or whatever, just like—stop bothering me. I’m trying to actually get work done.”

“Kay,” Jungkook grins and swivels back to his laptop, elbow hitting Taehyung’s.

They come to a compromise later (after Jungkook knocks over a precariously high stack of books by accident and cracks a framed picture in the process) by agreeing to jam the two desks together. It turns out with limited space, a bit of finagling commences, and what started as just moving a desk a couple of feet ends up setting off an avalanche of furniture rearrangements lead by Jungkook that snowballs into a quite-a-bit-more-involved impromptu interior redesign exercise than first anticipated.
"I mean, if we’re going to move these shelves anyway,” Jungkook points as he surveys. “You might as well move the desks to the windows. There’s more wallspace and you get to look outside.”

“I’m looking at my screen most of the time, I don’t care about looking outside. And at 5 o’clock the sun comes through the window between those two buildings, and it’s going to fucking blind me.”

“You have blinds, and think about the rest of the day, you get to look at the rest of the world. You have a 12th story office,” Jungkook peers down at the ground. “Why wouldn’t you use the view? I personally like looking outside.”

“Um, so?”

“Just stating my preferences.”

“Is this your studio? I feel like my preferences are like the only ones that matter.”

“Just putting them out there,” Jungkook shrugs and begins moving the bookshelf. “I think they’re good ones.”

Taehyung huffs and goes over to help him. “If I can’t see next week, you have to pay my optometrist bills.”

“Deal,” Jungkook laughs as he lifts the shelf up. “Holy shit, the carpet underneath is like a different color.”

“Yeah I haven’t moved anything since I first got this place.”

“When was that?”

“When I moved out of Namjoon’s, five or six years ago?” Taehyung grunts as they set the shelf down, a few books falling off in the process. “Your second album with BTD gave me enough clout. What was it called again?”

“Um, you really don’t have to bring it up—“


Jungkook’s lips thin, “Never say that album name again.”

“Which album?” Taehyung raises his voice along with his brows. “Boiz R Bad?”

“Yeah, that one,” Jungkook grimaces and jabs Taehyung in the stomach.

“What’s wrong with…’ Taehyung grins as he curls himself away, he’s always been ticklish as fuck, “…Boiz R Bad?”

“Stop.” Jungkook jabs Taehyung in the stomach again.

“But,” Taehyung turns to the shelf and pulls his copy of the album from it. He begins rifling through the photobook, “It’s such a classic, Boiz R Bad, the album with the baddest boys,” he stops at a photo of Jungkook, dark and moody with his styling, with the worst cross between shaved sides and a perm slapped on his head and enough eyeliner to make a passing scene kid claim him as one of their own, and he flips it around and points straight to the page, “I mean, just look at this certified Bad Boi, from the album with the baddest boys…Boiz R Bad.”

“Hahahahaha, so funny.”
A photo card flutters to the ground, and Taehyung picks it up, glancing down at an overly-contrasted image of Jungkook angstily glaring at the camera from under a football helmet. He holds it up between his middle and index finger, and snickers, “And this one. Damn if I wasn’t already, I’d be convinced now, boys are bad. At least the boys from Boiz R Bad. Although, now that I think about it, have I been saying it wrong? It being Boiz R Bad. Technically it’s Boiz R Bad with an exclamation point, so it should really be—”

“If it wasn’t funny the first time, it’s not gonna the—“

Taehyung cups his fingers around his mouth and whisper-yells, “BOIZ R BAD!”

“Okay, that’s it,” Jungkook lunges forward and begins tickling Taehyung hardcore.

Taehyung collapses to the ground, laughing his pleas for mercy with flailing limbs, and inadvertently he takes Jungkook down with him, and of course, in the worst of drama cliches, Jungkook catches himself from falling on top of Taehyung with two arms caged around Taehyung’s head, breathless and inches away from Taehyung’s face.

The room falls silent, save for the rhythmic ticking of an analogue clock, a question heavy in the air as Taehyung watches Jungkook’s eyes dart from his own down to his lips and back to his eyes again.

*Can we be more?*

And Taehyung knows, it’s up to him to answer.

Because Jungkook already committed to his choice, bared his soul, presented his heart-stained sleeves. It’s Taehyung who still hasn’t responded, hasn’t truly reciprocated, has just let things hang as they were, awkwardly fluttering in the breeze.

He’s being unfair, he knows he is, for stringing Jungkook along for a demo until the indefinite amount of trial days run out.

Yet, he still feels like it’s still the best thing to do, since he can’t find it in himself to give a proper answer, even after roughly two weeks, now, to think about things after it happened, because he still hasn’t considered every option, and he doesn’t understand the dangers, and he hates closing doors, it’ll be harmless, easy, fine if they just end up as friends, and, and, and—

Jungkook swallows, his adam’s apple bobbing hard as he does.

—and Taehyung still doesn’t really know what he really wants, other than more time.

After what seems like hours, Jungkook finally breathes, eyes hooded and dark, “Can I?”

“Can you what?” Taehyung asks like there’s more than one question and yeah isn’t already on on his lips.

“Can I…” Jungkook trails off as a series of heavily falling footsteps starts getting really loud, and he looks up, alarmed, at the door.

They get an abrupt knock as their only warning, and Jungkook immediately springs off of Taehyung and crouches awkwardly near the couch, pretending like he’s about to lift it, and Taehyung just rolls the the side and pretends he’s in the middle of a nap.

It turns out to be Jin, excitedly opening the door and hitting Taehyung in the head with the swing.
“Oh fucking ow,” Taehyung rolls onto his side, not faking his very real pain.

“Hey, Taehyung, good news, oh shit, sorry, I mean actually, this is kinda your fault, why are you on the—wait—holy fuck—no—” His eye grow impossibly large as he spots Jungkook and he scrambles over to where Jungkook is, knocking Jungkook’s arms away from where they were about to be used to lift the sofa and yelling, “Hey, hey, hEY, HEY, get the fuck away from that! Are you insane? You know your arms are fucking insured, right?!”

“I’ll be fine, I’m not weak,” Jungkook grumbles as he rolls up his sleeves and determinedly crouches back down. “I lift more than this regularly.”

“It’s not about that, what if you injure yourself?! Weights are whatever, but don’t fuck up your arms over stuff like this,” Jin pushes Jungkook into a chair as he lifts a phone to his ear, “Namjoon, are you free? Yeah? Okay...Taehyung’s studio...bring them too then...moving furniture...Jungkook was doing it...yeah, I know right...ten minutes...don’t ask.”

+++ 

“This is a really expensive moving crew,” Yoongi marvels, crossing his arms. “Think about how much money BigCube is paying us by the hour to push Taehyung’s furniture around.”

“Technically,” Hoseok grunts as he lifts the coffee table. “We’re not hourly or even salaried so…”

“It’s about the opportunity cost.”

“You were napping when we found you,” Namjoon shoots back.

“I know, but that’s me time, and I use it to brainstorm,” Yoongi gestures with his iced coffee at the chaos of seven six guys rearranging the studio, the centerpiece being Jimin and Jin trying to lift the couch as Jungkook scoffs at their efforts. He turns to Taehyung with skepticism woven into his brows, “I’m not sure what the value of this is, unless you’re superstitious now and into that Feng Shui, Pungsu shit. Even then, by inviting the god of destruction in—”

As if on cue, Namjoon accidently snaps the arm off a figurine, and part of Taehyung dies inside.

“—all your fortune pretty much already went out the door.”

“Don’t look at me,” Taehyung lifts his hands into the air. “Jungkook started this.”

“Of course,” Yoongi aims his glare at his mentioned unsuspecting victim and vidictively takes a sip of coffee. “Of fucking course.”

+++
Oh yeah sorry I left before I remembered to tell you
But the original reason I came is
B/c of the recent hype around you
The board has expressed interest in giving you a marketed single w/ promotional activities
Pretty exciting!!
And if all goes well, then potentially a full solo album
Obv keep it on the downlow, not sure if it’ll actually go anywhere, it’s still in the exploratory phase
Just thought I should give you a heads up
So keep up the good work
And stay out of trouble
Haha
:)
But, I’m super happy for you
It looks like you’re on the brink of finally catching your big break

+++ 

[ rewind—eight years ago, T-4 months until debut ]

Yeah, Taehyung blinks, resignation settling in on his chest, so this probably was never going to work out.

It’s just, seeing the writing on the wall spelled out in a text like that, is a little, well.

Yeah.

Yoongi

Hey so
Gonna be honest with you
It might be too late to pull off your plan
Just got the word
Even tho there’s four months left
They want to finalize the team asap
So they’re starting to negotiate contracts
Did he agree to the lessons yet?
Cuz there’s zero improvement in his scores

Oh okay
No
He told me a week ago he’d think about it
But hasn’t mentioned it since

Hmm
Not promising
But yea I’ll see what I can do
Maybe there’s another way
Like making BTD just a four person group

Haha, they still wouldn’t cut Fuckface

True
Not with his uncle on the board now

I can’t believe they added that fucker
So close to the debut date
Now Fuckface has a nepotism shield
how did he get like
stronger
someone please fucking nerf, i’m so sad

Yup
Good things happen to bad people

That should be your new album title
Taehyung blinks tiredly as his phone, numb more than disappointed. He wasn’t even surprised at this point. Because this was just another setback in a chain of setbacks that were starting to slam him in the face, all which seem to be amplified by a particularly aggravating link:

He was in career purgatory.

With almost no producing work on his plate, save for the highly-optional bassline for a commercial jingle Namjoon had managed to wiggle him onto that was due in like two months, and rest of the company fully shifted into debut album gear, he was starting to have an increasingly large amount of time to himself.

And it seemed like few of his friends at BigCube were in the same position.

Least of all, Namjoon, the brightest star of them all and BigCube’s newest hope for slingshotting BTD into the forefront of the most recent boyband wave. He was so inundated with work, that he hadn’t slept for about four days by the time he speaks face-to-face to Taehyung for the first time that week.

Which is actually more of an accomplishment than it sounds, considering they share a studio.

“Hey, so, an update,” Namjoon had said with hushed tones as they huddled in a hallway outside their shared studio, hands shoved into the depths of his soccer-pants pockets, eyes shifty and bloodshot. “I’m still working really hard to get you on to at least one song on the album. But it’s not looking good, it’s mostly a budgeting issue right now.”

“Budgeting?”

“Basically their argument is that there’s too many producers on this album and adding another one isn’t going to benefit as much as it costs.”

“I see. I could do it for free—“

“No. For this kind of work they should pay you. Especially since we’re finding enough money somewhere to pay some Swedish big name like three times more for a B-side that sounds like a off-brand Zedd deepcut off the market,” Namjoon rubs his face exasperatedly. “It’s so frustrating. I’m trying to basically swap you with them right now to get you in, because in-house is cheaper and future-proof. But,” Namjoon sighs.”Fuckface Senior just won’t change his mind when he digs his heels into the ground, and all the Crusty Fuckers on the board are always a little out of touch with the mainstream.”

“Yeah I heard the demo for the title, what are they thinking? It’s like a heavy metal ballad with a random rap verse thrown in just because Appearance Is A Talent can’t sing for his life,” Taehyung snorts. “BTD’s gonna get mocked into oblivion if they debut with that.”
“I agree. We had a long... *debate*...about it. Which I lost. It's so aggravating, the only reason Fuckface Senior even has a seat on the board is because he's a representative executive from a stakeholder company. He doesn't know shit about music, or pop music specifically. And even so, somehow he's got every board member over the age of 35 in his pocket, which happens to just be the majority of the board. So he just outvotes us with his Crusty Fucker Cohort every time, it’s so stupid,” Namjoon pinches his nose bridge. “But, anyway, I talked to Yoongi about it recently, and he agrees, something is a little off about the whole thing. Fuckface Senior’s reasoning doesn’t really make sense and he keeps changing his answers, so we’re going to start probing around to figure out what’s up.”

“Like uncle, like nephew, they’re both shady pieces of shit,” Taehyung snorts. “Good thing for Fuckface that it’s just genetic, I’ll let him know it’s not just his fault he’s garbage. It’s just in his genes.”

Namjoon laughs, “Please do that. And also, keep your head up, if this one doesn’t work out I’ll try to get you on to 2HOM’s album. It’ll be a little easier since they’re not such a focus, and even though I know ballads aren’t really your thing—“

“—at least it’s work. Yeah, thanks for your help I really owe you.”

“Thank me after I actually get you somewhere,” Namjoon shakes his head, pity in his eyes. “I feel like I’ve just been letting you down.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” Taehyung waves a hand. “Don’t worry about it, I’m super thankful you’re doing anything at all.”

“Still, feels bad.” Namjoon says before he looks down at his watch. “Anything else you want to talk about? I’ve got a meeting a few minutes, so...“

“Umm...oh yeah. A bit random, but are you free later this afternoon?” Taehyung bites his lip. “My brother got me free tickets for a movie, and I feel like we haven’t been hanging that much lately...”

Namjoon doesn’t say anything immediately and through his silence, Taehyung knows he already has his answer.

And so he quickly adds, “Or Yoongi or Hoseok—I know Jin has finals—but if you happen to know if either of them are free, haha...then...”

“Uh...not sure I can, or any of us can for the next month,” Namjoon says apologetically, teaching down and ruffling Taehyung’s hair. “Maybe next time. Sorry, we’re in a middle of a sprint, and we’ve just really busy.”

“Oh yeah,” Taehyung sighs. “That’s fine.”

“Again, keep your head up,” Namjoon says as he inches back into the recording studio, he flashes Taehyung a thumbs up. “We’re gonna get you somewhere eventually.”

How promising.
It’s difficult talking to someone who’s going places when you know you’re stagnating hard.

And pretty much everyone Taehyung knew was on their way up. All of his BigCube friends, at least, were involved with something greater than themselves, even the trainees who came in with him had moved on either to other agencies or back to a regular education.

Taehyung was the only one at a standstill. Neither here, nor there, going nowhere with no exit—save for outright quitting—in sight. The only tools in his hand to get himself out the well he's stuck at the bottom of were a flimsy promise and the strength of his dreams, and so he thinks it’s rather easy to see why he’s starting to give up. It’s a long climb up when he’s got nothing but hope.

The worst part is that the one person that’s become the hardest to hang around is the nexus of his support, his best friend, and his soulmate:

Jimin.

Because it’s like looking at a mirror of what could have been, and as much as he’s trying to forget the past and walk his own path, it’s just a little difficult when his best friend’s running parallel on the sky-high road he was supposed to take.

What makes it even more difficult is that it was always supposed to be Jimin and Taehyung, best buddies taking on the industry by storm, or at least according to the agenda of the stupidly naive pact they made when they decided officially during orientation at the sage age of 11 that they were going to be besties, back when anything seemed possible and years before everything went to shit.

And he knows Jimin’s trying as hard as he can to tone it down, trying not to brag, trying to pretend like nothing’s changing and they haven’t taken separate paths in the fork on the road. And Taehyung doesn’t blame him, honestly, for talking about every single great thing happening to him. He knows he wouldn’t be able to stop sharing it personally, especially if he was pretty much guaranteed to debut and a lot of cool shit was starting to happen to him as a result.

But it still doesn’t mean he wants to listen to Jimin gush about the Jeju trip all of the front runners, minus Fuckface, were planning on taking a month before debut (“regardless of who makes it, we’re all still gonna go, we’re all just that tight knit, oh yeah and we’re calling ourselves The A-Team”) or about the direction of various tracks on the album (“they’re going between hardcore trap rap and dance for this one, honestly would prefer dance, I think my voice is better suited for it”), or about the super funny thing Fetishly Innocent Instagram Ulzzang (“holy fuck she’s somehow better looking in real life, also drinks soju like goddamn water, I wonder how she still has a liver”) said yesterday at a raging party with other rising idol trainees from various agencies that Jimin was invited to last night.

Feels bad, man, is what’s unfurling in his chest and making it a little harder to breathe, but “haha, that’s funny,” is what woodenly falls from Taehyung’s mouth, hollow from an infestation of categorical disinterest, as Jimin charitably takes time out of his day to get lunch with him.

“It was,” Jimin doesn’t notice and unknowingly keeps sawing away. “She’s actually hilarious, but
kinda weird, like look at this shit she sent in our chat at like 4 in the morning, like, what? Who does that?

Taehyung takes a look at chat title and balks, “There’s a liners chat for our year?”

“Yeah between a bunch of trainees and a few people who debuted, and a few other names, it’s surprising active actually, also, holy shit, kinda not related to this but I forgot to tell you Taemin was there yesterday and guess what.” Jimin takes out his phone and starts scrolling. “I got his fucking katalk and lemme show you—”

“Oh yeah, cool. Also, sorry kinda random,” Taehyung says as he picks at the hem of his shirt. “But would you wanna watch a movie?”

“Yeah, sure,” Jimin doesn’t look up. “When?”

“I was thinking this afternoon.”

“Oh sorry,” Jimin’s face falls. “I can’t. I’m going to an escape room with some other—“

“The weekend then?”

“I’m going home—“

“How about next week?” Taehyung’s a bit exasperated, because since when did he have to reserve time with Jimin?

Jimin’s face falls, “Um.”

“You already have stuff planned?” Taehyung says, with a bit of disbelief.

“...sorta?”

Taehyung feels a flash of irritation.

“Nothing concrete,” Jimin laughs like nothing’s wrong. “I don’t want to commit because I’m not sure which day yet, but some people are talking about going to...”

Taehyung tunes him out as pulls his own phone out and fires off a text.

Where are you?

Studio F!
Just finished practice
Lol why are you asking?
“...so yeah,” Jimin says. “I’m really sorry, but I just don’t know yet. It’s just, everything is so crazy right now, and I can’t keep track of it all—”

“It’s fine,” Taehyung stands up abruptly, head throbbing, it’s fine Jimin won’t set aside time because they’ve only been best friends for years. He pulls his phone out again, “Actually, forget it. I gotta go, I have, a thing. Something. To do.”

Are you free rn

Uhh
Yeup!

Looool
Wanna do something

Yea sure!
When?
I’m just about to head out

Now?

Oh kkkkkkkkkkkkk

I’ll be there in 5

Alright
I’ll wait up then
“Oh okay,” and of course Jimin doesn’t even question him, and he calls over his shoulder as Taehyung starts heading toward the door. “I’ll let you know when I’m free when I know.”

So, like, never.

“Taehyung?”

“I said forget it,” Taehyung lifts a hand without looking back. “Later.”

“Taehyung!”

He heads out into the lobby and down in the elevator and finds who he’s looking for, leaning against the wall and talking to a girl trainee in the hallway just outside of the practice rooms, apology in his eyes, in his gestures, and in his words.

It’s a moment Taehyung clearly isn’t supposed to intrude on, and he stops mid-step, awkwardly trying to find a place to stealthily escape to.

“...um, so yeah, sorry can we move it to another day?” Jungkook sheepishly tugs on his collar, hair still damp from a shower. “Sorry it’s so last minute, it’s just, something came up—”

“...yeah. I guess that’s okay,” the girl’s shoulders slump, and even without context Taehyung feels a bit bad for her. “See you tomorrow then.”

“Yeah, I’ll let you know when I’m free,” Jungkook finally spots Taehyung out of the corner of his eyes and waves, the widest fucking grin spreading across his face.

The girl immediately whips around, and shoots a pointed glare at Taehyung the minute she sees him before stalking away.

“Um...sorry again!” Jungkook calls before turning back to Taehyung, eyes folding into happy crescents like he just didn’t ruin someone’s afternoon, “Hey!”

“Hi. And whoa,” Taehyung watches as the girl furiously turns the corner. “What was that about?”

“Uh,” Jungkook jams his hands into his pockets. “I canceled on her last minute. We were supposed to hang out,” Jungkook checks his watch. “Now, actually. So literally last minute. But, it’s fine.”

“Oh like a date? Shit, wait, you can uncanceled it,” Taehyung’s eyes widen, partly with fear. Yikes, suddenly the glare makes sense, and Taehyung prays to the gods of the scorned that she doesn’t know his name.

“We’re just friends,” Jungkook’s ears tinge with pink, “It wasn’t a date—”

Taehyung was pretty sure the girl would have vehemently disagreed.

“—and no, it’s really fine. We hung out a few times this week already, and I see her every day
during vocal class, so I didn’t think it was a big deal,” Jungkook shrugs, probably woefully unaware of the heart he just crushed. “But yeah, anyway, what did you wanna do?”

Taehyung’s about to open his mouth and give Jungkook some hyung-styled advice about priorities (like, for fuck’s sake, the girl was cute and being really forward) before he thinks about it and realizes, wait, actually, you know what? Nah.

He doesn’t really care.

Because Jungkook’s lovelife was really his own deal, and Taehyung’s concerns about not spending the afternoon alone, by himself, happen to heavily outweigh the guilt he feels about accidently cockblocking some tween he saw for the first time five seconds ago.

So Taehyung forgets about the girl and tries, for a third time that day: “Wanna watch a movie? My brother gave me free tickets.”

“Yeah. I’m down,” Jungkook says, without hesitation.

And Taehyung lets out the breath he hadn’t realized he had been holding, “Sweet.”


“Yeah,” Taehyung holds the door open to the practice room and follows Jungkook out, “They are.”

Maybe, he thinks, spirits slightly lifting, things will be okay.

Maybe, he thinks, as they walk to the theatre and Jungkook tells him about his day (apparently the vocal coach was giving him an unusually hard time) there’s more to happiness than cutting edge success.

Maybe, he thinks, as they sit down in their seats and laugh at all the shitty previews together, that settling for something less is alright.

Maybe, the feeling that’s deeply seeded in his heart, that this, Jungkook becoming his solace, pretty much because he was a fellow floundering failure like him, is just complacent coping against what feels like everything collapsing once again, is misguided, because maybe, he likes Jungkook just because he’s fun to be around.

And so, as the pictures move across the screen and Jungkook dozes off, head lulling onto Taehyung’s shoulder, Taehyung shifts to give Jungkook a better angle and finds it increasingly easy to convince himself that life was better being as simple as this.

And when the movie ends, and they’re walking out into the lobby, passing by the posters plastered against the wall, Jungkook points at an upcoming Avengers sequel and says, “Hey let’s watch that.”

“When does it come out?” Taehyung cranes his neck.

“Like four months from now.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Taehyung laughs. “We can celebrate your debut.”

Long story, short: they never do.

+++
The beginning of the end, starts like this.

“So,” Jin says, an unnerving smile that was probably meant to be comforting resting his face as he pushes a tablet forward. He taps the device, and glances up, “I just wanna know how much of this is true.”

Chapter End Notes

so hope world was amazing

Also idk if arm insurance is real but leg insurance is LOL

Lmao and lastly, yeah sorry for the delay, like always. I’m actually switching jobs again cuz I’m in an internship with conversion but I don’t think I wanna stay. So I’ve been interviewing while working full time and like...yeah man, 6-hour coding interviews, fuck me up mannnn, but yeah, sorry it's gonna be a little up in the air until i land something
“Where are you going?” Jungkook looks up the second Taehyung gets up out of his chair, eyes tracking him as he makes his way across the room.

“Uh,” Taehyung stops mid-step and makes up the first thing on his mind. “To a...meeting. About the holiday album.”

It’s a lie, he really just wants to take a break from trying to hammer out some demos for his single—preferably alone, so he’s not distracted while he’s sorting out his thoughts. And the questionable reason why he lies is because it gives him an excuse against what he goddamn knows Jungkook’s next question will be.

“Can I come with you?”

“Uh,” Taehyung hesitates. “No?”

“Why not?” Jungkook blinks. “I’m part of it.”

“Um,” Taehyung makes up a reason. “Producers only.”

“Who else is going?”

“Um, Yoongi, Namjoon, Hoseok,” Taehyung starts rattling off names. “People...who, you know, uh, producing people.”

“Oh, I’ll ask them then,” Jungkook fishes out his phone. “It should be fine.”

“No, wait,” Taehyung’s fairly sure Hoseok and Namjoon would play along but Yoongi would expose his ass, guaranteed. “Uh—”

Jungkook looks up expectantly, thumbs poised over his phone’s screen.
Taehyung sighs, and racks his brain for another excuse, and finds nothing, “—fine, you can come.”

“Oh sweet,” Jungkook jumps up excitedly and pulls on his coat.

“Just kidding,” Taehyung says quickly, faking looking down at his phone. “Meeting’s been canceled.”

“Oh,” Jungkook frowns. “What?”

“I’m, uh,” Taehyung edges towards the door. ”Still heading out though.”

“Where are you going?”

“Convenience store,” Taehyung calls from the hallway, fast-walking toward the elevator.

Jungkook takes three steps and he’s already right by Taehyung’s side, striding down the hallway and sticking his foot in the elevator to stop it from closing, “Oh okay, can I still come with you? I need to buy something too.”

“Oh, no,” Taehyung says tapping his finger nervously as the elevator makes it’s way down to the lobby. He quickly slips out of the elevator when it lands, and pulls his hood over his head just before he opens the entryway door. “Producers only?”

“That doesn’t even make sense,” Jungkook shudders as a blast of cool air hits them. “Oh fuck it’s cold.”

“It, uh, makes sense if you think about it,” Taehyung glances quickly at both ends of the road before he quickly jaywalks.

“I’m thinking about it, and it still doesn’t make sense,” Jungkook keeps pace and hurries with him, boots crunching over the snow, as he follows Taehyung down the sidewalk to the convenience store sitting on the corner of the intersection, breath curling out in wisps of white. “And anyway, I’m here already, so there’s no point in going back now.”

“Do what you want,” Taehyung shakes his head as they pass through the doors, and beelines immediately for the soft drinks.

Jungkook trails him, a pace behind and wrinkles his nose as Taehyung pulls out a liter of Mountain Dew, “You actually drink this stuff?”

“Stop judging me,” Taehyung turns on his heel and brushes past Jungkook as he heads for the instant noodles. “I drink what I want.”

“Haven’t you heard of the phrase ‘your body’s a temple?’”

“Then it’s built for the gods of caffeine and sugary drinks, and I’m the middle of prayer right now,” Taehyung grumbles. “So get out of my face, you’re disrespecting my religion.”

Jungkook snorts and starts to follow him, “Don’t tell me you’re buying ramen next. That’s so bad for you.”

“What if I told you I plan to boil it in this?” Taehyung holds up the Mountain Dew.

“That’s actually disgusting,” Jungkook pauses. “...wait. You’re not serious, right?”

“No. Just slightly insulted you believed me for a second.”
“I mean…” Jungkook eyes the snacks Taehyung rips off the shelf. “Is it a stretch?”

“Leave me alone, I need this for stress relief,” Taehyung hugs his stash to his chest and rolls his eyes. “And go buy your shit already, isn’t that why you came?”

“Oh,” Jungkook’s eyes flick towards the aisle. “Yeah.”

“I’ll meet you at the front when you’re done,” Taehyung says before striding towards the noodles. He picks up the cheapest package and then heads to the register, throwing his items onto the belt as he takes out his wallet. And when he looks up at the cashier, he nearly drops it on the floor.

It’s Fuckface McGee, plucked straight out of the past and placed in front of Taehyung like a bad dream.

It’s the first time Taehyung’s seen him since the moment they announced the final lineup. He looks worse for wear, bags under his eyes, hair not maintained, acne scars ripped across his face. Gone is the confidence and cockiness that defined him as a trainee, replaced with a slouch and an underlying tiredness that characterizes the way he asks Taehyung by contractual obligation, “did you find everything you need,” as he scans items without sounding like he remotely even cares.

It’s not clear if he recognizes Taehyung, he hasn’t looked up from the register yet as he waits for Taehyung to pay, but just to be sure Taehyung pulls his scarf tighter around his face and minimizes the number of words he says in response.

“Yeah,” Taehyung inserts his card.

“Want a receipt?”

“Sure.”

Fuckface hits a button and boredly picks at a nail as he waits for it to print.

And it suddenly strikes Taehyung as odd that out of all the convenience stores in Seoul, Fuckface had chosen the only one that was right next to BigCube. It seemed borderline masochistic, really, being in the shadow of a place that ripped away his dreams.

In what probably really rubbed salt in the wound, a life-sized standee of Jungkook is propped up on the wall behind Fuckface holding the snack he was endorsing, a cheerily grinning cardboard reminder of Jungkook’s success that probably haunted Fuckface during his lonely hours.

“It’s in the bag,” Fuckface tosses the receipt in and holds it out for Taehyung.

“Thanks,” Taehyung takes the bag and pulls.

And Fuckface, staring at him, doesn’t let it go.

“Um,” Taehyung pulls again to no avail, hairs rising on the back of his neck, and repeats, “Thanks?”

“Long time no see,” Fuckface says, thin smile lining his lips. “How are things?”

“Um,” Taehyung tugs on the bag, a third time. His heart begins to pound and he glances out of the corner of his eye, searching for Jungkook. “What do you mean?”

“At BigCube,” Fuckface repeats. “How are things?”

“Uh, great,” Taehyung pulls again and Fuckface still doesn’t let go.
“I’m happy for you.”

“Oh...thanks.”

“Because at least that makes one of us,” Fuckface continues smoothly, like he’s talking about the weather. “You ruined my life, you know.”

And he’s right, Taehyung knows deep in his heart. The fact that Fuckface was here, right now, manning a cash register on what’s likely a barely livable wage rather than partying it out with big names and models in Macau was probably, entirely Taehyung’s fault.

And because Taehyung’s always been too soft, even after all Fuckface had done, even as much as Jimin and Yoongi tell him it was justified, seeing Fuckface here dealing with the repercussions doesn’t make him feel vindicated.

“Oh,” Taehyung stammers, shrinking back. “I-I’m sorry. I really am.”

It makes him feel guilty to his core. Because even right up until the end, the difference in fortunes between Jungkook and Fuckface had nothing to do with fate. Taehyung had carefully set up the shot and pulled the trigger and he was very aware of the fact that—


“I—”

“And, I never fucking will.”

—that the onus of Fuckface’s misfortune was entirely on him.

“Hey Taehyung,” Jungkook’s voice floats. “Where are you?”

Fuckface suddenly looks up, eyes blazing in recognition, and Taehyung feels a wave of apprehension as he prays for Jungkook to go the other way. Clearly no one hears him, because heartbeat later, as Jungkook struts out of an aisle, head turned to the side as he raises his voice. “Do you know where—”

Taehyung doesn’t even dare turn around as Fuckface’s expression goes completely livid.

“Um,” Jungkook looks down at the bag and then up at Fuckface, expression blank. “Am I interrupting something?”

“No fucking way,” Fuckface lets out a startled laugh. “Of course. Of course you would be here, too, trailing Taehyung like a fucking dog. It’s like the good ol’ days again, I’m overwhelmed with nostalgia. Although, I’m surprised that you’re stupid enough to do it, especially after—”

“Huh?” Jungkook glances up, pure confusion scrawled across his face, “Do I know you?”

“Know me? What the fuck?” Fuckface looks about as stunned as Taehyung feels, “Stop fucking playing Jung—”

“Whoa, chill, man,” Jungkook suddenly shoots out a hand and yanks the bag out of Fuckface’s grasp, stepping in front of Taehyung and putting up his own hand defensively. “Not here to get into a fight.”

“As if you’d be able to take me on,” Fuckface sneers. “You look fucking weak.”
“Thanks man,” Jungkook grins.

“For what?”

“For the compliment.”

“It wasn’t a compliment.”

Jungkook continues like he doesn’t even hear him, “I appreciate it. All the love and support really does keep me motivated.”

Taehyung chokes and Fuckface immediately scowls, “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“I say it during interviews all the time, but I really mean it, even if it comes across as cheesy,” Jungkook scratches his head and continues rambling like he hadn’t heard a word. “Jin, my manager, is always telling me to knock it off, but I really want to let you know, sincerely, the rewarding part of this job, as in being an idol—“

Fuckface’s eyes narrow.

“—is receiving love from fans like you.”

Taehyung stares at Jungkook.

“What?” Fuckface looks at him incredulously.

“I love interacting with you guys.” Jungkook pauses for a moment and looks pointedly at the standee of himself behind Fuckface. “I mean...you are a fan, right? You gotta be, considering you brought that guy with you to work.”

Fuckface turns around, stares at it for a moment, “Holy fuck, what? That’s obviously the store’s—”

“It’s okay,” Jungkook fishes out a ballpoint pen out of his coat pocket, leans over and grabs the standee. “Don’t be ashamed. I understand. He’s a good looking guy. I’d do the same.”

Fuckface just gapes as Jungkook proceeds to messily sign the standee, patting it when he’s done and flinging it back towards Fuckface with a flick of his wrist.

“A gift,” Jungkook winks, and snaps a finger. “For being such a huge fan.”

And with that, Jungkook grabs Taehyung by the hand and dashes straight out of the doors on the store.

It takes Taehyung a minute before he finally has the sense to yank his hand out of Jungkook’s, and they hurry back until they’re safe within the confines of BigCube. It’s only when they’re in the elevator that Taehyung hunches over in the elevator to catch his breath.

“Oh my fucking god,” Taehyung huffs. “What just happened?”

Jungkook shrugs, jamming his hands into his coat pockets. “I made someone’s day?”

“I don’t think that’s, um...” Taehyung eyes Jungkook warily, “Wait, did you really not recognize him?”

And Jungkook breaks out with a grin, “Of course I did. I don’t remember his real name, but Yoongi tells me you call him Fuckface McGee.”
“Then what was that whole thing back there then?”

“I was just fucking with him,” Jungkook shrugs again. “Seemed funnier than taking him on. Especially pretending to not remember him, I think that part really got to him.”

“You were making him so angry that I thought he was going to punch you in the face for a second,” Taehyung snorts. There’s a feeling roiling in his chest, and he can’t exactly pinpoint what it is. It’s got hints of gratefulness and pride, oddly enough, and something else, and it’s got him wanting to—

“Yes, he got pretty mad.” Jungkook steps out of the elevator as soon as the doors open. “Although, just for the record, I would have totally been able to beat his ass in a fight.”

“I’m sure,” Taehyung follows him out.

“I’m serious,” Jungkook says, trotting over to his side and easily keeping pace. “And honestly, if he had gone further than just grabbing the bag, I would have—”

“Sure,” Taehyung snorts. “Such a tough guy.”

“I’m serious,” all traces of a grin are wiped from Jungkook’s face, replaced by the beginnings of a frown. “I would have fucking punched—”

“Not with the headlines you would’ve generated,” Taehyung shakes his head.

“Maybe I would have thought about it a little more.”

“Maybe? That sounds like something Jin would be pleased about.”

“He would have been proud.”

“Would he? I know Yoongi would, but Jin?” Taehyung holds up his phone in a threat as they enter his studio. “I disagree, but we could always check.”

Jungkook pales, “Please don’t tell him about this.”

“I’m tempted.”

“Please,” Jungkook begs as he falls back onto the couch, his hands pressed together.

“Okay, fine,” Taehyung sighs as he closes the door and subtly locks it with a nudge of his finger. “I won’t.”

It’s clear Jungkook notices, eyes darting over to the door handle before flicking back at Taehyung, and full of questions as Taehyung strides over, hesitation curbing the likely clarification that’s resting on his tongue.

And Taehyung doesn’t know what’s compelling him to want to do this, or maybe more accurately he doesn’t acknowledge what’s making him doing this, the tension from the past few weeks combined catalyzed by a sense that he should thank Jungkook with more than just words, cascading into into a need he can’t ignore.

He stops just in front of Jungkook, aware of how close they are and how quiet it’s become as Jungkook looks back up at him uncertainty. Taehyung mumbles, “Yeah, um, I just want to tell you….”

And suddenly he’s leaning down, grabbing Jungkook by the shirt and kissing him, eyes closed, heart
racing, mind surprisingly clear. The kiss gets deeper than he intends quicker than he intends, and maybe that’s helped by Jungkook pulling him down until he falls into an awkward straddle on top, and there are no words, just the sounds of lips and the rustling of clothes and the creak of the leather of the couch beneath them. Hungry, needy, desperate, are all terms Taehyung would say were fairly accurate qualifiers for how things were happening, as the cumulation weeks of skirting around avalanches them both into this: a pile of want, roaming hands and tongues and—

“Hey,” Jungkook suddenly breaks it, leaning back with eyes hooded and dark, and murmurs, “Can I ask you something?”

Heart racing, hair disheveled, hunched over Jungkook, Taehyung, in a bit of a daze, breathes back, “Yeah?”

“I’m just curious,” Jungkook reaches up and runs a through Taehyung’s hair, brows furrowing in thought, “Is there...is there something, um—” eyes flicking down before flicking back up to Taehyung, “—in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?”

Taehyung nearly slams his head into the wall as Jungkook dissolves into a bought of snickers, because this fucking guy.

“It’s my phone,” Taehyung says curtly, fishing it out of his pocket, holding it up for proof before chucking it on the coffee table.

“Um,” Jungkook bites his lip, hint a shit-eating grin peeking out at the corners, as he suggestively shifts his leg up just so, “Definitely not your phone.”

Taehyung feels his face flush and quickly scrambles off of Jungkook, also because honestly, he was kinda—

“No, wait—” Jungkook laughs, shooting out a hand and catching Taehyung by the wrist. “I was kidding, it was your phone. It was totally your phone. Sorry, it was just, digging into my leg and was starting to really hurt, so I—”

“Too late,” Taehyung rips his hand out of Jungkook’s grip. “You killed the mood.”

“I’m sorry, come back,” Jungkook grabs at Taehyung’s wrist. “I’ll bring the mood back.”

“Too late,” Taehyung yanks his arm back again. “You fucked up already. That was your one chance.”

“Wait,” the grin immediately slips off Jungkook’s face, “You serious?”

And Taehyung’s about to mess with him, until he sees how worried Jungkook actually looks, “…no.”

“Oh,” Jungkook’s grin spreads back like it belongs on his face. “So you’re saying there’s gonna be another—”

“So, um...” Taehyung quickly cuts Jungkook off, “What I meant to say earlier was, um, thanks. For the convenience store thing.”

“Oh, uh, yeah,” Jungkook runs a hand through his hair, bangs flopping back on his forehead as soon as his fingers pass through. “No problem?”

Taehyung lets out a weird ugly bark of a laugh that he immediately regrets.
“Oh yeah, also, uh,” Jungkook glances down at his phone. “I actually gotta go really soon to an endorsement photoshoot.” Jungkook rubs his nose. “But, um, would you, um…”

“Yeah?”

“Would you wanna come over to my place tonight?” Jungkook looks away, face beginning to bloom with red. “We can like, watch...Netflix or something, and uh, and—”

“Chill?” Taehyung says before he thinks about it. And then he thinks about it, “Oh, wait—”

“Um,” Jungkook’s almost blazing at this point. “You said it, not me.”

“That sounds like...” Taehyung starts scooting towards the door, mentally calculating how many steps it’s going to take him to reach the bathroom. “That sounds like a plan.”

“Cool,” Jungkook doesn’t look at him.

“And um, I’m just gonna, just, step out for a moment, and I’ll be back,” and Taehyung slips out the door.

+++  

[ rewind—T-3.5 months until debut ]

One unintentional benefit, Taehyung realizes pretty quickly, to getting close to Jungkook is that it really effective way to fuck with Fuckface.

And Taehyung knows this because even though nothing really changes with Jungkook in terms of his evaluation results, Fuckface starts paying particularly close attention when Jungkook performs, quieting down and calculatedly watching Jungkook’s performances with crossed arms and a thin frown on his lips.

Of course, Taehyung, the embodiment of empathy, takes advantage of that the minute he realizes and twists the knife as hard as he can, by rushing to hug Jungkook whenever he finishes and complimenting him excessively, lavishing him with undue praise as he ruffles his hair, arm slung around Jungkook’s neck, face really close to Jungkook’s as he whispers random shit in Jungkook’s ear like he’s telling a secret (usually it’s something along the lines of: “Hey, Jungkook, did you know it’s cloudy with a 36% chance of rain today.” ), or talks about their weekend plans excessively loudly, especially whenever Fuckface is nearby.

It’s funny because it’s entertainment on two fronts, watching Fuckface grow stony and Jungkook get really flustered, stuttering and ears going red at any interaction that’s even the slightest bit intimate. It’s an absurdly fake and intentionally obnoxious show of skinship that starts with just sitting a little too close to Jungkook, squishing up against Jungkook (ears tipped with a light shade of pink) when there’s feet of wall space between them and the next bystander, working up to random koala back-
hugs Jungkook (ears a nice shade of red) tries to shake him off of and finally turning high-fives into a death-grip of interlaced fingers that Jungkook (ears completely crimson) awkwardly yanks his hand out to break.

And maybe Jungkook's fluster would have caught Taehyung's attention if he hadn't seen it happen whenever Jungkook's placed even a centimeter outside of his element. For example, in Case Study 1, when Jungkook starts to make his first real group of friends, a clique of rowdy trainees his age from his vocal classes who look up to him as the 97-liner representational hope. And when they glom around him and shower him with friendship and compliments, they draw out the fluster, especially when some kid pulls Jungkook into a headlock and initiates a dogpile on top of him during a particularly wild practice.

It, being his new social circle, Taehyung suspects, starts to really build up Jungkook’s confidence in public, and pretty soon he’s showing the side of his personality during evaluations that Taehyung’s been privy to for a while, a competitive kid with an adorable smile who loves to mess around—which is objectively cute—and, well, as a result, plays into exactly what Taehyung needs, gaining Jungkook the attention of The Gatekeepers, as various evaluators begin to pay attention to Jungkook, multiple pairs of eyes beginning to routinely track him across the room as he plays with his friends.

With Fuckface, however, other than subtle glares, Taehyung doesn’t really realize how badly his strategy is affecting him, until Fuckface, on one unfortunate afternoon, decides to blatantly make moves.

“Hey, Taehyung, are you free this weekend? Because if you are, we should hang or something,” Fuckface squeezes himself nonchalantly between Taehyung and Jungkook one day right after practice, and leans against the wall like he’s hot shit.

“Sorry, I’m busy,” Taehyung immediately shoots him down for the third time that week and jerks his head towards Jungkook, who looks up from his phone and flashes a peace sign at Fuckface. “We’re hiking Bukhansan.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook nods, blissfully unaware of the underlying storylines taking place. “It’s going to be fun.”

“Oh,” Fuckface doesn’t even bother hiding his frown, and follows up without missing a beat, “How about next week?”

“I’ll let you know,” Taehyung pulls his face into a fakeass smile.

“Already got plans?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“There’s a party you should hit up if you’re around, I’m going and a few others, we got an invite. It’s mostly a bunch of currently promoting idols, but I heard G-Dragon might even show up. It’s gonna be sick, and you can take a break from—” Fuckface flicks his eyes towards Jungkook and whispers loudly like Jungkook can’t hear him. “— babysitting.”

Jungkook freezes.

“Yeah,” a satisfied smirk spreads across Fuckface’s face as he notices. “You should really start hanging around people going places for once.”

“What do you mean?” Taehyung narrows his eyes, but Fuckface doesn’t pick up on the cue and keeps going.
“I just feel just like,” Fuckface says, and Taehyung has a bad feeling about where this is going. “In terms of who you hang around, you could be doing—”

And Taehyung hopes either Fuckface has the sense not to say it or Jungkook’s not paying attention because he can just see all of his work unraveling in front of him.

“—so much better.”

Jungkook draws a sharp breath, and something in Taehyung snaps.

It’s beyond him and Taehyung’s ulterior motives now, it’s just an instinctual reaction spurred by the way Jungkook’s looking away, awkwardly scratching his head as his bangs fall in front of his eyes. And so Taehyung grabs Fuckface’s collar, yanks him close and whispers, semi-seductively, in his ear, “Hey, so like, can you answer a question for me?”

“Um, y-yeah?” Fuckface nervously bites his lip and goes slightly pink and Taehyung really wants to punch him in the face right at this moment.

“I’d really like to know..” Taehyung’s eyes suddenly flash and he hisses, shoving Fuckface suddenly with a hand. “...what the fuck your problem is?”

“Whoa, what?” Fuckface laughs nervously and puts his hands up. “Um, chill. I’m giving you a compliment, seriously, I’m just saying, you’re, like, super amazing and stuff, and you shouldn’t be wasting your time around kids like—”

“Hey,” Taehyung cuts him off. “Uh, how about you shut the fuck up. ”

“I mean,” Fuckface snorts and jabs a thumb at Jungkook. “Do you really think he’s worth your—”

“What part of ‘shut the fuck up’ do you not understand?”

“The part where you’re saying that to me,” Fuckface sneers. “Though I should have expected it though, that your personality was trash, since you’re from a bumfuck-nowhere town. You’re lucky that you’re hot, because even if you’re completely unsophisticated, your face redeems you—”

“Hey don’t talk, d-don’t talk about him like that,” Jungkook suddenly interjects, eyes wide, voice low.

“—yo, kid. Fuck off,” Fuckface waves him off, and turns back to Taehyung, “Even though you’re like that, countrified and shit, I’m still willing to let it slide—”

“Let it slide?!” Taehyung narrows his eyes and laughs derisively. “That’s fucking rich, you’re making it sound like I want something from you.”

“You should, I’m the one with a future,” Fuckface looks incredulous. “That’s why I’m telling you to ditch this loser, I could show you a really fucking good time if you would just let me —”

“Do you, like—” Taehyung finally loses it. “—ever listen to yourself speak, or do you just vomit the first thing that surfaces in your mind? Because, for your sake, I hope it’s the second one.”

“Sorry...what?” Fuckface narrows his eyes. “You wanna say that again?”

“Sure,” Taehyung leans forward. “Or let me rephrase that, rather. Do you realize the shit coming out of your mouth right now sounds really fucking dumb. Because,” Taehyung drops the bomb and whispers. “I’m not into you. At all. Take the goddamn hint already.”
“Not into me?!” Fuckface scoffs and takes out his phone. “Who was one being fucking thirsty over text last week?!”

Taehyung laughs into his hand, “Jin.”

“Jin?!” Fuckface looks up, incredulous at first, until realization wipes the expression off of his face. He suddenly hits call on his phone, and the ring cuts through the silence until it hits voicemail.

“Heyooo, this is Jin, I’ve got places to go and people to see. So please leave your name and your favorite color after the—”

“Yes,” Taehyung snorts. “So you get to decide what’s worse for you: the fact that I wasn’t the one you sent that picture of your dick to, or the fact that I still know it’s really small.”

Fuckface begins to sputter, “I’m going to, I-I’m going to f—”

“Hey, Jungkook, let’s go,” Taehyung gets up and nods towards the door. “This is starting to be a waste of time.”

“U-um, okay,” Jungkook carefully steps around Fuckface and scurries after Taehyung.

Just before they step out the door, Fuckfaces mutters, just loud enough for them to hear, “You better watch your fucking back.”

“How scary,” Taehyung laughs bitterly. “But what are you going to do? it turns out—” he should really stop, he thinks dimly, before he reveals all of his cards, but he can’t, he’s just so fucking angry and the words run away from him before he can catch them, “—after you fucking destroyed my future, I don’t have a lot to lose anymore.”

“Oh,” Fuckface smiles, no shame detected in his expression. “So you found out about that.”

And Taehyung wasn’t sure exactly what reaction he was expecting from Fuckface, or what reaction he even wanted out of him. But he knows it wasn’t this, Fuckface snickering with zero remorse and a tinge of pride. A wave of pure anger hits him in the chest, he sees red and staggers back, biting his lip and holding the verbal punches he wants to pull, because he’s not sure he can even form intelligible sentences.

“And anyway I’m not even talking to you, because yeah, like you said, you’ve got no future,” Fuckface turns to them, eyes livid once again and points at Jungkook. “I’m talking to him.”

Jungkook shrinks back and mutters weakly, “T-try it.”

“Don’t worry,” Fuckface calls after them, and Taehyung takes that as his cue to leave, racing down the hall with Jungkook following him at his heels, voice floating after them from the practice room. “I will.”

Taehyung’s back in the studio before he knows it, flinging the door open with a bang and slumping down in his chair, hands covering his face. Namjoon looks up for a moment, confusion in his eyes and Taehyung just shakes his head prompting Namjoon to frown and look back down, a sure sign he’ll ask about it later. His thoughts are racing as twin tides of frustration and anger ebb and flow, regret over so many things hitting him in a flood, and he forgets that Jungkook’s even there until he feels a tentative pat on his back.

“Are you okay?” Jungkook asks, hovering semi-awkwardly, clutching his arms to his chest like a t-rex as if he’s unsure how of what he should do with his hands.
“Yeah, sorry,” Taehyung slams his head on his desk. “I lost my temper back there, I really shouldn’t have. Sorry you had to see that.”

“Um, no, it’s okay,” Jungkook pats him on the back again. “Um, I wanted to say thanks, actually. I really appreciated it.”

“Don’t thank me,” Taehyung mumbles. “I just fucked up everything.”

“I don’t think you—”

“I put a giant target on your back,” Taehyung stares at the ground listlessly. “Tell me how that’s not fucking everything up.”

“Honestly,” Jungkook shrugs. “I’m okay with it. I think having people gunning for me is better than being underestimated. At least, now, they expect something out of me.”

“This guy is psychotic,” Taehyung glances at Jungkook. “I don’t know if you realized that.”

“I picked up on that,” there’s determination glinting in Jungkook’s eyes. “But, he’s on the shortlist right for BTD right?”

“Yeah. Unfortunately.”

“Great,” Jungkook says, cracking his knuckles as he offers Taehyung a tentative grin. “Is it too late to ask about those private lessons? Because right now, I really wanna take him down.”

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It’s a bit late to execute the entirety of Taehyung’s plan, but on last minute notice, he’s able to scrape together a pretty impressive motley crew of instructors.

It was the whole crew from BigCube: Namjoon for rap, Hoseok for dance, Jimin for a run-down of whatever special trainee training he gets that day, Jin for...confidence, and Yoongi for evaluation practice.

Most of the lessons go smoothly. Namjoon has the patience of a saint while trying to teach Jungkook the concept of ‘flow,’ Hoseok, who loves teaching, scares Jungkook a little bit at the beginning with how excited he is, Jimin becomes fast friends and bonds with him over the idiosyncrasies of trainee life, and Jin uses his unorthodox methods to draw Jungkook out of his shell.

(The one where Jin had Jungkook yell into a mirror “Who’s handsome? I’m handsome” fifty times until he was satisfied was especially memorable. The effectiveness was questionable, but it was hilarity was worth it.)

There was one exception. Yoongi.

And of course Taehyung knew it was going to be rough the moment he broached the subject with his friend, not heeding his “Go Away” RIPNDIP rug and barging straight into his studio one
afternoon.

“Hello,” Taehyung announces his arrival.

“What do you want?” Yoongi grunts as Taehyung grins nervously from the side.

“I was wondering if you could—”

“No.”

“You don’t even know what I’m gonna ask.”

“I don’t have to,” Yoongi swivels around and narrows his eyes at Taehyung, who sticks his bottom lip out in an attempt at a pout. After a moment, Yoongi groans and waves his hand. “Fine, what?”

“Could you give Jungkook lessons? Like from an evaluation angle. It won’t take that much time, and I think he needs a lot of help with that, and since you’re on the committee, I figured…”

“So, honestly,” Yoongi twists the cap of his pen. “I’m leaning towards no. I’m already helping on the administrative side, and I don’t want to spend more time on this than I have to. But I’ll give you a chance to change my mind: what’s in it for me?”

“The altruistic feeling of helping out someone in need?”

“I donate to charity.”

“I can treat you to a meal?” Taehyung grins sheepishly as Yoongi shakes his head. “Meals?”

“I fucking hate teaching, so you’d have to compensate not only for the amount of time it takes but also for the unenjoyment I’ll be experiencing while doing it. That’d be about…” Yoongi looks up at the ceiling. “A year’s worth?”

“Uh, yeah, no,” Taehyung bites his lip and thinks for a moment. Then suddenly, an idea hits him, “It’s a giant middle finger to Fuckface’s uncle.”

“Okay?”

“Think about it, if he knocks down Fuckface, it’ll be a major blow against his uncle,” Taehyung jams his hands in his pockets. “And your part’s probably the most crucial, since we both know Jungkook’s fucking terrible at evaluations.”

Yoongi takes a sip of his coffee, and then mutters, “…I’ll think about it.”

Yoongi agrees by text an hour later, and Taehyung gets him to show up later that night. Jungkook, who was in the middle of practicing singing, gets visibly nervous when Yoongi strolls through the door with his laptop in his hand and immediately stops.

“Don’t mind me,” Yoongi slouches into a chair, and pops open his laptop. He waves a hand, “Keep going and just do your thing. I’ll give you comments as you go.”

“Oh, okay,” Jungkook lowers the mic. “Should I do anything specific?”

“Run through your evaluation set,” Yoongi buries his nose into his laptop. “That should be fine.”

“Oh, okay.” Jungkook sings a few notes, then slowly falters as Yoongi stares down at his screen. After a moment of looking awkwardly between Yoongi and Taehyung, he speaks up, “Don’t you
“need to, uh, see me?”

Yoongi looks up, “Aren’t you just singing today?”

“Well, yeah, but…”

“I have ears.”

“Oh, but, um…” Jungkook trails off as Yoongi narrows his eyes.

“I mean, I have—no offense but—real work to do,” Yoongi holds up his laptop. “So until you start doing something, uh, worthwhile, I’m going to multitask.”

Jungkook looks at Taehyung for help, who shrugs and crosses his arms.

“Alright,” Jungkook brings the mic back up to his face starts singing again.

“You’re flat,” Yoongi calls out immediately, still not looking up.

“Oh, uh, okay,” Jungkook lifts the mic back up and resumes singing.

“You’re still flat.”

“Oh,” Jungkook starts again for a third time.

“What I mean when I say you’re flat.” Yoongi looks up, incredulous. “Is fucking fix it. It’s a piece of criticism, not an fucking observation.”

“Oh, s-sorry,” Jungkook looks terrified out of his wits.

“He’s got perfect pitch, so it really bothers him,” Taehyung sighs his explanation and covers his face with his hand. “Hey Yoongi, can you tone it down a bit?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” Taehyung jerks his head towards Jungkook whose eyes are so wide it looks like he’s having a crisis. “He’s just a kid.”

“So? When he pulls this crap during evals—“

Taehyung interjects, “Come on, you guys aren’t even close to being that in his face during the real thing.”

“No, but,” Yoongi looks directly at Jungkook and raises a brow. “Do you really think the other evaluators let him off easy because he’s younger? They’re harsh as fuck. And I know this because I read their comments. So,” Yoongi turns to Jungkook. “I’ll leave it up to you, whether you want me to sugar-coat things, but what I’m doing is giving the most honest feedback you’re going to get. If I were you, as in a trainee at the very bottom of the pile—”

Taehyung protests. “Yoongi—”

“N-no, it’s fine,” Jungkook cuts in, eyes still wide. “Um, I’d rather know what people really think?”

“See,” Yoongi smirks at Taehyung. “He gets it.”

“Yeah, I prefer this actually,” Jungkook continues, “I think it’ll be super useful. Thanks, Yoongi.”
“I think I like this guy,” Yoongi puts his laptop away and leans back in his chair, waving at Jungkook, ‘Go on.’

Taehyung coughs loudly into his fist. ‘He’s brown-nosing.’

“Well,” Yoongi leans back, raising his arms and clasping his hands together behind his head. “It’s working. Hey kid, actually, you know what, if you’re willing to stay late this week, I’ll teach you how to win some hearts on the Board.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. All you gotta do is say ‘Taehyung sucks.’”

“Taehyung sucks,” Jungkook immediately says, laughing slightly, before glancing apologetically at Taehyung.

“This kid is great,” Yoongi starts cackling and Taehyung frowns, strangely offended.

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The rest of practice doesn’t go exactly smoothly, with Jungkook doing his thing and Yoongi cutting in intermediately to scold him with corrections, but by the end, Jungkook, while looking emotionally exhausted, shows marked improvement.

“You can leave, Taehyung. I wanna talk to Jungkook for a bit,” Yoongi waves a hand at Taehyung, who nods and starts packing up his stuff. Yoongi turns to Jungkook just as Taehyung steps out the door, “Do you have time tomorrow after practice?”

“Um, can we do Thursday? I was going to go watch a movie with Tae—“

“Cancel it.”

“I—“

“Cancel it.”

“But—“

“If you want my help, then cancel it. But if you’re going to half-ass this, that’s fine, but I’m out.“

“N-no, I’m not half-assing anything, it’s just that—“

“You don’t get it do you,” Yoongi rubs his face irritatedly, “Hey, so kid, so ima give it to you straight. Break it down in a way that’ll hopefully resonate with you. If you don’t want to do this, quit now. Because it's only going to get harder.”

“I want to—“
“The reality is, even as naturally talented as you are, you’re not in a good place for two major reasons: your fucking abysmal scores and the fact there are currently nineteen other guys who want a spot way more than you. While there’s nothing I can do about the latter—that involves some soul-searching shit you’re gonna have to do on your own time—I can help you fix the former.”

“I-I just—”

“Look, if you keep going the way you’re currently going, you’ll be out in a month, I guarantee it. There are some powerful people who are not your fans and you’re just throwing reasons at their feet every goddamn week to give you the axe,” Yoongi says. “Now, I know you might not care about this piece of news that much, because I’m not like Tae, as in, not a dumbfuck, and can tell you have your, um, motivations or whatever you wanna call them for sticking around—“

“No, it’s not because of, it’s not what you think—“

“Don’t even try. I have eyes and a working intuition, and—yeah, see, exactly, I’m right on the money.”

“Um, please d-don’t, um, say anything to—”

“I’m not going to,” Yoongi snorts. “Honestly, I don’t really give a shit about it.”

“Oh. Then...um—”

“You’re probably wondering what my point is then?”

“...sorta?”

“My point is this: what I care about, what he cares about and what you should really be caring about is successfully getting you into BTD and taking Fuckface down. And to do that, you need to start taking this seriously and stop fucking around. You should be keeping your eyes on the real prize, because I can tell you right now, if you make BTD—and let me remind you that’s a big fucking ‘if’ right now—that’s what’s gonna give you real leverage in winning what you really want, not this pointless—”

And Yoongi snaps the door shut.

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Jungkook becomes almost obsessive about practice after that, and starts holing himself up later and later in the practice rooms with Hoseok and Jimin (and occasionally Yoongi) until it gets to an hour where Taehyung, yawning wide, has to leave first. It strikes him just how used to heading home with Jungkook he had gotten when he rides the last subway home alone at midnight, hand clasping a pole as he distracts himself with his phone, a strange sense of something missing settling in his chest.

The improvement isn’t immediate.
Jungkook goes through two more weeks of disappointing evaluations before they begin to even glimpse progress. And Taehyung can tell it’s taking an even heavier toll on Jungkook, because nothing’s worse than continuing to decline even after you pull all the stops and give it your all. If there’s a silver lining, Taehyung learns how to quickly cheer Jungkook up, distracting him from his misery through playing Overwatch or arcade games. And even when Jungkook starts actually performing well, working through his nerves to deliver solid dances and stable singing, the judges have thick lenses crafted from preconceived notions built on months of less-than-stellar performances, and those prove to be more difficult to break through than Taehyung anticipated.

But, eventually it gets better.

The improvements start with a trickle, at first, when Jungkook gets the first real compliment in a monthly evaluation that he’s gotten in a while (“your footwork is really good,” a choreographer tells him) and he basically glows for the rest of the day, his smile is so wide when he chest bumps a recently-made trainee friend that Taehyung overhears a stylist noona whispering to her friend (“that kid over there, what’s his name? Look how happy he is, he’s absolutely adorable, what the heck”). Then the improvements arrive more quickly. As proof of improvement, Jungkook’s moved closer and closer to the center of formations for his subgroup, and by the end of the month, Yoongi tells Taehyung he’s been successfully bumped up from “marked for dismissal” to “has potential.”

And, with two months to go, it pays off.

“They moved me up to the top group,” Jungkook announces one Friday night after practice, slightly giddy as they’re heading to a ramyun shop that recently opened.

“Oh?” Taehyung raises a brow. “Congrats, you’re almost there. You made it to the Top 8, shit, that’s amazing.”

“We’ll see if I can stay,” Jungkook laughs. “And anyway, I wanted to tell you I’m supposed to start getting those special lessons starting Monday, so, uh—“

“We can stop the private ones,” Taehyung nods knowingly. “Yeah I was just about to suggest that.”

“Oh,” Jungkook’s face falls a bit. “I wasn’t gonna say that, but yeah, that makes sense.”

“What were you going to say?”

“I, uh,” Jungkook looks down at the table. “Wanted to celebrate before that, with you, and—“ Jungkook quickly adds, “—other people, since I’m not really going to have that much free time anymore.”

“We can do that when you actually make it, don’t celebrate too early,” Taehyung laughs. “I’ll pay for dinner today, that can be your reward.”

Jungkook’s eyes light up. “Okay.”

“Also,” Taehyung says as he shoves a bunch of noodles into his mouth. “Where did you wanna go next week? I was thinking an art museum.”

“Oh, um, about that,” Jungkook looks towards the side. “I want to, but, some trainees are gonna go to Jeju for the weekend, and they invited me. I was thinking about going with them. But, I can cancel—“

Oh. Jimin’s trainee clique’s thing. Right. Of course Jungkook would be invited.
“No wait, what? You should totally go,” Taehyung plasters a smile on his face as a feeling that’s an off shade of happiness swells in his chest. He quells it with a swallow, “It sounds super fun. I’ll still be here next weekend.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung waves a hand. “Don’t worry about me, I’ll figure out something.”

“Okay,” Jungkook starts eating happily. “Do you have an idea about what you’re gonna do instead?”

“Probably still gonna hit up the art museum, but don’t know yet.”

“By yourself?” Jungkook snickers.

“No,” Taehyung scoffs. “I’m not that lonely.”

“Who are you going with then?”

That was actually a good question. By habit, he had just assumed he was going to hang with Jungkook without thinking about it, Jimin was going to be on that Jeju trip too, and the rest of Taehyung’s trainees friends were all busy practicing. Namjoon, Hoseok, and Yoongi were all busy this weekend working on the debut album and he had already told Minho and a few others he wasn’t free, so that pretty much left—

“That YG model, probably? If he’s around. Speaking of which, I should probably ask,” Taehyung quickly shoots him a text. The guy responds almost instantly, and Taehyung blinks in surprise. “Oh, he is, that was fast.”

“You still talk to him?” Jungkook mutters into his noodles.

“Yeah,” Taehyung grins down at the sticker the guy sends.

When he looks back up, Jungkook’s frowning, “...I thought you didn’t like him.”

“He was better than I thought, and he just got casted onto his first drama—which, is honestly the only reason why I said yes to the second date.”

Jungkook suddenly looks up, frown creased on his face, “You went on a second date?”

“Yeah, like, two weeks ago? Been on a couple more since,” Taehyung shrugs. “But that aside, the more we, uh...hang out, the more I’m actually considering giving him an actual chance. Never thought I’d actually catch feelings for a fuckbud—”

Jungkook drops his chopsticks and they fall to the ground with a clatter.

“—I mean—friend. A-a friendbuddy? Sorry, language,” Taehyung laughs at how flustered Jungkook looks. Sheltered kids, they were really something else, “I keep forgetting how young you are.”

Jungkook stoops down to pick his utensils up, and he mumbles from the floor, “...I keep telling you, I’m really not that young. I know what a fuckbuddy is.”

“Sure, sure, I still don’t want to talk about it with you though, feels like I’m scandalizing you or something,” Taehyung glances down at his phone again and grins before flipping it around to show Jungkook, covering his smile. “Oh, jeez, look, he just wrote the worst pickup line: ‘we don’t even
have to go to a museum, since you’re a work of art.”

“Lame.”

“I know. But shit, it works. He keeps sending these, and they’re like slowly chipping away at my heart.”

“Cool.”

“He just sent another one,” Taehyung continues and reads. “Do you like raisins? Well actually that doesn’t matter, because it’s a date.” Taehyung snickers clutches his chest exaggeratedly and closes his eyes as Jungkook sits back down. “Jungkook, help, it was only supposed to be a one time thing, but I think I’m falling.”

“Gross,” Jungkook mutters.

Taehyung cracks an eye open, “Not a romantic, are you?”

“Not really, no.”

“You’ll understand when you’re older,” Taehyung sticks his tongue out.

“I won’t,” Jungkook grumbles, frown deepening. “And also, I don’t really wanna talk about your love life.”

“Sorry, sorry, I’ll stop,” Taehyung laughs and Jungkook doesn’t.

For the rest of dinner, Jungkook remains silents, eating quickly and just staring at his phone while he waits for Taehyung to finish. And they walk out to the subway station in silence, Taehyung awkwardly looking around as Jungkook remains mum. Taehyung chalks it off as typical trainee fatigue and doesn’t think much of it, spending the time planning out his Saturday date on his phone instead.

When they get to the station, slouching on the benches as they wait for their train, Jungkook finally speaks up.

“Would you have even considered him if he didn’t land that drama?”

And it’s kind of the last thing Taehyung expects Jungkook to open with, and he’s a bit taken aback, “What do you mean?”

“Would you still see that guy if he wasn’t famous?”

“I thought you didn’t want to talk about my love life.”

“I still don’t.”

“I’m confused.”

“Don’t think about it too hard.”

“You’re weird,” Taehyung laughs as Jungkook’s frown deepens, before shaking his head, “But Honestly? Probably not, no. Fuck, I sound so superficial, but the fame makes him way more attractive.”

Jungkook’s silent for a moment before he speaks again, picking at the hem of his shirt as he
mumbles, “I don’t think I wanna go to Jeju anymore.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to practice more,” Jungkook bites his lip. “And because you—”

“Because of me?” Taehyung laughs again.

“Yeah because I don’t want you to be—”

“By myself? That’s cute,” Taehyung ruffles Jungkook’s hair and Jungkook knocks his hand away. “But I’ll be fine. I have a date already, remember? Even if you don’t go it’s not like I’m going to cancel it, so don’t do it for me.”

“But—”

“Honestly I should be thanking you,” Taehyung laughs. “I probably wouldn’t have followed up if this Saturday wasn’t free.”

Jungkook stares at the ground, “Oh really.”

“It’s turning out to be really cool day too, he just said he’s going to get me into a party that Bogum’s going to be at. Shit, if this is what it’s gonna be like dating him for real, I think I might actually go for it. I didn’t realize he was this connected.”

“...Bogum is last year's news.”

“Last year?!” Taehyung gasps in mock-astonishment. “Have you been watching Reply lately?”

“Yeah.”

“Bogum is the lead!”

“I know.”

“And still not impressed?!”

“Yeah, I know what I said.”

“Your standards,” Taehyung shakes his head and snickers. “Are too damn high. Jeez, after you debut, you better make it all the way to the A-list, anything less and no one around you is going to be good enough for you. Especially when you start dating.”

“It’s not that,” Jungkook stares at the ground. “It’s really not.”

“Sure,” Taehyung snorts, disbelievingly. “Says the kid not impressed by Bogum.”

“I mean, even though I know he’s a successful actor, it’s not like I’m attracted to him, one, he’s old, and two, that’s an entirely different—”

“So who would you? Wanna date that is, you never told me,” Taehyung, as nosy as ever, watches the way Jungkook starts fidgeting with his shirt. “Hypothetically. Pick anyone. Dead or—actually wait no. Definitely alive, just alive, it’d be weird otherwise.”

Jungkook’s silent for a moment. Then, “Why do you keep asking me?”
“Just curious,” Taehyung shrugs. “I wanna know who lives up to your impossible standards.”

“They’re not impossible.” Jungkook immediately retorts. “It’s a long shot maybe, but—“

“Oh shit,” Taehyung puts a fist over his mouth and grins. “Sounds like there’s someone specific. Wait, is it that trainee chick from the other day? I heard she’s slated for the next girl group, and she’s pretty cute—“

“No,” Jungkook suddenly snaps, pure irritation twisting across his face.

Shit, sore spot much? “Sorry, sorry,” Taehyung raises his hands cautiously. “You don’t have to tell me, I’m just teasing you, I’ll stop.”

“It fine, sorry, it was my bad,” Jungkook mumbles. “I still want to practice more, anyway. I need it.”

Taehyung doesn’t pry. “Forget about practicing, one weekend’s not going to make a difference. You should bond with the trainees, they might become your band mates in the near future.”

“...alright.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung says and sympathetically pats Jungkook’s back. “And I would take every chance to mess around while you can, because I hear from Yoongi, until debut, your life is going to be hell.”

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[ fast forward—the present ]

It takes Jungkook twenty seconds, one crash, and nine swears before he successfully opens his door.

And Taehyung knows this because he hears it all, hand poised in mid knock, mildly concerned before Jungkook cracks open the door, leaning against the entryway frame and looking cool like a disaster didn’t just happen and Taehyung wasn’t aware of a thing.

“You okay?” Taehyung raises a brow.

“Yeah, just tripped over a chair,” Jungkook hobbles over to the kitchen, “so, um,” Jungkook fusses around with some cabinets as Taehyung hangs up his coat. “Do you want anything to drink?”

“Sure, what do you have?”

“Um, water and beer.” Jungkook opens his fridge a crack. Bottles clink as he pulls open a drawer with his index finger, “And, uh, more beer.”

“And what else?” Taehyung pads over and peeks over Jungkook’s shoulder. There’s little in the fridge, just skin products, a scattering of prescription medications, a dizzying array of alcohol and what looks like—
“Half a carton of banana milk,” Jungkook points and laughs. “I only opened that yesterday, if you actually wanted it. It’s probably still good.”

“Thanks, but I’ll pass,” Taehyung wrinkles his nose and backs away to lean against the counter. “Water’s good. Can I get hot water actually? If it’s not too much trouble. It’s kinda cold.”

“Yeah, sure, uh, how do I..I guess I can like microwave it or something,” Jungkook closes the fridge, and pulls out a mug. He almost drops it with a curse, fumbling as he catches it just before it hits the counter. “You can start watching something.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I know how to use a microwave,” Jungkook snorts as he fills the mug. “I’m not that detached.”

“Your fridge was pretty empty.”

“Just because I don’t cook anymore doesn’t mean I forgot how a microwave works.”

“Are you sure?”

Jungkook makes a face at him, and sarcastically gripes, as he opens the microwave, “No, you’re right, I don’t know how. You got me.”

“Sad,” Taehyung laughs and shuffles over to the couch, flops onto it and flips to a random drama. RTAOTY appears on the screen, expression over exaggerated as she talks to her love interest about her hopes and dreams.

Jungkook joins him a moment later, placing the mug on the coffee table with a caution, “It’s hot.”

“No shit.”

Jungkook looks slightly offended, “Just a warning—”

“Yeah, sorry, thanks, you’re the best,” Taehyung snickers as he leans forward and takes the mug. He’s about to take a sip when what feels like liquid from a thousand suns meets the edge of his lip and he immediately splutters, “Oh fuck, that’s hot.”

“I mean,” Jungkook regards him unsympathetically. “I just told you—”

“Yeah, yeah, you were right,” Taehyung winces. “Ouch.”

“Do you need ice?”

“No, I’ll be okay,” Taehyung flicks his eyes back to the screen as he watches RTAOTY stalking away, her love interest chasing after her. “So what do you think about her?”

“She’s fine,” Jungkook glances at Taehyung. “Why?”

“I dunno,” Taehyung averts his gaze. “She’s, like, super into you.”

“Is she? I couldn’t tell.”

“At least from what I saw,” Taehyung grabs a pillow and hides his frown in it.

“Oh,” Jungkook grins. Then adds, raising a brow, “You jealous?”
“What?” Taehyung hugs a pillow against his chest. “No.”

“You seem like you are.”

“I’m not,” Taehyung throws the pillow at Jungkook’s face and he catches it easily.

“Really?” Jungkook lifts a brow again.

“Really.” Taehyung grabs another pillow and flings it at him.

“Okay,” Jungkook says, catching the second one while eyeing him. “Because...she is kind of cute.” Taehyung feels a flash of annoyance, “So you did think she was cute.”

“Well, yeah, I mean, look at her.”

“I am.”

“Then don’t you agree?”

“No comment.”

“No comment? It’s yes or no question. One that I would personally answer with—“

Taehyung suddenly gets up and straddles Jungkook, curling his fingers into his collar and blocking his view of the TV.

“Oh, um, hello.” Jungkook leans back and hesitates before tentatively looping his arms around Taehyung’s waist.

“How about you don’t talk about her like that,” Taehyung breathes, “When I’m right here. It’s kinda fucking annoying.”

“You started it,” Jungkook’s eyes flick over Taehyung’s shoulder.

Taehyung grips Jungkook’s collar a little harder, “And now I’m telling you to stop.”

“What are you going to do about it?” Jungkook leans forward, eyes darting down towards Taehyung’s lips.

“I’ll make you stop.”

“How?”

“I just will.”

“How? Because she’s—“

“Hey,” Taehyung tugs on Jungkook’s collar and whispers with fake-menace, “What did I just say?”

“Wasn’t listening,” Jungkook blinks up at Taehyung innocently, although his spreading smirk immediately exposes his facade. “But she’s—”

And that’s when Taehyung kisses him hard enough to shut him up, picking up where they last left off, and accelerating things past that as he slips wandering hands under Jungkook’s shirt.
“Whoa, someone’s excited,” Jungkook pulls back to murmur.

“Yeah,” to deflect his embarrassment Taehyung goes on the defense and deliberately shifts on Jungkook’s lap. “You.”

“Shit,” Jungkook blinks and adjusts his pants. “Um, yeah, guilty.”

“I could, um,” Taehyung diverts his gaze to the upholstery just to the right of Jungkook’s eyes. “…I could take care of that for you.”

“Take care?” Jungkook’s eyes widen, “What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean.”

“Do I?”

“Yeah.”

“I actually don’t. Because I’m slow,” the glint in Jungkook’s eye gives it away. “Spell it out for me.”

And Taehyung’s rolling his eyes as he untangles himself from Jungkook, heart pounding as he tries to keep a facade of calm. He nudges one of Jungkook’s legs with his own and waves a dismissive hand as he gets on his knees.

“Oh. Jungkook says without any real surprise.

“Yeah so hurry up,” Taehyung nudges at Jungkook’s knee.

“Um,” Jungkook cracks his legs open, suddenly slightly abashed, “You don’t have to—“

“So,” Taehyung pauses. “You don’t want me to?”

“No, no, trust me, I-I do, but, um, whoa—“ Jungkook’s eyes widen as Taehyung reaches over and yanks open his zipper. “Okay.”

And with a timely thump of his heart, Taehyung suspends rationale for a moment and just goes for it, removing the last barriers, closing his eyes and going down, taking in the taste of heat and salinity as Jungkook mumbles incoherent words in a lightly strangled voice in the background and carefully combs Taehyung’s bangs out of his eyes and clutches them with a gentle grip.

He knows he’s getting close when Jungkook goes quiet, the grip of the hand woven through his hair growing tighter, and so he keeps up the rhythm, and is slightly unprepared for when Jungkook to suddenly speaks, eyes dark, voice low, grip tight.

“Wanna move?” Jungkook jerks his head towards what’s probably his room.

“Yeah,” Taehyung lifts his head and breathes. “Sure.”

And he doesn’t know quite how they make it there successfully, a tangle of lips and limbs that somehow finds their way to their goal, Taehyung’s back hitting the sheets as Jungkook pauses for a moment to yank his shirt off over his head, tossing it to the side where it ends up draping itself over a row of neatly lined books and other assorted paper-based things standing on a shelf, an old, crinkled manila envelope peeking out just under the shirt’s sleeve.

Then they’re back at it again, getting drunk off each other, working each other up into a frenzy as pieces of clothing incrementally fall to the wayside.
Jungkook’s peppering a series of butterfly kisses up his chest when Taehyung sees it, innocently minding its own business on Jungkook’s upper arm, a small snicker escaping as he tries to mute it with his hand to save the mood.

Jungkook murmurs into Taehyung’s collarbone, “Someone’s ticklish.”

Taehyung shakes his head, takes another glance down at Jungkook’s arm, snickers again, and tells a white lie, “No, um, I just thought of something funny.”

“Oh,” Jungkook works his way up to Taehyung’s neck and Taehyung shivers, his fingers digging into Jungkook’s back. “Wanna let me in on the joke?”

“Um,” Taehyung looks for a third time at Jungkook’s arm, and finally lets a true laugh explode, curling to his side with his hand over his face.

“What’s so funny?” Jungkook, looking amused, lifts himself up slightly and looks down at Taehyung expectantly.

“What the fuck is that,” Taehyung points to what’s got to be the ugliest tattoo he’s ever seen, a thin-line faded piece of ink that vaguely looked like what would happen if a bird got shitfaced and attempted to sketch a self-portrait while blindfolded.

“Wait what?” Jungkook’s expression morphs into confusion as he looks down at his arm and covers it slightly defensively. “I mean, I couldn’t make it to the gym this week—”

“No, no, no, your arm is fine,” Taehyung peels Jungkook’s fingers away from his bicep and taps the tattoo. “That. What the fuck is that. Has it always been there?”

“Oh,” Jungkook lets his hand fall and looks down at his arm. “Yeah. Since I was, what, 16?”

“Really?” Taehyung sits up, sheets rustling as he takes a closer look. “I guess it would be above most of your sleeves.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook shrugs. “And when it isn’t, they just cover it with a shitton of foundation.”

“What is it?” Taehyung tilts his head as he takes a finger and pokes Jungkook’s bicep.

“A seagull,” Jungkook says, regret threading itself across his face. “Supposedly.”

“Where did you get it?” Taehyung marvels at the workmanship. “More importantly, why did you pay for it? Who designed it? What the fuck, I have so many questions.”

“Um, a friend of a friend bought a tattoo gun and brought it to a party to try it out. And I was drunk enough to think letting him freehand something was a good idea. And yeah,” Jungkook points at his arm, lips thinned in a line. “This is the result.”

“What don’t you just get it removed?” Taehyung snickers again. “Sorry, I’m just so—like—what even is that?”

Jungkook shrugs, “Reminder of simpler times, good party story, it’s funny, something along those lines.”

“Oh,” Taehyung flops back down onto the pillow, regarding Jungkook half-liddedly through his bangs as he reaches up and trails fingers down Jungkook’s chest. Then he lets out a shitty giggle. “That’s cute of you.”
A look flashes across Jungkook’s face, and when Taehyung blinks it’s gone, “Is that a good thing?”

“Sure,” Taehyung flicks the underside of Jungkook’s chin. “I appreciate it.”

Jungkook blinks, “I thought you said you didn’t like cute before.”

“What?” Taehyung’s brows furrow in amusement, “When did I say that?”

“Hmm,” Jungkook leans down and resumes working on Taehyung’s neck. He mutters unconvincingly after a bit, breath warm against Taehyung’s ear, “Don’t remember. It might have been someone else.”

Taehyung’s just about to retort when Jungkook tugs his waistband down with a finger. And heart revving in anticipation, he immediately decides closing his eyes and capturing Jungkook’s lips is a much better use of his time than investigating instead.

It’s mouth action first, a gripped hand second, then a bottle fished out of a drawer, followed by hesitation, a nod, and coaxing fingers, layered teasing until Jungkook’s got Taehyung propped properly on the edge.

Then they lock eyes and Jungkook, poised and ready, pauses, genuine question in his eyes as they dart back and forth in their search for an answer, which is enduring but dumb in Taehyung’s opinion, because obviously, wound up and sprawled out like this, all Taehyung’s thinking, rather, all he’s capable of thinking is—

“What are you doing? Don’t stop,” Taehyung breathes hard, bangs spilled over his eyes, gazing up at Jungkook with his heart thumping in his ears. He’s in a haze and has kind of got a one-track mind right now and he wants—no—needs Jungkook to, just, just, “Just fucking go—” and, like that, Jungkook’s got Taehyung’s back arching, brows furrowing, fingers scrabbling at the pillow behind him, “Oh fuck—”

And their prior conversation completely slips out of his thoughts a little later, but honestly, head thrown back, rocking against the mattress, gasps falling from his mouth in rhythm, Taehyung isn’t really in the best position to be thinking about much else at all.

Chapter End Notes

what i had in mind for jk’s S I C K T A T™️ [x]

also ayy lmao, i felt like i was baiting ppl for the longest time, but to my defense, this fic
at one point was only supposed to be like 20k and this part originally was supposed to show up like 10 chps ago. also sorry if it was awkward, this fic marks the first and subsequently the last fic i'll be writing something M-rated (or above) lmFAO learned it's not rly my thing

also sorry, i haven't responded to some comments on the last chp cuz i got really busy!! but i'll get to them soon ;;;;;; it was interviews and also i got really addicted to fornite lmao lmao
Against his better judgement, Taehyung stays the night.

He honestly does consider leaving, for a moment, basking in the afterglow when he’s tangled in the sheets, listening to Jungkook belt the greatest hits from J-Bieb’s discography in the shower, but it’s just an impossible task because burritoed in Jungkook’s comforter he just feels so warm, and the way Jungkook smiles at him when he emerges from the bathroom minutes later makes him feel even warmer, and the way he wraps himself around Jungkook like he’s a pillow makes him feel the warmest he’s possibly ever been.

See, this is his first mistake, he get complacent and forgets things, like the time, history, and just how hungry he gets in the morning, only to remember the last when the morning graces him with the natural splendor of dawn by lovingly imparting him with a sunbeam that finds the only crack in the curtains and nails him straight in the fucking eye, and he wakes up blind, bleary and starving.

So he rolls off of a lightly-snoring Jungkook, picks up the nearest shirt off the floor, bundles up and ambles outside to the nearest Burger King, debating a bit if he should get some for Jungkook too before doubling his order.

It’s honestly a no brainer, because worst case? More food for him.

Then he’s back before he knows it, lazily leaning against the cool of the granite countertop of the island in Jungkook’s kitchen, texting Jimin with one hand and shoving breakfast into his face with the other when the door to the bedroom opens with a furious bang and Jungkook emerges, eyes cast downwards, hair rumpled into an unruly nest on his head and a deep-set frown stamped across his face.

“Um, morning?” Taehyung lifts a hand and a brow. “You okay?”

“Whoa,” Jungkook whips towards him in shock, blinks a couple of times before the frown is replaced with a sleepy smile. He shakes his head as he yawns, “Yeah. I’m good. Sorry. Didn’t think you were still here.”

“Not a morning person?”

“Not on weekends.”
“I can relate, it kinda catches up to you,” Taehyung points his phone at the bag of food. “Are you hungry?”

“Depends. What is it?” Jungkook ambles over and peers into the bag, finger hooking the edge down.

“Burger King.”

“I’m good,” Jungkook wrinkles his nose.

Taehyung stares Jungkook down as he takes an exaggerated bite, and mumbles attractively through a mouthful of chewed food. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah. As much as you’re selling it right now, I think I’ll pass.”

“But it’s fmucking goo—oh shit,” he immediately looks down as a chunk of sandwich falls out of his mouth and onto the counter. He starts laughing as he pops it back into his mouth, “Oops.”

When he glances back up, Jungkook’s staring straight at him, head slumped on his hand and chuckling with the warmest expression Taehyung’s ever seen directed at him in his life.

“What are you staring at?” Taehyung says, suddenly self-conscious. He stands up straight, cheeks beginning to heat up. “Is there something on my face?”

“No,” Jungkook says as he stands up and stretches. “It’s just…”

“Yeah?”

“I’m just really happy.”

And before Taehyung can react, Jungkook ducks inside his room.

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They become insatiable.

It’s probably the result of months of pent-up tension finally getting a chance to unwind, and even though Taehyung knows he should be more cautious, the danger, in some ways, in many ways, makes it even more exciting.

Taehyung stays over maybe one or two times more, but because of late work nights and schedule conflicts, they start using Taehyung’s studio a lot as a meeting point, more and more, since it’s a convenient place to be with soundproofing and a lock.

It’s strange in hindsight how normal it becomes, how when they’re alone in a locked room for more than half an hour, things quickly escalate. Like, he’ll be working on the bridge of Twice Pink’s track, Jungkook will shove his hand down his pants, he’ll goad Jungkook with smirk and a “it’ll take more than that,” and pretty soon it devolves into a game where he tries to finish his task before Jungkook finishes him. Yeah, Taehyung won’t admit it, but Jungkook almost wins because Taehyung might kinda have a huge thing for the way music’s next big thing looks crouched between his legs as he works Taehyung with his mouth.

And since he knows that he’ll inevitably take the L anyway, Taehyung decides to just finish things
on the couch.

“Just a warning, I’ve only got,” Taehyung, a moment from pinning Jungkook down, pauses and squints at his watch. “Ten minutes.”

“Um, don’t start something you can’t finish,” Jungkook props himself up on his elbows as he watches Taehyung fish around in a drawer. “I swear, if you blueball me—”

“That’s more than enough time,” Taehyung scoffs as he finds the bottle he needs.

“A bit dicey,” Jungkook retorts skeptically. “History’s not exactly on your side.”

“What are you trying to say?” Taehyung leans over Jungkook, eyes narrowed as he yanks down Jungkook’s waistband. “Are you doubting me?”

“I’m telling you to get started,” Jungkook raises his brows. “Since it would appear you don’t have a lot of—s-shit—” Jungkook swears, back arching as Taehyung shuts him up with a finger, and then two. “—a warning—would—have been—nice—”

Taehyung himself finishes in 8 and coaxes an indignant Jungkook through it in just shy of 10, so close to almost failing that Jungkook smacks into Jimin on his way out, shirt haphazardly tucked in his jeans, hair a complete mess, expression dazed, face still flushed.

“M’bad,” Jungkook flinches from the contact, hood pulled over his head and hands jammed in his pockets.

“Um, hey?” Jimin staggers a bit.

“Wat’s poppin’,” Jungkook nods before rushing out the door.

“Um,” Jimin points over his shoulder. “What was that about?”

“Nothing,” Taehyung wipes the loopy grin off his face as soon as he notices the box of fallen protection and quickly kicks it under his desk.

“Alright,” Jimin dumps his bag near the couch and proceeds to shimmy past the coffee table towards the couch.

“Um,” Taehyung winces. “I wouldn’t...uh...sit there.”

“Why?” Jimin freezes, awkwardly holding his hands up in the air. His eyes narrow, “What’s wrong with it?”

“Um,” Taehyung grimaces.

It takes Jimin a second before realization slaps him in the face and he stands up like he’s been shot, “No.”

“No?”

“No.”

“Yes?” Taehyung sheepishly eeks out. “Maybe?”

“That’s so—no,” Jimin twists around and stares at the seat of his pants like he’s trying to sanitize it with his eyes before scrutinizing the couch. “You guys. No. I can’t, that’s just, like...no. No. No.
Fucking—no, it is two in the fucking afternoon—"

It’s funny, much to Jimin’s displeasure, because they end up having that conversation more than once.

It goes the other way too, like Jungkook will be playing games, and Taehyung will suggestively sit on him until Jungkook shifts to conceal his growing problem, and then said suddenly Jungkook’s kissing his neck, suddenly Jungkook’s working magic with his fingers, suddenly the protection’s ripped out of the box in the third drawer to the right of the paperclips and behind the post-its (“the blue ones, no no no not those, the blue ones, hurry up dumbass”) and suddenly Jungkook’s got Taehyung bent over the desk, hitting it just right with enough enthusiasm for the framed picture of his family’s dog to fall face-down with a clatter (which honestly, was for the better, it was getting weird to look at), while he’s serenading Taehyung something stupid, like his Inkigayo Traffic Safety song at the worst times.

“Ecodrive~ ♪

“What?” Taehyung’s eyes snap open. “The fuck—are you—singing?”

“Don’t accelerate~ ♪” Jungkook breathes into his ear. “For safe traffic~ ♪”

“Wait—is that,” Taehyung turns to glare at Jungkook, fingers grasping at the top of the desk as he tries to stuff his protests in between his gasps. “Oh,?” His brows furrowing as he rides out a particularly strong wave before he snaps. “Is that your fucking traffic safety song—oh, fuck, shit, right there —”

“Make sure~ ♪” Jungkook serenades him as he leans forward and doles out the finishing moves from two fronts. “To. Respect. Traffic. Safety~ ♪”

And curling over the table (“oh fuck, fuck, fuck”), Taehyung unravels in his arms.

“Jungkook what the fuck,” Taehyung, shaky from the finish, tries to kick Jungkook in the balls as the piece of shit himself cackles away but misses and hits him in the shin instead. He quickly begins pulling his clothes back on, and checks the vicinities for any evidence, reasonably sure he has a meeting with Hoseok in this very room in ten minutes (maybe out of good conscience, he should move it to Hoseok’s office), before chucking Jungkook’s boxers at his stupid face, “The last thing I’ve ever wanted to do was jizz to a fucking traffic safety song—oh my god, stop laughing you fucktard—”

Jungkook grabs him by the wrist, pulls him in close and cuts him off with a kiss.

And then he whispers seductively against Taehyung’s lips, “Ecodrive~”

Taehyung responds in kind by stomping on his foot.

Pretty much a typical Tuesday afternoon.

And of course there’s moments like these, where it’s just normal vanilla shit, like they’re both getting into it, and Taehyung’s got his arms looped around Jungkook’s neck, going at his own pace, watching the way Jungkook’s watching him with half-lidded eyes like he’s a show in the darkness. It really gets him, the way the sensation is making him lose his mind, the way Jungkook’s hands rest tentatively on his waist, the way Jungkook moves in a way that clearly says he’s feeling this too, the way Jungkook murmurs dirty talk against his lips.

(“Fuck—does that feel good? Because it looks like you’re having a lot of fun.”)
Um, Taehyung would really like to know exactly how he was supposed to answer that, because it was so, just so fucking—nevermind, he thinks he buries his face into the crook of Jungkook’s neck to hide his face in embarrassment.)

And in no time Taehyung can feel it start to build, and in no time things heat up as they chase the heat, and in no time they’re both pushed over the edge, hearts hammering in their chests as Jungkook closes his eyes and kisses him through the shudders.

“Goddamn,” Jungkook says, staring up at Taehyung, punchdrunk on something dangerous.

And Taehyung doesn’t really know what he was expecting, like maybe something more along the lines of ‘that was so good,’ or ‘touchdown’ or ‘is this chair from ikea’ but certainly not—

“I’m so in love with you.”

It’s strange, it’s six simple words, but their weight hits Taehyung with the force of a sledgehammer. It’s a familiar mix of euphoria with a big helping of caution, exploding straight in his chest, and sending his heart into overdrive.

Because, yeah, as heart-warming as it is, he’s heard the exact same promise before.

So, at a bit of a loss, he pretends he doesn’t hear Jungkook, changes the subject and just relishes in the high.

And that’s his second mistake, he thinks that’s the end of that.

+++ 

The paranoia doesn’t start until Wednesday.

By all accounts, the day itself starts out just fine. Taehyung lets Jungkook actually hold his hand for the first time, in the wee hours at a housewarming for Namjoon’s new place, when they’re watching a movie and between the blanket and a cushion, Jungkook’s fingers find his.

That’s probably what really sets it all in motion, that in some, wordless degenerate millennial fashion, Taehyung’s aware that he’s basically said yes to something concrete with Jungkook and ushered in a strange honeymoon period whose opening ceremony kicks off with a literal bang an hour later, when they’re making their way towards his car, and Jungkook, in the middle of lambasting the movie for its gaping plot holes and walks straight into a pole hard enough to leave a purpling bruise.

It’s so damn funny, at least after Taehyung made sure Jungkook hadn’t concussed, because of how stupid it is, how loud the metals rings, how absurdly stubborn Jungkook gets while insisting it doesn’t hurt, and as they’re waiting for the elevator, on their way back to Namjoon’s for an ice pack, Taehyung keeps sneaking peeks at the pole-shaped swelling and bursts into snickers as Jungkook intermittently sighs, gingerly prodding his face with his fingers.

“Jin is going to kill me,” Jungkook complains, inspecting it in the brushed-nickel reflection of the elevator doors.

“Probably,” Taehyung knocks Jungkook’s hand away. “Hey, stop touching it, you’re just going to make it worse.”
“Fine,” Jungkook sticks his tongue out, “By the way, this your fault, make it up to me.”

Taehyung snorts, “How’s it my fault?”

Jungkook swings his head toward Taehyung, expression deadly serious, and flicks his eyes in a quick once-over, “It’s because you look so damn good. I didn’t see the pole because I couldn’t take my eyes off of you.”

“Ugh,” Taehyung buries his face in his hands as Jungkook begins laughing his fucking head off like he’s the funniest person in the world. “That’s…”


“No, ‘much,’ that’s too fucking much.”

“I’m still gonna have to make it up to me.”

“How?”

Jungkook suddenly holds out his hand, palm-side up.

Taehyung’s eyes flick from Jungkook’s hand to his face, “Okay?”

Jungkook smiles and wiggles his fingers insistently.

“Words. You have them, so use them,” Taehyung looks down at his hand again, this time derisively, kinda hoping Jungkook does and kinda hoping he doesn’t.

Jungkook grins wider, “Hold my hand.”

Taehyung makes a face, huffs, and rolls his eyes, but loosely laces their fingers together anyway, heart thrumming in his chest.

They’re quiet for a moment, watching the numbers on the panel decrease as the seconds tick by. A sleek foreign car that undoubtedly belongs to one of Namjoon’s A-List neighbors glides past in the garage, tires squeaking over pavement as the reflection of the lights slip over the paint, and before Taehyung can even consider breaking their hold, Jungkook squeezes his hand tighter instead.

“Hey, so,” Jungkook breaks the silence, nervously tapping his leg with his fingers. “Random question, and, no pressure to give me an answer now, but but a-are you—um…”

“But what?” Taehyung raises a brow.

“How do I…” Jungkook looks to the side and scratches his face. “Do you have Christmas p-plans already?”

And for once, Taehyung catches the implication right away.

Because, right, Christmas. A major couple’s holiday. Okay. This was probably going exactly where Taehyung thinks it’s going.

“Um,” Taehyung plays coy anyway, bites his lip and starts checking out the laces on his shoes, his face getting warm. “Why?”

“Would you, um,” Jungkook looks down and rakes a pink through his bangs. “Would you wanna do
something that day—like, only if you’re free of course—”

And of course the elevator door opens then, merrily chiming a warning before revealing its cargo of their crew.

They all notice even though no one comments, verbally anyway—of course Jimin notices right away, smiling without saying anything, shaking his head in silent laughter as he covers his face with the ice pack they came down to deliver to Jungkook, Namjoon’s eyes flick down and instantly back up to Taehyung as his brows quirk with the slightest hint of amusement, Yoongi just shakes his head, Hoseok beams.

And Jin, well, he looks mildly happy but mostly resigned, expression slipping into a professional mode as if he’s mentally calculating some next moves, before he takes the ice pack from Jimin.

“Sorry, I wasn’t watching where I was going.” Jungkook winces, eye squeezing shut, nose scrunching as Jin presses the pack to his face.

“It’s fine. We’ll try to cover it up.” Jin chides, blinking as he brushes Jungkook’s bangs out of the way. “But it’d be nice if you could try and be a little more careful. This kind of recklessness is going to catch up to you one day.”

And Taehyung knows he’s not just talking about the bruise.

It’s funny, really, how that statement puts Taehyung on edge perhaps more than he’s ever been, and yet still, later, when they finally make it to Jungkook’s car and they’re sitting strapped into their seats as Jungkook figures out navigation, Taehyung says ‘yes’ when Jungkook asks him, again, about Christmas, and then ‘yes’ once again when Jungkook, all smiles, asks him to stay over.

It’s easy for him to reconcile why he does it when Jungkook captures his lips the moment the moment his apartment door shuts behind him, when there’s nothing between them but sheets and skin and when Jungkook’s got Taehyung seeing stars while spilling a mix of expletives and his name from his lips.

It’s always in the morning when his decisions become tougher to face, when he starts having major doubts again, particularly this one, though for a slightly different reason than just because of clarity in the AM, when he wakes up to his ringtone and the bleary and an thoroughly unamused expression from a recently roused Jungkook, and quickly answers his phone without checking the ID.

“He-hello?” Taehyung sits up as Jungkook sleepily rolls to his edge of the bed, pulling the comforter over the bed and curling into a ball.

There’s no response, and Taehyung waits a moment before he tries again, “Um, hello?”

“Hey.” a distorted voice suddenly cuts over the line. “Stay away from Jungkook if you know what’s best for you, you fucker.”

And then the line goes dead, a phone number ending in 3444 greeting him on his screen when he whips his cellphone off his ear.

Maybe it was the shock of the level of unexpectedness, or maybe it was fuzziness from waking up, but it doesn’t really set in for Taehyung at the moment, and he’s blinking, mind spinning and stuttering over how he should react when Jungkook emerges from his cocoon and squints at Taehyung, “who was that?”

“A s-solicitor,” Taehyung lies as he gets out of bed.

“Yeah,” Taehyung shakes his head to dispel the unease. “It does.”

+++ 

Fuckboi One

3:08AM
Tae
Have I evr told u
How I mss u
So fckign
Mch?

read 4:08AM

8:30AM
O shit
Sry, ignore that
I got rly fucked up last night

10:30AM
Haha happens
Don’t worry about it

This is so awk
Fuuuuck
Haha
But what’s up
It’s been a minute

Yep haha
How have you been?            
Good
You?

Same
Oh btw I saw an ad for your new album today
Congrats!
That’s crazy

Loool It’s just a single
But ty ty

Seriously proud of you

Haha ty again

Np lololol
Btw
I was thinking about you the other day
We should catch up

Haha

Seriously
Are you free sometime this week?
We should get a drink or something

read 10:42AM

11:01AM
Sure

Sweet
What day?

Tomorrow?

Sounds great

11:05AM

Actually, can I bring a friend?
Forgot I was supposed to hang out with him

O
Haha
We could just do another day

Other conflicts are work-related
Can’t move them, sry

Ah
Yeah sure then

Cool

Who is it?
If you don’t mind me asking

Jungkook?
Idk if you know him
O shiet
The idol?

Who hasn’t heard of him
Isn’t he like the next big thing

But yeah, ofc
I wanna meet him

Also
My costar is kinda obsessed with him
Is it okay if I invite her too?
Make it an actual group thing
She’d kill me if I didn’t ask

Sure lol why not

Cool, lemme ask her

1:40PM

She’s down
Haha
Shit
I’ve literally never heard someone scream so loud

Yikes
LOL
Sorry
In advance
She’s a lot of fun, I promise

Lol
I’m sure she is

Chapter End Notes

lmao again, sorry for the delay, i ended up breaking the chapter into two because i'm allergic to plot and i’m still trying to figure out some of the logic + find time to write it. also still gotta answer some of the comments from last chp. i read them and they were all really lovely and thank you so much, i'll get to them soon!! <3 <3

also holy fuq the amount of tk and general bts shit in the last month has been, wow, jeez, i am w i n d e d
Because the Internet

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

part i: If I ever feel better

someday this mess will make me laugh
i can't wait, i can't wait, i can't wait
-phoenix
if i ever feel better

[fan-talk] Doesn’t TAE look a lot like V?

TAE’s concept photos just got released, and I think he looks a lot like V!!

Just look at these pictures side by side. I can’t find a picture with the top half of V’s face (I don’t think he ever posted one? But it’s harder to find photos now since his insta’s been deleted for years...) so I know it might be a stretch but their body profiles seriously look so similar, like even the birthmarks on their faces

[images attached]

post reaction
[+1,209, -102]

1. Who’s V?
   1. A popular Instagram model who disappeared years ago after a scandal
      1. I thought netizens found out he was a escort too or something
      1. That was a witch hunt accusation from that one guy’s fangirls
      1. No smoke without fir
      1. You and I both know fans will set fires for their own agenda
2. That’s a name i haven’t heard in a really long time, wow, crazy if true. I remember there being rumors he worked in the entertainment industry, maybe there was truth behind them
3. They do look really alike, wow, if TAE’s really V then...good luck to him ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ

-Phoenix

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-Phoenix
he’s got two scandals to deal with before debut
4. Didn’t V date that actor guy who’s getting really big these days
   1. Date? I guess, if that’s what kids are calling getting railed these days
   2. YG entertainment never confirmed it
      1. YG never confirms anything
   3. Ah, yes, the infamous selca was daebak
      1. “Practicing first aid on a friend” ♪♫♩♫♩♫♩ ♪♫♩♫♩♫♩ legendary. how stupid did they think we were
   5. Wow the resemblance is undeniable. hk_info_2’s been on fire recently

[fan-talk] I think Jungkook is dating!!

He’s shining so brightly these days + some of his mannerisms are changing. Like, he never used to never wear bright colors, but look at this Gucci shirt he wore to the airport last week, ahha, it totally looks like someone else dressed him.

And look at this GIF where he froze last night in the background when the hosts were talking about Christmas dates on Inkigayo + Yugyeom/BamBam laughing and glancing at him

[GIF attached]

Fucking cute ahha. I hope he’s happy, and his SO is a pretty person inside and out because pretty people should date pretty people!!!

{__(__)}/
(•▽•)
/ > ♥

post reaction
[+2,209, -902]

1. What he does in his own time is his own business, as long as he doesn’t shove it in my face with a lovestagram or something, I don’t really give a fuck about what his personal life is like. I just wanna fangirl in peace.
2. My friend is a trainee at BigCube and she says it’s an open secret it’s TAE
   1. ⊱♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♫♩♫♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩♩♫♩♩anmar
4. Fuck [NUMERIC_SYMBOL] if this is true i don’t know what I would do. I hope jk has the sense to not date an iljin
3. I think this is just a coincidence [NUMERIC_SYMBOL] your evidence is so weak what the fuck, that GIF is like 6 pixels, you can barely tell it’s JK much less what he’s doing. Aigoo I don’t care if he dates but don’t make him trend for delusional shit like this
4. Wow, look at all these fans pretending to be cool about it~ Remind me in month when he gets exposed to check out how you all are dealing with this [NUMERIC_SYMBOL] I’ll be here with the popcorn
5. All this recent idol dating news just reminds me how I’m going to be a motae solo for the rest of my life [NUMERIC_SYMBOL] boys where are you, I wanna date tooooo

[fan-talk] Proof Jungkook and TAE must be dating

1. They have a few couple items, like this T-shirt from that one time some fans saw TAE at Burger King. Jungkook’s been seen in that shirt before in some practice videos. Also their cars are the same [NUMERIC_SYMBOL] celebrity couples are something else. [images attached]
2. They hang out together a lot [images attached]
3. They make the same hand gestures [images attached]
4. Jungkook went to Milan in October and had a Balenciaga bag (the shirt is sticking out in the corner), and TAE was wearing a balenciaga shirt with that same pattern in November [images attached]
5. Announcer mentions her new obsession is TAE, look at JK’s face so funny [images attached]
6. Taehyung and Jungkook were together at chimaek place and a bunch of soft photos were taken [images attached]
7. Okay this is not really evidence, but kyah~ it was too cute not to share. Walking down a sidewalk, TAE slipped on some ice and fell and was just lying there. Then Jungkook threw snow onto him instead of helping him up, it was so cute. kyah~ they look like they’re having so much fun. [video attached]

post reaction
 [+680, -302]

COMMENTS (Sorted By: Top)

1. Stupid and a stretch, especially the car [NUMERIC_SYMBOL] wtf is this
2. This level of coincidence makes it undeniable now, I thought JK would be more careful, especially since he’s about to hit daebak. And with this iljin of all people? Shitty taste, that’s all I can say, I’m so disappointed
   1. Sigh, I’m a fan of JK and I thought he would be different, but I guess it’s always looks > personality on the end. It’s like, out of everyone, why choose TAE?
3. Kyah~~ at the chimaek pictures. You get the sense they really like each other. And let’s be honest, they do match very well 🤗

4. If he’s dating TAE because of these things, then Jungkook must be dating Suga too 🫅 направленное место, направленное место, направленное место. look here he is buying Gucci and here is Suga wearing some Gucci and here’s them walking outside together, here’s Jungkook hanging out in Suga’s studio, etc, this is how delusional this post sounds

1. Honestly I would be more okay with him dating Suga than TAE though

5. Wow isn’t TAE also V or something? That fox sure knows how to get around. Fangirls, be careful none of your oppas are safe now 🫅 направленное место, направленное место, направленное место, they tell you they’re not dating in interviews but they’re really just spending your money on dates behind your back

1. He’s V???
   1. Haven’t you seen: [link]
   2. Shit 🫅 направленное место, направленное место, daebak, he really gets around

2. No, we knew something was up since the Cozy Conversations promotions, we’re not blind. Most fans don’t care or are really happy for him, the unhappy ones are in the minority.
   1. Well then your minority is f*cking loud then 🫅 направленное место, направленное место, check the cesspool comments at the bottom, they’re losing their shit
   2. Wait until the fansites start closing and the saesangs start releasing the dirt and creating controversies, that’s when you’ll see how cool fans actually are about it

**COMMENTS (Sorted By: Controversial)**

1. [vote score too low, comment hidden] F*ck ahha TAE is like a sentient *** box for rising stars in the big d*ck club. If you search up ‘slut’ in the dictionary it would just be a picture of his face. He’s always all over Jimin, Bogum, Minho, those actors, and that trainee, Jihoon recently, disgusting~~~ I’m glad he’s not friends with my bias~~~
   1. By your logic, your bias probably has a tiny d*ck then 🫅 направленное место, направленное место
   2. Too far, get a fucking life you crazy bitch
   3. V was only caught with one guy, it was unconfirmed, and it’s just speculation that TAE is V. Stop spreading lies.

2. [vote score too low, comment hidden] I wonder if JK can even keep TAE satisfied 🫅 направленное место, his thing isn’t nearly as big as TAE’s ex’s, he’s just gonna leave JK as soon as he finds an idol with a bigger d*ck ahha
   1. How the fuck would you even know
   1. [img][img]
   2. Ew, fuck, why are you zooming in on their crotch? Isn’t this sexual harassment? You guys are honestly as bad as those hannams from the male communities who harass female idols with those fancams zoomed in on their butts and chest
   1. It’s part of their job and you can’t sexually harass a guy
   2. What kind of backward thinking is this

2. [vote score too low, comment hidden] Probably when they fuck, tae’s just like “did you even start” 🫅 направленное место

3. [score too low, comment hidden] wasn’t v into 50-shades-level shit? Didn’t think jk would be into freaky shit in bed
   1. Judge for yourself, here’s the picture [img]
   2. People think this is bdsm? Clearly you guys are virgins, sad

4. [score too low, comment hidden] thank you hk_info_2, you always pull through

5. [flagged] How about you kill yourself, OP-yah?
6. [flagged] that ugly cockslut better not get within a 100m radius of our Jungkookie or I will slit his throat and then take a…[post censored for: distressing content]
   1. Reported
   2. What the actual fuck
   3. ????????? I feel so bad for TAE holy shit, I’m his fan and even though they’re cute, I think they really shouldn’t date only because it’s not worth it if he has to deal with crazy bitches like you
   4. You know they can track you by your SSN why would you even say something like this?????
   5. Get help
   6. Why is BigCube staying silent?? These are actual threats, this crosses a major line, they need to do something

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[fan-talk] Jungkook’s usage of “Tiger”

We all know that he refers to himself as a rabbit, and I think when he uses tiger (either the emoji or the word), it refers to TAE? Some people noticed that it pops up from time to time on his stuff.

“Tiger” is actually a pretty obscure reference to TAE that only long-time fans of his will know, but there’s this picture that was really famous with his fans back when he was just signed with BigCube, where he went to Lotte world and bought a tiger headband and wore it for a week or so.

[imgs attached]

Most of his fans don’t really know because TAE was a total nugu back then and just went by his real name, but he referred to himself as a tiger for that entire week and ended every tweet with a tiger emoji, so his longtime fans occasionally still refer to him as one.

Here’s the instances when Jungkook’s used a tiger emoji:

Screencapture from GotKid’s Yugyeom self-broadcast when he went to go visit Jungkook in a waiting room: you can see a playlist with a tiger emoji on it on Jungkook’s laptop.

[Image attached]

Jungkook posted a picture of TAE on Instagram a few months ago, and a bunch of his friends commented with Bunny + Tiger emojis. A lot of his fans thought he was referring to his pets, but he mentioned in an interview he doesn’t have any interest in getting any. He also recently deleted that photo, but screenshots still exist:
When he was posting some of his #backstageJK photos, he first uploaded a video of TAE with a tiger emoji, and then deleted it and reuploaded it without it. I can’t find screenshots because it was up for less than a second, but i remember it happening, you’ll just have to take my word for it ;;

I’ll acknowledge that these next few are stretches, but put in context they add to the evidence:

Someone asked him a question on a post-it to draw him the first thing that comes to his mind at a fansign a week ago and he drew a tiger

Jungkook’s thanks to on his albums for the past 7 years always thanks someone with the initials Ꮍ ᑕ ᇲ, which could be an abbreviation for tiger and could refer to TAE. He never adds a special message, just refers to them by initials and always puts them in the line where he thanks the other producers. So it might be TAE? Considering he’s a producer too, and he’s never been listed.

Out of all the stickers he could have chosen at this naver promo video (including a rabbit), he chose a tiger.

It could all be a coincidence, but this kinda feels like a pattern, no?

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post reaction

[+390, -93]

1. Did you sprain yourself with how hard you’re reaching? Some of these are so laughable, it’s not that deep
2. Heol, that was a while ago on this IG post..amazing, all the fans were trying to figure it out but in the end it was a lovestagram. Wow, he’s so ungrateful towards his fans.
   1. How was that a lovestagram? His friends commented that, not him
3. Be happy, Jungkook, if this is true, this noona can no longer be a fan
4. That’s such a reach, fuck, why are all these posts coming out today
5. Heol, that’s all I have to say about this. The fact that the playlist is full of love songs says everything. Did he take his fans for fools and think they couldn’t read them because the titles are in English or something? He has a lot of international fans too, seriously careless.
   1. 99% of pop songs are love songs these days, it doesn’t really mean anything
   2. If you watched the full video, he switches off the screen really fast, so it’s not like he was showing it off or something
      1. Isn’t that worse? He’s hiding it from his fans then
      1. We don’t care about his personal life
2. Something something artist-fan boundaries
3. Could be a coincidence

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**TAE used to be V? BigCube says no comment**

The agency does not control TAE’s affairs outside of his professional work. We are aware there are a number of trending topics right now concerning our artist’s personal life due to the great amount of interest in his debut, however we have no interest in investigating these matters at this time.

-BigCube Entertainment

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**post reaction**

[+203, -137]

1. So suspicious
2. That’s just a yes isn’t it?
3. We demand a clarification!!
4. Not a yes and not a no, but it was so long ago why does anyone care?
   1. The guy that V got caught with just won a Blue Dragon award ㅋㅋㅋ ㅋ ofc it’s going to be news
5. They didn’t mention anything about the rumors with Jungkook 🤔

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Taehyung hides his phone as soon as he feels a pair of arms wrap around his shoulders and leans back on the couch in Jungkook’s living room, trying to stop the feeling that he should have seen this all coming from lighting an anxiety fuse and blowing up his composure.

“Everything okay?” Jungkook asks, propping his chin on Taehyung’s head.

“Yeah,” Taehyung feels Jungkook bury his face into his hair, and wonders about how much he knows. “Um, what are you doing?”

“Your hair smells good today.”

“Thanks?” Taehyung raises a brow. “I used your shampoo.”

“Oh, I know,” Jungkook leans down and takes another sniff, exhaling with a contented sigh. “Wow, good job—me. Wow, I make such great choices.”

“I swear Jin’s rubbing off on you,” Taehyung shakes his head. “By the way, are you free tonight?”
“Yeah, why?”

“Wanna get drinks with a friend of mine?”

“Oh,” Jungkook blinks. “Sure. Which one?”

“Um...they’re not actually not really a friend. More like an acquaintance.”

“Uh okay...which one?”

“Actually less of an acquaintance,” Taehyung swallows and wonders why it’s so hard to say. “More like an, um...ex?”

“Oh,” Jungkook stiffens. “...again, which one?”

Why is it so hard to just say? Taehyung demurs, “I think you’ve only met one.”

“That YG model guy?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung can’t look at him. “Plus someone else I don’t know.”


“Great. Because I already told them you were coming.”

+++ 

If there was any moment that Taehyung would appreciate the earth opening up and swallowing him whole, it would probably be now.

“So,” Jungkook beams his insincere camera smile straight at YG Model (or YGM for short, as Jimin calls him) “What do you do for a living again? Sorry, I forgot.”

“I act, but just dabble in it really,” YGM demurs. “Right, Taehyung?”

“Um,” Taehyung shrinks a little further as three sets of eyes swivel towards him. “Seems accurate.”

The weird part about all of this is that it strangely felt like a double date, Taehyung thinks as he awkwardly sits on the floor, slouching against the base of the couch, fingerling the cuff of his ear as he makes himself as small as he can without being completely obvious. Which, in most other cases, could be fun. But this one kinda wasn’t, especially when the cast was composed of what was clearly
one of the awkwardest possible combinations of people possible, as in, sitting with him in a living room surrounded by more alcohol than a 19-year-old girl should reasonably have in her apartment were his ex, his new thing, and—

“Your fake modesty is so annoying,” RTAOTY hits YGM with her hand, “Oppa, you ‘dabbled’ enough to win a Blue Dragon Award.”

Of course, out of all the actresses in the world, it had to be her.

“Tell me more about you, Jungkook,” YGM squints like he’s thinking. “You, um, like dance or something, right?”

“Among other things,” Jungkook’s grin doesn’t reach his eyes. “Right, Taehyung?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung shrinks again. “It’s true.”

“You know he’s more than that! You should hear him sing,” RTAOTY gushes to YGM. “He’s practically the perfect idol.”

“Am I?” Jungkook glances down at Taehyung as RTAOTY giggles her ‘yes’ in the background.

“You’re alright,” Taehyung mutters and thinks about how he would just really like to leave.

“Oh, you guys,” RTAOTY giggles, fingers covering her lips. “You’re all so silly. Also, Jungkook o-ppa~” RTAOTY giggles at Jungkook over her glass. “Why don’t I already have your phone number?”

Taehyung shrinks a little further into his couch corner, picking at his lip with his fingers. Yup, he was practically having the time of his life.

“Haha, I don’t know?” Jungkook grins awkwardly, with less reluctance than Taehyung would really like.

“I’ll give you mine,” RTAOTY taps the table insistently. “So hand over your phone.”

And Taehyung knows that Jungkook knows he’s in-between a rock and a hard place by how wide his eyes were growing and how he was glancing at Taehyung for help out of the corner of his eye, and being petty, Taehyung intentionally doesn’t provide any indication how he feels about it, choosing instead to inspect the hem of his pants, and relishing a bit in the way he can tell Jungkook’s squirming inside.

“Um…” Jungkook flicks his eyes towards Taehyung again.

Say no, Taehyung thinks.

“Please?”

“Why do you need it?” Jungkook says lamely.

Just fucking say no.

“Aren’t we friends?”

“Um...yeah?”

It’s not that hard.
“That’s why,” RTAOTY drums the table with her fingers impatiently.

Jungkook sighs and hands his phone over, “Okay.”

Taehyung intentionally stares at his fingernails as RTAOTY detours a bit to take a selca.

“Check your homescreen~” RTAOTY says as she hands the phone back.

“Huh?” Jungkook glances down at his phone, and Taehyung catches a glimpse of RTAOTY’s selca adorned as the wallpaper. “Oh, haha.”

“Like it?”

“Uh...haha” Jungkook lifts his brows and offers. “It’s certainly different.”

“You should use it as my contact photo~ Or no wait, I want to take a different one for that, gimme your phone again,” RTAOTY says, making grabby hands, before a tap on Taehyung’s shoulder captures his attention.

He looks up just in time to see YGM lowering himself down to sit right by him, so close that their shoulders are pressed together. It’s awkward because the coffee table prevents Taehyung from scooting further, and so he just sits there, helplessly squished up against YGM.

“Hey, so, what have you been up to?” YGM suddenly turns and asks, so close Taehyung can feel his mint-laced breath fan over his face.

“Nothing much,” Taehyung shrugs. “You?”

“Nothing much? Seems like you’re having a fuckin’ big year,” YGM chuckles. “Cozy Conversations was so good, they kept playing it on set,” YGM laughs, eyes crinkling at the edges.

“Oh really? Wow,” Taehyung says, watching Jungkook and RTAOTY take a picture together out of the corner of his eye. “I’m glad you liked it.”

“Liked it is an understatement. But yeah,” YGM lifts his arms and yawns. “Haven’t been up to that much either.”

Taehyung snorts, “Yeah, says the guy having his breakout year.”

“Oh,” YGM cracks an eye open. “You heard about that?”

“Yeah, I mean, haven’t all of your movies been blockblasters this year? I feel like I can’t go to the theater without seeing your face in at least three different posters in the lobby.”

“Is that a bad thing?” YGM quirks a brow. “Or a good thing?”

Jungkook glances at them, an apparent frown of his face.

“Neutral,” Taehyung clears his throat and says, a little louder than necessary.

“That’s the Taehyung I know,” YGM snickers before casually dropping his arm over Taehyung’s shoulders, and murmuring into Taehyung’s ear, “Hey, this kinda feels like a double date doesn’t it?”

Taehyung cranes his neck away, “What do you mean?”

“Like us and them,” YGM leans closer and whispers into his ear. “I’ve missed you, you know.”
The hairs on the back of Taehyung’s neck immediately shoot up as YGM leans back with a grin, but before he can reply, a bowl of pretzels—crumbs and all—tumbles off of the coffee table and spills across the actor’s lap.

“Fuck,” YGM swears as he stands up, shaking his shirt off.

“Oops,” Jungkook holds up a hand, staring right at Taehyung, eyes wide with fake innocence. “My bad.”

“You’re so clumsy,” RTAOTY giggles at Jungkook before scowling at YGM. “Oppa, stop doing that, you’re getting pretzels all over my carpet!”

“Sorry, sorry,” YGM holds his hands up and steps on a pretzel with a crunch, wincing as dust from the crushed snack grind into the fibers on the floor. “Ugh, sorry again.”

“OPPA,” RTAOTY yells before miserably peering into the bowl and pouting. “Don’t make it worse. I’m already sad, I really wanted pretzels, they’re my drunk food.”

“Sorry, sorry,” YGM laughs. “I’ll buy you more to make it up to you.”

“Right now?” RTAOTY asks.

“Yeah, sure,” YGM starts heading towards the door. “You should come too Taehyung. I know you don’t like soju that much, so you can buy whatever you really wanna drink.”

“Um,” Taehyung glances at his untouched glass. He was starting to get pretty bored of water, and so he stands and starts following YGM, “…alright.”

“I’ll go too,” Jungkook immediately stands.

“No, wait,” RTAOTY shoots a hand out. “Stay with me here and help me clean up.”

“Uh, I...uh...” Jungkook looks pleadingly at Taehyung, who just offers an apathetic shrug.

“Please?”

‘Help me,’ Jungkook mouths frantically when RTAOTY bends down to scoop up some pretzels.

‘Help yourself,’ Taehyung mouths back pettily as he steps out the door. ‘Oppa.’

Jungkook’s beginning to raise his middle finger when RTAOTY turns back towards him and his fakeass smile returns to his face.

“Do you know to use a vacuum?” she asks, finger on her lip.

“Uh,” Jungkook quickly puts his hands down. “Yeah?”

“Then would you,” RTAOTY points at the pile of crushed pretzels and clings to Jungkook’s sleeve. “teach me how?”

“For sure, but after I go—” Jungkook steps towards the door.

“Oh,” YGM holds out a hand and laughs, gripping the door handle. “We don’t need three people to buy a bag of pretzels. Too many cooks, ya know?”

“I don’t think you’d need two people either,” Jungkook weakly protests. “So uh, Taehyung, maybe
you should stay.”

“Oh he doesn’t like the sound of vacuums,” YGM assuresses. Which wasn’t untrue. “I’d totally volunteer but haven’t touched a vacuum in a decade. But you should just stay here and help her, you looks like you’re good with your, uh, hands.”

“OPPA,” RTAOTY protests, glowing red.

“Um—” Jungkook’s crisis eyes are the last thing Taehyung sees before YGM door shuts behind them.

“Sorry,” YGM says as they walk down the hall. “She seems kinda bratty, but she’s honestly a good kid.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, it’s actually a miracle she’s this restrained I honestly feel a bit bad for her,” YGM frowns. “Like she’s one of those child-actresses who got pushed into the industry by her parents. I think she was, what, seven, when she landed her first drama? Crazy. And it was a hit. Got nominated for awards and everything. She’s never had a childhood since, and no one ever really tells her ‘no,’ so I’ve kinda filled in for the ‘big brother’ role with her over the years,” YGM sighs. “And she’s kinda crazy over Jungkook.”

“Ah.”

“Says his music pulled her out of a dark place. I honestly don’t get the hype myself, but even if they don’t know each other that well, he makes her really happy, so what can you do?”

“I see,” Taehyung says stiffly.

“So yeah, thanks for coming with,” YGM laughs. “I was trying to get her some alone-time with him.”

Oh. “No problem,” Taehyung grits out.

“Although honestly...that’s kinda a lie,” YGM scratches his head and stops just outside the elevator. “It was more selfish than that. I really wanted some alone-time with you, as well.”

Oh shit, Taehyung starts to get a bad feeling as YGM starts fidgeting with the sleeve of his shirt.

“You, uh,” YGM fills the silence. “You look really good tonight.”

“Um...thanks,” Taehyung takes a step back

“So, um, I know we kinda ended up on a bad note, but...I-I just wanted to say I haven’t stopped thinking of you since we broke up. You’re kinda the one that got away, I guess, I should have fought harder for you,” YGM takes a step forward and takes Taehyung’s hand. “And I know it’s years way too late, but I really wanted to apologize for how I reacted.”

“Okay?” Taehyung blinks. Fuck, is this what he thinks it was going to be?

“And, um,” YGM hesitates, nervousness suddenly rippling through his tone. “I wanted to tell you, I haven’t forgotten about you—or u-us rather. So, um, so, if you’re not seeing anyone right now, would you wanna—”

Suddenly there’s a bang, and a pattering footsteps that grow louder as they rain down the hall,
pounding until Jungkook appears around the corner, hair swept back and brows furrowed. Taehyung immediately rips his hand from YGM’s grasp and takes a step back.

“Whoa, uh,” Jungkook skids to a stop and dumbly holds up an unopened bag. “Um, I finished vacuuming and found more pretzels, so, uh, you guys don’t need to go—”

“Um...thanks?” YGM says, beginnings of an irritated frown working its way on his face.

“No problem,” Jungkook looks back and forth between them, “Am I interrupting something?”

“Oh, sorta,” YGM’s eyes flick towards Taehyung. “We were talking.”

“Oh? About what?” Jungkook presses as he goes and stands right next to Taehyung, chest pressed up against Taehyung’s arm.

Taehyung shoots him a warning glance, but it’s a moment too late as he feels Jungkook’s arm start to snake around his waist.

“Nothing, uh, important…” YGM’s eyes flit down as Jungkook’s hand appears on Taehyung’s hip, fingers possessively curling over his jeans just long enough to stop YGM mid-sentence before letting them fall.

The world seems to slow and it’s suddenly hard to even move as fear locks Taehyung’s muscles.

“Yeah?” Jungkook raises a brow, and it’s so fascinating to Taehyung how fine he is with what just transpired.

“Oh. Shit,” YGM raises his hands and steps back, shock ripping across his face. “Sorry, whoa, you two are—? Shit. I didn’t mean to—I seriously had no idea.”

“It’s okay, no hard feelings,” Jungkook winks as he pulls Taehyung by the hand into the elevator, their fingers aggressively interlaced. “Gets confusing.”

YGM’s stunned expression is the last thing Taehyung sees before the doors close.

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Jungkook’s stewing as he drives back to the agency, grumbling about everything he’s ever disliked about YGM, reaching as far back as his trainee days, and Taehyung’s only half-listening, glancing out the window as YGM’s words ring through his head.

His phone vibrates and shakes him out of his stupor, and he glances down at the incoming texts.
Hey so
Don’t worry
I’m seriously not going to tell anyone
You looked kinda upset
Also I’m really sry
For everything again

It’s okay
I’ve forgotten about it

Lol kinda doubt it, so, apologies, again
Also there’s something
You should probably know
There’s some rumors going around about you two
Among my circles
Obviously not super convincing yet
Or I wouldn’t have tried anything
But just letting u know, there’s some talk out there
So
If you actually wanted to keep it on the downlow
Might wanna tell him to be a little more careful than that LOL
He was not exactly subtle

Looool
He’s a lucky fucker tho
I haven’t ever seen you that happy with someone
Like ever?
So I approve

Uhm, thanks
I guess

Never thought that fucking kid would actually win in the end

What does that even mean lol

LOL don’t worry about it
Btw gl with it all!
Hope your single gets number one :D
I’ll be streaming it for sure
O yea and
If u ever get tired of him
You got my number ;););

“Shit,” Jungkook suddenly glances over his shoulder and takes a turn onto a street hard enough for Taehyung to slam into the door.

“Um,” Taehyung grabs the door handle as Jungkook guns down the sidestreet. “Everything okay?”

“I think someone’s following us,” Jungkook glances at his rear view mirror. “Yeah, fuck, see that car that just made a turn behind us?”

Taehyung peers at the side mirror, “Yeah?”
“Been trailing us ever since we left YGM’s place,” Jungkook curses again and turns down another street. “Either it’s a really unlikely coincidence or...yeah.”

“Do you recognize the license plate?” Taehyung asks, his grip tightening on the handle as the feeling of unease unfurls in his stomach.

“No, but they usually hire cars, so the numbers are always different—fuck,” Jungkook slams on the breaks just as a light flicks to red. He’s chewing on his thumbnail, eyes flicking from the light to his rear view mirror. “Do you mind if we chill at the office for a while? I don’t think it’s a good idea to go to either of our places right now,” he starts rapidly tapping his finger against the car wheel. “Fuck, what’s wrong with this light? They’re catching up.”

“Um, yeah, sure,” Taehyung says, sinking down into his seat as the car slides into the lane next to him.

Suddenly Jungkook’s phone, jammed into mount stuck to the front window begins buzzing, the screen changing from the navigation to a caller ID, a familiar number ending in 3444 glowing on the screen.

And Taehyung feels his heart stop.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Jungkook rips the phone out of the holder and throws it at his feet. “Out of all of them it’s her.”

“Her?” Taehyung asks, voice so soft he can barely hear it. He finds himself magnetically turning his head towards the car, subtly shaking as he stares at the tinted windows.

The ringing stops for a half a second before it starts again, the screen softly glowing with the same number.

“Yeah, she’s a saesang,” Jungkook suddenly starts yelling at his phone as the ringing starts up for a third time, pure anger seeping into his tone. “Holy fuck, just FUCKING. STOP.”

Jungkook suddenly looks at Taehyung, and there must be some sort of terrified expression on his face because Jungkook immediately calms down, “Sorry, didn’t mean to lose my cool. Don’t worry. It’s just, she’s been following me since a few months ago. Won’t stop calling me on some nights either. Sorry you had to see this. It’, uh, super, uh—” the light turns green and Jungkook cuts across two lanes almost horizontally, makes a quick u turn and starts speeding away. “—frustrating, if you know what I mean.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook turns down another street, and BigCube glows like a beacon in the dark. “It’s the reason I changed my number like three times this month. I need to figure out who in my contacts keeps selling it to them, because it’s getting so fucking tiring.”

“I see,” Taehyung says, watching out of the side mirror as the car turns onto their street about three blocks down just as Jungkook slides into the garage, the gate closing quickly behind them.

“I have a feeling it’s one of my agents, but, yeah, don’t know for sure, and don’t want to throw around false accusations...” Jungkook trails off as he worriedly glances over at Taehyung. “You okay?”

“Uh,” Taehyung shakes his head to dispel the chill creeping up his spine. “Y-yeah. Just tired.”
“Okay,” Jungkook pulls into a spot and parks the car.

“Thanks for the ride,” Taehyung gets out of the car, so much more wary now, irrationally glancing at all the dark corners as he hurries towards the lobby. And Jungkook’s on his heels, still griping about YGM under his breath as he scuttles along. “I can just chill here myself though, I got some shit to work on so I’m a bit behind.”

“I can keep you company.”

“You don’t have to. You should go home and get some sleep, don’t you have an interview tomorrow? Get some sleep,” Taehyung says as they enter the building, their footsteps echoing through the mostly empty lobby. He flashes his badge at the security guard who waves them along before stopping at the elevators. “I’ll be okay.”

“Nah, it’s fine,” Jungkook says as he hits the button and waits. “I wanna keep you company, and, uh, provide you with some, um…” Jungkook’s fingers ghost over waistband of Taehyung’s jeans. “...moral support.”

And Taehyung’s about to retort something when the elevator doors open and the last person he wants to see saunters out.

It’s Fuckface McGee, still in his work uniform, not even a quarter as shocked as Taehyung is to see him, and he lifts a brow at the two of them before walking away like he belonged there.

“What the fuck is he doing here?” Taehyung asks no one in particular when the elevator doors close. “What the fuck is he doing here?”

“No idea,” Jungkook shrugs, almost irritatingly unbothered. “But his uncle still works here, right? Don’t worry about it.”

“Yes, but…” Taehyung grips his jacket tighter around his shoulders.

“But?”

“Nevermind,” Taehyung says as the elevator doors open and they exit.

They’re halfway down the hallway when Jungkook suddenly stops and points over his shoulder. “Hey, so actually,” he says, “I have to go get something, you’ll be in your studio right?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay,” Jungkook winks. “I’ll see you there.”

And so Taehyung enters his studio alone, pushing the door open and flicking on the lights, going on autopilot as he dumps his wallet and keys onto a table with a clatter. It’s when he turns towards his desk that a manila envelope resting on his coffee table that definitely wasn’t there when he left catches his eye, and his blinks with surprise.

The lack of a return label probably should have tipped him off, but half-past-midnight him doesn’t like to think about things, which is also probably why when he slips the contents, the full implication doesn’t strike him right away.

It’s two pictures: one of him stepping out of Jungkook’s apartment that one morning he wandered off the Burger King, and a second under the streetlamp in Mapo-gu, Jungkook’s hands wrapped around his waist and their faces just an inch apart.
I warned you~ and I’ve got more

Messing around with him is OK, since I know he’s got “needs.”

Just stay in your lane and don’t try to be something more.

With a history like that, you’ll only cause him trouble ;)

Also, try not to worry Jungkook on your way out

Because, Dispatch would love these~

He stuffs everything quickly back into the folder, and buries that into a drawer, twisting his clammy fingers together while his heart and mind race and everything grows a bit numb.

He knew this was coming.

He knew, deep down, to some extent he was just skirting the inevitable, that the walls are closing in on him, that it was only a matter of time, that this was all to good to be true. The fear hits him then, at the desk in his studio, just how scary it all is, and he has to stabilize himself with two arms braced against the tabletop as everything swims before his eyes and chills run down his spine, the one question he had been asking himself for the better part of the month running through his mind:

Is this worth it?

He really doesn’t want much out of life. Just wants to have fun and chill with cool people and make sick beats. Live his best life, live without worries, live pressure-free. He had enough on his plate already, with the upcoming release and corresponding promotions, this extra layer of stress (fear?) was really something he could do without.

So is this worth it?

Because, even if Jungkook like from the same fucking wavelength, even if YGM was to be believed and Taehyung’s the happiest he’s ever been, even if his new deepest darkest secret has been, for a while now, that the first thing he wants to see the morning and the last thing before he falls asleep at night is Jungkook’s face, it’s still not clear what the answer would be.

Because the fact of the matter is, if it ends, that there will always be another.

Another person, another man, another Jungkook. Even if it’ll suck for a while, life doesn’t end after a
relationship does, Taehyung knows, because he’s picked up the pieces off the ground and put himself back together many times before.

So how is this worth it?

He didn’t sign up for this level of scrutiny. And he’s not out there to prove a point, not there to fight the current, not there to be a martyr for the cause. And even though Jungkook makes him happy, shit, Taehyung squeezes his eyes shut, _he really fucking does_, he’d never live his life just for someone else.

His phone vibrates, cutting through his thoughts, and he sinks into the corner of his couch as he glances down at a few incoming messages from Namjoon.

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**Namjoon**

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Just heard the track
D a m n
I think it’s safe to say
The student has surpassed the master
Haha seriously good job
Def a top 10
And if you play your cards right
Could be looking at a future no. 1
Just
Lol
I know you have a lot going on rn
But try not to go out of your way to invite trouble
Just my advice

---

He’s staring hypnotically at the texts, letting the words swim infront of him when Jungkook comes back, a pair of headphones cradled in his fingers like a trophy.

“I got these back,” Jungkook holds them up proudly. “Yoongi stole them from me like six months
ago, first time since I’ve been here that he hasn’t so I took them back.”

“Nice,” Taehyung lets out a weak laugh.

Jungkook’s about to say something when suddenly he rips his phone out, the device vibrating with a call before he unlocks it and yells into it, “Hey—I told you already, this is the wrong number so stop calling me,” before he turns it off and chucks it onto the couch.

Taehyung feels his throat dry, his hidden hands shaking in his lap. He doesn’t know but he needs to fucking know, “Same person?”

“Yeah,” Jungkook walks over to the blinds, pokes his face out for a second before swearing. “Fuck, the car’s still out here. Might be better just to hang out here for the night.”

Whoa, okay, a fresh wave of fear hits him then. It’s all too much. It’s just, wow, Taehyung can’t handle it, his mind’s going fuzzy and he just wants everything to stop.

Because one thing is crystal clear: he can’t live like this.

“Well since we have all night,” Jungkook closes the blinds walks over to Taehyung with a smarmy grin on his face, and the extra layer of guilt makes a noxious combination with the nausea already residing in his gut. “Want some of that moral support now?”

Taehyung doesn’t say anything, just lets Jungkook climb onto the couch next to him and slide a hand casually under his shirt.

How does he even start this conversation? He closes his eyes as Jungkook kisses him, leans into it like nothing’s wrong, shifts his position like everything’s fine. And why is it so hard when he’s done it so many times before, the words are getting stuck in his throat, his thoughts are freezing, the dread is creeping, the guilt is seeping when Jungkook smiles at him, so unaware of what Taehyung’s about to do next.

“I really didn’t like how YGM was all over you,” Jungkook whispers, fluttering kisses along his neck like he’s trying to erase something, undoing his belt with practiced dexterity. He slides in one finger as he murmurs, “I wanted to tell him to back off.”

Taehyung can’t find the words, can’t get over the guilt to respond because how can he indulge Jungkook when he’s actually thinking thoughts like, how does he make a clean cut? Leave no room for debate, cauterize the wound before it begins to bleed out. Maybe Jimin can help put Jungkook back together when it’s all said and done, he’s always been way the way more tactful one, the one with the right words, the one who’s done this before, who pulled Jungkook up from the hell Taehyung left him in after debut.

Jungkook slides home and goes slow, kissing him deep with his eyes closed, heart beating rapidly in his chest.

He’ll try let him down easy, cut him off slowly, ease the bandaid off slowly rather than ripping it off all at once. Taehyung bites back the moans, stares up at the stucco at the ceiling instead of at the way Jungkook’s looking at him.

He can’t do this anymore, he should really end this now.

Yeah, Taehyung feels a wave of nausea rise in his chest.

It’s for the better.
“What are you sorry for?” Jungkook asks bemusedly.

“I’m so sorry. I—”

“What are you talking about?” Jungkook stops, lifting himself up, and peering down at Taehyung, grin slowly fading.

“I—I—” Taehyung says softly, covering his eyes with his forearm as his fingers dig into Jungkook’s back. “I’m sorry if I gave you the wrong impression—”

Jungkook suddenly stills.

“—but I don’t really want to make this serious with you.”

The rest of the explanation dies in his throat, he’s bracing for some kind of negative reaction first instead, something antagonistic or disbelieving that he can bounce his improvised reactionary excuses off of.

But it never comes.

Instead Jungkook just murmurs the perfect answer, “oh, aight, that’s cool,” and kisses him softly without missing a beat, pins him against the couch like nothing’s changed, does it like this is all they were meant to be.

And, oh yeah.

That would be mistake number three.

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part ii: iffy

how much more do i have to work for people to not forget my name?

-sik-k

iffy
Taehyung’s relationship with YGM could best be described as “toleration for the sake of benefits” for lack of a better phrase.

And Jimin cracks up about it when Taehyung describes it just as such one night, when the three of them—Jimin, Jungkook, and Taehyung himself, are hanging out in the practice room, the two trainees taking a well deserved break, lounging on the ground next to Taehyung as they talk.

“That’s all you have to say about it?” Jimin laughs, arms crossed and body falling into Jungkook, “It’s progressing?”

Jungkook snorts and looks down at his phone as he cards his bangs with his pinky.

“Yeah,” Taehyung shrugs. “I mean, we’re moving forward, I guess. We, uh, just went exclusive? Kinda.”

Jimin’s brows rise, “Was that your idea or his?”

“His.”

“And you’re okay with it?”

“Yeah?” Taehyung shrugs.

“That’s so weird coming from you,” Jimin props his head on his hand.

“I mean,” Taehyung rubs his nose. “It’s still not serious. Like it’s not an actual relationship. I just stopped...shopping around, haha, pretty low effort. And as a plus, now I have a legit excuse to use on that one dude—Proposal Guy—remember him?”

“He’s still harassing you?” Jimin notices the confused look on Jungkook’s face and explains. “Some guy proposed to Taehyung after a week, it was weird. Then went nuts after Taehyung cut it off.”

“Oh,” Jungkook frowns. “What?”

“Yeah, that was my reaction,” Taehyung snorts. “You’d think because he’s promoting, he’d have a sense of self-preservation and just lay off, but, nope. He’s so fucking annoying, he’s just asking to get caught.”

“I swear, you only attract weirdos,” Jimin shakes his head and Jungkook coughs in the background. “You need to start setting standards.”

“My bar for FWBs is—well, was—surprisingly very low,” Taehyung closes his eyes. “Be at least 20. Be human. Be attractive. Be...actually that was about it. But I’m a loyal guy now, Jimin, I don’t sleep around anymore. YGM changed my ways.”

“It’s more like ‘why not,’” Taehyung shrugs again. “Man, I’m going to sound even more like an asshole, but it’s literally just because he takes me cool places and lets me meet his cool friends, and he gives me something to do on Friday nights—”

“Do or do,” Jimin wiggles his brows.

“Real mature,” Taehyung snorts. “Both. But I’m honestly thinking it might be nice to have a change of pace, as in having something stable with someone for once. And he’s decent enough and so even if he’s kinda boring—”

“Boring?” Jimin snorts as he takes out his phone. “If you consider a runway model-actor who takes you to exclusive parties boring,” Jimin points to himself and Jungkook. “Then what are we supposed to be?”

“Extra boring,” Taehyung snickers.

“I’m offended,” Jimin fake-gasps as he puts a hand on his chest. “I mean, I know Jungkook is a gigantic snooze-fest, but me?”


“Aren’t I?” Jimin slumps onto Jungkook again, and juts his bottom lip out in a pout at Taehyung, “I thought we were best friends.”

“We are, I just hold the people I’m dating to a higher standard,” Taehyung snickers. “I mean, honestly, he’s actually fine. Can’t have it all, and I really don’t see any better options than him at the moment—”

“Uh,” Jungkook suddenly stands up, slinging his duffel onto his shoulder, bangs covering his eyes as he jams his hands into his pockets. “I think I’m going to take off.”

“Oh okay,” Taehyung waves without looking at him. “See you.”

“Yup,” and Jungkook books it for the door.

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Namjoon manages to get Taehyung onto the 2HOM single with little trouble, and even if it’s not the song Taehyung really wants, it keeps him busy enough to raise his spirits. He throws himself at songwriting with so much zeal he doesn’t realize he hasn’t left the studio for three days until Jin knocks some sense into him.

“You should really take a break,” Jin comments during lunch on a sunny afternoon. “This can’t be
good for you.”

“Yeah I know,” Taehyung brings his can of coke up to his face for a sip, falls asleep for a microsecond and wakes up just as his hand tips over and spills soda all over the table. He doesn’t even look up at Jin, who’s probably shaking his head, as he sighs and takes a napkin to mop it up. “But I feel like I’m almost done, just like, I keep thinking if I put another day into it, it’ll be that much better. Especially since it feels like something’s missing.”

“Let me listen? Maybe I can help.”

“Sure,” Taehyung plays the track.

“What if,” Jin says after the song finishes. “You put Jungkook on it?”

“Like as a feature?”

“Yeah,” Jin nods. “It feels like it’s missing a higher voice. And it be a two-birds one-stone type of thing, like get his name out there and build him some pre-debut hype. I could try to get him on the music video and stuff, I think that it would really help his face if he gets enough predebut fans.”

Jungkook agrees almost immediately, and the resulting track flies through the approval process so fast, Taehyung’s a bit winded when he finds himself slouching at the edge of the music video set a week later, his song playing in the background on loop as staff flutter around him getting the props ready.

True to Jin’s word, he gets Jungkook casted as the main focal point of music video, and the boy himself waddles out of his dressing room in a ridiculously frilly schoolboy sailor-uniform getup with shorts shorter than Taehyung’s idol tenure and a golden crown with gaudy ruby heart insets, like an illusionary king of the girl’s dreams.

“Nice, uh...” Taehyung takes a glance and holds the snicker. “...outfit.”

“I don’t wanna hear it,” Jungkook grumbles as he adjusts his shirt.

Taehyung, being the considerate hyung he was, continues to ruthlessly make fun of him for it for the rest of the hour, and Jungkook gets kind of mad, especially when Taehyung shoves a camera into his face and laughs at the resulting picture.

Soon, Jungkook’s whisked away to act. It’s mostly cute shit like bicycling down a street or carrying balloons or strolling down a pastel village street. The scenes are haphazard at best, though the pivotal moment comes when Jungkook “confesses” to his love interest, an adorable trainee from another mid-tier company (who, from the looks of it, didn’t need to actually act during her ‘smitten’ scenes), with an obnoxiously large paper heart, shoving the thing towards the camera in front of a solid pastel background in what later becomes the music video’s thumbnail.

None of it really tickles Taehyung’s sensibilities, but then again, he’s pretty aware he’s not in the target demographic anyway and so he doesn’t really voice his opinion about it outside of continuing to heckle Jungkook about it when they rewatch it later, with all seven of them in Taehyung’s apartment, because, again there’s just something so amusing about just how irritated Jungkook gets when Taehyung brings it up.

“I keep telling you, it’s not actually my style,” Jungkook grumbles, fingers ghosting over the new gauge lodged in his earlobe, the cuffs of his ears tinting with their trademark pink. “I wear streetwear stuff normally, I just put that on for the music video.”
“But it should be, since you looked so fucking cute~” Taehyung shoots a pair of fingers over to pinch his cheek that Jungkook promptly whacks away with practiced precision.

“I think I would actually would hate to have you as an older brother,” Jimin says dryly, watching the two of them from the corner as they begin to wrestle.

Taehyung sticks his tongue out, flopping over Jungkook and hanging on him like a deadweight before the kid shoves him off, “Good thing I’m the youngest in my family then.”

“It shows,” Jimin shakes his head, as Jungkook gets up and shuffles towards the door, muttering something about going to the bathroom.

Apparently people out there really like the music video though, enough to land Jungkook a non-trivial number of stans and his first dedicated fan site that immediately starts posting photoshoot-grade photos of Jungkook mundanely existing in public spaces. Which as a trainee, pretty much was limited to a promotional performance at a coffee shop, taking public transportation and leaving and entering the agency building at any and all hours of the night.

For what it’s worth, the sudden attention doesn’t really change Jungkook, except for the fact that he now regularly wears a mask in public even when he’s not sick and he starts getting stopped randomly in stores and on the street and pieces of his personal life begin to filter out as the curious manage to root out tidbits from the online accounts he had forgotten to delete and acquaintances spill whatever beans they have in their arsenal. Apparently he had been a pretty vanilla individual, since nothing noteworthy surfaces beyond the revelation that Jungkook had once painstakingly wrote a thoughtful review for every single brand of banana milk on a forgotten blog when he was 10.

And it does the job.

As soon as various malicious posts emerge (that are almost 100% certainly from someone whose name rhymes with Duckface) of various “scandalous” things that needed some skilled deep-diving to unearth—a photobooth selca where he’s kissing an abashed instagram-famous ex from less than a year ago, a post detailing his connections to an estranged aunt that had married into a morally dubious chaebol family, a fan account about Jungkook being “rude” for not interacting with diehard fans waiting outside the agency at 2 in the morning, and a scathing review of his botched coffee-shop debut performance noting that he was slightly flat, his voice cracked twice and he completely froze when the host asked him for his name—the fansite master swiftly and efficiently shuts it all down.

And her love certainly turns important heads, particularly when 2HOM’s song enters its second week hovering just within the Top 20 in the charts and she ferries over a generous contribution to the pile of fanmail and gifts that show up for Jungkook at the agency in congratulations.

“Shit,” Taehyung whistles as Jungkook unwraps limited-edition designer dress shirt and gently places it next to his unboxed third iPhone. “You’ve got some fans.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook reaches over a glossy print of his face taken during his first live performance and starts inspecting the seams of a pair of kicks that cost at least a couple hundred thousand won.

“Though most of the gifts are from one fansite.”

“Who?”

“Uh, it’s in english, wait a sec,” Jungkook picks up a card and squints at the label, and sounds it out, “<Heart King>?”

And it enters one of Taehyung’s ears as a meaningless set of phonetics and instantly drops out the
“What does that mean?”

“Dunno,” Jungkook shrugs, pulling a freshly-unwrapped S/S Supreme sweatshirt over his head. “But she takes great pictures.”

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But yeah, going back to YGM, ‘bumping along’ pretty much defined their relationship, especially since Taehyung’s work starts picking up and he begins seeing YGM less and less outside of a bedroom-setting on non-Friday nights, and Taehyung finds himself committing to things on a basis of ‘why not’ more than having actual motivations to do so.

Like, for instance:

- Getting couple shoes? Why not.
- Drinking the bottle of ultra-expensive wine YGM brings over one Friday night? Why not.
- Joining YGM on his photoshoot tour in Bora Bora? Why the fuck not.

And so Taehyung easily commits to all of them. It’s all good, clean fun, and it’s pretty satisfying seeing the jealousy on people’s faces at work (especially the ones who had written him off) when he’s able drop lines like:

“Sorry Saturday won’t work, I’ll be in Bora Bora.”

That’s probably why he starts an instagram, because, let’s be honest, he’s 18 and for the first time in his life he’s going places. And so he sets up an account under the moniker “V” and begins posting all the pictures of his “adventures” and general snapshots of living life in excess: flying in a helicopter over the tropical beaches, drinking henny in a penthouse on a wednesday night, propping his gucci kicks onto the front of YGM’s foreign as they zip down the freeway during the night.

It’s the validation from the likes and his exponentially growing list of followers that keeps him around for as long as he stays, because it’s not YGM’s personality or skills in bed and certainly not the way the occupants of YGM’s world treat him.

It’s really laughable, how he brags about the exclusive cocktail parties YGM gets him into to Jimin because it makes him feel better when Jimin tells his anecdotes from his own, especially when he begins to dread them. Because the gatherings are mostly glorified networking sessions where it’s made clear from the beginning he has little to offer to the other participants.

The generational gap is one thing, since he’s usually the youngest by about half a decade, but it’s really the subversive questions that really get to him, the ones that ask one thing on the surface but are really needling him for something else.
For instance: *where do you live*, is not just innocent interest in which neighborhood he chooses to sleep at night, it’s coded question for how expensive of a neighborhood can he afford to buy into. Or *where are you from*, is not just a polite question about his childhood but rather one about kinship and pedigree.

It starts feeling like a series of interviews, each notable basically asking him, *is it worth my time is it to speak to you*, and he pretty much fails each one. To some extent he gets it, there’s only 24 hours in a day, and for notables with places to go and people to see, they’re just trying not to waste time with posers.

But being labeled as one kinda sucks major balls.

“So you’re a friend of…?” Almost A-List, an actor who was one hit movie away from being a top star, leans against the bar and gestures with his drink towards YGM, who’s chatting a few feet away with a movie studio executive. “Or a friend.”

“Um,” Taehyung’s hand tightens around his glass, unsure of how much he should let on.

“Just pulling your leg, I already know. I heard about how hard he chased you,” the guy nudges him and winks. “He’s one of my best buddies, so treat him well. He might look like a player, but he’s the softest guy you’ll ever meet.”

“Haha,” Taehyung smiles nervously. “Is he?”

“Yeah. So what do you do again?” Almost A-List asks, sipping his whiskey as he raises his brows. “He mentioned you sing or something?”

“Sorta? I’m a producer.”

“Oh, sick,” the guy’s brows rise. “Are you, like, with a label or something? Sorry, I don’t really know how music works.”

“Uh yeah, I am.”

“Which one?”

“BigCube?”

The guy shakes his head, “Not familiar.”

“It’s a small one.”

“Oh cool,” Almost A-List says, and Taehyung knows he’s already made a misstep as boredom starts seeping into the guy’s tone. The guy takes out his phone and frowns, “So, what’s, uh, a song you’ve worked on?”

“I just released something for 2HOM,” Taehyung glances at Almost A-List, who has a blank expression on his face. “They’re, um, ballad group, not sure if you’ve heard of them.”

“Nope, but sounds dope,” and Almost A-List looks away, complete disinterest written all over his face. They awkwardly stand in the silence for a moment before Almost A-List turns his back to Taehyung and seamlessly picks up another conversation with the Victoria Secret Angel lounging next to him.

It’s that moment when Taehyung realizes Almost A-List hadn’t even bothered asking for his name,
and precisely just how out of his element he really is. No one comes to talk to him after that, and he shrinks into the shadows, awkwardly watching as people around him mingle and he nurses his drink.

He gets a bit fucked up after that, ingesting more shots in an hour than he probably should to stave off the nerves. And if people begin to look at him like he’s an uncouth outsider, well, with his emotions cushioned by alcohol, it doesn’t really bother him anymore. It’s not like he belonged before, so at least now he doesn’t care.

Jungkook

1:02AM

Jungkook i’m so bored :):

Haha aren’t you at that party?

Yeh

But i’m stil l borde ’:

And i fel lke sht LMAOO

Oh D:

Where’s YGM?

idunno LOOL

But fck im, im sitting alone

I d rather be hngaing out wif you

Cuz ur way mroe fun

shudd i leave?
Taehyung watches the notification disappear and reappear a couple of times before he zones out, and YGM finds him like that, slumped over his phone, halfway asleep. He’s laughing as he pulls Taehyung into a darkened hallway and out of sight from the main floor.

“Hey,” YGM murmurs as he sits down on a bench and pulls Taehyung in close. “I know it’s not the most exciting event, but thanks for coming with me.”

“No problem,” Taehyung glances down the hall. It’s empty and so he turns back.

“Also, I just want you to know, you’re the best thing to happen to me.”

“Yeah?” and Taehyung giggles, partly because of the amount of soju he ingested, and partly because how amusingly lopsided their relationship is.

“Yeah,” YGM says, leaning in dangerously close. “I’m like, so fucking in love with you? I’d do anything for you. It’s crazy. You drive me so crazy.”

“Really?” Taehyung giggles again. He feels so little in return, and he can’t help it, he’s just not in love, and in the haze, it’s seriously hilarious how fucked up it is, he is, this is.

As he slips into a moment of sobriety, he realizes it makes him feel kinda sad, actually, the lucidity spinning the needle on his moral compass and wiping the smile from his face.

It should be a crime how little effort he put into this and how much he’s getting back, how he’s getting tenfold in return of what he invests. It’s so easy, too easy, the tide of hilarity ebbs out, leaving his psyche strewn with overwhelming sense of pity and himself staring at the bared truth:

For the both of them, he should really end it now. Yeah, actually, that was a good idea.

And Taehyung’s about to open his mouth and make his opening argument when YGM loops his arms around Taehyung’s waist to drag him closer, and looks at him like he’s the world.

Okay, Taehyung glances over his shoulder, and thinks about how difficult this was going to be, and that fuck, maybe now wasn’t the best time to break a heart, and that he’d do it soon.

And then the second shot kicks in, 90-proof seeping into his veins, making his chest warm and his mind fuzzy, and he’s back to giggling again.

“Really,” YGM murmurs, leaning his forehead drunkenly against Taehyung’s chest. “I wish I could tell everyone out there, right now, that you’re mine.”

Fuck no. Taehyung pushes YGM back and glances down the hall again, giggles a third time, this time with a bit of alarm, and shakes his head, “That’s not a good idea.”

“Probably not,” and maybe it’s the alcohol speaking, but YGM sounds so profoundly sad. “But I don’t like the way people are checking you out.”
Okay, maybe he'll break things off tomorrow.

“Don’t let it get to you,” Taehyung shakes his head. “Because both you and I know I’m with you. And that should be enough.”

Or, maybe Friday?

“Yeah. You’re right. See what would I do without you? You’re my voice of reason,” YGM looks up.


“I’m a pretty shit voice of reason,” and he thinks maybe he could pull a Leo DiCaprio and incept the idea into YGM’s mind. “You should find a better one.”

He just needs to end it soon. For many reasons. Nominally because playing with someone wasn’t a kind thing to do.

“No, you’re amazing, ever since I met you, you’ve made me so happy,” YGM slurs. “You fucking build me up. You make me feel so confident about myself. I never would have gone for that drama role if you hadn’t encouraged me. Have I ever told you that? You’re like my fucking...vitamin or whatever.”

Or wait, nominally because if someone finds out, Taehyung would be eaten alive by online rage.

“Nope.”

Or wait, nominally because, just, even if, like, what, there were so many reasons that it was just a terrible idea.

“Well you are,” YGM leans in again. “Hey, wanna dip and go back to my place?”

Taehyung checks one last time down the hall and shrugs, “Sure.”

+++
1:02AM

I'd rather be hanging out with you

Cuz you way more fun

shudd i leave?

Honestly yea
Did u need someone to get u?
I can ask Jin or something

1:42AM

???
Is everything okay?

______________________________

Jimin

______________________________

2:21AM

Ay when u get the chance
Can u text jk back
I told him not to worry since i know ur prolly
Uh
“Busy”

But yeah

Hes kinda freaking out rn lol

And idk what else to do

Jungkook

2:32AM

If you need help

Just call me

3:43AM

Ima go to sleep now but

Hope you get home safe

10:32AM

Oh shiet

Sry just saw these

Went back to his place and lost track of time LOOL

My bad ;;

Thanks for the concern tho!!
Maybe the biggest reason Taehyung’s lulled into a false sense of security is that nothing really changes between them.

Immediately, anyway.

They still hangout. They still hook-up. And behind closed doors and away from prying eyes, Taehyung occasionally still lets Jungkook hold his hand.

It’s a weird fine line that’s marked with double standards and blurred at the edges, but it works for them, at least Taehyung assumes it does, because Jungkook still is as cocky and cheerful as ever. And so Taehyung thinks everything’s cool, even if the crease in Jungkook’s brows grows increasingly deeper when he thinks Taehyung isn’t looking.

As a sort of “thanks everyone for the bomb-ass fiscal year,” some head honcho of the agency decides to hold their annual holiday party in Hawaii this year, a fact that Taehyung doesn’t remember until there’s 5 hours left to go, when Jimin calls him over a question about straw hats.

(“Do you think it’ll look too touristy if I wear it to the airport?”

“Why are you going to the airport? Oh, wait, SHIT, I FUCKING FORGOT—!”

“HOW DO YOU FUCKING FORGET—?”)

Thirteen stressful hours later, he’s standing at the edge of a private beach near Waikiki, letting the warm waters lap over his feet and his toes sink into the sand as he gazes out over the expanse of endless ocean, watching Jimin and Yoongi struggle with surfing.

Yeah, he thinks, feeling the waves swirl around his toes and the sun warm his back, he could get
used to this.

He feels something wet slap against his back, and when he turns around, he finds one of the new, friendlier stylists giggling behind him, fingers curled delicately around a lump of wet sand.

“You were looking too relaxed,” she explains, winding her arm back for what looks like another pitch.

“Oh my god, do I still look relaxed now?” Taehyung pulls a face and starts to run away as she lobs her sand bomb. It hits him straight in the back, “Fuck, ow.”

“Yeah, you do,” she winds her hand back for another pitch.

“Hey!” Taehyung shields his face and laughs as she flings it at him, takes a step forward and catches her by the wrist. “Stop, that hurts.”

“Sorry,” she says, batting her eyes with a pout on her lips. “But, not sorry. It was funny.”

Taehyung’s about to retort when something hits him bluntly in the back, sending him falling face-first into the waves. He’s trying to rub the salt water out of his eyes, the stylist skittishly fluttering around next to him as she offers her help, when a shadow falls over both of them.

“Sorry,” Jungkook emerges from his silhouette, zero amusement in his eyes, a surfboard in his hand. “But not sorry. It was funny.”

“Fuck that actually hurt,” Taehyung scowls. “Could you watch where you’re fuckin’ going?”

Jungkook just shrugs before turning around and shuffling off into the waves. And of course that sets Taehyung off, and he stomps after Jungkook, grabbing his wrist and spinning him around.

“What’s your fucking problem?” Taehyung hisses lowly, keeping an eye on the stylist as she watches them curiously.

Jungkook yanks his arm out of Taehyung’s grasp and just offers a wordless glare.

“If you have something to say,” Taehyung hisses, his head suddenly throbbing with a toxic combination of anger and lack of sleep. “Just say it.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Jungkook mutters, looking away.

“Clearly it does,” Taehyung growls. “Just say it.”

Jungkook finally murmurs, “I don’t like how close she’s getting to you. It bothers me.”

“Why?”

“It’s…” Jungkook twists his head away, biting the bottom of his lip as he hesitates. "It's so obvious she wants you.”

“So? I don’t feel the same. And, anyway, what’s it to you? It’s not like we’re s—”

“So?” Jungkook cuts Taehyung off. “It's annoying.”

“That's it?”

"...Yeah.'
"Okay? Why's that got you all like—" Taehyung gestures wildly at Jungkook’s face. “—this?”

“Because—fuck. Just forget about it,” Jungkook begins stomping back towards the waves.

"Jungkook—!" Taehyung begins to hiss, grabbing at Jungkook's arm, the sea-spray soaked limb slipping easily out of his grasp.

Jungkook abruptly stops anyway, calling over his shoulder a little louder than Taehyung would have liked. “And, oh, yeah, before you mention it again—I fucking know we’re not serious. You don’t have to remind me.”

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Taehyung doesn’t see Jungkook again until sundown, when the whole company is shuttled over to a private luau for their first of a week’s worth of company “events”. He makes sure to get a table as far from Jungkook as possible, pulling Namjoon and Jimin over to one of the further tables, and turns away when he’s pulled up onto the stage along with Jihoon and Yoongi to learn the hula from the dancers.

It’s so stupid, he was the one to break it off and yet he’s the one still watching Jungkook like a hawk, letting envy creep vines into his chest as he watches a girl, some staff member he’s seen around the agency before, hula her way over and share a smile with the idol. Jungkook doesn’t look his way once, and when the lesson is over, he, like a gentleman, helps her down the stairs and sits right next to her at a table by the stage.

That’s when Taehyung turns around, half-listens to Namjoon drunkenly talk about his pipedream of starting his own agency with Hoseok as he mopes into his plate of kalua pork, watching the reflection of the flames from the fire dancers flicker against the walls as he knocks back his Mai Tai.

Three more acts pass like that before he realizes he really has to take a piss, and so in the middle of a Tahitian number, he abruptly stands up.

“Where are you going?” Jimin’s eyes are plastered on the stage.

“Bathroom,” and Taehyung takes off, eyes sweeping across the room and unfortunately registering the fact that Jungkook and the girl’s chairs were now vacated.

He has a bad feeling when he steps out into a courtyard and the first thing he hears is an airy giggle, a couple clearly having fun behind a fern and conveniently right next to the very bathroom Taehyung was looking for. And Taehyung steps back, racking his brain for other options before he realizes he’s a bit too drunk for that and gives up. And so he warily heads for it, sandals crunching over the gravel before the guy facing his direction comes into full view.
And of course Taehyung’s heart jumps into his throat and of course it’s Jungkook, sucking face with that girl behind a fern by the bathroom like the fucking fool he is, and before Taehyung has the sense to pick his jaw up off the floor and walk away, Jungkook glances up and locks eyes with him.

His partner notices his change in demeanor and turns around, spotting Taehyung before gasping and darting away, and before Taehyung can turn heel and leave as well, Jungkook’s already striding over, blocking Taehyung against the wall with a well-placed arm.

“She’s one of my backup dancers,” Jungkook explains without being asked, his breath laced with beer, and his eyes slightly unfocused. He staggers a bit before he snickers, “You jealous?”

Taehyung stares hard at the ground, balls his hands into fists, and shakes his head.

“Oh really? Well we’ve been talking for the better part of the day and she asked me out on a date,” Jungkook continues, eyes searching for something in Taehyung’s expression. “And I told her—”

No.

“—yes.”

Even though he has no right, Taehyung feels his heart plummet.

“I normally don’t, especially with staff, like you know, the whole don’t shit in your own backyard thing, but sometimes I make exceptions and I happen to think she’s really pretty and nice,” Jungkook hesitates, squinting, taunting him like the immature brat he is, “You know, if we were dating, I would have told her no in a heartbeat, but like you said, we’re not,” Jungkook continues, giggling to himself as he methodically narrating the play-by-play of it all in monotone, each sentence driving into Taehyung like knives, “So I’m gonna dip from this in like a minute and take her out to dinner. It’s on the other side of the island and it’s fucking fancy and afterwards I’ll probably take her back to my—”

“Nice,” Taehyung feels a flash of anger. “Sounds lovely. I hope you have great time.”

Jungkook regards him for a moment, grin wiped from his face, “That’s all you have to say?”

“Yeah? It doesn’t matter to me.” But it does, it really does, wow, fuck, Taehyung’s frown deepens as a sinister feeling starts coursing through his veins. “Take some fucking pictures, even. In fact, post them online, since you’re clearly you’re fine with fucking around in broad daylight like this—”

“Is that really how you feel?”

“Yeah. I don’t care. Do what you want.”

“You don’t care,” Jungkook repeats.

“Yeah. I don’t. But that sounds like that’s not the answer you wanted me to give,” Taehyung sneers as his head pounds. “How do you want me to react? Just tell me and stop the games. What do you really fucking want me to say?”

Jungkook leans close, his hand gripping Taehyung’s forearm lightly in uncertainty, his nose brushing against Taehyung’s ear in hovering hesitation, so silent for a moment that Taehyung can hear the soft whistle of Jungkook’s inhale right before he murmurs quietly, “I want you to tell me to reject her.” Then his hand slips down, fingers ghosting over Taehyung’s before he speaks again, with a little more resolve, “I want you to tell me to not go.”

“I’m not going to do that,” Taehyung snorts as he pushes Jungkook away, “I’m not that kind of
person. That’s entirely up to you.”

“But—”

“For the last time, I told you,” Taehyung glares at the cracks in the floor. “I don’t fucking care.”

And at that Jungkook curls his fingers around Taehyung’s collar and yanks him into the bathroom and into the nearest stall, latching the door before pushing Taehyung against the wall.

“At least look me in the eye,” Jungkook mutters, face way too close. “If you’re going to say that kind of shit.”

“Fine,” Taehyung snarls, looking up with his eyes blazing. This was starting to be a stupid game, but he’d be damned if he wasn’t going to win it, “I. Don’t. Fucking. Care—”

And suddenly Jungkook is kissing him hard against the tiles, hands roaming over and under things, and Taehyung bends to his touch, because even though it’s been only days, it’s been too fucking long and Taehyung might be slightly fucking addicted and that’s certainly a problem and—

“Still don’t care?” Jungkook breaks it and breathes hard, hand ghosting over a prominent piece of evidence in Taehyung’s shorts.

“Nope,” Taehyung lies with his heart pounding in his ears.

“Alright,” Jungkook says as he sinks to his knees.

This must be dysfunction in motion, Taehyung’s fist clenched Jungkook’s hair as his mind screams at him to keep his resolve, Jungkook staring at him unnervingly, daring him to let out a sound as a couple of drunk tourists wander in and make a fuss by the urinals, Taehyung feeling himself cliffdrop over the edge in the seconds after the group leaves and heartbeats before Jungkook spits it all out in the toilet like a chore, wiping his mouth off on the back of his hand without a word and yanking the door open with a bang, revealing Taehyung for all to see as he totters out.

“You know, a fucking warning would have been nice,” Taehyung hisses, flipping up his middle finger as he scrambles to pull his swimshorts up from his ankles.

“That would require me to care,” Jungkook turns from where he’s washing off his hands at the sink, eyes flicking down to where Taehyung’s hurriedly tying the drawstring on his shorts. “And you’ve made it pretty clear we’re past that.”

What a fucking edgelord.

Before Taehyung figure out the best way to indignantly squawk about how being impassive about public indecency and being impassive about whatever the fuck was going on between them were really not at all the same, Jungkook turns on his heel.

“Have fun on your date,” Taehyung quips with a scowl.

“Thanks,” and with that, Jungkook stumbles out the door.
Taehyung doesn’t see Jungkook during the day for the rest of the week, which is just as well, because for what must be the first time in his life, he wouldn’t really know what to say.

And it doesn’t really matter anyway, because Hawaii has so much to offer by way of a vacation, that Taehyung’s having a grand ol’ whirlwind of a time, doing cool shit like helicoptor-ing and ATV-ing and totally not thinking of—

“Are you feeling okay?” Jimin asks as they’re lounging on a yacht zipping along the coast of the island, sun idyllically high in the sky and dolphins trailing alongside them in their wake.

“Yeah? What makes you say that.”

“You just seem kinda off lately.”

“I’m fine,” Taehyung shakes his head and tries not to wonder what Jungkook’s doing. “Don’t worry.”

“Alright,” Jimin says, clearly unconvinced. “I’m here when you wanna talk.”

He never comes up with anything to say.

Of course, at night it’s a different story.

It starts with incessant knocking on his hotel door at 1 in the morning that reveals a drunk-out-of-his-mind Jungkook as the source, and just how Taehyung finds himself going from standing with his arms crossed and arguing in hushed tones in the hallway to burying his moans into the crook of his elbow on his bed within five minutes is anyone’s guess, but what he does know when he finds himself in similar scenarios, curling up in the sheets post-coitus as the door clicks shut somewhere behind him, not once or twice but four nights a row, is that a) it’s a pattern and b) they have a fucking problem.

“Why can’t I quit you?” Jungkook slurs one night, completely out of it as Taehyung leaves a mark on his neck as his fingers dig into Taehyung's back, his eyes glisten in the dark.
And Taehyung pretends like he doesn’t ask himself the same question, just answers it by wordlessly sinking a little deeper, a little harder instead until Jungkook’s rendered incapable of saying anything else, and tries to live in the moment and minimize the regret he’ll inevitably feel in the morning.

+++ 

By the fifth day, the island fever is setting in and he’s starting to get sick of these nightly company functions for more reasons than one, they’re boring, they’re long, and (mostly) they’re unbearable because he has to deal with his demons and exist amicably in the same room as Jungkook for more than a couple of hours.

Tonight is extra dry, it’s a dinner party where the executive awards are being handled off, AKA senior management engaging in a huge circlejerk and everyone has to sit stuffed into suits and just clap all night long, and so to prepare, Taehyung’s wandering around, wondering why he bothered to show up early and trying to source alcohol to get as hammared as possible before it to numb the boredom.

Jungkook’s not here yet He’s not looking for anyone in particular, but he spots his first familiar face out on the balcony, and quickly makes his way over to the railing.

“So,” Taehyung sidles up to Jihoon and punches him in the shoulder. “Congrats on making it onto WANNA TEEN, I was rooting for you. Tell Daniel and Mingyu congrats too.”

“Oh hey!” Jihoon turns around with a smile. “Thanks man, you helped us out a lot.”

“I didn’t do anything, it was all you guys.”

“Nah,” Jihoon shakes his head. “You definitely put at least me over the edge.”

“You’re too modest,” Taehyung just shakes his head.

“I’m going to have to disagree,” Jihoon laughs. “Also your tie’s loose, hyung.”

“Oh is it?” Taehyung frowns down at it. “Well, whatever, it was a struggle to get it to here.”

“Here let me try to fix it,” Jihoon takes his hands out of his pockets, steps close, and begins adjusting it.

And Jihoon’s almost done when suddenly and hand shoots out of nowhere and pushes him away. Taehyung’s suddenly half-way across the room, a hand death-gripping his arm as he’s yanked across the floor. The entire room falls into a hush, all eyes on the two of them like the spotlight of Taehyung’s worst nightmares. He can’t wrestle himself out of Jungkook’s grip without making a
scene but he’s completely aware that by letting him haul him across the floor, that in of itself is a scene. So he just bows his head and lets Jungkook wordlessly drags him over into a waiting elevator. The second the doors close, Jungkook’s all over Taehyung with zero finesse, alcohol on his breath and sloppily shoving his tongue down Taehyung’s throat like he’s a teenager again with something to prove.

The thing is, Taehyung lets him do it. Keeps track of the floor they’re on and doesn’t think about why he melts like putty and it’s not until that the elevator door opens that he snaps out of it, the anger returns with a flash and seizes the opportunity to shove Jungkook off of him and grab him by his collar and pull him down the hallway until they’re at his room. As soon as he gets the door unlocked, he throws Jungkook in and slams the door shut behind him.

“What the fuck was that about?!” he hisses menacingly as Jungkook stumbles in and slumps down onto the floor against the bed.

Jungkook stares at the ground defiantly, silent and stubborn.

“Answer. Me.”

“I’m drunk and heartbroken,” Jungkook recites monotonously like he’s rehearsed this prior, then grins to himself like it’s actually funny. “Get off my case.”

A flash of irritation strikes Taehyung, and he raises his voice, “You think this is some kind of joke?! What the fuck is your fucking problem?!”

“I’ll tell you what my fucking problem is,” Jungkook looks up and the grin slides from his face as he narrows his eyes. “I put myself out there for a guy who keeps fucking playing with me. And that same guy seems to really get off on hitting on other people in front of my face. That’s my problem. My problem is you.”

“Playing? Hitting on? What the? If anything, I made it clear and you’re the one that’s—”

“So you let all your friends touch you like that? You two out there were getting really fucking close, you should have gotten a room—”

”He was fixing my fucking tie! And besides, he’s just a friend—”

“You can be someone’s friend and still wanna fuck them,” Jungkook snorts. “I can tell you from experience it’s not mutually exclusive, if anything—”

“Why does that matter? And why are you acting like this? Again, I told you I don’t want to make things serious with you, and so part of that—”

“You know, telling me why would have been, like, nice.”

“—and so part of that,” Taehyung speaks over Jungkook. “Means you don’t get a say in how I interact with people.” Because I’m not yours, Taehyung almost adds in spite, but catches it before it slips off his tongue. “So, again, what’s your fucking problem?”

“I still want you.” Jungkook says immediately, not looking up from the floor. “I still want you so fucking bad. I wanna be something to you beyond a fuckbuddy. I wanna call you mine. I wanna be able to tell other people to back the fuck off. And I wanna be yours. And right now I’m fucking drunk enough to finally say it out loud, but sober enough to still remember you don’t want me back. So, sorry. I’m fucking sorry. I’m trying to move on, but I’m kinda having a fucking shitty time.”
“Even if you’re having a shitty time,” Taehyung hisses and points down the hallway. “How is it remotely a good idea to make a scene out there? I mean clearly you’re going off the chain, the luau was evidence of that, but what the *fuck* is going through your head to justify it being a good idea?!”

“I don’t have a dating ban. What’s there to hide?” Jungkook scoffs. “Am I supposed to be celibate for my whole life? I was seeing people even when I was in BTD anyway, what’s the difference?”

“The difference? No one else fucking knew!”

“I don’t care if they know.”

“But I do!”

“Why?” Jungkook challenges. “Because I’m not worth it to you? Oh wait, hold up, you don’t have to say anything, I already know the answer to that.”

“Holy fuck,” Taehyung lets out a scornful laugh, “Why are you making this about you?”

“Because I’m involved! I don’t know if you realize this but you’re kinda breaking my fucking head —”

“Okay,” Taehyung pinches his eyes shut holds up a hand. “So yeah, *this* is why I don’t fucking date your kind anymore.”

“What do you mean by *my kind*?”

“Celebrities, media-personalities, socialites, whatever,” Taehyung narrows his eyes. “You all think the world starts and ends with you, and I guess that’s inevitable when you have people constantly dick-riding you 24/7. I kinda hoped you’d be different, but—”

“I-I’m,” Jungkook flinches, “But I’m not like that. It’s just, it’s just, y-you’re literally telling me I’m not worth to you, I think I’m allowed to react like this. Like what am I supposed to be? Fucking happy—?”

“How about considering things happening outside of your bubble? You’re not the only one suffering,” Taehyung cuts him off, “Like, for instance, how someone’s been fucking following me for the fucking past month.”

“...what?” Jungkook looks up, startled, “You never told me! How was I supposed to know?! What the *fuck*? Did anything happen to you?”

“No.”

“What? Are you sure it’s actually happening then?”

“They’re harassing me online. Someone broke into my studio and left me compromising picture and a threatening note. That saesang who keeps calling you found my number. I mean...” Taehyung laughs helplessly.

“I...” Jungkook stares straight at him, he blinks, his brows draw together into disconcerted frown. “Holy shit. Why did you not tell me?”

“I didn’t want you to worry,” Taehyung laughs blithely, “And what could you realistically have done?”

“I could have done *something*, like, I don’t know, hired a guard, call the police, I don’t know, at the
minimum, fucking been there for you,” Jungkook stares at him and asks quietly. “Why did you not tell me?”

“What’s the point? You know why that wouldn’t work and I didn’t want to make you worried—”

“Well, I’m fucking worried now—!”

“—and I really don’t think any of that would stop them.”

“There’s ways to protect you!” Jungkook throws his hands up. “Holy shit, Taehyung, you don’t understand, you’re not used to this, if you had just told me, I could have—”

“I don’t understand? I’m not used to it? I’ve gotten caught before, if anything I’m—”

“That’s not the same and you know it! It was your Instagram persona and it was 100% YGM’s fault, I would never do something so fucking stupid—”

“Even without stupid mistakes, I’ve been getting harassed by your saesangs ever since Cozy Conversations. I don’t really want to deal with this anymore. I’m not an idol for a fucking reason! I thought the phone call threats were bad, but the stalking is next level—”

“Fucking say something about it then! If you don’t tell me, I can’t fucking help you! I’ve been dealing with this kind of shit since I was 15, I could have fucking protected you,” Jungkook runs a hand frantically through his hair. “Taehyung, you don’t get it—”

“I don’t get it? I don’t get it? Why do you keep blaming me?” Taehyung asks, growing more livid with ever word. “Why is it always my fault? Why is it always something I should or shouldn’t have done?”

“I’m not blaming you—it’s, just, it’s—you can’t change them, but you can change how you—”

“Why,” Taehyung’s voice rises as he works himself into a frenzy. “If we can agree there’s shitty people in this world who are going to do whatever shitty thing they’re going to do no matter what, why can’t we just agree it’s sometimes better to pick a better battle and just let it go—”

“I can’t let it go because, because I’m fucking in love with you,” Jungkook raises his voice, unbridled anger seeping into his tone, staring Taehyung straight in the eyes like it’s supposed to mean something to him. “I’m sorry, it’s hard because I’m just really fucking in love with you.”

At that Taehyung lets out an incredulous bark of a laugh, narrowing his eyes. “In love? In love. We’ve been fucking for like two weeks, I don’t even think it’s been half a year since you were still treating me like shit—”

“T-that wasn’t, that wasn’t because I—” Jungkook cuts in. “I didn’t mean to—”

“—do you usually just toss around that phrase with everyone you’re with like it’s nothing? Or are you just that naive that you think you’re actually in love with me after a few fuckin’ weeks, because either way, that’s—”

“It wasn’t weeks. It was longer than that,” Jungkook suddenly spits out, staring hard at the floor, his brows creased in a deep-set frame for his growing frown. “Way longer.”

The retort dies in Taehyung’s throat. “What?”

“Try years. Eight of them. Yeah, shit, it’s really been eight fucking years,” Jungkook says, curling up
into a ball, his forearms shielding his head. “Since the day I met you.”

No. Taehyung can’t even process this, it doesn’t make any fucking sense. All this fucking time? Then wait, that means it goes back to when—

“So, I think that’s a long enough time to figure that out,” Jungkook mumbles. Gone is the sharp venom in his voice, replaced with a growing waiver. The knuckles on his fists grow whiter, “So yeah, sorry, again, it’s sorta difficult for me to just, just, just let it go.”

For that long? What were the other six years about? The questions are swirling around his head, but all that escapes is a quiet: “Why?”

“I mean...you believed in me when I was at my lowest and gave me almost everything that made me into who I am now. My first song, confidence, my first friends, a sense of purpose, you made me, you were everything to me,” Jungkook looks up, eyes unfocused, expression wiped blank as the corner of his eye shines through the dark. He blinks, and a tear slips down his cheek as his voice cracks, “Who wouldn’t fall in love with that?”

Oh. Fuck. He can see the guilt speeding like train in the distance, hurtling toward him at lightning. This is bad. He can’t deal with this too, he needs to make it clear, he needs to come straight, he needs to get rid of this burden, he needs to right some wrong, he needs to—

“Why do you think I helped you?” Taehyung starts. This can also be a solution, “Like, you, specifically?”

“I...I don’t know.’

“I did it to take down Fuckface,” Taehyung says quietly. “Did you know that? And to make it more painful for him, I chose you. Because you were the worst trainee in the group and I thought it would be funnier. That’s it,” but was it? Taehyung’s never bothered to figure it out, and so maybe that was an answer in of itself. “I’m not a good person, so you shouldn’t be idolizing me as one.”

“I mean...to some extent, I knew that,” Jungkook says, head hanging low, defeat in his tone. “I knew. Deep down I knew. I knew. I knew.Not specifically why, I mean, when you say it aloud like that, it’s little, I don’t know, fuck, like, wow. But, sure, to some degree I was aware.”

Taehyung says nothing.

“Because, you know,” Jungkook tells the carpet. “I always asked myself, every time we used to hang out, why would someone like you would waste time with a kid like me? And I knew, deep down, the answer wasn’t because of anything I had control over.”

“So why did you stick around then?” Taehyung says quietly. “I’d personally hate me.”

“I didn’t care,” Jungkook laughs breathlessly. “Pathetic, right? It made me feel validated, like I was important or something to you, at least at some level, at some point in time. I would have felt like that even if I weren’t in love with you. It kept me going even through the disaster of our debut album, it was like, I dunno, a light at the end of the tunnel? That someone believed in me, that I deserved to be there. Because I knew I wasn’t the ideal. So yeah, you telling me—especially now—that it was literally because I was the worst, that’s a little...” Jungkook sharply exhales, and another tear drips down his face. “...haha, like, shit?” Jungkook squeezes his eyes shut and turns his face away from Taehyung. “That gets to me a bit, I’ll be honest. Was I really not worth anything more to you?”

“I mean, what do you want me to say?”
“Haha. *Fuck,*” Jungkook wipes his eyes. “What kind of question is that? I don’t fucking know. *Fuck.*”

They lapse into silence, Jungkook’s stifled uneven breathing the only thing audible in the room. The edge of the tabletop digs uncomfortably into Taehyung’s leg, the silence hangs in the air so heavily that his heartbeat is almost audible. The darkness blankets the room, save for the patches of moonlight that casts everything into contrast, the lamps, the bed, the ugly pattern on the carpet on the floor.

And the two of them, motionless figures at a standstill.

Taehyung’s so numb now, he barely registers what he’s saying. He’s tired, he’s frustrated, he’s drunk, and he just wants this to to end. And he’d love nothing more than to curl up in his sheets and sleep until everything’s okay. Maybe that’s why he lets the worst in him take control for a split second and asks it, a simple *ad hominem* attack, a succinct summation of the latent resentment that he regrets the minute he lets impassivity droop his eyes to half-lids.

“Why are you crying?” The question slips past his lips before he fully realizes what he’s asking, his own voice sounding detached and foreign to his own ears, the sick satisfaction of getting a jab in almost immediately drowned by the suffocating remorse that rushes in behind it in it’s wake.

“I—” Jungkook snaps back immediately before he suddenly blinks, the moment he processes Taehyung’s words apparent in the flickers of his expression. His brows draw together and his voice wavers and cracks, “I—shit, sorry, I...I can’t help it,” Jungkook’s expression squeezes into a contorted frown, another tear slips out and he quickly wipes his eye off on the collar of his t-shirt. “I’m just so fucking, like...sad? I dunno. Sorry. I’m still kinda wasted too, I’m just...Sorry. I’m not capable of handling this all right now, it’s a lot, too much—I—I—” Jungkook takes in a shuddering breath and furiously wipes his face with his hand. “—sorry. I’m sorry. I don’t, I can't—fuck—I-I don't know why. I’m sorry.”

*It’s okay* is what Taehyung means to say, but it dies on his lips, killed by timing and fear of sounding disingenuous, and so he just stares blankly instead.

“I—I think—” Jungkook continues, without prompting. “Some of it...some of it is that I didn’t understand why you started ignoring me—and I still don’t—but I thought, maybe one day, if I worked hard enough, if I achieved everything I was capable of, if I became the person I wanted to be, I could one day make myself into someone who could stand next to you. And I guess I was wrong. Yeah, sorry,” Jungkook curls himself into his arms. “I’m not looking for sympathy, I’m just, it’s just, the impossibility of it all is starting to hit me,” Jungkook takes another breath. “Just like, it feels like I was never meant to be with you.”

“Yeah,” And Taehyung thinks he should stop, but he’s always been so good at twisting knives. “I think...yeah. I think, also, that this has made it really clear that it’d be better if we stop hooking up at this point.”

Jungkook stares at the ground in stunned silence.

“Yeah,” Taehyung bites. “Let’s end it. It’s too toxic.”

“No,” Jungkook’s hands ball into fists. “Wait—”

“I don’t think you can handle it,” Taehyung looks at him coolly. “I’m serious.”

"I—" Jungkook mumbles into his elbow. “I can.”
"I can’t have you flipping out every time I, like, even just talk to someone else. That's crazy. What you did out there just now, what you did out there at the luau, what you did out on the beach, that's crazy."

"That's—I'll stop—"

"Like between that and your fans, I just..." Taehyung laughs exasperatedly, running a hand through his hair to clutch at his bangs. "I can't handle it. I'm not equipped to deal. And since I know that now, I don’t want to keep leading you on," his voice is deadly quiet at this point. “I want to stop. There’s no point."

“Wait, no—”

"Jungkook, I can't give you what you want," Taehyung says quietly. “We’re not good for each other.”

Jungkook doesn’t move, doesn’t say anything, and remains in his curled up position on the floor. After a minute, Taehyung gathers his stuff and heads towards the door. His hand is almost on the door handle when he feels Jungkook grab his arm.

“Can we...” Jungkook’s hand clenches a little tighter around his elbow, “One last time?”

Taehyung knocks it off with his own, “I don’t think this is a good idea—"

“I need closure,” Jungkook pleads.

Taehyung’s not sure why, but at that, he nods. It’s not a good idea, his brain is telling him, as Jungkook kisses him gently and unbuttons his shirt, but the heart wants what it wants.

And so, for once Taehyung closes his eyes and actually listens, melancholy settling in his chest somewhere between the pain and pleasure. Jungkook’s so transparently desperate with the way he holds Taehyung, the way he moves, the way he sounds, the way he wants him, it’s almost embarrassing how much of his heart is exposed, and Taehyung’s glad he’s face-down most of the time because it hides the fact he feels the same. It feels like in some ways Jungkook’s trying to convince Taehyung to change his mind, and Taehyung is forced to admit to himself, as he braces himself against his forearms and buries his gasps into the sheets, that it almost works.

Jungkook flips him over at the last minute, kisses him through it sweet and slow with his eyes closed and his brows furrowed. And Taehyung knows this because he forces himself to keep his own eyes open as a strange victory to himself. Because it proves to himself that his heart is guarded, he’s in control, and most importantly, he’s not in love.

It doesn’t matter if it’s not necessarily true.

There’s a fraction of a second when he falters and forgets this is the last time, when he wonders if it could really work between them, when silence settles, when Jungkook reluctantly slips into sleep clutching Taehyung by the waist, when Taehyung watches the way Jungkook’s chest rises and falls outlined by the lights outside, when he cards his fingers through Jungkook’s hair and when it hits him hard that this is something he probably really wants.

So he winds his other arm around Jungkook, holds him a little closer, and for one last time, in the quiet hours before dawn, he lets himself pretend.
we angstin now LMAO

Also sorry, the flashback stuff was supposed to end this chapter but the chapter literally almost hit 20k with it because i’m pretty shit at estimating wc, so bear with me, it will actually end next chapter also ima scream this shit is going to breach 100k next chp and that’s actually my worst nightmare LMAO this is too LoNG

rofl also i created a twitter a while back to keep up with the bbmas and have been just lurking around since, but yeah: this is it

oh yeah and some references

- kai and krystal were a speculated couple for months (years?) and there were many speculation posts about it, most of which were pretty much dismissed by k and i fans alike, which is super hilarious to look back in retrospect when it was revealed that they were infact an item
- loen’s response to iu’s accidental selca upload with her and a topless eunhyuk, basically they were like, lmao eunhyuk was visiting iu b/c she was sick \(_(ツ)_/\)
- sehun dealing with a saesang on a vlive
- some other crazy shit regarding exo's saesangs, who were pretty nuts in 2012-13 and may be still pretty nuts, some lowlights include breaking in and stealing underwear (supposedly), carving into their own forearm 'I <3 EXO', chasing them with vans, finding and buying tickets for their flights (and taking pics of them sleeping), also kim yeoshin who is infamous for poisoning tvxq's yunho with glue in his drink and several other idols and who made death threats against sehun (supposedly. the poisonings were real but i don't think it was confirmed they were committed by the same person or if it was just someone online claiming to have done it)
- an opinion article on why saesangs and companies/idols have a co-dependent relationship. it is written by an armchair academic/groupie but i think it covers commonly-held beliefs for why companies don't really take action. i also happen to think the article is too kind. saesangs are cancers in the form of obsessive stalkers that need to seek help lol, not just "super curious" fans
The bed’s empty and cold when Taehyung wakes up, the rumpled sheets on the other side the only sign that everything hadn’t just been a shitty dream.

That’s probably why he immediately packs his stuff without a second thought, exiting the room without looking back as he books the first flight out back to Seoul, something with an offshade of misery clinging to his chest.

One moment he’s wading through TSA lines through a muggy airport in Honolulu, the next moment his plane his touching down in Incheon. He goes home, he sleeps for a day in a half, and just like that, Taehyung resets and moves on.

It’s a bit strange at the beginning, because, wordlessly, they’ve agreed to a full-stop to whatever they had: no texts, no calls, no face-to-face interactions, and even when the rest of the company returns to Seoul and Taehyung goes out for drinks with the rest of guys, it’s just the six of them, not seven.

Even if it’s suddenly suffocatingly lonely in his studio at first, and even if it feels like there’s something uncomfortably missing, he still wakes up and falls asleep every day, the sun still rises in the east and sets in the west, and the hours without him slowly become days, the days becomes weeks, and the weeks turn into months.

Until, one day, Taehyung wakes up feeling okay.

Pretty soon, Taehyung’s swamped with work again. Breakout Suckup hits him up for another song, the ballad he had given her had done so well that she wanted him on one of the title tracks on her debut solo album. And it starts out professional, but during one of their studio sessions, he starts noticing how she starts eying him. It’s simple, she’s pretty, why not are pretty much his guiding rules and so he lets her dance around him with flirty texts and veiled hangouts, until he just goes for it one night after he walks her up to her apartment and kisses her outside her front door.

His heart doesn’t really race when it happens, it’s a trundling beat compared to the way he can feel hers galloping in her chest when he draws her close. But all he wonders is why he even cares
anymore. Because when she pulls him inside with a suggestive giggle, he just finds himself thinking about open banana milk cartons and a shitty seagull tattoo instead. And look at how great that all turned out.

They don’t call it dating for the sake of plausible deniability, but it’s pretty much the same, familiar game of semantics. They hold hands when no one is looking. They go out with their masks on and do things together. He stays the night, multiple times a week. She stops by his studio almost every day, even after their song is released (Don’t Regret It, dream pop with a sax edge, it ends up being a summer hit), and if anyone gets suspicious, no one mentions a thing.

She’s perfect too, on paper. Pretty, witty, ambitious, safe, a partner his mother would be proud he brought home. She’s entertaining to be around, and exactly what Taehyung thinks he wants: never quiet, never still, lowest of the keys, but always dragging Taehyung around to try new things. She’s perfectly happy to be the driver of their relationship, never really minding how he takes the backseat, just enjoying the view. She’s never jealous about who he hangs around, never asks why he’s out late or can’t make dinner, doesn’t say a word when he forgets to text her good morning, ask her how her day was, get her something on their month-anniversary and while it could very well be because she’s chill, Taehyung convinces himself it’s because she simply doesn’t care.

Which would be convenient, because he doesn’t either.

His friends like her well enough too, or rather, if they have any negative opinions they deign to share them with him. There’s some side-eye and raised brows initially, but eventually all the flack disappears. And even Jimin, who, since the minute he landed from Hawaii, always looks like he’s been half a mind from sitting Taehyung down and really letting him have it, warms up to her within a week.

Of course when it’s the six of them and her, it’s awkward for a reason that everyone avoids like the plague, but everyone dutifully acts their part and welcomes her warmly without a hitch, like everything’s fine and the puzzle’s still complete, like there isn’t an elephant sitting in the room, and like there wasn’t someone else with them in her place, holding his hand for the first time and whispering shitty jokes into his ear not even a few weeks ago.

The only thing she really lacks is who she’s not, Taehyung realizes one blue morning when he wakes up from the happiest dream he’s had in a while, a sense of emptiness settling in when he opens his eyes as finds himself curled up alone in his bed instead of wrapped in a particular pair of arms he lost the right to dream about. But as the months pass and complacency becomes a default state of being, Taehyung starts to forget why that matters. And so in the dark hours of the night with her gasping beneath him, Taehyung starts believing that this the kind of love that he really wants.

Life, it turns out, vehemently disagrees.

They’re walking down the hall one day, and she says something somewhat funny, and Taehyung, hands stuffed in pockets, looks down at her and laughs like he’s supposed to, eyes calculatedly folding into amused half-crescents. And suddenly, someone clips his shoulder hard, and he stumbles, nearly falling to the floor.

“Fuck,” Taehyung whips around, annoyed. “Ow, watch where you’re go—”

Then, the words die, shot where they stand in his throat.

Because it’s the first time he’s seen him in what must be months. But it’s undeniably Jungkook walking past with his hands jammed in his pockets, because that’s his jacket, his piercings, his back, it’s his goddamn cologne. It’s like a dream and a nightmare and Taehyung’s heart begins pounding
like a drum in his ears, his lungs seem to forget how to draw in air, and his body forgets how to move, rendering him unable to even turn his head away as he watches Jungkook stalk down the hall.

When he finally snaps out of it and turns back to Breakout Suckup, there’s enough of something—that looks oddly like resignation—in her eyes to tell Taehyung that she knows.

“Are you okay?” She asks.

“Yeah,” Taehyung replies.

She doesn’t look convinced. But she doesn’t mention anything about it when he leads her back to the studio with his hand clamped on her wrist, and she doesn’t say much at all and just sits with her legs curled up on his couch for the rest of the afternoon. In fact, she’s so quiet that he forgets that she’s even there.

Which is just as well, because he’s rattled to the point where he gets stuck on a loop of flicking between a few unfinished songs, trapped on a carousel of unproductivity, thoughts drifting from work and spiraling around a certain guy instead, because: where was he going? What was he doing? What was his reaction? Did he see—

And then she breaks his thoughts with a tap in on the shoulder.

“Hey,” she says, when Taehyung looks up at her, thin grin gracing her lips. She blinks her eyes and what seems like a trick of the light, they glisten in the corners. She quickly ducks her head, rubbing her face with her sleeve, mumbling something about how she’s super sleepy, and when she looks back up, her eyes are clear once again, “I think I’m gonna go.”

“Alright,” Taehyung says, standing up and pulling her into a hug. “Want me to walk you down?”

She looks down at her shoes, head pressed against his chest. Then she sniffs softly and rubs her face again, voice small and wavering, “I’ll be fine.”

Alarms go off in Taehyung’s head then, and so he crouches down, peering up into her face. She reels in surprise, taking a step back and covering her mouth with her sleeve.

“Hey,” Taehyung asks, concern seeping into his tone, furrow pulling his brows together. “Is everything okay? Wait, shoot, your eyes, they’re kinda red—”

She stares at him wordlessly for a moment that seems to last forever, eyes shifting from side to side. It’s like she’s almost challenging him to figure it out, the crease in her brows growing with the silence. His heart beats in his chest, drumming slow in his ears, because he’s always been a terrible reader and has no idea what she wants. And so they stay like that, locked in a staredown standstill, until she finally conceeds with short sigh.

“Yeah,” She says with resolve, pulling a grin that doesn’t quite reach her eyes. “I’m fine.”

Then before she leaves, she gently takes his face between her hands and kisses him so softly that it feels like it’s a last time.
It turns out, he’s right about that.

The next morning, Breakout Suckup begins to distance herself, replying to his texts less and less as the week crawls by. He stops seeing her for spates of days that eventually turn into weeks. It’s all part of a tactic called breadcrumb ghosting, Taehyung finds out later when he tells Luna over lunch, and it works because he’s swamped with work and he believes they’re just drifting apart.

There’s a period of ambiguity that he doesn’t realize they’ve even entered into until they’re nearly at the end of it, when he wakes up at one in the morning with a start, groggily raises his head and realizes they haven’t even texted each other for a few days. But rather than do something about it, he keeps his distance, and it’s cleanly resolved that weekend, when he decides last minute to swing by a party at Sings Gud’s place and sees Breakout Suckup chatting with That One Actor Guy, interest that was shade more than platonic lighting up in her eyes.

And the fucked up part is that he doesn’t really feel anything—not jealousy, not relief, not sadness, not happiness, just a sense of regret that oh things have changed, yet again, without him realizing.

She sees him and stiffens until he raises his brow and mouths ‘you look good together’ and then she relaxes, eyes flicking away and blush dusting her face as Actor Guy leans down and whispers something into her ear.

And Taehyung takes that as his cue to leave.

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**SUN 1:34AM**

You left some stuff at my place
Want me to drop it off?

Oops sorry
No it’s fine
Don’t want to trouble you
You can just chuck it

Wait even your coat?

Which one?
Wait fuck omg
I’ve been looking for that

I take it you want to keep that one then
Haha

If it’s not too much trouble
My manager can pick it up tomorrow

Alrighty haha

Thanks!

You look happy btw
I met him once
He’s a good guy

Thanks ;;;;;;;;

Yeah
Also
Sorry I was so
You know
Haha
You deserved better than that

Don’t worry about it
I mean I kinda knew what i was getting into
My fault for falling for you 🥺
You’ve always had your eyes on that guy

Um
Yeah 😅😅😅😅
That one time I interviewed you
You wouldn’t stop glancing at him lol

Oh

Yeah

Shit

LOL
Hope it works out for you one day!
You guys would be cute together

Hah
Thanks
I guess

And like that, it ends.

But he doesn’t take any lessons from it, if anything, it just made it easier to move on to the next one, a small-time model with popstar dreams who had been going after him aggressively for the better part of the year. There’s something oddly satisfying about their arrangement, because the model’s obviously using him, but Taehyung’s using the guy right back. It’s mutually toxic with no expectations, and so it’s almost reliving when they breakup after about a month. Well technically, actually, the model dumps him (succinctly via a curt text), almost the second after it becomes clear that Taehyung’s not making any real effort to get him signed with the company.

He’s not at all sorry to see that one go.

But it kicks off this vicious cycle of relationships where he gets together with someone only to start counting down to the days when it ends. It’s all sorts of entertainment professionals: actors, actresses, models, singers, and at one point he almost stoops as low as a BigCube trainee with faded hopes. The guy’s not a minor, but something about the power dynamic and the way the guy looks at Taehyung not like an equal but like he’s his last chance makes it feel way too fucked up, and so Taehyung stops it right before it starts.

“How sorry,” he says, pushing the guy away with his hand before the trainee can kiss him for a second time, numbness creeping into his veins. “I’m sorry I gave you the wrong impression, but I really don’t think I can do this.”

And the guy, on the verge of tears, turns tail and runs, slamming into Jimin just as he rushes out the door of Taehyung’s studio, bowing awkwardly before he flees down the hall.
“What the—?” Jimin turns and watches the guy rush down the hall.

“Don’t ask,” Taehyung grunts, slouching deeper into his chair.

More than ever, Jimin looks like he’s on the verge of saying something, and he begins inserting little leads whenever they get lunch or hangout, phrases like “you look like something’s bothering you” or “damn you look terrible” and their appropriate synonyms, or even things as unsubtle as “wanna talk,” but Taehyung, without fail, takes the wheel with a grip of iron and steers the conversation in a different direction before Jimin can press any harder.

Because what’s there to say?

The problem is pretty clear: he enters every single relationship looking for the flaws and leaves even more cynical than he started. It’s quite easy to find negative things in anything when all he’s looking for is reason to end it before it begins. And so it’s hookup, rinse, breakup, repeat, a cliche emotional spiral downwards with no end in sight.

The months pass like this, in an endless march through spring, each day almost forgettable as the last.

Then, one day, just before summer, Dispatch catches Jungkook.

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The news explodes over the entertainment headlines immediately.

Ignited by an article dropped on a Thursday night, the piece detailed a whirlwind romance between Jungkook and the person he was caught with, an “It Girl” maknae from the hottest girl group, dubbed by media as The Nation’s Sweetheart, and was known for her sweet demeanour, her naturally selfless nature, her innocent looks, and for being arguably the most in-demand female celebrity at the moment. While she could barely sing, “born to be an idol” was a common compliment thrown her way, alongside “destined to be jjang,” and “person who lives life in the most beautiful manner.”

Summed up in that way, it could be said that she’s pretty much the antithesis to Taehyung.

The article, which was advertised as a congratulatory announcement but read more like a subversive hit piece, chronicalled everything from how they met (backstage at a music show) to how they grew from strangers to close friends (quickly and through meeting up at banks of the Han River to talk about life) to how they unwittingly recently fell into the first steps romance (she helped him through “hard times” and love apparently had happened somewhere along the way) and how they sealed the deal (with a kiss caught on camera by a well-hidden Dispatch Photographer in Mapo-gu).

And, predictably, fandom loses their shit.

Within the hour, the internet is strewn with the shards of broken hearts, pictures of cutting and burning Jungkook’s merchandise, accusations of Jungkook lying to fans, labels of nugus, traitors, attention-seekers thrown around and digital trails of the fandom publically falling to pieces on any and every social media outpost. His fansites begin to shutter their doors one by one, posting pithy farewells that add to the chaos and dismay. The log is turned and one of the many ugly sides of
humanity is exposed, and both Jungkook and National Sweetheart are horrifyingly bombarded with psychopathic tirades, rants, and threats.

Reality unforgivingly rips the heart out of delusion, and infatuation, in its swansong, screeches with its last breath.

Of course there’s pushback, spearheaded by influential fans leading purity inquisitions by accusing those undergoing meltdowns of not being “real fans”, alongside desperate rallies for support using trending hashtags, long lectures and preachy rants and finger-wagging about micro-specific ethics of fan/artist boundaries that really are needlessly long sermons that say different shades of the same common-sense rhetoric.

They, as fandom gurus, offer consolations in the face of negativity that this would be a painful but necessary session of chemotherapy to put the festering cancer of fandom’s toxicity and “delulus” into remission and, in a turn of optimism, prophesize that a genuine sentiment would flourish as a result, where a fandom utopia would emerge from the ashes where a majority were there for the music, like it should have been all along. A view that, while noble, missed the glaring fact that it was never entirely like that to begin with, and the base source of Jungkook’s popularity, as in the very existence of his mobilized fandom itself, was the manifestation of fervent obsession with Jungkook and a double-edged sword swinging its way back for the very first time.

Because people like idols for different reasons.

Sometimes it’s for music, sometimes it’s for the performance, sometimes it’s for reality-show esque entertainment. But sometimes, oftentimes, they fall in love. Or into obsession. Or into addiction. Or whatever people want to call it, they’re all just different shades of the same color. They dump their feelings and baggage into the emotional safety buckets idols sell, filling them to the brim, and when the most unstable get abruptly shoved out of the dream, they tend to break, and regret and vitriol are the first things to spill to the floor.

A fandom war between the two main schools of thought breaks out a few hours into it and every main online avenue is jammed with Jungkook-related posts screaming about how there’s too much, not enough, this is right, that’s wrong. And even among those that generally agree, the slightest nuance is a signal to take arms, something only exacerbated by how lightning fast the internet moves and how little leeway people get to express their points. The only constants that seem to exist are that everyone’s upset, everyone seems to have an opinion, and everyone is intent on impressing it to those that will listen.

Part of the ferocity of reaction is due to just how indisputable the photo is. It’s a clear, post-midnight photo of the two under a familiar streetlamp in Mapo-gu. Jungkook’s kissing National Sweetheart on the lips, finger hooking his black mask off just past his lips, their fingers interlocked, clear as day. He has all of his telltale earrings in place, he’s wearing no makeup, and, perhaps, most damningly, his shitty tattoo is visible, peeking out from under his sleeve.

The photo is the first thing Taehyung sees when he wakes up that day. How could it not be, when everyone at BigCube was in panic-mode trying their hardest to tamp down the impact the seige, and every coworker he knew had something to say about it.
Oh my god

We’re fuuuucked

Fucking dispatch

I feel so bad for Jin

Buckle in friends, we’re today’s headlines and y’all know what kind of fun that means.

They called us in for an emergency meeting fuuuzzuck my life I’m on two hours of sleep.

Online overreaction is already reaching critical mass and it’s been 30 mins. JK’s fucking dead.

Hello overtime.

My wife is actually gonna kill me.

Anyone have the photo?

Yeah: [img attached]

Well, fuck. Yeah. He dead.

And the hilarious thing is that Taehyung should really have been prepared for it all, at the minimum to receive the same treatment he had so easily doled out first, or by the fact that he had all but suggested Jungkook do this in the first place.

But he’s not.

The second he sees the photo it’s a swift suckerpunch to the stomach, the weird sensation of betrayal,
karma, relief, all stuffed into a bag and sunk into the depths with his stomach. And lying on his back, his phone dangling from his fingers in the air above his head, Taehyung feels so breathlessly floored.


Call Taehyung crazy and self-absorbed, but it looked like Jungkook was sending a message. The timing, the location, the angle, it was all too aligned to be a coincidence. His head begins to throb as his thoughts spin, and even though he has no rights, Taehyung seethes.

He does have a fourth thought, but he knows it’s a toxic one that’s capable of opening a pandora’s box of trouble. So he pushes it away before it consumes him, but still, it’s bitter and petty and comes back to haunt him with increasing fury everytime he sees that photo.

(“He loved me first.”)

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Jungkook’s popularity skyrockets in the months that follow.

It’s a phenomenon that happens to lucky acts when they fall into dating scandals with A-listers, they’re plucked out of obscurity and set dead center into entertainment news for the entire nation to scrutinize. And because everything’s set for them to succeed, the influx of curious bystanders yields a flood of new fans, and they’re able to ride the wave of scandal and unfathomably turn it into popularity.

It’s wizard magic, really, but Jin’s always been a magician with public opinion, and so Taehyung’s isn’t particularly surprised when he finds out he’s the brain behind it.

It’s not that Jungkook wasn’t popular to begin with, but he wasn’t remotely close to being a household name in the sense that to the average person, if they recognized him at all, would probably know him as “that one guy from that one boyband that’s in that catchy chicken CF,” then by anything more concrete.

National Sweetheart’s fame changes that.

Jungkook becomes a hot topic, and his already insane marketing power explodes. He’s soon pulled onto a hit drama with RTAOTY and releases an OST that tops the charts for eight weeks straight. He’s on a variety show for what seems like every other night. Initially he’s introduced as National Sweetheart’s Hot Idol Boyfriend, but as he begins to carve out a name for himself with his skills the public eventually relents and allows him to ascend to being Top-Star Jungkook.

And his relationship with National Sweetheart? It ends up being short romance, because in half a year, they breakup.

Taehyung’s honestly not surprised.
Because out of everyone involved, National Sweetheart indisputably received the shortest end of the stick. And it’s probably mostly because she had the most to lose—from how high she was perched there really was no way but down—but also because of her image as the purest angel of all the idol girls meant dating was pretty much a dealbreaker for her fanbase.

So predictably, her “uncle-fans” had ditched her in droves almost at the same moment that Jungkook’s fans descended down on her, and after being railed by an endless parade of attitude controversies, plastic surgery accusations, relentless online taunts about her less-than-stellar dance skills, she lost a few sponsors and voluntarily pulled out from her drama. Her stock within her group dropped, her individual merchandise sales plummeted, and the numbers were posted everywhere on the web for anyone to see.

To give her credit, she had been incredibly strong, braving the storm in public with a cheery smile and wave, even as random users would pop up on her insta lives and curse her out. It wasn’t even really clear it was affecting her at all until a fancam was released of a “fan” berating her over and over before a manager could intercept them, the guy clutching onto her hands and chanting like a mantra, “why did you betray me,” until she was reduced to tears.

All Taehyung could do is admire her for being strong enough to tolerate it for that long.

But anyway, they used the go-to breakup excuse of “busy schedules” that few netizens believe. Rumors immediately swirl about him and emerging relationships with at least three other eligible people. RTAOTY is thrown around as a top candidate and she shovels fuel into the fire by posting a series of captionless selcas with Jungkook. There are other competing theories the public has about the whole affair, including this was a sham-relationship to get both of them unprecedented press, one of them cheated on the other, Jungkook got tired of National Sweetheart or vice versa.

But by far the most interesting theory was National Sweetheart was a flimsy cover for Jungkook’s secret foreign jealous and vengeful baby mama, the one and only country legend, Pop-sellout, America’s IU, Heartland’s Younger Sister, Mother of Dragons Taylor Swift.

For the record, they have never met.

Jungkook stops showing up to the agency consistently after that, it seems like he’s always at an event or on a bus or plane hurtling him towards the next one. And he starts spending more time out of the country as interest in him grows globally, and soon it’s been close to seven months since Taehyung’s seen him in person.

The irony is that it’s now even harder for Taehyung than ever before to get away from his face. Jungkook’s marketing value goes through the roof, and as a result his image is blasted everywhere: on TV, in the news, on billboards, on the internet.

It gets to the point where it seems like every time he breathes, social media tremors.

It’s ridiculous, Taehyung now comes across inane details about Jungkook that he didn’t even know back when they were still fucking, like how he ties his shoes, what second he arrives at and leaves from Incheon airport, which constellation the arrangement of moles near his left ear looks the most like, the fact that he recently incited a fanwar because he received four flannel shirts from three different fansites for his last birthday and has only worn two, what his favorite breakfast food is on the third Tuesday of March on odd years, and so on.

It gets to the point where Taehyung can’t even obtain food without running into multiple pieces of media adorned with Jungkook’s fucking face trying to sell him random crap, especially when Jungkook scores the lucrative Hite endorsement and starts showing up on the sides of plastic
courtesy water jugs that some restaurants place on tables. At first, Taehyung has to turn it around so Jungkook, decked out in a button up and a beaming smile, is faced anywhere but towards himself. But, eventually he learns how to compartmentalize enough to be able to phase it out.

Jimin, thank fuck, stops cracking his tired chicken jokes just before Jungkook’s crowned the de facto chicken king, there literally isn’t a fried chicken advertisement running in Korea without him and his stupid fucking face anymore because he sells it with higher margins than the industry’s seen in a decade. And Jimin doesn’t question it whenever Taehyung immediately switches the channel to something else, anything else, the second the television decides it’d be fun to trigger him.

(“Crispy and—”

Click.

“—welcome back to the third day of the 20th Curling Championships—”)

It’s also considerably easier to get over things when he barely makes time for himself, and since the opportunities are there, Taehyung throws himself a rabbit hole of work. He breaks up with his latest fling over text and locks himself into his studio, spinning tracks for the upcoming sophomore album for WANNA TEEN, writing basslines for Hoseok’s new mixtape, engineering a musical makeover for a fading star, and so on.

And that was only last week.

He revamps and drops the single of his own called Talking to Myself, a breathy, hollow ballad about how sad it is to lose a love. Accompanied by a smooth verse by Namjoon, it’s got all the catchy hooks and soaring notes he needs, and when he wraps it up for distribution and leans back in his chair, looking out from his desk and admiring Seoul’s nighttime skyline, he realizes it’s the first thing he’s felt good about in a while.

The song does surprisingly well, especially considering they drop it without any promos to hype it. And the reviews are surprisingly mostly positive, and could be pretty much represented by the article written by yuppie critic Minjae:

[Review] Talking to Myself

In what appears to be the first act in BigCube’s annual summer hit rollout, TAE gives us a fresh track that slows things down in what’s been a rather stale season of heavy dance beats and half-baked drops. While it’s not particularly innovative in isolation, it’s a well-executed easy-listener that manages to differentiate itself in a saturated crowd.

The lyrics stay comfortably on the shallower end—the only real cinematic lines are constructed around a verse relating his failing love to a change in seasons—but there’s enough emotion in the vocalization to make up for some of it. It’s clear TAE has been working on his expression, and he rounds it out by enlisting the heavy-hitter RM, who adds a nice touch with his verse.
Overall, it’s an interesting move for a man whose claim to fame has largely been inoffensive dance songs—most successfully with JK’s safe trophouse thumper *Remember Me* —and taken in context with the other emotive ballad he recently produced, *December Love*, it’s certainly an indicator for an incredible potential for growth and musicality as he attempts to find his own color.

In other words, we’ll be watching to see what he has to offer in the future. He certainly has the potential to be a hit.

7.6/10

*Artist to Watch*

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Pleased by his success, BigCube assigns him an agent, who pretty soon gets him an invitation to sing on a music show. It’s just a one time thing, a special where they highlight emerging new voices, but it’s exciting nonetheless, and before he knows it he finds himself on the other side of the stage once again, sitting in a chair in a green room and getting primed and prepped by the coordis for the show.

Most of the stage goes smoothly. Taehyung’s surprised when he steps out that the audience is packed. They’re all holding signs of support, for him specifically, covering their faces with their phones or hands especially as the camera pans by them. It makes him more confident as he steps up and taps the mic, lets the lights dim and begins to sing.

The audience coos him through it, and he makes it through most of the song, awkwardly freestyle dancing when Namjoon’s verse comes up—Namjoon had tried to make it in person but just couldn’t clear his schedule to make it work—and returns to the mic to sing his last verse.

He gets through most of it, until that particular line, that fascinatingly vague lyric that he can’t seem to get through during any practice. It’s stupid how easily it makes his voice quaver, his lip tremble, when it’s something so cliche:

“*Honestly, I was the happiest with you.*”

But maybe it’s reasonable. It’s easy to lose control when his goal is to be emotional while he sings, especially as sleep deprivation and poor eating habits have been wearing his emotional guards down, and so unsurprisingly, a tear frustratingly escapes out of the corner of his eye and slides down his cheek.

And he bites his lip but lets it fall, figuring wiping it away would just bring more attention to it, and maybe, he thinks fleetingly, it’ll somehow evaporate before the broadcast zooms in close enough to catch it.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, however, they switch to the camera right on his face at that moment, perfectly framing him in the angelic glow of the stage lights as he blinks the rest of the tear out of his eye. The fans cry out as soon as it hits the monitors, and in a made-for-tv moment, he croons the last lines and stares straight at the camera with his colored-contact lenses, tear stain glinting distinctly on his cheek before the stage lights fade.

And perhaps predictably, that clip goes viral.
+++

interlude: crazy

i thought i knew you well
better than the others
—gentle bones

cra2y

[ rewind — 8 years back ]

The rest of YGM and Taehyung’s story gets pretty fucking boring, so let’s cut to the chase:

They get caught.

Sorta.

It’s more like YGM gets caught. Or plays himself, really. And what Taehyung means by that is that the catalyst for the clusterfuck is YGM thinking it would be a great idea to take a shirtless selfie when he’s staying over one night, and because it’s supposed to be a private photo, he captures it with a classic fuckboy ‘yeah i did this’ expression while jabbing a thumb at Taehyung, who gets to model in this modern renaissance masterpiece as a faceless, bare torso from his marked-up chest up to his neck.

The thing is, Taehyung doesn’t realize he’s actually a part of this trainwreck until after it’s already derailed and smouldering in a ditch, because like most people at 4:34AM on a workday Wednesday, he’s fucking asleep, and he gets to find out the image exists the same way that the rest of the internet finds out—through the trending headlines next day.

Because it turns out YGM was a fucking dumbass and he had accidentally uploaded that photo to his instagram story instead of whatever shitty photo he was going to upload right before he went in to go
work out, and to the shock of his fans, he had left it there for a full hour before he saw the damage and removed it like his life depended it.

Because, in a way, his life kind of did.

It, as most SNS controversies do, had started with his fans believing that he had been hacked and that the picture was either a very convincing photoshop or involved an uncannily similar model. But after the image disappeared and no official comment was made and it was becoming abundantly clear for multiple reasons that YGM was in fact the guy in the picture and those marks on Taehyung’s chest were not just ordinary bruises and the picture was not meant to be shared with the general public, his fans, well, snapped.

And it had started a cascade effect of castigating YGM, assassinating his character, then trying to determine who The Torso belonged to in order to further assassinate his character, raking the web for any and all public individuals who shared his body type, until one mutual fan had connected the dots—literally with birthmarks—between Taehyung’s online "V" persona and The Torso.

Which unleashed another round of fury as soon as it was made apparent on any and all public forums that V had been an attention-seeker who had subversively documenting their whirlwind of a romance, posting photos while vacation-dating YGM in secret, palling around with his many celebrity friends, showing off luxury items YGM had bought him, and so on.

Where the shit really hit the fan, however, was when it was uncovered that some of the presents V had posted weren't exactly from YGM, which is just as much as news to Taehyung as it was to drama-hungry netizens. They had been gifts from fans and fansites, which had included but were not limited to one ultra-expensive bottle of wine, a custom-made sweatshirt, a copious amounts of jewelry.

So, in some sadistic sense, it’s funny to Taehyung that the first words out of YGM's mouth (after the initial text barrage consisting roughly of a million variations of "fuck" and one desperately sent "im outside, open ur fkin door") were:

"Why the fuck were you posting our shit on instagram?" YGM's voice, deadly quiet, is laced with venom. "Like, why the actual fuck —"

"Wait," Taehyung holds a hand up. "Are blaming me?"

"I mean," YGM runs a hand through his hair. "None of this crazy fallout would have happened if you didn’t have that stupid little—"

"I’m not saying I didn’t contribute to the problem, but, holy fuck, you’re the one who posted the fucking picture! And you knew about my instaram and you didn’t stop me!"

"Yeah but why would you put a picture with that necklace, it was fucking fan gift!"

Taehyung’s jaw drops, “It was what?!”

“One of my fansites gave it to me!”

“Why wouldn’t you tell me that?!” Taehyung gapes horror. “And why the fuck would you give that to me?!”

“I—” YGM suddenly whips out his phone and stares at it, slowly growing more pale. He swallows hard before he pockets his phone, brows furrowed when he looks up. In a quiet voice he asks, “Can we talk about this later? I—I need to go in.”
“Yeah, fine,” Taehyung crosses his arms.

“Actually…” YGM says, tone suddenly incongruously pleasant. “Can you come with me?”

Taehyung narrows his eyes, “Why?”

YGM looks away, "There's something I need you to sign off on."

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That “something” turns out to be a Non-Disclosure Agreement, or an NDA, essentially a gag-order document threatening a lawsuit if Taehyung describes their relationship in a way that violated the contract's terms.

Which, after YGM guides him to a well-lit conference room and takes a seat across from him and next to a suited up lawyer who smiles thinly and pushes forward the packet of paper, and Taehyung picks it up starts scanning, seems to include pretty much mentioning it in any capacity at all.

“Yeah, I just need you to sign this.” YGM nervously taps the table and gently places a pen on the table. “I’m, I’m, uh, sorry about this, it’s really my manager that’s pushing for it, but…”

And Taehyung tunes him out, flipping pages until he’s on the next to last one. He picks up the pen, ready to sign off on it, until his eyes fall on one particular passage and the hairs rise on the back of his neck.

“Hey,” Taehyung points to the paragraph, eyes flicking up to YGM. He asks quietly, “What is this clause?”

YGM abruptly stands up and leans over the table, eyebrows furrowed as he quickly scans the page.

“Oh, that’s It’s just,” YGM diverts his eyes and sits back down. “P-protocol. Don’t worry about it. Just like, it’s just to ensure my brand’s wellbeing, you know.”

“Yeah, I mean, that’s the whole point of this fucking packet,” Taehyung flips through the rest of the packet and stops back on the same page before pointing at the paragraph. “But this one is essentially saying you can expose my identity at will without any notice, am I wrong?”

“You’re right,” YGM fidgets. “And I know it seems crazy just on its own, but really, it’s standard. We’re like 99% sure we won’t need to use it—”

“But 1% of the time you will need to use it 100% of the time.”

“Taehyung, please just let me finish. This is just in case netizens move too fast, it ensures we can act swiftly for damage control—”

“Cool,” Taehyung blinks. “But I still don’t agree to it.”

“Taehyung,” YGM buries his face into his hands. “It’s been a long day, please, just sign it.”

“It’s like 10 in the morning,” Taehyung stands up, fingers trembling a bit as he fumbles with his
wallet. “And I’m not signing something I don’t agree to.”

“What don’t you agree to?”

“Giving you the right to expose me?” Taehyung blinks incredulously. “If you change this, like either take that paragraph out or insert a new one where you have to ask me for a signature or something before you can, then, yeah, sure, we can come to an agreement. But no, I’m not going to sign this the way it’s currently written. It’s not fair, and it’s kinda fucking offensive.”

“Offensive? Taehyung.” YGM bangs his head on the table. “Why are you making this so personal?”

“I’m not making this personal, you are,” Taehyung suddenly picks up the packet and waves it. “This whole thing screams that you don’t trust me. You don’t fucking trust me enough to keep my mouth shut. How is that not personal?”

“Tae, it’s not about trust—“

“Yeah it is, just the fact that we’re having this convo with in the room,” Taehyung points at the lawyer. “With that guy. This is about a lack of trust.”

“This is just business, just separate it in your mind,” YGM shakes his head. “It’s just to give some assurance to the company that, on paper, we can trust you.”

“Oh,” Taehyung furrows his brows. “So like, you think I might sell the story or something.”

“It’s not that, it’s just in case—ugh—see,” YGM suddenly throws up his hands and mutters to no one in particular. “This is why I should have fucking dated another—” then he abruptly stops.

“Another what?” Taehyung narrows his eyes.

YGM hesitates, and his eyes flash, “Celebrity. Even GDragon’s model girl signed this same contract without a fuss—"

“Then she’s a fucking dumbass, not my problem.”

“Taehyung. If you just try to think of things at my level, at least then you’d understand the gravity of everything and not take it so goddamn personal—“

“Again, personal? Of course it’s personal. In fact that’s a really funny word to use in this situation. Because you want me to sign away the right to reveal my identity without my input. And that’s about as personal as it fucking gets.”

“You know what I mean—!”

And the fucking thing is, Taehyung does. He really does. He completely understands the stone cold logic guiding the decisions and, even worse, he’d probably be doing the same in a heartbeat if he were in YGM’s position.

Maybe that’s why he really doesn’t care then, because it’s like starting shot to the race to the bottom has been fired. And if YGM was revealing himself to be a desperate piece of shit who was spineless enough to try to trick him into screwing himself over, well Taehyung would be damned if he wasn’t going to get his out of this too.

No love lost on his side. Because he wasn’t loose with his heart and fucking foolish enough to make
stupid promises he can’t keep. Yeah, wait, Taehyung’s eyes flick up at the invertebrate glaring at him from across the table. Wasn’t this the same doucheanoe who was making a grand confession in a public hallway like, what, a week ago?

Damn, how quickly things change.

“So much for ‘I’d do anything for you,’” Taehyung mimics in a high voice and YGM winces. “Turns out that’s only true for you if it aligns with what’s good for you. Am I really being unreasonable? All I’m doing is asking you to take this clause out or change it so you need my express authorization before you can. Think about it from my fucking non-celebrity—or wait, uh—pleb status, isn’t that fucking reasonable? So you can’t leave me for the wolves without me approving it with a quick, ‘hey man yeah I’m cool with that’?”

“Like I told you, it’s for if we need to move fast—”

“I probably would have given you permission too,” Taehyung keeps going and snickers because it’s true. He’s such a fucking softie he probably would have if YGM had fucking asked. “That’s the hilarious part about all of this. But now? I don’t really know about that anymore. I’m gonna have to think really fucking hard about it now.”

“If you don’t sign this,” the lawyer finally speaks up, voice calm and collected. “We’ll make sure your career never gets off the ground.”

Taehyung feels his heart stop and his eyes flick between the lawyer and YGM, “Wh-what do you mean?”

“You don’t want to find out,” the lawyer says simply. “But we have connections, so let’s say, we’ll make things difficult.”

That effectively shuts Taehyung up and gets him to sit back down, because he’s seen the way artists have been shut out from the stage, opportunities seemingly at random ripped away from people who stepped across the wrong lines and crossed the wrong powerbrokers, made-up slander coming up from the dredges of the internet and hitting them while they were already down. The possibilities were truly endless, and the way the lawyer’s staring him down, gaze steely in cold, makes it seem like anything is on the table and there’s nothing he can do.

Unless, he glances at his phone—

Suddenly he grabs it and points to it, “I have photos,” and Taehyung really doesn’t, and he’s sure his finger is shaking as he jabs the screen.

Alarm crosses YGM in a flash, “Of what?”

“What do you think?”

YGM suddenly pales, “You wouldn’t. You don’t.”

And Taehyung really doesn’t know what YGM assumes it is, but he keeps going with his bluff, “If I don’t sign this,” Taehyung shakes his phone. “What stops me for posting?”

“Knowing what’s good for you?” The lawyer leans forward, eyes steely, and states, plainly, like it’s a fact, “Because first, we’ll assess whether what you posted violates privacy laws. And second, we won’t just stop at making things difficult for you. We can and will make your life hell. We have the means to make sure you’ll never fuckin’ work in this industry again.”
“Great, I’ll be in good company then,” Taehyung wills his hand to stop shaking and he points right at YGM, voice slightly wavering. “Because with what’s on here, neither will he.”

“I’ll release my photos of you then,” YGM slams the table, and the lawyer shoots him a warning glance. “I have quite a few with your face.”

“Go ahead,” Taehyung motions, adrenaline speeding up his movements and sending his pitch up at least half an octave. “Be my fucking guest. But you won’t. Because we both know it might fuck you over more than me. You don’t know what kind of skeletons I have in my closet. Because you really don’t know me that well.”

YGM glances at his lawyer before narrowing his eyes at Taehyung, “What are you talking about?”

“You don’t really know anything about me.”

“I’ve known you for two years, and we’ve been dating for one month—”

“You mean dated?” Taehyung scoffs.

“Dated?” YGM blinks.

“You’re fucking nuts if you think we’re still a thing after this,” Taehyung hisses as he jabs the packet.

“Oh,” YGM looks a little lost. “I guess.”

“And like, do you really know me at all? Because just because we were fucking doesn’t mean you really knew anything about me,” Taehyung laughs. “Not to sound like one of those people, but you really don’t know the, uh, quote, real me. Because if I recall correctly, we pretty much only talked about you. I really don’t think you even know the name of the song I just released—“

Taehyung catches the flicker of surprise that flashes across YGM’s face.

“—oh shit. Wait. You didn’t even know I put out a song,” Taehyung starts laughing as he pounds the table. “Whoa. Unreal. See? I’m so curious, what were you even in love with? My face? My ability to listen? What was it?”

“Why are you bringing this shit up? It’s irrelevant, we’re not going to talk about this right now,” YGM mumbles, fingers gripping his armchair as the lawyer suddenly gets up and holds his phone up to his ear.

“Because I’m trying to emphasize the fact that for all you know I could be anything. Do you really wanna test that?”

“But you wouldn’t be,” YGM mutters uncertainly.

“That’s an assumption,” Taehyung quickly shrugs, fear still spiking his heart. “Should have asked me more about my life. So yeah. Offers still stands. I’ll sign this. Only if you take out this clause. But otherwise,” Taehyung taps his phone. “I blow it all up.”

“Okay, okay,” the lawyer suddenly pulls the phone away from his ear. “Slow down, we’ll change the clause to include prior authorization, just put the fucking phone down, alright?”

“Alright,” and relief finally floods Taehyung’s chest.  

Forty-five tense minutes later, YGM slides another packet forward, not looking at Taehyung when
he picks it up and starts rifling through the pages, the ink still warm on the paper. And after scanning every page, he signs it carefully before capping the pen and putting on the table.

He feels pretty jittery now that the adrenaline’s gone, and when he stands up without a word, his legs feel like rubber as he pockets his keys.

“Thanks,” YGM mumbles staring down at the table as Taehyung pushes the door open and steps out, looking as small as a guy who was easily a head taller than him could in a chair. “And, um, again, I’m sor—”

“Just know that even if you won that concession,” The lawyer cuts YGM off, eyes pointed straight at Taehyung, nothing resembling mercy within them. “We won’t hesitate to still make things hell for you. So I’d tread carefully if I were you.”

And then, the door swings shut.

It feels like the world’s moving in slow motion and Taehyung’s being led out by puppeteer controlling his legs when he books it for the lobby. When he gets there, he pushes the front door open, the metal handle cool against his palms as he stumbles out into the street. Everything looks cold and unforgiving in the fading light, the glances from the pedestrians feel like glares, the reflective windows of the skyscrapers glow steely against the evening, the buzz and bustle of the traffic on the street becomes a roaring river of a reminder that the world, with or without him, will continue to surge relentlessly forward.

He’s so painfully aware he’s made a contract with a devil, there’s still no guarantee that YG won’t try anything, there were no provisions not to. And even if there were, it’s so difficult to prove the secret underpinnings and under the table deals with networks and traditional promotion outlets that if YG really wanted to, they could shoot his career dead in the water without even lifting a finger.

And they probably will. Because why wouldn’t they? Bury a problem before it appears, it’s the move he’d make.

Shit. His ears ring as his heart pounds in his head, fear returning and curling up where it belongs in his chest. He’s fucked, he’s probably really fucked, he just shot his dreams over a stupid fling. A chill runs down his spine. He really has no idea what he’s gotten himself into. What a stupid mistake.

This is why he’s destined to be nothing.

His feet carry him forward, he’s not really sure where to, plodding him down the sidewalk to a station to a train to a stop to a street to a run-down apartment complex and the next thing he knows he’s standing at the door of Jungkook’s dorm, blinking with his finger pressed against the buzzer, his hood drawn over his head, his other hand jammed in the pocket. There’s a party going on by the sounds of it, the muffled music and laughter filtering through the wall as some guy yells “Hey, hey! Someone go answer the fucking door.”

“I got it, I got it,” a familiar voice grumbles before footsteps near the door. The lock clicks right before the door swings open, revealing a wide-eyed Jungkook. “Taehyung!” Jungkook immediately exclaims, grin spreading across his face, and a weird sense of relief suddenly hits Taehyung. “What are you doing here?”

Then the party hushes as most of the people curiously crane their necks in his direction. A girl in the background elbows her friend and starts snickering as she glances at Taehyung, eyes occasionally flicking toward Jungkook as she covers her lips and whispers into the guy’s ear.

And it’s like something finally snaps and Taehyung suddenly can’t find words, or air, voice choking
up as the tears start slipping down his face hot and fast as he brings his hands up into his face to shield them from view.

Goddamn, he dimly thinks. He’s so weak.

Just so fucking weak that even a crowd of gawking teenagers is enough to overwhelm him. Yeah, damn, his parents were right, his haters were right, BigCube was right, they all made the right call, he wasn’t made for this, wasn’t good enough for this, didn’t deserve to see the lights on the stage. And it strikes him then, as he’s staring at the speckled concrete below, watching the cracks blur as he blinks, that, shit, this really could be it.

This could be the end of his road, this is the last chapter in his book, this is the last stop on the Wild Ride of his dreams, and damn, it’s—

“Taehyung?” Jungkook asks tentatively, worry seeping into his tone.

—it’s just as inglorious as he feared it to be.

“Tae—?” Jungkook asks again, and Taehyung glances up, his face clearly wrought into something terrible enough that Jungkook’s own expression morphs immediately into shock, prompting him to quickly step outside and shut the door behind him, his hand rising uncertainly towards Taehyung. “Shit, are you okay?”

Is he?

He’s probably fine.

Or he should be fine at least?

Just, yeah, his life kinda sucks.

Like, it really fucking sucks. Haha. So hard. Like, what is he going to do? Or, more like, what can he do? How is he going to tell his family? His friends back home? He’s so behind on studying for the CSAT, he’s only got a few months now, just what is he fucking going to do? There’s no plan B in place, nothing and no-one to save his ass, and it’s a little too much, and that’s—there’s—it—it’s—he blinks, eyebrows furrowing in confusion, shit, his thoughts are so frenzied and fuzzy now that he can’t even remember what Jungkook’s question was.

“Tae?” Jungkook presses the back of his hand lightly against Taehyung’s forehead. “Are you okay?”

Oh right.

“Ohum, yeah,” Taehyung says, his head throbbing as he strains his expression into what he hopes is a pleasant smile. “Sorry. Hi. I’m great.”

Then his legs give out, his eyes roll back, and the world fades to a welcoming black.

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When he comes to, he’s swaddled in some blankets and curled up on a lumpy twin mattress. The
party's still raging on in the living room, a muted bumping bass vibrating through the wooden floors and the muffled sound of laughter filtering through with the golden glow of the hallway lights from under the crack in the bedroom door.

He blinks and his eyes adjust enough to take in the room, a jungle of bunkbeds and miscellaneous furniture towering above him and crammed so tightly into the tiny room it's probably a fire hazard.

It vaguely smells like the unventilated musty odor of teenage guys hastily mixed with an attempt at deodorant, there's trendy clothes flung everywhere, comics and figurines and general personal possessions haphazardly balanced on every surface available, posters of anime, sports teams, popular celebrities taped onto the flaking walls. It takes a moment, but he deduces the corner he's in belongs to Jungkook, a neat inlet in the sea of messiness, clothes and accessories mindfully propped in an intentional fashion, the laminated picture from Jungkook’s "debut" performance carefully placed on the wall by Taehyung's head next to a cluster of photos of what must be his family and friends.

It’s weird, Taehyung’s never seen any of these photos or the people in them, but he’s heard so much about them from the anecdotes he’s managed to wheedle out of Jungkook, that suddenly it’s all rushing together, a weird mix of the foreign and familiar, faces to names, places to labels, snapshots to stories, visual context given to the kid he's been bumping around for the better part of the year.

There’s photos of Jungkook’s middle school graduation—he one where he had tripped and fell on the way up to the stage, gashing his knee. There’s a group photo from last year's birthday party—probably seconds before his best friend smashed his face into the cake. There’s a massive grandchild gathering around the grinning grandmother—the one who painstakingly drove him to the auditions in Seoul and later convinced his parents to let him train. There's also photos of friends and peers from his dance academy back in Busan, their letter of encouragement for him taped carefully in the middle, a nice piece of stationary crowded with stickers and well-wishing messages scribbled out in technicolor.

A picture of his family catches Taehyung’s eye. It's a photo the four of them picturesquely standing next to a motorboat, the water rippled and murky, the trees colored with autumn, his strong-willed mother standing confidently next to his amiable father, who has his hands on the shoulders of his excitable brother and Jungkook himself, probably half as young as he was now, a cheerful child standing small in his boots, grasping a fishing-rod curved high into the air above his head.

And it’s an interesting choice of a print because Taehyung knows that must be photo documentation of the first and last fishing trip they ever took, because it’s the one from the story where Jungkook and his brother had learned with horror that fishing was a sport where “winning” meant the fish, uh, don’t quite make it, a fact they found out as they watched their father skillfully whip out a knife to “clean,” with morbid efficiency, what they had assumed were new pets. And Taehyung only knows this story because Jungkook had ruefully told him while they were walking down the damp aisles at Noryangjin Fish Market about a month ago.

“Hey,” Jungkook had prefaced it as Taehyung ogled at a tank of cod. “Have I ever tell you about how my dad taught me about the futility of struggle?”

“What?” Taehyung had turned around and sniggered. “No. That’s so random. But I wanna hear, your stories about your dad are usually hilarious.”

“So, like,” Jungkook drove his hands into his pockets as he morosely peers at the tank of swimming fish, his camera swaying, unused, from the strap on his neck. “One day, he takes our whole family fishing and tells us we’re going to learn a lesson about life…”

And pretty soon Taehyung’s laughing so hard he’s crying, fist over his mouth, as Jungkook just

“You think?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung slings an arm over Jungkook’s shoulder. “I’d watch this kind of quality content on a Tuesday night while I’m like, I dunno, doing laundry.”

“Only on Tuesdays?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung flicks Jungkook’s chin and teases. “It’s funny but not that funny.”

Taehyung still doesn’t know how, but like always when he hangs out with Jungkook, the rest of the day had just melted away, one minute it’s 11 in the morning lost in the dank maze in Noryangjin and somehow he blinks and it’s 6 in the evening huddled next to a street food cart as the setting sun beckons dusk, both of them bickering over the right to pay with hushed tones and hidden wrestling. Jungkook had won in the end, stuffing the money into the stall owner’s hand before Taehyung had caught him, eyes glittering in the lights with triumph as he shoved a paper bowl of mandu into Taehyung’s hands.

It had been a good day, a really fucking fun day, the kind that’s going to be hard to recreate pretty soon, Taehyung realizes, with a bit of a pang, whether Jungkook makes BTD or not.

Taehyung’s eyes skitter past a few other photos on the wall, until they stop on one he recognizes with surprise, because it’s one of the two of them, in an overly-blurred and saturated photobooth shot taken a month ago in one of the malls in Myeongdong, posing with exaggerated grins against a blindingly neon background, jokingly framed with a cheesy love-song lyrics from a trendy ballad that Taehyung had scrawled across each one in obnoxiously glittery writing and carefully decorated with the gaudiest of heart and flower stickers available.

“Wanna keep this one?” Taehyung had snickered as the booth spat out their glossy photoset, picking it up and gingerly and examining it in the light. He quickly cut off one of the smaller copies for himself and slipped it in his wallet, and waved the photo in question in Jungkook’s face. “It’s pretty cute.”

It’s the shot in the seconds after Taehyung had jumped onto Jungkook’s back without warning, Taehyung’s face split into a gigantic boxy grin, and Jungkook’s face stuck somewhere between a photoshoot smile and the panicked yelp he was about to let out, the borderline-cringy lyrics, ‘from the moment we met, I knew you were the one,’ scribbled down at the bottom, tacky roses adorning the edges and clashing with the lime-green background.

“Um,” Jungkook’s lips thinned as he examined it, blinking only when Taehyung had lost patience and shoved it into Jungkook’s sweatshirt pocket. He had pulled it out, holding it up in front of his face between his thumb and index fingers, and stared at it, his face unreadable, “Yeah, sure, I guess.”

“You don’t have to really keep it, here, give it back,” Taehyung had laughed, reaching over. “You look like you don’t want it.”

“Oh, uh,” Jungkook shook his head before he slipped it back into his pocket, pulling his hood over his head. “It’s not that, um, I was just, uh, appreciating the artwork.”

“It’s pretty amazing, if I say so myself.”

“Amazing is an...adjective, sure,” Jungkook had raised his brows amusedly.
“Hey,” Taehyung had jabbed him in the waist. “If you’re not going to appreciate art, give it back.”

“What are you gonna do with it?”

“I don’t know, but I’ll appreciate it more than you. And, I dunno, sell it when you become famous.”

“I’ll keep it then,” Jungkook had laughed. “And besides, you already have your own copy.”

That photo was tacked next to a series others taken of his BigCube friends, of other trainees over food or practice or noraebang, of Namjoon, Hoseok, Yoongi, Jimin, Jin, of the seven of them, and of one of Taehyung himself, leaning back against the balcony of his apartment during a house party in the fading light, an easy grin on his face as the wind sweeps up his hair, the sky streaked in the hues the setting sun, the bustling city sprawling out until the foothills for miles below.

When it had been taken, Taehyung had been standing out and peering over the edge of his balcony. He had felt on top of the world then, the possibilities had seemed so endless, staring down and watching the cars wind their way around the city blocks. He had lost track of time, spinning around almost seemingly at random, only to find Jungkook sitting in a patio chair and inexplicably staring straight at him, the string of lights above him just beginning to glow.

“Take a picture,” Taehyung had sniggered and posed after Jungkook had quickly looked away. “It’ll last longer.”

And so Jungkook had.

A low snort in the room suddenly catches Taehyung's attention and he whips around and spots a figure curled up in a corner. It's Jungkook, crouched with a laptop nestled on his legs, wired earbuds jammed in his ears, screen flickering a gentle blue against his face.

"Hey," Taehyung croaks, lifting a hand. "What time is it?"

"Shit, sorry, did I wake you up?" Apology twists itself into Jungkook’s brows before he squints at his laptop. "And half past one."

"No, I should be saying sorry," Taehyung starts to sit up, and his head starts to pound. He winces, holding a hand to his forehead, "Sorry I’m being a burden, I'll get going—"

"You’re fine," Jungkook quickly waves, nearly swatting his laptop off of his legs in the process and swearing as he barely catches it, "You can stay the night. It's cool, we've got space."

"Are you sure?" Taehyung asks, squinting his eyes shut as his headache grows. “Your roommates won’t mind?”

"Yeah," Jungkook shrugs. “One of the guys loves hosting stuff so we’ve become the party dorm, people crash here all the time.”

“Oh wait,” Taehyung winces as someone screams in the living room. “Sorry for keeping you here you can totally go back, I’m fine.”

“It’s okay, I just about to sleep anyway. I have practice in,” Jungkook squints. “Five hours.”

"Where are you gonna sleep?"

Jungkook pats the floor next to him, and grins, "Here."

"What?" Taehyung sleepily starts to crawl off the mattress, flopping onto the floor with the blanket
wrapped around his waist and a heavy sigh. He closes his eyes, a nod away from dreams, and he flails a hand in the direction of the now-empty bed, "No I'm the guest, I'll sleep on the floor."

"No what are you talking about? Since you're the guest you should get the bed."

Taehyung waves a dismissive hand and yawns. "The floor works and I’m already on it."

"That doesn't mean you win," Jungkook snickers as he puts his laptop to the side and stands up. He pads over to Taehyung and crouches down into a squat. "That's not how this works."

"Um, yeah it does," Taehyung rolls over, away from Jungkook. "Also I'm older, so you have to do what I say, age privileges, you know."

"Yeah—no," Jungkook laughs again. And Taehyung gets a split-second warning of what Jungkook’s about to do as Jungkook’s hands quickly slide under his body.

“What?” Taehyung’s eyes snap open and frantically flails just as Jungkook lifts him about knee-high into the air and tosses him back onto the mattress. His head hits the wall and he groans.

“This is my room, so this is how it works,” Jungkook as he brushes his hands off and lightly kicks Taehyung with his foot.

“Wrong,” Taehyung quickly rolls back off the bed and stops at Jungkook’s feet, facedown on the carpet, the fibers digging into his cheek.

“Right,” Jungkook lifts him with a grunt and easily tosses him back on.

“The fuck?” Taehyung frowns and whines, “When did you get so strong?”

Jungkook shrugs.

Taehyung sighs and starts to roll towards the edge of the bed again, “How about we compromise then?”

Jungkook blocks him with his leg, his foot stubbornly braced against Taehyung’s back, “Nah.”

“You haven’t heard my proposal yet,” Taehyung cracks his eye open.

“Don’t have to,” Jungkook sticks his tongue out.

“Hey, you’re being a brat, I’m still you’re hyung, at least pretend to listen.”

“You hardly act like one, so why start now?”

“Jeez, now you’re just being disrespectful.”

“Fine, fine,” Jungkook crosses his arms and leans down. "What's your proposal?"

Suddenly, Taehyung shoots out a hand and pulls Jungkook down until they’re nose-to-nose. Jungkook freezes like a deer in the headlights, eyes going wide as Taehyung grins boxy and bright back at him, “Sharing is caring.”

“O-oh, uh,” Jungkook stutters as Taehyung pushes him off and throws him a corner of the blanket. He sits up against the wall, knees drawn to his chest, and blinks down at Taehyung.

"Deal?" Taehyung cracks open at eye at him.
“Is, is this okay?”

“Yeah?” Taehyung rolls towards the wall and curls himself around a pillow. "Why wouldn't it be?"

"Um, like," Jungkook turns away, scratching his head. "Because you're, like, with..."

"Oh. We, uh," Taehyung says, voice slightly strangled, blinking wide, heart suddenly shot in his throat, the feeling of foreboding making it so hard to just act natural. "Broke up. Kinda."

“Ah,” Jungkook responds after a moment, looking down. He drums the sheets with his hands awkwardly, mouth thinned in a line, brows raised.

"Yeah."

“What do you mean by kinda?”

“He...” Taehyung considers for a moment how he should frame this, how much he should let on, how deep he should go. Then he takes one look at the way Jungkook's looking at him, and somehow it just spills out, the whole story complete with play by plays and zero euphemisms. He's caught up in the moment, sitting up straight, voice rising and falling with the fear, hands tearing at his hair. And for the entire time, Jungkook just listens, no judgement on his face, never interrupting, just nodding intermittently with his hands folded neatly in his lap.

"I'm sorry," Jungkook says when Taehyung's finally finished, watching him with sympathy. "That sounds really shitty."

Taehyung lets out a bitter bark of a laugh. "I guess that's one way to put it."

"At least he's out of your life now?" Jungkook bites his lip. "And it sounds like he's mostly off your back."

"Hopefully," Taehyung flops onto the mattress, pulls the blanket up to his chin and throws his forearms over his eyes. "I'm so stupid, I mean I made a lot of my own mistakes, but I really shouldn't have gotten involved with him. I was just fucking around, I didn't really realize what I was getting myself into."

"Hindsight's 20/20," Jungkook says. "Don't feel to bad about it."

"Fuck, you're such a nice guy," Taehyung shoots up a hand to pinch Jungkook's cheek, which he easily slaps away. "It's okay to just call me out on this one. It's deserved."

"I'm not really that nice," Jungkook fiddles with the corner of the blanket, pulling at a thread. "It's just true."

"Nah, you really are," Taehyung rolls his eyes. "Modest too. Your personality's so good, fuck."

"My bad?" Jungkook apologizes with a laugh.

Taehyung's about to shoot out another one-liner before a wave exhaustion hits him full on and he forgets his train of thought. He rolls over, burying his face into the blanket as he mumbles, "Thanks for listening by the way. It means a lot."

"No problem," Jungkook says, voice muffled. "That's what friends are for right?"

Friends. Taehyung blinks in surprise. Interesting. Maybe, yeah, that’s kinda what they are. Even though "mentor" was really the title he was gunning for eight months ago, he supposed friends is
what they've inadvertently fallen into being, and—

Taehyung yawns widely, rest of the thought abruptly lost in the sleepy haze, "Sorry, but I think I'm going to pass out."

"Okay." Jungkook laughs. "As long as it's on the bed. Which you're totally going to use, because you're still a guest."

"Fine, you too though." Taehyung raises a hand in defeat, eyes drooping. "I better not find you on the floor in the morning, or else."

"Or else what?" Jungkook slides under the sheets.

Taehyung rolls over and shoots Jungkook a glare, bangs scattered over his eyes. "I'll make it so you’ll never sleep on the floor again."

"What?" Amusement crosses Jungkook’s face, “How are you going to do that?"

"I dunno yet," Taehyung yawns again, eyelids drooping. “But seriously, good night.”

“Uh, yeah, goodnight,” Jungkook says tentatively and a light tug on the blanket is the last thing Taehyung feels before he’s shepherded into sleep.

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It turns out passing out outside some guy’s front door is one of those special shared moments that can really bring people together. And even though Taehyung can't quite name it, something changes between them.

It's apparent when Taehyung wakes up in the morning, sun filtering through the cheap cotton curtains, the rays spotlighting the dust lazily swirling up into the air. It takes him a moment to figure out where he is and who his limbs are flung around, sleepily blinking until Jungkook’s face comes into view, the poor dude lying ramrod straight and staring up unblinkingly at the ceiling with his arms locked down by Taehyung's deathly coma embrace.

“Morning,” Jungkook greets when Taehyung raises his head and squints.

"Shit, sorry," Taehyung mumbles as he drowsily pulls himself off of Jungkook, the soft slide of cloth over cloth audible through the morning silence. "How long have you been awake?"

"Uh," Jungkook fishes his phone out from somewhere in the sheets and squints at it. "An hour?"

"You're kidding."

Jungkook squints at his phone again, "Nope."

"Holy shit, I'm so sorry," Taehyung sits up, slouching over, brows knitted together. "You could have gotten up, I'm a heavy sleeper."
"It’s fine, it’s fine," Jungkook waves his hand. "Don’t worry about it."

"What were you even doing for an hour?" Taehyung scrunches his nose. "Just staring at the ceiling?"

"Pretty much."

"Seriously?"

"Yeah," Jungkook snickers. "No, it’s fine, I had my phone."

"Oh my god," Taehyung hangs his head. "Still, I’m so fucking sorry, I should have told you before I went to sleep I get kinda clingy. Usually my friends just shove me off but..."

"It's seriously okay," Jungkook shrugs as he bites his bottom lip. "I, uh, didn't really mind."

Taehyung shoots out a finger and flicks Jungkook's ear. "You're way too nice, what the fuck? What's wrong with you?"

"Um, want a list?" Jungkook jerks his head away, muttering as he suddenly stands up, straightening out the creases his rumpled shirt, his hair a bird's nest on his hair, "Either way, I really wouldn’t call that being nice."

"Why?"

Jungkook looks away, “Don’t worry about it.”

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Fear fades quickly when there's nothing to feed it, and with a newly-filled plate of work, Taehyung finds himself so busy he doesn't have a the mental capacity to dwell on YGM nor the NDA.

It turns out 2HOM was so thrilled with his work on their title song that they wanted him on their winter special as well, and so in between working on that in his shared studio with Namjoon and monitoring evaluations, Taehyung has a hard time finding time to think much less worry.

Jimin's sent with some senior artist to Japan last minute to be a backup dancer for one of her concerts for half a week, leaving Jungkook to practice dancing by himself at the wee hours of the morning.

And somehow, without really realizing it, Taehyung finds himself filling that mentor gap at least with his presence, crouching in the corner on his laptop as Jungkook runs through routines. It's the first time he's really watched Jungkook dance since he handed the reins over to Jimin, peering at him from over the lid of his laptop, catching him confidently busting moves to a trendy beat.

"Goddamn," Taehyung whistles when Jungkook's done. "You've improved so much."

Jungkook whirls around, sweat dripping down his face and neck, a huge grin on his face, "You were watching?"

"Yeah," Taehyung watches him trot across the room and grab a towel. "You're easily within the top
two now for dancing."

"Just top two?" Jungkook grabs his bottle, takes a few steps until he's right next to Taehyung. He leans against the wall and tips the bottle back into his mouth, glancing out of Taehyung out of the corner of his eye.

"Well, Jimin's a thing, and I am his best friend," Taehyung lowers his voice and whispers like there's more than just them two inside the room. "But between you and me, you’re actually probably better."

“I’m telling him you said that,” Jungkook sniggers as he whips out his phone.

“No, don’t!” Taehyung swipes at his phone.

“Okay, okay, I won’t,” Jungkook puts the device away. He scratches his ear before he speaks again, “Uh, thanks for, coming to watch me.”

“No problem.”

“It’s definitely nice having company. Did Jimin ask you to?"" 

“Nope,” Taehyung squints up at Jungkook, who looks mildly surprised. “Just wanted to hang out here.”

“Oh,” Jungkook’s ears grow a bit pink. “Thanks, again.”

“Mhm,” and suddenly a thought strikes Taehyung. He’s been so out of touch because of everything going on with YGM and 2HOM that he’s pretty much forgotten about the whole BTD debacle, “When are evaluations again?”

“Next week.”

“Oh shit,” Taehyung whistles. “You ready?”

Jungkook flicks his eyes up at the ceiling, “I don’t feel ready.”

“You look ready though.” Taehyung points. “You were killing it out there.”

“Thanks,” Jungkook says, flushing a little.

“Don’t thank me,” Taehyung waves a hand. “Just stating facts.”

They fall into a bit of a silence, Jungkook picking at the hem of his shirt as Taehyung turns back to browsing on his laptop, before Jungkook breaks it again.

“Um, I don’t really know how to start this, but I’ve been really wanting to tell you thanks for…” Jungkook trails off as he gestures around the practice room.

“For?"

“Everything? I guess. I didn’t think I had a chance before a few weeks ago, and like, now,” Jungkook blinks. “Like wow , I still can’t believe I’m actually in the running.”

“Uh,” Taehyung rubs his nose. “I would say ‘no problem,’ but all I did was give you some resources. You did most of the work.”
“Maybe, but the lessons really helped,” Jungkook shrugs. “And, honestly, I just wanted to tell you I’m so glad I met you,” the studio lights glitter in Jungkook’s eyes. “I never would have made it this far without you. I didn’t really know what I was doing or why I was here, until recently. And now it looks like I have a real shot. So thanks for that.”

“For what?”

“Giving me the chance at my dreams,” Jungkook beams down at Taehyung, almost blindingly so.

And at that, Taehyung’s heart skips a beat.

It takes him so off guard that his heart is still pounding a bit as he watches Jungkook walks back to the stereo, it was just a fucking smile, what the fuck was wrong with him?

“You never told me,” Taehyung says, shaking himself out of the daze. “Why do you wanna be an idol?”


“Me?” Taehyung raises a brow in surprise.

“Yeah, like how did you end up here? You were a trainee once, right?”

“Oh. Yeah. I got scouted at a mall and then I thought being an idol would be way more fun than studying to get in a SKY university. So, a shitty reason, pretty much. Probably why it didn’t work out in the end. Wasn’t here for the right reasons.”

“I feel like there aren’t really right reasons. And I think you had deeper reasons then that,” Jungkook laughs. “And even then, you did it for yourself right? Because it was something you ended up liking.”

“I really didn’t have a better reason. And just, like, being ‘here for a good time,’ still seems pretty shallow to me.”

“I think that it’s fine. Especially since it worked out,” Jungkook grins. “I dunno, probably biased but you’re pretty great at producing.”

“What the—you just justified my shitty decision making, what are you, some kind of saint?” Taehyung throws his arms over his eyes and mumbles. “Skills, looks, personality, knowing the right thing to say, goddamn, where are your flaws? You were actually made for this.”

“What’d you say?”

“I said that guy you like’s so lucky,” Taehyung suddenly lunges forward tackles Jungkook. “You’re too perfect.”

“I’m not and you definitely said something else;” Jungkook grabs onto his arms. “That doesn’t even make sense, and besides I heard something about my—“

“Did.”

“Didn’t,” Jungkook grunts as he pulls out his phone, the screen glowing against his face as he types. And then, “By the way, are you free next Saturday?”
“Yeah?”

“Wanna go here?” Jungkook looks down as he holds out his phone out, a review page for a restaurant glowing on the screen. “For dinner.”

“Sure. Damn, that’s one fancy place,” Taehyung whistles. “What’s the occasion?”

“It’s my birthday.” Jungkook says, pausing for a second before adding, “And I’m turning 16.”

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Even though Taehyung gets to the station five minutes early, Jungkook’s already there, sitting in a concrete bench, leaning with his forearms against his parted legs, phone gently cradled between his fingers.

He’s put together uncharacteristically nicely, tucked into a well-fitted designer dress shirt and slipped into what turns out to be an expensive-looking pair of jeans upon closer inspection, revealing ears lodged with gauges and adorned with a couple of helices that definitely weren’t there a few months ago.

He glances up when Taehyung gets near, standing up with a stretch and waving with an easy-going smile, he almost looks like a completely different person, face photoshoot-ready with hair that’s styled and dyed what looks like a dirty blond.

He’s a far cry from the scruffy kid who had been practically shaking in his shoes back from the first time they had met and perhaps, more importantly, Taehyung realizes with a start, whoa, Jungkook looks kinda fucking good.

“Damn,” Taehyung stops right next to him and whistles. “Someone dressed nicely today.”

“Uh,” Jungkook glances down at his shirt, his ears tinting with the subtlest of pinks. “Thanks.”

“Nice hair. Your choice?”

“Sorta? We had a photoshoot today so they could post trainee photos on Facebook,” Jungkook takes a lock between his fingers and looks up at it. “They offered to dye it and so I went for it.”

“It looks good on you. Also,” Taehyung pulls out the manila envelope sandwiched between his arm and his side. “I know I already got you a gift, but I figured you should have another one. So happy birthday. Again.”

“What’s this?” Jungkook asks bemusedly, and flips the envelope around. “It’s heavy.”

“It’s just prints of a bunch of random pictures I took over the last few months,” Taehyung laughs. “Just of the places we went and stuff we did. Because, yeah, we really went around a lot, there’s like fifty or so photos or something and just I couldn’t choose...”

And Jungkook doesn’t say anything, just cleanly splits the envelope open and starts rifling through
the photos, intermittently hesitating on a few, like a photo of the seven of them, faces lit up by fireworks on the beach, on a selca Taehyung had taken of the two of them while they were eating fried chicken, faces messy, cheeks stuffed, eyes crinkled, twin grins pulled wide, on a photo of himself dancing in a practice room in the lonely hours, a vintage grain filtering the photo from the camera Taehyung had used.

“So yeah,” Taehyung starts rambling to fill the silence. “Haha, sorry it isn’t, like, more...expensive? I guess.” Taehyung nervously clasps his hands together behind his back and starts rambling. “And I’m nearly as good of a photographer as you, but I-I got the idea because I was looking at all of the photos on your wall—“

“I, uh, sorry, I’m just kinda out of it but,” Jungkook slips the photos back into the envelope and blinks up at Taehyung, a grin threatening to break out from its tight-lipped prison. “I really like these. Seriously, thanks.”

“Hey,” Taehyung kicks Jungkook's shoe as they start moving towards the train. “You scared me. I thought you hated it or something and I was like, shit, what the fuck am I gonna do...“

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Taehyung blinks, and suddenly he finds himself sitting in the restaurant, in the middle of telling Jungkook a random stupid anecdote, wondering exactly where the last hour went.

Jungkook appreciatively sniggers, leaning back in his chair and running a hand through his hair. And even though the table’s already been cleared and the check’s long been sitting patiently on the table, Taehyung barely remembers what he ate, much less what it tasted like. All he can vaguely remember is how weirdly hard it is to take his eyes off Jungkook.

"But enough about me," Taehyung slaps the table. "How does it feel to finally be 16, Birthday Boy?"

Jungkook shrugs, "Kinda the same as I felt like when I was 15 if I'm being honest."

“That’s boring,” Taehyung props his head on his hand.

“How did you feel when you turned 16?”

“I dunno, it was so long ago.”

“It was only two years ago.”

“But that’s like, over 600 days. I can’t even remember what I ate for breakfast yesterday, forget how I felt like when I turned 16.”

“Then you’re boring too,” Jungkook scoffs.

“Sure,” Taehyung shrugs. “I’ll own that.”

“We can be boring together then.”
“Wrong, I can be boring, but you’ll need to be interesting.”

“Why?”

“For your job,” Taehyung snickers. “Oh yeah, by the way, good luck.”

“Oh thanks,” Jungkook looks amused. “It isn’t for a few more days. Why are you telling me now?”

“I’m not going to be around,” Taehyung says nonchalantly. “I’m gonna back to Daegu for a week to visit my family, since there’s finally a break, I have some money from your song, and it’s been so long—”

“Sounds like fun. What are you gonna do there?”

“Honestly? I dunno. I just wanna eat my mom’s food.”

“That’s it?”

“Yeah. All day, everyday. Not even gonna leave the house, I’m just going to be eating for seven days straight.”

Jungkook snickers before’s quiet for a moment, staring down at the tablecloth before he speaks up again. “I forgot to tell you, but I’m going to LA on Thursday.”

“Oh, what, really? Why?”

“They’re sending me to a dance bootcamp while they make the final decision, I guess that’s a good sign?” Jungkook says, fiddling with his fork. “They’re investing more into my training.”

“Seems like it.”

“But, um,” Jungkook scratches the back of the neck. “Are you going to be here when I get back?”

“Yeah? Why?”

“Um. I-if I make BTD, I think there’s only a few days before promos begins, and, uh I—” Jungkook suddenly pulls his hood over his head. “Actually, don’t worry about it. If I don’t make it, it honestly won’t even matter.”

“What is it?” Taehyung raises a brow, now amused. “Now you’re making more curious.”

“Seriously don’t worry about it,” Jungkook slinks back into his chair, pulling the strings around his hood until only his eyes and nose are visible. “Forget I said anything.”

“Now I’m going to start guessing, so you should just tell me anyway.”

“You can try, but I’m still not going to.”

“Why?”

“It doesn’t matter if I don’t make it. You’re not going to care,” Jungkook insists as he casts his eyes downward, “It’s just something I wanna ask you.”

“About what?” Taehyung laughs. “My opinion on your debut?”

“In a way?” Jungkook blinks and fidgets, “But don’t worry about it.”
Daegu’s a nice change a pace, a little slower, a little more homey, it’s a nice little reset in the midst of the flurry of activity back in Seoul, and so when Taehyung finds himself sitting at his kitchen table at 3 in the afternoon chewing through some leftovers, his feet dangling over the linoleum, he knows there’s really no place he’d rather be.

Apparently evaluations were going pretty well for Jungkook, at the beginning he was getting pretty much hourly-updates that ranged from staying positive to minorly freaking out. But after two nights in a row where he had pretty much stayed up until four in the morning listening to Jungkook rant concerns over the phone while he sleepily repeated his reassurances, toeing the line of sleep, eventually the panic(?) subsided and the updates became more irregular and upbeat.

And like that, it’s suddenly Friday, he’s refreshed, evaluations are over (a fact that he’s informed of by both Jimin and Jungkook). Jungkook’s already gnawing on his fifth In-and-Out burger in LA and Taehyung himself is on a train hurtling him back towards hell, woken up by a fun little welcoming text exchange that rudely awakens him from his pleasant dream.

Jin

Hey

Whattup?

When you get a chance

Can you swing by my office when you get back?

I’d like to talk

Sure
It's not like Taehyung was really expecting anything good to come out of the meeting with Jin, but seeing a guy he's known since he was 11 sitting at a desk with his hands folded together, the blankest expression on his face, doesn't exactly inspire confidence.

So when he takes pulls out the chair and takes the seat, awkwardly adjusting his shirt to have an excuse to break the unrelenting stare Jin hadn't broken since Taehyung had entered the room, it's not surprising that the unease begins.

"So, um," Jin says, sitting up a little straighter, starting more and more to look like a 20-year old trying to play the part of a middle-aged man. He asks stiffly, "How was your day?"

"Cut the bullshit," Taehyung says with a stilted laugh, attempting to slice the tension with a bit of clowning. "What’s wrong?"

"Um," Jin balks, blinking his eyes owlishly before he opens his mouth again. "Where do I begin?"

"You tell me."

"Do you," Jin suddenly whips a tablet out of nowhere and begins fiddling with it. "Happen to know why I've asked you to come here?"

"Not really," Taehyung says, and he wonders dimly if it has to do with a certain fuckboy model-actor. "Is it for something bad?"

"Um," Jin's lips thin.

"I," the unease begins to grow and a chill runs down Taehyung's spin. "I take that it's a yes."

"It's certainly not a positive thing," Jin balances the tablet against the table on its edge. "I just want to ask you some clarification questions, because, BigCube, depending on how you answer, may need to take action on some things moving forward."

"About what?" Taehyung says, voice going a bit too high and betraying the fear that was begin to curdle in his gut.

"Um, I guess, here's a great place to start. We have some contacts with journalists. And by we , I mean really just mean me because, no offense, but everyone else on the PR team is kinda incompetent. And I managed to intercept a piece of news that's going to be published pretty soon and would like to know how what response, if I any, I should start preparing," Jin lowers the tablet and turns it back on, "On that note, so," Jin says, an unnerving smile that was probably meant to be comforting resting his face as he pushes a tablet forward. He taps the device, and glances up, "I just wanna know how much of this is true."
Blind Item about Grooming Scandal between Idol Trainee A and Producer B

There’s a trainee that is set to debut for an upcoming boyband from a small company. This trainee was not previously close to being in consideration and within a few months is now one of the top choices. One insider said, “It’s seriously so suspicious how A moved up for consideration so quickly. It’s thought that his relationship with B is what helped, when you watch them together you can’t help but think there’s something more than platonic going on between them. Which if that’s true, is completely sick. Because that means B is abusing his power and preying on A. I think that severely calls into question B’s character as well as the agency’s ability to protect its trainees and the overall fairness of its selection process.”

What makes this news much more scandalous is that A is a minor and is a number of years younger than B.

"Is this," Taehyung puts the tablet down with a sudden laugh, a sense of nausea swelling up and replacing the fear. "Is this supposed to be about me and Jungkook?"

"Does it seem like you guys?"

"Well, no, because none of it's true," Taehyung squints at the tablet before handing it back. "Unless you count the ages and what our professions are. I just figured given the context."

"Okay," Jin lets out a sigh of relief. "I assumed that, but I’m glad you confirmed." he pauses. "But yeah, we think that it’s targeting you guys, and that’s a huge problem. And if this blind item gains traction, we’re going to be a much larger problem on our hands in a few months."

"Why?"

"You turn 19 in like three months right?" Jin says grimly.

“Yeah?”

"You won’t be a minor anymore," Jin nervously taps the table. “And depending on whether the public runs with this and how out-of-hand it gets, well, even if you’re really not that far apart in age, just think about how this sounds: ‘Adult Producer Groomed Underage Trainee Boytoy for Rookie Idol Group—’"

Taehyung winces and feels the nausea rise again, stronger this time.

"—at least to me, that seems like a career-stalling level scandal. At the best you’ll get sent to the military to wait this out, at the worst, well, you’re done.”

“Can’t you just sue them?” Taehyung says, unease returning as quickly as it had left.
“We don’t have the budget for that. And, well, how do I say this, you’re not...” Jin trails off.

“An asset worth saving?”

Jin winces, “That’s not exactly how I was going to phrase it. But, since you’re not a marquee name yet, they may just decide to part ways with you if something...starts.”

"Oh, so,” Taehyung stares numbly at the table. "What's next?"

"I'll try to find a way to stop them from publishing this item, but if it goes through," Jin shrugs. "Pray? I guess. I don't think it'll get a lot of attention, especially since you guys aren't in the spotlight yet, but, you never really know with these sorts of things. And if your thing with YGM happens to blow up, well...there won’t be a lot I can do for you."

"I see,” Taehyung squints his eyes shut. Holy fuck, he does not feel good.

"In the meantime," Jin says. "Just, be a little more mindful about how you are around Jungkook I know you like to cling and you guys are pretty close these days, but now that he's a real contender, he's got lots of people watching him. And it probably goes without saying, but a lot of those people really don't have either of your best interests at heart."

Somehow, after that, Taehyung manages to stand up, wobbling slightly before he heads out the door. And Taehyung doesn’t really know how he gets himself back to the studio, but the first thing he does is wave to Namjoon.

And the second thing he does is throw up.

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Namjoon

I’m so sorry
We tried everything to get you on the last-min track
They won’t budge
We’ll try again for the repackage, so that’s
Uh
Three new songs due in half a year?
We’ll aim for that instead
Yoongi

Yea don’t worry about rent this month
Pay me back whenever you get back on your feet

Jin

They’re publishing it
I’m sorry, there wasn't anything I can do
But I think it’ll be fine honestly
So hope for the best, prepare for the worst?

Jimin

Fuck fuck fuck fuck
I think I twisted my ankle
But it feels worse than that
Shit it might be a sprain
I mean I can force it for a while until debut at least
But idk if I can make it through promotions if it doesn’t get better
I’m fucking scared they’ll kick me off b/c of this
What should I do?

Unknown

I really need to talk to you
I know you blocked my number
But it’s super important
Please check your email
Hoseok

Shit, super sorry to hear about the 2HOM project
I didn’t think it was gonna fall through
And um...so the thing is
They delayed my mixtape until at least quarter four
So while I’d love to have you on it
We’re not even at the stage where we’re conceptualizing it yet :/
So I’ll hit def hit you up when we do
But I don’t think that will be for another two months

Jungkook

I’m at Disneyland! :D
[img attached]
Do u want me to get u anything from here? ⇔ ⇔ ⇔

+++ 

[ fast forward— the present ]

It starts with Taehyung finding a shirt he stole from Jungkook.

It’s just a shitty old cotton t-shirt with “I <3 LA” organized in that classic block fashion, the edges fraying and the elastic slightly stretched out. It’s kinda weird how it even got where he found it in the
first placed, crammed between his couch and a sidetable, and Taehyung doesn’t really want to think about the mechanics that managed to wedge it there.

And he doesn’t really do anything about it at first, just folds it up and puts it on the coffee table, almost as if encouraging it to find a way to become sentient and solve itself. But pretty soon it becomes a taunting reminder of a lot of things he doesn’t really want to remember, and so he finds himself taking action into his own hands in the only way he knows how:

By shoving his problems onto other people.

“Hey Jimin,” Taehyung says nervously, phone held up to his ear. “Could you do me a favor?”

“Depends on what the favor is,” Jimin snorts over the phone.

“Could you return something for me?”

“What is it?”

“A shirt.”

“To who?”

And this is going to be the hard part, Taehyung knows, because Jimin’s always been a huge fan of making him face the music, but still, Taehyung’s always kinda been a little bitch, “To a coworker?”

“Got a name?”

“Starts with J and ends with a K?”

“Got an actual name?”

“Uh...Jung…”

“Got the second part of that name?”

“You know who it is.”

“Nope. Say it loud and fucking clear.”

“Okay, now you’re just fucking with me. You’re an asshole, I hope you know that.”

“Um, so who’s doing the favor for who?”

“Just kidding, you’re the nicest person I’ve ever met.”

“I love it when you lie. Gimme a name though, and you’ll have a deal.”

Taehyung winces. “Jungkook?”

Jimin goes quiet over the phone for a long enough time that Taehyung wonders for a moment that the line’s disconnected, until:

“Sure. I can pick it up at five.”

And Taehyung heaves a sigh of relief.
Ever punctual, Jimin stays true to his word and knocks on Taehyung’s studio door right at 5 o’clock, silhouette outlined in the frosted glass outside his door.

And when Taehyung opens the door and sees the look on Jimin’s face that practically screams ‘we need to talk’ and sees the fact that Yoongi’s standing behind him, straw of his iced americano jammed like an IV through his lips, he quickly realizes this was not as easy as he thought it was going to be.

So he proceeds to shove the offending shirt into Jimin’s hands and attempts to shut the door in his face.

Too bad Jimin’s always been quick with his reflexes and jams his foot in the door first, which Taehyung proceeds to accidently slam.

“Oh my god,” Taehyung’s suddenly dancing nervously, holding the door open and warily staring at Jimin’s ankle. “That’s that ankle right? Oh fuck, did I just? I’m so sorry.”

“You better be sorry,” Jimin says drly, wincing as he shakes out his foot. “Because, yeah that is. But you know how you can make it up to me?”

“How?”

“By having a little talk—”

And Taehyung tries to slam the door a second time, except this time Jimin just rams his entire fucking shoulder through the door.

“Okay, try that again and I’ll actually end you,” Jimin scowls as Yoongi trundles in and shuts the door behind him. “We’re talking whether you want to or not.”

“Um, I’m so sorry, but—”

Suddenly Jimin shoots out a foot—his “bad” foot—and kicks Taehyung straight in the shin. And Taehyung goes down like a rock, eyes smarting as Yoongi just snorts.

“Shit,” Taehyung gurgles in pain as he falls to the floor. “What was that fucking for?”

“Being a dick and a half. I’ve already heard Jungkook’s side of things, and now that you can’t go anywhere, I wanna hear yours.” Jimin smiles sinisterly as Yoongi peering cautiously over his shoulder. “So, like I’ve been asking for months ever since we got to Hawaii, is there anything you wanna talk about?”

+++
“No?” Taehyung manages to grunt, curling his hands over his smarting shin.

“Then let’s see,” Jimin pulls up a chair, and flips it around until the back’s facing Taehyung, before straddling it and folding his arms over the back of the chair, “I’ll go first. Let’s talk about Jungkook.”

Chapter End Notes

Lmfaooo there’s no real reason why this took so long except that it’s a long-ass chp and it turns out living life and writing fics tends to conflict. Haha, sorry, my bad.

Also i fucking lied and broke the flashback up one more time because this is way too long. Again, sorry, one more time LOL

And I don't actually have anything against YG Ent, it's just, they always handle their dating scandals terribly. LOL maybe I should change the agency names tbh...

Umm, some references, in no particular order (take the commentary with a grain of salt LOL):

- **Baekhyun + Taeyeon** was a wild trip, I think it’s the first time two “top idols” had been caught together, so everyone lost their shit and the fallout was crazy. One of the many lowlights is a fan confronting Taeyeon at an airport and harassing her the point where she cried(?) or at least looked upset.
- **Hyeri basically made her entire name off** of her relationship w/ Tony Ahn
- **ROMEO member** was caught dmimg a minor fan to come to his room with him, probably also useful to know that she was 18 and he was 20, so like, still skeevy and weird and gross for reasons, but wasn’t as pedo as the media made it sound. The end result was he “reflected” and was pushed to enlist to ride the scandal out
- Example **“blind item,”** basically published gossip blurbs, sometimes they’re shots in the wind and sometimes they’re on target.
- **Random, but Jay Park talking about idol life,** kinda interesting to see his perspective on it, esp since he was pushed out of his group for a comment scandal. also goes into the dating part a little bit. there’s like a second reason other than marketability that’s a reason idols are “banned” from dating and it has to do with culturally how confucian countries operate as meritocracies, so schools, tests, jobs are paramount and so for parents, anything else, dating especially, is seen as "distraction" to their kids and, in more extreme cases, is banned. so it, as in that philosophy, according to jay park, apparently also applied to jyp idols too.

Twitter
“Uh huh,” Taehyung grunts into his phone, the device sandwiched between his face and his shoulder as he tries to unlock his apartment door while simultaneously balancing his bike against his waist. “Well, you should probably still go to sleep.”

“I can’t,” Jungkook says over the phone, tinny from the effect of speakerphone, rapid keyboard clicks punctuating the background silence. “The decision is in like 12 hours and—oh, no. No, nonono FUCK,” the sound of what’s likely a headset ricocheting off a wall cuts through the receiver. “Oh my god, I was so close to winning the game.”

“Sucks to suck,” Taehyung snorts softly as he finally gets the door unlocked, easing it open with the front wheel of his bike. “Hey, isn’t it like 2 AM over there?”

The light’s on in the living room, the sounds of a conversation involving more people than just his roommates floating through. It's pretty unusual at this time of day, and so he strains to hear but can’t make out the words as he slips off his shoes.

“All right, I’ll try to listen,” he hears Jungkook say, soft and hushed. “But it sounds like they’re talking about something really important.”

“Thanks,” Jungkook grunts, quiet for a minute before he continues. "Sorry to keep talking about it, but it's...it's like...it's not like...I'm expecting to make it. But, like, I know I'll feel so terrible if I get cut
at this point. Especially compared to a few weeks ago.”

“Why do you say that?” Taehyung blinks as he nears the corner.

“Because I’m so close,” Jungkook says simply. “It’s like...getting second place. Getting tenth is like, it sucks, but because you’re so far from making it it’s kinda whatever because you feel like you didn’t even deserve it. But getting second...that’s...holy shit. Haha. It'd be the worst. Because it's being just short of being The One. It’s just, like, it’ll always be this huge ‘what if,’ for me, you know?”

"Ah."

"Like, what if I did that much more? I would be legit so sad."

“Oh,” Taehyung says, uneasiness swirling in his stomach.

“Yeah. Especially because I...” Jungkook pauses. “I’ve never wanted something more badly before.”

“I...” is all Taehyung can say. “I’m sorry I can’t promise you anything.”

“Yeah. I know.”

Then he tunes Jungkook out as he turns the corner.

“Hey,” Yoongi nods, curling his socked foot, legs straddling the corner of the coffee table. Behind him are Namjoon and Hoseok huddled over a piece of paper situated on the center of the surface and even further, by the dining room table, is Jin, disinterestedly checking his phone as he picks at his rice, grain by grain.

It looks like a war room, with marked papers scattered all around the table, three laptops, open and glowing, balanced precariously on different surfaces and at the edge of the table. Namjoon and Hoseok only look up long enough to nod at Taehyung before huddling back up and exchanging hushed whispers as Yoongi picks up his laptop and starts typing something, rapid fire, his face inches from the screen.

“Hey Jungkook,” Taehyung says quietly into the phone. “I’m going to have to hang up.”

“Huh—?” Jungkook sounds slightly dismayed before he’s cut off by Taehyung ending the call.

He tiptoes carefully around the huddle, glancing out of the corner of his eye at the activity before he slips into the kitchen area and slides into a seat next to Jin.

“Hi,” Jin says, without looking up.

“Hey,” Taehyung says, hushed, and leans in. “What’s going on over there?”

“Pre-vote strategizing,” Jin shrugs and scoops a bunch of rice into his mouth.

“Oh,” Taehyung says, glancing down at the floor. He wants to ask, but he can’t come with the words, and he’s racking his mind for the best way to phrase it when Jin speaks again.

“Jimin’s already in,” Jin says, putting his phone on his table, instagram open as he scrolls through it. “Jungkook is not.”

“Oh. Wait,” and the relief Taehyung feels from Jimin’s status is immediately wiped away. “Jungkook is not, what do you mean—?”
“It’s unclear,” Jin blinks, rubbing his nose. “Fuckface and his friends will vote against him, for sure, but there’s three people who haven’t yet decided. So that’s what that—” Jin points to the three huddled by the couch. “—is about. Strategizing to sway them.”

“Oh,” Taehyung says for a fourth time as he struggles with the follow up question.

“Oh,” Jin opens his mouth like a mindreader. “Arguments for him being placed on the team are potential for growth, age, dance abilities, social media impact. Arguments—from Fuckface Senior—for keeping him off are his consistency, his recent performance stumbles, and potentially keeping him to be the leader or center of a future team.”

“There’s a future team?” Taehyung lifts his brows in surprise. Maybe this could be a Plan B. His hands begin to itch to reach down towards his phone to tell Jungkook.

“Yes and no,” Jin leans against his hand. “If this one does well, then yes. If it doesn’t, then no.”

“...Oh.”

“But also,” Jin pauses on a photo before quickly hitting the like button. “If you ask me, if he doesn’t make it, they’re just going to push him out after.”

Taehyung’s heart plummets through his chest, “Wait why?”

“New blood’s coming through, they just picked up a 13-year-old guy from one of those survival shows who’s of the same mold,” Jin shrugs. “And also Fuckface Senior doesn’t like Jungkook because he’s clearly backed those guys,” Jin jabs a finger at the huddle. “And since he’s got this whole thing rigged up, it doesn’t look promising. Oh yeah, also, did they tell you? They found out why they won’t let you on the album.”

And maybe it’s the nonchalance in Jin’s tone that delays it a bit, but Taehyung blinks about four times before it really punches him in the gut.

“What?” He asks weakly.

Jin looks up at him for the first time, and even though his voice is steady, the pity in his eyes and the furrow in his brows relay everything, “You know how Fuckface Senior is like a board member right? But he’s one because his company has a large investment in BigCube.”

“Yeah.”

“And you know how that external Swedish producer guy was given like...70% of the album?”

“Yeah.”

“Turns out Fuckface Senior’s company invests in the Swedish producer dude’s label. Maybe it’s a coincidence,” Jin scratches his head, eyes blank, the slightest hint of anger seeping in his tone. “Maybe it’s not.”

“I see,” Taehyung says weakly.

“And I have no idea if you guys can get around that. But, there’s a silver lining. While it’s not great, at least the fog has cleared and we know what we’re up against.” Jin blinks. “Also, I guess, since we’re talking about you, I should probably tell you I looked a bit more into the Blind Item thing. Just like, an update since it’s been published, what’s been happening to it and how it’s gone down for people affected by it before you.”
“So,” Taehyung taps the table nervously. “What’s the verdict?”

And the fact that Jin doesn't look him in the eye or answer right away is somewhat remedied by the fact that it’s plausible that the scoop of rice he’s currently shoving into his mouth needed his undivided instead. But only somewhat, and so Taehyung’s fingernails cut a little deeper into the palm of his hand as the stifling silence grows with the seconds.

“Um,” Jin says carefully, dabbing his mouth excessively with his napkin. “The good news is, no one’s—internal or publicly—has linked the blind item to you guys or come remotely close. Infact, this item might be about a real case of it happening at one of the other companies, and public has snapped up that lead.”

Taehyung slumps in his chair with relief.

“The second piece of good news is that based on precedent, I think it’s highly unlikely it’ll affect Jungkook negatively.”

And a second wave of relief hit Taehyung full in the chest.

“The bad news is,” Jin fiddles with the edge of the napkin. “These types of controversies tend to impact the...non-minor, for lack of better words, more. I was checking out precedent cases and no one without major clout has ever really recovered. So you’re on really thin ice. Like razor thin ice. And I think, it just gets thinner if Jungkook ends up actually making the cut.”

“I see,” Taehyung grips his phone, his hand shaking.

“So, here’s some advice,” Jin tears the napkin. “I know how badly you want to take down Fuckface and help Jungkook. And given...talk I’ve been hearing,” Jin flicks his eyes over at the huddle. “There may be some opportunities that may crop up tonight for you to get involved. But they—” Jin jerks his head towards the couch. “—really have no idea what’s on your plate right now. So my suggestion, for your own sake, is do not touch that meeting with a 10-foot pole.”

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It’s the buzz of his phone that rouses him from sleep later that night, the violent rattle of the device against the wood of his nightstand and the glass of water it had shaken itself up again, and he barely gets a glance at the glowing 2:39AM stamped across the screen before he smashes it against his ear.

“Wazzup,” Taehyung yawns into the receiver, reaching a hand under his silk pajama top to giving his shoulder blade a good scratch.

“Hey,” Yoongi replies, voice low and muted and oddly calm.

“It’s so fucking early,” Taehyung’s head droops with exhaustion. "What do you want?”
"I need you to get your ass here asap."

"Here?" Taehyung blinks in confusion.

"Into the office."

Taehyung’s suddenly a lot more alert, a mix of trepidation and intrigue cranking up the wheels in his mind, "Why?"

"I’ll explain when you get here, it’s just—uh, try to get here in 15 minutes."

Taehyung sleepily jumps off his bed, holding his phone between his cheek and his neck and blindly searches in the dark through his floor-bound heap of clothes for a pair of jeans. It’s when he fishes them out, jamming a hand through the leg to straighten out the cloth, that Jin’s words cryptically come back to him, a bit of trepidation flickering up in his chest when he pauses long enough to think, "Um, what’s going on?"

There’s no reply and it takes Taehyung a moment to realize that Yoongi’s not at the receiver any more, and he’s talking to someone else, words muted and lost until suddenly the volume of his voice is rushing back again.

"Uh huh, alright, okay—" Yoongi still sounds like he’s talking to someone else. "Sorry, Taehyung, I got to go. Just, uh, get here as fast as you can."

And before Taehyung can reply, Yoongi hangs up.

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It’s just curiosity, really, Taehyung thinks as he steps up to the elevator bank, the midnight wind rushing cold through the parking lot. Right? He’s just there to observe, really, he justifies it to himself as he presses the call button, feeling the subtle tactile click against his index finger before he steps back, an uneasiness swirling around in his veins, Jin's warning rattling ceaselessly in his mind.

As long as he doesn’t get involved, he should be fine. Right? He’ll just there to observe.

Right?

The doors glide open and he steps through and presses the floor. The elevator immediately rattles its way towards the seventh floor, the digital numbers incrementing steadily as it rushes him towards his destination. Checking his reflection in the wall's mirror, Taehyung cracks his knuckles and adjusts
the collar on his dress shirt as the car eases its way to a stop.

The hallway’s empty when he steps out of the cara, the brisk clip of Taehyung’s soles against the floor echoing in the silence as he makes his way down the hall to the only door with a light under the crack.

Suddenly it opens with a bang, Yoongi bursting through with a scowl on his face as he slams it shut behind him, muttering curses under his breath as he runs a hand through his hair, before he looks up and pauses, relief sweeping over his face.

“Oh, sweet,” Yoongi nods. “You’re here.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung says cautiously. “So what’s going on?”

“We’re taking the vote right now.”

Taehyung blinks, ears beginning to ring, “What?”

“We’re taking a vote. On the last member of BTD. Jimin’s already made it, and Jungkook and Fuckface at a draw.”

“O-oh,” Taehyung takes a step back and holds out a hand. “So what did you need me for?”

“What do you think?” Yoongi claps an arm around Taehyung and steers him into the room before he can protest. “To break the tie.”

“Wait,” Taehyung’s heart stops in his chest and his hands grow clammy as he desperately thinks for an excuse. He comes up with nothing. “I’m voting?”

“Yeah?” Yoongi gives him a look. “Why else would you be here?”

Then before he can get in another word, Yoongi shoves him through the door.

It’s like stepping into a lion’s den, Taehyung thinks with a swallow as twelve sets of eyes immediately pin him down. Namjoon and Hoseok are sitting there at the conference table, eyes downcast, flanked by several executives and miscellaneous decision makers Taehyung’s had the privilege of talking to maybe twice at the most.

And at the head of the table is Fuckface’s uncle, a greying man maybe in in his forties lounging in his seat with his hands clasped in front of him, his expression decidedly slipping into unamusement the moment their eyes meet.

“Who is this?” Fuckface Senior points at Taehyung with his finger, eyes trained on Yoongi.

“Taehyung,” Yoongi says without wavering at all as he pulls out a chair next to Hoseok and pushes Taehyung down into the seat. “He’s a producer, worked on 2HOM’s album.”

“I’ve never even heard of him,” Fuckface Senior says like Taehyung’s not even in the room.

“Well, you should have,” Yoongi says as he slides back into his seat. “He basically got 2HOM to chart on his own. But regardless, let’s get back to the discussion?”

“Sure,” Fuckface Senior leans back in his chair, eyes calculatedly resting on Taehyung. “But what’s left to talk about?” he taps the packets of paper in front of him. “We’ve been going around in circles about this for the last three hours, and I think I’ve made it pretty clear which one between the two should make it.”
And that’s when Taehyung looks down at the sheets lain out in front of him, the profiles of Fuckface and Jungkook lain out in front of him. He flips through Jungkook’s quickly, fascinated at how the whole of his worth is numericized and summarized, assembled neatly into a stacked paper form. There’s all of his physical stats, his weight, his age, his BMI, his blood type, his health problems. There’s photos from all angles of his face and full-body, with and without makeup. There’s a page of analysis from every dance and singing evaluation he’s gone through since he joined the company, important notes circled and highlighted from different points in time, and before Taehyung can flip any further, Fuckface Senior’s voice cuts through his thoughts.

“I think one thing everyone should remember, is that everyone should let go of the...personal attachments,” Fuckface Senior looks around, eyes stopping on Yoongi for one beat too long. “...they have towards the candidates and regard this as the investment it really is. We’re here to assemble the best team with the best people to give this band the best chance to succeed. We're not here to return favors.”

“That’s really fucking rich coming from him, he’s been advocated for his nephew all fuckin’ night,” Yoongi mutters under his breath before Namjoon silences him with a look.

“Just look at this,” Fuckface Senior carelessly flips through Jungkook’s file, stops on the page with the evaluations and begins to read. “Nervous. Has major stage fright. Can’t perform consistently in front of crowds. This isn’t trivial stuff we should dismiss, this is a consistent pattern of unprofessional behavior from a child who isn’t ready for—”

“He’s, um, he's n-not like that anymore,” Taehyung automatically retorts before he realizes what he’s doing. And suddenly the spotlight’s on him. He swallows nervously, hand beginning to crush the hem of his jacket with his vice-like grip, “Um, I mean, just—I look at the last few evaluations, starting from maybe a, a, few months ago? He’s improved considerably. I believe he started receiving the highest marks in vocals and dance in the last few weeks as well, and...yeah. Just like...” Taehyung awkwardly peters off. "Just, please, look."

Fuckface Senior’s eyes narrow but he complies, lips thinning as he scans the page.

“Maybe so,” Fuckface Senior finally says after minutes of silence, reluctance in his voice. “But it’s only been a month. Let's juxtapose this against my nephew,” Fuckface Senior taps Fuckface’s profile packet, “Who has been consistently performing at the highest level since the day he entered. Which has been, what, years, now? I think there's still no contest in this case.”

“Um,” Taehyung starts bouncing his leg nervously, fingers clenching into the fabric of his pants. “While that’s t-true, I-I think, I think, it may be more important to look at the potential of growth—especially since Jungkook’s so young—”

“Young, well, isn't his age is another negative thing?” Fuckface Senior narrows his eyes. “He’s way too young. He's not mature, and more importantly, he’s not ready.”

“Okay, sixteen, he’s old enough,” Taehyung quickly defends, “And besides, his youth can be an asset, he drops the average age of the team by a year alone, it can appeal to younger fans—”

An executive cuts him off, staring squarely at him behind her glasses, "Well, actually, one thing to also consider is that we can save him to be a leader for our next boy band instead. He’s very talented like you say, and I think a few years of development will do him good.”

The table begins to murmur in agreement, a few nodding their heads, their buy-in unraveling the furrow in their brows.
Taehyung’s heart begins to sink, “But there’s no guarantee, right? This is going to be a huge emotional setback for him. He doesn’t know that you’re just saving him for your next band, this is going crush his dreams,” He begins to speak a little more frantically, his voice rising in pitch as he glances around for allies and finds fewer left. “And also not that I’m doubting the abilities of our group, but what if there isn’t a next boy band—”

“That’s why we’re trying to form the best one now,” the mildness in Fuckface Senior’s voice contrasting against his glower. “The plan is to not fail, and in order to not fail, we need the best people. This is what I mean when I said to separate yourselves from personal attachments.” Fuckface Senior’s hands ghost over the stack of discarded profiles, a pile of twenty-something trainees who had evidently not made the cut. “All of these kids have dreams. The fact that Jungkook has them is basically a requirement at this point, not an asset. If he’s good, he’ll make the cut the next time. If he’s not, then, well,” Fuckface Senior nods his head, his lips narrowing into the thinnest of grins. “That’s just how it goes.”

And Taehyung sees a flash of red, “A lot of the earlier results seemed to be a result of him being unable to assimilate into a new environment with strangers, it’s not his fault, he has so much potential —”

“Potential?” Fuckface Senior slams the packet down and Taehyung recoils. “This is a final product, if you didn’t realize, not a prototype. How do you justify letting on a kid who has a learning curve when we could pick someone who’s already polished and equally or more qualified? How could we expect him to act professionally when we stick him into interviews with people he doesn’t know or throw him into countries he’s never been into before? He’s unreliable, that’s what all of this is telling me—”

“I t-think if you work with him, you’ll see a huge payoff,” Taehyung says and Hoseok suddenly stiffens next to him. “Like, if you look at the timeline and his recent success, it’s the result of us—”

Fuckface Senior’s eyes suddenly narrow, “What are you—”

“Excuse me, sir, before you keep,” Yoongi cuts in, passive-aggressive gummy smile plastered across his face. “May I remind you that Taehyung is the swing vote? I feel like you should be appealing to him rather than trying rip him apart.”

“Appeal to him?” Fuckface Senior suddenly barks out a laugh leans back in his chair, his glare now aimed squarely at Yoongi. “What’s the point? Like, what is the actual point?”

“What do you mean?” Yoongi’s smile doesn’t waver.

“I know you guys have rigged this. You’ve politicized the process.” Fuckface Senior waves a hand around the room, and points straight at Taehyung, “This guy is going to vote for Jungkook, just like you brought him in to do. He’s not here to listen to a real debate or real arguments about why my hardworking nephew is the perfect piece. He’s here to put your guy on the team. There’s no point in trying to convince him because he’s a shill. I’ve lost. And I accept that.”

“Then why even debate at all?”

Fuckface Senior jabs a thumb at the notetaker, a shrewd woman typing furiously on her laptop, and sneers, “For the record. Because when Jungkook crashes and this team burns as a result, I want it to be known that I, one, knew it would happen, and two, that I explicitly said it and, three, that I will not assume any responsibility for this choice at all.”

Then he sits back, the silence so thick Taehyung could have cut it for a knife.
After about a minute, one of the executives speaks up, “So are we ready for a vote?”

“Actually,” Namjoon stands up abruptly. “I need a break.”

And Taehyung grins at him in relief. He’s not really able to stand right away, residual adrenaline still coursing through his veins, his hands still shaking from when he had spoken up. He watches all but one person gets up and files out of the door, waiting until almost the last minute to stand up, his phone securely in his hand.

He’s about half a pace away when a hand catches him just before he steps out the door, and when he turns around, it’s Fuckface Senior, the latter’s face emotionless and his stare steely.

“Can I help you?” Taehyung says, fruitlessly trying to retract his arm.

“Yeah,” Fuckface Senior says simply, tone pleasanter than his words. “I’d be careful if I were you.”

“What do you mean?” Taehyung recoils.

“I lied earlier,” Fuckface Senior leans closer and whispers into Taehyung’s ear. “I know exactly who you are. I know exactly what you want. And I know exactly what shit you’ve gotten yourself into. So be really fucking careful and weigh your options. Because this isn’t just about Jungkook or your friends. It’s about you. And what you really want.”

Taehyung freezes, “I-I, I don’t know what you’re—”

"We have the resources to bury it away," Fuckface slides his phone out of his pocket and holds it up. "All it'd take is one phone call. Just think about it. Think about what I want, and think about what you want. They don't have to be mutually exclusive."

Taehyung’s mouth runs dry.

“I mean, here’s a secret, the blind item isn’t about you guys.” Fuckface Senior laughs. “But—”

As if at the worst moment, Taehyung’s phone lights up and begins to buzz, and of all names, Jungkook’s is spelled clearly across the screen.

“—we both know, ultimately, that’s honestly up to the court of public opinion to decide, isn’t it?” Fuckface Senior glances down at Taehyung’s vibrating phone, shakes his head and laughs again before he turns and steps out the hall. “But honestly, it looks like I don’t have to interfere because it seems you’re good at setting traps for yourself on your own. Good luck with everything, I sincerely hope you get to produce something someday. Your 2HOM song? It was actually pretty good. It’s just—” Fuckface Senior brushes lint off his jacket. “Yeah. Actually now that I think about it, I take back my earlier threat. Do whatever you want, honestly. I kinda don’t really give a shit about my nephew if we’re being honest, I’m just doing this as a favor to my sister. And I don’t really care if Jungkook makes it, we can always just end his contract if he becomes too much of a burden. But you know what I really can’t have?”

Taehyung stares at him dumbfoundedly.

“A cheap Instagram escort with a career-death sentence from a Big Three company fucking around with my bottom line,” Fuckface Senior snorts. “You get me? So just don’t. And I'll give you what you want.”

Then he turns tail and leaves, striding down the hallway and around the corner.
It just doesn’t feel real. And maybe that’s why Taehyung stands there for a while, numb and staring at the cracks on the ground before he realizes his phone is still buzzing, cutting through the silence, Jungkook’s name flashing on the screen. It ends, a Missed Call (3) notification popping up on the screen before it fades as it starts ringing again, and so Taehyung hurriedly snatches it up, slips into the conference room and unlocks his phone to answer, hoping that no one sees.

“Uh, hey?” Taehyung asks, voice low, pinching his eyes shut as he leans against a wall.

“Hey!” Jungkook sounds cheery, the sounds of a busy street behind him. “Want a shirt?”

“A what?” Taehyung asks in disbelief.

“A shirt!”

It’s such a stupid reason to call, and Taehyung slumps against the wall in defeat, something like irritation beginning to bloom in his chest, “Uh, yeah, sure, I guess.”

“Okay, which one do you want? There’s this one with a skyline, there’s one with a flag, there’s one with I, heart symbol, LA, and…”

Just outside the door, in the peripherals of Taehyung’s vision, a shadow appears outside the frosted glass, a face getting closer and peering in between the lines and Taehyung recoils.

“Um,” Taehyung mutters. “Pick whatever.”

“There’s only three,” Jungkook scoffs. “It’s not that hard.”

“I don’t really care,” Taehyung hisses as the shadow moves and door handle jiggles. “And I don’t have time for this.”

“Is everything okay?” Jungkook suddenly asks, concern creeping into his tone.

“Yeah,” Taehyung says as the door handle opens. “But I need to go.”

“Oh, ok—”

And Taehyung manages to end the call right as Hoseok slips through the door.

“Oh,” Taehyung sighs with relief. “It’s just you.”

“It’s just me?” Hoseok raises a brow. “Jeez, what were you doing in here?”

“Jungkook called me,” Taehyung pulls out a chair and slumps into it. “Just over souvenirs, but I’m sure if anyone besides you guys caught it, it would have looked so fucking bad.”

“Oh shit, yeah,” Hoseok swears, pulling up a chair and sitting down in it. “Speaking of Jungkook, I came to talk to you about the meeting.”

“What about it?”

Hoseok draws in a deep breath, “You need to abstain.”

“Abstain?” Taehyung looks up at Hoseok. “Why would I want to do that?”

“At this level it’s almost entirely politics,” Hoseok starts. “Honestly if you think about it, the differences between Fuckface and Jungkook on paper are so minuscule, it’s just favoritism at this
“But,” Taehyung says, his hands beginning to shake as the reality sets in. He’s done. Shit. He’s really done. Maybe the least he can do now is actually follow through with Jungkook, “You know that even without all of that, Jungkook’s ceiling is higher, he is actually the better candidate, just, he needs more time—”

“Exactly,” Hoseok slams a hand on the table. “He’s not ready right now. And unless you’re ready to accept the burden of the consequences if it doesn’t work out, when it doesn’t work out, like if Jungkook messes up, if the group tanks, if the song bombs, you’ve got no seniority to protect you and Yoongi and Namjoon can only do so much. Or what if Jungkook breaks, mentally or emotionally, how are you going to live with that? You’re assuming more responsibility than I think you’re aware you are. Forget just not being able to produce for BigCube, this is hang this around your head forever.”

“I...I know,” Taehyung wrings his hands to ward away the growing guilt.

“So?”

“But I need to, Hoseok,” Taehyung says, hanging his head. Deep down, he knows Hoseok is right. “I...He wants this really badly—”

“Just because he wants this doesn’t mean he’s ready for it.”

“—and I dragged him in for my own personal shit, I gave him hope, I can’t be the one that ends up taking it away.”

“What’s past is past,” Hoseok shakes his head. “If I were you, I just wouldn’t get involved. You don’t understand what you’re dealing with. Unless you’re prepared to sink with this ship, don’t fuck around with something so high stakes. Like, sure, I know you’re not saying it but I know you’re still mad that Fuckface wronged you—”

“Look,” Taehyung holds up a hand. “It’s not really because of that anymore, sure, yeah I’d love to get a shot at him—”

“Stop taking shots, you seriously need to move on,” Hoseok pinches the bridge of his nose. “Just live well and focus on your own path. Forget the fact that he did that vocal trainer shit and—”

Wait. “Vocal trainer?” Taehyung furrows his brows.

“Yeah? That vocal trainer who told you weren’t good enough? Back during your trainee days.

“Hold up. I knew he messed with my singles, but,” Taehyung’s eyes narrow. “What is this shit about him doing shit with my vocal trainer? What are you talking about?”

“Like when he, you know, back before your first evaluation...” Hoseok suddenly peters off, eyes flicking to the corners of Taehyung’s face, a nervous look beginning to form on his own, “Wait, shit, you don’t know.”

“What do I not know,” Taehyung’s voice drops as he leans in, menace cutting into every word. “Hoseok. What are you talking about?”

“Don’t worry about it actually,” Hoseok adjusts his collar and swallows, “I—I’ll tell you after—”

“You're going to tell me right now.”
“Taehyung.”

“I’m serious.”

“You need to move on,” Hoseok pleads, lips thinning into a worrying line.

“I think I deserve know all the facts,” Taehyung straightens in his chair.

“But—”

“I think, since it involves, me,” Taehyung’s eyes flash. “I deserve to know.”

Hoseok closes his eyes and exhales slowly out of his mouth. “I’ll tell you, on one condition. Don’t let this affect your decision.”

"I won’t."

"Though, I’m not sure how it really wouldn’t,” Hoseok mutters almost to himself, taking in a deep breath before he starts. “So Fuckface...”

+++  

Taehyung’s the last one back, shutting the door behind him with his back to the room, before he turns slowly to face the room, everyone lined up around the perimeter, blinking up at him as he takes his seat.

His ears are ringing because he’s so numb, a new level of strangely cold static buzz wrapping around his heart.

But he’s surprisingly calm.

He looks up, eyes steely and resolved, straight up at Fuckface Senior who is staring right at him, impassive and unimpressed.

“So?” Fuckface Senior waves a hand dismissively, and Taehyung's anger begins to simmer. "What's your verdict?"

"I've..." Taehyung starts. "I've taken a lot into consideration. And I'm ready to make a choice."

Then his blood boils as Hoseok’s words come rushing back

“So Fuckface,” Hoseok had said. “Knew you were insecure about your voice and so he bribed your vocal trainer in the months the final evaluation to mess with you, to get in your head and make it seem like you had no chance, to trigger your nervous breakdown to create an opportunity.”
"My choice takes into account namely his ceiling for potential,” Taehyung says, looking down at his clasped hands, and Hoseok turns away, eyes shut, expression grim. “And his passion and drive.”

“He did it because he desperately wanted a spot and he was angry because he knew that your final evaluation, in particular, was pretty much a sham—”

“And secondarily his strength as a vocalist, his strength on social media, and the versatility he brings to the team.”

“—or maybe coronation is a better word for it. Since all you had to have done was show up. Because that at that point you weren’t even remotely close to being cut. It was actually the opposite.”

“These are the top attributes that make this individual a compelling candidate to me,” Taehyung leans forward, glaring straight into Fuckface Senior’s eyes.

“You had already been chosen as the first member of BTD.”

“And are the reasons my vote is for Jungkook.”

+++  

Jungkook

AUG 24

I mad wit
Ma date
Made it
Holy shit
holy shit
I made it

Haha I heard
Congrats, you worked really hard for it
I’m proud of you
I’m so

Holy shit

I’m gonna get you a second shirt

As a celebration

Which one did you want?

You didn’t respond so I got the ugliest one

The I <3 LA one

Oh haha thanks

Also I’ll be back tomorrow

When’s a good time to give it to you?

Uh

maybe not next week haha

Oh

When then?

Don’t know yet

Oh okay

Let me know!

I wanna tell you something too

AUG 25

I landed

Shit, that was a long flight
So when are you free?

Oh nice, hope you had a safe flight
I’m actually in Daegu rn
Sorry

Wait what really?
When are you coming back?

Not sure yet

Oh
Okay
I still have your shirt!

**AUG 26**

You can drop it off with Namjoon haha
I’ll pick it up later

I wanna give it to you in person

**AUG 27**

I heard you’re back!

**AUG 28**

Yeah haha
We’re leaving for promos in a week
So if you have time let me know
I still wanna tell you something

Oh ahha
Just text me?
Or call I guess

I’d rather tell you in person

AUG 30

When are you free?

Tomorrow?

Okay!
Where you wanna go?

AUG 31

Actually sorry I can’t make it

Ah okay
Any other time?

I don’t think so
Sorry

Good luck with promotions though

Haha
Thanks

SEPT 12 (3:10PM)

Hey
Jimin and I are going out to
[link attached]
Wanna join?

SEPT 12 (7:30 PM)

Not sure if you got my last text
But wanna join?

SEPT 28

I think I saw you at Starbucks 😈😈😈
I waved but you didn't see me

OCT 1 (5:13PM)

Slkdjflskdf
We’re about to go onstage for our debut perf
I’m so nervous
[Image attached]
Oh my god
It was a disaster 😞 😞

Hey! How are things going?

Hey it’s been while
HMU if you’re around i guess lol

[ fast forward — 8 years ]

The phrase “Let’s talk,” is usually not a good one.
The phrase, “Let’s talk about your” kinda "ex,” is much less so.

And so the minute that the phrase “let’s talk about Jungkook,” leaves Jimin’s mouth,
Taehyung, lying on his back on the ground, his expression impassive, deploys the wisdom of the proverb “out of sight, out of mind,” and rotates his head until it’s full of wall instead of his slightly-irate best friend.

“How about we don’t?” Taehyung suggests hopefully.
"Sure, would you wanna hear a story instead?"

Taehyung and grunts, “Not really.”

“Great,” Jimin takes a deep breath. “So, there's this guy—“

“I said," Taehyung glares. "Not. Really. And I mean that as in, no, not really, I do not want to hear this story.”

"Well—too bad," Jimin snorts. "I'm going to tell it anyway."

Taehyung rolls his eyes, "So what was the point of even asking me what I want then?"

"Common courtesy? I dunno. But anyway, once upon a time, there was this guy."

"Already seems like a pretty shit story."

"Shut up and listen," Jimin delivers a swift kick to Taehyung's ribs. "So there's this guy right?"

"Yeah," Taehyung groans, clutching his side. "You mentioned that already—"

"I said, listen," Jimin kicks him again. "There's this—"

"Yep I get it."

"—there's—"

"Uh huh."

"—this—"

"Cool story."

"Guy," Jimin grits out, looking so irate that Taehyung finally shuts up. "And this guy had a lot of shit going for him. But, he never really knew wanted, and when things got tough, instead of fighting, he would run away."

"Nice."

"Like, every time."

"Literally?"

"Yeah, every single time."

"Sounds like my kind of guy."

"Yeah I agree. Especially since he ended up disappointed a lot, often times in totally preventable ways."

"Neat."

"But not."

"Agree to disagree."

"No I'm definitely just disagreeing."
"Well I agree to disagree with your disagreement."

"You can't agree with me if I don't accept the agreement."

"Just watch me."

"What? No. You literally can't, because you can't just unilaterally agree to something, an agreement by definition take two parties—"

"You're getting sidetracked from the story."

"It's over," Jimin blinks. "That's the end. He ends up as a sad, disappointed guy."

"That's it?" Taehyung scoffs, "That's actually a pretty shitty story."

"I mean, I agree," Jimin shrugs. "But it's based on a real person. Wanna know the guy’s name?"

"I already know," Taehyung flops his head towards Jimin and glares. "It’s me."

"How intuitive," Jimin raises his brows and grins, "Wanna hear the second part of this story?"

"You mean the part where I die sad and lonely?" Taehyung narrows this eyes. "Because, thanks but no thanks."

"It's not about that, it's about the guy’s amazing friends."

"I have friends?"

"Yeah," Jimin raises his head. "And they’re sick of watching him get into trainwrecks."

"You know what my solution is for that? Don’t watch."

"That’s kinda hard when you keep giving me a front row seat." Jimin glares at him, "And the worst thing is, you’re not the only one who’s doing it. You don’t even know the beginning of how painful it is to watch both you and—"

A pang shoots through Taehyung’s chest, and Jimin notices before he can wipe the grimace off his face.

"Yeah, you guys are so alike, have I told you that? You're basically like the same person and you self destruct in almost the same way. Figures that the Love of Your Fucking Life would also—"

“Okay, look,” Taehyung lifts himself on his elbows and scowls, “Just because we had a fling doesn’t mean he’s remotely close to being love of my life, I think I love myself a little more than that—"

“Really?” Jimin raise a brow.

"Yeah," Taehyung quips, then adds when Jimin doesn't lower his brow. "And besides, I’m completely over him."

Jimin's silent for a moment, eyes filled to the brim with judgement before he opens his mouth again, "Alright."

Expecting a fight, Taehyung's a bit taken aback and so he repeats defiantly, "Yeah."

"Cool," Taehyung lowers himself down slowly, regarding Jimin suspiciously.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Jimin squints.

"I just can't believe you're dropping it."

"What’s there to believe? I did. It’s done."

"Yeah I know. But it’s weird that you're just," Taehyung flicks his hand. "Letting it go. Just like that."

"Give me some credit," Jimin just laughs, fiddling with his phone for a bit in the silence before suddenly sitting up straight and blinking, “Oh, yeah, wait, did you hear the news?”

“About what?”

"Him."

"Who’s him?" Taehyung shoots back, a little too quick for his own liking.

Jimin pauses for a moment, then drops the name: “Jungkook.”

It's so stupid how even the mention of his name sends Taehyung’s heart through a gold-medal gymnastics routine, and he can't even help it but he starts running through all the viable scenarios that could possibly involve the intersection of "Jungkook" and "news."

"I don't care," Taehyung tries his best to sound nonchalant.

"Really?" Jimin lifts a brow, a potential sign of a bad time. "Because he just told me, literally yesterday, that he just started seeing someone—"

"What," erupts straight out of Taehyung’s mouth before he even begins to even think, his heart involuntarily plummeting straight into his stomach, the inner corners of his brows already drawing down in dismay.

Jimin’s face slowly slips into a sinisterly-smug smirk and all Taehyung can do is watch it grow with dread.

"What's with that reaction?" Jimin snickers. "I thought you didn't care."


"You seem to be really over him."

"I am," Taehyung flops away from Jimin, glaring at the stucco on his wall instead. "I'm trying my best."

"Really? Doesn't look like it."

"Yeah, I am," Taehyung morosely picks at his fingernail. "Fuck you."

"No, fuck you, for breaking the heart of the guy you were in love with," Jimin aims a withering glare at Taehyung. "Like, what the fuck man? You did zero favors for anyone, least of all you. And you were a douchebag while doing it—"
Okay, I don't know what he told you," Taehyung suddenly sits up, voice low and eyes narrowed, frustration burning into the first flickers of anger. "But first, I'm sure he didn't share the part where he slipped into total douchebag mode first and kept pushing me around for the whole fucking week after I initially told him I didn't fucking want something serious, and second, it wasn't like it was easy. You of all people should know—"

"Yeah, I do," the hard lines of Jimin's expression soften, pity washing away the edge. "But you guys made each other so happy."

Taehyung's heart thuds in his chest, as he struggles to find the words to respond. From the turmoil in his chest, nothing emerges as a victor, and so he stares vacantly at the wall instead.

"And," Jimin continues after a moment. "That's why I'm so frustrated this time—"

"Why are you the one frustrated?" Taehyung snaps back to life and slams his hand on the ground, hard enough that Yoongi looks up from his phone. "Jimin, they were stalking me."

"Yeah," Jimin casts his eyes down to the ground and clasps his hands together. "I know, but—"

"But?" Taehyung laughs incredulously. "Why do I have to live like that? You guys make it sound like it's just a normal relationship and I should just go for it because like, like, it made us feel positive and because he's like a good guy or some shit, but everyone seems to ignore the whole part where who he is brought in this wave of pure insanity, like, like—like they were digging into shit I thought I had buried, and this is like before the media caught on. You saw what they did to National Sweetheart, and I don't even have immunity from the media, it's just, it's like, am I crazy or is that not a whole lot for him to fucking ask of me?"

"Yeah, I—" Jimin suddenly sighs, shoulders slumping. "I don't have a solution for that. And I actually agree with you."

"So what's the fucking problem here then? Why do we even need to talk?"

"I mean. Okay," Jimin takes a deep breath. "There's a lot to unpack. How do I even start? How about with...normally I'd let this kind of shit go, I've been watching you drive trains off cliffs since the day I met you, but I think, for once, it'd be nice if you were honest with yourself. Like I said before, you can't keep running away."

“I—"

“I mean, when you look deep at the heart of the issue, it's actually nothing new, right? It's the same damn problem you've always been having. You start things without any real plan or thought, you don't realize just how complicated they are until the going starts getting tough, and then you twiddle your thumbs while you let your troubles grow until they reach critical mass and overwhelm you. And while that's happening, you don't try to solve it or talk to anyone and instead pretend like everything's fine, and then you run right at the last minute before it explodes,” Jimin starts counting with his fingers. “Like, isn't that what happened with the evaluation, the YGM situation, pushing Jungkook into BTD, and now this.”

“But I—"

“See, it's just, as a friend this is super frustrating,” Jimin continues. “Because it's like watching you bang your head against a wall over, and over, and fucking over again all while you wonder out loud about why your head hurts. It's like, haha, maybe I'd feel differently if you tried to do something about it for once. But you never do. You just keep on making the same mistake—barreling head-first
into things without thinking it through, taking the benefits without considering the consequences, and then getting all surprised when everything starts imploding on you. Then you run away before it gets really bad, and so you never learn. It’s frustrating, it really is. Especially…” Jimin hesitates.

“Especially when you get other people involved, and end up hurting them too.”

Taehyung looks away.

"You really fucked him up," Jimin says quietly. "I don't know if you realized that.”

“Really?” Taehyung scoffs, his own disbelief sounds disingenuous in his ears.

"Yeah, for maybe a few months after, he was—"

“He looked like he recovered just fine when he was with his new girl,” Taehyung quickly cuts Jimin off. "I mean if anything, she was a huge upgrade from me,” Taehyung laughs hollowly, pulling his legs closer to his chest to try to keep the growing pangs at bay. “Jumped up to the A-list while he was at it, really made a name for himself. And I've watched a few of his variety show appearances, and he looks really happy in all of them. And, yeah, okay, I'll admit I haven't entirely moved on but it's clear that he really has and I think whatever he lost with me, he gained back ten times more, so —”

"He's a strong guy, sure," Jimin says quietly. “But he’s also a pretty good actor.”

"So?"

"I think despite all of that, he's still very much in love with you."

Taehyung’s heart catches in his throat and he pushes it back down with a shaky laugh, "That's not a funny joke."

"It's not a joke."

"Are you calling him a masochist then? Because what kind of—"

“I don't think you realize just what you are to him. Like how much you mean to him, what exactly you did for him, like, how he recognizes how far you stuck your neck out for him, really, specifically back when you—"

"Anyone in my place would have done it," Taehyung cuts Jimin off. "Even you could have been cocky teen seeking revenge and gave a kid a couple of singing and dance lessons to see if he could fuck with the system. It's nothing special."

"You know that's not what I'm talking about.” Jimin stares straight into his soul. “You pretend all the time like you never did it, but the fact is you nearly threw everything away to allow him onto BTD.”

"I didn't do all of that shit because I was a good person, I mentored him because I wanted to fuck with the system, you know this, you were there.”

"Okay, yeah, I'm talking about the voting thing. But let's talk about the mentor shit too, because it sounds like you're bullshitting yourself into believing it was nothing but part of some mastermind longcon plan,” Jimin rolls his eyes. "Look, you babysat a kid you randomly picked up for nine months when you could barely manage yourself, five of which there was no guarantee he was going to have a shot, much less even wanted to be there. You hung out with this guy to make him feel more at home, you invited him into our friend group to give him a support system, and then you bugged us all to help train him when we barely had time for ourselves. Like who does that? And
then during evals you stayed up until like four in the morning each damn day holding his goddamn hand over the phone—"

"It was hardly every day."

"It was actually every fucking day," Jimin snorts. "I know this because you kept me awake. Given all the crap that was looming over you, I never would have done half of what you did if I were in your place. I mean revenge plot, whatever, but you went way above and beyond what was necessary to get this kid ready to take Fuckface down. You created this monster yourself by fucking coddling him probably more than his parents. This, plus the voting thing to put him on BTD, is the crap that caused him to fall head over heels. You might not think it about yourself, but to him you were almost a saint. So go and get him back, because I hate seeing you guys like this. You’re meant to be, seriously, just like wakeup—"

"I mean," Taehyung clenches the hem of the shirt in his hands, cloth bunching up in his knuckle-white grip as he pauses to bide for time. "Look, even if I-I...I hypothetically wanted to, he’s still probably...he wouldn't, he still probably hates me for what I did, and it’s not at all worth it to—"

"Oh my fucking—" Jimin starts fake-punching the air. "I just fucking told you he wasn’t—he's fucking in love with—I’m so—fuck—you guys are—like—insufferable. You two are so fucking dumb, I can't do this, I need support," Jimin suddenly swivels around and barks at a dozing Yoongi. "I tried. It’s your turn now."

"Huh—what?" Yoongi wakes up with a start.

"It’s your turn to talk," Jimin waves his hand and starts spinning around in his chair. "Change his fucking mind."

"Oh," Yoongi frowns, sleepily blinking. "Um. What am I supposed to be talking about?

"You know," Jimin hisses. "What we talked about before we came here."

"Oh," Yoongi says, confusion still written over his face. "Um, oh," Yoongi’s face suddenly lights up and he turns to face Taehyung. "So we’re, uh, leaving BigCube. Wanna join?"

"Uh—what?" Taehyung sits up with a start. "What the fuck? Leaving? For where?"

Jimin hits Yoongi, "Not that!"

"Oh, shit—huh?" Yoongi waves a hand and squints, staring off into the distance. "Oooooh wait, fuck. You wanted me to talk about that."

"Yes," Jimin hisses, "We talked about this like literally 15 fucking minutes ago!"

"Ow," Yoongi curls into a ball and rubs his arm. "Why are you making this so dramatic—"

"Wait, you guys are seriously leaving, like what?" Taehyung interjects. "Since when?"

"It’s actually just a sublabel under BigCube," Yoongi mumbles. "But we get our own office and stuff. I’ll send you an email about the details, but it literally got approved like a few hours ago so it might take a while—"

"Wait, who’s we," Taehyung holds out a hand.

"Us," Yoongi motions to himself and Jimin. "And Namjoon and Hoseok. And wait, oh yeah, Jin too
“Jin?” Taehyung’s heart skips a beat. Something akin to a mix of apprehension mixed with a dash of hope rises in his throat and so he swallows to keep it down, “So, if Jin’s going then is he also...?”

“Hasn’t answered yet, but we extended the offer,” Yoongi says simply before picking up his coffee, taking a swig from it. “If that’s a dealbreaker, we can talk about it later, but right now, I guess I gotta talk about what Jimin wants me to talk about.”

“Alright,” Taehyung eyes him warily.

“So, hmm,” Yoongi strokes his chin for a bit before holding up a finger. “Where to start? How about with this: stop being a little bitch.”

Taehyung, slightly stunned by an (semi)uncalled for attack, just blinks, his jaw going slack.


“Okay, look,” A vein in Taehyung’s temple starts throbbing. “I don’t even want to get back with him, and yeah after what I did in Hawaii I probably don’t deserve him, but to say I don’t deserve him because I’m a little bitch? What?”

“Is it untrue?” Yoongi blinks.

“I…” Taehyung’s so taken aback by Yoongi’s bluntness that he’s at a loss for words. “Yes?”

“I don’t think so. Again, he’s fought for you since the start. All you’ve done since his debut is run. Seems a bit imbalanced to me, if we’re being honest.”

“He’s fought for me?” Taehyung snorts. “Since when?”

“Well when your first controversy broke out—that attitude one from Heart King, keeping you on as a duet in Cozy Conversations,” Yoongi starts counting his fingers. “To name a couple off the top of my head, and—”

“I mean I appreciate all of those,” Taehyung says weakly. “But honestly none of that really changes my mind about dating a celebrity—”

“Yeah, yeah I heard you the first time,” Yoongi waves his hand. “What is it going to take then? To change your mind and trust him, that is. For him to cure cancer or something?”

“I need,” Taehyung balls his hands into fists and finally admits. “I need assurance that when it goes bad, like really bad, he’s not...he’s not going to—”

“He’s not going to pull a YGM?” Jimin fills in softly.

“Yeah,” Taehyung hangs his head. “I dunno. I just--sure. Like, I think he’s a good guy, and even though he wrote that letter about the Heart King thing, he's never, like, I dunno. What I mean is that if we got into something that’s like, really bad for him, I can’t imagine he’d...” Taehyung swallows and adds, voice small. "He'd be there through it all."

“So...I’m going to take a page out of Jimin’s book,” Yoongi cuts in and takes a swig of his coffee. “Wanna hear a story?
“Is this story just as shitty as Jimin’s?”

“It’s way better,” Yoongi snorts. “Remember that one time after BTD’s debut when they started getting really popular and you were having a really hard time because Fuckface Senior was basically trying to give you a slow death to push you out? By not allowing you onto any projects? And you were about to call it quits and go home?”

“Yeah?” Taehyung’s lost.

“And there was nothing we could do? Then, miraculously, Namjoon and I saved you at the 11th hour? Got you onto that title song that you hit out of the ballpark?”

“Yeah?” Taehyung’s still lost.

“What if I told you...we actually didn’t do jackshit. Except for set up the meeting. As in, all of our arguments failed, they wouldn’t listen to us at all.”

“What do you mean?” Taehyung’s brows furrowed in confusion.

“Like, we tried as hard as we could, but nothing we said made even a dent.” Taehyung’s head begins to spin, “Then how did you—?”

“Well for starters, it wasn't just me and Namjoon out there. There were actually three of us trying to get you on.”

Three?

Yoongi glances down at the floor and grins. “I didn’t think he’d have it in him, but but he shoved his weight around, that fucking maniac, he—”

No, Taehyung's ears begin to roar, it couldn’t have been him.

“—he threatened to quit if they didn’t let you on. Because Pdogg was waffling, Fuckface Senior was screaming his head off in a corner, Namjoon actually broke a table. Then that kid drops to his knees and starts begging to HitmanB in a full bow, head straight on the floor. That was only thing that changed their minds. It was wild. Crazy. And oh yeah—that was also the day I realized that your value as a producer—”


“Oh shit, that’s not what I meant, I mean…” Yoongi pinches the bridge of his nose. “How do I say this? I think the four of us, as producers, have different strengths. And that’s a good thing. We shouldn’t be the same. And yours, your strength that is, is your ability to surround yourself with good people, or rather, you get people to do things for you, it’s amazing, really. I mean you’ve got artistry too, don’t get me wrong, but, I think this industry is so much more than just skill. It’s about people at the end of the day. Because, think about it, as producers, we sell music to people, we sell people to people, we produce things for people, and somehow you’re able to broker really strong relationships with the best. So while you might not have lyricism like Rapmon or perfect pitch like me or style like Hobi, you’ve got connections, and I think that might be the strongest asset of all. Because what is a successful pop song at the end of the day? A song that a lot of people like from an artist that a lot of people love, and you’ve got at least one of those guys glued so tightly to the palm of your hand you couldn’t get rid of him even when you tried. So yeah, if I were on the fence, I’d fight for him, because he put himself out there for you when he had the most to lose, and people like that, I think, at least, are quite hard to come by.”
“Oh,” Taehyung says faintly as he struggles to process everything. “I see.”

“So, have I changed your mind?”

Taehyung breathes, “Who’s he?”

And Yoongi just laughs.

“Who did you think?”

bridge: shelter

[i could never find the right way to tell you
have you noticed i’ve been gone]
—porter robinson

[rewind — 8 years ago, shortly after debut]

What a lot of people don’t remember is that BTD wasn’t an instant success.

Of course “not a success” really was just a nice way to say that to their first album, by all metrics, had completely bombed. It had sold just short of 30,000 units, which was an abysmal number especially when put up against the marketing campaign that was put up behind them.

There were a number of factors that pop-scholars would later point to: the unfortunate timing of their release which was sandwiched between two albums from enormous names that would later become two of the biggest drops seen in a decade, the fact that a cross-network writers strike happened a week after their debut and stalled all music show broadcasts for a good two months, the fact that the title song that Fuckface Senior had personally curated had completely sucked, the fact that they got slammed by a costuming plagiarism scandal about a month into promos because one of their coordis had been a lazy piece of shit and dressed them in almost identical outfits to the reigning boyband’s at the time.
It was the perfect storm.

And it completely wrecked BTD.

"Hard to watch" was a way to understate it, especially when the photos from their first fanmeet were release and no matter what angle the photographers tried to frame it, it still looked like there were almost more people on stage than there were in the crowd.

As the weeks continued and things got worse and not better, moral plummeted among the members. It got to the point to where the fifth member had to be talked out of leaving at the 11th hour, a pen in his hand and his mother by his side, his fist clenched through his bags, his eyes squeezed shut, the hand gripping the pen trembling as a BigCube rep desperately whispered empty promises into his ears.

And Jungkook, as a way of putting it kindly, struggled. Hard.

He seemed to be at odds with himself, uncomfortable in his own skin. He started stuttering through interviews, forgetting lines during songs, and messing up choreography so badly that while his fans found it enduring, public netizens really did not. Which resulted in a stint where he trended briefly as an idol with no skills, a compilation video of him stumbling around stage as irrefutable evidence, cringeworthy footage of a klutz fumbling his way across stage, a conscripted jester with fright in his eyes, insecurity in his limbs, his struggle neatly spliced into a one-minute shareable punchline for the whole internet to see.

The thing is it’s not like Taehyung didn’t care. It’s more like he didn’t have the emotional capacity left anymore, because he knew his fate was precariously tied to Jungkook’s, and every time the analytics came back, he could feel the noose tighten a little more. In the back of his mind he could see Fuckface Senior crowing as his trickle of work dried up to nothing, until his one source of hope was ripped away.

Hoseok

Hey
I’m super sorry
But i can’t put you on my mixtape
I tried really hard
But
I can’t, they won’t let me

It’s okay
I kinda knew

Do you know what you’re gonna do?
Go home, probably
Idk
I’m tired
But yeah
Thanks tho
For everything

Missed call from Hoseok (2)

He doesn’t really feel anything when it happens, it’s just another nail into the coffin of his dreams that has already been boarded shut long ago, or more like the foreboding death knell he had been expecting when he realizes there was literally nothing left for him to do in Seoul except for pack up and leave.

Or maybe he did feel something, it’s just hard to remember when his only memories of the night were leaning of against the dingy wall of his apartment building outside for hours, frozen still, head bowed as the rain falls around him, soaking into his clothes and dripping down his bangs as his hand loosely hung at his side, clutching his phone with a vice-like grip.

Too bad it hadn’t been waterproof.

It turns out his phone wasn’t the only thing that the rain had fucked up that night. A few miles away, on a stage at a university festival, BTD had been paid to show up, rain or shine. And even if the water was drenching the audience and the stage, and their dance routine was far from stationary, given their limited opportunities, their team had decided that it was important for them to perform.

So they did.

And it was a disaster.

It wasn’t their wobbly dance moves, or their unstable live that came out as a result. It wasn’t even the fact that they had worn white that day and the rain had drenched their costumes and rendered them way more sheer than intended or that their mics stopped working midway-through and embarrassingly exposed The Visual’s crippling reliance on AR to anyone with ears.

It was the fatal mistake of Jungkook stepping left when he should have stepped right, sending him slamming straight into Jimin. It was his subsequent failure to catch Jimin with frantically flailing hands, it was accidentally pushing Jimin straight over the edge of the stage instead, it was Jimin’s already fucked-up foot hooking onto a floor speaker and twisting at an unnatural angle as gravity pulled him over and straight onto the floor below.
And it was a horrified Jungkook jumping straight down to help him as the other three looked confusedly on, awkwardly continuing dancing to the music as the crowd broke out into equally confused whispers until the song was over and they shuffled off the stage.

Initially, anyway, the moment started an akgae fanwar. When the news release to posted online relaying the unfortunate fact that Jimin, indefinitely, would not be able to perform due to his injury, Jimin's impatient diehard solo-fans, already irate from the fact that it had taken sixty whole minutes to release the news press, exploded with fury at what they interpreted as foul play on Jungkook's part. And what had initially had been interpreted within fandom as an unfortunate accident slowly was spun in some echo chambers into a narrative of jealousy and sabotage of an embittered maknae attempting to steal the limelight from the group's innocent fairy, a case study of idol revenge played out in public forum with a shoddy attempt at coverup from Evil BigCube who had clearly always favored Jungkook (as evidenced, at the minimum, by how he was unfairly (in the eyes of Jimin-stans) casted as the center).

Of course, Jungkook's fans, spearheaded by Heart King, passionately disagreed. And what was originally just unfettered feelings about an unfortunate fall quickly escalated proxy battle for a long-standing feud, fuel for a war between the stans of two members, disgruntled fans flinging their hottest of takes at each other in growing fury, their hashtags so passionate and numerous they blotted out the sun.

At the same time, the fancam of Jimin’s fall and Jungkook’s desperate attempts to save him begin to circulate outside of the fandom, with the more sympathetic narrative of a slippery stage causing an unfortunate mistake, passed around from user to user at an exponential pace until one day, it exploded with millions of views. Interest in BTD immediately rose, and their stock bloomed, and sympathy flooded upon them.

It was a moment almost designed to trend, emotional porn at its most choreographed, the devastating story of an earnest rookie and his hardworking hyung colliding on a rain-slicked stage, with the controversies with being overworked, child labor, the inherent noxious nature of idolism and fandom all swirling around as undercurrents in the storyline. It was an opportune feel-bad story that people watched from their armchairs, had some emotions about, maybe even cried and went “ah, I really felt that,” and pitched in their support through angry comments, articles, hashtags and retweets in an arms-race of wokeness that escalated it from a mere unfortunate tale of two nugus into a preventable tragedy decades in the making.

And that turned out to be BTD's saving grace, the miracle of going viral.

Among other things, one of their songs, a pseudo-ballad called Teamwork Makes the Dream Work, returned to the charts (and stayed) as part of a campaign from fans, new and old, to apparently send the message to Jimin and Jungkook that a majority of their fans supported them both. They were invited back to music shows to perform their song as a result, and in their last week, even scored a single win, which was captured in a closing credits video of the other three members awkwardly clapping, stunned and blinking rapidly, and of Jungkook standing on the side, tears streaming down his face as ribbons and confetti rained around them, Jimin running up to him, his own eyes glistening as he captured him in a hug that blocked him from view of the cameras for the rest of the encore.

And Taehyung vividly remembers where he was during that moment: sitting on his bed inside his semi-packed up room and placing the last of his manhwa in a box marked for shipment to Daegu in a few days.

“How are you feeling?” Yoongi appears at his door, leaning against the frame and nodding towards the screen.
“Proud, I guess? At least one of us made it,” Taehyung takes out the tape and aggressively rips off a piece with his teeth.

Yoongi raises a brow, apparently unconvinced.

“Honestly, I feel really happy for him,” Taehyung tries again, trying to work more sincerity into his tone. It's true, probably, but with a heavy heart it's hard to feel a lot of anything. "He deserves it.”

“You don’t look like you’re happy.”

“I mean,” Taehyung gestures around the room and lets out a bitter laugh. “I’ve got a lot of personal shit going right now. But yeah, I can promise you, I am.”

“Alright,” Yoongi raises his brows. “You know you’re welcome to stay here as long as you want, right? You don’t have to go.”

“Thanks,” Taehyung lifts the box and picks himself off the bed. “But I think the signs all point to the fact that I’m not really meant for this.”

“So you’re just quitting.”

Taehyung feels a vein throb in his temple and pauses, “I think reassessing my options is a better way of putting it.”

“But that’s what you’re doing, quitting and running away.”

“I mean, I’ve been trying this since I was eleven and I haven’t gotten anywhere,” Taehyung throws the box onto the ground. “And it’s not even just BigCube, I’ve been applying to other agencies too, but I keep getting the same message, that I’m almost good enough, but not quite.”

“I think with 2HOM you proved that you were way better than good enough.”

“Thanks,” Taehyung laughs as he pops open another box. “But upper management doesn’t think so.”

“Fuck upper management. It’s all subjective anyway.”

“While I agree,” Taehyung bites his lip. “When you’re on the other side, there’s not a whole lot you can do about it.”

“I guess,” Yoongi crosses his legs and watches as Taehyung begins pulling his figurines from the shelves.

“So what do you want?” Taehyung turns around and asks after a good five minutes of silence. “Did you just come here to watch me?”

“As thrilling as this is,” Yoongi snorts. “No. I have some news.”

“What kind of news?”

“BTD’s repack has just been expanded in scope. It’s going to be a full album with 13 new songs,” Yoongi watches Taehyung.

And Taehyung feels that sick sensation of getting his hopes up, the fog in his heart masochistically clearing as he blinks in disbelief, “And?”
“There’s funds to work with more producers.”

“And?”

“We’re going to try to get you on,” Yoongi says, pulling out his phone. “So if you’re willing to stick around for like, another two weeks, that would be cool.”

“But I have a non-refundable train ticket.”

“Take the loss.”

“My mom’s expecting me home.”

“Tell her to wait.”

“I need to start studying for the CSATs.”

“Why can’t you do it here?”

“It’s too cold here,” Taehyung starts hurling excuses. “I don’t want to stay in Seoul any more. I hate it in the city. I wanna see my dog. I dunno, I just don’t want to get my hopes up again. I’m sick of chances with no outcomes.”

“Buy a jacket?” Yoongi shrugs, “Stop hating it? Facetime your dog? Don’t get your hopes too far up? I dunno. I mean, if you really don’t want this, we won’t push it. It’s easier if we don’t. Namjoon’s actually on his way to open the discussions, so here,” Yoongi presses something on the screen of his phone and puts it to his ear, “Let me just call him right now to stop—”

“No—” bursts out of Taehyung’s mouth before he can even think about it, his arm outstretched and his eyes wide.

Yoongi lowers the phone, a knowing smirk crossing his face.

Taehyung adjusts his shirt and lets out a nervous cough, “I mean do what you want.”

“Alright,” Yoongi raises his brow and lifts himself off the doorframe. “I’m going to go join Namjoon and will be out for a few hours, but when I get back,” Yoongi waves a finger around the room. “All of this better still be where it is now.”

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It’s the waiting game that’s the worst, the alertness that began the second Yoongi lit that fire under his ass again that turns every call of his name, every buzz of his phone, every email in his inbox into an almost heart-stopping affair.

This is the part that he hates the most, sitting in the purgatory just waiting for some sign. There’s no timeline, no deadline, just updates in the form of Namjoon having nothing new to share with him when he returns from meetings, shaking his head in an almost knowing way every time he steps
through their shared studio door.

As the days and eventually the weeks pass, the optimism begins to wane and slowly the tabs in his browser that used to be opened windows for music blogs and charts turn into train tickets and things to do in Daegu.

It’s maybe the third week of this when he’s ready to call it quits, trying his best to phrase it in a text to Yoongi that enough was enough, when there’s a gentle knock on the doorway.

Taehyung looks up, and it’s Namjoon, a giant grin on in face and a laptop resting easy in his hand.

“Yo,” Namjoon raises a hand, a couple of fingers casually curled up in greeting.

“What’s up,” Taehyung sits a little straighter.

“Got some time?”

“Nothing but,” Taehyung scratches his head. “What’s up?”

“One sec, hey,” Namjoon says, sticking his head back out in the hallway. “Did you want to come in?”

There’s no audible response, and Namjoon stands there for a bit, awkwardly, hesitating, with his hand on the doorframe, “Are you sure about this?...okay. I’m going to close the door then.”

Turning to Taehyung, Namjoon starts, “We...” his eyes flick toward the door as he hesitates. “...We got you on the album.”

“You guys...what?” Taehyung says hoarsely, unable to believe what he was hearing.

“We got you on the album,” Namjoon repeats, more assuredly this time. The grin returns to his face, and he thumps Taehyung on the back, “And not just on any part. On the title track. Congrats.”

He means to thank Namjoon or say something cool like, “let’s do this thing,” or “thanks man” or “fuck yeah” but the words get stuck in his throat and Namjoon catches him before Taehyung falls to the floor, hands glued to his face as the apathy he built up over the better part of last year washes away and he collapses onto Namjoon’s shoulder into uncontrollable sobs.

And as Namjoon pats him on the back and he cries his eyes out into the cotton of Namjoon’s shirt, he doesn’t hear the soft rustle of someone getting up just outside in the hallway and walking away.

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[ fast forward — 8 years ]
So, going viral had been pretty great.

Propelled by the uploaded performance and subsequent ripped GIFs (of increasingly decreasing quality) of his tearful last notes, Taehyung’s song had shot up on the charts to top the charts overnight, and over the course of the next month, the song and his profile had gained quite a bit momentum. As a result, he had seen his rather sparse promoting schedule bloom from a few coffee shop appearances to a consistent music show schedule paired with a fansigning event.

His fandom explodes. Upon discovering that his producing catalogue was not only long but substantial, people begin to hail him as a slept-on “King” and a “Legend,” ringing in the hype and spreading the gospel of the birth of a new star. Pretty soon, the bandwagon arrives, chock-full of refugees from a drought of “Talent,” summoned by the drummings of success and unleashing its exodus of pop-enthusiasts unto the promised lands, where they subsequently exalt him as The Next New Thing and begin rallying behind him as the latest messiah of basic bitch music.

And like many of the viral contemporaries before him, he’s christened with several nicknames. The one that gains the most traction is Crying Angel, because a number of people evidently thought the whole setup had looked convincingly heavenly (and he had been, well, crying when it had happened). It was a name he was pleased enough with, even it sounded more like one that would be assigned to a sad stripper or a rusting yacht rather than a rising R&B artist—but it was fine, really, since it certainly could have been worse.

Probably the best thing to happen out of all of this was Namjoon had personally inviting him to be on his sellout song of the year, an annual fun project in the form of a DJ-Khaled-esq composition where he deployed the most addictive tropes in music and smashed five of his most-trendy music friends as features, all basically just because he could. And so alongside Yoongi, Hoseok, and Jimin (and uncredited samples of some sounds from Jin), Taehyung’s lumped in and given a few lines that roughly translate to “yeah, I’m swiggity swaggity, and we’re here to party,” lyricized in about three different, but equally meaningful ways.

He doesn’t hear the entirety of it until post, but like everything Namjoon does, it’s an earworm. The only surprise he gets is that a previously undisclosed fifth voice belongs to Jungkook, of all people, who weaves in and out of the song as the chorus, and is probably something Taehyung should have seen coming from a hundred miles away. And while part of Taehyung feels that he kinda can’t listen to the song anymore without feeling a little terrible, the other part of Taehyung recognizes that Jungkook’s improved about twofold since Remember Me, and he sounds ridiculously, ridiculously good.

Needless to say, the song, aptly called “We the Best,” in apparent homage to its muse, becomes a smash hit.

It’s an instant number one, shattering records both left and right, it’s played as BGM in every store that pipes in pop music over their speakers, it’s picked up by a number of commercials, and it’s incorporated into any drama that needs to express the sentiment of being the best/wanting to party (or at least that they were topical enough to give the necessary nod to the right pop culture trends.

There were no real plans to promote it at all, and due to everyone’s stacked schedules it’s too difficult to hash a consistent music show appearance. But Namjoon’s agent books a slot onto Sketchbook, a talk-show/live-music format show where the guests are generally a surprise, and pretty soon Taehyung’s backstage, just chilling around in his stage getup, just people watching to pass the time.

Everyone’s in the middle of their pre-performance rituals: Namjoon’s in a corner, practicing his lines.
as he hunches over his phone, Yoongi’s curled up in a L on the couch, and Hoseok’s animatedly chatting with Jimin and Jin (who had recently gotten some interest from netizens as The Hot Manager, become a minor meme, and was going to perform as a surprise cameo), each one of them weathering the storm of stylists who are fluttering around and fixing their makeup and hair.

Of course Taehyung’s aware that one guy’s missing, the biggest name in their credit list of stars, and what puts him on edge is the fact that he has no idea if Jungkook’s even going to show. It’s completely a self-inflicted problem, he knows, he could easily just ask someone, but there’s a degree of bliss in not knowing, even if his anxiety continues to with every passing moment. With maybe fifteen minutes left to go, and unable to stand the growing anticipation anymore, he excuses himself from the green room to sit out in the hallway get a breath of fresh air.

He finds a bench a few paces away, slouches down into it and buries his face into his phone, browsing various designer brands’ FW collections until a conversation from a waiting room catches his attention.

“...like, so,” Voice One pauses. “I really fucking hate him.”


“...yeah.”

Taehyung glances up that, and instantly finds the source: two girls inside of a waiting room across the hall, sitting with their backs facing him. The door is just open enough for him to see their faces in the mirror, two relatively no-name idols from an equally relatively no-name group. He’s only familiar with one of them, Voice Two, or Tragically Overlooked, the talented vocal center who was woefully underutilized and just couldn’t seem to catch her big break.

Voice One, on the other hand, is so below Taehyung’s radar in terms of potential al that he hadn’t even bothered to give her name. And she’s talking animatedly, gesturing so wildly with her hands that the giant bow fastened in her hair is shaking, bitching so loudly that Taehyung’s able to hear her through his earphones, even before he turns the volume down.

Tragically Overlooked laughs, raises a brow skeptically, “Really? I heard he’s really sweet. From a friend of a friend, so don’t quote me, I’ve only gotten to see him from a distance.”

“Well that’s a lie. He’s actually the biggest piece of shit. And weird as fuck.”

“Whoa, what did he do to you?”

“It wasn’t to me,” Voice One waves a hand. “It was to her.”

“Oh. Uh. Okay, what’d he do to ‘her’?”

“He—wait—do you know how they broke up?”

“No?” Tragically Overlooked blinks. “How?”

“Oh my fucking god, don’t tell anyone I told you this,” Voice One sweeps her hair up with her hands with a flick. “So, like, it’s been few months after the Dispatch shit and everything’s settled down. Kinda. She’s still like a little rattled by how badly everyone reacted to the news, and like, it’s not like she was entitled or anything, but she assumed that going through all of that shit together and making it through it all would make their relationship, you know, like stronger or something. But she was so wrong.”
"What do you mean?"

"He starting getting...ugh," Voice One frowns and rolls her eyes. "How do I say this?"

"Did he start being, like, mean to her or something?"

"No, he was really sweet actually,” Voice One shakes her head and then she grumbles, “She wouldn’t stop texting me about it. Fucking went to all her shit, sent her gifts almost every other day, all of that kind of bullshit. Oh yeah, for their month anniversary, took her to the exact park bench where he asked her out and recreated the moment."

"Whoa just out in the open like that?"

"Yep."

"Damn, he sounds like a guy without a fuck to give. Which park was this? Like, was it super crowded or—"

"You know that famous park on the Han River with the pretty trees that's in all those date spot listicles? Yeah it was there, she said it was like a fairytale. Actually disgusting."

"Yeah," Tragically Overlooked sighs. "Though honestly, that sounds really cute. If like...Minho did something like that—"

"Ugh, you and Minho, just make a move on him already. But back to the story, it actually does gets sketch," Voice One waves her hands. “So, like four months in, she wakes up one morning and he’s listening to something.” Voice One pauses for effect.

“Okay?” Tragically Overlooked blinks.

“Isn’t that weird?” Voice One questions, drumming her fingers impatiently.

“Is it?"

“Oh, wait, sorry, details. It’s a five in the morning, he’s sitting up, hunched over, earbuds in—but he’s asleep.”

“Huh?”

“Yeah, exactly, so at some point in the night he just woke up or something and was just listening to music—”

“Well he’s a singer, so I mean, honestly that’s not…”

“Oh, wait, wait,” Voice One pinches her nose and holds up a hand, nails sparkling in the light. “It’s the same damn song, on loop.”

“Okay, that’s a little weird.”

“And it’s not even like a distributed song. It’s just a draft.”

“A draft?”

“Yeah, it’s was just some work in progress sound bite. It’s released now actually, it’s called...Talking to...to...dammit I can’t remember. It was super rough, apparently. But anyway, he’s like asleep, he’s been listening to this thing over and over again for god knows how long, she steals an ear bud and
lists it, it’s nothing really special, but then she notices he’s like frowning in his sleep and mumbling some shit along with the name of his—“

“Wait, no…” Tragically Overlooked gasps. “His ex?”

“Exactly,” Voice One snaps her fingers. “And suddenly he’s, like, crying.”

“Like crying-crying?”

“Okay it was just like a little, like barely, but still, for her it was shocking, so she gets super concerned and wakes him up, he opens his eyes and just kinda stares at her. Like in confusion. She was like, it almost looked like disappointment—“

“Yikes.”

“Yeah I know right? She doesn't really know what to do, so she like goes to wipes the tear off and the first thing out of his mouth is, sorry. Not thanks, but, sorry. And she’s like, what? Then he’s like, I'm not being fair to you. And then he falls back asleep.”

“Oh my god,” Tragically Overlooked covers her gape with her fingers. “I feel so bad for her.”

“He doesn’t remember it in the morning, and so she thinks he was just having a nightmare. But then things just started deteriorating, like he wouldn’t answer texts right away, he stopped making time for her, and then a week later, suddenly, he just breaks up with her. She said there was no real warning, he just like, in the car when he dropped her off. Like he was looking at his phone during dinner earlier, wasn’t saying much, then the second before she stepped out the car while he was dropping her off, he just looks her in the eye for the first time that night and just says I don't deserve you, and then she was like, what? Then he was like, I'm really sorry.”

“No. Again?”

“Yeah, and then he’s like, ‘it’s seriously not you, it’s me, but I think we should break up,” Voice One dramatically narrates. “She said she couldn't say anything for a while, but then finally asked him why, he didn't say anything, and then she asked if it was because he was still in love with his ex—"

"Holy shit, her balls. What did he say?"

"He said no but she said he couldn't look her in the eye. So she breaks down, and he just awkwardly patted her on the back until she ran away. She said she felt stupid because she was the only one crying.”

"I'd probably do that too in her situation. Wasn’t she like, super into him?”

“Yeah,” Voice One suddenly drops her tone and Taehyung strains to hear. “Especially because he was her first…”

“Everything?” Tragically Overlooked looks shocked. “Like, everything?”

Voice One vigorously nods.

“But she’s like, 20?” Tragically Overlooked shakes her head. “That can’t be right, didn’t they meet just this year?”

“No, turns out they had some history. Well it’s more like she has history, he never seemed to notice her.”
“Oh my god,” Tragically Overlooked gasps. “I had no idea.”

“Oh, she’s super quiet about it,” Voice One closes her eyes. “But they met as trainees, when she was at BigCube before she transferred agencies. Like they both came in around the same time were both shy at the beginning and they got along because of their mutual quietness. Then one day, randomly, almost overnight he gets super talkative and confident. She thought he was so cool and because of that and she, quote, fell in love.”

“Hmm. I’d say that’s sweet if I didn’t know how this ends.”

“Yeah. To make things worse, Jungkook always seemed to be preoccupied with someone else at the company.”

“Oh noooo, a love triangle?”

“Yeah, but she said Jungkook was still super nice though. And it sucked, because he was really sweet to her during training and when they hung out, but the minute that other guy was within an hundred-foot radius, it was game over. Like he wasn’t rude, but he would drop almost everything and go to him. So like, for instance, you know how he was her first kiss?”

“Oh no.”

“So her heart’s racing, they kiss and it’s like the best moment of her life because he’s grinning at her before it happens, it’s sweet and Jungkook’s closing his eyes, everyone is cheering because they know she has the fattest crush on him, and she’s so happy she could die and she said it was like literally the best moment of her life. Until, suddenly the doorbell rings.”

And suddenly the hairs on Taehyung’s neck rise, because something about this story seems so damn familiar.

“And so Jungkook gets up to answer the door,” Voice One continues. “And it was the guy.”

“Nooo.” Tragically Overlooked groans. “Why was he even there?”

“Who knows? She sure didn’t, but Jungkook basically disappears with him into his room for the rest of the night, and when she finds them, Jungkook's just sitting in this dark room watching over the guy while the guy was passed out.”

“Well maybe he was being a good friend—“

“The guy was like asleep, not in critical condition.”

“How do you know?”

“She said.”

“Um,” Tragically Overlooked makes a face. “Okay. I mean, honestly though, that makes him seem like a good guy—”
“I mean, sure. But for her? It’s like, oh my god, like if you were at a party, and like...Chaeyoung shows up and Minho disappears with her—“

“Shut up,” Tragically Overlooked hits Voice One on the arm. “I...guess. I mean I suppose either way I feel bad for her.”

“Me too, she honestly should have dropped him then, because who wants a guy who already clearly has a number one? But she just kinda rented out a piece of her heart to him for-fucking-ever. She was completely over the moon when he finally asked her out earlier this year. And completely crushed when he finally ended it.”

“Shit. Wow. I had no idea all of this was going on. I can’t believe she told you all of this though, she’s normally super private, right?”

“Yes,” Voice One suddenly mutters. “Please don’t tell anyone else either. I just trust you and needed to tell you to get it off my chest because a feel so...ugh about everything." Voice One groans. "But she pretty much confided in only me.”

“Wait, you’re the only person who knows?” Tragically Overlooked reels back.

Voice One nods.

“Wow,” Tragically Overlooked pushes her bangs out of her eyes. “Honestly...based on that, this kinda sounds like you have a chance.”

“For what?”

“What do you think~? Tragically Overlooked grins as she elbows Voice One. “Since I know how you feel about her. Is that why you’re so mad at him? Because honestly, it sounds like he didn’t treat her badly. He just wasn’t really into her.”

“Shut up,” Voice One goes beat red. “He’s still an asshole.”

“I feel like you’re just being biased. But are you going to go for it? Seems like there’s an opportunity.”

“No,” Voice One covers her face. “It’s really not the right time, she’s still getting over him. And I don’t wanna be a rebound. If this happens, I want it to happen because she sees me for who I am, do you get what I’m saying?”

“Yeah, I’d probably feel that way too.”

“I feel like such a terrible person,” Voice One covers her face with her hands, her voice getting muffled between her fingers. “Because she got hurt. And, like...I didn’t think he wasn’t right for her, and to give him some credit, I think he knew that too. And I know that because she chased him so hard, kind of made him into a fantasy prince type figure, she lost sight of the fact that he never was as invested as she was. But to consider her a rebound. A rebound. Fuck, she’s so fucking amazing that she should be everyone’s first choice. And so when they broke up and she told me, I fucking felt happy. Like I know I shouldn’t have—“

“Yeah, I get what you mean,” Tragically Overlooked puts a comforting arm over her shoulder. “The whole situation sucks.”

“Yeah. You know what else sucks? There’s a chance that both might be here today, because they’re on RM’s song. And even though I wanna lowkey punch Jungkook in the face if he shows up, I have
to pretend like I don’t know what’s going on. So I’m going to have to just settling for watching him suffer because his ex is there instead.”

“Wait, what?” Tragically Overlooked leans in. “Wait, oh my god...do you know who the ex is?”

“Um,” Voice One’s brows furrow. “It’s...he’s on RM’s new song too even though I’ve never really heard of him before. He’s called—“

“Taehyung?” Jimin suddenly calls from down the hall, his head sticking out from the cracked-open door.

Voice One suddenly whips around, eyes wide and her whole demeanor taking on deer-in-the-headlights quality when her eyes land on his.

“Yeah?” He dusts off his pants as he gets up, lifting a brow in Voice One’s direction as she looks like she’s ready to implode.

Tragically Overlooked notices and suddenly turns around too, eyes bugging out and her elbow jabbing into Voice One’s ribs as soon as she recognizes who he is.

“We’re up in five,” Jimin beckons with his head. “Come back and get ready.”

“Okay,” Taehyung nods and turns away.

Jimin’s still holding the door for him when he gets back, and everyone is there (sans one), suited up and ready to go, their mics all stuffed in their pants and their in-ears jammed where they belong. There’s a sort of muted nervousness mixed with a bit of excitement as they get herded into the backstage, the voice of the host, Yu Heechul, and his introductory monologue cutting through in intervals as Taehyung tries to squeeze in some last minute practice.

“You ready?” Hoseok asks, a grin on his face as he hits Taehyung on the back.

“As much as I’ll ever be,” Taehyung nervously grins back as he watches Namjoon suddenly jog out onto stage and the crowd scream in surprise.

“You’ll be great out there,” Hoseok laughs as Jin runs out on stage. Then he’s gone too, following Yoongi out onto stage, Jimin, grinning, at his heels.

And then Taehyung takes a deep breath, adjusts his mic, and steps out on stage.

The crowd goes wild as he comes into view, belting out his notes as he rushes the edge and slaps as many high fives as he can. Pretty soon his part is over and he’s just messing around on stage, jumping onto Jimin’s back, ruffling Yoongi’s hair, bowing in front of Yoongi, grinning obnoxiously behind Hoseok.

One moment he’s having a great time dancing in front of fans, about to reach out and poke Namjoon in the face, the next moment he’s stunned by a solid shoulder-check and he’s falling to the ground, hitting the floor in a rather painful way. And by the time he gets back up and gets his bearings straight, he realizes there’s a seventh person on stage.

And cue a minor heart attack.

Because there’s Jungkook, the man himself in all of his stage glory, singing his heart out and crouching down before a crowd going nuts. He stands up again and begins adding backup hypeman noises while Yoongi spits out another verse. He’s clearly having the time of his life, being
hyper and goofing around, singing out random parts of the song while he bounces close to the edge of the stage, not even once glancing Taehyung’s way.

That doesn’t even really matter because it’s like Taehyung forgets that he’s part of the performance, he’s just watching, mesmerized, as Jungkook just does his thing, a swell of too many emotions for his shriveled up heart to handle, overloading his mind and his senses, his brows furrowed in confusion, a weirdass grin threatening to tug at the corner of his lips, his heart beating out of his chest.

And then as quickly as Jungkook arrives, he’s gone, slipping over towards the back before stepping stage left and disappearing off into the dark.

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“You were great out there,” Jimin grabs Taehyung and puts him into a headlock the minute they step offstage.

Namjoon’s still out there talking to Yu Heechul, his voice interspersed with crowd laughter booming over the mics in the background as the rest of them chug water and mill around with staff.

“Nah, you were better,” Taehyung says, sweeping an eye around the room, totally not keep a lookout for a certain guy.

Too bad Jimin notices anyway, “He’s not here.”

“Who’s not?”

Jmin gives him a look, “Who else?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Taehyung plays coy and then suddenly remembers. “Also I brought the shirt, you forgot to take it the other day. Could you return it today?”

“Jungkook’s? You brought it all the way here?”

“Yeah, I’m not gonna see you for like another week, I’m going to be out on that school festival tour.”

“Oh, I guess,” Jimin blinks and then sighs. “But, yeah, sure, you held up your end of the deal.”

“Sweet,” Taehyung slips out from under Jimin’s arm and starts jogging down the hall. “Thanks. I’ll be back in a minute.”

It’s pretty quiet in the halls save for some staffers he bows to on his way towards the dressing room, quickly passing open doors and the elevator hallway until he makes a turn and stops dead in his
tracks.

Because head bowed down is one shuffling Jungkook, his hands buried in his pockets and the hoodie of his sweatshirt pulled straight over his head.

“Fuck,” Taehyung mutters to himself, slowing down to a stop as he starts trailing Jungkook. Well not really trailing Jungkook, he was heading towards his own destination and Jungkook, for whatever reason, seemed like he making his way in the same direction as well. It’s just, it’s awkward, already, being stuck behind a person going half the speed he was, it was even more awkward, because the door he was trying to go through was only about ten paces from where Jungkook was walking, and it was the awkward, because, well, the person was Jungkook.

Then suddenly Jungkook stops dead in the middle of the hallway and whips around, staring straight at Taehyung.

“Why are you following me?” Jungkook asks, eyeing him levelly.

There’s no malice in his voice, but no real question either, in fact there’s nothing emotionally relevant at all, and if it wasn’t for the fact that they haven’t spoken for the better part of the year, Taehyung would have instantly read it as a joke.

But yeah, that’s the thing, it’s the first time Jungkook’s looked his way, it’s the first time Jungkook’s said a word to him, it’s the first time Jungkook’s tangibly standing in front of him in a setting that’s not a forgotten dream.

So Taehyung blinks, “Um, what?”

“Why are you following me?” Jungkook asks again.

“I’m...not?” Taehyung leans to the side and points down the hall. “I’m just headed to the dressing room.”

Jungkook’s gaze follows Taehyung’s finger and after a moment he raises a brow, “Sure.”

“I’m serious,” Taehyung squints, irritation beginning to rankle. “I’m not following you, we’re going in the same direction.”

“Right,” Jungkook lifts a brow again and begins to head down the hallway again.

And Taehyung knows that he really shouldn’t take the bait, but he kind of can’t help it and he finds himself hot on Jungkook’s heels, insisting, “I’m serious! I’m just going in the same direction.”

“Okay?” Jungkook’s eyes are trained forward. “Did I say you weren’t?”

“No, but—” Taehyung nearly slams into a passing PA and apologizes to her before jogging up to catch Jungkook. “I can tell you don’t believe me.”


“I—”

“So could you stop following me?”

“Holy fuck,” Taehyung laughs incredulously, throwing his hands in the air. “Can you be mature for once?”
“No.”

“I—” Taehyung mutes his internal scream, “What is your fucking problem?”

“Oh,” Jungkook rolls his eyes. “We’re having this conversation again?”

“We’re going to keep having this conversation as long as you keep—“

“Great,” Jungkook stops right outside of the dressing room door, Namjoon’s stage name on a piece of crinkled paper slapped over the wood veneer. “Because the answer’s still the same.”

“What do you mean?”

Jungkook regards him for a moment, eyes half-lidded, hands still jammed in his pocket, mouth a straight line before he speaks again, “My problem’s still you.”

And stunned, all Taehyung can do is watch as Jungkook slips through the door.

Taehyung really tries to give him space. Stalking up and down the hall awkwardly, checking his phone intermittently, he gives Jungkook ten full minutes to get whatever he needed to and go. And’s only after he peers through the little window and finds Jungkook just sitting there, wireless earbuds jammed in his ears, slouched on the couch, legs crossed, head propped up on his hand, does he finally give in with an irritated huff and just go in.

Jungkook doesn’t even look up when the door opens, his attention undivided as he browses on his phone, his eyes downcast and his thumb periodically flicking the screen, and Taehyung breathes a sigh as he tiptoes towards his bag and sticks his hand inside.

“What are you doing here?” Jungkook suddenly asks, monotonous, and without looking up.

“Um,” Taehyung pauses, hand jammed in his bag. “Getting something. I’m not following you, I promise.”

“Right,” Jungkook says, lifting his head just enough to watch Taehyung with unamused eyes.

It’s awkward to say the least, Taehyung rifling through his bag, fingers periodically brushing over the shirt he’s “trying” to find, hoping that Jungkook leaves or at least looks away so that Taehyung can take out the shirt (without Jungkook seeing) and finally hand it off to get it out of a life.

“Can I help you?” Taehyung finally asks after about five minutes of this.

“Yeah,” Jungkook follows up without missing a beat. “You’ve been groping your bag for the last five minutes. Why?”

And almost all of the goodwill melts away in an instant and it takes all of Taehyung’s will not to drive his hand through the floor and so he channels his anger furiously through his texts instead.

Jimin

Where the fuck are you
Having a good time

No like physically

Not where you are

Jimin

What?

I need to give you this shirt
Please come back to the dressing room

Nah
Just hand it to him, he’s there right?

Wait
How do you know

Uh I got my ways lol
[image attached]

Is that
Me
Wait wtf
That’s me right now
Wait what the fuck actually
how did you get that
Are you inside??
The fuck????

Lmao I didn’t take it
Because I’m not there
But yeah anyway
Ur a fuckin dumbass
He’s a fuckin dumbass
You guys are both fuckin dumbasses
Perfect match
But I’m tired of this
Please, both of you
Get ur shit together and like
Solve your own problems for once haha

Jimin
You better be fucking coming here

seen

Jimin

seen

JIMIN

seen
So that’s how he finds himself awkwardly sliding up to Jungkook, shirt behind his back, trying to figure out the best way to successfully deliver this shirt back while staying true to his core values.

That way he decides, a split second later, is to toss the shirt onto the coffee table Jungkook’s feet are propped on with just the right amount of indifference and to maybe disdainfully gesture it to further emphasize the fact that, you know, Taehyung doesn’t care.

What really happens is technically a mistake. Because Taehyung kind of misses the coffee table by a few feet both on the horizontal and vertical fronts, and instead of neatly landing on the coffee table, the shirt hits Jungkook straight in the face. And the moment the garment makes contact, unfurling gently and draping itself like a tiny shitty ghost costume over Jungkook’s head, Taehyung realizes he really is more of a flight than fight guy as his feet involuntarily rotate him toward the door.

“What the—?” Jungkook pulls the shirt off his face, brows drawing together and a chill runs down Taehyung’s spine and the same moment a mantra of oh fuck runs through his mind.

And Taehyung knows he’s got no time and only two options. It’s escalate or deescalate, and see, he’s aware that there’s clearly pros and cons to both. And he’s very aware that escalating is just the base-emotions reaction because after the wringer Jungkook’s been putting him through all day Taehyung would love nothing more than to get in a solid clap back. But on the other hand, he is 25, he’s better than that, and he knows he needs to do the mature thing and apologize and—

“What is your problem?” Jungkook snaps.

—did Taehyung mention he’s fucking going all in, doubling down, and escalating this stupid thing to the fucking heavens where it belongs? He’s almost fucking ready to throw hands over it, holy—

“Dude,” Jungkook scowls, holding the shirt. “Like seriously, what the fuck?”

“You left your shirt at my place, I’m returning it,” Taehyung shrugs carelessly, like Jungkook’s head was the intended landing destination the whole time. “You could at least say thanks.”

Jungkook unfolds the shirt and glances at it, a flash of something runs across his expression the second he recognizes the I ♥ LA print and he looks up, somehow more livid than before.

“This is yours,” Jungkook finally says, holding out the shirt.

“It is not.”

“It is, it was a fucking gi—actually forget it. Whatever, it doesn’t matter, it’s not mine and I don’t want it. Take it back.”

“It’s yours. Look I have enough crap I need to get rid of already, I don’t want your shitty shirt adding to the pile.”

Jungkook’s frown twitches even further downwards.
“So just, like, throw it away if you don’t want it either,” Taehyung digs his heel into the ground and buries his hands into his pants pockets.

“Okay,” and Jungkook flings it at Taehyung.

“Funny. What are you, 12?” Taehyung catches it before it hits him.

“Yah,” Jungkook grins like he’s proud of how good a comeback it is and that’s when Taehyung realizes confidence is really half the battle.

“No words,” Taehyung tosses it back.

Jungkook suddenly gets up, staring at Taehyung at eye-level before shoving the shirt into Taehyung’s chest. Two things happen at once, Taehyung pitches forward in attempt to not fall flat on his back, and Jungkook’s foot accidentally hooks the coffee table, and that how they fall, Jungkook flat on his back, a head slamming lightly into the ground, and Taehyung right on top of him.

Jungkook clutches his head with a groan, eyes squinting shut. “Could you like get the fuck off of me?”

“I—“ Taehyung tries to get up but his foot slips on the fallen shirt and he ends up falling again, forehead hitting Jungkook’s chin.

“Fuck ow. Seriously, get off,” Jungkook raises a hand to shove Taehyung. “My day could literally not get worse. I haven’t gotten sleep in about three days, haven’t been home in five, and I’m operating on a really short fuse and the last thing I need is you, of all people, getting all up in my face like this—“

And maybe it’s the close proximity, but when he notices the bags under Jungkook’s eyes, the way his fingers are shaking from exhaustion, the yellowing bruise on his shoulder likely from practice, all the anger evaporates in a flash, and concern and worry take their place.

“Are you okay?” Taehyung examines the bruise, fingers hesitantly reaching towards Jungkook’s shoulder.

“What?” Jungkook frowns and hits Taehyung’s hand away. “Yeah, I’m fine, just like, get off—”

“Um,” Taehyung grabs Jungkook’s hand as he realizes this is a good of an opportunity as ever. “I’m going to go but, first, can I say something?”

“What?” Jungkook asks, hair fanned out behind him and tousled over his eyes. His expression is slowly morphing into the beginnings of a glare as he blinks up at Taehyung, his brows pulling closer together as the seconds tick past.

“Um,” and the grand monologue Taehyung had been stewing over since Jungkook slammed into him an hour ago is gone, wiped clean from his mind.

"I asked," Jungkook repeats, irritation beginning to seep into his tone, his eyes flicking quickly to the shirt balled in Taehyung's fist. "What?"

"I-I, just, um," Taehyung begins to freeze. This totally wasn't going the way he was expecting. Not that he thought it was going to be anything close to a walk in the park or anything, but he wasn't anticipating getting hauled to the edge of a cliff either, jagged rocks of total failure looming down below as the corners of Jungkook's lips begin to tug further and further downwards. "I just...um, I
"What do you want?" Jungkook's face twists in irritation.

"Um," Taehyung clenches the shirt even tighter in his hand. Here goes nothing?

"Look," Jungkook heaves a frustrated sigh, "If you're not gonna say anything important, could you get the fuck off of me and——"

"Sorry." Taehyung suddenly interjects as he bows his head. "I'm really sorry."

Jungkook goes quiet.

"Yeah, I mean, everything's going to sound like an excuse at this point, so I mean, is sorry. For Hawaii. I’m so sorry. For before. I’m sorry. For the after. I’m sorry. This is not an excuse but an explanation, I got scared and made a huge mistake and lost you," Taehyung slumps a little further. "And I’ve been thinking about it for the last few months, and it took Jimin beating it into to me to really realize it, but I honestly regret it, everything, a lot.”

Jungkook pulls his forearms over his eyes and lays like that, silent in the stifling silence before he mutters, shaking his head. “What are you trying to say?"

“To say sorry, I-I guess?"

Jungkook’s lips thin.

"And," Taehyung continues without a plan. "I just wanted to tell you that you are..." Taehyung peters off. Because what exactly was Jungkook? Everything? Amazing? The reason Taehyung’s even sitting here, on Jungkook, backstage, with a contract and a future? How does he even start to package that into words and communicate that to a guy who's slowly growing irate and looks like he'd love nothing more than to shove Taehyung off and to the ground.

"What?" Jungkook suddenly snaps, raising a hand that suspiciously looks like it's ready to do some pushing.

"Um," Taehyung quickly opens his mouth. "You are maybe the greatest thing that's happened to me?" Ah shit, that sounds so disingenuous, but since he's already committed, Taehyung keeps rambling. "And even though I know it's too late, I’m, I'm, um, really not expecting anything by telling you, it's just," just what? Oh. Yeah, "I just really wanted you to know, because, you've always been way too good to me, and I just, I, back when we—um, I mean, I never got around to letting you know——”

"Why now?" Jungkook interrupts, voice small and quiet.

"Huh?"

"Why are you telling me this now?"

“I, uh,” Taehyung looks down and studies the fibers in Jungkook’s shirt. "Yoongi told me about, how you, back on your debut repackage, you...yeah. Helped me,” or no wait, that wasn’t quite right. “Saved me.”

Jungkook’s silent for a moment before he speaks again, "That's in the past. We were different people."
"It still, I don't think you know how much, or like, what it even really means to me—"

"Is that your only reason?" Jungkook cuts him off. "Because if that's your only reason, that's not—"

"No. It just gave me a reason to trust you. The other part was already there. I'm in—" No, too soon. "I'm the happiest when I'm with you, it took me too long to realize it, but, yeah. I know it's too little and too late, but I, I'd do anything to get you back. Even as friends. Even as casual acquaintances. Really. I know you probably don’t feel the same, rightly so, but that’s, yeah, I just, that’s how I feel,” Taehyung curls a fist into Jungkook’s shirt. "I really miss you."

“God fucking damn,” Jungkook covers his face with his hands and mumbles through his palms, “Shit. Fuck you. Seriously.”

“What?”

“Holy...you're actually a piece of shit. Wow,” Jungkook inhales sharply. “Fuck. What am I even supposed to say? I'm at a fucking loss, you're just, you're so, fucking, like...I fucking swear—"

“Oh,” Taehyung's heart plummets. "Um."

"I...can’t,” Jungkook clenches his hands. “Like...you are so... frustrating? I can’t seem to ever have you when I want you. But you never let me move the fuck on either. Whenever I go after you, you lead me on until you decide to turn around, fuck me up and run, and what seems like the millisecond that I’m almost over you, you always, always, find a way to crash back into my life. Just like— fuck,” Jungkook tries to roll over and fails, lower half still pinned down by Taehyung, voice getting more and more muffled as he pulls the collar of his sweatshirt up until it’s covering his eyes. "Fuck. I need you to leave me alone for once. You don’t just get to waltz in and out of my life whenever it’s convenient for you. And yet, somehow, you keep getting away with it over and over and fucking over again, and you...you’re so...you’re a goddamn asshole, do you know that? ”

“Um,” Taehyung winces, resignation settling in his chest. “Yeah, Jimin's told me.”

“Great. Because fuck you.” Jungkook mumbles. “Like, seriously, fuck you.”

“Sorry,” Taehyung begins to shift to stand up, beginning to blink rapidly. “Yeah, um, sorry. I knew its too way too little and too late, but I just, I just r-realized some things, and I just, like, um, thought you should know how I felt—”

“Like, this is the worst timing. Actually the worst timing. I’m so close to getting over you,” Jungkook curls into himself. “Like fucking...stop giving me hope, like, shit, how do you do this every fucking time? Did you know how much you fucking me up last time? Because you really did. Like a lot. A shitton.”

“Sorry,” Taehyung feels the regret well up in his chest, rising up into a pressure lodged in his throat. “I know it doesn’t mean much now, but I’m really sorry.”

“It's been like what, half a year already?” Jungkook continues like he hasn’t heard Taehyung. “I’m in the middle of rebuilding everything right now and trying to get over you forreal and realizing maybe for the first time, that the amount of pain I seem to suffer every time I fall back in love with you isn’t really worth it. We haven't said a single word to each other for months, which was great, you didn't even bother looking my way pretty much the second you left Hawai, which was also great, you moved on to another person faster than I even started thinking about getting rid of your number, which was just super great. And then, like almost nothing happened at all, here you are, out of the blue, deciding to show up today and saying things that I want to hear, and just like, just like that,
I'm...?” Jungkook exhales with a shudder. “...god-damn, honestly, actually, what the fuck is wrong with me.”

“Huh?” Taehyung choke out a laugh in confusion, eyes growing damp.

“Don’t worry about it, I’m just saying I’m fucking stupid. Because,” Jungkook mumbles something unintelligible, uncovering his face to reveal slightly unfocused and reddening eyes. “...like you really don’t deserve it, I feel like I just never learn, and I kinda think this might just end really badly again—for, what is this, a third or fourth time?”

“Oh, um,” Taehyung sits up a little straighter. “So is that a—“

“Don't make me regret this,” Jungkook's fists clench tighter. "But...I-I'm...I'm willing to give it another shot. Just, when you decide to run again, could you give me a courtesy warning this time around? That'd be great, thanks.” Jungkook rubs his nose. “And just so we’re on the same page this time, exactly what do you want with me? I need you to tell me, because, yeah, actually, if it’s just some halfway BS again—then I-I can’t, I really can’t,” Jungkook heaves a muffled sigh. "Not when it comes to you."

“I want to—“ Taehyung says, fingers curling into Jungkook’s shirt, his heart is pounding like crazy and he’s going a little dizzy. “I want to be with you again. Like forreal this time.”

And suddenly Jungkook pulls him down by the collar and kisses him breathless, his lips warm and greedy, his eyes closed, Taehyung’s own slipping shut as he gives in and lets go.

It feels so right, it feels so electric, it feels so warm, it feels like lo—

Jungkook suddenly pulls away. “Don’t think, for a second,” he mutters, eyes hooded as he lethargically blinks. “That any of this means I’ve completely forgiven you.”

“Yeah, um,” Taehyung laughs sheepishly. “I figured.”

“I'm gonna make you work so fucking hard for this,” Jungkook mumbles. “You don’t even know.”

“If you say so,” Taehyung glances down at Jungkook’s lips and leans in testingly.

“I’m serious,” Jungkook pulls him back and stares at Taehyung levelly. “You don’t just get to toss me a ‘sorry’ and the do whatever, whenever you feel like it.”

“I know. I can’t promise I’ll be everything you want me to be,” Taehyung runs a hand through Jungkook's hair. “But, I can promise you I’m here for the long haul this time.”

“Promises are cheap,” Jungkook glances up at Taehyung. “You’ll need to prove it.”

“How?”

“Date the shit out of me,” Jungkook mumbles. “That’s all what I want, okay. If we’re actually doing this, I want to be really yours this time. Like, I’m talking hand-holding, dinners, long-walks on the goddamn beach, cute shit, romantic shit, whatever, anything and everything. We can take it slow, fast medium, whatever. I don’t care how long it takes, I just fucking want it all. We’re starting back from square one.”

“Sure. I’ll try my best. Here, I’ll start out with a confession.” Taehyung choke out a laugh as he wipes his eyes. “I think I like you a lot.”
“Wow,” Jungkook pulls him down for another kiss. “What a great start.”

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The 2.0 launch of their relationship technically starts that night, when Taehyung fires off what he hopes comes across as super casual text but was actually a piece of prose that he may or may not have spent the better part of 20 minutes engineering.

**Fuckboy 6**

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Hey wanna come over tonight? :)

---

It’s was art, really, the casualness of “hey,” the chillness of “wanna,” the implications of “come over tonight,” smoothed over by a smiley (that he immediately regrets as too forced the second he sends the text). And it’s slightly amusing to himself how anal he’s getting about it, especially when the indication Jungkook’s typing appears almost immediately before disappearing and reappearing a few more times before manifesting as:

---

Oh sure

---

Cool
I’m not done until 2 AM tho
Might be too late?

Nah
I’ve been staying up later
So perfect

Oh okay cool

Well
See you then?

Yeah

For the first six hours, as Taehyung burns time alternating between manhwa and dramas, it doesn’t seem like 2AM will arrive anytime within the next century, but when the clock’s down to 15 minutes and Taehyung realizes he hasn’t even begun thinking about cleaning up his place, suddenly the seconds seem so fleeting.

He’s shoving stuff into shelves he’s never opened, quickly wiping off dust from countertops with disposable napkins, arranging the decorative pillows on his couch, even giving that one scuff mark on his wall he’s never gotten around to removing a futile wipe, in an effort to tidy up his place. And he’s by the shoe rack, speed-stacking pairs he had previously just kicked off lazily in the foyer, when there’s a knock on his door.

And he immediately yanks the door open.

“Hey,” Jungkook greets, wrapped in a designer oversized hoodie and jeans, eyes shining in the lights.

“Hi,” Taehyung replies, still in sweats and a t-shirt, heart catching in his throat. “Wanna come in?”

And when Jungkook beams and steps through the door, it’s game over. Because they don’t make it to the bedroom.

They don’t even stand a chance because Taehyung’s pinning Jungkook up against the wall the minute the door snaps shut, fingers running up his shirt as he captures his lips, fingers running under clothes, through hair, no time for breathing, no time for thinking, only time to make up for what was lost.

Taehyung pulls away first, slightly in daze a grin on his lips. He notices Jungkook glances over his shoulder, eyes darting subtly around and he laughs, “What are you looking at?”
“Nothing in particular,” Jungkook breathes as he glances down at Taehyung’s lips. “Just at your place.”

Taehyung glances over his shoulder giving a once over of his standard kitchen before turning back to Jungkook with confusion, “What about it?”

“It’s nice,” Jungkook shrugs. “I’ve never been here before.”

“Oh yeah,” Taehyung says as his fingers ghost over Jungkook’s belt. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Jungkook shrugs again, leaning off the wall as Taehyung slips off the belt. “No time like the present, right?”

They eventually make it to the couch, at least, and illuminated by the city lights in the darkness, it just becomes the two of them. Mouths and fingers have already got them both pretty close and so by the time they’re completely into it, Taehyung’s completely overwhelmed because it feels so good and he’s feeling on fire, and so he throws his hands over his face to shield whatever involuntary expressions he’s making from view.

“Wait,” Jungkook says, lightly tugging at Taehyung’s arm. “I want to see your face.”

“There’s not much to—fuck,” Taehyung’s back arches as he gasps. “—to see.”

“I beg to differ.”

“Beg all—you want.”

“Okay, please, can I see your face?”

“No.”

“Please?”

“No.”

“Please.”

“Oh my—fucking—” Taehyung glares through his fingers, “Why?”

“Because I’m just really into you,” Jungkook immediately says with earnest.

“Holy fuck—fine,” Taehyung reluctantly slides his hands slowly off of his face anyway, head thrown back, hair a mess, face on fire, eyes narrowed to slits.

“Wow,” Jungkook breathes as he slows to a stop. “You’re so…”

And Taehyung's heart skips a beat, and he goes slightly lightheaded and giddy because it’s all just a major sensory overload and wow, bathed in the dim glow from the city lights outside, Jungkook’s never looked so good, like almost unreal, his hair down, his eyes bright as they stare straight into his, and wow, Taehyung realizes as the feeling swells in his chest, he’s really kinda in lo—

“...red,” Jungkook finishes lamely. “You're so red. Like your face is so—“

—just kidding, mood’s dead, everyone go home, nothing to see here.

“I—I’m covering it up again,” Taehyung twists away, slapping his hands straight over his face.
“Good fucking bye.”

“Sorry,” Jungkook laughs as pulls at Taehyung’s hand again. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to...I mean, I didn’t know what to say. It’s just, you’re so...stunning? Haha fuck, that sound so lame. You took my breath away? Shit, that’s even lamer. *Fuck*—” Jungkook drops his head onto Taehyung’s shoulder and murmurs, voice vibrating across Taehyung’s collarbone. “I’m just so...I just can’t think straight whenever I’m with you. I’m sorry, I get so tongue-tied and anything I say always comes out sounding so dumb.”

Taehyung curls his arms around Jungkook and draws him close, close enough that he can feel Jungkook’s heart skittering in his chest in a beat that matches his own. “I get it, because—yeah. Same, actually. But enough talking, if you could start moving again, that’d be great.”

And that’s how it goes, with the creak of the couch and muted moans, fingers digging, skin on skin, movements rhythmic until they aren’t, Taehyung surging forward as the final wave begins to crest, capturing Jungkook’s lips, hugging him so close and so tight his fingers turn white as they become undone.

There’s something oddly distant the end of it, when they separate and Jungkook wordlessly picks himself up, stepping off the couch. And sprawled over the couch in the afterglow, all Taehyung feels like he can do is watch as Jungkook pulls his shirt over his head.

Jungkook turns to glance at him, face void of expression. "Where’s your shower?"

“Over there.” Taehyung points.

“Cool, thanks,” Jungkook turns around and starts paddling over to the bathroom. “I’ll head out after.”

“Oh.” Taehyung’s not sure what he expected, honestly, but his heart sinks a bit anyway. He pauses for a minute when Jungkook glances over at him again. “Uh, you c-could stay over. If you want.”

Jungkook, eyes widening, just stares at him.

“If you want. You totally don’t have to. But, yeah, you can. There’s space,” what the fuck is does he even mean by that? Bed space? Room space? Emotional space? What? Jungkook hasn’t even blinked and that’s a signal that this is just a bad idea, “and I-I know you’re busy and it’s totally fine even if you’re not so like, no pressure or anything.” Taehyung starts rambling, his heart sinking by the second as Jungkook just lets him suffer. “But yeah, offer’s there—still stands, I mean. Well. Actually. That’s kinda like the same thing, I guess? Um. Anyway, all that matters is that there’s an offer, both standing and there and just lemme know whenever if you wanna stay or not—“

“Sorry.” Jungkook suddenly snaps out of jpeg mode and runs a hand through his hair. “I just like couldn’t believe I heard right for a second.”

“You heard right.” Taehyung does his best to shrug nonchalantly, still internally squirming about the fact that Jungkook hasn’t given him an answer.

“But yeah,” Jungkook grins and relief washes over Taehyung. “I just didn’t want to rush things, but of course I’d want to.”

“Oh,” Taehyung says, flashing up an awkward thumbs up, “Great.”

“Since I’m going to shower anyway,” Jungkook jerks his head towards the bathroom. “Wanna save water and make this into a round two?”
“Um,” Taehyung does his best to shrug nonchalantly, “If you can keep up.”

“What do you mean, ‘keep up’,” Jungkook scoffs. “I could go like, uh, five more times, easy.”

“Really?” Taehyung lifts a brow and he slides off the couch, toes curling as they touch the cool marble below. “Five? That’s a lot of times.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook’s eyes track Taehyung as he treads towards Jungkook and grabs his arm. “Are you doubting at me or something?”

“Maybe,” Taehyung tugs him toward the bathroom with a laugh. “Talk all you want, but actions speak louder than words, amirite? You gotta prove it to me.”

“What would I need to pro—oh,” Jungkook lets Taehyung yank him forward by the arm. “I mean. Yeah. Totally. For science.”

+++ 

It’s not that Taehyung hadn’t taken Jungkook seriously when he said that he was really going to make him work for this, but something he didn’t account for was that, at least was that Jungkook really meant everything.

As in, at least for the foreseeable future, Taehyung was literally responsible for everything involved with their burgeoning relationships.

And that included planning dates.

Which was something that he realizes in his 25 years of existence that he’s never really had to do, as he dully searches on Naver on his break for things like “Top 10 Date Spots in Seoul,” and “fun things to do on a date,” or even a slightly desperate “cool activities in my area,” to help get those ideas flowing.

(Which are plastered across browser windows that he forgets to close when Jihoon surprises him with a visit and in the middle of talking, glances over Taehyung’s shoulder and at his screen.

“Got a hot date, hyung?”

Taehyung spits out some of his coffee, “What?”

Jihoon points over his shoulder.

“Oh,” Taehyung’s widen like a deer in the headlights as his heart pounds with a slight fear in his chest. “Uh...?”

“Cool activities in my area?” Jihoon reads with a snort. “Yikes, hyung. Have you ever done this before? If it’s any help, I heard from a recent interview that he likes watching the sun rise.”
“Really?” Taehyung’s brows involuntarily rise. “Wait. Uh...who’s ‘he’?”

“Who do you think, hyung?”

“...how do you know?”

And Jihoon just laughs.)

And that’s precisely how he finds himself parking at the edge of an empty beach with slightly perturbed Jungkook slouched in the passenger seat a few days later, the tires crunching over grit and pavement before they come to a halt right before weathered concrete barrier.

“So um,” Jungkook steps out of the car, squints his eyes and raises himself on his toes. “What are we doing here at...” he pretends to check the watch he doesn’t have “…ass-o’clock in the fucking morning?”

“What do you think we’re doing?” Taehyun says as he faces the west, the waves lapping onto the muddy beach.

“Uh,” Jungkook shivers as the breezes rolls in and squints really hard. “Honestly, I’m not sure.”

“We’re watching the sun rise over the ocean,” Taehyun claps his hands together before holding them out with a smirk. “Sunrise over the sea. Aren’t I such a romantic?”

And Jungkook doesn’t respond, eyes narrowing into squints as he turns and blinks at the ocean and then turns and blinks at the land. Taehyung’s heart begins to sink slightly as Jungkook repeats the ritual a few more times, his arms cross over chest and nothing remotely close to 'impressed' crossing his relatively blank expression.

"Um," Jungkook finally speaks after a solid thirty seconds, “not to be a killjoy or anything, but doesn’t…” Jungkook glances over his shoulder and jabbing his thumb towards the land behind him, “…doesn’t the sun rise in the east?”

“Uh—oh. Oh. Shit, wait— oh no, ” Taehyung checks his watch in despair. “Oh my god, it does. Sorry. Oh my god. Fuck, I fucked up, um, we could like go onto the little inlet and watch it over the cove, so you can see like...water and shit, but it’s still fucking lame—”

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” Jungkook points behind him. “We can get some street food and chill or something. It’ll still be fun, I’ve never seen the sun rise over a bunch of buildings before.”

Taehyung glares, “You live in one of the biggest cities in the world, of course you’ve seen it rise over buildings.”

“Okay,” Jungkook shivers again. “I’ve never driven like, what, an hour, then to watch the it rise over a couple of buildings—”

“Ugh, I said I was sorry—”

“Seriously, it’s fine,” Jungkook waves his hands. “Let’s go get food though. I’m starving and I don’t wanna miss a moment of whatever this is going to look like. I’m actually curious, maybe it’s great.”

“It’ll lame, I know, I get it.”

“Nah, it can’t be,” Jungkook glances at him, and grins, true sincerity in his tone. “Because you planned it.”
And so they sit down on a sun-weathered paint-peeling park bench as nature’s theatre begins the show, and the sun does, as reliable of a main actor as ever, rise over the cityscape, taking its sweet damn time gracing the stage with its golden glow. And Jungkook helps usher it in, obnoxiously serenading Taehyung with the 20th Century Fox theme on loop for “mood music,” as he informs Taehyung like he truly believes it’s funny. And to get him to stop, Taehyung shoves pieces their shared street toast into his mouth at any moment he takes a breath. (It ends up being a fruitless effort.)

“Hey, let’s take a selca,” Jungkook says after the sun clears the skyline and they’ve wandered out onto the beach, fumbling with his phone.

“Sure,” Taehyung holds up a peace-sign.

Jungkook snaps the shot and immediately bends over his phone.

“Can I see the picture,” Taehyung bounds over. “I’m trying out a new smile—”

“No, sorry,” Jungkook holds his phone away and quickly hits button on the screen. “I already sent it out.”

“Oh, okay,” Taehyung feels his own phone buzz.

It’s a text from Jimin, a “crying with tears” emoji followed by a photo, the selca Jungkook just took to be exact, the beach name stickered across with Taehyung grinning blissfully unaware in the background and Jungkook pointing a thumb at him from the front, unamusement splashed on his face, the caption reading:

**We drove here at the crack of dawn**

**cuz this dumbass thinks the sun rises in the west.**

“Who did you send this out to?” Taehyung’s jaw drops, “Because wow, you’re the worst.”

“What are you talking about?” Jungkook asks innocently.

Taehyung flips the phone around and points at the picture, and Jungkook immediately starts backing away, laughing as he steps back onto the sand.

“I knew Jimin would stab me in the back,” he says as he holds out an apologetic hand as Taehyung starts advancing towards him. “I stand by that caption, the 97-liner chat agrees with me.”

“Jungkook, I don’t care what a bunch of kids think,” Taehyung starts running after him, pauses for a moment to pick up a wet glop of sand. “You all are the worst.”

“I’m 23 now,” Jungkook twists away just before Taehyung grabs him by the shirt. “When are you gonna stop calling me that, what kind of kid is that old?”

“Whatever, kid or adult, you’re dead to me,” Taehyung catches Jungkook by the arm and shoves his handful of sand down his shirt.

Jungkook swears as he shakes his shirt out, eyes searching for something behind Taehyung. Then quicker than lightning, he leans over and steals a kiss, lips brushing over Taehyung’s for the briefest of moments before he pulls back with a winner’s grin.
“So, then, would you let a kid do that?” He lifts his brows, eyes trained on Taehyung’s lips.

Taehyung buries his face into his scarf, face heating up “...no.”

“I thought so,” Jungkook laughs, eyes glittering in the morning sun. “Wanna head back?”

“Sure.”

It’s quiet, save for the sounds in the background, the waves washing over the beach, the birds cawing in the distance, their shoes sinking into the sand, Jungkook’s sleeve swishing over his jacket as his hand swings loosely at his side. What he does next is really a result of a subconscious urge, where it comes from, Taehyung has no idea. Maybe it’s the morning, or maybe it’s the weather, or maybe it’s that familiar feeling swelling in his chest, but without really thinking about it, Taehyung reaches forward and catches Jungkook’s hand in his, weaving their fingers together easily before he really realizes what he’s doing.

Jungkook stiffens slightly, hand going rigid as he asks hesitatingly, “Are you sure?”

And Taehyung has no idea what expression’s being paired with that question, because his own gaze is aimed straight for the sand, eyes skipping between driftwood and seaweed, his ears heating up more by the second. And even if he dimly hopes that there isn’t anyone still on the beach, he realizes with a start, he kinda doesn’t care.

Damn, he must be in it pretty deep, shit, he’s really in it now, because—

“Yeah,” Taehyung tightens his grip and pulls his scarf higher over his face. “I’m sure.”

+++  

a supplementary story:  
memory

i'd be your anything
-sugarcult  
memory
At the ripe age of 19, Jungkook is aware of the fact that he, more or less, is, uh, The Shit.

Why shouldn’t he be? He’s the most popular member of Korea’s hottest boyband, there are millions of his Biggest Fans© constantly lionizing him as the best thing to happen to both their existence and the world since sliced bread, and making the headlines these days is pretty much as easy as walking to Show Core in a particularly well-fitted shirt.

Forget the fact that he kind of suffers from imposter syndrome, like he’s lowkey mystified by his good fortune because he wakes up every morning and still finds himself unattractive in the mirror, still is hyper-aware of his fuckups in every single live performances, still takes the hate comments a little too seriously, (still is painfully aware of the fact that he’ll never become good enough to convince the one guy he’s really ever loved to look at him like a viable option for his heart).

(Mostly because step number one of that pipe dream requires said guy to just physically look his way period, which is something he really hasn’t done since Jungkook’s debut.)

(But yeah, anyway.)

Those are just details, small details, sometimes crippling details. And Jungkook’s now more of a big picture guy. And the big picture is that he’s The Shit, he’s going places, and he’s currently living his best life. And that’s all that matters, right?

At least that’s why he’s having this little monologue with himself just before the meeting for their new album begins, walking slow and conversing with himself as he watches the way the multi-colored fibers in the carpet rush past his vision before he ends up at the frosted glass doors, roughly fifteen minutes early and nothing to show for it.

There’s no one inside when he pops the door open, the florescent lights automatically flickering on as he steps through the door. He zeros-in on the chair furthest from the door and makes a beeline from it, passing boxes of packed supplies marked for the move to the shiny new headquarters they were slated to make in a month before he flops into his destination, slouching into the leather and propping his arms up on the armrests.

Five minutes past finds him spinning around in a circle in pure boredom, playing his latest free mobile game obsession to pass the time. He’s starting to get antsy, incrementally checking the time and wondering if he’s gotten the room mixed up when a voice floats from the hallway.

“...so what do you think of TEEN DREAM’s new song?” Jimin asks, the sound of two sets footsteps approaching quickly thumping louder in the hall.

“It’s catchy, I can see it winning this week,” a familiar voice answers, and Jungkook freezes, heart starting to race, because it’s him. “Jinyoung’s behind it right? It’s really well engineered.”

“Yes. But what do you think about it.”

“I mean, uh…” Taehyung pauses. “I guess I wouldn’t switch the channel if it started playing on the radio.”

“But what do you really think about it.”
“Uh...haha. Hmm. I guess, cute isn't really my thing right now? In terms of both music and aesthetics.”

Jungkook blinks.

“Man,” Taehyung sighs. “There’s just so many agencies going after that lucrative middle-school money ever since B1FINITE imploded last year, so the industry’s saturated with cute groups now with everyone trying to fill the vacuum. I’m honestly not really about it, and they’re starting to go to some gimmicky lengths,” Taehyung pauses. “Like holy shit, look at this one, they’re not even being subtle, they actually gave them pacifiers.”

“Oh...oh. Yikes.”

“Yeah.”

“So who are you into these days instead?”

“Nu One. Their song is sick—I mean I’m a sucker for deep house—and they’re like a breath of fresh air. And, well, because...uh...haha, yeah.”

“Ah yes, their rapper, your latest obsession.”

Jungkook medium key feels like he just was stabbed in the heart, but it’s cool. That’s cool. He’s cool. He’s used to it.

“What? He’s not my obsession. I might just have like a small thing for him. But honestly half of it is because he fits the, uh, mold, if you know what I mean.”

“Right,” Jimin’s eye roll is apparent through his tone. “Because how could I forget that fuckboys are your greatest weakness.”

“You know me,” Taehyung laughs, “They’re so bad, but just so good.”

Fuck fuckboys, man. Jungkook honestly doesn’t really know what they are, but, like seriously, the world would be a better place without them.

“Your Fuckboy list is really something else though, what number are you on now? Twenty-nine?”

“Fuck you, I’m only on five. It’s an exclusive list, not every guy I meet gets admission,” Taehyung sniffs. “And it’s about personality—”

“Don’t kid yourself, it was a fucking thirst list to begin with and it will always be a thirst list for as long as it exists.”

Jungkook sinks a little lower in his chair.

“It is not. It’s a list for guys who have my number and fit the Fuckboy mold. So like are slightly douchey but also...happen to be kinda hot. Haha.”

Seriously. Jungkook kicks the ground with his Timb’d foot. Fuckboys could go to hell.

“So, how many guys on that list have you ended up with?”

“I—no comment.”

Okay, actually, for the sake of science, what the fuck was a Fuckboy and, uh, also for science, how
does one become one? Jungkook quickly tries to naver it, but clearly the three bars of wifi were a lie as the page refuses to connect.

“Point made. Well the fact that it’s a list built out of phone numbers made my point already—“

“It’s not like that’s why I put them on the list though! Just, uh, one thing always leads to another and it just kinda, like, happens.”

“Your taste in people is so questionable,” Jimin pauses. “Speaking of fuckboys though, what about Jungkook?”

Jungkook’s ears perk up and he sits up a little straighter as he strains to hear.

“What about him?” Taehyung sounds wary.

“He’s like...how do I say this. He’s kinda becoming one, isn’t he—?”

Nah. Because Jungkook could already confirm, 100%, without a doubt, with pride, that he’s already very much one. Bonafide, certified, ratified, licensed. Forget the fact that he still doesn’t really know what being one really means, where does he sign up to be a part of that list?

“I can tell,” Jimin continues. “Like entering the first stages of fetal fuckboi-ery. Like he’s not a douchebag, I can’t even really see him ever being one, but the other pieces are definitely in place.”

“Oh,” Taehyung laughs nervously. “Wouldn’t know, but sure, I guess.”

“I feel like,” Jimin continues. “You do know though.”

“...what makes you say that?”

“I don’t know,” Jimin says with that voice he has when he knows something. “Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I somehow keep catching you in the middle of watching his MCountdown fancams.”

Wait what? Jungkook’s eyes widen as his heart spurs into overdrive.


Oh.

“With his fancams?”

Oh?

“Um...yeah? The, uh, the lives always sound different. Haha. You know.”

Oh.

“I guess? But anyway, he doesn’t need more views. If you’re gonna watch fancams then watch mine, because I need more. I’m ten thousand behind him, be a real one and help me out for once.”

“Sure, send me the link—” and the door suddenly swings open.

And it’s super chill, even though Jungkook hasn’t seen Taehyung in person for like four months, two weeks, and six days—or whatever (haha, like, who’s even counting?) because of BTD’s overseas
tour, he’s totally cool about this and he totally doesn’t duck under the table in a panicked decision in order to hide. He totally does it to re-tie his shoelace instead. Because, like, uh, safety first, whatever second and coolness third—

“Oh shit,” Jimin stops just as he enters. “Are we the first ones?”

“Are we?” and Taehyung steps into the room.

—no fuck that, coolness is fucking first.

“Nope,” Jungkook announces, voice cracking as he suddenly shoots up a hand. He clambers up off the floor, trying to straighten out his shirt while simultaneously artfully disheveling his hair, shoelace still untied as he drops his voice a half-octave for good measure, “I’m here.”

“Oh my god,” Jimin jolts and stumbles back, into Taehyung. He puts a hand on his chest. “You scared me.”

“Sorry,” Jungkook shrugs as Taehyung snickers.

Then they super casually make eye contact.

Taehyung super casually nods in greeting.

And Jungkook nods back. Super. Casually.

Of course when Taehyung sits down, Jungkook super causally doesn’t look anywhere near the his vicinity. Because he’s the paradigm of cool and he’s totally got this and—wait, also, by the way, for the record, he’s completely over Taehyung.

Jungkook’s eyes flick over in his direction just in time to catch Jimin whispering something into Taehyung’s ear. And Taehyung immediately laughs, face splitting into an eye-smile grin, fist curling over it to hide it, sending Jungkook’s heart skittering a little faster than he’d like to admit before he glances away.

Yeah, Jungkook awkwardly rubs his nose, glaring at the fake wood-grain veneer of the table. He’s totally over him.

Although it’s a little harder to convince himself of that fact when Jimin decides to go to the bathroom two minutes later, and it’s just the two of sitting around a gigantic conference table in stifling silence, Jungkook’s heart beating out of his chest as he realizes he has a golden opportunity of a lifetime and racks his brain for the perfect conversational opener.

Once he has one, Jungkook musters up every ounce if his courage, runs his fingers through his hair, wonders briefly if Taehyung is aware of that he was recently crowned The Hottest Idol Guy in Naver’s latest netizen poll (3,000 participants, go check it out, specifically if you’re the guy sitting across from him at the table, then, like, really check it out), and opens with:

“Sup,” Jungkook nods, super casually.

Without missing a beat, Taehyung lifts a brow without looking up from his phone and shoots back, “Nothing much. You?”

“Oh, s-same.” Swing and a miss, that’s a dead end. But it’s okay, get knocked down 9 times, get up 10 right. “So,” Jungkook says, lowering his voice and pushing boredom into his tone. “What have you been up to lately?”
“Producing and stuff,” Taehyung shrugs, still looking down, general disinterest spelled out in almost every form of body language possible, “What about you?”

Um.

Well.

Nonstop interviews, fansigns, concerts, practice, endorsements, parties, TV appearances, so many stories that he wants to share with Taehyung, from things as large as the insanity of their first world tour to things as small as the pann post about photography that he came across yesterday that no one else gets (but he’s sure Taehyung would) or the dumbass Louis Vuitton x Supreme sandals Jimin just bought last week or the funniest dad joke Jin’s told to date. Just so many things, so much information to make up for the lost days, weeks, years, because, fuck, wow it’s been three years but he still really misses him. And forget his stupid crush, he just really wants to go back to the way they used to be friends because he really doesn’t really understand how they drifted apart and—

“Um?” Taehyung glances up, probably confused why Jungkook wasn’t answering a small talk question in the socially accepted amount of time, and the expression on his face clearly tells Jungkook that the real answer isn’t the one he’s looking for.

Because that was a lot. Way too much. This isn’t a heart to heart, Jungkook knows they’re just trading pleasantries to fill up an awkward silence, and so he neatly sums up everything in two words:

“Idol stuff,” Jungkook says, disinterest woven into his tone. “You know.”

Wait. Jungkook’s eyes widen the second the words leave his mouth because fuck. Shit. Taehyung doesn’t, was this a sensitive topic or—

"Cool," Taehyung snorts softly, raising his brows briefly before he looks back down at his phone, apparently completely unimpressed.

They lapse back into a silence that sticks around until Jimin comes back, the rest of BTD and Namjoon, Yoongi, Hoseok in tow. A few executives and Jin then wander in and the meeting passes by in a blur. It’s mostly about the proposed themes as imagery for the next album, and it doesn’t surprise Jungkook that he finds himself stealing glances at Taehyung pretty much every moment he gets a chance.

What does surprise him is how often he catches Taehyung staring straight back at him, their eyes meeting in the middle almost every other time Jungkook looks his way, a jolt zinging through his chest, his heart beginning to pound before Taehyung smoothly looks away, expression impassive like it never happened at all.

The fifteenth time it happens is when he really starts thinking about it. Because while it could be something, it must be something, but it might be nothing, and so he’s trying not to overthink it when the meeting ends, even as he tries to as not-awkwardly as possible catch Taehyung’s attention to casually communicate “see you around” in a Super Casual Way as everyone starts standing up to leave. But a coordinator taps him on the shoulder just as he’s about to make the interception and asks him about potential hair colors for a just a moment too long and when he glances back up, Taehyung’s already quietly slipping through the door.

He must be pretty disappointed because when Jimin sidles up to him the first thing that comes out of his mouth is:
“What’s with your face?” Jimin laughs. “You look you’re constipated.”

“Nothing,” Jungkook says quickly, shaking his head, trying to dispel the feeling.

“Really?” Jimin doesn’t look convinced.

“Yeuh.”

Jimin raises a brow, “Okay.”

“Well, actually,” Jungkook runs a pinky through his hair, stares off into the distance and thins his lips. The glances, they must have meant something. So he turns to Jimin, deadly serious, “Question.”

“Yeah?”

Jungkook blinks, “What’s a fuckboy?”

Chapter End Notes

hey it's been a minute LOL

as an extra, here's a [deleted scene], there's some notes at the beginning that explain the context lolol

References (as always, grains of salt needed for consumption, read at your own risk there are several lukewarm takes in the paragraphs below):

- GFriend got famous of a fancam of one of their members falling a lot and people pretty felt for her pain and made that go viral i don’t remember the timeline but i just remember for a long time they weren’t a thing and then they blew up and suddenly were a thing.
- So did Hani, and Up & Down, the single featured in the fancam, which originally didn’t even make the Top 100, ended up hitting 1 on Gaon (korean equiv of billboard) and she became the It Girl of 2014-5 and her girl group EXID rose from their ashes. She was lauded for being funny, smart, quirky, relatable, essentially a korean JLaw, until she was later caught with TVXQ’s Junsu as part of Dispatch’s infamous New Years Day Dating News release and later started crying a lot on TV http://netizenbuzz.blogspot.com/2016/01/2015-seoul-music-awards-hani-tears-up.html which the public was understanding of at first because she was under duress of being outed for dating, but then she kept doing it, like...a lot
- Related/unrelated, she shortly fell out of favor with the It gods just in time for Seolhyun, armed with her viral SG model campaign, to take her place http://netizenbuzz.blogspot.com/2016/01/seolhyun-is-one-step-away-from-earning.html (although arguably Seolhyun was actually gunning for Suzy’s National-Trend title idk it’s been a long time, it’s unnecessarily complicated and i’m kinda getting everyone mixed up).
groups have go to gimicky lengths to stand out and attract attention, including ya own boys in the form of two predebut manhwa/comics (we on:be the shield, hiphop monster) that marketed their debut. Sometimes, those gimmicky lengths can get pretty sus

- Speaking of sus, pacifier stuff is really more of a thing they make girlgroup members do which is another notch in the strange bedpost of fan/artist interactions, which has its own perennial debate on its limits with two main sides 1) no one’s directly forcing them + they’re consenting + they’re doing it intentionally to score a shitton of money/rewarded with sales to put up with it, 2) personal rights to boundaries against sus shit + they’re unfairly beholden to agencies and fans in the contract/business sense + severely warped sense of what’s intrusive

- But honestly, infantilism themes are not new, take yung snsd’s kissing you lollipop choreo for instance, i may be just projecting but i’ve always thought throughout the entire perf, taeyeon kinda looks like she would rather die
It’s not overt, but when he’s paying a particular amount attention, Taehyung can sense a certain nervous carefulness in the way that Jungkook treats him with an almost textbook amount of caution, giving him too much space, conceding a little too much, leaving certain things unsaid.

It’s like Jungkook doesn’t quite know where the line is in their relationship, and instead of stomping over it like he was before, he’s shuffling forward and flinching every time he thinks he’s hit it.

And it makes Taehyung’s heart clench a bit, watching him build behavior barriers to prevent himself from going too far, and it starts haunting him at night while he’s staring up at the ceiling, the guilt of the fact he knows he’s the cause of this consuming him as he tries to come up with solutions.

He’s pretty shit at it, and so he turns to his one trusty guru who’s managed to always kick his life into shape:

“What should I do?” Taehyung asks, one night, at two in the morning, the cool glass of his phone pressed to his ear.

“Um,” Jimin responds back, his voice sleepy and irritated even through the speaker. “Show him you care?”

And so that’s what kind of starts it, Taehyung’s new habit of delivering small gestures and reminders delivered in the dumbest of ways.

It’s stupid stuff like combing through Jungkook’s hair while they’re watching a daily drama in Taehyung’s living room, Jungkook curled in his arms and nodding off, eyes slipping open every once in a while to stare almost gazelessly towards the tv before his lids begin to droop again.

“Huh?” Taehyung suddenly stops, pinching a clump of Jungkook’s hair. “What’s this?”

“What’s what?” Jungkook murmurs, eyes opening blearily. “What’s where?”

“This,” Taehyung repeats vaguely. “In your hair.”
“Wait, shit,” Jungkook raises his head and frowns. “Is it lice or something—”

“No, it’s this,” Taehyung suddenly slips his hand in front of Jungkook’s vision, his hand folded into a finger-heart, his eyes folded into twin crescents, his lips pulled into a shit-eating grin.

“Oh—?” Jungkook squints at it with real intensity before recognition suddenly relaxes his features and he buries his head back into the crook of Taehyung’s neck and grunts, the tips of his ears growing red. “Oh. Ha ha, funny.”

Or like when they’re on a car date and sitting in parked in some parking lot and the conversation’s winding down with night and Taehyung will pipe up:

“I just saw this ridiculously good-looking guy,” Taehyung tells his reflection in the window.

“Huh?” Jungkook whips around and narrows his eyes.

“Yeah, like, just now. He’s super fit, got great face, nice eyes, killer smile. Complete package.”

“Okay?” Jungkook’s face begins folding into a scowl, his eyes subtly scanning the deserted lot. “There’s no one else here but us.”

“Wanna see a picture?” Taehyung dodges the question, pulls up a photo on his phone, before flipping it around, beaming brightly as he points to it. “I’m head over heels with him. He’s totally my type.”

“Um…” Jungkook squints, brows relaxing from apprehension into confusion. “That’s...just a picture of me?”


“Oh my...fuckin’...” And Jungkook runs a hand over his face before Taehyung pulls him down to start what they really came there for.

Or it’ll be something like Taehyung springing up from his chair when he needs a break from his work and somersaulting over the arm of his couch, feet landing into Jungkook’s lap.

“Um, hello,” Jungkook reels in surprise, blinking behind his glasses as he scoops Taehyung’s feet into his arms. “What’s up?”

“Nothing,” Taehyung snickers, “Just physically showing how I’m head over heels for you.”

“Amazing,” Jungkook tries to fight the smile spreading across his face and fails as he slips into a cough of a laugh. “You’re amazing.”

“Thanks, I know.”

Or like getting Jungkook a tiny bouquet of dried flowers:

“What’s this?” Jungkook gingerly takes it from Taehyung, paper and plastic crinkling as he scrutinizing it like its a suspicious package.

“Flowers,” Taehyung beams as Jungkook brings the bouquet up to his nose and gives it a suspicious whiff.

“I guess I mean why this,” Jungkook inspects a stalk with tiny buds, growing cross-eyed as he does.
“Just ‘cause,” Taehyung shrugs.

Jungkook just gives him a look and tosses them to the side (but later Taehyung will see them placed on a shelf over his fireplace, between a golden disk award and BTD’s first music show win trophy).

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It’s a few weeks before awards season when Jungkook stops by his studio late one night, peering around the door.

“Hey,” Taehyung greets from where he’s curled up on his couch with his phone, his head nestled in the corner between the armrest and seat back as he watches Jungkook trundle across the room. He lights up when he spots the paper bag of fast food hanging from Jungkook’s hand, his stomach growling in anticipation, “Thanks, holy shit I’m starving. Did you get something for yourself?”

“Nope,” Jungkook drops the bag onto Taehyung’s lap. “I already ate.”

“Wait, shit really?” Taehyung says with dismay, frown tugging at the edges of his lips as he pulls the bag open, the enticing scent of preprocessed chicken sandwich and fries wafting up as he pulls them out with gusto. “You should have told me, I could have gotten it delivered or something.”

“You think I didn’t?” Jungkook raises his brow. “I haven’t left the building since I got here.”

“I’m a lot less impressed now,” Taehyung laughs.

“Forget I said that then,” Jungkook slips into the other corner of the couch, folding up his legs and resting his head against his hand. He watches Taehyung tear through his sandwich for a moment before he asks, “Wanna go to a house party tomorrow?”

“Um, sure? With who,” Taehyung licks his fingers before digging into the fries. He holds one tipped with ketchup up in the air, “Want one?”

“Friends. Yugyeom’s hosting it and the rest of the 97-line are gonna be there,” Jungkook blinks at it for a moment before he leans forward and takes a bite. “And a few other people.”

“What’s the occasion?” Taehyung mumbles through a particularly large bite.

“Just MAMAs,” Jungkook shrugs. “Since it’s one of the first award shows and a lot of us are going to be in it.”

“Oh,” Taehyung pulls down the wrapper. “Sounds like a party for the big leagues. Am I even allowed to be there?”

“Funny you should mention it,” Jungkook peters off as he pulls a card out of his jacket. “Did you know you’re a part of the ceremony?”

Taehyung pauses mid-bite, the words floating through his ears but not quite registering with his brain, “Sorry, repeat that?”
“You’ve been nominated,” Jungkook laughs as he hands over an embossed card. “For Male Rookie of the Year. Also for SOTY for Talking to Myself. And We the Best and Remember Me, but that’s not individual guess, still, haha, you absolutely killed it this year—”

“Oh my fucking god,” Taehyung tosses his sandwich onto the coffee table before he lunges forward, snatching the card from Jungkook’s hand, his heart starting to race with excitement as a grin spreads across his face. “No way.”

“Way,” Jungkook laughs. “You made it. Congrats on crushing it this year. I’m so proud of you.”

“I—I’m—” Taehyung loses his words as the excitement wells up and crashes over as euphoria, the giddiness rising as he scans the words of the nomination over and over again. He suddenly sits up straight and jerkily flails the card in the air, “I gotta tell Jimin. And Namjoon. And Yoongi and Hoseok and fuck, Luna, Jihoon, everyone, but, first—’

Taehyung grabs Jungkook by the shirt and pulls him in, falling backwards as their lips crash against each other as Taehyung kisses him as hard as he can.

“Thanks,” Taehyung breathes when they break. It’s almost compulsive, there’s no reason behind it, it’s just he’s so fucking grateful with no way to express it.

“For what?” Jungkook’s eyes level with Taehyung’s.

“For, um, just—everything.”

“What did I even do?” Jungkook asks bemusedly. “But you’re welcome, anyway.”

“For telling me, for getting me food, for being the best,” Taehyung starts rambling. “For being here, and for...for being inspiration for the song.”

“I was the inspiration?” Jungkook says, with fake surprise laced in his tone. “For Talking to Myself?”

“I mean...you sound like you know the answer to that already,” Taehyung narrows his eyes.

“Just making sure. The lyrics are kind of vague. Maybe there was someone else who also confessed to you in the snow, I don’t know,” Jungkook laughs as he picks himself up, narrowly dodging the swat Taehyung sends his way.

“No, just you,” Taehyung rolls his eyes. “Most people also didn’t ignore me for three straight hours before stopping me right before I’m about to drive home either, but, you know, that part didn’t quite make the cut for the song.”

“Sorry, I’m not super brave,” A smarmy grin is starting to spread across Jungkook’s face. “But, since I’m assuming the lyrics are accurate, at least I know now that you’re the happiest when you’re with me. Right?”

Taehyung chucking a pillow at Jungkook’s face, his face beginning to heat up as he stands up and heads towards the door, “I’m going to go to Jimin’s now.”

“You’re dodging the question,” Jungkook clutches the pillow to his chest and snickers as he calls out. “You make me the happiest, did you know that? I’m just glad it’s finally mutual.”

Taehyung pauses, one foot stepped out in the hallway, when he briefly looks over his shoulder and mumbles, “Yeah, me too.”
The next night is pretty much a blur.

Like practically the second Taehyung steps off the elevator and into Yugyeom’s apartment’s rooftop garden, Jungkook a step behind him, he’s swarmed by a mob of people eager to get a word with him. It’s a lot of back-patting and congratulations, number-swapping and promises of future correspondence, a new drink being shoved into his hand any time the one in his own becomes half-empty, a lot of faces he’s seen on TV many times and a lot of names he’s already pretty familiar with.

Jungkook stands off to the side, with his own gathering of people waiting to talk to him, his eyes every so often flicking over and meeting Taehyung’s, sharing secret grins especially when some of the more enthusiastic have their moment, like Breakout Actor of the Year, a 20-year old guy who featured as the second-lead in the biggest daily-drama of the year, who starts gushing the moment he gets a word in with Taehyung.

“Holy shit,” Breakout Actor says. “Hi. I, um, I love your music. I’ve been a fan for such a long time, since your Soundcloud days. I honestly can’t believe I’m talking to you.”

“Same, you’re a legend,” Taehyung laughs. “You were so good during your drama. I was rooting for your character to get the girl.”

“I can’t believe you watched that,” Breakout Actor flushes, and mutters. “And luckily, between you and me, that’s working out a little better in real life.”

“Wait, you and—” Taehyung’s eyes widen as Jungkook glances over in curiosity. I’ll tell you later he mouths and Jungkook raises his brows, a knowing laugh already on his lips.

“We’re still in a ‘some’ relationship,” Breakout Actor grins, “But enough about me, your new song is actually the shit…”

After about an hour of meeting and greeting, with his brain starting to overload from all of the new information, Taehyung excuses himself for a break. He finds a secluded spot behind a wall of ivy, a nice little astroturf-covered niche lit up by criss-crossing strings of hipster lights bordered by a glass barrier overlooking the city below. He walks up towards the barrier, placing his drink down and leaning against it with crossed arms, watching the cars wind around the gently-lit streets below.

A breeze hits him, his eyes sliding shut as it rushes past, touseling his hair and playing with his clothes. It’s pleasantly warm and he almost loses himself in it until the sound of a phone camera shutter grabs his attention.

“Sorry,” Jungkook says, stepping down from the patio as he pockets his phone. “You and the background, it all just looked very picturesque.”

“It’s fine,” Taehyung pushes his glass and pats the barrier next to him in invitation.
And Jungkook accepts, stepping around floor lamps and a couch until he sidles up next to Taehyung, leaning back on the barrier with his elbows propped up on the top.

“Are you having a good time?” Jungkook asks, reaching around to grab Taehyung’s glass, giving it a tentative sniff before he takes a sip. “I told you everyone wanted to meet you.”

“Yeah, you weren’t kidding.” Taehyung looks back out towards the city, shifting his weight to his other leg. “Just wanted a breather though.”

“Makes sense,” Jungkook twists his head and glances over his shoulder before his eyes flick back towards Taehyung, as he comments, “Nice view.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Taehyung raises his hands in the air, gesturing at the speckled grid of lights below.

“I’m talking about you.”

And Taehyung immediately punches him in the arm.

“What?” Jungkook laughs as he grabs his bicep. “It’s true.”

“Alright,” Taehyung rolls his eyes and they lapse back into silence. It’s comfortable, with Jungkook’s arm pressed up against his, the breeze still rustling through his hair. It’s almost too comfortable, like, a level of comfort knows he doesn’t deserve, which sparks the question he asks when he turns towards Jungkook.

He takes the sleeve of Jungkook’s dress shirt and fiddles with the silk, eyes focused down on the grain of the wood underneath, and asks, “Why did you take me back?”

“What do you mean?” Jungkook says as he shifts, a hint of surprise in his tone.

“Like, I said some pretty shitty stuff and...” Taehyung chews on the inside of his lip. “And I hurt you pretty badly. Like, I’m not even sure I would take myself back at this point, so why did you?”

“Oh. Um...” Jungkook scratches his ear as he peters off. “It’s like, it’s not...it’s not just about whether you make mistakes—I mean, actually, sure, in some sense it is. Like, yeah, I’d probably prefer it if you hadn’t strung me along or gone and fucked me up like you did in Hawaii. But, I get why it happened and that’s all in the past, and so it’s...” Jungkook blinks. “For me, at least, it’s more about what you did before and you do after and whether or not you’re willing to change. And knowing you, and watching you lately, you are willing. So the second chance seems like a no brainer.”

“Oh,” Taehyung tells the barrier. “I see.”

“Yeah, ‘cause overall I think when I look at everything that you’ve done, for me and other people, despite all the shitty stuff hurled your way, you’ve got a pretty good track record,” Jungkook says. “And that’s the kind of stuff that made me fall for you. I mean, who would put their whole career on the line for some teenage trainee? Not a lot of people.”

“Who told you about that?”

“Some good mutual friends,” Jungkook’s silent for a moment. “Do you have any regrets?”

“For what?”

“Choosing me. For BTD”

“Oh,” Taehyung looks up in surprise. “No. Why would I have any?”
“Really?” Jungkook asks with disbelief. “I feel like your life would have been so much easier if you hadn’t gotten involved.”

“Maybe,” Taehyung looks down at the urban sprawl below. “But I really don’t. Because just look at yourself.”

“What do you mean?”

“Look at everything you’ve achieved, everything you’ve become, you grew up so well. And I knew from the first day we met that you had it in you,” Taehyung lets his eyes slip shut as he leans forward and presses his lips gently against Jungkook’s, “I have a lot of regrets about a lot of things. But I’ve never had a single one about choosing you.”

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The first time Taehyung says it—like out loud, not in his head—it’s a total cop out. Because it’s 6 in the morning, Jungkook’s asleep and Taehyung mutters it under his breath.

Well to be fair, Taehyung also thinks he’s in a dream. Honestly, how could he not when it’s the same damn setting he’s been sliding into for the months when they were apart, when he was deepest in his REM cycle, lying tangled in the sheets with his forearm slung over the soft part of his stomach and staring, in a stupor, at the guy curled up next to him with the comforter drawn up to his nose as the sun rays scattered across the sheets sidle by with the hour, watching, in wonder, the way Jungkook’s slow breathing rhythmically flutters his bangs, the soft whistle the only sound cutting through morning silence

“Hey, I—” Taehyung clears his throat and tells Jungkook’s nose like it’s a test, “I, uh, I-I love you.”

And then Jungkook’s eyes flutter open, unfocused from sleep. He stretches, pulling his arms up over his head, face scrunching up before he throws his arms around Taehyung and murmurs, “Did you say something?”

“No,” Taehyung lies.

“Oh okay,” Jungkook shrinks under the covers and frowns. “Damn, I was having a good dream.”

“What was it about?”

“You told me—” Jungkook cracks an eye open before he shuts it and rolls away from Taehyung. “—nevermind.”

“What did I say?”

“Nothing,” Jungkook waves a hand. “Don’t worry about it.”
The setting’s a little different the second time he says it.

It’s a lot less soft when he’s sliding down slow, arched back gliding against Jungkook’s chest as he moves, moans slipping from his mouth as Jungkook’s fingers find the sensitive parts on his chest. It’s not even what they intended to fall into when they started watching the movie, a fact probably evidenced by the sloppy way Jungkook was barely zipped out of his pants, Jungkook’s shirt lying where it was tossed halfway across the room, and the way Taehyung’s own was only being carried as high as Jungkook’s roaming hands cared to go.

“Hey,” Taehyung murmurs, hoping his words get lost as he lets them slip. He’s just so overwhelmed by the feeling thrumming in his chest and the heat building a little lower as he slides down. And the thought that he could let him know, should let him know, will let him know grows until on the way down it just kinda slips out and he sighs, almost too soft to hear, “I—fuck—I think— I kinda— love you.”

“Huh?” Jungkook hums lazily into Taehyung’s shoulder, pressing a kiss against his neck as he grips Taehyung’s waist a little tighter.

“I—mmm, oh shit,” Taehyung’s legs clench as he rides out a wave. The bravery goes with it, and he throws his head back onto Jungkook’s shoulder instead and mumbles, “...nevermind.”

“You just— kinda love me?”

“So—you did hear that,” Taehyung glances at Jungkook out of the corner of his eye and offers a one-eyed half-hearted glare. “You’re full of lies.”

“Yeah,” Jungkook snickers softly, voice vibrating in his chest, fingers digging light into Taehyung’s waist. “I just wanted to hear you say it. Again.”

“You could have just—oh fuck, right there, ” Taehyung huffs. “—you know— asked .”

“Um,” Jungkook murmurs, “Nah. Too desperate.”

“What? I mean...” Taehyung throws him a strange look as he trails off, expression morphing from a reflection of incredulousness to ecstasy as he exhales hard and bites his lip as a lax flick of Jungkook’s wrist coaxes him closer to the edge. “Shit, go faster.”

“You know, though,” Jungkook adds as he acquiesces. “Feel free to tell me again, whenever you want, by your own accord.”

“Just fuckin —ask me to—then.”

“No.”

“Why? Oh fuck .”

“Because.”

“That’s not an answer.”
“But it’s my answer.”

“That’s not a good answer.”

“It doesn’t have—to be, but I’m not gonna ask.”

And so Taehyung decides to indulge him, but on his own terms, and he so waits until Jungkook’s getting close, and he pulls away from Jungkook’s lips for a moment, as they’re both breathing hard.

Jungkook looks almost offended at the change, a wordless ‘what the fuck are you doing’ twisted across his face before he leans back down again, and that’s when Taehyung drops it, locking his legs around Jungkook, right before Jungkook’s lips touch his, he lifts himself up, nose brushing against Jungkook’s hair—

“I love you,” he breathes into the shell of Jungkook’s ear, letting himself fall back down to the sheets staring him dead in the eyes, a grin spreading across his lips.

And then, like that, with astonishment ripping across his face, Jungkook’s done.

“Oh— fu-fucking fuck,” he swears as he shudders to a halt, slumping over when he’s spent, his ears the reddest Taehyung’s ever seen them.

“Wait...did you —?” Taehyung cackles, watching Jungkook dazedly pull out. “Is that actually your kink?”


“Oh shit, that’s adorable,” Taehyung props himself up on his eyebows and flicks the underside of Jungkook’s chin, the biggest grin on his own face as a warmth curls itself in his chest.

“Stop,” Jungkook grumbles into his hands.

“Wait,” Taehyung laughs, roping his arms around Jungkook’s neck and pulling him down into his arms. “I mean, like in a good way.”

“Is it though?” Jungkook’s head lands in the crook of Taehyung’s neck, his hair jutting up and tickling Taehyung’s nose.

“Yeah,” Taehyung inhales, the scent of Jungkook’s shampoo filling his lungs. He revels in the silence for a moment, before he adds, “Though I still can’t believe that actually made you c—”

“Oh okay , you know just for that—” Jungkook suddenly gets up and pushes him back down, slipping two fingers in as soon as Taehyung’s back hits the sheets, a glint in his eye as he starts moving them with a mission. “How about I give you a lesson?”

“On—” Taehyung gasps as he throws his head back. “—what?”

There’s a vindictive glint in Jungkook’s eye. “So I’ve noticed you’ve been driving a lot more lately —”

Taehyung’s back arches involuntarily, “Is that— no —”

“—and so some advice I’d like to share is that,” Jungkook’s barely masking the grin on his face. “you should really make sure to—”

“Don’t you fucking dare—!” Taehyung gasps, fingers digging into Jungkook’s back.
― respect traffic safety ~♪" Jungkook starts serenading.

“No!” Taehyung protests.

Jungkook leans down, nose brushing against Taehyung’s ear and whispers as he crooks his fingers. “Don’t accelerate ~♪”

“Oh my fucking— do not.”

“For safe traffic~ ♪”

“No traffic safety—in the f-fuckin bedroom!”

“Remember to stop at red lights~ ♪”

“F-fuck you!”

“For safe traffic~ ♪”

“Y-you’re the shittiest boyfriend!”

Jungkook suddenly stops, mouth slack, “What did you just call me?”

“The shittiest!”

“No, no, no the other thing!” Jungkook waves his hand.

“You’re!” Taehyung covers his eyes with his forearm and grabs the sheets.

“You know what I meant.”

“The!”

“Fine if you’re not gonna answer,” Jungkook shifts his fingers just right and whispers into Taehyung’s ear, “Ecodrive~ ♪”

“Oh —” Taehyung curls around Jungkook, limbs hugging him tight as he shakes to the finish. “F-fuckin’ hell.”

And Jungkook just starts laughing his head off as he slips out and off and dashes to the bathroom.

“You’re the worst!” Taehyung yells at him as he gingerly steps of the bed. “I hope you know that!”

“Eye for an eye,” Jungkook calls back, his voice echoing off the marble walls, the sound of the shower starting, the rain of water rushing in the background.

“What if I actually develop some weird-ass kink for your traffic song?”

“Sounds like a personal problem.”

It’s later, after the aftercare and after the lights are out and they’re back in clean sheets, on the cusp of sleep that Jungkook asks about it again.

“Were you being serious about it earlier?” Jungkook mumbles into Taehyung’s chest, breaking the silence.

“About what?”
“You know...when you said I-I was...”

“Yeah,” Taehyung mumbles, chin nestled into the crook of Jungkook’s neck, arms winding around his waist and his back, fingers carding through his hair. “I was.”

Jungkook hugs him a little tighter, buries his face deeper in the sheets, his hair tickling Taehyung’s nose as he mumbles, “Really?”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I be?” Taehyung’s eyes flutter shut. “Because I’m...“

He peters off, because how does he even start to explain it? Why there’s a nonstop warmth heating his chest these days, the reason why he loves waking up in the mornings and falling asleep at night lately, why he’s laughing more, living more, loving more. It’s because he’s so happy. He’s in love. He feels complete. All true, but there must be some broader reason for it all—

“Because you’re...?” Jungkook, cast in the moonlight and the city lights, murmurs, adjusting his arms around Taehyung, his breath fluttering against his chest.

“Because—” And the answer suddenly hits him, and he sighs contentedly, carding a finger through Jungkook’s hair, “I’m all yours.”

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The third time he says it, it’s—well, it’s hard to explain without context.

So let’s start with some.

History always has a funny way of catching up to Taehyung. The net of it is that it’s zero sum, neither good or bad to him, it’s some sort of chaotic neutral entity that both tends to bite him in the ass on one day and send him miraculous blessings the next.

When he wakes up the morning before MAMAs, his bed’s empty and the sound of Jungkook’s voice is floating through the closed door. It’s too low for Taehyung to hear and so he dozes of back into almost-sleep when Jungkook steps back in, face-blank.

“Everything good?” Taehyung blinks blearily at him as Jungkook starts pulling on outsidewear.

“Whoa,” Jungkook jumps and gives Taehyung a thin grin before pulling a sweatshirt over his head. “Um...yeah, I guess.”

“Who were you talking to?”

“Jin,” Jungkook steps over to the night stand and shoves his wallet and keys into his jeans pocket.

“Are you leaving already?” Taehyung sits up, rubbing his eyes. “What time is it?”

“Six,” Jungkook says. “But yeah, I need to go in before my flight.”
“For rehearsal?”

“And other things,” Jungkook pauses before bending down and kissing Taehyung hard, leaving him breathless when he finally breaks it. He stares at Taehyung for a bit, eyes searching for something, before he snaps out of it, murmuring softly, “Jin wants to talk to you before you leave.”

“Oh okay,” Taehyung blinks dazedly, “Are you sure everything’s okay?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll see you tonight then?”

Jungkook pauses at the door frame before glancing back at Taehyung, eyes wide. Then he turns away, knuckles white against the door and says, “Yeah.”

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What happens next is so overwhelmingly predictable that Taehyung should have seen it coming from at least ten miles away. And so when Jin pulls out chair with a sign, sits down with a cautious heaviness and covers his hands with his eyes, inhaling loudly through his nose, Taehyung has a feeling he knows roughly what he’s going to say before he says it.

“So,” Jin exhales and starts fiddling with an office toy sitting on his desk. “How do we start?”

“Who found out?” Taehyung’s mouth spits out before his mind really has time to catch up, the familiar feeling of numbness slowly rising like a tide in his chest.

“Oh,” Jin raises his eyebrows. “So you know already?”

“No, I guessed,” Taehyung picks at the hem on his pants and gestures around Jin’s office. “But the setting and your face and the cryptic notification all told me this isn’t going to be a lovely afternoon chat between two old friends.”

“Ah, yeah” Jin blinks. “Well, I already told Jungkook about all of this, so he knows.”

“And what did he say about it?”

“Wanna hear the context first?”

“Sure,” Taehyung shrugs. “Shoot.”

“So, um, we were contacted about a statement about you guys,” Jin glances up at Taehyung. “From Dispatch.”

“Oh,” Taehyung feels his mouth dry, his heart beginning to pick up in pace.

“And you’ve probably put this all together by now,” Jin blinks again. “But you two are going to be their New Years reveal. It appears an outside source tipped them off on a lead, and I think we both
have a good guess on who that source could be.”

“Heart King?” Taehyung asks with dread.

“Yeah,” Jin pinches the bridge of his nose. “Fucking hell. She already hit Jungkook with National Sweetheart, but this time, she must have really wanted to maximize damage.”

“Do you know what pictures Dispatch have?”

“Nothing too damning, the cards they showed us were just pictures of you two walking out of his apartment and getting into a car,” Jin flicks his eyes up. “Why, were you guys being careless?”

“Not really,” Taehyung shakes his head. “But I mean, do you think they have photos from…”

“Heart King? Probably not, I’d guess she just gave them leads. But since she overstepped her bounds, it probably isn’t the smartest thing legally for them to get tangled in her deal. But yeah, whatever she has she’ll dump it all there anyway. She’s probably just waiting for them to reveal it before posting her proof.”

“Ah I see,” Taehyung slumps dejectedly into his chair. “So what did Jungkook say about all of this?”

“He said that it’s entirely up to you.” Jin holds his hands in his lap, “He said he’d even understand it if you wanted to end things.”

“And what do you think I should do?”

“I think...I don’t know,” Jin hangs his head. “Historically, lesser names have come back from worse, bigger names have been destroyed by less. It depends on how we play our cards,” Jin hangs his head. “The grooming stuff won’t really come out anymore, that was so long ago and after they arrested the producer for it, it was pretty clear the blind item was about him. I also think in some sense you need to live your life, since you’re relevant now. You have enough clout and this kind of scrutiny will never really go away. But I also think there’s a smart approach to things and a less smart way to approach them. I think, especially since we’re all moving to a new agency in a few months with limited bandwidth, some battles are honestly not worth fighting.”

“So given all of that,” Taehyung buries his hands into his pockets and leans back, leg jittering nervously against the ground. “What do you recommend I do?”

“There’s a couple of options,” Jin pulls up a few articles on his computer. “You can make yourself comfortable, this will take a while...”

+++
Hey

So

Jin just told me

About the dispatch thing

Yeah?

And I

I think

We need to talk

Fuckboy 6 is typing...

+++ 

If he thought the party was a blur, the MAMAs are a whirlwind.

He’s pretty much in a daze from the moment he sits down in a chair to get prepped in his hotel room, BigCube’s biggest makeup and hair stylists fluttering around him as the clothes stylist wheels options on a rack around him. Then he’s herded into a van and shuttled off to the red carpet, where he awkwardly steps out and nearly trips as a flurry of camera flashes and screams hit him, the fans flanking the sides zoning in on him the moment he comes into view.

He honestly can’t even really remember anything after his interview, one moment he’s blinking at RTAOTY in her diamond-studded ball gown as he answers questions about his year, the next moment he’s back in a chair in front of a light-studded mirror, and the next he’s standing on a scuffed platform just under the stage, re-adjusting his mic as the murmurs from the crowd turning into screams as the lights dim.

Somehow, with his miracle skills, Jin had slid him in as the opening act, and as excited as he was, the part of him that would but fine that wasn’t starts protesting loudly as the platform begins to rise and the opening notes of *Talking to Myself* begin to play.
The performance itself feels like a dream, watching the lightsticks in the audience sway to the beat, the chorus of everyone singing along with him right until the last notes fade along and he grins at the camera as the stage lights fade and he steps off to backstage.

Then a third wardrobe change later, he’s sitting in the artist area, perched at the edge of a bench between Monster Rookie Girl Group and the rest of the artists from BigCube, Jimin to his left, and Namjoon, Yoongi, Hoseok and WANNA TEEN all lined up in a row.

“Hey,” Jimin elbows Taehyung when Representative Female Rapper leaves the stage. “Isn’t your award next?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung says as That One Actor Guy slips around the panel, a camera-ready grin slapped on his face. “It is.”

“Hey who’s the second announcer—?” Jimin suddenly stops.

Taehyung follows his gaze and his heart halts in his chest when his eyes fall on Jungkook. He looks so good, in his suit and with his hair, his eyes glittering in the lights, the trophy clasped in his hands, and Taehyung can’t find it in him to look away. And yet Jungkook’s not looking at him to an almost militant degree, eyes darting everywhere out in the crowd except anywhere near Taehyung’s vicinity, smiling like everything’s fine.

And it kind of makes sense, Taehyung thinks and yet his heart sinks a little, especially when Jungkook makes eye contact with someone in the crowd and gives them a shy grin.

Once the crowd quiets down, Jungkook leans down to the mike, his nose nearly brushing it as he recites, “There’s a lot of talented guys who step on the scene every year, and this year certainly is no exception.’

“Each one of these guys have brought us a fresh perspective on pop and has really raised the bar for everyone else,” That One Actor Guy steps back and points at the screen behind him. “Here are the nominees.”

The montage plays, the screams resounding for each of the clips, but none as loud as for his own, which erupt when a second for the We the Best music video plays, the bit flashing across the screen where Taehyung awkwardly floats by the screen in a pool floaty with his reflective glasses, singing as he points at the camera.

“Fuck, that’s the clip they went with?” Taehyung whispers into Jimin’s ear, his nerves starting to get to him a little just as the camera focuses on him, suddenly blinking embarrassingly as his wide-eyed expression hits the monitors as Jimin snickers next to him.

Jungkook stands expressionless as That One Actor Guy fumbles with the envelope, nearly dropping it before he finally gets it open.

“Whoops. And the winner is...” That One Actor Guy pauses, glancing down at the envelope and feigning surprise. The fans scream, and he leans into the mic, grinning teasingly, “...TAE!”

The chorus from Talking to Myself swells, and Taehyung gets up, buttoning his jacket and bowing to the competition as he makes his way to the stage.

Jungkook’s still refusing to look at him, his eyes aimlessly pointed out in the crowd until Taehyung gets near. He diverts them to the ground instead, hands wrapped securely around the trophy, lips pressed thinly together.
He only flicks his eyes up when Taehyung stops right in front of him, the subtlest hints of worry woven into his brows just barely visible through the impassiveness, holding the trophy out for Taehyung to take.

“Congrats,” Jungkook whispers, barely audible over the music.

“Thanks,” Taehyung reaches out tentatively, hand hovering near the trophy for a split second before he suddenly shoots his arm past it, grabbing Jungkook by the tie.

Then Taehyung pulls him in for a kiss.

And all hell breaks loose.

Jungkook goes beet red, the fans break out into a fresh wave of screaming, the cameras go crazy, the phone in his pocket begins buzzing like no tomorrow, their contemporaries in the artist area are anywhere from a range of bemused and livid, he can see Jimin and Hoseok catcalling, Yoongi shaking his head, Namjoon looking at the ground with a big grin on his face, he knows somewhere backstage Jin is ripping his hair out, upper management’s going to be on both their asses tomorrow, and he pretty much nullified his performance since the headlines were going to be dominated by just this moment, all of social media was going explode with debates of whether or not this was a publicity stunt the minute the broadcast delay catches up, netizens from all corners of opinion were going to drag them from hell and back, and his interviews for the next three months will contain a question about his intentions, guaranteed, but—it doesn’t matter.

Because when it's all said and done, when the crowds and the lights and the noise eventually fades, this is the truth that will remain:

“Hey, so, um—you’re mine,” Taehyung covers the mic and grins nervously when they break, as the uproar from the crowd descends on his ears. “Just makin’ that clear.”

“Oh,” Jungkook says in a daze, his face flickering with white from the flashes from the cameras. “Cool. Me too, thanks.”

“I also just want you to know,” Taehyung whispers into Jungkook’s ear. The screams rise in volume and the camera shutters explode with rapidfire clicks again. “You make me so happy.”

Taehyung then takes a step back, loafer scuffing over the stage, and gives Jungkook his biggest beaming grin and a subtle index-and-thumb finger heart (a well-placed fancam still catches that one), sniffs and wipes his eye and throws in a shitty giggle to drive the point home, “I’m so fucking in love with you, Jungkook. Like, really, I am.”

Yeah that was his crime. But he could own it now, a wise man once told him that lesser names have come back from worse.

Jungkook goes impossibly more red and gapes at him like a fish before sputtering, mind clearly overloading, expression flickering between bewildered delight and cognitive overload, “I mean, I mean, when we talked about releasing the notice ourselves, not that I necessarily mind this, but I didn’t mean it had to be like this—”

“Yeah, yeah, tell me later,” Taehyung lightly pushes him away, takes the award and faces the lights. He uncovers the mic, leaning down awkwardly to reach it, hand slightly shaking, heart thrumming in his chest, drops his voice down a quarter of an octave, looks out into the crowd, and speaks to his fans, “S-so, um, I’d like to thank you guys, first of all…”
After the shocking reveal at the MAMA awards, it has been confirmed by their agency that top stars TAE and JK are dating. BigCube Ent has released an official public statement in response:

“As it’s been reported, they have been dating for 4 months. The two have been friends since they were young and have had a close sunbae-hoobaek relationship for awhile now. They have only recently developed feelings.

We hope that you cheer them on.”

post reaction

[+14,129, -9,932]

TOP COMMENT

1. Heol, this is surprising...but they match really well!! It may not always be easy going forward, but wishing them a happy relationship~!

Chapter End Notes

hey!! it's been a while LOL rip i'm so so sorry i still gotta reply to comments from chp 19, but def 20 but i actually have zero time these days holy shit. but i'll def get to them!! i read all of them and they're honestly ridiculously sweet, i don't deserve you guys. buy fukin rip me what is free time anymore
I can’t remember the dude’s name but i’m like 98% sure there was this one wild playboy first gen idol who gave zero fucks and introduced his gf-at-the-time at his concert. It was wild, those days were wild. But documentation on 1st gen idols who were neither in HOT nor Shinhwa is like...rare to none and I saw it mentioned offhandedly in a netizenbuzz translated comment thread years ago and I can’t find the guy’s name so there’s 2% chance that there’s an 100% chance it was just a fever dream and I completely made this up. So maybe don’t quote this, it could possibly be fake news.

I mentioned this in the last chp but Dispatch is notorious for releasing details on at least one high-profile celebrity couple every new years since 2013 (Rain and Kim Taehee). And by high profile, it’s literally the highest profile one they can find. Last year it was GD and Jooyeon, and the rest of the list is [here](#). Kinda shitty, but honestly, when so much of an individual’s professional ethos is built around an obsession of who that individual is as a person, it ends up feeling like a side effect rather than an adverse one.

Agencies have a particular way of phrasing their dating announcements, it’s like they need to maintain their idol’s image of being honest and real even in a situation where they sometimes explicitly weren’t being (ie Baekhyun saying he’ll never date until he’s 50 for his fans pretty much at the same time he was probably dating/making moves on Taeyeon lmao) while not further offending fans and as a result, have adopted the unique tone that a zoo would probably use to announce an endangered species’ birth.

lmao the next chp is honestly an epilogue, holy shit we're almost done wtf
Epilogue: Day 1

Chapter Summary

i won big the day that
i came across you
— honne
day 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[ fast forward—4 years later ]

Why was he here?

“He” as in Taehyung, 29-year old singer-songwriter at Ddaeng Entertainment, and “here” as in racing down the hallway with coffee in one hand, and a hot chocolate in the other for Seoul’s most promising candidate for Laziest Boyfriend of the Year.

It’s simple, it’s because Jungkook was too damn lazy to get his own damn drinks.

And that’s kinda why Taehyung’s counting the steps left to Jungkook’s studio as the heat from the cups begins to seep through the cardboard sleeves and scald the palms of his hands. There’s literally one more corner left, but it kinda feels like he’s holding literal lava, and so he loses a battle he’s created with himself and drops the drinks onto the nearest side table, frantically shaking out his hands as he hisses in pain as a few trainees wander by and give him odd looks.

He grins and gives them an awkward nod in greeting, and they raise their brow before tentatively returning it, whispering between themselves before they quickly shuffle away. Taehyung sighs, wringing his hands together before grabbing the cups again, the sear of heat beginning to singe his palms again as he hurries back down the hall towards the frosted glass door at the end of the hall.

How exactly did he get coerced into doing this? With a couple of carefully worded texts sent about half an hour ago:

Fuckboy <3

So

I’ve been thinking about it
We’ve been dating for like
Four years now?

Yeah?

What about it

And

I realized

I’m like

So fucking in love with you

Nice

Wow that’s your reaction?

Yeah

Man I just bared my goddamn heart for you :( 

Enumerable

:((

I mean

As sweet as it is

You pretty much say that

To me every morning

And?
I mean

Again it’s sweet

But it does lessen the impact

A little bit

Loool

Yeah but it’s true

:thumbs up:

Wow ur being so mean

Lololol <3

Sorry

I love you too

I’m just

Wow

I’m crazy about you

Like I literally can’t imagine life without you

Same

Can I

Ask you something

Loool

What?
Something important

Go for it

Actually

Wait.

...

Is this

Going where

I think it’s going?

It’s something I’ve been thinking about

For a long time

Jungkook

Yeah?

If you’re about to ask what

I think you’re about to fucking ask

Don’t you dare do this over text

When I’m literally

Sitting next door

What am I gonna ask?

…you know

LOL

Do I?
Im going to call u
Pick up ur phone

call declined

Are you serious

call declined

Wow

call declined

Answer your fucking phone

call declined

You are not doing this over text

call declined

I’m coming over

call declined

I’m outside

Taehyung
Open your door

You are

Jungkook

The love of my life

Stop

My other half

I said stop

My soulmate

You better NOT

So

Will you

NOT LIKE THIS
OPEN YOUR FUCKING DOOR
FUCCCKiN
I KNO YOUR IN THRE
I CN HEAR U LAUGHIN INSDE

call declined
So will you

Make me the happiest guy alive

Taehyung

JUNGKOOK

IF YOU DO THIS OVER TEXT
YOU ARE SO FUCKING LAME

And will you

I WILL SAY NO
I WILL ACTUALLY SAY NO

Get me some hot chocolate

read 2:03PM

Thanks

read 2:03PM

Hahaha

read 2:03PM

Hahahahaha
Hahhahahahhaa

Are you
Serious

Yah
I rly need sugar rn

Wow
Just
...
Wow

Lol
But could you actually get me some
I’m like
Half asleep

I

Zzz

Fine

Thx you’re the best
And you’re the worst

:'(
Ouch
Right where it hurts

You’re fuckin lazy

Where’s the lie though

):<

<3

Yeah. Seriously, the things he does for love.

He’s just outside the door, his elbow dropping down to pop the handle open when a tweenaged kid suddenly yanks it open, his head turned over his shoulder as he quickly bows, “Thank you so much!”

“Yeah no problem, but also thanks for dropping the thing off,” Jungkook leans back in his chair, his face peering in to view, his lips quirking into a grin when he spots Taehyung before they flick back towards the kid. “Good luck with evals. Let me know how they go.”

“Will do! Good luck with—shit,” The kid turns around suddenly and smacks straight into Taehyung, apologizing and bowing before he scampers back down the hall.

“Who was that?” Taehyung amusedly laughs as he nudges the door shut with his foot and heads over to Jungkook, quickly shoving the cup into his boyfriend’s hands.

“A trainee,” Jungkook takes a sniff before takes a sip. “Came for advice.”

“Ah,” Taehyung’s eyes wander around Jungkook’s workspace, over his producing equipment and post-its and decorations, and the awards all neatly lined up neatly on a shelf off to the side.

The last four years had been a wild ride. Kicked off with explosive start Taehyung inadvertently launched their public relationship off of with The Kiss, they, as a couple, had immediately grabbed entertainment headlines all over the nation (and in some parts of the world). The aftermath reaction itself was a mixed bag. His own fans were more or less estatic for him, the public pretty much completely lost interest with it within a couple of weeks, and Jungkook’s diehards were, to put it
simply, post-National Sweetheart veterans and were not really that surprised.

The week after was probably the hardest, because that’s when deluge of dirt-digging hit posts started hitting social-media en-masse. What they were about, Taehyung honestly couldn’t tell anyone the specifics because he went almost completely off the grid for a month or two to weather the storm, but through what he gleaned later was the internet, with a few thousand armchair prosecutions, thought he was some iteration of being a hoe, an asshole, and a showoff (mix and match or choose all three, only while supplies last).

The accusations that he was V flared up again, and that’s when Taehyung came to peace about that whole deal being his own personal PR herpes. All of the posts that were the detective work of their budding relationship are brought to the forefront again (the couple clothes, the emojis, the supposed dates), leaving netizens wondering what was actually blatant evidence of a loud couple agenda and what was symptomatic of broken clocks being right twice a day.

Needless to say, the day after The Kiss, BigCube’s upper management had freaked the fuck out, and Taehyung had never felt more sorry for Jin, who he knew was thanking the brunt of the fury. And overall it wasn’t terrible for Taehyung, even if he did get thoroughly chewed out at the handful of disciplinary meetings set up to berate him, because of his contract expiration and the fact that he had a graceful transition lined up to Namjoon’s new agency, Ddaeng Ent.

Jungkook’s exit wasn’t quite as clean.

Most of it was done behind closed doors, kept under such tight wraps that even Taehyung wasn’t privy to any of the happenings, Jungkook clamping up and shaking his head whenever he broached the subject. But what Taehyung had wheedle out of Jin after a night of drinking was that there had been plenty of pleading and yelling and finger pointing (largely over how the dating thing had been handled) that amounted into a strange passive-aggressive PR hit piece released to Osen decrying Jungkook as a lazy SOB who was somehow paradoxically parting ways amicably by letting his contract expire but also was being deliberately axed for being an undisciplined employee and would be leaving BigCube within the year.

Oh and what about Heartking?

That ended kinda, um, unexpectedly.

After a thorough investigation stemming from the break-in of Taehyung’s studio when she had dropped the envelope of the incriminating photos on his coffee table, Heartking was eventually caught on charges of breaking in and entering and was revealed to be salary worker who, to put it kindly, needed to get a life.

“What are you going to do about it?” Jungkook asks as they speed down the freeway, the highway lights zipping past. “Now that they caught her. Jin said they could press charges if you wanted to.”

“I…” Taehyung blinks. “I’ll probably just forgive her.”

“Oh—wait, what?”

“Yeah,” Taehyung shrugs. “She’s like the same age as me.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“I mean, even if she almost ruined mine, I don’t wanna ruin her life,” the car speeds along a bridge and Taehyung’s eyes watch the way the water ripples in the dark. “I tried that once with Fuckface, felt pretty empty after. And besides, if they lock her up I’m pretty sure she’ll never let that grudge go.
I don’t necessarily want to punish her, I just want her to leave me the fuck alone.”

Ironically, as Taehyung finds out a couple months later, the decision does the exact opposite:

New fansite: Prince TAE

Hello~

I’m happy, happy, to announce the grand opening of a new fansite for the one and only super lovely Taehyung.

I know there will be some controversy because I used to be Heartking, but I’ve turned a new leaf and become a better version of me. It’s all thanks to of Taehyung’s incredible kindness and generosity, which pulled me out of the dark place I was in and gave me this second chance.

Needless to say, I fell in love with that! His happiness is seriously my happiness and...

“What the,” Jungkook’s jaw drops when Taehyung shows him the new twitter. “What the actual fuck. How did you...what the fuck.”

“I dunno,” Taehyung laughs. “Killing them with kindness sometimes works, I guess.”

“I thought you wanted her to stay the fuck away from you.”

“This works too,” Taehyung shrugs as he scrolls down her feed.

“But I want her to stay the fuck away from you, with this, we’re like, back at square one again—”

“I think she’s changed,” Taehyung muses as he stops on one particular picture.

“How did you know? All she’s done so far is posts pictures of you—”

“Because this is the first one she posted,” Taehyung flips his phone around.

It’s a screencap of the encore after very first time they performed together, from slightly below that scuffed stage with confetti streaming down from the rafters and the two of them wrestling and laughing together, Taehyung looking down as he tries to whack Jungkook’s confetti-filled hand away and Jungkook beaming at Taehyung like he was his whole world.

And the caption?

A pair of tiger and bunny emojis sandwiched between a smattering of hearts.
“Huh,” Jungkook brings the screen close to his face and squints. “Huh.”

“Yeah, we’ll see,” Taehyung takes his phone back with a laugh. “But I have a feeling that things are going to be alright.”

But yeah, the rest of the years between were a blur.

There’s no real stand out favorite moment, just a growing collection of simple small ones, like coming home after they’ve moved in together to a lit apartment, a hooded-Jungkook twisting around from the couch and greeting him with a grin, moonlit walks with their new puppy down by the river, the quiet stretches along the river, fingers linking loosely when no one else is around, stolen kisses in hidden corridors the agency, and the music show studios, and in darkened sidestreets just a few blocks away from the hustle and bustle of the main roadways.

Scattered among those kinds of moments were the months that their schedules hurtled them on opposite sides of the world, and were probably the worst. Like earlier that year when Jungkook spent several weeks in LA after Jin manages to turn an KCON invite into an opportunity for a mini media-blitz and concert combo, extending what should have been a three-day trip into three weeks and a half.

And Taehyung actually doesn’t think much of it even after he sends Jungkook off at 5 in the morning, draped in an oversized sweatshirt, sleepily waving at him from their bedroom door, or when, from the moment he lands, Jungkook starts sending him a bunch of photos of random things and people in LA, or even when a selca with an idol friend makes it to the ‘gram and sets off a mini-flurry of cheating rumors among netizens.

It hit Taehyung in the morning on the third day when he woke up alone, wrapped around nothing but a pillow and his sheets and realizes he’s really fucking grumpy. Like, frown on his face, something’s obviously missing, he feels like shit, level of grumpy.

“Well yeah,” Jimin said while they’re eating lunch in the cafeteria after Taehyung spelt it out for him. “I could tell.”

“How?”

“Look at a mirror,” Jimin had laughed. “It’s written all over your face.”

It doesn’t really hit Taehyung why until Jungkook returned dutifully a month later, clearly exhausted and jetlagged when he, straight from his plane, arrives at an impromptu kickback between the seven of them and he sags onto the couch next to Taehyung, head supported by his hand.

What starts as sitting side by side slowly evolves to Taehyung somehow worming himself until he’s sandwiched between the couch and Jungkook, koala-hugging his boyfriend’s back with his chin propped over his shoulder as he lethargically watches the rest of them play a drinking game.

“Damn, Jungkook,” Jin had shaken his head at Taehyung right before he took a shot. “You were gone for what, a couple of weeks?”

“Three weeks and five days,” Jungkook had laughed, his voice vibrating through his chest.

“Also eighteen hours, thirty-six minutes, four seconds and nine milliseconds,” Taehyung has grumbled, holding his phone up, the stopwatch with the time receipt glowing for everyone to see. “If you wanna be really precise.”

“Look what you did to him,” Jin had squinted before shaking his head.
Jungkook has turned his head and glanced down, eyes drooped and a loopy grin across his face, and let out a huge sigh, “I know, and he called me every night too. Clingy as fuck.”

Everyone had laughed and Taehyung had wordlessly tightened his hold, peering up with a glare and raising a middle finger to no one in particular.

“See,” Jungkook triumphantly gestured at Taehyung’s arms as if it proved a point that hadn’t already been made. “Clingy.”

“Oh, don’t give me that pretend-exasperation bullshit,” Yoongi squinted at Jungkook and points an accusatory finger. “Your face says it all, you fucking love this.”

Jungkook glanced down at Taehyung, a grin threatening to break across his face. He bites his lip and lifts his brows, “And what if I do?”

And when Taehyung had buried his face deeper into the crook of Jungkook’s neck, his arms wrapping tighter around Jungkook’s navel as he inhales the soft familiar scent of his boyfriend’s detergent, it struck him then that the unease he had been feeling in the months prior had completely dissipated and that by sitting here, with Jungkook in his arms, everything just felt completely right with world.

And that he honestly couldn’t imagine anyone else by his side.

That was probably the catalyst for scheduling the appointment with that hype designer jeweler on Tuesday, during one of Jimin’s rare breaks to get a quote for a custom ri—well, actually, forget he mentioned that, he was getting ahead of himself.

The squeak from the office chair suddenly shakes Taehyung from his thoughts and plunks him back in Jungkook’s studio, the awards glittering in the background as Jungkook swivels around and stares up at Taehyung.

“Everything good?” Jungkook asks, reaching up and adjusting Taehyung’s collar. “You’re being unusually quiet.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung rubs at his eyes. “Just a lot on my mind lately.”

“I feel,” Jungkook laughs softly, carding through his hair with his pinky.

They lapse back into a comfortable silence, broken by the faint background sounds of Jimin whistling as he headed down the hall, Jin yelling at Yoongi to wake up from somewhere in the distance, Hoseok laughing and Namjoon singing.

Taehyung’s straining to figure out what song Namjoon’s working on, trying to catch any of the fragments of notes and lyrics that he possibly can to piece together into a mental framework when he sees Jungkook get up from his chair.

“Hey,” Jungkook taps him on the shoulder. “So I have an important question to ask.”

And when Taehyung turns around and glances over, his heart stops straight in his chest.

Because Jungkook’s getting down on one knee, his wide eyes locked on Taehyung’s and his lips curving into nervous grin.

“Taehyung, you’re my rock, my soulmate, my second half. You’re my everything, you literally mean the world to me. So will you—”
Taehyung’s hand flies up to cover his mouth, his heart racing in his chest, his answer ready to launch itself from his lips, plans to cancel his appointment already forming in his mind when he suddenly notices Jungkook sliding onto all fours and awkwardly patting the ground, eyes darting around the carpet as he ducks his head under his desk.

“—will you help me find my pen? I just dropped it and I really need to sign off on this endorsement deal by the end of the day—”

“Oh...my...fucking...” Taehyung covers his face with his hands in embarrassment. “No. You can’t do that twice to me in one day.”

“Do what?” Jungkook grins up at Taehyung. He face falls into an expression of mock-astonishment. “Oh wait, oh shit, you thought this was a—? Oh, fuck, I’m so sorry.”

“Right,” Taehyung rolls his eyes. “Keep talking like you totally didn’t make it look like a—”

“Again, I’m sorry,” Jungkook laughs. “I just really need this pen. But anyway, while I’m down here,” Jungkook reaches behind the leg of his desk, and pulls out a tiny box. “Related question.”

He’s laughing and fumbles and nearly drops it, and Taehyung’s heart stops for a moment in his chest, as Jungkook regains his balance and pops it open.

“I really meant everything I told you earlier,” Jungkook raises a brow and beams, a ring glinting in its box, “So, Taehyung, will you—?”

“Holy shit.”

“Uh...so is that a—?”

“Yes.”

+++ 

[ rewind—fourteen years ago, in a dance studio in busan ]

“So which agency do you think you’re going to choose?”

Jungkook blinks at that question, he’s 13 with big dreams and a wide-open future, but all he knows is how to parrot what his parents want, using words and metrics he doesn’t really understand. But what he is sure about is that he’s really excited for the shot at being an idol, most kids don’t even get one opportunity, and he, well, he’s got seven.

“JYP probably?” Jungkook responds. “They’re part of the Big Three and have a, a, uh, proven track-record and also an, um, explosive second quarter of growth and—”

“Uhhhh,” his friend makes a face. “What does any of that even mean?”
“Honestly,” Jungkook admits, biting his lip. “I don’t know. But my dad is very excited about all of that. We’re taking the tour tomorrow.”

“Nice! Can you get me Sohee’s autograph if you run into her?”

“I doubt I’ll see her,” Jungkook laughs. “But I’ll try.”

“Sweet. Also—wasn’t BigCube one of your companies?”

“Yeah, but they’re at the bottom of my list. My dad said something about, what was it?” Jungkook places his index finger over his upper lip as he flicks his eyes towards the lights on the ceiling. “Potential bankruptcy? It sounds like a risk.”

“I don’t know anything about that, but isn’t RM there? I know you like his stuff.”

“Wait, really?” Jungkook’s eyes widen. “Yeah, I’m such a huge fan.”

“Yeup, and Suga and Jhope. Seems like they’re really banking on their producers.”

“That’s cool,” Jungkook wrinkles his nose. "But I’m not sure I wanna do hiphop.”

“Oh, about that, I also found this guy on soundcloud the other day,” his friend takes out his phone and fiddles with it. “He just got signed and released a few songs. I think most of the online hype is about his face honestly, but you should take a listen, it’s the kind of basic shit you’d like.”

“What’s his name?”

“Tae...hyung? I think, lemme check,” his friend squints at his phone. “Yeup, Taehyung.”

“Never heard of him,” Jungkook shakes his head. “How good is he?”

“Pretty good? He’s not like, RM or anything—”

Jungkook wrinkles his nose again.

“Look, all I’m saying is he might change your mind,” his friend shrugs as he hands over his phone. “It’s not like he’s gonna change your life.”

Skeptical, Jungkook presses play.

+++ 

And, of course, what happens next could be a whole story of its own.

So here’s a question: was this all a result of chance or fate?

Well it’s—wait.

It really doesn’t matter.

Because what is the difference between the two when the course of time can’t be altered? And
regardless of whether it’s by destiny or design, after the first time they collide, when 17-year old Taehyung steps out with his future that day in the form of a finalized producer-contract clutched in his hand and really appreciates Seoul’s urban jungle for the first time in a long time and a 14-year old Jungkook slips into a small practice room and introduces himself nervously in front of a judging crowd of trainees, whether it’s by luck or some predestined plan doesn’t change a thing. They’re still the same two guys with big dreams and an unforgiving industry to take on.

Even though this story’s winding its way down, this certainly isn’t their end. They’ll keep on going, since there will always another mountain to summit, another path to take, another goal to reach, and who really knows how far they’ll go or where they’ll end up.

Because even now, in the present, there’s still no written conclusion for their story yet, just another milestone being paved into their trail, the binder already being smoothed down onto the ground when they (attempted to) take their engagement photos in a series of poses that dissolve in the chaos, like, for instance, Taehyung trying his best to carry Jungkook bridal style, the veins popping out of his neck and his brow twitching as Jungkook throws his arms around Taehyung’s neck, gracefully sticks his foot into the air, and spreads a shit-eating grin across his face), or Jungkook ruining another shot of staring lovingly into each others eyes as they classily sip from champagne flutes by pulling a face at an inopportune moment and causing Taehyung to dissolve into waist-bending snickers, spitting his mouthful of champagne all over Jungkook in the process.

But really, just looking at the one relatively successful shot they get—standing together on a grassy hill with their arms wrapped around each other as the sun sets in the background, laughing together with their eyes screwed shut the split second before Taehyung wrestles himself out of Jungkook’s grip to avoid the hidden tickling jabs his fiancé was non-stop prodding into his waist—the rest of their story seems like it’s shaping up to be the happiest one.

Seriously, how could this possibly be their ending? Especially with scenes like this one from a heartbeat ago: a moment from an idyllic, cloudless mid-summer’s evening, set in the ballroom of one of Seoul’s nicest hotels, under an ornate awning adorned with twisting vines & blooming roses—

(“...um, lets see...” Taehyung takes a step back and grins. “Gimme a moment, I think I need a moment to think about this one.”

“F-fucking—no,” Jungkook hisses. “Fuck no, Taehyung, now is not the fucking time—“

“Hey,” Taehyung snickers. “I’m sensing some double standards. You gave me so much shit with the proposal. Let me have this one.”

“Yeah, okay, but the difference is it wasn’t in front of a thousand people—”

“And?” Taehyung looks out into the crowd and squints. “Wait, we didn’t even send out a thousand invites, there are like seven hundred here at the most? And I highly doubt our nextdoor neighbors really came, especially after that midnight noise complaint.”

“I told you not to be so loud.”

“Yeah, you know, that’s real easy to demand when you’re not the one—”

“Hey, guys,” Yoongi grimaces. “TMI.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Taehyung waves in apology. “What I’m trying to say is that there are at most six hundred and ninety-eight people here. Not even close to a thousand.”
“Not the point,” Jungkook hisses. “Just, like, hurry up. I’ve, I’ve, I’ve waited fucking years for this —”

“Okay, okay, sorry...I—wait, Jungkook,” Taehyung peers at Jungkook. “Oh my god, are you crying?”

“No—guh,” Jungkook sniffs indignantly and scowls. “Just—oh my god—say it already—”

“Actually, wait, can I, like, take a picture?” Taehyung starts patting his pockets. “Since this is a, um...once in a lifetime moment and—oh wait, what am I talking about? Haha, I don’t need it,” Taehyung cackles and turns to his best man and smacks him in the arm. “Jimin, Jimin, dude, I won our bet, look, he’s actually—”

“No way,” Jimin’s jaw drops as Namjoon begins laughing into the palm of his hand and Hoseok shakes his head. Jimin groans, covering his eyes with his hand, “Jungkook, you schmuck, you just lost me a fucking watch. You had one job—“

“What—? Wait. No. I—no, this my fucking day, my job is to—guh—no. Do not fucking pin that on me,” Jungkook holds his hand over his face as Yoongi and Hoseok lean out to cop a look. He starts trying to subtly wipe his eyes as he hisses, “Wait, why are you giving me shit for this?! You’re crying too, Tae!”

“Oh am I?” Taehyung grins as he quickly wipes his eyes off with the heel of his hand, his fingers curling into his palm. “I guess I am.”

“What even—oh my—ugh—we’re the same!”

“No we’re not. Unlike you, I can own being a little bitch—”

“Tae!”

“Okay, okay, okay, sorry,” Taehyung presses his hands together and takes a deep breath. “I...wait—just—give me a second, I, uh, forgot my line. Line?” Taehyung grandiosely waves a finger into the air and Jin completely loses it.

“Tae. Hyung. It’s. Two. Fucking. Words,” Jungkook hisses. "This is not funny."

“Okay, okay, I’ll cut the jokes,” Taehyung takes a deep breath. Then pauses. “I—wait—actually, hold up one more time,” he squints and surveys the crowd. “I would really like to appreciate all of this for just one more moment—“

“Tae—! ”

“Okay, Okay,” Taehyung beams and takes Jungkook’s hands into his. “I...um—”

“Just fucking say it!“

“I do.” )

—clearly, this is just another start.
#fakedeep, the entire fic actually, i’ll call myself out on it LMAOOO, i feel like i’m bullshitting essays again, good times

Holy shit, we’re done. Um, thanks so much for all of the lovely comments and kudos, and for sticking with it if you did, through my typos and uncut writing and mdashes, and irregular schedule, uhh...and if you didn’t, HAHA obv you’re not reading this but yeah, honestly, thanks for giving it a chance.

There was no outline or beta for the entirety of writing this thing so my bad for all of the typos and plot that really stretched out way too long. A lot of this was really was an excuse to try random shit I’ve always wanted to try with writing so it’s honestly been a lot of fun.

This originally was just supposed to be a comparatively linear enemies ->fwbs -> ??? -> romcom-esque love story then halfway through I decided that had been done pretty successfully many times already and decided to use this as a frankenstein composite for all the salvageable material from my (many) dead plots. Although, fun fact, the real OG story before i made it tk was an even more linear minjoo oneshot about a producer and idol pining for each other through The Power of Song. LOL and guess what it was called--yeah, you guessed it, it was “Serendipity” because i’m got zero originality. And that’s pretty much what the series label is for, if I ever get around the finishing the incarnation of that, which goes more into their trainee days.

But anyway, a last reference for this chapter

- Taeyang + Min Hyorin is the fucking cutest thing thanks. For whatever reason, probably age and he’s a chill guy and tame compared to his bandmates and being pretty far removed from being an idol, his fans were actually totally chill about it

And some stuff that implicitly inspired the entire fic:

- Pann Post about an SM trainee who did a reddit ama once
- Tablo’s Tajinyo Fiasco basically tablo was accused of falsifying his claim of attending stanford, it’s kinda the lengths that someone will go to take another person down are horrifying (in this case, it was his cousin) and the way his company pretty much threw him under the bus when this was happening to save their budding boyband infinite, but also his journey from being a pretty angsty guy who despised popular entertainment so much he declined to even talk to Gdragon about a collab prior to this happening to the mentor-figure he is today (w/ huge support from his wife and daughter). I think the stark difference between his songs One and Thank you For Breathing (which was also, by itself, inspo for the fic) pretty much sums up the story.

Anyway, yeah. Holy fuck this is a long a/n, but that’s pretty much it. LOL….bye!
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