Youth | Taegi

by tiramisuga

Summary

the story of how a young Kim Taehyung finds his place in the world
What if, what if we run away?

Taehyung's POV

The first day of summer is, in my opinion, one of the most liberating experiences ever. Waking up late, going straight to lunch, and just lazing around all day. Fucking perfect. But this morning's a bit different. I'm currently stuck in a baby blue Volkswagen beetle with my long legs folded up—rather painfully, I might add—and just watching mile after mile of green pastures and blue, cloudless skies pass me by. If I'm lucky, I'll spot a cow here or there. The beetle's a car meant for four passengers, but with my height, I have no business stuffing myself into the blasted thing. My parents don't quite understand that and insist on using it anyway.

"Taehyung? You awake?" My mom asks me, interrupting my thoughts. Actually I didn't even know I was thinking to begin with, if that gives any idea of how out of it I am. "Tae?"

"Yeah mom, awake," I respond. My words come out muffled since my chin rests on my hand, covering my mouth up.

"Honey," she sighs, "I know you don't really want to do this but-

"It's fine. I really don't care." The last thing I want for this car ride is to have my mom lecture me on a topic that's been beaten to a pulp since January. It's June now. Towards the end of my winter holidays, my parents made the pleasant announcement that because their twentieth anniversary passed three years ago, they waited till now to go all out on a big trip. The reason they didn't want to go then was because they preferred to do it after I graduated and now here we are. The catch? They want to go alone.

Before I had the chance to wonder where that left me, the happy couple went ahead to explain that one of dad's old childhood buddies owns a vineyard nearby. Nearby meaning a five hour drive (they forgot to mention that until this morning). I don't know who this friend is but from what they said, he's apparently a nice and hospitable guy. The plan is that I'll spend two and a half months at this friend's house while they go around Europe, having the time of their lives. Needless to say, I'm more than mildly bitter about the arrangements.

Honestly at this point, I'm convinced that they just want a break from me. I've already graduated
from high school and this is the summer before I go off to college, if I choose that path anyway. The past year has just been them trying to convince me that college is the way to go, otherwise I'll never be successful. It's not that I'm against a higher level education or anything, there's just nothing that interests me anymore. College feels like it would only be a waste of money for my folks, even though they're loaded.

They're the epitome of what society deems perfect, my parents. Dad's the owner of an incredibly successful law firm, which means he's always busy. When he isn't on his phone barking at some poor sap, he's holed up in his study, alienated from the rest of us. I can't remember the last time he properly spent time with me, but that's alright. Being alone has its perks and it's a solitude that I've grown rather accustomed to. There's no point in trying to pursue a conversation with him, he's not interesting. And I'm a firm believer of the idea that if a person has nothing interesting to say, they're better off being quiet. Small talk is agonizingly drab.

Then mom. She's a piece of work, that woman. In a country obsessed with perfect skin care, mom got into the right business by being a dermatologist. I've been to her office a handful of times and it's always filled with women, ranging from late teens to how are they still alive. There's almost never a day when mom doesn't have a patient to see, but it's a pretty sweet deal. All she does is walk in, listen to the patient complain, examine the affected areas of skin or whatever, prescribe some expensive cream, then move on to the next patient. Despite my shoddy description of her, people like her quite a lot. They find her charismatic, and to be candid, I agree. There's something about my mom that draws a person in. From a random man's standpoint, she's very attractive so that could be it, but it could also be the fact that she's nice. Everyone tends to feel as though she's a person to be trusted. But when she's not in the office, she's out doing things with her friends like shopping or drinking tea. My mom and her friends drink too much tea, I swear if there's ever a shortage, they're going to be held responsible.

Which leaves me. Kim Taehyung, an embarrassingly ordinary offspring of two wildly successful people. Though a part of me suspects that my parents think I'm a deadbeat, I'm really not. There's lots of things that I liked to do in the past: art, music, sports. But with every passing year of high school, I grew tired of everything and never understood why. Maybe it's because every time the Mr. and Mrs. found out, they'd try their hardest to ensure that I became the best at whatever I wanted to do. All that pushing had its consequences because now here I am, not enjoying anything anymore. The whole ordeal makes me sigh when I think about it, which is why I actively avoid it these days. When I graduated, they were so excited, but then I told them college may not be in my future, promptly wiping the smiles off their briefly proud faces. It's absurd how easily I disappoint them.

I let out a heavy sigh as another hour of mindless gazing begins. "Taehyung, are you bored?" Dad asks, as if he doesn't already know the answer. It's not worth replying to so I stay quiet. When my phone buzzes in my lap, my hands immediately reach for it, thankful for a distraction. It was a text from Namjoon, asking me if I'd already started the trip. Swiftly moving across the keypad, my fingers type out a 'yeah' and press send, dropping the phone back into my lap so that I can redirect my gaze to the vast nothingness on the other side of the window.

Namjoon's one of my oldest friends, but you couldn't find two people who were more different. He's a kid who knew what he wanted to do with his life from back in middle school. Be a businessman. I call him an idiot all the time, but in reality, that's the last thing he is. His mind's sharp and it's expected that once he graduates, he's to take over the family business alongside his dad. True to his parents' wishes, his summer's going to be spent in the office. Though we grew up with each other, Namjoon will never know how much I envy him. He's so put together with the job, a nice boyfriend, and he's equipped with the brains to handle it all. There are times when all I want is his life just because of the lack of uncertainties. I'll never admit it to anyone, but it's fucking terrifying, not knowing where you belong in the world. It's so big and I'm so small. Surely there's a place where I'm
supposed to be... I just haven't found it yet.

"Maybe some music will help?" Mom suggests as she leans over to turn on the radio with the press of a perfectly manicured finger.

"No, let's keep it quiet," Dad shoots the idea down immediately and misses my eye roll. "I don't want a headache." Not questioning him, she places her back against the seat and looks out the window. Typical.

"Thanks mom," I mutter softly. Catching my gratitude, she looks back at me and her thin, red lipstick-covered lips part to reveal perfect teeth in an affectionate smile. Mom nods, reaching back to take my hand for a minute. Her thumb softly rubs against my palm; I don't let go. Her cold touch feels nice on my own warm skin. Dad just continues driving silently, his eyes never once leaving the boring, straight road. I really hope this vineyard is worth it. Worth waking up at 7 am on the first day of vacation and being packed into a car with my vapid parents.

Two hours down, three more to go.
two

What if, what if we left today?

Taehyung's POV

I heard the engine sputtering slightly as it died down and assumed it meant that we had arrived. At some point throughout the mind-numbingly dull drive, I'd fallen asleep. When my eyes opened again, I found myself trying to make the most of the limited space in the back, curled up in a fetal position. Mom and dad are standing outside, whispering to each other while I gather my few belongings and get out of the car. "I'm ready," I announce so that they can open the trunk.

"Ahh alright," Dad says through those tight lips of his and unlocks the trunk, gesturing for me to heave out my own luggage. I do just that, placing my one giant black suitcase on the ground, then lock the car back up. At this moment I realize that the day had gotten significantly nicer while I was asleep. Warm, bearable rays of sun beam onto my tan skin and I can feel my body tingle in pleasant relief. I brush my dark brown bangs, now lighter in the sun, out of my eyes so that I can have a nicer view. See, I'm one of those "never leave the house" type of kids, so things like sunlight are, more or less, a luxury to me. But somehow, my body still produces a shit ton more melanin than kids who actually do spend time outside because their skin tones are leagues paler than my own. Mom had to force me to start taking Vitamin D supplements because she's paranoid that I'll have a deficiency. I used to be outdoorsy, in my athlete days, but now the only games I play are video games. Most of the time, Namjoon accompanied me and it's not all bad, we had a good laugh here and there. After a while though, I had to stop because he broke too many of my controllers and I wasn't about to keep paying for new ones. Guy doesn't know his own strength at all.

Mom strolls over to dad and links their arms together, their backs facing me. "It's so beautiful," I hear her say in awe which prompts me to take a look at our current location. And she's right. The vastness of the plantation itself astounds me as I take in nothing but row after row of crops, each seemingly a more vibrant green than the last. And while the car ride was literally nothing more than green grass and blue skies, there's something remarkably different about how nature presented itself in the vineyard. I can see how to someone else, it would seem useless or irrelevant, but the beauty captivates me.

"Jungyoon hyung?" A new voice comes from behind me, the tone full of curiosity. Unwillingly, my gaze breaks away from the breathtaking sight and quickly finds the source of the unfamiliar voice, leading me to a man slightly shorter than I. He smiles at my family and waves, one hand resting in the pocket of his black jeans which, I should add, are tattered at the knees. His ebony black hair
dramatically contrasts with his pale skin—I don't think I've ever seen someone so pale before—but at the same time, it suits him.

"Yoongi!" My dad exclaims (I've never heard him this excited before) and walks forward as the man, now known as Yoongi, does the same. They meet in the middle for a hug consisting of those pat on the backs that guys usually do. Not a fan, I think they look kinda awkward. "It's been a long while, my friend," dad says as they let go, the nostalgia in his tone distracting me from my train of thought.

Yoongi nods in agreement. "Far too long," he replies. His voice interests me. It's not like anything else I've heard before. It's low and borderline raspy but intriguing at the same time and his speech is, for lack of a better word, lazy. A cheerful drawl is the best description I can come up with based on the first impression. "Jangmi," he acknowledges my mother and reaches out to shake her hand which my mom accepts delicately. "You're more beautiful than the last time I saw you." Surprisingly, the flattery brings a bright scarlet color to my mom's porcelain cheeks, something that's not usually done. It's clear that Yoongi is no stranger to women if he's able to charm her so smoothly.

"And you've become more handsome too," my mom says with a full smile, brighter than her normal ones. "Is there a beauty you've been hiding from us all these years or still a bachelor?" Her question flusters the old friend as he brings his hand up to rub his neck. The silver watch on his wrist catches the sun's attention, causing a fierce glare to nearly blind me and I avert my gaze to the ground instead.

"No wife yet, but I have a girlfriend," he bashfully informs, "she's not here right now, but we've been together for a few years."

"Oh, I see," dad says with a hearty laugh, "is the great Yoongi finally settling down?"

"Maybe... if I play my cards right." Yoongi looks at me when I finally glance back up and our eyes meet. "You're Taehyung, right?" he asks me, not breaking the eye contact. Not wanting to speak all of a sudden, I just nod. "Nice to meet you."

"Nice to... nice to meet you too," I reply quietly and Yoongi extends a hand out for me to shake. For some reason I stare at it, not knowing what to do, but then once dad clears his throat, my hand automatically reaches out to return the gesture. His hand is really cold and the veins are incredibly prominent. "Thank you for letting me stay for the summer." My head hangs low and everything I say comes out as a mumble; I can practically hear my parents judging my socialization skills. Contrary to the current exchange of greetings, I don't normally feel socially awkward around people, I just choose not to talk to them because silence, in my opinion, is far more comfortable than the mindless droning about someone else's mundane life.

"Not a problem!" He chuckles. It's a nice sound, making me wonder what a full blown laugh would sound like. Would it sound as nice or even nicer? I think the latter is the answer to a question like that. "Anyway," Yoongi addresses my parents, "come inside! We can catch up for a little while."

Not wanting to intrude, my dad shakes his head. "It's alright, Yoongi, you don't have to trouble yourself."

"Nonsense!" Yoongi's eyes gleam with what can only be excitement. "You spent so long in a car, step in for a little while and sit! I won't keep you for long." Exchanging a brief look with each other, the Mr. and Mrs. oblige, making their friend's enthusiasm skyrocket. Before I can do anything, my luggage is taken out of my hands by Yoongi, who smiles at me. "I'll take this, you don't have to."

"Oh..." My throat feels dry. "Thanks." The three adults stroll into the house, chattering animatedly
while I don't move an inch. Instead I take several steps back to fully soak it all in. Yoongi's house
gives off a sophisticated, vintage vibe, like the ones where you enter and you're scared to sit down
because it looks like anything could break. Personally, houses like this make me feel uncomfortable
and intimidated. I feel out of place. Glancing back at the car, a sigh slips past my lips. Wish I could
be with Namjoon. He's the one person who doesn't make me feel strange in my own skin and I really
need that sometimes. Like now.

Yoongi pops out of the front door and calls my name, once again breaking me out of my trance-like
state. "Taehyung, are you coming?" I want to say no. Say no and take the car wherever I want to go.
But as rebellious as I feel inside, I'm too much of a coward to ever do anything about it.
"Taehyung?" He snaps a finger in front of my face and it hits me that he walked over to me in the
time that I spaced out.

"Huh?" I can't imagine how stupid I must sound to this man.

"Are you alright?" There's concern in his voice which catches me off guard since we just met a few
minutes ago. "Or are you usually out of it?"

"I-uh..." I curse my stammer mentally. "I get nervous in new places." Not entirely a lie, but not a
complete truth either. He smiles at my timid and rather humiliating confession.

"It's probably not the best way to spend a summer vacation, is it?" Yoongi inquires quietly. "I get it,
but I promise it's not so scary once you get settled in. There's a lot to do here too, I'll make sure you
aren't bored."

"Ahh," I awkwardly say, "thanks..."

"Don't mention it. Now let's go inside, hmm?" He nudges me as though we've known each other
forever, like we're friends. "I can show you your room and you can start unpacking."

"Alright..." The fact that he isn't annoyed by my constant mumbling makes little sense to me, but I
roll with it. Yoongi places an arm on my shoulder and we walk in together. I don't tell him to remove
the arm.

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As I walked into his house, it dawns upon me that I underestimated how elegant the inside of his
house would be. "Here, you can put the slippers on," Yoongi instructs and points to a shoe closet
next to me. Nodding, I shuffle in that direction and take off my beloved gray Vans, one of my most
prized possessions, then pull off my socks. Immediately, a chill runs through my body as the soles of
my feet make contact with the sedona red wooden floor and I slip my feet into the slippers, grateful
to seek refuge from the cold floor.

My eyes take in the room before me. Open cherry display walls mix with regular white walls,
wooden beams run across the ceiling, a black leather couch sits in the corner across from the
fireplace and in front of the couch rests a small coffee table, also black, holding a decorative piece.
Yoongi's living room, dining room, and kitchen all seem to be connected, I notice when I spot the
long table with white leather chairs placed north of the couch. "Do you like it?" Yoongi asks me.

"It's a r-really nice h-h-house," I struggle to say but regardless, my response brings a wide smile to
the older male's face. "Very aesthetically p-pleasing..." Shut the fuck up, my mind screams at
me. Since when do you use phrases like 'aesthetically pleasing'?

"Thank you, I'm glad you like it." He joins my parents, who are sitting quietly on the couch and gestures for me to do the same. "Would you like anything to drink?"

"You wouldn't happen to have any wine, would you?" Dad answers, breaking out into a pompous laugh as though he'd just made the world's most brilliant joke when really, it was nothing above basic. Below basic, if you ask me. Of course a vineyard owner would have wine, I think and scoff to myself, which is thankfully gone unnoticed by the adults.

"Nah, we've had a shortage," Yoongi shoots back, grinning. Well, at least he's willing to humor my dad's poor sense of humor. There aren't many people who do. "But is that really what you want so early?"

"No, you don't have to get us anything." Dad shakes his head, still smiling at his own 'cleverness'.

"Well, a glass of water would be appreciated," Mom speaks up and Yoongi nods, walking off to the kitchen for a minute. He returns with a glass of sparkling water which mom accepts graciously with a "thank you." After she takes a sip and sets the glass down, my eyes land on the mark made on the rim by her bright red lipstick, and I cringe. Glasses with mouth stains on the rims are a pet peeve of mine. I try to be as careful as possible when eating and drinking, but when the stain's something as noticeable as lipstick, it drives me up a wall. I don't know why, I'm just high maintenance at times.

Dad leans forward and clasps his hands together, setting them in his lap. "So what's life like here, Yoongi? How've you been doing?"

"Umm," Yoongi pauses to think for a little while, "it's not bad honestly. I love the vineyard. It's calm and peaceful but my favorite time would have to be harvesting season even though it's a lot of physical labor. I do have people come and help me but yeah, it's always lovely that time of year. But y'know, dad was the real winemaker. He left the property under my name so that I could live here after college and take care of it. I've been doing that since. I do have a partner who helps me with the business, Park Jimin. We could sell the grapes to other wineries and have them produce under a different label but dad always preferred having our own. So what Jimin helps me do is take our grapes, when they're ready, to a winery where we use the equipment to make our own. There's a large cellar separated from the house where we store it all for aging purposes and that's basically how the job life works."

"Ahhh, I see. Well, that's good that you have the partner to make life easier. Sometimes, things get overwhelming at the firm even though I have lots of helpers." There he goes again, making it all about himself. I wish dad could sit still and have a conversation without bringing himself up but Yoongi doesn't appear to mind it from what I observe.

"It is. I don't know if you saw but there's a lake nearby," Yoongi says, "so maybe I can take Taehyung there if he'd like to go swimming or anything?" He looks in my direction and my insides churn for unidentifiable reasons. "Do you like swimming?" I can feel my parents' eyes on me as they wait for a reply.

"It's nice," I softly respond.

"He's the quiet type, isn't he?" The dark haired man asks mom and dad, who concur instantly.

"We're actually hoping that the change in scenery will be good for him," mom says, "high school was rough and he doesn't really want to go to college so I want him to just lay back and think about life for a little bit, about what he wants to do. Otherwise, he'll just stay holed up in the house, playing
video games with that friend of his."

"Namjoon, mom," I correct her through gritted teeth. I hate being talked about as though I'm not even in the room, it's condescending. "His name's Namjoon."

"Well whatever the name, he still knows what he's doing with his life while our Taehyung is kind of... kind of lost." Lost. That's the perfect word for my mental state. It's lost. "He doesn't date, doesn't show much of an interest in anything so hopefully, he'll have a good time here then get ready to head off to college with a fresh mind."

Yoongi peeks at me through the corner of his eyes and I have the overwhelming urge to melt into a puddle from utter humiliation. First impressions are always highlighted yet my parents just made me out to be a total loser in front of their attractive and successful friend. It's not even true, what they're claiming. That I don't date and all that. I did hold a girlfriend here and there but they never lasted for long. I got bored with them. Makes me sound like a total fuckboy, I'm aware, but it's not that. Most of my relationships never went past making out; it's a personal choice. I just never found someone who stimulated me enough, made me think or see the world differently. It's possible that I'm expecting too much from the vain girls at my school but none of them show even an ounce of the wisdom that I yearn for at times. Yet here my parents are, thinking I'm some depressed, crusty piece of flesh with no sex drive or friends. I'm glad to get away from them. At the very least, it should do wonders for my self esteem. "Don't worry, I'll take care of him."

"We really appreciate that," dad says and I can tell he's sincere because there's a sense of concern in his normally apathetic tone. "You know, Yoongi, you're more than ten years younger than me but you don't look like you've aged a day minus the slight stubble."

"That's only because I was too lazy to shave this morning," Yoongi complains and for the first time today, I crack a smile that nobody sees. "But thanks, I try."

"More than?" I accidentally let the question escape, however, I don't retract it.

"Yeah, I was born when your dad was fifteen. We were neighbors and he was close with my parents so he would come over to play with me. Even after going to college, whenever he returned for the holidays, he visited me like I was his little brother. At this point, it's basically come to that. We are brothers despite not being related by blood."

"I don't really want him to call me hyung because we're too close for that, it's alright with me. But he insists." Well, that's surprising coming from someone as hungry for respect as dad. "It was amazing, watching him grow over the years."

"Thing of the past," Yoongi brushes it off. The front door opens, and the sound of high heels hitting the floor echoes throughout the house. "Ah, she's here," he says.

"Yoongi!" A voice rings out as a beautiful, curvaceous woman walks into the room and sees the desired man on the couch. She's the type who could capture every eye no matter where she went, with her sun kissed skin (brighter than my future, I reckon) and enviable figure. Pushing her long, dirty blonde waves to the side, the lady leans down and plants a lingering kiss on Yoongi's unsuspecting lips; it makes me uneasy. "How are you, babe?" She purrs and I can feel my parents beginning to feel unwelcome as well.

"Good, should I introduce you to my friends?" The lady glances up, noticing us for the first time and lets out a high pitched laugh that I think men are supposed to find seductive. For some reason, I find her laugh to resemble that of a banshee screaming, no offense to the creatures. She takes a seat next to her boyfriend, somehow managing to look comfortable in her glamorous but tight black dress.
"Jangmin, Jungyoon, this is Sunhee but she goes by Sunny."

"Nice to meet you," she greets us politely but I can't get the previous kiss out of my mind. "I'm Sunny."

"I'm Jangmi and this is my husband Jangyoon, and our son Taehyung."

"Hello, everyone," Sunny chirps and looks at us all. When her gaze falls on me, it seems as though she stays on me a split second longer than needed. Nobody else notices though. Maybe I'm imagining things.

"You're very young..." Mom comments.

"She's a bit younger than me, yes." Yoongi shifts in his seat awkwardly.

"I see." Unsure of myself, I cough to break the silence that coats the atmosphere awkwardly. It brings the owner's attention to me and it clicks in his mind that I still hadn't been told where I would be residing for the rest of the summer.

"Would you like me to show you to your room?" questions Yoongi with a subtle tilt of the head.

I clear my throat though I'm not sure why and nod slowly.

"Yes... please." He stands up then proceeds to walk over to my luggage, which was sitting by the shoe closet, and picks it up.

"Follow me then. Oh," Yoongi realizes, stopping in his tracks, "say goodbye to your parents because I suspect they're going to be leaving soon."

"Alright." I shuffle back to the room I was previously in and my parents rise from their seat while Sunny remains seated. "He told me to say goodbye," I declare to them, stepping forward. "So goodbye. Have a good trip." Mom meets me halfway and wraps her arms around me tightly while standing on her tiptoes, as though she's sending me off to a boot camp.

"Take care, Tae. Eat all your meals and don't give Yoongi any trouble, alright?" She requests, rubbing my back like a mother would do. Regardless of how fussy she is, I hug back just as tight. Her hugs always make me happy and I suspect it's because she's so much shorter than me but I dunno, I feel warm when I reciprocate.

"Okay mom," I reply obediently, inhaling her citrus-y fragrance. My stomach lurches as it dawns upon me that I'm going to miss her. Dad, not so much, but mom... I'm really going to miss her.

"Don't drink up all the tea in Europe."

She chuckles at my half hearted attempt at a joke and pulls away, softly placing a kiss on my forehead. I can feel the lipstick marks. But I won't rub it off right now. "I'll do my best. Love you Tae, watch over yourself and have... have a good time." She means it. With that glossy look in her eyes, I can tell she truly does want me to enjoy the time ahead of me. What must it be like to be a mom? To watch a child grow up in front of you then come to the acceptance that one day, that child will belong to the world and leave? A strange question. But it's gotta hurt.

"Son," dad says seriously as he comes forward for another one of those awkward man hugs, "you're an adult now so carry yourself like one. Don't be foolish."

"Thanks dad, I'll try not to be. But it's very hard for me, you know that," I retort, sarcasm dripping from my tone like a fatal poison.
"Very funny. At the very least, Taehyung, do some thinking. About life, about yourself, about where you want to go with it. You can't sit in our house forever and expect to magically be successful."

"I never recall assuming that or even claiming that I plan to live with you guys for the rest of my life." What a pretentious asshole, I can't believe I'm related to him.

"You don't need to, I'm sure the thought's crossed your mind at some point." God, he's so pompous. "Whatever, the point is we want you to enjoy your summer-

"Thought I was supposed to reflect on my uselessness." I smirk at how frustrated he's getting with my little jibes. "Now I'm supposed to have fun? I dunno, you're sending me mixed signals here."

"Would you let me finish?" Dad snaps angrily. "I'm just saying enjoy your last summer before going off to college and take the time alone to experience some self growth, Jesus!"

"You shouldn't take his name in vain, you know."

"Alright, fine. But remember what I said, Taehyung. Goodbye." With his lips pressed tightly once more and a vein starting to protrude on his neck, dad huffs and sits back down. "I'm going to wait to say bye to Yoongi."

"Cool. Bye then."

"We love you, Tae," mom says one last time as I'm about to leave and go back to my room of residence.

"I..." I take a deep breath. "I love you too, mom." On that note, I exit the living room, relieved to feel everyone's gazes taken off of me, including Sunny. Right now, I want nothing more than some silence and a closed door.
What if we say goodbye to safe and sound?

Taehyung’s POV

Thankfully the mattress in Yoongi’s guest room is comfortable because the first thing I did after entering was throw myself onto the bed, prepared to stay there for the rest of the day. It's been four hours and I haven't budged at all. Pretty impressive if you ask me but you probably aren't. Anyway, those hours were spent with me blankly staring up at the ceiling while music played softly. I stared for so long that what was in front of me became blurry and I couldn't quite tell what I was looking at anymore. On several occasions, my eyes nearly closed but my mind put up a fight, constantly reminding me that it usually takes me a while to fall asleep in a new place. My mind never quiets down.

All sorts of thoughts swim in my head as I start my fifth hour of uninterrupted peace. I do this a lot, thinking while listening to music alone. Mom always thinks I'm sad whenever she sees me doing this at home and it’s nearly impossible to convince her otherwise. I'm not sad, at least, I don't think I am. That's the thing with me and emotions. Being able to identify them shouldn't be so difficult, not with oneself, but when asked how I am, I can't ever quite comprehend what it is that I'm feeling. Am I happy? No, I can't be, I reason. Happiness must feel like a surge of power going through every vein of the body. That's how I imagine it anyway and if I don't experience that, I must not be happy. Throughout high school, adults kept on saying shit like how it's the time for self exploration, that it's the time for us to figure out who we are... How can I possibly have an inkling of who I am if I can't even differentiate my own emotions? How can a person be so out of tune with themselves? I don't really know.

Asking myself how I'm feeling is bad enough but then there's the issue of having to identify the emotions of others. That's the hardest fucking task in the world. Now that I think about it, my inability to understand emotions probably contributes to my failed relationships. Girlfriends frequently had mood swings, all of which would go over my head, causing them to get pissed off at me for 'not paying enough attention to them. They never understood that I couldn't pay attention to them because I was too busy trying to understand what was wrong with me. I'm still trying.

Just thinking about those times leads me to release a trapped sigh heavily and it feels as though I hadn't taken a breath in a very long time. At that moment, a knock comes from behind the door and then the creaking of door hinges disrupt the atmosphere I've created for myself. Yoongi steps in
cautiously, as though he's unsure of what to say, like I'm someone he's scared of. A new song starts playing and he glances at my phone, nodding at it.

"That's a nice song," he acknowledges with approval. In any other circumstance, I would be annoyed by his infringing upon my peace and quiet but I can't bring myself to be upset. Maybe because it's his house. "Who's it by?"

I don't break my eye contact with the plain white ceiling as I reply, "The Japanese House. Sugar Pill."

"I'm sorry?" Yoongi asks me and his confusion amuses me. Lifting my head, I peek over at the man with a small smirk.

"The name of the song," I say, pointing at my phone which lay carelessly on the bed, "is Sugar Pill." He nods again then his gaze lands on my untouched luggage that sits by the wall next to the bed. Running my fingers through my bangs (it's a habit), I heave my body to sit up properly, arms resting on my knees. "I'll unpack tonight."

"Oh, that's no problem. What've you been doing this entire time? Sleeping?" He cocks his head to the side as I subtly gesture that I hadn't slept.

"I've been thinking."

"About what, may I ask?"

"You may..." My throat feels dry again. "But I won't answer you." To my surprise, Yoongi chuckles after hearing my blunt reply. That's new.

"Fair enough. Well, you haven't had anything to eat since you've gotten here. Don't you want dinner?" He crosses his arms and waits while I contemplate the offer.

"Not particularly. Not at the moment, anyway" is my simple reply.

Yoongi's eyes wander the room and the silence is filled with Troye Sivan's voice as Talk Me Down begins. The older man makes eye contact with me—his eyes are a really dark brown—and clears his throat. "You know, Taehyung," he speaks up and takes a few footsteps closer to me, "you can't spend all summer cooped up in here. You're actually going to do things, fun things."

"Like what?" My curiosity gets the best of me and Yoongi's eyebrows raise in what I interpret as mild excitement.

"I already told you about the lake but we can go places! There's a place that has horseback riding nearby, if you're interested in that, umm... well, you can walk through the vineyard with me in the evenings. It's beautiful at that time, just as the sun sets, the plants are covered in this golden glow and it's really soothing. But if you're not interested in all that, being a teen and all, I understand." He adds that last sentence quickly and it confirms my suspicion that Yoongi isn't completely at ease while interacting with me. I can't say I blame him. It must be intimidating to converse with someone ten years younger than him. I mean, I had trouble stringing a sentence together but I think that's for some other undiscovered reason.

"It's no problem," I attempt to make him feel less discomfort, "that all sounds nice."

"I just want you to have a good time here, seeing as it's your last summer before college and all." Fuck, why'd he have to go and mention college? I didn't want to hear that word for a while yet it appears again in front of me, taunting my very existence. He sees my expression hardening and
realizes that he's said something wrong. "I'm sorry. Did I upset you?"

"I..." The words keep getting caught in my throat and it frustrates me. "I don't like talking about college," I finish the sentence in a hushed tone and avert my gaze to the device that was still playing music. Grabbing it, I press pause then toss it aside without a second glance. "It stresses me out."

"I'm sorry," Yoongi apologizes again and damn, the anxiety in his tone is almost too much to bear. Why's he so fucking polite? How do I deal with the formalities with him?

"You don't need to be. You didn't know," I say. When his expression brightens up again, I will admit that a sense of pleasure takes over me just by seeing the look on his face. "I'll eat but is it alright if I shower first?"

"Oh, yeah!" He responds happily and points at a door inside the room. "That's the bathroom so you'll have your privacy."

"Mm, thank you."

"Do you want to call me Yoongi hyung?" The man asks me suddenly and I'm taken aback because we only met hours ago yet he wants to be on closer terms. I can't tell if I find it endearing or foolish. All my cynicism aside... I kinda want to call him hyung, so I nod approvingly. "Thanks, Yoongi hyung." Unknowingly, a smile creeps up on me and I give in, liking how the name sounds even though I said it in a whisper.

The dark haired man smiles back invitingly. "Not a problem, Taehyung. I'll be in the kitchen making dinner so join us when you're done."

"Us?" I ask, puzzled. Who could be joining us on such short notice? Unless...

"Sunhee, she's eating with us. She normally eats with me whenever she's here," Yoongi elaborates and automatically, my shoulders slump down just an inch which he doesn't notice. "We'll be downstairs, see you in a bit." With soft footsteps, he leaves the room and closes the door.

I glance around the room and actually take it in for the first time because even though I've been in it for five hours, I haven't actually seen what the room has inside. The bed itself is raised slightly, covered with a furry brown blanket and across from it, in a corner, sits a wicker chair. Placed next to it is a small basket filled with magazines and books, which I appreciated because there are times when music isn't enough and I have to read in order to escape. I didn't bring any books with me though so I'm pleased that Yoongi was courteous enough to keep some in the room. All in all, the room is rather nice with its comfortable modern design that contrasted with the impression I first had of a vintage interior.

With a hesitant groan, I get off the bed and start heading to the bathroom when my phone vibrates suddenly. Though I want to ignore it, my hands naturally gravitate towards the object to pick it up. Namjoon's face is displayed on the screen. Swiping to answer, I bring the phone to my ear and mumble out a 'hey'.

"Tae? What's up, how is it so far?" Action music plays in the background on Namjoon's end and I hear what I suspect to be the sounds of him blowing stuff up. The image makes me chuckle, just a little bit. Laying back on the bed, I take a moment before replying.

"It's alright," I say and hold a hand out to inspect my fingernails for no particular reason. Whenever I'm on a phone call, things around me become so much more fascinating and I find myself staring at them when technically, I should be listening to the other person on the phone. "I've only been here
for half a day, Joonie."

"I know but like what's the impression? Is the dude nice? Is there stuff to-OH I JUST DESTROYED THAT MOTHERFUCKER!" Namjoon yells into my ear obnoxiously and I immediately move the phone away an inch.

"Fucking hell Joonie, you're screaming in my ear," I complain, rubbing my temples.

"Sorry, I got excited. Continue." He didn't sound all that sorry but then again, I didn't need him to.

Exhaling deeply, as though I have a lot on my chest, I begin speaking, "It's a nice place, scenic and all that. The room I've been given is nice too, I don't think privacy will be a problem here. They seem to know how to give someone their space."

"They?"

"The guy who lives here, Yoongi, has a girlfriend and judging by what I've seen and heard so far, she's over here a lot."

"Is she hot?"

"Incredibly," I reply honestly and Namjoon lets out a low whistle.

"That's pretty lucky then, isn't it?"

I roll onto my front and lay my head on my arms. "Why would it be lucky?"

"You're away from your parents in a house with a hot chick, sounds damn good to me," Namjoon explains. The superficiality of his logic makes me roll my eyes.

"You asshole, did you miss the part where I mentioned that she's his girlfriend? Besides, I don't feel attracted to her," I retort with the intention of making my best friend realize how stupid he is.

"If she's incredibly hot, why aren't you attracted to her?"

"Attraction isn't that simple, Namjoon. It takes more than a nice body and a pretty face, there's gotta be some substance there. I learned that the hard way."

"Yeah, a nice body and pretty face." His mocking laugh infuriates me and I grit my teeth. Namjoon always knows how to get under my skin, even if he's trying to be playful.

"What a superficial dick."

"Whoa, easy there with that language," Namjoon responds and pretends to sniffle, "I have feelings you know. And my dick is not superficial, I'm taking that personally."

His cheesy acting brings a smirk to my face and I laugh. "Like hell you do. But anyway, you're not in any position to talk about hot women, you're gay."

"Your point?"

"You can't tell me that all it takes is to be hot for an attraction to occur! Look at your relationship!"

"Are you saying my Hoseok isn't hot? Because if you are, square up and I'm gonna blast you out of this dimension the same way I did with player number three," Namjoon shoots back aggressively and I hear another explosion in the background. It's making me miss him... I want to be there, playing
videogames with that idiot.

"Hoseok is hot, don't worry," I attempt to tame him but that was a mistake.

"I see, so now you're hitting on my boyfriend," my friend retaliates, "you're treading on dangerous territory here, Tae."

"Oh shut up!" Unintentionally, my amusement turns into something else and I laugh harder than I have all day. "I'm not hitting on him!" My laughs get louder but it feels really nice, making my body lighter. "I swear, you're absolutely insane. How you're gonna manage such a big company is beyond me."

"Just you watch, I'll blow your fucking mind."

"Mmm, no thanks, go blow Hoseok's mind instead," I say, stifling more laughter.

"Taehyung, that's just foul."

"Again, you're in no position to talk."

"I know," Namjoon admits defeat and lets out a laugh as well. "Alright, so tell me about the family friend of yours." The amusement disappears, leaving me to ponder how exactly I ought to describe Yoongi.

"Umm..." I think hard but I'm not quite sure what words capture his essence. "He's a nice guy-"

"For Christ's sake, there's gotta be more words in your vocabulary other than nice. Put some more effort into it," Namjoon demands and suddenly, it all seems burdensome.

"Alright, alright." Closing my eyes, I try to picture the way Yoongi looked when he came into my room. "He's not the tallest, has jet black hair and is really pale."

"Like a vampire?"

"Sure, let's go with that except I'd say he's better looking than a vampire. He's got this deep, raspy voice that's kinda pleasing to listen to. Like, he's someone I would actually want to sit down and have a conversation with."

"You'll get that chance this summer then," offers Namjoon helpfully but I sigh, remembering the disaster from earlier where I couldn't form proper sentences.

"Maybe but I got really shy when we met this morning so I stammered a lot," I say and bury my face in the bedsheets in frustration.

"Aww, is little Taetae feeling shy?" Namjoon teases me and instantly my cheeks heat up. I don't like being teased at all, it creates this vulnerability that I'm not exactly the biggest fan of.

"I'm not shy, don't do that!" I snap at him. "You know how I get around new people..."

"You don't say anything around new people, Tae."

"I know but I had to say something to him right and I don't know why but I got tongue-tied." I run my fingers through my hair and grip the roots in annoyance at my own incompetence. "No doubt he thinks I'm an idiot, it was embarrassing."

"You're not an idiot, you just got timid. You do that around new people, it's endearing. The two of
you will get along soon enough," Namjoon comfortably reassures me. Maybe he's an idiot but I'm glad to have him in my life. Otherwise where would I be? Probably out of the shower by now, actually.

"Hey, I gotta go," I say, realizing that twenty minutes have passed since Yoongi called me down to dinner. "Need to shower."

"Alright, text me later then but not later tonight. Hoseok and I are going on a date." I can practically hear his smile, it's that obvious. Namjoon talking about his boyfriend might be one of my favorite things if I had to make a list. I'm only guessing though.

"Have fun with him."

"Don't need to tell me twice. Bye Tae!"

"Bye." I hang up and head to shower without thinking twice because the last thing I need for today is to have Yoongi think I'm some untimely loser who can't speak. I really don't.

~*~

By the time I come out of the shower, a half hour had passed since Yoongi called me down. I rush over to my suitcase and zip it open, grabbing the first pair of sweatpants and a royal blue tee shirt to change into. Droplets of water fly off my hair as I run around my room trying to get things done. After my phone is put on charge, I leave the room, bounding down the stairs in hopes that I didn't take too long.

The smell of sizzling pork covered the kitchen and my stomach grumbled. I haven't eaten anything since breakfast and that was hours ago. Sunhee's in the kitchen, leaning against one of the counters as Yoongi cooks. I clear my throat so that he could know I arrived.

"Ah Taehyung, right?" Sunhee asks me, pointing a finger curiously.

"Mmm." I nod in reply.

She gestures to a seat at the dinner table with a large smile, too large to be real. "You can go and take a seat! Dinner's almost ready."

"Actually, I was wondering... if I could help with something, maybe?" I nervously ask and stuff my trembling hands into the pockets of my sweats so that neither of them could sense my awkwardness. Yoongi turns around after hearing my question and grins. His, unlike Sunhee's, is welcoming and... comfortable.

"There's no need, Taehyung. You can just go have a seat," he says contently and now I feel obligated to go sit down because Yoongi said to. Silently, I obey and take a seat at the already prepped dinner table. Having nothing better to do, I observe Yoongi and Sunhee's interactions.

So many things about Yoongi's girlfriend strikes me as alluring, including the way she stands. Resting one elbow on the counter, hip jutted out to the side, hair flipped almost carelessly to the side but every wavy strand is in its place, one leg bent slightly so that she could lean comfortably. Yoongi sprinkles some sesame oil on the meat and then spears a piece with a fork, holding it out for Sunhee to taste. She grins at him, raising a perfect eyebrow as she reaches to take the fork but then the dark haired man pulls away.

"Say ahh," he requests and Sunhee rolls her eyes, a little pout forming on her plump lips, as though she's above such sappy acts of affection but does as he asks nevertheless. Yoongi feeds her the meat
then watches her eat it slowly, his face breaking out into a wide smile as she nods in approval.

"Delicious," Sunhee confirms. "But you know what's more delicious?" Her tone becomes sultry and I watch her get closer to Yoongi. She kisses him deeply, which bothers me because he really should be cooking the pork and I don't exactly want a charred dinner. Unfortunately, Yoongi grabs her by the waist and pulls her closer, soon they're making out and I don't know where to look. *The trees outside are nice, I notice as I turn to the window to distract myself, they're very green and earthly. The color is pretty this time of year, they must have lots of chloroplasts. Very tall too. Why I'm distracting myself by looking at trees is a mystery to me.*

"What's more delicious?" I hear Yoongi say in a husky voice against her lips and I praise the heavens above that nobody can see the grimace on my face. *Please don't let the meat burn, please, please, please,* I silently pray.

"You," Sunhee cleverly remarks and kisses the tip of her boyfriend's nose. They giggle together, making my stomach squirm in discomfort. I really hope this isn't what the whole summer will be like, it's unsettling. I can handle mild PDA, being around Namjoon and Hoseok has made me immune to all that but Yoongi and Sunhee give me the strong urge to gag. Maybe they're just too perfect looking or something. Yeah, maybe that's it. But if they are usually like this... then I'm going to get very well acquainted with the trees around here this summer.

"Oh shit, the meat's gonna burn!" Yoongi exclaims in the background, dashing back over to the stove. At least my prayers have been answered.
Dinner is an awkward affair, to say the least. I keep quiet for the most part and focus on eating the food, which I don't mind all that much. The barbequed pork is delicious and I find myself enjoying the bowl of steamed vegetables that Yoongi had offered me. It isn't a dish I normally bother looking at—frankly, mom gave up in the war of me against vegetables, I hate them that much — but I accepted it out of politeness and thankfully, received a pleasant surprise. This is the first time I've been so conscious of every move that I've made in front of someone and I don't know what to make of it. Yoongi seems to like me so far and that feels more important than I anticipated. A part of me cares deeply about making a good impression in front of the dark haired man.

They chat the whole time, Yoongi and Sunhee. I've decided that I'm going to stick to calling her Sunhee because using Sunny makes me cringe. Though I don't participate in their conversations, I still learn a bit about his girlfriend. Like the fact that she's a model (surprise, surprise) and that she's from a wealthy family. I conclude this when she starts telling Yoongi about how her "daddy" wanted to have him over for dinner again and that her family was planning some sort of event on a yacht. The word "daddy" itself makes me gag and to hear a grown woman say it makes things so much more embarrassing, especially with her boyfriend right in front of her. For fuck's sake, I don't even have it in me to think of lavish things like yachts, yet here Sunhee is, chirping away as though every person should be used to such frivolities. I know my parents are rich but that didn't mean they spent their money without care, they were actually pretty cautious of where their money went. And it makes sense. If I had the fortune of being rich and had to work hard for it, I'd like to know where my labor was going. I want her to stop talking but of course, none of that translates into my actions as I silently continue eating.

"I don't know if I'll have time to have dinner with your parents," Yoongi says before daintily taking a bite of rice and Sunhee pouts insufferably.

"But," she protests, "you haven't seen my parents in months and they love you! Please, Yoongi?" Batting her eyelashes, she leans on the table and I curse internally because fuck it, she's good. A woman who knows exactly what she's doing along with knowing that she's succeeding. It's dangerous. I can hear the dark haired man practically give in with the heavy sigh he emits. "Plus we'll get a quite a bit of privacy there," continues Sunhee, tactfully placing a hand on his bare arm. Her fingers linger, and it appears as though she leaves goosebumps on his smooth skin. She's powerful.
Yoongi faces her and they're eye to eye. He's gonna give in, I feel it. "When's this dinner thing?" He inquires.

"In six weeks," Sunhee sweetly replies, and it's almost sickening. If I had to visualize what her voice looks like, I'd imagine honey slowly dripping off a spoon. Except while honey is delicious, her tone strikes me as poisonous. My own thoughts cause me to chuckle slightly because my clear dislike of the woman is amusing. She hasn't even done anything to me yet I'm thinking all these terrible things about her. I need to stop, this isn't okay. I don't know why I'm being so hateful towards the poor girl.

"Six weeks?!" Yoongi exclaims, catching us all off guard. "Why are you letting me know this early?"

"So you don't make plans to get business done with Jimin or just other plans in general. My parents really care about this, and I want it in your calendar now," Sunhee answers simply. "You're charming, Yoongi, it only makes sense that they want to see you again. We've been dating for a while now and you honestly haven't given them enough time. What if we get married someday?" *Shit, she went there,* I think while listening. "They're going to want to pay for the wedding and stuff but how can they do something like that if they barely know the man I'm going to marry?"

"You... you'd want to marry me?" Yoongi asks, puzzled. Wait, should I even be here for such a conversation?

"I mean, I'm only being hypothetical here but if it were to happen, what would you do?" Sunhee shrugs. They're talking about marriage, it doesn't feel appropriate for me to be here... I can't even go back to staring at the trees because the sun's already set and it's pitch black outside.

"We haven't even discussed marriage all that much..." He's mumbling and it shouldn't amaze me as much as it does. She's rendered him nearly speechless. That's impressive.

"Again, I'm only giving out an example. Point is, I really want you there." Gross, she sounds slightly whiny now; it's unbecoming of someone so flawless looking.

I snap out of my blurred state of mind once more after hearing Yoongi clear his throat. "Alright babe," he says, "I'll go." Immediately, Sunhee's face becomes radiant as she beams at him, showing off her perfect teeth. "But, there's a condition," he adds slowly.

"Yes! Anything, name it!" Why does she sound so breathless? Is that the effect that Yoongi has on her? Her eyes are twinkling, which is bizarre to me because I've never seen affection on such a level before. Seeing as my own folks have been married for more than twenty years, that twinkle isn't quite as strong as it used to be. They're just going through the motions now.

Yoongi nods in my direction and I freeze in the middle of chewing. "He comes with us," the man negotiates. The next sound I hear is that of my spoon clattering as it slips out of my fingers and onto the plate. A damned blush creeps onto my cheeks; my entire body is heating up. I don't like being the center of attention and they're both looking at me. *Shit, this is so uncomfortable, please, please look away. Please,* my mind begs them but to say my pleas fall upon deaf ears would be incorrect. After all, my pleas are silent. Too cowardly to voice them, I sit there with wide eyes.

"Him?" Sunhee asks incredulously and her waxed brows furrow in confusion.

"M-m-me?" I repeat weakly, lifting a finger to point to myself, as though there wasn't enough clarification that I am, in fact, the person in question. Yoongi just nods, acting like the matter has been finalized.
"It'd be unfair for him to sit here and twiddle his thumbs alone," he explains, "it's his summer too. And I'm not going to be inconsiderate about that. Taehyung has no friends here anyway plus it might be interesting for him to see a yacht or be on one." Yoongi makes direct eye contact with me and my body temperature increases even more. Such deep, brown eyes...

"What do you say?" Damn it, the question's accompanied by one of those smiles... How can anyone say no to a smile like that? It's too friendly, too inviting, and I'm not immune to his charisma yet.

"Yes... What do you say, Taehyung?" questions Sunhee. I may be mistaken but there's a subtle threatening tone to her voice that I don't like. It's possible that it's just my perception. I've been wrong before.

"I d-d-dunno," I stutter helplessly. It's so humiliating, being this useless with words. I yearn to be eloquent, but it's hard. He's making me tongue-tied again. "You d-don't need to t-t-take me into consideration..."

"Of course I do, you're a guest! I want you to have a good time," says Yoongi warmly. Ugh, I wish he could take a hint that I really don't want to go. Sadly, I don't have it in me to tell him that.

"Umm..." After several seconds of awkward shifting in my seat and fingernail picking, I nod my head a little in defeat. "Alright," I mumble, "I'll go...but!" I glance at the both of them. "Only if you're one hundred percent sure that I'm welcome. The last thing I want to do is intrude," I finish strongly.

"I wouldn't worry about that." Yoongi chuckles as he takes a sip of his Pinot Noir. The garnet color of the liquid stains his lips, making them darker, and I draw my attention away so that he doesn't notice me staring or something. "You're going to be welcome. Now Sunhee, you're pleased?"

She takes a moment to answer and smiles widely once more. "Yes, I am."

"Good." And that's the end of the 'dinner with daddy' conversation. I don't know how I feel about going because on one hand, it sounds nice to be on a yacht. Really nice, actually. Namjoon would be so jealous since his dad never takes him on outings like this. Though he doesn't seem to care. Despite his lack of luxurious adventures, Namjoon's gotten pretty good at sneaking out to spend nights out with Hoseok doing god knows what. They stay out till dawn and then go back home; their parents never notice mainly because they're never home. If the couple does well in school and stay on the right path, nothing else really matters. It's worth mentioning now that their relationship's unknown to everyone except me. Sometimes their wild nights out brought an inebriated Joon over to my doorstep, hair frazzled and clothes wrinkled. Actually, I'd wake up to get ready for school and find him passed out on my floor, snoring away like a fucking chainsaw. Nose music, as he calls it. He's so close with me that the staff always lets him in, even at the ungodliest of hours. I wonder if they're together right now... They're probably having a blast.

Anyway, while the yacht sounds like it could be exciting, my anxiety keeps poking at me to say no. Anxiety fucking sucks. I've robbed myself of so many opportunities to have fun just because I never turned a blind eye to the cursed worrying nature of mine. It takes over me sometimes. I can't hold concentration on something for a long time and the stupid brain bounces from one concern to another, driving me up a wall. Anything could happen on the yacht. Several what if questions float around such as what if I embarrass Yoongi in front of Sunhee's parents? What if I do the same for my parents? What if I somehow manage to be uncoordinated enough to fall off the yacht? What if I get seasick? Is all that worth it just to have a little fun?

At one point, the vineyard owner looks directly at me while I was in the middle of taking another mouthful of the savory food. "Taehyung, what do you like to do?" Yoongi questions, resting his
elbow on the table and placing a hand on his chin. He seems particularly interested in finding out more about me and I'm not sure whether his curiosity makes me feel flattered or uncomfortable.

Slowly, I finish up the food and reach for the glass of water in front of me, praying that I don't knock it down. After taking a prolonged drink, my eyes meet the older man's, who hasn't showed any intention of moving on to a different topic. Sunhee's gaze is also on me but I pay no attention to her. "Well," I quietly say, "video games are pretty good." Video games are pretty good? My mind repeats mockingly. You couldn't have said one cultured thing like 'oh, I like music or art' but you bring up video games? Fuck you. My mind is so kind to me. To my surprise, Yoongi grins as though he's amused by my response and he opens his mouth to speak. Unfortunately, Sunhee's shrill laughter interrupts him which leads to my gaze falling upon her. It rings in my ears, loud and clear; a thing of nightmares.

"Video games," she says, snickering, "you're still a child, aren't you?" Sunhee delicately grasps her wine glass and sips, eyes never once leaving me. Never mind not knowing why I disliked her so much, I understand now. Her remark causes my self consciousness to kick in; the body reacts accordingly with my shoulders dropping and my figure hunching over as I stare at my food once more, wishing I never glanced up to begin with.

I hear Yoongi shift slightly and lean over on the table more. "What's wrong with video games?" He asks the woman. "I used to play a lot growing up. Wish I still could, they're a good way to pass time." I peek up to see Sunhee's reaction and it's worth it to see the disbelieving expression on her pretty, plastic face.

"Well yeah, but you played them at his age." She raises her wine glass to gesture in my direction. "You're a grown man now." Great, now she's implying that I'm an immature little kid who can't do shit.

"But a child at heart," replies Yoongi and I hold back the mocking laughter that builds up inside me momentarily. "Besides, Taehyung's a grown up. He's eighteen so doesn't matter what he does, he's legally an adult." Suddenly, the look on Sunhee's face, the one of superiority, changes as she glances over yet again at me. There's something different in her eyes, something beyond my abilities to detect and comprehend.

"You're eighteen?" Assuming that the question's meant for me to answer, I nod a little bit, still facing my plate. "Interesting..." She sips her mulberry colored wine again and Yoongi clears his throat.

"So you like video games." Damn it, why is he re-routing the conversation? Clearly I can't say anything without that chick there, ready to ridicule me. I want to leave, the food is cold and there's no longer an appetite for it. "Glad that's been established but there must be more things that you like to do," he adds, prompting me to tack on more to my original answer. I don't like this.

I pick at my food, shifting some rice over here and there, then shrug indifferently. "Oh, come on," he says and it's obvious that he's trying to be friendly but I can't answer his question. I don't want to answer his question. I just want to leave. "Taehyung?" The anger bubbles up inside me, inexplicable and merciless.

Taking a deep breath, I set my chopsticks down to look at him for the third or fourth time tonight. This time, the depth of his eyes don't distract me. "I like being alone, I like not talking to people, I like darkness and being surrounded by my own thoughts which are usually messy and hard to decipher. I like being with Namjoon, but he's not here right now and I'd be so damn fortunate if he was. To be honest, he's probably off making out with Hoseok somewhere and if only I could be so lucky to do the same with someone else, just run away from this stupid little reality. Sadly, I can't, I'm stuck here and I don't like it. Matter of fact, why don't I go ahead and list off the things I don't like?
You'll probably be better off knowing how to *not* tick me off."

This is out of my control now.

Holding up a hand, I begin counting. "I don't like socializing, I don't like questions and I *certainly* don't like being patronized when I do bother to fucking answer. I understand that I seem like a child just because I like video games, but I'm so sorry that it's disappointing. Sorry I didn't say a museum or something remotely intelligent." My eyes lock on Sunhee, who gapes stupidly. It feels satisfying to see her shocked like this. "Now that we got the useless exchange of information out of the way, I'd like to go to my room. If you'll excuse me," I rattle off and stand up. It all appears to be rather dramatic, I realize while walking out of the room without a second glance.

"He claims I'm being patronizing but what am I supposed to do after an immature display like that?" Sunhee says in the background. "Though he doesn't look as young as eighteen, he behaves like one..." With my newly formed fists, I continue walking away, ignoring the burning sensation to turn around and tell her off. She's not worth that effort.

The strong sense of victory dials down as my feet trudges up the stairs and I grow weary with each step. I shouldn't have been so rude... Yoongi's been kind to me this entire, well, day, but that's besides the point. He could have easily said no and my parents would have had to find different arrangements. And I just repaid his kindness by blowing up and making a fool of myself in front of him and his girlfriend. Despite my immediate disliking of her, regret settles down in the pit of my stomach and I know that I'll have to apologize when the morning comes.

With my fingers curling around the door handle, I stop to debate whether I ought to go apologize now. "No," I whisper to myself and open the door, wincing as the hinges creak obnoxiously. *But you fucked up*, my conscience counters. "Maybe... but I can't go back now."

Turning off all the lights in the room, I collapse on the bed with an exhausted sigh. Hundreds of scenarios race through my head of the possible conversations Yoongi and Sunhee are having as I lay here. "Stop thinking, Tae..." I tell myself sadly. Namjoon would know how to calm me down, he always does. I can't help wanting to call him again. However, it'd only disturb him... I don't want to bother the one person who doesn't consider it a pain to care about me. Besides mom, I mean. I can't call either of them. Coming to the acceptance of this fact, I curl up and hug a pillow. Forcing my eyes shut, I prepare for a sleepless night, the first of many.

I hope he'll forgive me.
What if, what if we lost our minds?

As I check my clock for the tenth time in the past hour, I acknowledge one thing: new places and guilty consciences mix terribly together. Half of me wants to rush over to Yoongi and apologize, while the other half feels too scared to move. The urge to move but feeling frozen. If I had to sum up my first night here, that sentence would be the way to go.

Darkness envelopes the room; one might question why I don't turn a light on and read one of the many books from the basket. Why am I just staying still in a pitch black room, unwilling to make life easier on myself? The thing is, I can't focus on anything right now, so trying to read a book would be torturous. It would consist of me mindlessly flipping through pages and staring at one sentence for prolonged periods of time. Of course, that doesn't stop my mental state from torturing itself anyway. It's as though all the things I've done wrong in my life held a meeting in my brain and made the unanimous decision that they would flood me with terrible feelings. I don't like being a shitty person.

Dad's words come back and circle around me several times, specifically about wanting me to think about my future and where I want to go or who I want to be. Sometimes, I wish I could ask him if it was that easy for him, to know right off the bat who he wanted to be. Because to me, that's such a complicated task. Being eighteen does mean I'm a legal adult but that doesn't mean that mentally, I'm ready to be one. Hell, I don't even know what I want for breakfast the next morning and I still need to check my shoe size when I'm out because I can't remember. It brings a new non-romantic meaning to the saying 'age is just a number.' It truly is just a number. The law recognizes my existence as that of a grown up yet grown ups know what they want, they have a grip on life. I'm the equivalent of a child set loose in a candy store with no clue what any of the candies taste like and all the child sees are colors everywhere. Except it's a lot darker in my circumstance. I don't get to pick candies, I pick a future. The life I want to live now and twenty years down the road. The life that will not only bring me success, but pride to my already known family.

Sometimes I worry that nights like these—the ones I spend anxiously mulling over things of the past or the future—will only take years off my entire life span. I then get the desire to appreciate the present but the sad thing is, it's hard to be happy with what I have now. And that sounds horrible, considering how fortunate I am to have the privileges that I do. It's not like I never tried to be appreciative, though. On many occasions have I attempted to list out all the things that make me pleased or just the slightest bit satisfied, and every damn time... I can only list one. And that's Kim Namjoon. It sounds so pathetic, the whole being so dependent on one friend, but where else can I go? Mom and dad? Fuck no, they'd only spout out what most parents are known for. Actually, I'm
pretty sure they'd come out with folders filled with different life plans that are categorized alphabetically or something. Namjoon accepts my messy state and I think that's the only reason I was able to let my guard down around him to begin with. He looks at me and doesn't see a boy of two successful parents, or a boy who hates people. Namjoon looks at me... and he sees the boy who's scared. The one who wants to dream big and wants a happily ever after, but is just too fucking cowardly to take the first step to get there.

It would be another ballgame if I had love, which I don't. I'm far from love and I don't think I've ever been remotely close to finding it. There were times throughout high school when I really thought I felt it, but those moments proved to be horrible figments of my imagination. Because in order for me to love, I need to receive it. And nobody properly did that with me. Nobody—minus Joon—took the time to strip me down and see me for what I actually am. They saw a handsome face, a nice smile, a soothing voice, a way to make friends jealous, a way to go up the social ladder and that's what I'd reduced to. A simple step on a ladder.

Tired of being awake for so long, I peek at the clock which reads 4:23 AM. It feels like I'm summoning every ounce of strength in my body as I push myself upwards and swing my legs over the bed. I contemplate what to do at this hour and strangely enough, an impulse compels me to stand up. It'd be nice to walk outside for a little bit... maybe the fresh air will help me get rid of the venomous mentality that's been plaguing me over the course of a seemingly endless night.

Carefully opening the door, my shadow-less figure slips out and I tiptoe down the stairs, almost zombie-like. I'm kind of scared that the stairs will squeak as I go down; hopefully, Yoongi is a deep sleeper. As I navigate my way through the house to find the front door, my realistic side decides that now's a good time to pitch in, making me ask whether it's wise to go out before the sunrise in a place I don't even know. Despite the justified rationalization, I shake my head as if I'm responding to someone in front of me. A little impulse is needed now and then to break out of the scarily cyclical routine that life has presented me with.

It's funny, I never wanted a routine life nor did I expect to have one. Life should be like those perfect ones portrayed in storybooks, one where I'm the fearless, handsome hero who doesn't have self esteem issues and strides with confidence, not to mention, gets the girl. I should have thrilling adventures every day. A life where I don't have time to sit down and think about what I'm doing with it. Sounds like a dream.

Deeply immersed in the thoughts of a fairy tale life, I don't notice that I've left the house until a subtle, warm breeze races through the vineyard, pushing every strand of my hair back and making my clothes ripple. It's beautiful outside... I half wish the night could have been spent out here. At least the glittering stars would have kept me company. They're more welcoming than people are, to be honest. As I walk over to the vast grass field surrounding the house, a thought occurs to me and quickly, I take my shoes off to place them to the side. With the first step I take, a small smile tugs at the lips as the cool grass tickles the bottom of my feet. The sensation of walking barefoot in grass causes waves of relief to wash over my body, and I can't help but feel cleansed somehow. Nature works wonders when there's nowhere else to go.

I make my way further into the field, then suddenly come to a stop. Going too far could put me into trouble. Instead, I sit down and cross my legs, emitting an inaudible sigh as my hand runs over the blades of grass. It's so quiet out here, minus the soothing whispers of the trees as they sway, completely under the breeze's power. Glancing up, it becomes prominent that the wispy clouds are starting to fade away. I suspect that the sun will rise soon.

If someone was to see the current sight, I wonder what they'd think. Would they find me strange for sitting outside in the twilight before the sunrise? Or maybe they'd think that I'm a troubled teen, one
of those problematic, overly angsty ones. The idea makes me laugh; being overly angsty does describe me to some degree, but trepidation appeals to me more. A feeling of fear... That accurately explains the twisted stirring that dominates my heart when I'm alone. Trepidation and abhorrence since most of my solitude is spent hating myself. The inability to identify nearly anything about myself causes such a strong fear, because I can't imagine how I can go anywhere in life with so little knowledge of my own being.

Out of nowhere, a high pitched chirp sounds as the song bird rises from its slumber and catches my attention. What had been a never-ending blanket of Egyptian blue above me is soon replaced by other colors, as light dances across the sky, painting it in the most carefree way. In its trail remains beautiful streaks of light pink; layers of soft oranges and glaring yellows appear on top. How can something be so effortlessly flawless? Maybe because it's not man-made. Most natural creations strike me as flawless, whereas any man-made object presents itself, chock full of imperfections. As a creation of nature itself, I wonder if I ever stood the chance to be flawless. It's fascinating how people are also natural creations yet they're probably the most blemished. Possibly due to our mentalities which are a product of the society we've built around us. We kill, we argue, we cry, we destroy, we judge, we hurt. Even animals are better than us. They take only what they need; no more, no less. They don't hurt others or fight, they live simply, but I can guarantee that they live with more fulfillment than most people in the world.

Leaning back, I lay down on the grass and watch the sun come up slowly, continuing to set the sky aglow with brilliant colors. It puts my heart at rest, the sunrise. A part of me wants to take a picture of it and my hand reaches into my pocket to grab the device, but of course it's not there. I left it on the bed. In a way, it's better that I don't have it. I'm forced to enjoy the incredible sight with just my eyes... and that's okay. The chirps of nearby birds multiply and soon they're having all sorts of conversations, none of which I can understand. I still feel like less of an outsider with the birds. The variety of calls intrigue me, how one's a sharp trill while another is a bubbly warble or a pleasant chirrup.

Though it only feels like I've been outside for a few minutes, I figure that it's best to start getting back to the house. Can't have Yoongi wake up and potentially freak out over the "adult" he's been put in charge of. With much hesitation, I stand up and tread through the field, spotting my shoes after a handful of seconds. Sticking them back on, my feet drag as I try to encourage myself that once I'm in the house, all I need to do is apologize. However, my stomach sinks to contradict my weak attempts at a pep talk and now, all I want to do is hurl. But, I don't particularly like throwing up so I take deep breaths and keep the sun rise in mind. "It's going to be alright," I faintly whisper.

Once I enter the house, it becomes clear that nobody's awake yet. Makes sense though, because when my gaze falls on the closest clock, I learn that it's only 6:25 AM. I've been outside for nearly two hours, but it felt so brief. Time's moving faster these days, it's mildly worrying. With the same level of caution that I had while leaving, I go back to my room and enter the bathroom to wash off any grass that may have stuck to the soles. But before I could leave, my reflection in the mirror catches my attention. I would be such a nicer looking person if I smiled more often. Spreading my lips wide, I try to smile and immediately get rid of it. It looks silly, all box shaped and weird. Never mind that previous notion. It was clearly stupid of me to think that I could look nice in any way.

I then brush my teeth, deciding that since I'm up, I might as well start getting ready for the day. But that doesn't involve much. The main task is to unpack—in my moment of burning anger last night, I had forgotten to even open the suitcase again. However, as tedious as it is, I can't avoid it forever (it would be nice if that was an option). I mean, I suppose I could spend the summer without unpacking, but the laziness would probably bite me in the ass one way or another.

Begrudgingly, I open the luggage and stare down at all the clothes piled together. Damn, this'll be
annoying. Though there could be music in the background, I ultimately choose the quiet over it. Just because I don't want my mind clouded with song lyrics that'll be stuck there all day. I begin taking clothes over to the dresser and arrange them neatly, pants in one drawer, shirts in another. Items that easily wrinkle are placed on hangers, then placed in the closet (color coded, thankfully). Other toiletries are put in the bathroom and my laptop goes on the top of the dresser. To my surprise, it all takes less time than I had originally anticipated, ending after a remarkably fast-paced two hours. While I put the finishing touches and zip up the suitcase, my stomach grumbles, reminding me that I'm in desperate need of food.

So I head down to the kitchen in hopes of finding something to eat. However, since it's not my own home, a certain shyness kicks in and I feel like it'd be rude if I started rummaging through Yoongi's pantry. With this logic, I end up sitting quietly on the couch, waiting for the dark haired man to come down so that my stomach could stop bugging me. Again, I hate being so dependent on people.

Eventually, footsteps are heard as the floorboards on the stairs squeak slightly and I look up, far more excited than I should be. Sadly, I'm greeted with disappointment. Sunhee walks down, clad in an giant gray tee shirt that stops at her upper thighs, revealing nothing but long, toned legs. She yawns and even that simple action epitomizes grace; I can't fathom how someone could be this enchanting. It sounds like I'm fawning over her, but I'm only stating a fact. By anybody's standards, Sunhee's a beauty. That aside, I certainly wasn't expecting to see her here... I thought she'd left.

"Good morning, Taehyung," she says and the shock must be evident on my face because she follows her greeting with a little laugh. "You look surprised."

"Umm... Just, just a little," I manage to reply. Sunhee saunters over to the kitchen and opens the fridge, running a hand through her long hair the way most girls seem to do these days. "Are..." My body tenses up as I struggle to speak eloquently. "Are you getting breakfast?" I stand up and slowly make my way over to the island in the middle of the room.

Yoongi's girlfriend hums in response, searching through the shelves to find something suitable for breakfast. She finally decides on a bowl of sliced fruits and obtains a fork. "Did you sleep well?" Sunhee asks me before popping a piece of honeydew in her mouth. My own mouth feels dry from nervousness; damn salivary glands always pick the perfect fucking time to shut down. Now I'm scared of saying the wrong thing and messing up again.

"I s-slept alright, thanks." She chuckles at my stammering, and I can't tell whether I'm offended or not. I don't even know if I have the right to be offended after last night. Then, the woman looks up at me and our eyes meet. A blush creeps up on my cheeks, even though I can't understand why. The moment feels too intimate for comfort.

"Taehyung," Sunhee says gently, pursing her lips together, "you don't need to be so worried and reserved around us, you know. I know you don't prefer to be around people... Actually, I'm sorry." She breaks the eye contact, bringing her own gaze to the marble counter and traces a circle with her pointer finger,

"Hmm?" Christ, what a vocabulary I possess. It puts the damn dictionary to shame, doesn't it? My legs feel slightly weak but I don't want to sit. If I'm gonna be here for a whole summer, the first thing I have to be good at is getting along with the bewitching Sunhee (emphasis on witch). "You're sorry?"

She finishes chewing her pineapple slice before answering. "Yeah, I am. I'm sorry for patronizing you, it was unfair of me. I can't imagine that felt good, especially in a new place like this." Sunhee raises a hand, gesturing at the house. "Yoongi is a good guy and what I was like yesterday wasn't acceptable. So let's try to get along, what do you say?" Beaming at me, she leans over on the counter
Rubbing my palms on my sweatpants, I nod feebly. "I'd like that. And I'm... I'm sorry as well. What I said was out of line and I didn't mean to." A nervous chuckle escapes as I continue speaking. "Thing is, everything is all so new and different, I can't help but feel a bit intimidated by all of it."

"Ah, well that's understandable," Sunhee says, "I can imagine that it's scary but you're in good hands. Yoongi's wonderful, you'll enjoy the time here." She finishes her sentence with a wink, and though it seems slightly flirtatious of her, I brush it off. "It doesn't suit you," remarks the woman.

My face scrunches up in confusion as I process what she said. "What doesn't suit me?" I ask, still a bit baffled. This whole talking casually with Sunhee thing is gonna take some getting used to.

"Being shy and nervous," Sunhee elaborates. "You fit the tall, dark, and handsome category. A man like you ought to be confident and assertive."

"Oh... Thank you," I respond and my tone reveals that I'm not entirely sure whether it's a remark significant enough to thank her for; I don't think it matters, quite frankly.

"Not a problem." We stay there in a silence that feels awkward, more so for me than her. Once again, my stomach emits a low, rumbling noise and my hands instinctively reach for my abdomen. "Oh, you haven't eaten yet?" Sunhee tilts her head, highlighting her curiosity, although it's hardly something being curious about. I shake my head and she thinks for a moment. "There's a cake in the fridge, do you want some of that?"

Cake for breakfast? That's bizarre for me, we rarely have cake at my house and I don't have much of a sweet tooth anyway. "Are there any apples... Or you know, something I could have with a cup of coffee?" I inquire and thankfully, Sunhee nods.

"Yeah, I'll show you where the stuff is." I finally take a seat on the stool by the island to watch her get out all the food, mentally taking notes on where things are located in this house. She hands me the coffee, and I take a sip, relaxing as the mildly bitter taste spreads across the tastebuds. My concentration is averted as Yoongi comes down the stairs, fully dressed in a sky blue collared shirt and black pants. He's also remarkably handsome, I wonder what his parents fed him and the same goes for Sunhee. How two people can be so visually astounding is beyond me.

"Morning," he says and Sunhee turns around in glee. She approaches him, placing a little kiss on his cheek which makes him smile, revealing his gums. He has a nice smile. "You're in a good mood."

"Yeah, Taehyung and I are getting along," comments Sunhee, gesturing in my direction and then I feel Yoongi's gaze on me.

"Umm... Yoongi hyung?" I say after gathering the courage. "I'm sorry for everything I said last night." With that pathetic apology, I sit there in front of him, feeling very small. "I didn't mean to burst like that." My head hangs in shame.

"Taehyung," Yoongi speaks, pleasing me with his gravelly voice. "It's okay, don't feel bad."

"It is...?" What the fuck, are they just super forgiving or do they not get offended? If some kid came to my house and yelled at me the way I yelled at them, I'd kick them out without a second thought. I don't handle disrespect very well.

"Sure. I hadn't realized that you disliked talking and all that, so I didn't mean to push you beyond your comfort zone. Hopefully, now that everything's in the clear, we'll be alright now," says the dark haired male, astonishing me further. Damn, now I feel worse for being such a dick.
Sunhee interrupts my guilty thoughts, "Are you going to the winery?"

"Yeah, Jimin's coming over and we'll get something to eat along the way," Yoongi confirms. "What about you, babe?"

"I've got a photo shoot today so I don't think I'll come back till tomorrow. They're usually long and exhausting so I might just go straight home." They smile at each other—being a third wheel feels great—and turn to face me. "Does that mean Taehyung's going to be alone all day?"

"Actually!" Yoongi excitedly says with a snap. "Jimin's stuck with his nephew today! He's bringing him along so if his nephew wants, he could stay here with Taehyung. They'll be here in about an hour or so... I'm pretty sure you're around the same age. So you won't be alone!" The new information causes a churning sensation in my gut. I just got used to Yoongi and Sunhee, now I'm going to have to talk to another stranger? That's fucking terrifying, there's only so much socialization I can handle in one day.

Despite my reservations, I drink my coffee and give them a thumbs up. I'm really scared now. When Yoongi said that the guy's nephew is around my age, I'm pretty sure he meant for it to be a note of comfort, but teens are awful. It's already hard enough for me to push myself and talk to people; teenagers are an entirely different level of anxiety inducers. I'm not sure how this day is gonna go anymore.
Goosebumps spread across my skin like a wildfire when the doorbell chimes throughout the house. I haven't done much in the past hour other than sitting around and occasionally checking my phone. But like always, there's nothing interesting enough to hold my attention for more than the standard three minutes. I did, however, send a series of texts to Namjoon out of sheer panic at the prospect of meeting Jimin (I think that's his name) and the nephew. Some people can get along with strangers so well and I sincerely envy them. I want to socialize without having palms beaded with sweat, a racing heart, and a ruminating mind. Unfortunately, that isn't an option; I've got to make do with the problems I have.

Yoongi went over to open the door and as soon as his fingers curl around the brass doorknob, I fight the urge of bolting up the stairs to hide. And it's not easy because that urge is almost mentally paralyzing, embedding only the one verb in my head. Run. This time though, I'm not giving in to my usual cowardly ways. I'd have to meet the boy anyway, seeing as we're going to be stuck together all day. So instead of caving, I sit up, straightening my normally curved spine to the point where it feels uncomfortable, and try to look friendly. I'm probably trying too hard. My ears pick up the welcoming greeting exchanged between Yoongi and his friend; to my knowledge, the nephew hasn't spoken yet. God, I'm so nervous.

"Come on, Jimin," the dark haired man says, leading them up the stairs to where I currently am. What I see next surprises me more than I had originally anticipated. Earlier, when Yoongi hyung told me about the nephew, naturally, I didn't know what to expect. But that's not to say that I didn't have my own mental image of what I thought the boy would look like. All I can say now is that I was so far off. My jaw automatically drops as he stands in front of me, paying no attention to my existence while my eyes drink in the sight before me. This boy is spellbinding, for lack of a better word.

Phone in hand, he sways a little from side to side, completely immersed in that screen of his. His hair is black—not nearly as dark as Yoongi's—and he's wearing an oversized, knitted red sweater that's ripped up in a way that I wouldn't expect to be attractive, but on him, it's faultless. Paired with the sweater are black skinny jeans and tightly laced black combat boots, which are worn out. I can tell from the scuff marks on the otherwise shiny leather. The main thing that strikes me is his choice in accessories. Simplistic silver rings decorate his pretty fingers, black polish coats his nails, and on his
neck rests a onyx choker, contrasting sharply with his milky skin. Truth to be told, this boy is everything I wish I could be, appearance-wise.

Feeling my gaze, he looks up and my chest tightens from fear of potential conversation. We made eye contact, just for a split-second, before I look down, swallowing slowly. His eyes are a piercing blue. My fingers start fiddling shakily and they get cold, really cold. It's one of the many manifestations of anxiety that I possess, along with terrible eye contact, a hoarse voice, and my personal favorite, a dry mouth.

"Taehyung," Yoongi says, shattering my awestruck state of mind, "this is Jeon Jungkook, Jimin's nephew." The ebony haired male smiles at us both; I only half-heartedly return the gesture, while Jungkook casually waves. "Jungkook, if you don't want to come to the winery with us, you can stay here."

"Oh!" Jimin suddenly exclaims, then vigorously nods. "Yeah, you don't have to tag along if you don't want to," he chimes in, eliciting a tiny smirk from his nephew.

Ruffling his own hair (which epitomizes perfection), Jungkook's slender fingers select a strand and plays with it. I tear my eyes away from him, because he doesn't need to know that I find him mesmerizing. "You don't need to make it any more obvious that I'm unwanted. I'll stay here; consider your hint taken." He ambles over in my direction and I swear my heart's never beaten at such a rate. Taking a seat next to me, the raven haired boy crosses his legs, then proceeds to resume activity on his phone. The sharpness of his reply causes Jimin's eyes to widen and he stutters in an attempt to protest his nephew's seemingly true statement.

"That's n-not w-what I meant!" Jimin says, a bit red-faced, but Jungkook remains unfazed. Suddenly, he scooches closer to me and glances at his uncle. "Really? It sounded like it. But at any rate," he coyly shoots back, then leans, lessening the space between us, "I don't mind staying here. He's cute." And to my complete surprise, Jungkook puts an arm around me, immediately making my breath hitch. "We'll have fun."

We'll have fun? What the fuck does he mean by that? Judging from Yoongi's little frown, I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one confused by Jungkook's assertion. All I can say is that I can't figure out how his demeanor makes me feel. Only a few seconds ago, I'd pegged him to be someone who keeps to himself, but now he's invading my personal space and it's wreaking havoc on me. But what's more... is that he called me cute.

Stepping forward, Yoongi places a hand on his friend's shoulder reassuringly, though he didn't look completely at ease himself. "We're going to be late, so let's just let them be," suggests the porcelain man. "As long as they don't burn the house down, I think we'll be alright." Jungkook chuckles at the vineyard owner's light hearted joke; unfortunately, I can't even process it. Mentally, I'm just screaming in protest, but physically, I continue sitting as timid and small as a fucking mouse cornered in a cage. I want to speak up badly, so badly. Yet there's a force ten times stronger than my will that binds my cries and words to my chest, forbidding them to leave. And every time they try to escape, this force pushes them back down my throat, and I feel like its grip on my neck tightens to remind me that I'm not in control. It's terrifying.

Sunhee arrives again, fully dressed this time in a white sundress that makes her glow even more (which I didn't think was possible) and her makeup emphasizes her evident beauty. She gasps upon seeing Jimin, rushing over to give him a hug. "Jimin, it's been far too long!" Her voice rings in my ears; it's all I can hear as I watch her place a kiss on each cheek of the short man, causing his pale cheeks to be replaced by a rosy hue.
"It has, Sunhee," Jimin acknowledges cordially. I can't help but envy him for being so composed in her presence. Maybe he'd like to trade places with my own bumbling, foolish self. She's so pretty that it intimidates me, even though since this morning, she's been trying to converse with me more as an equal. "Are you heading off somewhere?"

Sunhee nods, and I get fixated on her earrings, which move as her head goes up and down. I'm so easily distracted, it's incredibly problematic. "I have a modeling thing today," explains Yoongi's girlfriend. "So, I won't be able to see you for the rest of today." That last sentence is addressed to Yoongi, who gives her an understanding look.

"That's fine," he says, "I'll see you tomorrow then?" Sunhee smiles in agreement and loops her arm with his.

"Let's walk out together," she suggests in her sweet tone and I observe both men melt under her influence. It's impressive.

"Jungkook, Taehyung," Yoongi suddenly says and turns to face us. "Have a good day and Jungkook, watch yourself a little, will you?"

"Yeah, yeah," Jungkook waves carelessly and I gulp, though there's nothing but dryness in my throat. "Bye Yoongi."

Jimin whips his head around with just a bit of sass (I struggle to hold back my spontaneous laughter) and glares at his nephew. "What am I, chopped liver?" Jungkook shrugs, even more indifferent this time.

"Might as well be. But have a good day, uncle." Appearing to feel a little more validated, Jimin turns back around and follows his friends out the door as a prominent third-wheeler. As soon as the door closes behind them, Jungkook lets out a liberating sigh.

"Thank god, they're finally gone," he mutters, untying the laces and kicking off his boots, bringing his feet up on the couch. "They're so suffocating, especially that skank of Yoongi's." His language appalls me; I know I swear, but I wouldn't go as far as calling Sunhee a skank. That's such a degrading term... But I wonder if he has reason to use that term for her. Just calling her a witch is satisfying enough for me. Jungkook reaches into his back pocket and pulls out—to my complete and total horror—a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. This scene is escalating far faster than I'd anticipated and I'm not liking it at all.

"W-what are you doing?" I stutter helplessly. Jungkook stops in the middle of picking a cigarette out of the box and peers at me, then his thin, pink lips curl into a smirk. He holds the box out to me.

"My apologies," he remarks, not really sounding apologetic at all, "do you want one?" In a flash, my hand shoots out and smacks the box out of his hand, causing it to fall to the floor with all cigarettes intact. "Fucking hell, a no would have sufficed, new boy," grumbles Jungkook as he reaches forward to swiftly pick up the box.

Taking a deep breath, I calm myself. "I don't smoke." My voice doesn't shake, which brings me a small bit of pleasure, but it's overshadowed by my anger as I watch him light the terrible thing and take a long drag. He looks incredibly attractive even while doing something so dreadfully stupid, but fury bursts within me. "Can you not do that?" I snap angrily.

Looking at me, Jungkook breathes out and all the smoke hits me in the face, instantly sending me into a coughing fit while clutching my chest. God, I despise the smell of cigarettes. When I was a sophomore, I had a girlfriend—a popular—and even though she seemed perfect at school, it was
soon revealed to me that she was a chainsmoker. She'd go through more packs than I could count and before I knew it, she'd ask me for money to buy more, which I unwillingly provided for a while. After she stopped hiding it from me, I couldn't deal with it. Every kiss tasted like ashes, no matter how much gum she chewed, and she'd cough so much sometimes. It was this raucous, jarring cough that made her chest sound hollow, and despite all my requests, she wouldn't stop. She couldn't stop. That's what addictions do. Sensing my uneasiness with her unnerving habit, she publicly broke up with me later on in the year, saying that I was a douchebag for not accepting her. I suppose it was a blessing in a way, but the public embarrassment had hurt me. From then on, the mere mention of smoking makes me clench my fists.

"What's the matter, new boy? You look tense," teases Jungkook and just as I expect, my body tenses up, shaking a little bit. Biting my lip hard, I try to blink back the tears that quickly appear. My deep breaths become louder, more exaggerated—not for show, but for coping—and I close my eyes. Jungkook's movement is felt as he comes closer to me; the smoke lingers under my nose and I have to fight the urge to vomit on the spot.

"Please," I whisper, "please throw that away." I guess my panicked state impacts him, because he slowly gets up and puts out the disgusting thing, then walks off. Hearing the running water and then the trash can lid, held breath slips past my reddened lips as I unclench. "Thank you."

"No problem..." Jungkook replies, looking a bit freaked out. Fuck, I've already made a bad impression. But there's nothing I can do, smoking scares me. "Mind telling me what that was all about?" He plays with the satin choker, and I try to respond without getting distracted by him.

"I-umm, I can't handle smoking. Bad experiences with it," I manage to utter dryly and he nods, still fiddling. "I'm sorry... if you want to smoke, you can go outside, but don't do it with me around."

"Nah," responds Jungkook casually, shaking his head, "I didn't need to do it that badly, I got a couple good drags so it's fine. Didn't mean to upset you though. Sorry, new boy." He reaches forward and ruffles up my hair, then gives me not a smirk, but a smile. An actual, friendly smile.

"It's a-Alright." His nickname circles around my head, and I wonder whether I ought to correct him by informing him of my actual name or just let him continue calling me new boy. "S-s-so do you know Yoongi and Jimin well?"

Jungkook nods and leans back on the sofa, settling in comfortably. "I come here every summer," he elaborates, "to spend time with my uncle. It's a tradition thing."

"Really? You two don't seem to get along so well..." I comment cautiously, hoping that I'm not intruding or saying anything that gets him angry. Based on everything that just occurred, I can't tell whether Jeon Jungkook is someone I befriend or fear.

"That's just how we are, I suppose. He tries to be strict and shit, but he's honestly just a pushover," Jungkook says, snickering. "Sometimes, I need to remind him that he's trying to bite off more than he can chew when it comes to managing me. It's not hard, our height difference makes it easy for me to intimidate him. That and all this." He spreads his arms out, gesturing at all the bracelets that were hidden under his sweater sleeves and the other accessories; I also spot his black earrings which automatically increases my liking for him a little more, despite the smoking thing. "If I got a tattoo, which I may do someday, it'd put him over the edge. That'll be the day. But for now, I make do with my tattered clothing and jewelry."

"I see." My mind draws a blank about what to talk about next. However, in the next second, a light bulb goes off in my head and I ask before thinking. "Why'd you call Sunhee a skank?"
"How long have you been here?" Well, I wasn't anticipating him to answer my question with a question.

"Just a day..." Jungkook's mouth forms an 'o' before he forms a reply.

"Still, can't you sense that she's just off?" Without thinking twice, I agree by vigorously shaking my head up and down. A triumphant grin appears on the raven haired boy's face as he sits up straight, facing me completely. His gaze brings a blush to my face. I'm not used to having conversations with other people my age these days, minus Joon. "Good. Now I'm not the only one. Welcome to the "Sunhee's a skank" club."

His comment makes me giggle unintentionally, but I couldn't hold back this time. It's nice to have someone to discuss things like mutual dislikes. "Oh, I should tell you..." I start to say, "my name's Kim Taehyung." Jungkook's thin lips stretch wider as his smile grows. His smile is also beautiful, how can some people look so extraordinarily handsome when they smile while I look foolish? Between Jungkook and Yoongi, my own self-esteem can only suffer this summer. Woe is me.

"Well, Taehyung," Jungkook says, trying out my name. I like the way it sounds when he says it. "What's your reason for being here this summer?" His gaze causes my entire vocabulary to fly out of my head and I sit for several long seconds, struggling to formulate a response.

"Umm... So I just graduated. And my parents wanted to go on this big trip for their anniversary, so they left me here to figure out what I wanna do with my pathetic excuse for a life and all that," I spew out. Wow, my bitterness isn't even slightly obvious (note the sarcasm).

Jungkook lets out a low whistle. "Shit, that sounds... like shit, actually. You're being forced to stay here?"

"I mean," I try to fix my wording and shift around on the sofa so that I'm also facing him. Up until now, I had my side to Jungkook, but might as well settle in, too. "Okay, so Yoongi hyung's a longtime friend of my parents, so he offered to let me stay here. They need some time away from me and my 'deadbeat-ness,'" I say, putting air quotes around 'deadbeat.' "So they want me to figure out what I wanna do with my life, like going to college and everything. It's fucking stressful."

"Sounds it. Do you want to go to college?" This is interesting, nobody's asked me these types of questions before.

"I don't know. If I went, I wouldn't know what to do, what to major in. I'm essentially clueless about myself, because I'm so used to my parents micromanaging every part of my life, but I don't want to let them control this portion of it." Jungkook listens quietly, surprisingly with an expression of interest.

"How do they control it?"

I think back to all the extracurriculrals and clubs I'd withdrawn from in the past years simply because of their involvement. "I liked all sorts of things, I guess. Music, sports, student government... Like I didn't mind taking part in all those things, I actually enjoyed it. But once my parents caught wind of it, that their son was actually good at something, they got so damn competitive. Constantly, they tried to make me the best, and it made me tired. It all became extrinsic motivation; it wasn't worth it," I remorsefully explain.

"Didn't you try telling him that?" I shake my head no, then brush my bangs. "Why?"

My shoulders move in a shrug. "I dunno, they don't seem to understand when I talk to them. It's..."
almost as though we speak two different languages. Like, I'll protest and it goes in one ear, then immediately out the other." Jungkook chuckles, encouraging me to speak more. "I kinda resolved matters by withdrawing from those things. I isolated myself and only stayed around by my best friend, but once he got a boyfriend, that got a bit difficult for me. So now, I mainly lay around and brood."

"Wow, angsty," retorts Jungkook and I roll my eyes with a scoff. "And attitude. Didn't you only make life harder on yourself by staying away from everyone?"

I laugh harshly. "People are shitty and not worth being around. Most of them won't take a second out of their day to check up on you, but when they have problems, the rest of the world needs to be put on hold so that they could whine about it. It's pathetic."

"I sense some bitterness, but you're generalizing. Not everyone is like that," Jungkook reasons. "You're lucky enough to be alive, you know? Why not spend it well by actually living?"

"Living is hard in this world, especially when one bad event eclipses all the things worth being thankful for."

"But that's about how you choose to perceive that one bad event."

"I know, but... it's hard. I don't know why it is; I've tried to be the glass half full type of person. It's never worked before," I say and sigh heavily.

"Did you try hard enough?"

"Maybe not. I don't have enough motivation these days..."

"Then I wouldn't jump to conclusions that life's all doom and gloom. There's something out there."

"Thankfully, that's something I've come to accept. I suppose I'm tired that it's taking me so long to find that sparkle factor in my life. As for non-shitty people, I know of one. My best friend... He isn't like that at all. He's the one person I feel most peace around." Talking about Namjoon makes me smile fondly as memories of our long night talks together and hard times together flood my brain.

The bewilderingly beautiful boy tilts his head with curiosity. "Tell me about him," he asks me in a soft tone and I oblige. As I continue telling him about my life and Namjoon, Jungkook pays attention without once appearing to be bored or judgmental, leading me to one solid conclusion. Jeon Jungkook, this boy with his radiance and chokers and raggedy sweaters, is a person I don't need to fear. He's one I can trust.

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jungkook in the pic is like a mixture of WOH kook and BST kook (more of the latter tho). i couldn't pick between the two gifs so here's the second one. thanks for reading~
And when the lights start flashing like a photobooth

Taehyung's POV

Pounding. That's all my heart does as I babble on to the handsome nephew, who is still listening attentively. It's funny, I never knew how much I had to say until Jungkook prompted me to, and once I start, it feels like burden after burden is being taken off my shoulders. I don't even know what I'm talking about right now with him; it all feels too much like a blur. Like one of those moments that just happens so fast and you're so caught up in trying to believe that it's real that whatever's actually happening barely gets processed in your mind. Then, hours later, you sit alone wondering it was all a scarily vivid daydream or an amazing reality.

A whole morning and afternoon passes us, which I don't notice until the front door opens, and Yoongi enters with his friend. Their chatter compels me to stop instinctively, causing Jungkook to look up at me curiously. "What's wrong?" He softly asks, twisting one of his silver rings.

"Nothing," I mumble back. I'm not entirely sure myself why I'm getting all shy again, but the idea of having Yoongi overhear me talking about my school life (I think that's the topic) doesn't come across as appealing. He probably already finds me a troubled loser of a teen. Hearing me discuss academics and all that would only confirm his suspicions. "Are you going to have to go now?"

Jungkook shifts his position so that only one leg hangs off the sofa and gives me this smile that could mean many things. But at the root of it all, it's a sweet smile. "Uncle, I'm not nearly as bad as you think. I had a good time."

"Jungkook," calls out Jimin and the nephew sighs heavily. "Did you have a decent time? Or hate everything like you always do?"

Letting out a dry chuckle, the blue eyed boy stands up and stretches his arms. "Uncle, I'm not nearly as bad as you think. I had a good time."

Jimin, taken aback by the reply, nods slowly. "Well, that's good. But we're gonna have to go now."

"You don't say?" Jungkook shoots back sarcastically. I have the urge to smirk, but I bite my lip to suppress it. His wit amuses me; I reckon that's why I don't have any issues talking to him. "Alright, Taehyung, see ya. This was fun." Reaching over, he ruffles my hair playfully and though I want to fix it immediately, I don't. In fact, I'm more surprised by the fact that his hand is going through my hair and that a shy person like me managed to make a friend—one attractive beyond belief—in the past five hours.
"Bye," I whisper back, then attempt a smile for a split-second before returning to my neutral state. Jungkook laughs—somehow he's even more attractive when he does that—and starts heading towards his uncle. It could be my imagination but I swear that I hear him say 'cute' under his breath as he goes off to put his boots back on.

Yoongi grins at me, tilting his head slightly. "You seem a bit happier, Taehyung." A light blush begins creeping on my tan cheeks and I avert my gaze to avoid looking even more flustered in front of him. "See ya, Jimin. Good luck on that blind date of yours," he adds teasingly. Now it's Jimin's turn to look flustered.

"Yoongi!" He exclaims, instantly spotting the prominent expression of mirth on Jungkook's perfect face. The nephew crosses his arms and grins widely. I think everyone in the room knows that Jimin's not going to be able to escape the boy's remarks on the topic.

"Blind date, huh?" Jungkook laughs as he teases his uncle, who's turning tomato red at this point. Poor guy. "When did you plan on telling me about this?"

"Thanks a lot, Yoongi," said Jimin spitefully, "Now he's gonna talk about it throughout the whole car ride." The dark haired elder gives his friend a thumbs up and waves goodbye. Rolling his eyes, his short friend walks out while gesturing for Jungkook to follow. The door closes softly behind them, leaving me with Yoongi.

Yoongi goes off to the kitchen to get a bottle of water and takes a seat next to me afterwards. Luckily, he doesn't notice me stiffening. "I'm sorry you had to stay home all day," he says, taking a sip of his water. "Jungkook's not the best company, but he's a decent kid."

"I thought he was great," I answer quickly, wanting to defend Jungkook for some reason. "I had a nice time with him."

"Oh, really?"

"Yeah, we talked and it was good." Glancing down, I pretend to draw circles on my hand. If I looked at Yoongi, my heart might do that strange thing again where it just goes way too fast or my mouth could get dry. It's frustrating.

"What'd you talk about?"

"Well," I start to say, "it really started off with him smoking." Hearing the word 'smoking' shocks Yoongi as his eyebrows raise and chokes on his water. Water dribbles down his chin while he coughs loudly, hand placed on his chest. Not entirely sure how to handle the situation, I dash off to the kitchen to get paper towels, and return with the roll.

The dark haired man takes it out of my hands and mutters a shaky 'thanks' as he wipes his shirt and mouth. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to shock you," I quietly reply. He shakes his head, then places the paper towel roll on the coffee table.

"You didn't shock me, but wow. He tried to smoke here?" Nodding is the only action I can manage. "What a kid," scoffs Yoongi. Leaning back on the couch, he rests his head comfortably and emits a deep sigh. I'm not sure whether it means he's got a lot on his mind or just needs a nice breath after the poor intake of water. "The house doesn't smell, though."

"Ah, that's because I scolded him about it."

Yoongi peers at me in mild surprise and asks slowly, "You scolded him?" Once again, I nod. "And he listened to you?"
"Does he usually not listen?" His tone strikes my interest since Jungkook, in all his rebellious apparel and mannerisms, seems to be a good kid to me. Yoongi chuckles indifferently, redirecting his gaze to the window. Not much is happening outside from what I see as I glance in the same direction. Two squirrels are currently having the time of their lives bolting from tree to tree while the birds act as spectators. But that's about as exciting as it gets.

"He's an interesting kid, Jungkook. I don't really want to influence your opinion of him since you both just met, but be wary of him," Yoongi says thoughtfully. I'm not entirely sure how to respond to his advice, although it dawns upon me that in the several hours we spent together, the beautiful boy never once spoke of himself. He just let me do the talking; I barely know anything about him. And being so caught up in the chance to talk freely, it didn't occur to me that I ought to have asked him any questions about himself. Jungkook appeared to be so interested in what I had to say. Ugh, this is why I'm shitty company. This sense just doesn't work inside me... yet. I'll be hopeful here.

"Why wary?"

"I'd explain but," Yoongi stops to sigh before continuing, "like I said. I don't want to impact your thoughts on him, especially when he's someone you'll see frequently over this summer. Your time should go well with him. He's just a bit reckless, that's all. So when you are with him, just keep your guard up at times... otherwise, he could persuade you to go into uncomfortable situations."

Processing the information, I sit beside Yoongi soundlessly and think about his words. What could he mean by 'uncomfortable situations'? And the reaction he had to the fact that Jungkook actually respected my wishes, you'd think that the guy's a juvenile delinquent or something. Though I think harder about whether there had been any indication of such characteristics, I can't see it. Sure, the smoking caught me off guard, but to use that as a reason to call him reckless doesn't make much sense to me. People do much worse these days.

Yoongi snaps me out of thinking by asking if I have anything specific I want for dinner. Since food didn't cross my mind all day, I shrug and the older man takes a moment to think, pursing his lips. "How about pizza?"

"That sounds pretty good," I respond automatically. "I could go for pizza. Saves you the trouble of cooking."

"Who told you cooking was a trouble for me? I enjoy doing it."

"I mean, you cooked last night. So it can't be fun having to do it every night, right? I'd get tired of it." Yoongi laughs softly and pulls out his phone from his pocket.

"I actually like it even if I have to do it two nights in a row. It's not that easy to get me to stop liking something. Anyway," the vineyard owner says, then goes on to tap a contact on his screen, "I'll place the order now. Do you care about what goes on it?"

"Not really, so long as there's meat." He grins at my response and approves it with a brief nod. As the person on the other end picks up to take Yoongi's order, a yawn overcomes me. "I'll place the order now. Do you care about what goes on it?"

As I walk into the room, my sleepiness intensifies and I fling myself onto the bed, immediately embracing the comforting cold pillows. Not bothering to turn off the lights, I toss and turn around for a little bit to find the optimal sleeping position and when I finally do, my eyes flutter shut as I drift off to sleep for the first time in forty eight hours.
"Taehyung? Wake up, the pizza's here," says a gravelly voice, only to be ignored by me. Waving a hand aimlessly, I turn my back upon the source of the sound and hug my pillow tighter, eager to salvage a few more hours of blissful sleep. "Taehyung." A soft hand touches my shoulder, nudging me slightly and despite my attempts to continue ignoring, I open my eyes a little.

Standing before me, Yoongi smiles contently and brings his hands together in a clap. "Good, you're up! The pizza's been here for a little bit and I'm really hungry. Wanna come down now?"

"Mm," I mumble, shifting around under the comforter, "you could have started without me..."

"Yeah, but I wanted to eat with you. Actually, I would have let you sleep longer but the pizza is getting cold and my stomach is gonna start growling any minute. So what do you say?" He gives me such a hopeful look that before I know it, my feet are touching the ground and I'm upright, albeit half asleep.

"Alright, let's go." Rubbing my eyes, I follow him out of the room and start heading down the stairs except my dizziness is underestimated, causing me to stumble. "Wh-whoa!" A small cry escapes me as I lean forward and grab onto Yoongi's back in fear.

"Are you alright?" Yoongi asks calmly, hand resting on the rail. I suppose it would have been a good idea for me to do the same. But instead of making me feel dumber than I already do, the kind elder carefully takes my hand off his shoulder and turns to look at me. "A bit woozy, huh?"

"Sorry," I apologize in humiliation, "I guess I'm more tired than I expected." Without saying another word, Yoongi takes my hand in his own and leads me down the stairs. While I should probably feel babied, I can't help but feel a sort of fluttery, vexing feeling in the pit of my stomach. Neither of us pull away until we reach the kitchen, and then the dark haired man lets go, much to my confusing disappointment. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it," Yoongi replies and picks up the large pizza box. "Wanna eat this on the couch?"

"I don't mind. I wasn't sure if you were one of those stuffy people who won't let people into specific rooms." He laughs at me and shrugs carelessly. I don't know if I've mentioned this before but I really like his laugh.

"I'm not that uptight. Actually, I prefer eating on the couch, but I don't do it often because Sunhee's usually here for dinner. She prefers doing things the proper way and I just like being laid back," says Yoongi as he walks off to the living room with the pizza. Spotting a few plates, I grab two and quickly head in the same direction, then place them down on the coffee table by the pizza box.

"You two seem like a couple that gets along really well, though," I remark as Yoongi opens the cardboard container, revealing a perfect pizza coated with pepperoni and melted cheese. The redolence fills the room and my appetite stirs. "Whoa that looks great." The comment makes Yoongi chuckle as we sit cross-legged on the floor. "I didn't realize how hungry I am but geez."

Yoongi goes ahead and takes a slice. "Yeah, pizza does that. Hang on, I'm gonna get something to drink, do you want a beer?"
The question catches me off guard, eliciting a look of shock which he notices at once. "I've never had beer," I say lamely.

"Really? Not even a sip?" I shake my head and a smirk replaces the curious expression on Yoongi's face. "Your parents did a good job looking over you; do you want to try one?"

"Umm." In all honesty, I don't want to but if I say no, will he think of me as a bigger child than he already does?

"That's okay, you don't need to. I was only offering. I'll grab you a water." Leaving no room for me to respond, Yoongi saunters off while I sit helplessly at my pizza. That entire conversation felt rather stupid and I feel like I've done something wrong. That being said, tasting beer wasn't exactly on my list of things to do this summer. "Here you go." He returns and hands me a bottle of water, then sits back down again.

Quietly, we both eat our food and the awkwardness kills me inside just a little bit, but I'm too much of a coward to do anything about it. My mind instead holds a screaming match with one side yelling for me to say something while the other side does nothing except discourage. Damn the indecisiveness that makes living such a struggle.

"You're not much of a talker, are you?" Yoongi abruptly asks.

"Hmm? Well, umm... it depends, really. I talk a lot with Namjoon, but other than that, I tend to stay quiet around others."

"Namjoon. You mentioned that name last night. Is he your best friend?" I nod as a reply to his question and he purses his lips together in thought. "But you don't talk to people other than him."

"Not necessarily. I had a nice time talking to Jungkook today, which was totally unexpected." I wipe my fingers on a napkin, happy to get rid of the oils. "Then again, I don't really expect to have a good time with anyone other than Joonie."

"Why's that?"

"Well, I don't normally get along that great with people my own age. They're all so superficial, it drives me insane." I pause and take a bite of my pizza as Yoongi drinks his beer. He glances at me and soon his lips curl upward in the faintest smile. "What?"

"You've got a bit of sauce on your upper lip," he points out and I blush yet again. For some reason, he's got me blushing a lot. It's starting to get annoying. Hastily, I wipe my mouth but he shakes his head. "You didn't get it." Reaching over, he grazes his thumb over my lip, apparently getting the sauce off. But the contact causes an entirely different sensation within me that I have to push aside with all my willpower. "Gone now." Yoongi flashes a gummy grin.

"Thanks."

"So why's it hard to talk to kids your own age then? I mean, I get that superficiality is a problem but is that it?"

"They all bore me," I respond rather bluntly. "It's like every kid you go talk to, you hear the same conversations over and over again. So-and-so is sleeping around with this guy, who's also flirting with his ex, who is so conveniently single and the cycle continues. And if it's not about mindless hookups, then you're probably talking to the nerdy kids who have their futures decided from them since they were in the womb, because God knows how parents love to plan futures."

"Everything comes out in an unintentional ramble and I don't notice how amused Yoongi is until I stop to eat..."
some more.

"Sounds like you've got a lot to say for a quiet kid," he retorts playfully.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to sound so pessimistic."

"Nah," he says, casually waving his hand at the comment, "You're good. Growing up, I actually liked talking to your dad more than my own classmates when I was in high school. It's more fun talking to people who have interesting things to say, instead of useless fluff."

I peer at him in utter disbelief. For once in my life, I think I've found someone who understands what it's like inside my head. Not completely, but a huge chunk of it. "You strike me as a really social person, though."

"I am, but that's because I had to be. If you let me pick, moments of uninterrupted silence are preferable over meaningless small talk," Yoongi explains and my heart skips a beat because I think I'm making a connection. And it feels incredible. "So I understand you. Sometimes, I'm glad that I learned to be social otherwise I never would have met Sunhee."

"Oh yeah, how did the two of you meet?" I inquire with curiosity. A part of me doesn't really care but I figure since we're making pretty good conversation, I have to do my part to help continue it before a dead end presents itself.

"Jimin took me to a bar one time, even though I begged him not to take me. Thankfully, he was persistent, because Sunhee and I had been noticing each other for most of the evening until he finally pushed me to go up and talk to her." With a fond smile, Yoongi looked down. "It was the best thing Jimin had ever forced me to do. Life's been a lot better with her around."

An uncomfortable emotion bubbles up inside me, but I express it with a tight lipped smile to feign interest. "You really like her."

"Yeah, I do." Unexpectedly, Yoongi begins blushing and it's a sight to see. His porcelain-like cheeks are tinged with a soft pinkish hue, a combination so alluring that I can't take my eyes off him. "Is something wrong?"

"N-no. It's just funny seeing you all flustered," I quickly tell him, hoping that my attempt to play off my fascination with him is successful.

"Oops." We continue to talk into the night and when we're done with our pizza, Yoongi and I sit on the sofa together with the television on softly in the background. I didn't particularly care to watch TV, but the idea was his and I have a hard time saying no to his requests. As my own eyelids start to get droopy, I feel something heavy on my arm. Looking over, I find that it's the dark haired man's head. He's fallen asleep. *Shit, how do I take care of this? I gotta sleep but I'm scared of waking him up.*

After a quick scan around the room, my gaze stops on a blanket placed conveniently at the end of the sofa we are on. Without trying to move too much, I pick it up and drape it over the two of us. The softest snore comes from Yoongi, putting a grin on my face. He's cuter than he thinks. As I snuggle under the blanket with the vineyard owner leaning against me, one last thought circles my head as I slowly fall asleep. For the life of me, I never would have imagined this scenario.
Dreams are interesting. I can almost never remember mine, but instead wake up the next morning with the thoughts that something crazy happened the night before. No inkling of the dream itself, just the feelings that come from it stay behind. It's an interesting escape, I'd say.

I'm laying on my bed at home comfortably and it's drop dead silent. Mom and dad are at work, which leaves me to do nothing besides bumming around the house. I'd hang out with Namjoon or something, but since he wasn't replying to any of my texts, it's safe to say that he's busy. I wish he could come over and we could play games, or do anything. When it comes to the two of us, he's kinda the idea man putting up with me, an eternal sourpuss. It legitimately takes him at least half an hour to convince me to go through with his idea at times, because I'm too pessimistic to try new things out. According to Joonie, this habit of mine is just 'not cute.'

Anyway, so as I half-heartedly enjoy the solitude, the front door slams and my heart jumps up to my throat. I haven't the slightest idea who it could be either; my parents always came home in the evening and right now, it's the peak of the afternoon.

Without knowing why exactly, I scramble under the sheets and pretend to be asleep as footsteps come closer to my room. The pounding in my chest does intensify to some degree as I continue to keep my eyes forced shut; but then, the door creaks open. Footsteps slowly make their way into my room. To be honest, I'm not entirely sure what to do at this point. "Taehyung," a deep voice calls out. "Taehyung, wake up." An ugly, clanging sound follows and it hurts my ears.

Aha, it's Namjoon! He should have known better than to fucking come into my house without so much as a warning, that's terrifying. Wanting to scare him for his stupidity, I reach out and grab his arm (catching him by surprise), then yank him down on the bed. He yelps, but comes crashing down anyway since he has the elegance of a drunken goose.

"Taehyung, what gives?" complained my best friend and I open my eyes in triumph... only to see that I've made a mistake. The man I pulled down isn't Namjoon. I must have been dreaming again, because on top of me lays Min Yoongi. Astonishment is clear on his face as he gazes at me and stutters slightly. "G-good morning," he says, looking straight into my eyes and I no longer can remember a time when I had been this embarrassed.

Our faces are so close to each other, I mentally scream, since I'm practically frozen on the outside. If he or I leaned in just a little bit, imagine what would happen. Wait, what? Snapping myself out of these stupid thoughts, I zone back into reality and Yoongi looks more puzzled than he did five seconds ago. "Taehyung?"
"Yeah?" Damn it, why do I sound like a breathy schoolgirl, this is absurd. And what if I have bad breath? That's probably inevitable; I should've stayed quiet. But to my surprise, the dark haired man tilts his head and smiles at me, causing my heart to race (which I pray he can't feel).

"Did you sleep well?" I nod this time, not willing to take chances with the whole bad breath thing. It shocks me mildly that it's been a good thirty seconds at this point, and he's still made no effort to get off of me. However, it's almost like Yoongi can read my mind, because he gets up in a flash.
"Good!"

My eyes land on the pot and spoon in his hand and he follows the direction of my gaze, then lets out a pretty loud laugh. "I've always wanted to wake someone up like this," Yoongi says, demonstrating the noise made by clanging the two kitchen items together. "Never had a little brother or sister of my own so now seemed like the perfect chance." Wait, does he think of me as a little brother? But more importantly, why does that idea make me feel disappointed?

He reaches out to me and takes my hand, proceeding to pull me up off the couch. "Go get ready, we're going on an adventure today!" exclaims the man happily and a fluttery feeling resurfaces in my stomach. It's the same one that's been bugging me for the past few days since I've been here, though I've yet to figure out what the hell it is. I'm probably being very dense right now, but what can I do?

"Where are we going?" I ask, trying to keep as much distance as possible without being weird.

Yoongi sends a wink my way and shakes his head. "To the grocery store! I gotta pick up some more food and stuff. Normally I go alone, but since you're here... why not take you? Sunhee hates grocery shopping, plus she's busy all day today. It'd be nice to have someone come along."

He must notice my shoulders droop slightly after hearing him say grocery store. I guess it is an adventure of sorts for me, so I can't really pick on his (poor) word choice. "Don't you want to come with me? Or do you prefer staying home, it's your preference."

"I'll join you," I say quickly so that he can't retract the offer. Spending more time around him seems like it could be fun. Sitting up, I folded up the blanket and placed it on the couch, then start to head upstairs when he stops me.

"By the way," Yoongi speaks hesitantly, "Sorry for falling asleep on you last night." Peeking at him, I see the tinged pink cheeks and I can't help but feel good about the fact that I'm no longer the only flustered one. "You could have just left, you know."

Unintentionally, I chuckle; he's a lot cuter than he realizes. "Nah, I couldn't have. You were so comfortable and everything. Didn't wanna wake you up." Yoongi walks over to me and places a hand on my shoulder.

"Well, thanks for the consideration," he says and pairs the sentence with yet another smile. I swear, he'll be the death of me if he keeps grinning like this. "Anyway, I'll let you get freshened up. You wanna have breakfast outside as well?"

"Oh, sure. If it doesn't trouble you too much."

"Don't worry about that. Whenever Sunhee's not around, I'm kinda by myself so it's nice to have someone to hang around with and do these types of things." He shrugs indifferently.

"What about Jimin, I thought you guys hang out together?"

"Oh, that's strictly for business. Jimin's schedule is rather busy and he's out looking for a relationship. So hanging out with a buddy isn't exactly high on his priority list." Now I feel mildly sorry for
Yoongi. Having a girlfriend can be great and all, even if she's Sunhee, but it's necessary to have one friend around. Without Namjoon next to me, I don't know how I would have survived my years on high school. The guy kept me afloat. So what helps Yoongi keep going? Maybe I'll be able to ask him later on.

Not knowing what else to say, I head up to my room and start rummaging through the dresser drawers to find something suitable to wear. Throwing on jeans and a dark V-neck tee paired with a white collared shirt, I peer into the mirror. Something's missing. Driven to find the right finishing touch for the outfit, I scour through another drawer until my eyes fall upon a beige beanie. I put it on and look at my reflection, feeling somewhat better about how I look. I'll have fun today.

~*~

"So what kind of things do you like eating?" asks Yoongi as we walk through different aisles of the market. "Do you have a sweet tooth?" He laughs at the grimace on my face that appears right after he poses the question.

"Not a fan."

"Lucky for you, I'm not either. Sunhee is and that's the only reason I'll make sweet things around the house. I'm more of a spicy foods person."

"Mm, me too." It's kinda cool that we have small preferences in common. Though it's probably silly, the little things make me feel more at ease around Yoongi. Actually, it's starting to make me enthusiastic at the prospect of spending time with him.

We walk through the aisles together and Yoongi picks out the food out while I observe him. On multiple occasions, he tries to persuade me to choose as well but I decline each time. I didn't particularly want anything I saw. Plus he picked out some really good things anyway so anything I want to get would just be a wastage. No reason to throw money around.

"So what're your plans after this?"

"I dunno," he says, shrugging. "Do you have anything in mind because I'm free all day."

"Not really, I was just gonna follow you and do whatever you wanted." He laughs at me, though not in a mean way but more of a 'what am I gonna do with you?' attitude. "Well, I don't know! I mean we're doing breakfast and groceries, what else do you wanna do?"

"Anything that's not involved with food," the dark haired man responds jokingly and I roll my eyes. Suddenly a thought pops up in my head.

"I wonder if Jungkook has anything to do today..." I say out loud and Yoongi's expression changes slightly.

"Jungkook?" He reaches up to mess with his hair slightly while contemplating. "I don't know, I suppose you could always ask him." Eager to see the boy again, I reach for my phone and start searching my contacts when it hits me that I never did get his number. Damn it.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't have his number so I can't contact him." Seeing my tight lipped smile, he gets his phone out and flashes me a more sincere grin.

Yoongi presses something on his phone and winks at me. "I got this." After a few seconds of the
phone ringing, the person on the other end picks up. "Jimin? Hey, is Jungkook there?" I blush, hearing his friend's muffled voice; the dark haired man smiles as the voices change and Jungkook takes the call. "You busy today? Mmm, well I was wondering if you wanted to come over today. Taehyung actually wanted to call you but he doesn't have your number. So what do you think?"

Argh, just watching him talk to Jungkook about meeting with me is nerve-wracking. What if the guy finds me childish for not being able to contact him on my own? I can't help but regret the fact that I brought him up to begin with; what'll we do in the house anyway?

"He'll come over in the afternoon," says Yoongi as he hangs up his phone. "Does that make you feel any better?"

"I didn't feel bad to begin with but what are we gonna do at the house?"

Pursing his thin lips together, Yoongi takes my question into consideration and grins widely. "Well I do have video games," he responds with a chuckle, "Or we can go to the lake, the three of us."

"Those both sound pretty good."

"Really?" His eyes light up at my expressed approval towards the lake and I can't help but smile. It's really hard not to. "Okay, we'll go to the lake then!"

"You really like the lake," I comment as he throws an arm over my shoulder happily. "I haven't been here that long and you've already mentioned it to me thrice."

He gives me a funny look with an eyebrow raised, as if I said something totally out of the ordinary. "Thrice?"

"Yeah, it means three times..."

"No, I know but who uses that word anymore?" Yoongi laughs freely and brings a hand up to his mouth to cover up, but it's pointless. It's too boisterous for him to contain.

Huffing, I shrug his arm off me and place my hands on the shopping cart firmly. "I use it, it's a perfectly good word. There's some words that ought to be used again, in my opinion."

"Like what?"

"Smashing." Yoongi chuckles this time round and shakes his head. "Like how cool is it to say that something's simply smashing?"

"I didn't realize you had such a good vocabulary," replies Yoongi teasingly.

"Of course you didn't. I'm quiet most of the time. But being reserved doesn't mean I've got the knowledge of a troglodyte. Sometimes silence can be a sign of intelligence." He nods in defeat, putting his arms halfway up in the air. I feel smug with my victory and we walk through the frozen foods aisle in a comfortable silence. But then my eyes fall on the shelves of ice cream and the silence is broken with my excited exclamation. "Oh, can we get ice cream? Please?"

Yoongi sighed, shooting me a quizzical glance. "You're a tough one to read. Didn't you tell me only a little bit ago that you don't like sweet things?"

Unknowingly, I purse my lips into a pout and widen my eyes to convince Yoongi. "I don't but it's ice cream, Yoongi hyung! Can't we get some? This is my favorite flavor too!"
Abandoning the cart, the vineyard owner walks towards me and peers through the glass door to see which flavor I was pointing at. "Chocolate chip cookie dough," he reads, clearly unimpressed by my taste.

"Yeah!" Honestly, at this point, I don't even know where this enthusiasm is coming from. I don't even get this hyped about ice cream at home. It's weird.

Sighing heavily once again, he reaches out and opens the freezer door, instantly wincing as the chill hits him. Yoongi grabs a pint of the ice cream, then slams the door shut quickly. "Fine," he says and I'm smiling so that my face muscles ache terribly. I don't mind it at all.

"Thanks hyung," I mumble shyly and he waves it off.

"Häagan Dazs," Yoongi mutters in response. "Why's this stuff so damn expensive?"

"It's a top notch brand, that's why."

"Whatever." He pushes the cart down the aisle and begins walking quickly. "Let's leave, it's cold here."

"Okay hyung," I chirp with content.

It's bizarre how cheerful I'm feeling. Like normally, getting me out of the house is a struggle. Just ask my mom. But with Yoongi, it's been really liberating in the sense that I'm getting to say and feel things that I don't usually waste time with. If that makes sense. It probably doesn't, my mind's a jumble that's practically impossible to decipher. But you know, I've managed to decipher one thing. Based on the evident smile that Yoongi's fighting back as we roam through the grocery store together, I can tell that he's enjoying my company. Finally an adult who does.

I wish words could describe how happy I feel at this moment. I really do.
You know, I understand that it's pretty melodramatic to assume that when one bad thing happens, it's because the universe is basically against your happiness. But I can't help myself from resorting to such a conclusion as Yoongi, Jungkook, and I rush to the house, drenched from head to toe. As it turned out, there was a downpour scheduled at the exact time we had started our little picnic by the lake.

So we ran. With Yoongi lugging a heavy, food-filled basket, the three of us ran for the house. Jungkook had stayed behind me the whole time, muttering the most colorful arrangement of curses. In all honesty, I didn't think people could use words the way he did. Anyway, it was a terrible experience, to say the least. It's not that bad being out in the rain, but running around, hearing the mud sloshing around under your feet and nearly tripping like fifty or so times due to a complete lack of coordination... I can't exactly say that it's the bee's knees (also, I don't know anyone who uses that phrase anymore).

"I can't fucking believe this," Jungkook says scornfully. "Of all days, we get a storm now. Fucking outrage."

"Hey, language," chides Yoongi almost immediately, fumbling to stick the key into the lock. "You weren't the only one caught in the storm." He opens the door and we all rush in at once, bursting through with relief. We kick off our shoes, then stand at the entrance for several long seconds without knowing where to go. I guess it occurred to Jungkook as well that it wouldn't be a good idea to drip water all over the vineyard owner's house. Not when it's so well cared for.

"Do you have any towels?" Jungkook grumbles angrily. Nodding, Yoongi shoots up the stairs, basket in hand, and disappears. "I guess he does."

"I'll get 'em!" he yells, leaving Jungkook and I to do nothing except shiver like a pair of sopping idiots.

I feel bad. Jungkook would never have been in this situation had I not invited him. He probably would have been doing something super cool or whatever it is a kid like him does. Yet here he is, stuck with me. Gah, the guilt is terribly overwhelming. He's standing next to me and all I wanna do
is just blurt out a stream of apologies, but I'm still too shy to say a lot of things around him. In fact, how I got through a whole day with him that last time is beyond me. How does anyone talk to someone this perfect?

"Hell with this," he announces, reaching down to casually pull off his white tee, which leaves his upper body bare. Raindrops clings to his skin and I feel my jaw just dropping. He's so muscular; there's no making sense of it, because in my opinion, he looks so scrawny when he's clothed. It's a wonder that my mandible didn't fall to the ground. Jungkook notices the stupid gaping, eventually letting a suggestive grin creep onto his face. "You enjoying yourself there?"

When I fail to reply, he snaps loudly in front of my face, successfully getting my attention back on his face. "Huh?" I ask. God, how humiliating. "N-n-no, I wasn't enjoying m-myself." Of course the stutter chooses this exact moment to rear its ugly head again. Pretty sure my face is beet red.

"Sure," he retorts. "Why's he taking so long to get towels, we're dying here." As soon as Jungkook finishes complaining about being towel deprived, we hear Yoongi bounding down the stairs, each footstep with a purpose. He's humming some song and to my horror, he's shirtless too. Yup, I think life absolutely detests me.

He flings the towels at us and smiles comfortably. "Here you go." We quickly dry ourselves off, proceeding to enter the house, but then my foot gets caught in one of the spaces between steps. A small cry escapes me as I launch forward — I seem to be doing a lot of this — and before my face could make blissful contact with the ground, Yoongi reaches out. He brings me close so that my face is inches away from his; our eyes meet, dark brown staring into dark brown. Skin against damp cotton. My freezing cold hands suddenly rest on his soft, bare back and though every part of me screams 'let go', I can't bring myself to. And the way he's breathing isn't making matters any better either.

"Excuse me, lovebirds," Jungkook interrupts, "but I need to use the bathroom. Where is it?" Almost as if a jolt of electricity is surging through us, Yoongi and I leap apart, each of us glowing an embarrassing shade of red.

"Umm, we're not lovebirds," I mumble in an attempt to salvage the situation and Jungkook playfully laughs, patting me on the back.

"Ahh, you're adorable," he teases. "But really, the bathroom? My hair's not getting any better as I watch you two hug."

"We weren't hugging," Yoongi scoffs indignantly and I gotta tell you, it mildly stings. It's as if he wouldn't be caught dead hugging me. "There's a bathroom upstairs, just go and see."

"Alright." As Jungkook heads up, an awkward silence falls in between the vineyard owner and I. Not daring to look up at him, I start drying myself off with the towel and slowly walk away from him.

"Sorry 'bout that," Yoongi says, dryly chuckling. "I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable or anything."

"Oh, you weren't! You were helping me, it's fine. I'm not uncomfortable at all; I'm feeling all the comfort in the world right now," I babble senselessly, and he just giggles. I feel incredibly childish now.

Yoongi reaches over to mess up my hair. "Jungkook was right about one thing. For an angsty teen, you're pretty adorable." With that compliment, he strolls away and puts on a new shirt. Can't tell if
that makes me disappointed or grateful, and I do realize how bad that sounds. "Anyway," his muffled voice says as he vigorously rubs his hair with a white towel, "I don't think the food in the basket's wet so when Jungkook comes downstairs, do you wanna eat that?"

"S-s-sure," I painfully stumble over the one word, still thinking about the way he held me again. Whatever this is, it's starting to get really annoying. "I'm gonna go up to my room first. Change into some dry clothes and stuff." Thankfully, Yoongi nods, allowing me to bolt up the stairs at top speed, desperate to find an escape to myself.

Bursting into my room, I slam the door behind me and lean against it, trying to process the rate at which my heart's beating. This is absurd. Nothing's ever made me feel this way before and I gotta say, it's terrifying. Pretty sure I could qualify for being tachycardic with this heart rate. I'll have to talk to Namjoon about this. Shaking my head, I strip off the wet clothes and start hunting through the dresser, picking out some trousers and an oversized tee. As I tug on the trousers, my bathroom door opens and out walks Jungkook in my clothing. In a startled state, I accidentally yell, instantly falling over on the bed.

"Oops, sorry. I borrowed these." He gestures at his — or should I say my — clothes and shrugs as though he totally didn't violate anyone's privacy. "You having trouble with your pants there?"

I thrash around on the bed to quickly yank the trousers on and sit up, slightly out of breath again.
"What're you doing in here?"

"Came in here for a bathroom, found one and stayed." Jungkook plops down besides me on the bed and leans on his hands. Aware of my own nakedness, I put on the red shirt I'd picked out as the dark haired beauty continues to talk. "That was something downstairs."

"What do you mean?"

"If you're playing dumb, it's sweet. But are you seriously telling me that you didn't feel the tension?" Jungkook asks, far too serious for my liking.

"Umm." I run a hand through my wet hair and cringe at my terrible ability to stall the conversation. "I don't know what tension you were talking about. I just fell and he caught me, y'know?" Cue the nervous laughter. "It's because he's a nice person who likes to help people in trouble, that's really all-"

Out of nowhere, Jungkook reaches over to place a finger on my chin, rendering me speechless on the spot. My breath hitches and if I was nervous before, it's nothing compared to how apprehensive I am now. He runs that finger down my jawline, his thumb grazing my bottom lip briefly, and his eyes practically bore holes into my own with the intensity of his gaze. "You're telling me," he says in hushed tones, dangerously close to being sensual, "that you didn't feel tension between you two? When he was this close to you?"

I literally cannot say a single word. God help me.

He goes on to cup my cheek with one hand and I feel the coldness of his many rings on my warm skin. It's not the same as being so close to Yoongi, but I can't lie. What Jungkook's doing right now seems unfair to me; he shouldn't be able to make me feel so stripped down, so vulnerable, in a handful of seconds. "So did you really not want him to go any further?" His whispers are making this so much more than what it deserves to be, yet I don't have it in me to stop him. The touches are enticing.

"Jungkook..." I manage to say, almost as softly as him.
Our lips are close enough to make the gap between us disappear. There's not a single sound other than the sound of us breathing. All of a sudden, he breaks the mood in the blink of an eye by poking my cheek and cracking up into a carefree bout of laughter. "And you tell me you didn't notice anything. That's rich."

Completely out of character, I lift my hand and smack his shoulder like I normally do to Namjoon. But that's only with him... at least until now. "Where the hell do you get off teasing me like that?" I scowl at him, causing his momentary expression of glee to transform into something of pure wonder.

"I'm only helping you see what's right in front of you. You wanted him," Jungkook states simply and though I'm one to appreciate the truth, his is one I cannot accept so blindly. "You can't even lie to me, Taehyung. Your face gave it all away and to be honest with you, I wouldn't be surprised if he wanted something more too."

"Do not joke about things like that," I sharply reprimand, "He's dating Sunhee; there's no way he'd look twice at anyone else."

"Pft, that bitch won't stay in his life for long. I'm surprised they made it this far. Anyway, I'm right. I know tension when I see it and there was a suffocating amount of it down there."

"Nonsense."

"I gotta tell you though, Tae, you're a mystery. Shy kid like you with their eyes on a man ten years older? It's wild," Jungkook says, nodding like he's impressed with my so-called choice in men.

"I do not, Jungkook."

"Uhuh, not buying it. He'll have the hots for you soon enough, just you watch," says the breathtaking boy so indifferently.

"That's not for you to claim. You're trying to find a problem where there's nothing wrong," I tell him harshly, but he remains largely unfazed. Instead, he takes my hand and stands up.

"Come down then." Without letting me have a say, he pulls me out of the bedroom, taking me down the stairs with him. "We'll see who's right in the end." Never once releasing my hand, the two of us reach the living room where Yoongi had been setting up the contents of what would have been our picnic.

"Oh good, you're ready!" Yoongi exclaims and for a split-second, I swear I see his eyes flit down to our intertwined hands. His countenance changes ever so slightly, painting a small smirk upon Jungkook's thin lips. "Ready to eat?"

"Always," I blurt out, lightening the mood. Everyone laughs as we sit down around the table, ready to feast on our well deserved meal. I grab a plate and start to take food, but Jungkook immediately takes it from me, earning a small whine from my child-like side.

"I'll get your food for you, Tae," he says cheerfully and in a brief moment of eye contact, shoots me a wink.

Yoongi gazes at us, completely puzzled. "Can't he get his own food?"

"It's fine. I can do that for him."

"There's really no need, I can get my ow-" He shuts me up by pressing his finger against my mouth and Yoongi's eyes widen, unsure of how to interpret the scene folding in front of him. Hell, I don't
even know how to interpret what's happening; what's Jungkook playing at?

Handing me a plate loaded with food, Jungkook smiles and the irritation I have with him melts away slowly. His smile's a force to be reckoned with. But as I glance back at Yoongi, I catch him frowning as he gets his own food, pushing me to wonder whether he's bothered that I came hand in hand with his business partner's nephew.

I'm sure it's nothing. He's got nothing to be upset about, especially in regards to my connection with Jungkook. Something like that wouldn't make sense anyway... I think.
More than a week has passed since I came to the vineyard. It's safe to say that Yoongi and I are on much better footing these days, although the same can't quite be said for Sunhee. She's still snooty, and their relationship is chock-full of PDA, which means I spend a lot of time staring out the window or in my room when she's around. However, Jungkook's been around more as of late so when it *does* become the 'Yoongi and Sunhee Show', we just retreat to my room, which always earns a little suspicious look from the vineyard owner. Our little escapes has played a role in kinda bringing us closer together.

In fact, that's what I'm doing right now. The day had been going decently until the "beloved" couple started making out. Jungkook had sighed heavily and now we're sitting in my room with me on the wicker chair and the blue eyed Adonis took the bed. It's pretty quiet, something that ends up being the case more often than I'd like. But I dunno what to start talking about; generally, Jungkook's nice enough to initiate the conversation.

"How're you liking it so far?" he asks out of the blue, flipping lazily through a magazine. At first I thought he was reading, but the magazine's about interior decor so there's no way reading's an option anymore.

"Liking what?"

Closing the magazine, Jungkook rolls onto his front and faces me with an interested expression. "Liking it here, being under the same roof with the love of your life." He immediately flinches as the pillow I chuck hits him square in the face, eliciting a giggle from me and an annoyed groan from him. "Fuck you, Tae."

"Mm, thanks," I sarcastically retort, "but Yoongi hyung isn't the love of my life. Don't be ridiculous. It's nice here and I like being away from family, but that's all there is to it."

"Wasn't born yesterday, Tae. You like him and until you finally come to this conclusion yourself, I'm just gonna keep asking."

"You're annoying," I sass him, but it doesn't seem to change his opinion in the slightest. Frankly, I don't understand why he's so set on trying to prove to me that I like Yoongi, when I clearly don't.
Sure, my throat gets pretty dry if we're too close in proximity or I start stammering ridiculously, but that's all just nerves. It's not like there are feelings involved when it comes to him. Pft.

Smirking, Jungkook just runs his hands through his hair and I kinda wanna tell him to stop, because it's distracting me from... well, I'm not really doing anything, but it's still distracting. Fortunately, my phone starts ringing, taking my attention away from the guy. "Hello?"

"Taehyung, how're you holdin' up?!" Namjoon says excitedly and without any control, a smile just takes over my whole face. My cheeks are gonna start hurting, I can sense it. I didn't realize how much I missed hearing my best friend's voice.

"It's alright; I think I've gotten used to the new place and all." Jungkook eyeballs me as I curl up happily on the chair, completely amused by my silly expression. "How's summer going for you?"

"It's great; I've been out with Hoseok like every night and it's the dream. Hey, I have an idea," Namjoon proposes, "Wanna do a video call instead?"

"R-right now?" I glance over at Jungkook, who's back to flipping through the magazine. "I have someone here."

Namjoon whistles on the other end. "You've got a date with you? Should I leave you alone then, call back later?"

Shit, that's not what I want. It's been days since I've been able to have a proper conversation with him. "No, it's not a date. Just a friend. If you wanna do a video call, I've got no problem with that." I shift around uneasily on the chair, looking at Jungkook. Pulling the phone away from my ear, I quickly explain the situation to him and he nods.

"Do you want me to leave?" he asks casually. "I can go downstairs, it's really not a problem."

"Oh, that's not necessary," I quickly tell him, waving my hands a bit crazily. "Stay here. You've heard me go on about Namjoon quite a bit so might as well meet him." As I get back on the phone with my friend, Jungkook sits up and pats the bed for me to sit next to him. "Alright, we can do a video call. You can start whenever you're ready."

I situate myself besides Jungkook on the bed and set up a few pillows to prop the phone on. Our arms are touching. "Sorry, I didn't expect this to happen."

He laughs, which is an incredibly beautiful sound, and shakes his head. I know I comment on his laugh and smile a lot, but it's just so nice to look at that I find myself noticing it without thinking twice. "Not a problem. This'll be interesting." My phone screen suddenly switches to the front camera, displaying our faces and not gonna lie, it caught me off guard to see myself next to someone so charming. "Oh, I'll answer," Jungkook says, going ahead to accept the call. Our faces reduce to a corner of the screen and Namjoon's familiar smile takes over the whole device.

"Tae!" he exclaims. It's amazing to see how happy he is to me; there's really not very many people out there who get so eager just to have my company. "You look great!" I glance down at my choice of clothing: gray sweats and a plain black tee. Nothing that amazing so I don't see how I could look great in all this.

"Thanks."

"Holy shit, you're gorgeous," Namjoon declares in a state of awe, making the raven haired boy chuckle knowingly.

"Namjoon," I whisper angrily and he gives me this look as though he's done nothing wrong. It feels like we're having a whole conversation with our faces. Jungkook watches our little exchange and I swear he's thinking that we're a bunch of idiots.

"Okay, okay. No but seriously, Jungkook. You're like... hot."

"You're like... hot," I repeat, trying to let the stupidity of the sentence sink in. "Is that how you picked Hoseok up? You're like... hot?"

"Shut up, have you seen him?"

"Well yeah, I've seen him! He's gorgeous, I realize that!" I snap at my best friend, momentarily forgetting that Jungkook's sitting right next to me, listening to everything.

"Wow, you two are cute," Jungkook says, snickering arrogantly. I can hear his ego inflating and honestly, making me agitated.

"Thanks. Anyway, how's it going with the vineyard owner?" Namjoon inquires curiously. Almost instantaneously, Jungkook's eyebrows shoot up, indicating that he's a lot more interested in the topic at hand. Not good news for me.

"There's nothing going on with the two of us! God, between the two of you, I can't seem to catch a break. You know he has a girlfriend."

"See, you keep saying that he has a girlfriend, but I've yet to hear you say that you've got no feelings for the man," Namjoon says thoughtfully.

Jungkook snaps his fingers in delight and exclaims, "That's exactly what I'm saying! I keep telling him the same thing and he spouts the same bullshit about Sunhee being his girlfriend. Like there's so much sexual tension. Whenever we're in there, he gives us this look like there's nothing he hates more than seeing us together and I reckon that he's jealous. It's amazing!"

"You two are making a mountain out of a molehill."

"We're paying attention to what's right in front of us and Namjoon hasn't even been here to witness what I've seen!" Jungkook asserts with indignation. "I say by the end of your time here, you'll be in some sort of relationship with him."

"Why does this matter? I'm not here to break relationships..." I mutter helplessly.

"Jungkook, what's the girlfriend like?" Good grief, when did this become a gossip session between my two friends? Leave it to me to become a third wheel in a conversation that I myself initiated.

Yanking the phone out of my hand, Jungkook stretches out on the bed and starts describing Sunhee at length, including all the interactions between her and Yoongi. It doesn't seem right to me, discussing the man's girlfriend while they're literally downstairs and everything. Choosing to be a buzzkill over a guilt-ridden guest, I propel myself towards Jungkook, desperate to grab the phone, which he moves out of my reach pretty quickly.

"Give me the phone!" I grunt irritably, struggling to get the damn device out of his hands. Namjoon's trying to mediate, but his voice is drowned out by the sound of the Jungkook and I wrestling over the phone. "I just wanna talk to Namjoon, Kook, lemme have the phone."
"Only after you admit that you have feelings for Yoongi!" Jungkook shoots back. Soon we're all tangled up on the bed, just a mess of limbs, heavy breathing, and cotton sheets, while my best friend sits on the other end of the call in bewilderment.

"I won't admit to something I don't feel, now give me the phone!" Out of sheer boldness, I pull his hair and he yelps in pain, begging me to let go. Man, I wouldn't have had to resort to such childishness if they had listened in the first place.

"Kim Taehyung!" Jungkook finally shouts out and grips my wrists. When I look at his eyes, it hits me that I'm laying directly on top of him, which must seem like an incredibly compromising position. His chest heaves under me and my mouth goes dry again, not entirely sure how to break myself out of these circumstances. His breath smells like ashes.

And just my luck, the bedroom door opens, letting Yoongi step in on what I have just labeled the most awkward moment in my life. Like it actually beats the time I walked in on Namjoon and Hoseok doing it in my bed. At least I ran out of that room fast enough; I'm frozen here.

"Oh, I didn't realize you guys were in the middle of something," he mumbles, bashful all of a sudden.

Jungkook pushes me off, a little too hard since I fall off the bed with a thud. "Oops, sorry," he apologizes, though I reckon it's not all that sincere. "Yeah, we were in the middle of something."

"Wait, wait, no! No, we weren't!" I sputter and impulsively smack Jungkook's leg. "There's-there's absolutely nothing going on here. Jungkook took my phone and I was just trying to get it back, but he wouldn't let me have it."

"Uhuh, cute story," quips the raven haired man. Now to my utter astonishment, he leans over the bed and presses his lips against my cheek in a pretty long, lingering peck. My face feels like it's on fire. Yoongi's hold on the door knob tightens so that I can see the vein popping out on his arm, making me more nervous than I had been before.

"Uhh," I laugh anxiously, shoving Jungkook away. "Not sure what you're playing at, but there's nothing happening here." A hand ruffles my hair and I swat it away instantly, desperate to fix the situation. "Hyung, did you want something?"

"Yeah, did you?" Jungkook snarkily asks. Somewhat caught off guard, Yoongi rubs the back of his neck and tries to remember why exactly he came into the room. Strange that he can't recall.

"Just that Sunhee and I were going out tonight so dinner's in the fridge," he says monotonously. "We'll probably be home late tonight."

"Excellent," the blue eyed boy says, "we've got the whole house to ourselves tonight, Tae." He slips his hand in my shirt and rubs my back, increasing my level of discomfort tenfold. I can tell that Yoongi isn't entirely pleased with what's unfolding in front of him either.

"Alright, I'm gonna go now," Yoongi declares loudly and walks out without another word. As soon as the door closes behind him, I scramble up to get a pillow and begin hitting Jungkook with every ounce of strength my out of shape self can muster.

"Hit me all you want, but I'm doing you a favor here."

"How?" I exclaim, wiping the sweat from my forehead. "How are you possibly helping me out with him?"
"Jealousy brings out a lot in people," he answers simply.

"Excuse me, what? There's no jealousy. I am his guest. He is a family friend," I angrily mutter through gritted teeth.

"And the sky is blue, grass is green, vineyards have grapes," Jungkook continues infuriatingly, "Oh, let's not forget that Taehyung has a crush on Min Yoongi."

"You're terrible."

"That's what you think now."

"Playing my handsome, blue eyed paramour isn't gonna do anything except make life awkward between us, can't you stay out of it?!" I hiss at him. It is amazing how collected he is.

"Well until you grow a pair, I'm gonna help you grab hold of something that could easily be yours if you bothered to put in some effort. Here's your phone." He throws the device at me and I finally see that Namjoon had hung up a long while back, thank God. Ruminating over everything Jungkook has just said, I cross my legs and sit on the ground quietly.

I don't like Yoongi. I don't. What's more is that in no scenario will Yoongi ever find himself liking me. Just don't see it happening. Jungkook and Namjoon have it all wrong. They'll see soon enough. As long as that vineyard owner is dating that bombshell of a model, there's no place for me in his life. Yeah. It's just a matter of time before everyone understands.
My heart hurts. I don't know what brought this bout of pain on, really. I'm sitting in the living room along with Yoongi and Sunhee, who are busy cuddling in the loveseat as the film of Sunhee's choice plays softly in the background. It's not that I was watching them, yet all of a sudden, this panging starts in my chest. And it's aching so badly; half of me wants to yank the damned heart out of my chest and just fling it at the ground while the other half begs to let the tears fall. Tears I didn't know needed to be shed.

I guess I see the two of them... and I think of how good they look together. Then I think of mom and dad. How even though they're going through the motions, they're doing it together. How, despite all the little quarrels and frustrating moments of bickering, they stay at each other's sides regardless.

I see the way Yoongi holds her, tenderly as if she's made of glass with cracks surfacing. I see how he runs one hand down her arm, smoothly, delicately. Silk under his fingertips. I see how her red lips curl up in a smile that seems sincere, bringing him happiness. His eyes crinkle at the corners when she takes his hand and kisses it gently, then rubs it with her thumb. They look... so warm. Like they belong together and for some reason, it makes me burn inside.

It's difficult for me to accept that a love as handsome as theirs will ever be in my fate. Or even one like Namjoon and Hoseok's. A small sigh escapes me as I reposition myself on the couch so that my leg doesn't fall asleep and I wonder to myself. What do I lack as a human? What makes me less lovable than others? Why is it that every person I'd ever tried to love never worked out in my favor?

Before I can stop myself, my cheek dampens as tears began dripping down, lingering near my chin. I'd wipe them, but it's better to leave them alone. There's no point in hiding something that's fighting so hard to be seen. Thank God that the room is dark; nobody will see me. Fingers curling around the edges of a nearby pillow, I bite my quivering lip hard. Too hard. I had thought that one pain would somehow cancel out the other; now I'm stuck with a throbbing red lip and the spontaneous aching.

"Would you," I whisper, praying that they could just hear the words and not my shaky voice, "Would you please excuse me?"

"Mm? Tae, is something wrong?" Yoongi asks so innocently that it amplifies the pain and I feel as though I can't breathe. "Taehyung?"
I want to ask him to not say my name, because nothing good comes out of it. It sounds so soft, slipping past that beautiful mouth of his, it sounds special. But I am not special and though I know this, it hits me hard right now.

"Nothing's wrong. I just... need to go to my room," I murmur and stand up to leave. As I turn, a soft hand wraps itself around my wrist. I want it to be his, for some reason. When glancing behind me, I see Sunhee looking up at me, concern etched across her elegant features.

"You alright?" She inquires and I pull my wrist away, nodding slightly. The concern never leaves her face as I bound up the stairs; Sunhee confuses me so much.

I trudge into my room, throwing myself onto the bed and finally releasing the choked sobs that I'd been holding back throughout the evening. Teardrops spread all over the tastebuds, leaving a salty taste in my mouth. Struggling to breathe, I cry harder into my pillow, loudly and sincerely. I don't understand this. Why have I been reduced to such a messy state just by seeing a couple together? This kind of thing doesn't happen to me; I brush romance off my shoulder because a part of me has been convinced that it's not meant for me, love.

It often strikes me that since the world is enormous, I must belong by someone's side. Maybe these are just the thoughts of a longing teenager (adult, technically) and they have no significance in the grand scheme of things. But God, I wish so badly that I had a shoulder to lay my head on, a love or romance to call my own. Not like the trashy, fake ones from high school; something real. Something so fulfilling that my heart feels like it'll burst from happiness, the way Namjoon's seems to when he sees Hoseok enter a room.

Come to think of it, I recall how lonely and scared I'd been when their relationship had started to take off. It was like this world that had belonged to solely Namjoon and I had to be stretched to fit in a stranger. A stranger that he's hopelessly in love with. So there was no way for me to say that I wanted us to remain the way we were. That I wanted it to be the two of us for the rest of our lives or something. That I was genuinely scared that the world would no longer have room for me.

I felt pushed aside, threatened, jealous. The one emotion nobody ever wants to admit because it brings out the ugliest in us. I would go to bed crying, and lie to Namjoon the next day about why my eyes were so damn puffy. Time with my best friend lessened as he started making room in his schedule for this guy who made his heart race. Fear of replacement had been the worst at that time in life. Ever since then, I've always thought about whether I'll be lucky enough to find someone who looks at me and loves me the way Namjoon does with Hoseok. I want my own Hoseok.

A soft droning suddenly emits from my phone, lighting up the screen to show that I'm getting a call. A call for Jungkook. Without bothering to wipe my eyes or my nose for that matter, I pick up, aware that I'll probably sound like a broken mess. But why play with facades? It's not like those'll get me anywhere.

"Hey, Tae?" asks the blue eyed Adonis in his usual tone, cocky but simultaneously friendly. Upon hearing my trembling breath, he speaks up again, slightly worried this time. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"I-I-I don't know," I manage to say, only thinking of how pathetic I must sound to him. "I was just s-s-sitting on the couch with... with them. And all of a sudden, there's so much pain. I don't know why, Jungkook, there's just so much pain and I don't know why," I babble aimlessly.

I hear creaking, like those of mattress springs, and the sound of a door opening. His hushed voice comes through the phone, "I'll be right there, okay?"

There's no attempt of protest on my part, not tonight. I don't have it in me to tell him to stay, mainly
because I don't want him to stay. I want him to be with me and comfort me, because right now, it feels like he's the only friend I have around here with time to spare for me. "Thank you, Jungkook."

As I hang up the phone, I stare at the little black screen until a drop of water appears on it. I wish I could stop, but emotions don't seem to come with on-off buttons. It'd be convenient if they did. Placing the device on the nightstand, I go back to my curled up position and that's when the door hinges squeak as Sunhee peeks into the room.

"Mind if I come in?" she asks, tilting her head slightly. When I fail to reply to her simple question, she takes it as a yes and comes in, taking a seat next to me. "What's bothering you, Tae?"

I still say nothing. Suddenly her hands are on my arms and she pulls me upward so that I'm sitting up like her. "Ignoring me isn't going to do anything," the model gently says, moving my sticky hair out of my face. "Tae... talk to me."

Taking a deep breath, I wipe my tears again and face her, unwilling to let her in on any of my feelings. I don't know what to think of her yet and that's not a sign I'm going to take lightly. "Nothing's wrong. I guess I just got emotional thinking of my parents or something. Homesick, I mean."

"Mmm," she murmurs, gazing at me quite intently. She reaches forward and places a hand on my cheek. "You're a difficult one to read." Our eyes meet, causing my already splotchy face to turn a rather bright shade of red. Her gaze is different, but I don't know why.

"A-am I?" I stutter nervously. She goes on to run that hand down so that it rests on my neck, brown eyes never once leaving mine. "I'd say you're the difficult one."

"Is that so?" she whispers and I can feel her breath lingering near my lips. "You're very handsome, Taehyung. You're aware of that, aren't you?"

"Umm... I don't necessarily agree. I'm not all that nice looking," I reply, accidentally looking down at her lipstick coated lips. I didn't mean to, but they're so close and it's strange to be in this position. "But you are," Sunhee insists, leaning in so that her lips are now by my ear. "A little too handsome for your own good," she whispers huskily and suddenly pulls away, leaving me in a state of nothing but bewilderment. As she walks away back towards the door, the confusing woman looks at me with a small smile. "I hope you'll be able to read me one day." I can't tell if I'm crazy but it looks like a wink followed that sentence. Unable to understand what's happening, I watch Yoongi's girlfriend leave my room, swaying her hips as if she had someone to impress.

"What?" I let out the sigh that I had been holding back. "What could that mean?" A text from Jungkook arrives then. "Come out," it read. Shaking my head, I quickly grab my phone and slip out of my room, careful to be quiet as I head down the stairs. As I walk past Sunhee and Yoongi, a raspy voice calls me out.

"Tae, where're you going?" Yoongi asks.

"Out for a little while," I rapidly say. "Jungkook's meeting me."

His tone of interest transforms into one of mild irritations as he replies, "Oh. Well, don't stay out too late."

With nothing more than a nod, I slip on my shoes and run out of the house as fast as I can, eager to feel the night air on my face. I run straight into Jungkook, who catches me without fail, and smiles widely, though still worried. We're both out of breath. "Sorry it took me a while," he says bashfully,
tugging at one of his silver hoop earrings. "I tried to get here as soon as possible, but y'know. Uncle Jimin always has something to criticize."

"It's fine, I'm glad you came at all." He lets me go and we look at each other for a while before I end up smiling too, feeling silly all of a sudden. "I'm sorry, this is stupid."

The handsome boy cocks his head to the side, not understanding. "What is?"

"Me having you come here so late at night just because I feel shitty," I admit uncomfortably. Laughing, he takes my hand and holds it tightly. "I don't like troubling people, especially not friends."

"It's fine. If I felt shitty, I'd want someone to come down for me. But I have nobody like that so I want to be that friend for you. And if you didn't trouble me, I don't think I'd call it friendship," Jungkook says honestly and I stare at him in amazement. It's hard for me to conceive that people like him are real. So perfect in every way. "Do you wanna take a walk?" he asks me out of the blue.

"Sure." Not letting go of each other's hands, we start walking under the evening sky in total silence. Minus the chirping of the crickets. That silence slowly evolves into something more satiating; a conversation laced with jokes and witty remarks. An exchange between two polar opposites who needed someone to be with on this particular night and found solace within the company of the other. A much needed opportunity to escape our strangely suffocating environments. A chance to delve into each other's youths.

For that moment, all the heartache I felt earlier after watching Yoongi with his girlfriend disappears, and it becomes a world revolving only around Jungkook and I having a good time together. And after listening to him laugh endlessly into the night just by being with me... I think accompanying him under this star scattered sky is one hell of a good place to be right now.
twelve

Runaway now and forevermore

Taehyung's POV

A relatively quiet evening befalls Yoongi and I as we each tend to our own tasks. I decided earlier on that Jungkook didn't need to be by my side. He's been over a lot recently and I've noticed that his presence tends to have an adverse effect on Yoongi's moods. It doesn't seem to matter how he's feeling; as soon as Jungkook sets foot in the house, he gets this scowl on his face and it doesn't quit till the brunette leaves.

So having nothing better to do, I'd scoured through all the books placed in my room, ultimately finding one that seemed like it wouldn't put me to sleep by the second paragraph. It's a history book specifically on Korean wars, which doesn't sound like the most stimulating thing to read about at the moment, but I might as well leave this summer having learned something.

The two of us occupy the living room; Yoongi's busy on the phone with Jimin while I lay comfortably on the couch with my glasses on, intent on making decent progress with my current read. For some time, there's really not much noise other than pages flipping and the dark haired man's murmur as he discusses future trips to wineries with his business partner. It'd be kinda cool to sit down and talk about this book with him; I'm assuming that he likes history since he bought the stuff. Or it could've been a gift from someone, I dunno.

They talk for about 15 minutes before he finally puts the phone down and sighs heavily, leaning on a table. Guess it was a draining conversation. Turning his head, Yoongi spots me as if he hadn't realized that I've been here the whole time; his lips part in a small grin.

"Are you bored?" he asks after walking over to see the book in my hands. "I didn't know you took an interest in history."

I sit up, adjusting my glasses, and shrug indifferently. "It's not so bad. Sure, when I have to read like 20 pages for a class, it's a real pain but like... I don't know. It's like a story. And stories are pretty fun to read so I prefer to view it that way."

He chuckles and sticks his hands into the pockets of his jeans. A silver bracelet rests on his right wrist, I notice. It looks nice on him. "Well uh, I'm gonna go do the dishes; think you can help me out with that? It won't take long, you'll be able to get back to your reading soon enough."

"You want me to help you do the dishes?" I ask, perhaps with a bit too much disbelief. It's just that I'm not particularly accustomed to being asked for help in the kitchen. Mom generally kept me out and did everything by herself. Plus it's worth mentioning that I never went in there willingly to lend a hand.
Yoongi casually nods. "I'll wash and you can put the stuff on the rack. It's a bit of a stretch for me to place them there while washing other dishes so I could use a hand. If you don't mind, obviously." He adds that last part rather quickly and laughs, sounding just a bit nervous. Maybe I ought to be surprised that he's nervous about asking for my help, but all in all, it's kinda cute. Endearing, actually.

Checking the page number before closing the book (I consider it a crime to dog-ear the pages), I leave it on the couch and stand up, earning a pleased smile from the handsome vineyard owner. "Thanks," he says gratefully, heading into the kitchen.

"No problem." I follow Yoongi into the room and stand beside him as he quickly begins scrubbing through the pile of soaked dishes. Neither of us are really all that chatty at first; he washes the dish and I place it on either the drying mat or rack. This goes on for roughly five minutes, allowing me to get deep enough in my own thoughts that I'm not really paying attention to whether he's talking to me or not.

"Tae?" He taps my shoulder, pulling me away from my wavering concentration on nothing important. "Daydreaming again?"

"Well, it's night so no," I jokingly reply, eliciting yet another soft chuckle from him. "What's so amusing?"

"Nothing," he says and shakes his head. "It's just, have you ever done the dishes? Or y'know, worked in a kitchen?"

"Not really. We use a new fangled piece of equipment called the dishwasher," I retort, with a bit more sass than I'd originally intended, but he bursts out laughing (thankfully). "But ma never really asked me to help her out. She liked doing everything by herself, including cooking. So I'm a bit lacking when it comes to household chores and stuff."

"I see. Looks like you'll get some practice this summer," Yoongi answers with a cheeky grin, "I could always use help around here and with the two of us working together, it's bound to be more efficient."

"That sounds alright." I nod agreeably. "So what were you talking about with Jimin... hyung? Can I call him that?"

"Sure, he won't mind. We were just trying to schedule some stuff with the wineries, nothing very exciting," Yoongi tells me, not sounding all that enthusiastic.

"Do you not like working for the vineyard?"

"Hmm?" He hands me a cleaned bowl to put away. "What makes you ask that?"

"You just didn't look very excited when you were explaining it. You took on the job as a favor to your dad, right? I remember you telling my parents that."

"Yeah, I did." He carefully begins scrubbing a pot and it makes the veins in his hands even more prominent. Not that I'm complaining. "He really loved this place. I mean my summers were spent here and soon enough, he got me involved with the business. I've never had it in me to think of doing something else."

"Why just your summers?"

"My parents had separated shortly after I was born. The whole year was spent with mom and then I came here every summer to get dad's undivided attention. It wasn't the most ideal lifestyle," Yoongi
sits almost wistfully, slowing down the rate at which he's cleaning. "But I made good memories. They tried really hard to make up for the fact that they'd divorced and a lot of people aren't lucky to have that kind of consideration. When I look back on those times, I'm grateful."

"That's really true," I slowly reply and place a spotless glass on the drying rack, careful not to let it slip out of my grasp. "I don't know that I would've thought about it that way."

"I guess you can't really know unless you're in the situation yourself." Yoongi sighs and when I glance at his face, it appears as though he's not really here anymore. But the dazed look lasts for a minute at most before he snaps back to our dishwashing reality. "So what do you have to say about your summer so far?"

His question catches me off guard; I've been more focused on talking about him. "Umm, it's been a good three weeks, I'd say."

"I know it's not the most exciting," responds Yoongi apologetically and immediately, I shake my head to get him to think otherwise. I don't want him thinking that it sucks here, not when it's better than my own place in many ways.

"I wouldn't say that at all. It's a nice change of scenery, y'know? Not the usual suffocating atmosphere at home, I can think more here. Like gain more insight on myself and stuff. Which sounds totally stupid, I know."

"Not at all. I like that you're introspective. It's impressive for someone so young and honestly, it's attractive. Not a lot of adults that I meet are able to properly reflect on themselves yet you're over here always trying to make yourself better. I don't know, I think it's something to be admired," Yoongi asserts and I nearly drop the plate in my hand from embarrassment. I'm not entirely used to being complimented, especially not by him. But it's so nice that he does... even if it makes that damn fluttery feeling come back.

"Thanks," I nervously tell him. "Actually, there's also been one more aspect to this summer that I consider priceless."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Jungkook." Automatically, a smile creeps onto my face, stretching wider than I'd prefer. Power of Jeon Jungkook, I guess. "He's been amazing company. Like we'll go on walks at night and I'm usually a pretty reserved person. But with him, I feel like I can say whatever and he'll hear me out. Like he's not someone I need to impress because I can tell he really likes me."

"Really?" Something in his tone's altered drastically. It's more forced now, but I don't know what I've done to cause such a transformation. "He's that great?"

"Yeah, he is," I say to Yoongi honestly.

"I mean, you two do seem awfully close," he remarks. "I gotta admit, I was shocked when I saw how quickly you got along with him. Hey, could you pull up my sleeve a little bit? It's sliding down."

I fold his white sleeve and push it further up his arm so that it stays above his elbow. "Yeah, I wasn't expecting it either."

"But could you answer a question for me?" asks Yoongi suddenly, and for some reason, it evokes a sense of anxiety in me. "Are you in love with him?"
"W-what?" I sputter in astonishment. "Love? Where does that come from, how can I be in love with him?"

"I don't know, but I figured I'd ask. Are you guys dating?"

Now this is just ridiculous. "No, we're not," I firmly state, placing another plate on the rack.

"But he's all touchy with you, it's hard to believe that there's no attraction there." Yoongi sounds... angered almost. I can't understand why he'd bother bringing up Jungkook if it'll only make him mad. "Like a few nights ago, when he kissed you. Is he like that with you often?"

As I'm about to reply, Jungkook's words come to mind. Jealousy brings out a lot in people. Could that be why Yoongi's asking so many questions? Out of jealousy? It certainly could explain the darkened expression on his face, but I don't like jumping to conclusions. It's a pretentious thing to do, acting like you know a person when there's a whole side unknown to you. He's got nothing to be jealous of. However, I don't exactly know if I appreciate him asking about what my relationships with other people are like on such a level.

"We're not, but I don't know if there's no attraction there," I simply inform him. "He's incredibly good looking so I'd say I'm pretty attracted to him although I won't act on it." What am I doing? Why am I telling him these things?

"You realize that he will, don't you?" Yoongi mutters, taking a coffee mug and scrubbing it rather vigorously.

"What are you saying?"

"I mean," he says with a huff, "if Jungkook senses that you like him and he likes you back, then he won't wait for you to make the first move. He'll sweep you off your feet before you know it, that's just how he works. And then it lasts for a brief moment before he comes with new arm candy."

"I don't see how that's any of your business," I snap, surprising both Yoongi and myself. "If there is, say, something between Jungkook and I, wouldn't it make sense for the two of us to work it out? What if I want to be swept away by him, you don't know that."

"I'm just giving you a heads up. He's a different type of person, Jungkook. There's stuff about him you don't know, and that stuff causes him to live life a little more recklessly than others."

"You've mentioned something like this before; why can't I know?"

"It's not my news to tell. If Jungkook ever trusts you enough to tell you, then you'll know. But you won't hear it from my lips."

"Well, I don't know that I'm in need of a heads up." This isn't going how I pictured at all; in fact, it's turning out to be a bit of a disaster. I don't want to argue with him, but he's pushing my buttons with this Jungkook issue.

"I don't know if this attraction's worth it, Taehyung."

"And I say it's not up to you whether it's worth it or not; that decision's mine." He looks annoyed. Really annoyed. Suddenly, a clattering sound echoes in the sink and I look over to see one of Yoongi's soap covered hands quickly being stained with red. Broken pieces of the coffee mug are scattered in the sink as well.

"Shit!" he exclaims and sticks his hand under the faucet, turning the cold water on. Blood continues
flowing out of the newly made gash, throwing my mind in frenzied state.

"Oh my God, look how much you're bleeding!" I shout and dash over to one of the kitchen cabinets. "Keep running that under water; where's your first aid kit? Or band-aids?"

"Cabinet to the right, first shelf," he says and keeps cursing under his breath, holding the cut hand. Scanning rapidly, I spot a box of first aid supplies, pulling it off the shelf instantly.

"Turn off the water," I instruct, walking over to the sink, box in hand. "Give me your hand." Sure enough, his left hand has a slice on the palm starting from the thumb and ending by his ring finger. Beads of blood line the cut, eager to drip away, but I yank an alcohol swab from the kit and rip the packet open. "It's gonna sting," I warn him.

As soon as I place the little swab on his cut, Yoongi hisses angrily and tries to tug his arm away, but I have a tight hold since I knew a reaction like this would occur. "Fuck, that hurts so bad!" he cries out, writhing under my hold.

Carefully, I clean the cut so that there's no chance of an infection and rummage through the box for a band-aid. "How did you manage to do this in a few seconds time?"

He scoffs, clearly upset by my bewildered tone. "I guess I gripped the mug too tightly, so it slipped and one of the shards got me," Yoongi explains, somewhat softer in nature this time. I tug his sleeve up further so that nothing gets on the white shirt. He looks pretty good in it so it'd be a shame to have it ruined by blood.

"Way to be careful," I snap at him, agitated by his carelessness. "You've gotta be more cautious. Don't you know by now how hard to hold something that's wet and covered in soap?"

"Oh, save me the lecture," Yoongi sarcastically quips at me and I raise my head to glare at him, but my gaze immediately softens upon seeing his expression. I can't get mad at him, even if I prayed for it. "Accidents happen."

"I just want you to be careful. What would have happened if the shard was stuck in your hand?" Covering the cut up with a large bandage, I close the kit and go to put it back in the cabinet. Yoongi stands there, merely staring at his now sliced hand. "I'll do the dishes now, you place them on the rack."

His eyes meet mine and a regretful smile appears on his thin lips. "Alright. Thank you, Tae." We switch places at the sink and I start washing the rest of the dishes (after throwing the mug shards away, of course). The rest of the time passes by, unnoticed, but I notice after awhile that every time Yoongi takes a dish from me, he gently brushes his hand against mine. Amazingly enough, it gives me goosebumps every single time. But I can't tell him that.

Instead, I accidentally start giggling and he gives me this puzzled look, wanting to know the reason behind my sudden amusement. "It's just funny. You were like a little kid a few minutes ago, all whiny about getting that cut cleaned."

He shoots me this joking glare and laughs. "Shut up, Tae."

"You know I'm right." I grin at him and poke his cheek teasingly, leaving some suds on his skin, which he wipes away roughly in practically a nanosecond.

At least he's smiling now.
thirteen

My youth, my youth is yours

Yoongi's POV

Today's been the hottest day of the summer so far and the air conditioning was on full blast from the morning to the afternoon. But to everyone's relief, dusk brought with it a refreshing breeze, allowing me to fling open all the windows in the house and actually appreciate some fresh oxygen flow. By everyone, I mean Jungkook, Taehyung, and myself. I don't exactly remember when Jimin's nephew got here. I just know that I went to take a shower and when I returned, he was sitting in the living room with Taehyung.

I'm not gonna complain or anything, but lately it feels like I've been seeing Jungkook around here too often since the brunette enjoys his company so much. Slightly makes me regret introducing them at all, which is petty of me. It's embarrassing. I guess I should be glad that the boy found someone to call a friend; with me being 10 years older, he probably doesn't feel comfortable being around me as much as Jungkook. Not gonna lie, that irritates me to some degree and I'm not really sure why.

Some things have changed around here since the arrival of my old friend's son. For example, I find myself getting annoyed a lot whenever I see him having a good time with someone who isn't me, and he tends to pick his way into my thoughts in almost every situation possible. It constantly gives me this urge to make him happy, although I'm potentially the last person who can. That's only an assumption, but I won't be surprised if my thinking is correct. Taehyung seems to find all the comfort in the world with Jungkook and it has me wishing that I could be the blue eyed boy, much to my dismay. This kind of emotion never really comes over me. It's absolutely bizarre.

"Taehyung!" Jungkook suddenly exclaims, catching my attention. I glance over at the pair and they're laughing hysterically, tears practically forming rivers on their faces. Ugh. "You're not supposed to show me your card! It's like the third time I've explained the rules." Giggling madly, Taehyung covers his mouth and falls back against the sofa, not able to breathe properly. I want to make him laugh like that.

"I'm trying to get a hang of it," he says in that strangely deep voice of his that somehow has a childish tinge to it. Charming in its own way. "It's not easy, I've never played cards!" They catch me watching them and I avert my gaze bashfully. "Hyung, do you wanna join us?" Taehyung asks, peering out from the side of the couch.

Like the fool I am, I wave my hand to gesture that I don't. "I've got that date with Sunhee soon so I
don't wanna start a game I can't finish," I tell them, and his face subtly darkens a bit. A part of me does want to join them, but I also know that all the little exchanges between Jungkook and Taehyung would be enough to drive me up a wall. Sometimes they seem to be off in their own little world, one where there isn't that much room for anybody else. Though I'm an adult, being excluded still feels the same as it did during my younger years. And at any rate, I've already got this stupid cut on my hand that stings like hell. I don't need more injuries that source from unjustified anger.

Anyway, Sunhee and I had arranged this date a while back, so I've been looking forward to it for some time now. She's been really busy as of late, meaning most of our plans have been canceled last minute. And it's led to a lot of disappointments on my end. Of course, I have to play the role of the supportive boyfriend, which I've been doing. Be there, tell her it's okay that she's busy, find something else to do in the spare time. Same routine, forever and always.

It's just that it'd be nice to make plans and actually follow through on them once every now and then. But if I try telling her that, she'll get all sensitive and it'll be like one of those scenes in a movie or show where the girl's preaching about being a working woman who needs to always put her career first. Needless to say, I kinda want to avoid a scene like that. It's not that I have no respect for working women or whatever, but I wish she could find it in her to put me first for once. The way I always do for her.

"Have fun," says Jungkook apathetically and resumes the game with Taehyung, stealing his attention away again. I'd be lying if I said that it didn't bother me just the slightest bit, their growing bond that is, but I don't receive time to ponder over my thoughts. The room fills up with the obnoxious sound of my ringtone; a call from Sunhee.

I take the phone, then head over to one of the windows to get a taste of that night air. "Hey, you on your way?"

Sunhee begins speaking and instantly I know that this will be another failed attempt. Another plan canceled. It's all in her tone, the one that's apologetic yet coquettish at the same time. "Honey, I was so looking forward to our time tonight, but I remembered last minute that this one photographer's having a party."

Fingers curling around the phone tightly, I nod slowly, aware that Jungkook and Taehyung are observing my every move. "And you can't miss it, right?"

"I would in a heartbeat if it was someone who didn't matter, but he's a really good photographer," Sunhee reasons, although I'm not buying any of it. Not really. I'll pretend as if I am. Pretending is always a pretty good way to get myself out of any potentially sticky situations. "If I can make a better connection with him, he might want me to be a model for him!"

"Ah, I understand," I reply blankly, drawing circles on the window with my free hand. Try not to sound disappointed, I say to myself repeatedly. Don't let your guard down. Don't do it.

"Do you want to join me?" she asks, and in response, I glance down at my choice of clothing. A simple collared shirt and jeans. I can't go to a party filled with fashion conscious people dressed like this, it'll reflect badly on Sunhee. If I appear as an embarrassment to her, she'd lose face in front of all those judgmental snobs. Guess it's best that I stay out of her way, isn't it?

Sighing, I switch the phone over to my other hand and lean against the windowsill. Don't sound disappointed. "No, I don't think I can."

"Baby, I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you at some point, okay?" I can picture the face that she's making. Head tilted slightly to the side so that her hair beautifully falls like a curtain against her face, eyes
glossy, pretty lips pushed outward in a pout, practically pulling me into kiss them. It's too seductive, too captivating for me to resist. I'm partially glad that she isn't right in front of me.

"Mhm." I'll believe her even though I don't want to.

"You're the best. I gotta go now, but I'll call you later," she promises and I can hear faint music in the background mixed with muffled chattering. She's already there. The woman didn't bother telling me until she actually arrived. Nothing new, I suppose.

"Bye Sunhee. I love you." I hate myself for saying it first, but I feel like if I didn't, she would just hang up without bothering to. Like she'll slip away from my grasp and I won't be able to hold her again. I don't want to imagine a life like that.

"Mm, love you too." Never sounds completely sincere when I hear it from her. I probably expect too much. The line goes dead and I stare at the phone, a lot more crestfallen than I'd wanted to be. There go my plans for the evening. Exhaling deeply, I drag my feet over to the couch and plop down on the couch, no longer in the mood to do anything. Taehyung gets up to sit next to me, lightly placing a hand on my shoulder. He hesitates whenever it comes to touching me, but I think it's cute.

"She canceled?" he softly asks, not removing the hand. I have to admit, the contact feels good. I'm grateful for it. For him. Is that weird?

Taehyung takes my silence as a yes and stays quiet for a moment. "Do you wanna do something with us then?" Crossing his legs, he sits up straight with an expression of general rumination. "All we have right now are cards but we could find something to do."

"I don't know. My mood's kinda plummeted." Taehyung and Jungkook exchange some sort of look before getting up to stand side by side. I can't help but notice that because they're roughly the same height, it makes them look even better together. What's bizarre is that they're so different from one another; it shows just in their fashion styles. Jungkook's sporting this plain muscle tee with tight, tattered jeans and those scuffed up boots of his; no change in his regular accessories of silver earrings, bracelets, and rings. Busy and eye-catching. The brunette, on the other hand, wears this tight fitting black shirt with comfy, beige trousers; perfectly simplistic. In my opinion, they clash greatly. Not entirely sure why these types of thoughts pop into my mind, but it is what it is.

Jungkook's signature smirk returns and he glances at the other teen. "You know what?"

"Hmm?" I reply, although the question isn't addressed to me. Nobody cares, it's all good.

"What is it?" Taehyung answers, already looking somewhat hopeful that Jungkook's idea would be good. I'm genuinely trying to see what he sees in this guy, but I keep drawing blanks. Jungkook's not all that great.

"We could do karaoke. There's a place not too far from here and I can take us. Brought my car here today instead of walking." Right away, the brunette's eyes light up and he smiles — a feature that I don't frequently get to see — before nodding excitedly.

"That sounds like a good idea! What do you think, hyung?" Taehyung asks me, basically beaming with enthusiasm. Shit, now here's the problem. I can't sing. I'm absolutely terrible at that so taking me to karaoke is the same as trying to teach a blind man to see; there's no way I can do it. So there's really no part of me that wants to agree to this cockamamie plan of theirs. Yet at the same time, I can't say no. Not after seeing the look on Taehyung's face. He looks incredibly eager to go and that's not something that occurs very often; he's usually the brooding sort.
"I didn't know you were the type to sing," I tell him, watching as his cheeks are dusted by the softest of blushes. God, how can people look like this?

He shrugs, immediately putting his hands behind his back in such a bashful manner. "I used to sing some, but I stopped after some time. I guess I'm kinda shy about it now but," he says; a noticeable positive shift occurs in his tone, "it's totally worth it if it'll make you feel better! I don't mind singing all that much in these circumstances."

"You know you don't have to sing, right?" Jungkook informs him, though he's clearly amused by the sudden youthful elation of his friend.

"Yeah, but it's not that big a deal. It'll be an experience," responds Taehyung optimistically. It's interesting to see him like this; not quite out of character for him but it's still strange. He's really trying to make me feel better.

"I gotta say, the fact that you're gonna sing is making me look forward to this even more. Whaddya say, hyung? Let's do it. Forget about that jer- I mean Sunhee," the blue eyed boy says, rectifying his mistake quickly. I'm not all that offended; Jungkook's dislike for Sunhee has never been a secret from me. She's just an acquired taste, that's all.

With both sets of eyes now on me, I sit in front of them quietly, deep in contemplation. If I go, I'll make a fool of myself in front of Taehyung, singing and jumping around. Any idea he's had of me being this cool guy would be sure to vanish. But if I don't go, I'll seem all depressing and buzzkillish, which isn't favorable either. To be frank, the idea of getting a bit drunk or screaming into a microphone in a darkened room doesn't feel like it'll be all that bad. Maybe I can "sing" my frustrations out or something; I dunno.

When I peek up to meet Taehyung's face, he bites his lip as though he's anxious for my decision and maybe that's what drives me over the edge, because the next thing I know, I'm rising from the couch with this sigh of defeat. "Fine, let's go. But you gotta drive safely," I warn Jungkook. The guy drives like a maniac sometimes. I mean, I get his life's rough and that he's honestly got so little to lose at this stage in the game, but that doesn't mean he ought to be reckless with his potentially numbered days. If I were in his shoes, I'd certainly try to be more careful.

"Sure thing boss!" He grins cheekily before throwing an arm over Taehyung's shoulder, pulling him in close. To my astonishment (and to the brunette's), Jungkook leans in to place his lips against the corner of Taehyung's mouth for a small kiss. This urge to gag quickly comes and goes within me as I obnoxiously begin coughing to break their little moment. Don't ask me why, it was just annoying to look at. The blue eyed cad moves away and gives me this triumphant look, like he's won something that I want. All Taehyung does is stand there with his lips somewhat parted in awe.

This type of thing is exactly the reason why I don't want to go. Now I'm gonna have to spend the whole evening with Taehyung and Jungkook as the latter drapes himself all over the brunette, who will never protest because he just loves it too damn much. Way to screw myself over.

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since this is my first fic on the site, i was wondering if it's going alright so far. do you guys like
it? thanks for reading~
fourteen

A truth so loud you can't ignore

Taehyung's POV

The ride over to the karaoke place is relatively quiet with nothing but a humming engine and tapping fingers on a steering wheel to keep it from being dead silent. Though Jungkook had initially offered me the seat in the front by him, I ultimately chose to accompany a rather downcast Yoongi in the back. He's been trying pretty hard to act thrilled about spending his evening with us, but it doesn't take a genius to deduce that he'd rather be graced by the presence of his vivacious girlfriend, to whom neither Jungkook nor I hold a candle. It had surprised the man when I took my seat next to him, like the idea of me turning down my friend seemed absurd. Nevertheless, Yoongi didn't question my decision.

A small gap stays between us and throughout most of the ride, Yoongi just stares out the window with a hand resting on his chin. His gaze is so distant, just focusing on the land that we're speeding past; it makes me feel bad. I wish he could be happy about being around us, so that he could smile. A smile as nice as his deserves to be displayed all the time, instead of that longing look that he's got on right now. Every now and then, Jungkook peeks at the rearview mirror to get a glance at the older man only to be disappointed by his static position. All Yoongi does is stare out and sigh heavily. I wonder what's going through his mind. Probably something like how much he regrets saying yes to our idea.

"Tae, you excited to sing your heart out?" Jungkook suddenly inquires. I think he couldn't stand the boredom hanging about the atmosphere anymore.

Looking down at my hands, I shrug. "I don't normally sing in front of other people, but," I pause to cast a glance at Yoongi, "if it makes a friend feel better, I don't mind it."

"That's cute. Don't you think so, hyung?" Jungkook steers the conversation over to Yoongi, who shows zero interest. It's such a sad attempt, but hey. At least he's trying. Unlike me with my reserved thumb twiddling. "Hyyyyyy," he says in an uncharacteristically nasal tone to get his attention.

Time for another sigh from Yoongi. "Hm?"

"Didn't you hear what Tae said? It was really cute," Jungkook continues to egg on, "He's too shy to sing, but he'll sing to make you feel better. Whatta guy, right?"
"Hmm?" Yoongi says again and all I want to do is bury my face in something, but I reckon that'd come off as pretty childish. "Oh. Yeah, I guess." I don't even think he processed any of what Jungkook said to him. When I take a look at the rear view mirror, I see Jungkook looking at me as if signaling me to say something. But what do I say? Yoongi's clearly not in a mood to talk to anyone. Based solely off his body language, all he wants to do is brood.

"Well, I'm excited to see what your voice sounds like, Tae. We're almost there anyway, just one turn ahead," replies Jungkook informatively. "And here we go!" Gripping the wheel, the blue eyed Adonis makes a terribly sharp turn to the right without further warning, causing me to lurch in Yoongi's direction and practically land on his lap. It's actually pretty easy to slide around on the seats since they're leather. Our eyes meet at once, and the vineyard owner instinctively holds my arms to prevent any more unwanted jerking around. We're in the position for a handful seconds at most, but I have to say that it feels much longer than that. The dark haired man doesn't tear his eyes away from me for a moment, while I sit there and deal with the burning sensations dominating my face. I'm not used to such an intense gaze from Yoongi.

The car comes to a jerky stop, which propels us forward ever so slightly and pushes our bodies closer together. "Sorry about that!" Jungkook cheerily says as he turns the engine off, removing the key. "It's a bit of a tight turn to make and I've never been too good at those. But we're here now."

"You were fine on all the turns before this one," mutters Yoongi, still holding me. Blushing furiously, I scramble to get back into my own seat and stare at the ground quite forcefully. Like enough to pop my eyeballs out of their sockets. Without another word, the seemingly grumpy elder gets out of the car and slams it shut, making me wince. Jungkook comes over to my side of the car to open the door for me. Humiliated, I stagger out, thankful for the breeze. I'd feel ten times worse with the humidity from earlier.

Jungkook heartily smacks my back and takes a step closer. "I can't keep creating chances for you, but you're welcome," he whispers, his breath tickling my ear. My face instantly scrunches up in confusion, but it dawns upon me that the handsome bastard had swerved recklessly on purpose. "What the fuck was that for?" I hiss at him, but he only chuckles and places a hand on my shoulder.

"What're you doing?!!"

"Shh, he's watching," the raven haired devil murmurs before pressing his lips against my cheek. If I was burning up before, it's nothing compared to now. I don't like that he's messing with me like this, but I can see Yoongi from the corner of my eyes and he doesn't seem too pleased either. Is that a good thing? "I'm gonna go get us a room." With that, Jungkook turns and walks off into the karaoke place, leaving me alone with Yoongi.

We look at each other. Not knowing what else to do, I laugh nervously and run a hand through my hair in the hopes that his anger could lessen. "He went to go get a room. I'm sorry about earlier, I didn't mean to fall on you like that."

He stays quiet for a moment — possibly because he doesn't know how to respond or because he doesn't wanna say something mean. But Yoongi shakes his head dismissively as if the contact left him unfazed. "It's not your fault. It was his."

"Ahh, I guess. You did warn him to not drive recklessly," I say softly. "But no harm done, right?"

"Right. So you can stop blushing like that now; your face looks brighter than a tomato," Yoongi remarks indifferently before following the same path that Jungkook took to enter the building. All I can do is stand there, feeling more embarrassed than I did before. "Are you coming?" He stops to look back at me, eyebrows furrowing in bewilderment. "Or did you plan on standing out here the
whole night?"

My mouth turns completely dry as I try to figure out what to say. Obviously, it's that I didn't plan on standing in the parking lot, but formulating a response for such a simple thought is more complex than I would think it to be. "Oh. Well, umm," I struggle to get the words out and end up staring at the ground. "I was gonna come in."

Footsteps scratch against the pavement, their path leading to me. Yoongi stands in front of me and gazes without saying anything. "Did Jungkook scare you with that turn?" he questions gently.

"N-no, that's not it. I just felt bad for falling on you and everything. Plus we haven't been talking as much since we had that talk about him while doing the dishes, you know? I can't help but feel like I'm just doing all sorts of things wrong," I confess to him quickly.

A soft chuckle comes from the dark haired man and I look up in surprise. Nothing funny has been said, so what's the cause behind the amusement? "Did I say something wrong too?"

Smiling, Yoongi reaches over and places a hand on my shoulder. "No, you didn't. You're not doing anything wrong." He takes a deep breath before continuing. "Listen, my reasons for being upset with Jungkook don't have too much to do with you. He irritates me at times, but he's a good kid."

"Just a few days ago, you were saying that he's dangerous to be around. You're confusing me, Yoongi hyung."

He sighs simply. "I'm confusing myself too."

"What's that supposed to mean? Don't you know your thoughts about Jungkook?" I'm not sure what to do or say now, he genuinely is puzzling me. It's as if he doesn't know what his opinions are at all. It's peculiar.

"I do, but things are starting to get complicated somehow," he says, not making any sense, "I don't entirely understand what's happening myself. But the bottom line is this: you aren't doing anything wrong. You're here for a good time and if Jungkook gives you that... then I guess it isn't my place to have an opinion."

"I like listening to your opinions though; I certainly didn't mind them before. It just bothered me that you seemed to be so judgmental regarding the relationship between Jungkook and I," I tell him sincerely.

"So there is a relationship between you two?"

Why is that what he takes out of my sentence? "What? No, there isn't! I'm saying that we're friends and stuff, but you really don't seem to approve of it at all and I dislike that. There really is nothing between the two of us."

"But he kisses your cheek and is generally up in your space all the time," Yoongi points out. "Are friends supposed to be like that?"

I open my mouth to reply, but as soon as I do, Jungkook pops his head out of the karaoke place excitedly. "Hey guys, I bought us a room! C'mon!" Rolling his eyes, Yoongi turns to look at the raven haired one while I let out an inaudible sigh of pure relief. It would have been impossible to explain that Jungkook does half the stuff he does to make the vineyard owner jealous. Not to mention the fact that he thinks I like Yoongi, which is a preposterous idea.

"Coming," grumbles Yoongi as he heads into the building, and I follow him, still deep in thought. I
cannot understand why he says the things that he does. Could it be that Jungkook's plan is working? Is he jealous? I think internally. But then how would that make any sense? He has nothing to be envious of! He's got this perfect girlfriend and life, what's left to want? What a confusing man.

Once I enter the store, Jungkook holds my hand, immediately drawing the attention of Yoongi again. "Let's go," the blue eyed Adonis says, giving my hand a reassuring squeeze. The three of us walk down this hallway, stopping at the second room on the left side. "This one will be ours for the next couple of hours." He started to open the door and paused halfway. "Oh!"

"What is it?" I ask him.

He smiles and makes eye contact with me; I can sense Yoongi feeling like a third wheel. "I forgot to get snacks. Yoongi hyung, you can go ahead in and we'll go take care of that."

"Why can't all three of us go?" inquires the vineyard owner, folding up his arms.

Jungkook dismissively waves his hand, bringing a scowl to Yoongi's otherwise handsome face. "It's not necessary to have that many people go up. Tae and I can take care of it."

"Is there anything you want in particular?" Yoongi glances at me after I ask the question, the somewhat angry look in his eyes softening. "I'll make sure we get it."

He shakes his head. "No. I'll just go inside then, but don't take too long."

"Mm, we won't," replies Jungkook cheekily. "Alright then, come with me." He begins walking off, my hand still in his, meaning that he's pulling me along. I look back, but Yoongi's already gone into the room.

"Dude, what's your deal?" I sharply ask Jungkook, who stops in his tracks to shoot me this insufferably innocent look.

"Why, what'd I do?"

"All the touching, this hand holding, making Yoongi third wheel along with us. If you wanted just the two of us to come here, why didn't you ask? It's making him feel bad."

Jungkook tilts his head and his innocent expression disappears, replaced by the more appropriate smirk that he wears most of the time. "Did he tell you that?"

"Tell me what?"

"That it's making him feel bad or annoyed."

I scoff at him, taking my hand out of his grip. "There's no need; I can sense that he isn't entirely comfortable. His girlfriend canceled on him, Kook. What's the point of making him feel worse?" The raven haired devil leans against the wall and gives me this look as if I should know why already.

"Remember how I said that jealousy brings out a lot in people?"

"Yeah..."

"You're seeing the effects of jealousy in him," he answers simply. "That's really all there is to it. And before you go off about how ridiculous that is, tell me one thing. Is he unhappy about how close we are?"

"Kinda. But he doesn't even get why!"
"Mm. He's getting there," Jungkook says thoughtfully, looking at the wall. "Won't be long till he can put the pieces together."

"What are you talking about? Why is there anything to put together; what's going on in that mind of yours?" I fire questions frustratedly, yet he just smiles. I know I said that it's a nice smile and all, but there's only so much I can take of it.

"He's not happy with Sunhee. I don't imagine that he ever will be. I see potential in you two," Jungkook responds without hesitation. "You already like him and he-"

"Now hold on, I never said I liked him. You keep making these assumptions, Jungkook!" He's really getting on my nerves. "You're gonna continue making a mess of things and I'll have to clean it up till it gets to a point where it's too big for me to handle. Please, can't you just leave things as they are?"

"No."

"Well, why the fuck not?" I fire at him, glaring.

"Because I think it holds promise. You're an unhappy, lonely person and he's busy convincing himself that he's happy and satisfied. But the reality is that he's too good for the girl that he's with and you can't seem to understand that you are what he needs," Jungkook elaborates; all I'm able to do is gape blankly. What a smooth reaction, am I right?

"You seem to have it all figured out," I mutter, making him place a hand on my chin to push my head upwards so that we're eye to eye. "What?"

"I know what I'm seeing, Tae. It's just a matter of time before you two figure it out as well."

"How can you be so confident?"

He shrugs in response. "Just am. Now we gotta get those snacks, otherwise he'll come storming out of that room cursing at every living thing near him."

"Wha-" I don't get a chance to finish my sentence since Jungkook just proceeds to drag me over to the snack counter, ignoring all my attempts at a protest. He's such a bulldozer of a human.

Yoongi and I sit, eating our snacks as Jungkook takes his sweet time to pick out a song. I don't usually come to these karaoke places, but I'm pretty sure it's supposed to be super wild and crazy and... spontaneous. What are we doing? Sitting around, munching on chips. Right now, I feel like I'm stuck in a room with a bunch of boring geezers even though they're both insanely good-looking.

"Sorry it's taking so long," Jungkook mumbles, gazing intensely at the screen. "I gotta find the right song."

Groaning, Yoongi slumps back in his seat and pouts, looking more miserable than ever. "Why do you even need to find the right song? Can't you just pick one and scream the lyrics or something?" He lifts his head to peek at whether Jungkook had settled on a song or not, but as soon as his eyes fall on the song selection screen again, his face scrunches up again in frustration. There's really not much for me to do, but I feel obligated to do something. So my hand, as though it possess a mind of
its own, reaches out to rest on top of his. Instantly, everything in me screams that I've just made a mistake, but Yoongi doesn't really do anything to move me away. Huh.

"Obviously you haven't come to karaoke with me before," says Jungkook.

"You know I haven't! This is my first time doing this with you!"

Jungkook whips around and shoots this super annoyed glare at the vineyard owner, who takes it without caring. "Well, excuse me for trying to make a good first impression for Taehyung here. He's never heard me sing, you think I want him to think all I do is scream?"

Yoongi leans forward suddenly, knocking my hand off his. I shrink back and stay quiet; it's doubtful that anyone wants my opinion at this point. "What does he have to do with this?"

"Hyung, I can sing. I'm good. So what makes you think that I'd sing just any song when I could show someone that I've actually got some talent in this area?"

"So you're doing all this to impress Taehyung?" He says the word 'impress' with so much contempt that it makes me uncomfortable. The time we spend here is supposed to be mindless and fun, but there's just so much damn negativity between Jungkook and Yoongi that I frankly don't think any of us will come out of this with a smile on our faces.

"Course I am. He's special," retorts Jungkook, instantly causing Yoongi's eyes to widen. He looks at me and I shake my head aggressively, hoping that he'll understand that I want the stupid bickering to end. Thankfully, he gets it. "Alright, alright," the blue eyed man surrenders, finally picking a song. "You're so impatient, hyung."

"Bite me," the vineyard owner spits back, throwing himself back on the couch.

"Not for all the money in the world." The room's atmosphere really doesn't match the mood between the people here. There's bright disco type lighting that clashes terribly with all the spite that everyone's seeming to carry. If I weren't the one caught in this situation, I'd laugh. "This'll do," Jungkook mumbles as he selects a song quickly. I couldn't catch the name of it.

"What are you gonna sing?" I timidly ask him, and I feel Yoongi's gaze on the back of my neck. I can't tell if he's scowling, but it certainly feels like he is.

"Sofa," he replies. Suddenly, orchestral music flows through the speakers and I know at once what song he's about to sing. My jaw drops and eyes widen through poorly contained excitement, amusing the handsome man. "You know it then?"

"I love this song," I gush, smiling from cheek to cheek. I had a time during my grade school years where this song had been my obsession. I thought everything about it was brilliant, still do. The instrumentals, the vocals, the lyrics. It's just an overall gorgeous song... and I'm about to hear Jeon Jungkook sing it.

The blue eyed one grins at me before lifting the mic up to his lips. "Lucky me," he said. The lyrics appear on the screen and as he opens his mouth to sing, I swear my heart stops. I don't even realize that I've curled up, hugging my knees tightly. Yoongi continues slumping, unimpressed as ever. But I don't have any time to pay attention to that, because the best possible thing happens. Jungkook begins singing.

His eyes flutter shut and the music makes him sway from side to side. His voice, sweet as honey, pours into the microphone with a passion that I've never seen from him before. In fact, I didn't know Jungkook could be capable of loving something so much. If I didn't know any better, I'd say that he's
forgotten that we're in the room. To him, it seems like it's just about the music now. It's captivating to see.

The song goes on for a while, one sugary note after another, his dulcet tones being the only source of pleasure in the room. Jungkook ad-libs effortlessly until my favorite part of the song comes up: the bridge. He finally opens his eyes and turns to face me; Yoongi stirs ever so slightly, I can sense it. Walking over slowly, the raven haired man extends a hand out to me, which I take without hesitation. I stand up and meet his eyes, ignoring my aching cheeks. He is so beautiful.

Step by step, we make our way over to the center of the room, his gaze never once leaving mine. He bathes in the glow of the purple lights, making him more ethereal than normal. Jungkook sings, but now it's different because he's singing to me. I'm too scared to look away from him, far too scared. The loud pounding of my heart is overshadowed as his feathery voice belts out the high notes, sending endless chills down my spine. It's amazing... he's amazing. But a small portion of my thoughts are occupied by the sour faced vineyard owner behind me. He's unhappy and it's bothering me.

The song ends and Jungkook pulls the mic away, then takes a step forward to kiss my cheek. He's been doing so much of that lately, especially in Yoongi's company. I can't tell how it's making me feel. On one hand, I wonder if he's genuinely bothered by it, but then I wonder why it is that I care so much about how anything Jungkook and I do affects him. Why should Yoongi's opinion matter here? And why do I keep letting it matter?

"Did you like it?" Jungkook questions softly while rubbing the tip of his nose against my cheek. "You seemed to be enjoying yourself."

"Uh hah," I reply sheepishly and take a step back to really look at him. "How did you know I loved that song?"

Jungkook smiles cockily, tilting his head to one side and licking his upper lip. God, he's infuriating sometimes. "Lucky guess?" Our little exchange is interrupted by the slamming of a door, and I don't even need to look to know what happened. Yoongi stormed out. My face must express some form of disappointment, because the blue eyed Adonis sighs knowingly. "Go talk to him."

"Hmm?"

He nods in the direction of the closed door. "He's upset. You should go talk to him." I stare at the man in front of me, utterly puzzled as to how easily he switches from angering Yoongi to trying to comfort him. How can he play this role so unbelievably well?

"You're the one who pissed him off, why can't you talk to him?" I shoot back, but he rolls his eyes disdainfully. Guess I've said something wrong. "Well, why don't you?"

"Because, Tae, it's a no-brainer that he'd rather get consolation from you than me. He kinda hates my guts right now, if you couldn't tell. Plus it'll only help your chances."

Now it's my turn to roll my eyes; he's being absolutely ridiculous. "What chances?"

"To make him fall for you, duh."

"I'm not here for that!" I hiss at him, though I reckon he doesn't really care like... at all. "Stop assuming that I like him and everything, it's obnoxious. I'm staying at his house for the summer, I'm trying to be a gracious guest."

"You could be a gracious guest with your tongue down his throat, I mean," says Jungkook,
shrugging. "Betcha he'd be gracious."

"I don't want my tongue down his throat! Gosh, just talking about all this is making my face burn and you're suggesting something this stupid. I do not like him, end of story," I tell him firmly.

"Yeahhhh, well, you're not the storyteller here. That's my job."

"What, since when?"

"Since two seconds ago. Now get out and comfort that poor idiot." With one hand on my back, Jungkook quickly shoved me out the karaoke room and shut the door behind me. He's surprisingly stronger than I expected. I mean, I did say he comes off as scrawny.

"Fuck you, Jungkook," I mutter under my breath and proceed to stomp off down the hallway. Yoongi's nowhere to be found. "Great, now my host hates my guts too." Wandering around aimlessly, I eventually find the entry door where a man of Yoongi's stature is hanging out, looking incredibly bored. It must be him.

Collecting myself, I leave the store and stand next to the vineyard owner, who refuses to acknowledge my presence. "You okay?"

"Pft, do I seem okay to you?" he snaps irritably. I lower my head so that he can't glare at me or anything; it's making me feel bad. I wish he could be happier. "I'm sorry," Yoongi apologizes unexpectedly.

"Why're you apologizing, we're the ones who seem to screw up everything."

"No, I'm being an ass. I'm sorry," he says again, glancing in another direction. "Everything kinda sucks right now."

"You wanna talk about it?" Yoongi says nothing. "Does it have to do with Sunhee at all?" I prompt him more. Maybe talking about what's bothering him will ease his mood a little bit. "Hyung?"

He sighs heavily, throwing his head back to view the sky filled with scattered stars. "I don't understand what I'm doing wrong with her," Yoongi whispers sadly. "I try and try, but it never feels like I'm good enough for her. Like I'm not worthy of being seen with her."

"How can you say that? Have you seen yourself?" I stutter immediately. I cannot believe he thinks so little of himself; it only amplifies my dislike of Sunhee. How can she belittle such an amazing person like this?

Yoongi chuckles before responding. "I dunno. She's just so career oriented and everything. I feel like I'm constantly having to catch up with her life and it goes by in a blur. She's always meeting cool, new people and then tells them that I'm her boyfriend. Some of these people look at me like I ought to consider myself lucky to be dating someone like her. It makes a person feel... so small. And then I wonder if I'm in the right place when I stand besides her. Then I start thinking that I'd like to spend the rest of my life with her, but why does it feel so wrong at times?"

I've never had him say this much to me; I'm in a state of mild shock, honestly. "I didn't know you had all these thoughts of not belonging."

"It's been a thing. I've had these thoughts often and these days, they just seem to get stronger. I don't understand why it has to be this way. We were like you and Jungkook once upon a time, you know?"
"What do you mean like Jungkook and I?"

"Like two crazy people in love. Where it was just the two of us and nobody else really mattered. But we got out of that phase and now when I see you two, it reminds me of what we used to have," Yoongi admits. "At least that's the only reason I can come up with as to why seeing you guys together makes me angry."

"We aren't in love... I promise you, I'm not in love with him," I sincerely tell him, turning to face the man. "I don't know why you keep thinking that, but I don't love him. We're friends, there's no relationship."

"He's so close to you though. You can't expect me to believe that, do you?" Yoongi inquires softly. "I get it. He's Jungkook, this stunning, rebellious guy with an effortless way with words. Plus he can do practically everything. Can't blame you for falling."

"You shouldn't blame me at all, because I haven't fallen. Anyway, this isn't about me. It's about you and what's bothering you."

"What's bothering me is that I don't like myself all that much right now. And it's disheartening. Out of nowhere, I'll be overwhelmed with all these weird feelings that I can't make heads or tails of, and it's so damn confusing. I don't know what to do with myself."

"You've never been so relatable before this moment," I tell him and he simply laughs at me.

"Really? Why's that?"

"Well... there was this point in high school where I just hated myself. I really, really hated myself. There was nothing that appealed to me in regards to my own existence. It's still there, maybe to a lesser degree. And even today, I don't know where I'm supposed to belong or what I'm supposed to be doing with this life of mine. There's no guidance, only expectations," I confess.

"Why?"

"My parents kept having all these hopes and dreams for me, but they never seemed right. My best friend became too busy with his new relationship to give me the time I wanted from him. But I couldn't say anything, that's selfish. I began liking myself a whole lot less, like everything about myself bothered me. People seemed to like me for superficial reasons. If I expressed even a tidbit of a deep thought, they'd move away from me, because deep thoughts aren't fun. They found me attractive, they wanted a good time. But that's not what I wanted."

"What did you want?" he asks, his full attention on me and me alone.

"To be next to somebody and feel like it's where I ought to be," I admit to him, too vulnerable at this point to even feel embarrassed. "Not like I'm a third wheel or something."

We stay quiet for a while, making me wonder if I've said anything wrong. But then, Yoongi clears his throat. "Have you ever heard of Maslow's hierarchy?"

"You're really gonna bring psychology into this?" I ask him sarcastically, though a part of me is taken aback that he'd take this opportunity to give me a lesson on humanistic psychology.

"So you know what it is?"

"I know of it, not what it is. My teacher didn't go too much into it during that unit or whatever. Or maybe I wasn't paying enough attention," I grumble back.
"Basically, there's five levels to the pyramid. We need to fulfill each level before moving onto the next one. First one's physiological needs, which you've met without any problems. Food, water, shelter, basic things," Yoongi says thoughtfully, "Then there's the second level, which I'm also sure you've met. Safety, the need to feel secure and all."

"Alright..."

"I reckon you're stuck on that third level if we look at it from that point of view. The level of belongingness and love. That's where we form relationships and stuff that make us feel like a part of something bigger. Maybe that's where you're lacking. Maybe you didn't get the intimacy you needed or the trusting friendships you needed. The way you talk makes it sound like you don't even feel like you feel comfortable at home with your parents."

"Since when did you know everything about all this?" I don't mean to be snappy, but there's just something about having someone analyze you and tell you what they think is wrong. It's weird, I don't know.

"I have a psychology minor," Yoongi explains casually.

"That's random... you're a vineyard owner with a minor in psychology? Then what'd you major in?"

"Business."

"That makes sense. But anyway, so you think I'm stuck on the third level. What comes after that?"

"Mm," he hums, stuffing his hands in his pockets, "esteem and self actualization. So what I'm saying is how can you move on to feeling confident and good about yourself if you're so busy craving something solid with another person?"

"This was supposed to be about you, not me, hyung," I protest somewhat weakly.

"You'll get there, Taehyung," he says suddenly, looking at me right in the eye. My legs are weakening, oh no.

"I'll... I'll get there?"

"You'll find someone you can stand next to and belong. Not question if that's where you're supposed to be. You'll find someone who can take your hand like this." He demonstrates by taking my hand in his. "And it'll fit so perfectly, you won't think twice about taking it." Our hands fit perfectly, but I stay silent. "You'll have someone who makes you smile and laugh so hard that you'll forget your miseries while you're with them. Because all you want to do is smile... and anything that's bugged you won't seem so bad anymore."

"You think I'm capable of finding that?"

"I do. From what I've seen of you, I think you're more than capable of finding it."

His eyes search mine as he speaks, his hushed tones taking away my ability to think. "If... if that's what it takes to fulfill that third level, aren't you in the same boat as I am?" I murmur, not really in my clearest state of mind.

Eyebrows furrowing, he looks at me curiously. "What do you mean?"

"All those things you just described," I say in a whisper, "Do you feel all that when you're with Sunhee?" And it's as if the moment is shattered. He drops my hand, breaking our eye contact and
"Taking a step back. "Hyung?"

"That's another conversation for another time." Pasting a smile on his face, he looks up, his happiness painfully forced. "We gotta go inside now. Jungkook paid for the time we spend in that room, don't want it wasted. And I need to hear you sing."

"Are you sure? Do you at least feel a little bit better now?"

He takes a second before nodding. "Mm, I do. Thanks for coming, Taehyung. For listening to my stupid rambling."

"It's not stupid. It's important, because it's how you feel and if you ever need someone to listen to you ramble, well, I'm here!" I burst out quite passionately, surprising the dark haired elder. "I'll be here the whole summer. If anything's ever bothering you, will you tell me? I'm not the best person to talk to... or to be around. But I'll do what I can to bring you some peace of mind. Will you let me do that?"

His smile softens, becoming more honest this time round. "Okay. I will. Thank you, Taehyung."

"You're welcome, hyung." Yoongi starts to walk inside the store, while I just watch him do so. Yes, he totally avoided answering my question today, but it'll come back another day. Yes, he stopped me from digging deeper into his relationship with Sunhee. But despite all that, I think we've truly gotten somewhere tonight. Maybe he won't tell me what he's really thinking at this point in time... but that shouldn't mean that he doesn't want to. And I want to be here for him when he does.
My youth, my youth, my youth

A couple of days have passed since our karaoke outing, or as I call it, the night Yoongi opened up to me for the first time. His words really made an impact on me; I've spent so much time wondering why I feel lonely despite having people nearby, and he's right that I haven't found quite the right person to be next to. I haven't found that hand to hold.

As I lay on the bed, aimlessly tossing a plush ball in the air, I keep thinking about how I felt once he took my hand to prove his point. Call me crazy, but to some degree, holding Yoongi's hand felt right. So right that it actually terrified me. Just the mere feeling of my skin brushing against his elicited more of a reaction from me than the endless series of cheek kisses planted on me by Jungkook. I can't tell if that's because I know Kook's only trying to make the older man jealous or if Kook's right about my feelings. It terrifies me to think that I might have a crush on a man who's not only my dad's good friend, but also ten years older than me. Ten years older and in a relationship with one of the prettiest women out here.

Speaking of Sunhee, she decided this afternoon that it was a good idea to drop by to hang around, explaining why I'm drowning in boredom in my room. I'd rather be downstairs with Yoongi, talking or something. It doesn't necessarily need to be about anything deep, I'll take whatever I can get. But due to her presence, I have to spend the time thinking. I could go down there, but seeing them together makes me the third wheel. Now, I could call Jungkook and I know he'd be over in the blink of an eye. But the thing is, I feel like I ought to do some processing on my own. If I so much as utter a word about what happened between Yoongi and I that night, he'd probably have me pinned down on the bed in demand for details. He's a touchy guy, have I ever commented on that?

To compensate for Kook's absence, I sigh heavily and roll onto my stomach, letting the ball fall carelessly on the bed. Time to see if Namjoon can manage a phone call. Grabbing my phone, I get ready to call him, but as soon as my thumb gets close to that call button, I freeze. Is this worth bothering Namjoon over? What if he's busy and just finds me a nuisance? I don't wanna distract him from anything. You see, this is why I'll never get anywhere in life. All I ever do is fucking hesitate instead of jumping in headfirst; this is my best friend and I can't even call him up easily. Fuck this overthinking.

In my moment of hesitation and self-cursing, my phone begins buzzing with a call from none other than Jungkook. A groan accidentally slips past me as I stare at the call screen, debating whether to
pick up or not. It's true that I haven't seen Kook since the karaoke night due to unexpected business on his part. He didn't bother to tell me what it was, and I didn't bother asking. But I also know what I might do if I accept the call. He'll probably ask about how it's going with Yoongi and I'll end up doing something involuntarily that'll be a dead giveaway to the fact that I'm reconsidering how accurate Kook's hunches are.

After gazing at the screen for a few more seconds in unnecessary contemplation, my impulse wins and the call is accepted. Jungkook's gorgeous face appears, and not gonna lie, I gasped internally. He's just one of those friends you have where every time you see them, you just think to yourself "how the fuck can a person be so beautiful?" I swear, half the time I'm with him is spent thinking about that.

"Do you plan on talking or gaping?" he asks suddenly, smirking yet again. Everything I do makes him smirk, it's rude.

Scoffing, I roll my eyes and his smirk turns into somewhat of a smile. Definitely nicer to look at. "Well, you're the one who called. Shouldn't you initiate the conversation?"

"Uh no? I initiated the phone call, and you picked up, implying that you wanna talk so... talk. The floor's yours," he infuriatingly retorts.

"You asshat."

He scrunches his face up to pretend cry. "Gosh, that really hurt my feelings," he 'weeps' and bursts out into a rambunctious fit of laughter immediately. Leave it to him to not be serious about anything at all. "Seriously, what's new. I haven't seen you in forever and I already miss you, it's awful."

The slight change in his tone compels me to talk, not to mention the 'I miss you.' I don't particularly find myself to be a miss-able person so hearing him say that honestly... dunno, it catches me off guard. "How can you miss me when it's been only two days?"

"I guess that's the power of Taehyung, right? You're such great company that once a person's out of it, they feel your absence strongly," replies Kook smoothly, one hand lazily ruffling up his hair.

Blushing slightly, I divert my gaze. "You say that with such ease," I tell him softly, "it's like you're used to saying things like that."

"You think so?"

I meet his blue eyes once more. "Yeah."

"You're wrong," he states indifferently. "I don't throw words like that around without it meaning something. I really do miss you."

"I find it so hard to believe that you do. I'm not saying you're lying or anything, it's just my self esteem won't let me believe you," I say to him bashfully, tugging on the my t-shirt sleeve.

"If you knew what my life was like, you'd understand why I miss your company," the blue eyed man explains seriously, gazing at my eyes with such an intensity that I might just spontaneously combust if I maintain eye contact for too long. "Anyway," he changes topics, reverting to the signature smirk, "how're things?"

"I like things. Things tend to make life easier, like this ball." I pick up the ball I had been throwing earlier to show him. "This is a thing which makes time pass faster. This bed is a thing upon which I
lay to rest and that leads to a pretty comfortable life, I'd say. So all in all, I'd give things a 10 out of 10."

Jungkook rolls his eyes so obnoxiously that if they fell out of his head, I wouldn't be surprised in the slightest. "I'm in awe of your wit, Captain Smartass. You know what I'm talking about."

Snickering, I shake my head at him before continuing. "If you're referring to your made up Yoongi hyung situation, there's really not much for me to say. Nothing's changed. I still don't like him."

Saying that with a straight face is the fucking hardest thing ever, and I end up mumbling the end bit. Sure enough, Kook picks up on it.

"Oh, my God," he suddenly says, looking more alert than ever. "Something's happened, hasn't it?"

"What?"

"Your face. Your eyes keep shifting around and your voice is kinda shaky," he points out excitedly. "Taehyung! You do like him!"

"I do not!"

"Then why do you look so flustered all of a sudden? Something must have happened. Did you kiss, did he hug you, what happened?" Jungkook fires question after question, overwhelming me further. As if the emotional turmoil isn't enough. "Did something happen that night?"

Exhaling, I shake my head once again and sit up to lean against the wall. "It's really nothing. It's stupid."

"Stupid, maybe. But it's enough to make you flustered so I gotta know. I've been a supporter of you two having a relationship since day one so you gotta tell me," Jungkook pushes.

"Nothing happened, Kook! We just went outside and talked. I kinda helped him calm down a bit; he started talking about his personal life for a bit, which was nice. I felt like we were getting close and that made me happy, I dunno. Then somehow, we switched to talking about my problems that've been going on since high school. He started spouting off some psych crap on me and held my hand and kinda lectured me, but nothing really happened." I finish the end of my reply quickly so that he won't catch what exactly went down between us, but unfortunately, that guy's a damn good listener when he needs to be.

"He held your hand?"

"It was to prove a point, okay? Don't get ideas. It's nothing exciting at all," I scold him, brushing my bangs out of my face. "People hold hands, it's natural. Friends hold hands."

"Are you guys friends?" Jungkook inquires and rests his chin on his hands, as though waiting for me to start getting flustered again. So rude, I swear. "Or is it something more?"

"I don't know if friends is even the right word, but to some degree, I'd say we are friends. Not super close, but we made some progress."

"Uhuh, uhuh. So tell me," says the blue eyed man with piqued interest, "how did it feel to hold his hand?"

I pause before responding, because if I screw up with my wording here, things may take a turbulent turn. "It felt fine."
"Just fine?" He sounds disappointed and I kinda want to laugh. "There's nothing else?"

"I mean, it felt nice. It was a nice moment, holding hands with him. Felt right, felt... good." I say cautiously.

"It felt right," Kook repeats, deep in thought. "Why does it feel right?"

"I don't know. But when our hands are together like that, I can't help but think that it'd be nice to hold it on other occasions. They fit so well together; it's comfortable too."

"Oh God, you're whipped," he concludes immediately. "You like him, you're finally realizing this."

I sigh, but Jungkook just waves a finger at me. "Tae, you can't even tell me there's nothing here anymore. Why else would you even consider holding his hand again? How does he make you feel? Please be honest with me here."

"He makes me confused. There are times when we're together and I feel accepted. Happy. But then, these moments show up where things he says bother me or he manages to make me angry, like when he constantly asked about you and I, what our relationship is like, et cetera. It bothered me that he cared so much, because why's it any of his business what you and I do together? Plus, he's with that perfect Sunhee of his and you don't see me being salty over the fact that he's dating someone as annoying as her," I ramble, not comprehending that what was intended to be a calm reply ended up as a rant, more or less.

Jungkook's lips stretch widely into the biggest grin I've seen on his face yet and he lets out the most triumphant laugh. "I KNEW IT!" he exclaims, overjoyed to have heard about my emotional conflicts. "I fucking knew I'd hear this sooner or later; I was right!"

"You aren't, I was just answering your question!"

"Oh, come on. Listen to yourself, Taehyung! He makes you feel all these things without even trying and you clearly resent his girlfriend, though if that's not out of jealousy, I don't blame you. She's not a likable character," Jungkook says in distaste. "Regardless of that, I see love here. You like him, end of story. Question is, are you gonna do something about it?"

"Even if you're right, I won't make a move. It's not fair to him, he's in a relationship."

"With a witch," grumbles Kook, only to be ignored by me.

"I don't wanna get myself in trouble or have him hate me. There's too big of an age gap, it's embarrassing."

"You're both adults, I fail to see the issue."

"The issue is I'm his best friend's son. That doesn't make sense, that just sounds wrong in every way possible!" I hiss angrily.

"Damn, it's a forbidden love... that's so fucking hot," Jungkook admits.

"It's not hot! It's irritating that I could possibly like a guy who I'll never stand a chance with. And it's hard because I see him every day, looking drop dead gorgeous as usual. Then I see his kindness, his compassion, his ability to make me feel secure and as though his home really is mine, and my heart just wants to run out of its cage. It's the worst feeling in the world, knowing that I'm falling for someone who's off limits, and it hurts knowing that there's nothing I can do to stop it."
"Tae..."

"I hate having crushes so much, Kook. You don't understand. It rarely bodes well for me, and in this case, I'm having to sit helplessly with the knowledge that my feelings are being wasted on someone who could never possibly reciprocate," I miserably confess, hiding my face behind one hand. Jungkook stays quiet for some time before sitting up on his bed as well.

"Tae, look at me for a sec." I refuse to look up. "Tae, please?" I glance up for a split second before looking down again. "We'll amp up our game. He'll want you in no time, trust me."

"It's not about games, Kook. I wish he'd like me without needing to have some stupid game. But that's a dumb wish over a lost cause."

"You're too pessimistic, Tae, and it bugs me. You're more than deserving of his attention and affection," argues Jungkook, "You're incredibly handsome, you're kind, you're thoughtful, you're not plastic! There's so much more to you than what meets the eye; I figured that out after one conversation with you and look, I'm hooked. I'm addicted to listening to you speak, because it's so nice to meet someone who takes time to think about what the little things mean, rather than those who acknowledge them and move on. I could continue, but I think I've made my point. We'll heat up our game a little more, see how he responds to it. I take it as a sign that he disapproves of our bond, only since he doesn't understand it completely. He keeps making it out to be romantic, and I think he's jealous on some level."

"That's a bit of a stretch, don't you think?" I mumble under my breath. "It's really not worth wasting time over."

"I say it is, so it is. Don't worry about it. We'll take care of your love affairs. It'll all be okay," he says calmly. At that moment, my door flings open and Sunhee stands in the doorway, which comes as a surprise to both Jungkook and I.

"Hey Taehyung, lunch is almost ready so I thought I'd let you know. But could you help me with something beforehand?" she asks innocently enough, pushing all her hair to one side and leaning against the door frame.

"Uhh, sure. Just lemme say bye and I'll be right there." The woman nods and sashays off, leaving me with an irritated Jungkook. "Guess I gotta go now."

"Alright, take care. Be weary of that snake, she's no good for anyone. I wish Yoongi could have at least dated a nice girl, there's so many of them. Instead, he finds trash covered with a glittery veil," Jungkook angrily mutters and twists one of his rings. "See ya later, Tae. Good luck."

"Mm, bye. See you." He hangs up and I slowly get off the bed, brushing the comforter to remove any big wrinkles. I meet Sunhee out in the hallway, greeted by a large smile. Same one she puts on everywhere, but doesn't seem genuine at all. "What did you need?"

"A new towel. I'm spending the night here, and Yoongs told me to ask you about it." Yoongs? Towels? I'm here on vacation, not as a worker, what the fuck? Not that I can say that out loud anyway.

"Sure thing. But umm, where are the towels?" I ask with a dry chuckle. She covers her mouth as she laughs a little before turning on her heel.

"This way. It's just kinda high up, and you're taller than me so I figured you could get it? If you don't mind," she says as we head into Yoongi's bedroom. His room is really neat and organized, topped...
with tasteful decorations. I really like his style... and I'm also trying not to think about the fact that I'm in his bedroom. Otherwise I might hyperventilate a little bit.

Sunhee stops me in front of a small closet and opens the door to it. "They're all the way up there, could you grab me one?" she inquires.

"Does it matter which?"

"Nah, any will do." Reaching up, I take one of the fluffy, lilac colored towels and hand it to her with a half-hearted smile. She grins and as if her actions hadn't already shocked me enough, the woman places a hand on my bare arm. Leaning in, Sunhee gives me a small peck on my cheek the way Jungkook does, except hers makes me want to go wash my face with soap instantly.

"You're so sweet, Tae. Thank you," she says with a hint of gratefulness in her tone, but I dislike the way her fingers linger on my arm. It doesn't strike me as normal. I smile nervously, stepping back so that we're no longer touching.

"No problem." With a curt nod, I turn my back on the glamorous she-devil and make my way down the stairs for lunch. Yoongi works away in the kitchen in his red apron, humming to himself. It's adorable. He's adorable. "Hey, I heard lunch was ready," I casually announce. There's no need to make it obvious that Sunhee stresses me out with her mannerisms. He looks at me and smiles so widely that a pang is felt in my chest as soon as I see it.

"Yeah, it is. I'm making sandwiches, hope they're of some good."

"I bet they'll be delicious," I tell him happily before taking a seat at the table where he had a variety of sandwiches laid out, accompanied by fruits and a large salad. "This looks great. Thank you, hyung."

Grinning still, the vineyard owner places a hand on my shoulder. "I'm glad." He walks back into the kitchen and the spot on my shoulder where his hand rested a few seconds ago burns furiously. My chest hurts and my shoulder burns, but I feel so incredibly happy just seeing him. Great. This really must be a crush.
sixteen

My youth is yours

Yoongi's POV

Most of my teenage years were spent in hazy, confused state. I had my fair share of friends, most of them mindless party-goers and painfully oblivious rich kids. That was the main demographic of my school. Hanging out with them was a way to get rid of free time which, in hindsight, wasn't really the best decision. I could have spent the time improving myself or working harder. But I didn't like having free time. I'd get too much time to myself to think and... it just never boded well for me. Thinking.

From a very superficial perspective, most people couldn't tell that I had been a kid with his own inner turmoils. I smiled at everyone, fit in perfectly, got the right grades. It didn't take too much effort; I guess I just had that sort of presence or charisma. People liked me and I, being the social butterfly that I'd been raised to be, would mingle without a second thought. But a part of me wonders if I mingled too much and it robbed me of any opportunity to have something real with someone.

It's surprising that all of sudden, thoughts of my high school self have been creeping up again. So much time went into trying to forget about them, but after bringing them up to Taehyung, my alone time has been spent reflecting on how much I've actually changed in all those years. I told him about how my parents had divorced and how a lot of high school was wasted in a whirlpool of anger. Now I'm starting to recall why.

There would be many nights when mom would return home with different men. She'd introduce them to me, one face after another, one meaningless night after another... with the same fake smile on her face. It saddened me to see her with people who never seemed to make her smile the way dad could. I only say that because I've seen pictures of them from their early married life. The smile on her face after the divorce has never been quite the same, meaning that I never really got to witness her genuine happiness. But even though it chipped away at my heart, I didn't dare say anything to her. I felt that she was obligated to have this time to herself, to have the chance to feel good about herself even though she went through the men like pieces of gum. She worked hard as a chef and burdening her with my thoughts on her dating life didn't seem fair. I disliked myself immensely for staying silent.

So in all honesty, I wasn't one to be crystal clear about my feelings with her. I told her what she wanted to know. Same goes for dad; I didn't go out of my way to tell him much either. Not because I hated him for leaving her or anything, but because I was too scared to waste a single second of my
time with him talking about sad things. I wanted him to believe that I was this super upbeat, chipper kid in the hopes that maybe I'd be able to believe my own pretense as well.

Back then, I'd craved a pretense because high school left me shattered. And it wasn't until I started talking to Taehyung that I realized why, all these years later. I constantly thought of the fact that my parents weren't together, that my family was broken. I felt that I somehow had a hand in their splitting up, despite their attempts to convince me that it wasn't my fault. I figured that I was probably broken and even though I was well off socially in school, I yearned for something more meaningful that nobody seemed to offer. I remember how weird I considered myself for being like that. Putting myself down for not thinking the mainstream way, that was quite the common leisurely activity for me. It made me feel alone. I was so fixated on my own pathetic state that I couldn't think clearly. It explains the whole haziness of it all. It really was a confusing time. I didn't know who to turn to or where to go for advice. I refused help from counselors of any sort, because I had too much pride to walk into one of their rooms and trust them. It wasn't where I belonged, but then again, I didn't know where that place was to begin with.

It wasn't until college that I started to piece myself together bit by bit. My bond with dad grew stronger as he continued to plant ideas of me taking care of the vineyard in my head. I took his advice to heart, blurring out that of mom's since she kept pushing me to be something else. I'll never really understand why she was so strongly against me doing what I do. Anyway, I ventured into the business classes, found myself enjoying it, and decided that I wanted business as my major. Psychology caught my interest, more as a hobby type of thing since I liked thinking about the mind. Boom, there's a minor. I grew out of my high school shell and gained a bit more confidence in myself as I walked by myself in the world without mom or dad hovering near me. It felt good to experience independence. But my determined footsteps didn't take me to my place of belonging.

Taehyung brought all that back to me. That night when he told me about his conflicts about not knowing where he's meant to stand and self loathing, it was like listening to a slightly different version of myself. I suddenly saw my 17, 18 year old self standing in front of me, head hanging low, mumbling the pains I'd kept to myself for years on end. It kinda stirred something in me... because I knew how hard it would've been for me to tell someone I'd known for a few weeks about all this. I felt a sense of honor. Kim Taehyung was trusting me, and what's more is that he stood out there on that night wanting to help me.

A part of me is still slightly astonished that he's staying here for the summer. When he first came into my life, I saw the eighteen year old for what he is. My best friend's teenage son. These days, I see him and feel a bit of awe at how much better he is at expressing himself than I was at his age. It does still hit me that he's the son of my best friend, but I'm starting to see him for something more, I guess. Which is totally unexpected, because I didn't think I'd like him at all.

Jungyoon had called me out of the blue, all business-like yet friendly at the same time. I'd been so surprised that he called me, mostly since the guy was generally so busy. Calls for friends wasn't in his normal agenda, but I mean, I respected that. Life doesn't always leave time for things like that. Anyway, so he called and we spent a good half hour just catching up on life until he'd cleared his throat in a way that often meant that he was about to get to his main point. And then he asked me if his son could live with me for the summer. It made me nervous at first, to think that a teen would come and stay in my house, because what if we couldn't get along? I was basing my thoughts off of my experiences with Jungkook, who I have this sort of love-hate relationship with. I didn't want another Jungkook type teen in my life, one alone was a handful. But since the request came from one of my closest friends, how could I possibly say no?

So Taehyung came and my first impression of him was that he's a timid guy, mostly because of how he stuttered and struggled to speak in front of me. I found it cute, an endearing quality. Then his little
outburst during dinner happened. God, a part of me was absolutely dumbfounded that my most well mannered friend's son had the audacity to behave in such a way, while at the same time, I was thoroughly amused by his red faced rage. Sunhee had been appalled, and definitely a lot more offended than I'd been, but she kinda deserved the yelling. I didn't think she'd been particularly fair to him; poor guy was just trying to talk and it was obvious that he's terribly shy, but she kept making him feel small. Of course I'd never tell her that, she'd kill me.

From the point of that little rant of his, I started to separate Taehyung from his dad. I didn't connect them as strongly, they're just far too different for me to. The only bit of Jungyoon that I see in the eighteen year old is in his straightforwardness. His physical features share more similarities with his mom, and his personality is unlike the two of them combined. Not entirely sure how someone could be that different from his parents, but there we go.

"Hyung?" a soft voice interrupts my thoughts. I glance sideways to see Taehyung lingering by the doorway of the patio. He's dressed in his pajamas, the regular sweats and oversized shirt. It's a good look on him. "You've been out here for a while, everything alright?"

As soon as he says that, I looked around me and it hit me that the sun had already set. I've been sitting outside for more than an hour or something. "Yeah, no, everything's okay. Just needed some time to myself."

He shifts slightly, biting his bottom lip. It looks like he's debating something inside. "Tae, is there something you want to ask?" Taehyung plays with his hair as he continues standing by the door, still debating.

The brunette opens his mouth and closes it immediately, shaking his head. His bashful actions bring a smile to my face, making me forget about all my heavy thoughts for a second. I gesture for him to come take a seat next to me. "Come on, it's getting lonely out here anyway."

With a more prominent feeling of happiness, Taehyung came over and took a seat next to me, careful to leave a small space between us. "What've you been doing?" he asks gently.

"Thinking, I guess. What about you?"

"I was reading. But then I got bored and looked around for something to do. The house felt empty so I thought why not spend time with you?"

"What were you reading?"

A simple question is all it takes for his eyes to light up. A simple question to make him cross his legs and face me as he starts spouting off everything about his book, what he thinks of it, his favorite parts, etc. A simple question to make him smile in a way that I feel good inside. I love that that's all it takes. I like that he can make me feel good.

I like that sitting here and listening to him... feels right.
seventeen

What if, what if we start to drive

Taehyung's POV

"So?"

"So what?"

"I want to hear you say it in person," says Jungkook eagerly. An immediate sigh leaves me; I knew I shouldn't have asked him to come over. But it's a Wednesday afternoon and Yoongi's gone out to do stuff (he didn't specify what), leaving me in this house alone. He didn't bother telling me when he'd be back either. I didn't particularly want to be by myself so calling up Kook seemed like the thing to do. Though it should have hit me that he'd come with the intentions of talking about the annoying topic that always sneaks into our conversations somehow.

Trying to find my courage — and my voice — to admit such a humiliating truth, I stall by pretending to gaze out the window, as though the sway of the praying trees takes my mind elsewhere. Is this something I want to say to Jungkook's face? Not really. Confessing this makes it real, there's genuinely no going back afterwards. It will be my horrid truth out in the open and though I can't see the words themselves, I know they'll drift in our minds. Affecting our thoughts and actions. I don't really want it to have such an impact. Or any, for that matter.

Jungkook clears his throat, no longer wanting to show patience by any means. "Tae. I'm not letting this one go."

"Tch," I click my tongue irritably as I face him, eye to eye. "I don't see why this is necessary. Why do you need to hear me say this?"

"Because it means I'm right."

"That's such an insufferable reason to make someone say something along these lines," I retort, but it's obvious that he doesn't give a damn. Jungkook's mind is made up, and though I have respect for that blue eyed Adonis and his attitude about life, I'm not appreciating his approach to my personal matters in the slightest. "You're really going to make me do this?"

"I am." That bastard says it with the straightest face I've ever seen on him; there's not even the hint of his smirk. "Say it."
Exhaling heavily, I glance down at the couch. "I like him," I mumble, though it's barely loud enough for me to hear.

"Louder, please."

"I like him."

"Who do you like?"

"Yoongi hyung."

"You like Yoongi hyung."

He's doing a fine job of pushing my buttons right now. "Yes," I finally say with a deep breath, "I like Yoongi hyung." The beaming smile that appears on Jungkook's face is truly unlike any other that I've seen on him. If this is what triumph looks like, then wow. Wait, no, I'm annoyed with him, not admiring his smile.

"Amazing," Jungkook replies happy before leaning over to engulf me in a big hug. "I'm happy for you." Without meaning to, I reciprocate by automatically placing my hands on his back. It feels nice.

"But Kook, there's nothing that can be done about this, you know," I tell him as he slides back to his original spot on the couch. We sit cross legged, facing one another. One with a gaze of defeat, the other scheming. "He won't like me, I'm a child to him."

"You don't know that," Jungkook asserts and shakes his head. "He could like you. Maybe he doesn't at the moment, but there's no reason why he won't someday."

"Why should I invest in these feelings in the hopes that someday, something will happen?"

Interestingly enough, his smile takes on a more... I guess sorrowful, feel. I don't know what I said for that to happen, but the joy in his eyes dull slightly. "Because you have days to invest in."

"I don't understand."

"I'm saying you have the time on your hands to see where this goes. You don't have to sit and wait for this summer to end so that you can leave to forget about these feelings you have. They mean something to you, even if you tell me they're bullshit. He means something to you, otherwise why else would you have chosen him to feel this way towards?"

"I didn't choose him, it just happened," I argue, though I reckon it's not going to convince him of anything.

Jungkook chuckles softly and starts twisting one of his rings. It's a habit of his, I've noticed. He does it if he's ever deep in thought, or in situations that require more thinking than usual. "But you found something in him worth going after. Just because you dislike the fact that you have feelings for Yoongi hyung doesn't mean that you don't find him worth it. Obviously, maybe on a subconscious level, you do."

"I don't."

"Listen to me," Jungkook interrupts, "The reason you're so against this is because you hate the messiness of it all."

"Well, there's multiple reasons actually," I correct him in annoyance. "He's dating someone, he's my
dad's best friend, he's not into guys, I'm too immature for someone like him-

"And who told you those last two bits?" asks the dark haired man sharply.

"Nobody. I'm just guessing."

"No, you're just biased against yourself in every way possible," Jungkook shoots back. "The first two reasons you listed I can acknowledge, because they are facts. However, there's been zero indication that you're too immature for him or that he's not into guys."

"He doesn't strike me as someone who'd be into guys, though."

"It's not always going to be so obvious, Tae. You just can't come to terms with the fact that you are attractive and you're able to make anyone fall for you. It's true, you have everything that it takes."

I stubbornly pout in response. This is one of those conversations I won't have the upper hand in. "I don't."

"That's pigheadedness. You're worth it. And Yoongi hyung can definitely be the one who shows you that you are worth it," he adamantly says, "I'm a firm believer of this."

"Whatever." I roll my eyes, leaning back onto the armrest of the couch. "So what happens now? I've admitted that I like him, that's all there is to it?"

Jungkook laughs as if a child had just asked him the silliest question in the world. Guess that gives me my answer. "I'm gonna help you get him. Or at the very least, I'm going to help him see you."

"See me?"

"For the amazing person that you really are and show him that he does want you."

"Uhh," I stupidly respond, unsure of where to take a reply like that. "How will you do that?"

"I have my ways. But," Jungkook seriously says, "You have to trust me. There can't be questioning."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because in the few weeks that I've known you, almost month now, I know you're someone who questions things a lot. You're going to be bound to challenge my methods and I can't have that. You either trust that I know what I'm doing or you don't." Jungkook crosses his arms and suddenly it feels like I'm back in a classroom by myself with a teacher giving me a lecture or something. "Can you?"

"Umm." The debate in my head goes back and forth like a tennis match, and eventually a clear winner is established. Mostly because I'm a bit curious to see what the man has up his sleeve. "I trust you."

"Okay."

"Good. So what's happened with you two lately? I mean since the karaoke night?" Jungkook inquires, his tone holding a little less intensity than it had a few seconds ago.

I shrug carelessly. "Not much. He enjoys his alone time so I make sure to give that to him, but there was an evening where we stayed up for hours and kinda just talked. It started off with him asking me about the book I'm reading, then it went from there."
"Really?"

"Yeah." An unsuspecting smile creeps onto my face and I look down in sudden shyness. "It was
great, I had a lot of fun. He seemed to like it too, he was smiling the whole night." Jungkook grins in
approval and I continue. "Sunhee's been real busy lately with stuff, so that's been leaving him to do
things either by himself or with me. I lend a hand when he's doing stuff around the house like
cooking or taking out the trash. It's been pretty good so far, we have good conversations when we
work together. He asks about you sometimes, how I'm getting on with you. I think he's letting go of
the idea that we're romantically affiliated, which is relieving in a sense."

"Why's that?" Jungkook's brows furrow and he looks at me with the utmost concentration. It's a bit
unsettling.

"Well, he'd always get so cold when he asked about how we're doing and stuff. It took me forever to
convince him that we aren't dating or anything, so now he's friendlier."

Jungkook says something under his breath instantly, and I can't understand him. "What are you
saying?"

"I just think it's interesting that he's so against the idea of us dating. I don't see why he'd be so
affected by it." A mischievous glint appears in his eyes. "Unless he likes you."

"Oh pft, we aren't going back to that now."

"Think about it, what else would explain his attitude towards us dating other than jealousy? He
doesn't normally have any problems with me, but ever since you entered the picture and we've been
hanging out, all of a sudden he starts thinking I'm the devil or something!" Jungkook exclaims. "It's
the perfect explanation."

"I'm ignoring all the nonsense you just spouted, okay?" I tell him clearly. "We aren't going into this
again." At this moment, the front door handle starts moving and I peek behind me, spotting Yoongi
through the glass panes by the sides of the door. "Ah, he's back."

"Alright, follow my lead," Jungkook instructs and before I can even say anything, he reaches
forward to grab my t-shirt and pull me forward. Our lips crash together, making everything in me
protest. He's kissed my cheek in the past, but this was new. Jungkook had always avoided the lips, it
was never on the lips.

I place my hands on his shoulders and pry us apart. "What the fuck?"

He only looks me straight in the eye and says one thing, "Play along." With that, Jungkook comes
closer once again, this time kissing me hard enough that I fall back on the couch with him on top.
Not knowing what else to do, my hands go on the back of his neck, feeling the silk of his blue
choker under my palms, and I start to kiss back. I haven't kissed someone in so long, but there's no
time to think about that as our lips move together in a sort of hungry aggression that I haven't
experienced in some time now. He tastes of nothing but ashes.

The front door opens and closes, but neither of us stop what we're doing. Instead, Jungkook pulls me
up, placing his hands in my hair. He runs his fingers through each strand, his mouth never once
leaving mine. I can't help but bring him closer to me so that we're chest to chest and I can feel the
coldness of his rings on the sides of my warm face. He's a damn good kisser, that's all I can say.
"Keep going," he whispers against my lips and I listen, not thinking twice. I've never done
something like this, I don't know what exactly is happening.
The loud clanging of keys hitting a hard surface sounds along with someone clearing their throat, breaking us from our moment. With tousled hair and unsettled breathing, Jungkook and I turn to face a rather pissed off Yoongi. He stands with his arms crossed against his soft yellow shirt as if he's about to give us a major scolding. "What are you guys doing?"

Jungkook chuckles, this time not as softly. "What does it look like we're doing?"

Yoongi looks directly at me and my face goes bright red, but I don't break the eye contact. Feels very bold not to, to be honest. "I thought you told me you guys aren't dating. Several times," he says firmly.

"Oh," Jungkook answers, much to Yoongi's irritation. "We weren't, but we decided that it's too good of a thing to go to waste."

"Meaning?" Yoongi asks, and one hand is clenched, while the other picks at a part of his ripped jeans. Geez, he's really getting angry over this. Does that mean Kook was onto something?

The dark haired man takes my hand in his and holds it up for Yoongi to see. "We're dating," he announces boldly, catching me off guard.

"Wait, what?" I accidentally blurt out and Jungkook smiles at me.

"We're dating. I know you said we weren't, but come on. Don't you think this is too good to let go, Tae?" He leans over to place a kiss on the tip of my ear, and I can see a pinkish tinge appear in Yoongi's normally pale cheeks.

"Umm... I guess we are," I say very hesitantly, watching Yoongi's reaction. The vineyard owner inhales sharply and nods his head. "Is that okay, hyung?"

"Yeah, of course," he says through gritted teeth. "Absolutely perfect, it's great. It's fine."

"That's awesome!" Jungkook chirps happily, and the two of us just stare at the guy. Nobody knows what to make of him at this moment. "Now we can date freely, Tae."

Clearing his throat once more, Yoongi raises his head with a pretty grumpy expression. "I'm gonna go upstairs, there's some work to do." He walks, no, stomps up the stairs and as soon as he's out of sight, I punch Jungkook as hard as I can.

"OW! For fuck's sake, what did I do?" he yelps, rubbing his upper arm.

"Where do you get off ruining everything that I worked so hard to accomplish?!" I hiss at him. "I literally just told you that I finally convinced him that we weren't dating!"

"Yes, but you're an idiot," Jungkook counters, hand still on his arm. "I told you to trust me. We need to make him jealous. It's the only way he'll come to terms with his feelings about you."

"Those imaginary feelings that you're making up, right?" I snap.

"No, it's the ones that he hasn't been able to acknowledge yet, because there's been no reason to. Now, I'm giving him a reason."

I sigh exasperatedly and glance at my friend, who shows no hint of shame or regret at what he's just done. "You better be right or else."

"Or else what?"
"I'm gonna fuck you up real bad, Kook," I threaten him, but he only smiles widely. That's not what I was going for.

"Ah," he says gently, "Well, now I'm kinda hoping I'm on the wrong track." Scoffing, I shove the guy, and he bursts out into a fit of laughter so contagious that I can't help but join in. I don't know what exactly Jungkook has just done, but as I'm sitting with him, it all seems far too ridiculous not to laugh. "It's a shame if he doesn't like you though," Jungkook unexpectedly states.

"What, why?"

"He's just gonna miss out on some really great making out," the man says bluntly and I gasp, making him laugh even more.

"You fucking tease."

"Yeah. I am." And all we can do is smile.
"Good morning," I say with a rather obnoxious yawn. Nobody replies. Dragging my sleepy self down the stairs, I make my way into the kitchen in hopes of finding something for breakfast. There's no need to bother Yoongi to make anything fancy, so I grab the first thing I see after opening the pantry: a box of cereal. Simple enough; I'm not too high maintenance about breakfast anyway. Actually, I skipped it often during high school. Yeah, not the healthiest decision but at 6 am, you're too damn tired to care. It confuses me when people go on about having a hearty meal to start off the day, because honestly, I'd rather have a proper dinner. I don't know, I'm just not a big breakfast person by any means.

After obtaining a bowl and taking a seat, I start to pour a decent amount of cereal (I'm a cereal before milk guy) when Yoongi comes up to the table with a pretty blank expression. I should get used to seeing that look on his face anyway, it's the only one he's been giving me for the past few days this week. Ever since Jungkook announced that we're "dating", the vineyard owner has been giving me nothing but indifference and a cold shoulder. I wanna say that it doesn't sting, but... it does. I don't like the coldness, I don't like the tension. It puts me on edge, because all I want is to have a proper conversation with him like we had just started doing. My feelings aside though, I can't bring myself to ask him to go back to normal. In a way, it's unfair to him. He's entitled to his feelings, but more than that, he thought we weren't dating before Jungkook decided to step in. So I can imagine it's frustrating. Not knowing what to think anymore.

"You okay?" I inquire softly; it doesn't matter how nervous I am, I gotta make an effort somehow. That's literally what I've been doing this whole time. I ask him some small questions, he'll give me one to two-word answers, and that concludes a conversations. He won't even look at me when he responds. It's hell, if I'm going to be completely honest. Why is he so upset with me, does he even have a right to be angry with me?

Sighing, he leans against one of the kitchen walls, still not really looking at me. "I'm fine," he says without a trace of emotion. I wish he'd smile. Even in sweats, Yoongi is surprisingly handsome. But the lack of happiness in him dulls the radiance, and knowing that I'm the cause of it makes things worse.
I place the spoon in the bowl and stare at the ground for a few seconds, contemplating what I could say to keep the conversation going. "Hyung, I can tell you're bummed out or something."

"I'm fine."

"Is that all you're going to say?" I continue questioning, my tone raising slightly. "Can't we talk about this?"

Yoongi chuckles harshly. "Well, I would. But you'd probably lie to me and then I'll believe you like an idiot. Because at the end of the day, that's all I am. An idiot."

"What?" That gets him to look at me in the eye.

"You told me that you guys weren't dating. I walk in and what do I hear? That you are," he says with a quieted anger, "So what am I supposed to think? Either you're lying to me or he is."

I clear my throat and shake my head slowly. "What I'm not understanding, hyung, is why you are so fucking riled up about this." I don't handle being called a liar well, I bet that's starting to become obvious.

"Excuse me?"

"Why does it matter to you at all? Why do you care so much if I'm dating Jungkook or not, why? You've yet to give me a solid answer; all you tell me is that he's bad news, he's bad news. I've been hanging out with him for a month now and he's given me some of the best company I've ever had. So if I want to date him, despite your claim that he's bad news, then isn't it my decision?" I fire the questions without a second thought. Enough is enough; we aren't children.

"God, Taehyung!" Yoongi exasperatedly exclaims. Well, it's not the emotion I'd like from him but this is also the most expressive he's been in three days so I'll take it. "You just don't want to get involved with that kid, there's too much baggage, there's too much to handle! You'll be heartbroken by the end of it all and I wanted you to avoid it, is that too much to ask?"

"Yes, because last time I checked, I'm an adult and your advice is just advice. I won't be killed if I don't follow it!" I retort in mild anger. This isn't fair, it just isn't. There's no reason for him to act out because he doesn't agree with something I'm doing. What am I to him anyway? "Is there any other reason why you're so strongly against this?"

He exhales heavily, lowering his head and standing still for a few seconds. Silence, silence, silence. "I don't know why. I can try for hours to come up with the right words for it, but at the end of the day, I don't know. There's this bad feeling, that's it."

"So I'm supposed to operate my life based on your bad feelings?"

"No, that's not." Yoongi struggles to speak, "It's not- ugh, I don't know how to word this correctly, Taehyung."

I push the chair back and stand up suddenly, knowing that all I want to do is leave this room right now. "It's fine," I tell him quietly. "You don't need to bother; I don't wanna hear anymore." Walking right past him, my feet take me back up the stairs as I focus on not letting the tears fall. He's angry with me. And it hurts so much.

~*~

Jungkook peers at me while laying on my bed; I've lost count of how many times he's given me that
Concerned look after coming over. I think he could tell that something was wrong when I called him, but I haven't bothered to explain what happened or what's going on in my mind. Sigh.

"Tae?" he says gently, rolling onto his front and facing me completely.

"Mm?"

"Would you tell me what's wrong? Did Yoongi say anything?" Jungkook observes me carefully as I take my sweet time to answer. I don't want to bother him with all these stupid issues, I really don't. "How upset was he?"

I let out a deep breath and lean back in the wicker chair, gazing up at the ceiling. "I wish I could be you."

Instant surprise. "What?" Jungkook asks with the most baffled expression. "Why would you want to be me?"

Chuckling, I hold up a hand and start counting on my fingers. "You don't let other people stop you from what you want to do. You don't even take their opinions into account. You dress amazingly. You just... you just live. And it's remarkable. I want to live."

Jungkook stays quiet, a contemplative expression replacing his confused one. We sit in silence for some time until I hear the mattress squeak. He stands up and starts playing with the buttons on his red silk shirt. I don't know who else would wear a red silk shirt in the middle of summer, but I admire it. "Strip," he says demandingly, and it becomes clear to me that he's in the process of unbuttoning his shirt.

"What?" My mind is being boggled right now; of all things I expected the guy to say, strip was not one of them.

"Come on, take off your clothes," instructs Jungkook. He meets my bewildered stare and nods as if this is the most casual reaction ever. "Just do it, Tae."

"B-b-but why?"

He tosses his shirt onto the bed and begins unbuckling his belt. In a matter of seconds, my friend stands in front of me clad in a tight tank top and his boxers. Shame on me if I ever thought for a second that Jungkook could ever be boring. Not that I have, but shame on me anyway. I merely gape at him, still avoiding taking my clothes off. "Taehyung, I'm literally standing here in my underwear," Jungkook says, shrugging. "Please do it, will you?"

I stare at him for a handful of seconds, entirely unsure of what else to do or say to stall this little situation. "Fuck" is all I manage in a whisper as I hesitantly start to take off my oversized button up. As soon as I shrug the shirt off, Jungkook hands me his red one. "What do you want me to do with this?" I ask him while looking down at the shirt blankly.

"Put it on. If you wanna be me, first step is to dress like me, so go ahead and put this on." He pushes the shirt towards me, taking mine out of my grip. Slipping on the button up, Jungkook gives me an impish smile before gesturing towards my pants. I give up. After completely exchanging outfits, we stand there looking at one another. That blue eyed devil is wearing my clothes... and I've got his on.

"Well fuck me up, Taehyung. You look hot," Jungkook comments softly with the tilt of his head as he checks me out from head to toe. "But you still need the accessories." Ignoring my readiness to protest, he takes out his long silver earring and hands it to me along with one of his many rings.
"How did you know I had pierced ears?" I inquire weakly, holding the jewelry.

"Dunno, we sit close at times. I've noticed. Came as a surprise though, I'll tell you that much," replies Jungkook honestly.

I laugh lightly while putting the earring on. "It happened my sophomore year. Namjoon dared me to and I didn't think twice about it. I wore earrings for the rest of that year and for a while as a junior until I didn't want to anymore."

"That's cute," he says. "Now go look at yourself in the mirror." Nodding, I shuffle over to the bathroom and get a good look at myself, astonished at what a difference clothes can make.

"Wow," I say to myself breathlessly. "This actually looks good!" I turn to face Jungkook happily, who beams at me.

"You look phenomenal," he compliments me, bringing a blush to my face. "I don't know what else to say, you're taking my breath away. I mean you take my breath away in general, but it's even more intense now."

"Really?" Can't remember the last time someone used the word *phenomenal* to describe me.

"Wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it. Shake your hair up a little bit though, it's too neat," he suggests.

Happiness surges through every vein of mine and all I can do is smile widely at my friend, who returns with just as much enthusiasm. I run a hand through my hair, tousling it up as requested.

"Thank you so much for doing this, but why? What's the point of doing this?"

"You want to be me. Step one is to dress like me," Jungkook elaborates, "Step two will happen tonight; you'll see what a typical night in my life is like."

"I still don't understand."

"I'm giving you the chance to walk a mile in my shoes, literally. Thank God we're the same size," he explains lightheartedly. "You look a lot happier just by wearing the clothes."

A giggle escapes; I can no longer contain my excitement. "It's just that I look attractive! I feel attractive and I feel cool. Is this what it's like to be you? Do you feel this awesome all the time?"

The dark haired man chuckles before shaking his head. "I don't, but maybe because I'm tired of being myself. It'll be nice to be Taehyung for an evening. Mild mannered, thoughtful Taehyung."

I nod slowly, then become incredibly aware of my dry throat all of a sudden. "Ack, I need to go get some water."

"Me too." Grinning still, we bound down the stairs and much to my surprise, Yoongi's sitting on the couch. Watching TV. I thought he was going to be out of the house or something, it's not like him to stay inside all day. Hearing us, he glances up and freezes upon seeing the clothing switch. "Hey hyung," Jungkook says, leaning against the wall. "What do you think?"

"Of what?" he fires back coldly. Jungkook gestures at my outfit and looks back at him. "Oh. I don't like it."

The smile on my face disappeared in less than the amount of time it had taken Jungkook to put it there in the first place. I look at the carpet, too embarrassed to glance anywhere else. "Why don't you like it?" asks the blue eyed Adonis in a rather direct tone; I can sense that he's bottling up some
"Eh," Yoongi shrugs as though his opinion means nothing to me. I know I said his advice is just advice, but I still care about what he thinks of me. "I find it trashy." Ah, well. Guess it was too much to think that I could look good in a change of style. Who am I kidding here?

"Fair enough." Jungkook peers at me, noting immediately that any of the happiness I had only a few seconds ago is far from gone. I'm back to my ridiculously crestfallen state. "I think he looks good."

"Well, you would. He's your boyfriend," snaps Yoongi. "You're obligated to find him handsome no matter what garbage he wears."

I see Jungkook about to go off and without thinking, I start talking. He can't yell at Yoongi. "Jungkook, can you take me somewhere tonight?" I ask unexpectedly, louder than I'd intended. I'm not letting Yoongi win, he can't make me feel bad whenever he's in the mood to be bitchy. Yes, I have a crush on him, but I have some dignity.

"Huh?"

I face Jungkook and lean in, kissing him on the lips for several seconds. He goes along with it faster than I would have anticipated, but I guess he's just really good at playing along. Better than I am anyway. It's not nearly as intense as the first kiss, but that's fine. I don't need it to be. "Take me out tonight, do you think that's possible?" A sly smile to accompany the request.

A smirk slowly appears on Jungkook's face as he realizes what I'm trying to get at and he nods cooperatively. "Sure. I know exactly where to go."

Yoongi's face becomes more and more sour by the second as we breeze past him to get our water and head back up to my room. But who gives a damn? Certainly not me. I'm going to walk a mile in Jungkook's shoes tonight and I'm determined for it to be the best experience ever.
nineteen

What if, speeding through red lights into paradise

Yoongi's POV

It's past midnight and they're not back. I normally don't stay up this late, but with Taehyung out, I'm too worried to go to sleep. I've tried, and it resulted in a couple hours of tossing and turning. Worrying, worrying. Especially since they've been gone for so long; all I do is check the clock, which seems to get slower every time I peek at it. Think, check the time, think, check the time. A seemingly endless cycle. I ought to go to bed, stop caring about all this. But stopping myself is harder than waiting.

It boggles my mind that Taehyung's dating Jungkook, even after everything I've told him. What's more than that is that he kept trying to convince me that he wasn't, so it doesn't take an idiot to piece together the fact that he lied to me. When I found out that they were, courtesy of Jungkook, I saw nothing else but red. The frustrations I experienced were unlike any other and to be honest, I didn't know what to make of it. So I kept quiet. I didn't talk to Taehyung in the hopes that he'd take a hint. But he continued his attempts to talk to me and what went down was exactly what I tried so hard to avoid. I ended up being mean, the whole purpose behind my keeping quiet in the first place. I didn't want to hurt his feelings or snap at him, but with the two of them rubbing their relationship in my face, I couldn't control myself. There was too many words I'd been holding back.

Being lied to, I can tell you, is one of the worst feelings in the world. You don't just feel disappointed, it's much worse. Betrayed is a way to describe it, but that sounds so angsty and dramatic that I can't bring myself to use it. I feel disrespected and more or less, like an outsider. It's been a real mission to ensure that I was likable enough for Taehyung and I thought we had a pretty good bond forming. When I found out he wasn't truthful, it made the whole bond idea seem like a joke. I feel like just another adult to him, nothing special like I had felt the past couple of weeks. Lying does that. Makes you feel stripped down and worthless, because a person doesn't have the decency to be honest with you in the first place. If they're a person you care about, it simply amplifies the hurt. And the anger. Soon, in my case anyway, the anger is all operate off of. I can only see shades of red, which get darker every single day.

Fighting with Taehyung doesn't make matters any better, but I'm not going to apologize to him. For one thing, he hasn't explained why he lied to me. It won't necessarily make me feel any better, I know it won't. The only thing it does is allow me to understand his perspective to some degree, though I'm dead set on mine. Stubborn, yeah; I'm nowhere near perfect. A part of me doesn't like this, honestly. I don't like being upset with him, it's toxic. So terribly toxic. I'd hoped to talk to him
calmly about everything when he came downstairs, and it nearly happened until I saw that he'd switched clothes with Jungkook. Red painted my vision once again.

He idolizes Jungkook; it's incredibly obvious. For one reason or another, it makes my blood boil and I guess the switch in clothing was a more of shove than a push for me. There's nothing worth idolizing about him, that kid is a flat out mess. I should know, I've known him for several years now, which gives me a lot more insight in comparison to Taehyung's month. I work with his uncle for Pete's sake, who else would hear about that kid if not me? Jungkook's overall carelessness is bothersome since it opposes my organized ways, and to take that carelessness out on my guest makes little to no sense to me. Why Taehyung is so awestruck by Kook, I can't understand. He's amazing on his own, and I've never appreciated a person's personality so much before. Conversation with Taehyung range from light-hearted to intellectually stimulating; it comes with a promise of excitement and fun. I genuinely treasure the interactions we have. If only he could understand how wonderful he actually is, rather than aspiring to be someone else. I stand firmly by that, which (hopefully) explains why seeing him wearing Kook's clothing infuriated me. Call it the last straw.

Half past one quickly approaches and my anxiety increases faster than I'd like. I hope he's okay. Sitting on a couch and reflecting isn't how I want to spend my night, but it lets me replay what went down earlier today. To be quite frank, Taehyung's request for a date had been so sudden that I didn't have a chance to process what was properly happening. It was impulsive, it was shocking. Maybe I'm biased, but it looked like even Jungkook was taken aback by the brunette's straightforwardness; I saw it during that kiss. Taehyung caught everyone off guard, and in my opinion, it wasn't in a good way. He's not the type to just go wild one night; he's calm, cautious, thoughtful. Actions weren't matching personalities, and my conclusion after rethinking all this is that something seriously isn't adding up. Taehyung must have snapped, how else could he have the boldness to ask something like that of Jungkook when he's so focused on not burdening or troubling people? It's just like the dinner outburst, except this time... it's my fault for bringing him to the edge. The red is slowly starting to fade.

Quarter til two, the doorknob moves. As if a jolt of electricity goes through me, I shoot upwards and dash down the stairs. Thank God, he's home. He's home. Flinging the door open, the first thing I see is a practically unconscious Taehyung being carried by Jungkook, who looks like he's ready to collapse under the weight. Incoherent mumbling mixed with giggles come in an endless stream from the brunette, making the blue eyed one smile as he enters the house. A strong scent of alcohol wafts near me and I reckon it's from them since I haven't been drinking tonight. They're overflowing with contentment, while I just stand by the door trying to calm my worried heart. The contrast is drastic.

"It's nearly 2 in the morning," I tell Jungkook sternly. He waves as if that's absolutely irrelevant and gestures at Taehyung, who is still on his back. "What happened to him?"

"I did what he asked, we went out." That awful smirk appears on his face before he continues. "Tae had a little too much to drink, so now here we are."

Here we are. Here I am, seeing red again. Just when I thought I'd gotten rid of it, it fights its way back into my sight. "You... you let him drink?" I ask slowly, forming fists by my sides. Teeth clench and nails dig into skin to prevent the rage from getting out of hand.

"Yeah, it's no big deal."

"Jungkook," I say and struggle to keep a gentle tone, "He doesn't drink. He's never had alcohol before, he doesn't like it."
Sighing, the insufferable boy shrugs like it's meaningless. Like bringing home a wasted Taehyung is the most normal thing in the world. "Look, I didn't force him to drink. We went to a bar and he wanted to try. Got carried away, that's all."

"And you didn't think to stop him?" Struggle is becoming an inaccurate word for the difficulties I'm experiencing at this second.

"Why? He's a grown up and he wanted to drink," Jungkook attempts to reason, and it's at this point that I realize that they're still in each other's clothes. It worsens everything, I don't understand why exactly. "I think he's had enough people telling him what to do. He needed a night of doing what he wanted, even if it meant he got out of control."

Taehyung suddenly moves his head closer to Jungkook's ear and whispers something. "Yes, it's hyung's voice," replies the dark haired one, and Taehyung emits this bubbly laugh before rumbling some more sentences that I can't make heads or tails of. I cannot believe it; he's totally out of it.

"This is exactly why I tell him not to date you," I mutter under my breath, catching Jungkook's attention.

"What?" he asks arrogantly, and fuck, I can't take this anymore. It's not okay, none of this is okay.

"You're reckless, Kook," I respond with every ounce of anger I can gather. "You took out one of the sweetest people and brought him back drunk out of his mind. He hates alcohol! As his boyfriend, shouldn't you know that?!"

Scoffing, Jungkook walks over and lays Taehyung on a couch before facing me again. I notice that the brunette's shirt is all wrinkled and the top few buttons have been undone. His hair's an absolute mess. It only makes me angrier. "It's not my decision whether he wants to drink or not."

"But think about what it means. If someone like Taehyung, someone who normally has pretty good self control, asks to drink and does it uncontrollably, shouldn't that tip you off that something's wrong? Instead of letting him drink himself into oblivion, you should have let him talk about what's bothering him!"

Jungkook laughs boisterously and I feel as if I'm being belittled somehow. "Are you that stupid? Hyung, the only reason he decided to drink like this was because of you! You wanna point fingers at someone? The only one you've got to point at is yourself. He was happy wearing my clothes, he was genuinely happy. And you acted like the world's biggest asshole, how do you think that made him feel? Do you understand how highly he thinks of you and your opinion? You made him upset and this is how he decided to cope with it. Frankly, I understand where he's coming from; you behaved like a jackass."

"I think the idea of him dressing up as you is fucking terrible!" I exclaim. "He's great on his own; you ought to spend less time teaching him how to be like you and instead show him how incredible he is as an individual."

"I was just trying to make him cheerful for the time being," grumbles Jungkook, stuffing his hands in the pocket of his, no, Taehyung's sweatpants. "I know he's amazing, I'm with him all the time. If anyone knows how extraordinary he is, it's me. He's perfect."

"Then cheer him up the right way, damn it! If you do this, let him dress like you, and that makes him feel good, then he's only gonna try even harder to emulate you! And you know yourself, Kook. You know how shitty your life is, don't pretend like you've got everything together when you're falling apart. You are not what he wants to be."
Jungkook's head snaps up and his eyes fill with tears, but he's determined not to let them go. I know that face, I've seen it in the past. It means I've struck a nerve. "I didn't ask for the life I got. I didn't ask for the heart I got. I didn't ask for the chest pain when I run, or for the countless times I've been on a tiled floor coughing up nothing but blood. I didn't ask to wake up every day wondering how much longer I have. I didn't ask for any of this. But I face it morning after morning, night after night, and if you knew how agonizing it is to face your misfortunes every single day without any hope of escaping, you'd know why pretending is the only solution I've come up with," he says with a quivering voice.

"Jungkook, I-"

"I would never bring harm to Taehyung," Jungkook continues, voice weaker now. "I know you think I'm reckless, because I smoke and party and throw life away, but consider the idea that my life is being torn away from me whether I like it or not. Being reckless doesn't really endanger me in any way. Because I've got nothing left to lose. But I'll never hurt him. He's my friend."

"Don't talk like that!" I snap at him. I know he's telling the truth, but I don't know how to reply to any of this. I never considered it the way he laid it out.

"Then how do you want me to talk, hyung? Lie to you? Sugarcoat and say pretty things so you'll like what I'm saying?" he says quietly and shakes his head, full of disapproval and nothing else. "Speaking of, Tae didn't lie."

His words hit me like bricks. I can't tell what I'm feeling anymore. "What?"

"He didn't lie. We only decided to start dating the day I told you. He was telling you the truth all along, so maybe it wouldn't kill you to start talking to him again. Or at least acknowledging him as more than dirt under your shoe like you've done the past few days. He's a quiet person, but that doesn't mean that he doesn't feel pain," Jungkook elaborates and ends the sentence with a heavy sigh. Taking one last glance at Taehyung, he starts moving towards the door again. "At least I know what you think of me now. Thanks for the honesty."

Jungkook leaves without letting me say anything else and I stand at the top of the stairs, utterly confused. So much just happened, what should I take in? Sigh.

"Mmm," a deep mumble sounds and I look at Taehyung as he flails his arms around wildly. Not knowing what else could be of help, I take a blanket to cover him up, then head over to the kitchen to retrieve a glass of water.

"Here, Tae," I speak gently after returning to the couch and he opens his eyes, though it's more of a squint. "Drink this." He smiles in a silly way as he sits up, taking the glass out of my hands and chugging it down. He's a loud drinker, that's all I can think as he gulps the water. Handing me the glass, Taehyung wipes his mouth with Jungkook's shirt sleeve before falling back on the couch.

Taking a seat, I cover him up with the blanket again and he starts speaking breathily, almost inaudible to me. "Kook?" He thinks I'm Jungkook. I guess I'll have to go with it for his sake.

"Yes?"

Taehyung aimlessly moves his hand until he finds mine, holding it tightly. "I love him."

I freeze as soon as he finishes, because he thinks I'm Jungkook. But if I'm Jungkook, then shouldn't he be saying "you" instead of "him"? Is there another person that Taehyung cares for, or am I overthinking here?
"Who do you love, Tae?" I ask him. This overwhelming sense of fear and nausea takes over as I await his response. He stays quiet for a while, breathing easy, almost falling asleep. I squeeze his hand, hoping that even if it's one word, he'll say something. "Tae, who is it that you love?"

"Hmm," Taehyung hums, breathing slower and slower. He's drifting off. "Himmmm," he whispers one more time before falling silent. Accepting defeat, I get up from the couch. Placing a hand on his warm forehead, I think to myself. If I was confused before, it's nothing compared to how I feel now. Why would he tell Jungkook that he loves him, but actually use the word him?

Walking away, I head upstairs to retire to my bedroom when a new thought occurs to me. Jungkook's words come back. He asked me if I even understood how much my opinion means to Taehyung and that it was because of me that he's in such a devastated state of mind. I must mean a lot to him. So... is it even slightly possible that Taehyung could have been talking about me? Am I him?

I guess time will tell.
A soft knock sounds against my closed bedroom door, prompting me to raise my head ever so slightly. Flashing red numbers on my alarm clock say 10:15 A.M. but all I can think in my blissfully drowsy state is that it's not time to get up. I can sleep some more. Burying my head under my cotton covered pillow, the snoozing continues as a creaking noise follows the gentle knocking. Mm, I don't wanna get up.

"Jungkook?" says my uncle in his mild mannered voice, full of caution and little harshness. "Hey, you gotta wake up. Your appointment's at 11:20." Not replying, I pretend to be in the deepest of sleeps, but this is Uncle Jimin I'm dealing with. He knows me well enough to figure out when I'm trying to succumb to laziness. "Kook, this is an important meeting. Dr. Choi insisted that we sit down and talk about what to do for you."

"Mmm," I hum and move my bare legs around under the soothing sheets. "I don't wanna get up. Bed's too nice."

"You can go back to sleep after the appointment or something," he reasons kindly, and I can feel his hand tugging slightly on the corner of my comforter. "You can't skip this. Get up."

"Unclee," I whine childishly; it doesn't matter that such behavior is unbecoming for an 18 year old. Dragging my tired ass out of this heavenly bed is one of the hardest tasks in the world, and I need my sleep. So badly. "Lemme sleep."

"Too bad," Uncle says, his tone more stern this time round. Crap, now I really don't stand a chance of staying in this bed. Ugh. "Get up and get dressed. I don't want to have to ask you again."

Groaning typically, I roll onto my front and eyeball him with mild irritation. It's obvious that he doesn't care, but it's okay. He knows I gotta get the annoyance out of my system. "Fine. I'll get up." He nods at me before turning to leave.

"Ah," he says and stops in the middle of the doorway. "Eat breakfast and everything, you don't wanna go there on an empty stomach." With that, Uncle exits my room and I'm left staring at the open door. Still debating on how much more time I can kill in this bed before I absolutely have to get up. I'd say a good 10 minutes. The hospital's roughly a 25 minute drive and it doesn't take me long to get ready. Breakfast isn't a big deal either, though it's something I normally skip since I'm not in the mood for it.
That's the thing about living with my uncle over the summers. People don't go out of their way to nag me to do things; he justs gives me reminders and stuff that I usually take heed of, though I go out of my way to get under his skin a little bit before actually listening to him. Don't ask me why I'm like this, it's just a habit now. I've been told that I'm a pest most of my life, so why not be the best damn pest out there, right? It makes it more comforting to think about the fact that I'm a burden to most of the people in my life.

Throughout the bulk of the year, I live in an apartment on my own that's also paid for by myself. I work a couple jobs, usually both back to back so that I have the nights to myself, and that money goes behind the thankfully cheap apartment. Any other expenses I have generally include food, clothes, booze, and cigarettes. I don't eat much food, so less money really goes into all that. In addition to my own earnings, Uncle Jimin sends me money monthly for any extra expenditures that I may have, a plus for which I'm incredibly grateful. He feels bad for me, compelling him to take care of me more frequently than his role as an uncle entails. It raises the question of why my parents don't provide me any monetary support and that's easily explained.

I was raised in a painfully broken household. It was around my middle school years that my parents' steadily destructive relationship reached an all time low, resulting in a pretty nasty divorce. Mom couldn't handle the irresponsible tendencies of my alcoholic dad, let alone taking care of me. She hates me; I was born out of wedlock, so she views my existence as a mistake that ruined her life. But after the divorce, the woman quickly remarried this guy who's just as much of a deadbeat as dad and birthed two kids. They'd met in the restaurant where she served as a waitress. I barely know my step-siblings, she never let me hang around them, so I stopped bothering. My limits were made far too clear to me; I knew to stay away. As for dad, the last I saw him was when he moved out of our rinky dink house. Never a phone call, nor a postcard. He too made it clear that he had no intention of keeping in touch with such an irritating family. Nobody cared.

Being all too familiar with his sister's habit of running away from tough situations, Jimin stepped in when everything got to be too much for me to handle. He offered me a place to go, a shoulder to lean on when everything seemed bleak. In my childhood moment of weakness, I accepted his company and though it's been years, I've never let myself turn away from Uncle Jimin's help. His kindness pushed me through high school, although he failed in keeping me on the straight path that he so badly desired for my future. I went ahead with the drugs and drinking, much to his displeasure. I know he had hopes of seeing me become something great, but when your own mom looks at you as the dirt under her nose, it gets pretty hard to look in any mirror and not see what she sees. That's partially why I make an effort to dress nicely; it boosts my mood just enough and I feel somewhat better about myself. It's how I cope, I guess.

So when I do come over to stay with my uncle, he continues giving me money so that I can pay my bills while taking the break. I'm so incredibly indebted to him, but neither of us talk about things like that. It's better off going unmentioned, because if you tell him stuff along those lines, Uncle will only shake his head and say he does it simply because he cares. And that you shouldn't trying to repay a person who cares, it'll only put a burden on your already drooping shoulders.

The bright numbers on my clock change to 10:10 and my phone begins buzzing, a picture of Taehyung popping up. He tends to call me in the morning, something that rarely fails to bring a smile to my face. Swiping to answer, I hold the phone up to my ear and groggily greet him. Taehyung, on the other hand, has clearly been up for way too long. "Kook?" he says my name urgently.

"Yeah, what's up?"

"I drank last night," the brunette tells me with this panicky tone; it sounds like he's pacing back and forth in his room. Must be the nervous energy. "Did you let me drink last night?"
"Well," I say slowly and swing my legs over the bed, sitting up. "You wanted to so I didn't see why I should stop you. You seemed pretty bummed out yesterday."

In a rather regretful whisper, Taehyung whispers, "Fuck, oh fuck." Stifling my laughter, I wait for him to continue. "I don't normally drink, did I do anything bad? Did I come onto you? Did anything happen? Oh my God, I'm home, what if I said something to Yoongi hyung, the possibilities are literally endless," he frantically blabbers. "Kook, I don't remember anything, what happened?!"

"For one thing, it's too early for you to be shouting at me so let's remember what indoor voices are like, Tae," I scold him, shaking my head. He apologizes timidly, making me smile once again, and I proceed to elaborate on what exactly happened last night to help his hazy memory. "You just drank a lot and danced around with me. You didn't really come onto me, though there were a couple instances where you got fairly touchy and it came as a surprise to me. It's alright though, I've been around drunk people enough to know it's not the worst that could've happened."

"Really?" he asks worriedly, but I can sense his level of panic lowering just a little bit. It makes me glad that I can comfort him; the feeling's a pretty good one, being a person someone goes to for comfort. "Thank God."

"I took you home around late 1 o'clock, I think. Handed your pathetically drunk ass off to Yoongi hyung, who was worried out of his mind and I don't know what went down after that since I left." I know I'm leaving out details of Yoongi scolding me to no end, but Taehyung doesn't need to know all that happened. He sure as hell doesn't need to know what I said in reply, not anytime soon anyway.

Sighing, Taehyung chuckles with more ease and I hear the creak of his mattress springs, so at least he's taken a seat now. "I'm so relieved. Kook, don't ever let me drink again, okay?" he requests firmly.

"Alright, Tae. I won't," I promise him honestly.

"So hyung was worried about me?"

"Mhm, he stayed up till I brought you home. There was a lot of relief on his end and I'd advise you to thank him for taking care of you, because you're a painfully annoying drunk. I learned that the hard way," I inform him, only somewhat sarcastically. He's definitely a handful when intoxicated; I hadn't anticipated becoming his babysitter that night, but life's full of surprises.

Taehyung giggles in embarrassment. "Alright, I will. Thank you, Jungkook," he says seriously, catching me off guard. "I really needed a night out and I'm glad I had you."

The sentence strikes a chord in my heart, but I don't want to let him know that. "You're welcome, Tae." In order to keep the conversation from becoming too heartfelt, I change the topic. "You still have my clothes."

"Huh? Oh yeah! When do you want these back?"

Though I don't know what possess me to say this, I go ahead and tell him that he can keep the clothes. Well, I guess I do have some clue as to why I'd give up one of my favorite outfits. Taehyung was so happy in them, happier than I could have ever been. At the very least, he could keep the clothes as a memory, since most of his was blurred from the alcohol intake.

"Oh, no," he insists. As expected of Kim Taehyung. "I can't keep these clothes, they're way too nice!"
"But I want you to," I shoot back, grinning widely. My cheeks are starting to have the pang that accompanies smiling too much; that's something I didn't know could happen until I met Taehyung earlier this month. "If I said you keeping them makes me happy, would you refuse me?"

He sputters on the other end and I know that I've won. "Solid, you're keeping them then."

"But Kook, these are your clothes," he weakly says, but I'm pretty sure he knows that I'm far more adamant than I let on.

"That's okay. They're yours now. Looks better on you than me, to be honest."

"Fine," Taehyung admits defeat and sighs again. I like listening to him sigh, even though he does it quite frequently. It sounds like he's letting go of the world every time, and I don't know. It's a thing of solace for me. "Do you have any plans for today?"

"Umm," I mumble, glancing at the clock. "Yeah, I'm fairly busy today. I would hang out, but it's probably better off that I don't."

"Aw damn," he says in disappointment. Is it bad that it makes me feel good to know that someone was looking forward to being in my company that much?

"Plus, I think you ought to give same time to Yoongi hyung. He was really upset last night and bringing me in the house would probably piss him off further," I advise him, recalling the harsh words exchanged by us only a handful of hours ago. I don't really want to go in front of him for a day or two, it'll give him time to cool down. I can hope it will, anyway.

"Alright."

"Thanks Tae. I gotta go now, there's some business to attend to. Talk to you later?" I ask him, walking over to my closet and skimming through all the clothes that rest on the hangers. He agrees and we say our goodbyes, ending the call. My fingers run through shirts one by one until it stops on a somewhat transparent black shirt that always hangs loosely on me. Pair that with some ripped, light blue jeans, a black cap, and silver earrings. Today's outfit has been chosen.

I get dressed quickly after brushing my teeth and all that. Bounding into the kitchen, I grab some random nutrient bar, then find Uncle Jimin making his way through the newspaper on the couch. "Ready, let's go," I let him know and he nods.

"Alright. Breakfast done?" I show him the already half eaten nutrient bar and he scrunches up his nose disapprovingly. "That's not a real breakfast," he says, placing his hand into the pocket of his jeans to pull out his car keys.

"I'll do the trick," I reply as we start to head out the door. Uncle chooses a worn out pair of tennis shoes, while I automatically went for my scuffed up Docs. Hospitals make me uneasy, having my favorite shoes on kinda puts a positive note on things.

"Let's go."

~ *~

Dr. Choi's office isn't too big, but it has two large windows with nice views. Every time I find myself
in his room, I'm drifting off just by staring at the trees outside. The windows have a slight tint to them, so it always looks like the weather's slightly gloomier than it actually is. But that's okay. He has a bookshelf in one corner of his room, filled with books on cardiology and other general medical reads, though the top shelf contains picture frames filled with photographs of his family. It's a cute little family, I always think to myself. They look happy.

His desk is pretty organized, not having excessive paperwork. Usually his computer, some speakers, and art of his choice. If I'm not busy staring out the window, I'm glancing at the various pieces he's placed around the room tastefully. Uncle's normally on his phone. There's not much to observe, in his opinion. It's just a doctor's office.

My thumbs play with one another to kill the time, and Uncle notices. "You nervous?" he inquires gently. Thing is, he knows that I'm nervous. The reason he asks is to let me know that he's here for me, nothing else. It's Uncle Jimin's mission with me to make sure I know that I've got whatever emotional support, or support in general, that I need from him.

"Yeah," I answer quietly. "We get the diagnosis today... how can I not be nervous?" Before he could come up with a response, footsteps enter the room and Dr. Choi takes his seat, all dressed in his white apron and stuff.

"Jungkook, how are you doing today?" he asks in his typical friendly manner, placing a small stack of papers on his desk. I reckon they're mine. I shrug; it'd be a lie to say that I'm doing well. Hell, I'm terrified. "Well, last time you were with me, we did an ECG for you last time and I have the results in front of me. The test revealed that you have an irregular heartbeat, or an arrhythmia. Combined with all the symptoms that you've told me about, we have very good reason to believe that you have a condition called mitral valve stenosis."

I'm not sure what those words are supposed to mean to me, I'm no fucking doctor. Doesn't sound any good, though. "What is that?" asks Uncle with his brows furrowed, a clear sign of his concern. "Is it fatal?"

"Well," Dr. Choi says and lowers his head solemnly. Shit. "There's definitely treatment for it and we'll do the absolute best we can to ensure that you have a better quality of life."

"But what's it caused by?" Uncle questions.

"There's a few reasons out there. It could be congenital, but I think the doctors would have caught it earlier if it has been lifelong. You told me that you had strep throat one winter, correct?" I nod slowly, not understanding how strep throat could tie in with a heart disease. "Did you go to a doctor or do anything to treat it?"

"No." I got strep throat back when my parents were reaching the point of divorce. Nobody really paid attention to me and it went untreated. It got better eventually though, so it only reinforced my thought that everything was going to be alright.

Giving me a rather regretful nod, Dr. Choi continues speaking, "Strep throat that goes uncared for can result in rheumatic fever. If that then goes untreated, it can cause the mitral valve, a flap in your heart that allows blood to go into the left ventricle, to fuse or thicken. This makes it difficult for blood to travel from the left atrium to the left ventricle, which is the main pumping chamber of the human heart. So the blood in your body isn't being pumped normally and it's causing stress. Mitral valve stenosis can lead to a lot of complications as well."

"What kind?" I ask him softly, scared of hearing the answer. "Why're the symptoms showing up now if I had the fever years ago? I didn't start having the chest pain and bloody coughs until the past
"Year or so."

"Symptoms take some time to surface. Though you had it way back, the heart doesn't start showing signs until a while later," he calmly explains. "Complications that occur if your condition isn't taken care of right away could be heart failure, atrial fibrillation, pulmonary hypertension, blood clots, and/or heart enlargement. None of these are options you want, which is why I'd advise you to take action as soon as you possibly can."

Suddenly the newly labeled abnormal beating of my heart becomes unbearably loud to me; it pounds against my eardrums and my chest tightens in what can only be anxiety. "What sort of actions?"

Dr. Choi presses his hands together before going into more detail. "Right now, I'm sitting on a very strong hunch that mitral valve stenosis is the diagnosis. Nothing has been set in stone. Symptoms point to it, you actively drink and smoke, which will no doubt have consequences on your liver and lungs eventually, and the strep throat incident all indicate it. But there's a test to confirm that all other heart related complications can be ruled out. A transthoracic echocardiogram, it's a non-invasive test that gives us a video of how your heart is functioning. It's the best way to assure that we're pointing at the right cause."

Uncle Jimin looks at me, tears brimming in his eyes. I can't let myself cry. "And if it is? What do I do then?" I ask Dr. Choi, still in my controlled tone.

"There's really no medicine that will fix the defect," he says. "For medications, I can give you things to relieve your pain, but they won't get rid of the problem itself."

"What if I want the problem gone entirely?"

"Then there are a few possible routes for that. Unfortunately, all of them involve surgery. Depending on how bad the damage to the valve is, I can recommend a certain type of surgical procedure. That is, if that's what you want."

Before I could say anything, Uncle Jimin leans forward in his chair. "I think we should go through with that test you mentioned earlier before coming to any conclusions. I think it's best that we do that first, can that be done today?" Dr. Choi nodded, and both adults peered at me, awaiting my decision.

"Okay," I agree, and they nod subtly.

"I'll go talk to one of the nurses and we'll try to get you set up as soon as we can in a different room," Dr. Choi informs us as he stands up from his leather chair. Uncle also stands to shake his hand as a form of thanks, but I remain seated. Still more aware of my problematic heartbeat than ever. How will I pay my way through surgery if that's what it comes down to? I can't ask Uncle to pay for something so expensive, I'll never rid myself of the guilt. I've been a big enough burden to him; he didn't even sign up to take me in as his kid when I was born.

This easily could have been avoided, that's the only thought on my mind. Had mom or dad paid attention to all the complaints I'd given them about the pain I had when I had strep throat and done something, I wouldn't be sitting in this chair right now trying to fight back a damn flood of tears. If only they could have taken a second out of their selfishly spent lives to take care of me, I wouldn't have to worry about my heart failing. If only dad could have stayed and mom bothered trying to understand. How different my life could have been. I could have had a full family, parents to turn to, instead of a pitying but kind uncle. I would have had a place to go.

If only they could have loved each other and learned to control themselves, learned to make compromises rather than just understanding their own perspectives. I wouldn't be here right now,
I shouldn't be here right now. I was a child, how could I have taken care of myself? How could I have known that by forcing myself to stay quiet, I made this problem, putting myself at the risk of heart failure? How could that child have known that he was ruining his life even more by trying to stay out of the problems created by his parents?

How could a little 11 year old child _possibly_ have known?

I guess I can't stop tears from falling all the time.
Before our bodies turn to stones

Taehyung's POV

Light footsteps descend from the staircase, tearing my attention away from the book I'm trying so hard to read. Maybe because I know who's coming down. Yoongi appears with a somewhat different expression from what I've seen in the past few days, and I can't tell how it makes me feel. He's still serious, but now with a hint of concern that accompanies his brown eyes; definitely more appealing in comparison to the stoic look he'd been giving me for most of the week.

"Hey hyung," I hesitantly say, uncertain of whether he's still angry with me or not. Jungkook told me that Yoongi had to deal with the aftermath of my drinking, but since it was my first time really going at it with the alcohol, I have no clue what kind of a drunk I was. Kook didn't do much to explain my behavior either.

Maybe I was a happy drunk, like Namjoon. Man, he turned into something else after a few drinks. It was always a crazy amusing sight for me; the guy would become sickly sweet after enough intake. He'd go on and on about how much he loves everything, there isn't a limit to the love of a drunk Namjoon. One time, he sat on my floor and spent five minutes complimenting the fuck out of my carpet, which was this blue and black abstract thing that mom had found for me while shopping. And when I say he complimented my carpet, I don't mean "whoa man, your carpet is so nice." No, I mean he went off about all the different colors, the material, the luster — I kid you not, this kid deadass talked for a solid minute about that — and the "comforting feeling" that it gave him. Basically, I spent five minutes of my life watching my intoxicated best bud woo my carpet. Another time, he was very appreciative of geese and that was another moment. I can only hope I wasn't that bad.

Yoongi nodded. "Hey," he replies somewhat half heartedly. "Did you sleep alright?"

"Mm, I'd say so. Wasn't too bad." I don't really want to say anything negative here, it might end the conversation. It's difficult being a pessimist at times, honestly, because people don't know how to deal with it. Half the time, I wanna ask them if they really think I wanted to be this way, if I can really help the fact that I'm overly anxious most of the time, too much of a thinker, and just fixated on
everything that can go wrong. Be positive, that's all they say. My reply to that is *walk a damn mile in my shoes* before saying something like that to me. If I'm negative for any reason, I probably have a right to be, take it or leave it. And that's exactly what happens. They either walk away or shut down, and it's so fucking frustrating, because they'll always think you're in the wrong. But... I can't help myself. Explains why I can't be friends with everyone.

"Good, you looked like you needed the rest."

Crossing my legs on the sofa, I lay the book down and gulp (I got nervous all of a sudden). "Speaking of bad..." I skeptically begin.

"Yeah?" Yoongi takes a seat on the arm of the sofa, keeping a decent distance between us. He looks at me questioningly, and I'd be lying if I say that my breath isn't taken away simply from seeing him right in front of me like this. It's irritating. He's not even doing anything yet I'm in awe and my mouth's as dry as a damn desert. Why must it be like this?

"Umm, w-well," I stutter, something I haven't done in front of the vineyard owner in days. Damn it. "I, umm, didn't cause too much trouble for you last night...d-did I?" The sentence comes out rather shakily, and my timid gaze meets his curious one in time to see his lips curl upward in a small smile. The dark haired man shakes his head, bringing me a strong sense of relief. "Nah, you just passed out on the sofa..." Yoongi pauses as though he's contemplating whether more ought to be said. Ahh, I feel like I'm on the edge of my seat here.

"Hyung, did something happen?" *Please say no, please say no, please say no.*

He simply looks at me for a few seconds, cheeks slowly covering in a blossoming pink, before shaking his head again. I wonder what he's thinking about. "No, it's fine. Nothing happened. Did you enjoy the night out with Jungkook?" There isn't as much contempt in his tone now, even though Kook's been brought into the conversation. That's different. That's *actually* new.

"It wasn't bad," I admit shyly, "Though I think a night here is better for me." Yoongi's countenance perks up a bit, his interest captured. Seems like I've finally said something right.

"Really?"

I nod, suddenly aware of the soft beam of the mid-afternoon sunlight that's resting on my relatively exposed shoulder. My hand reaches up to rub the spot, instantly soothed by the touch of warm skin. Come to think of it, my neck feels tense. Not removing the hand, I roll my shoulder (which hurts like hell, might I add). Eyes closing, I take a moment to massage them real quick. Fuck, I didn't realize they'd gotten so stiff and painful, don't even know how. Once it begins to feel mildly better, I glance at Yoongi. To my surprise, he stares, mouth slightly agape. "Is something wrong?"

The inexplicably awestruck man fails to formulate a proper response until I wave in his face. "Huh? Uhh," he stammers, "Nothing. But umm, why would you prefer being here to a night out?" His face is scrunched up in such a cute and confused expression; I can't even count the number of beats my heart skips while gazing at that perfect face. Chest tightens, face reddens, muscles twitch in a contained excitement to smile. Damn, he makes me happy.

I ponder for a moment, fingers busy playing with the drawstrings of my trousers. I couldn't deal with being in Kook's clothes anymore; it's nice to return to my oversized... well, everything. "I dunno," I bashfully, but sincerely, tell him; "If I compare that night we had pizza together and fall asleep on the couch to what went down last night, I honestly prefer the first thing more." After a quick minute of self doubt, I add, "I like being around you." What's the point in acting indifferent? He tried that and it
blew up in his face with me drinking like a mindless monkey. Better to be upfront with him about my feelings. Somewhat. Yoongi doesn't need to know all the details regarding those.

But the smile on Yoongi's face when I tell him that... it's beautiful. The word isn't even enough to describe the way it actually is, but I can't imagine of a better one. Ethereal, perhaps. He's ethereal, he's art. Not only is the mid-afternoon sun falling on me, it brushes against his porcelain skin as well. His dark hair that almost looks jet black most of the time exposes its true colors of a dark but soft brown. Somehow the sunlight manages to give it a reddish tinge as well, enhancing the beauty of his cheerful expression. The smile creates precious crinkles by the corners of his crescent eyes (yet another effect), and it fills me to see him pleased. Youth glows on his face, softening me to my core.

My mind gets carried away, concocting images of us together. Yoongi holding me in his pale arms, wearing his white shirt that he washed the dishes in that one time and the ripped jeans that shows a large portion of his knees, while I play with his fingers. He has particularly nice fingers, long and slender. I made sure to try and remember how it felt when he took my hand during the karaoke night; it comforts me. We sit in the soft moonlight, cuddling happily. I can see the small creases in his face caused by his smile, compelling me to grin as well before leaning in to kiss the corner of his mouth. Dear God, I've got it so bad.

"That makes me happy," remarks Yoongi contently. I feel like I've done something right. "Though I can't imagine your boyfriend would be all that pleased to hear that."

"Who?" I breathily ask, still taking in the smile he wears so nicely.

With furrowed brows, the vineyard owner slides onto the couch cushion and fiddles with his silver bracelet. "Jungkook. Your boyfriend," he states, shooting me a gaze that brought me to reality. Right, I'm in a fucking love triangle that lowkey makes no sense since one of the relationships involved is a complete and total lie.

Chuckling nervously, I lower my head. "Right. Kook's my boyfriend now."

"You forgot?" inquires the man. He probably thinks I'm an idiot, I can feel it so strongly. But I gotta take note that, and this may be me simply over analyzing things, Yoongi moves a bit closer to me. One arm hanging over the top edge of the couch and the other in his lap. Not the time for this, but wow.

Shrugging, I meet his eyes again. They hold an intensity to them that I can't exactly decipher, but it makes me flustered. In a good way, of course. "I don't know. We only started dating recently, and I guess I'm still processing it or something." Not entirely convinced myself that it's a good response, but hell, I've got nothing else.

"Mm, I guess that makes sense. Sometimes I can't believe I'm dating Sunhee, y'know?" he says casually and runs a hand through his hair, moving the sunlit strands aside even further. Didn't know a forehead could look so nice, good grief. But anyway, typical of him to mention Sunhee. Guess I gotta be ready to hear all about their relationship again. "But you love him, right?" Yoongi interrupts my train of thought rather abruptly.

"W-what?"

Yoongi doesn't blink while repeating his question. "You love Kook, don't you?"

Well shit, that's a plot twist. "It's too early in our relationship for me to feel something like that," I seriously inform him. "Like... I love him as a friend. Care about him deeply and all that, but I can't say I have love for him in a romantic aspect." The vineyard owner processes my reply, though he
doesn't appear to be too satisfied with the response. I wonder what's going through his head.

"You don't love him then?" I shake my head, no longer sure of what would work as a good verbal reply. I made it pretty clear, I think. "Hmm. That's interesting."

"Why's that?" Yoongi cocks his head to the side and starts to respond when the doorbell rings, drawing both of our attentions away.

At once, the dark haired man rises from the couch. "Oh, that's her," he mumbles, basically bouncing down the stairs. Swinging the door open, Yoongi greets a glamorously dressed Sunhee and lets her step in before almost immediately sweeping her off her feet in a kiss. "Hey babe," says Yoongi in a sultry tone that I haven't heard him use in a little while. Sunhee giggles into the kiss, making me gag just a teensy bit. Lowkey feels like my cue to leave.

Quietly getting up, I begin to make my way over to the stairs when Sunhee cheerily calls out, "Hello Taehyung!" Damn, I was close.

"Hi."

She looks at me and purses those plump lips of hers in a pout that probably has any man wrapped around her finger in a matter of seconds. Not me. "Why the long face?"

"Dunno, I was born this way," I retort with a simple shrug. "Doing alright?"

"Oh yes, I'm doing fantastic," she says, beaming. Yoongi walks up behind her and places a hand on her waist, drawing her in closer to him. "Actually, I know something that'll make not just me better, but all three of us!"

Oh goodie, the witch comes with ideas. "What is it?" Yoongi asks softly against her ear and it makes me feel something awfully painful. I'll try to ignore it.

"Well, because this place currently reeks of boredom," Sunhee pipes up in a manner too bubbly for my liking, "I thought you two could accompany me to a party tonight! You'd get to dress up and get away from this house." What an award winning idea.

"Umm," I say instantly, stuffing my hands into my back pockets. "Not sure I'm really up for a party or something tonight. It's not too boring here."

Yoongi grins at me somewhat gratefully, but then Sunhee turns to him with her alluring eyes that I know he can't resist. I've seen her gaze working its magic way too many times. "What about you, Yoongs? You wanna go?"

He hesitates. I can tell by the small biting of his bottom lip that he's thinking about it. I want him to stay. I want him to spend the hours with me, not her. Wishful thinking yet again. "Sure, why not," answers Yoongi.

"Ah, really? You're going?" Geez, I blurted that out before thinking twice.

"I mean, there really isn't much to do here. And you had your night out with your man yesterday. Guess it's my turn to have a night out with my girl," he responds and kisses Sunhee again, who deepens it, much to my dismay. The feeling of uneasiness is incredibly nauseating; I want out of this situation. "Don't you want to join?"

"What?" The fuck, if he wants a night out with his girl, why bother dragging my pathetic ass into the situation? Can't he keep it to himself or something, I want no part in this. "Do I have to go?"
Yoongi shrugs as though my presence won't make a difference at all. "You don't need to, but what's the point of staying here alone?" His face straightens and a sigh slips past him. "Ah, you're gonna invite Kook over, aren't you?"

That's actually not a bad idea, but given that he already told me earlier that he couldn't make it, I can't fall back on that idea. I'm all out of options. "No, he's busy today."

"Oh, then why not just come with us?" Yoongi presses, bothering me even further. I feel crazily pressured right now with both pairs of eyes watching me try to make a decision. I could stay home tonight and be lonely, wondering what Sunhee and Yoongi are up to. That'll only hurt me, since I'll drive myself crazy making up various circumstances. On the other hand, I can go with them to the party, watch them act like a cute couple while standing around awkwardly. It'll suck, but I'll get to be with him. Well, not with him, but it's good enough. Neither sounds like a good path, yet one's gotta be better than the other. "Tae?" he asks again, making my heart lurch merely by saying my name.

"Mm?"

He gazes at me intensely. "You make up your mind yet?"

Rubbing a pair of clammy palms against my trousers, I nod slowly. "Alright, I'll go."

Yoongi smiles again, except it's different this time. There's mischief in that smile, and I don't know why exactly. "Good."

Who knows that sort of hellish adventure I just got myself into... guess I'll find out soon enough.
Tick, tick, tick. The hands on the clock move without mercy as I peer through all my clothes, desperate to find something, anything, suitable to wear for Sunhee's last minute party invite. I know there ought to be a couple articles of decent clothing amongst all my other raggedy things, but I must say that searching for them has become a full blown adventure. The sun has gone into hiding, leaving a pitch black sky in its absence decorated with nothing but a struggling moon. Hah, I guess the moon and I have one thing in common tonight, because God knows I'm struggling more than normal at the moment.

I don't really want to go to her event or whatever. Reason I agreed is because that little voice inside me, the one that pushes me to do practically anything, grew louder the second she invited us. Do something fun, it basically shrieked at me, it might make him like you. And I dunno, having him like me doesn't sound all that bad. At the very least, he'll see me in a different environment, and who knows? That could have an impact in its own little way. I can just imagine Jungkook sitting on my bed right now, nodding smugly and making his sarcastic little remarks at all the clothes I put my hands on. Ugh, he'd know what to wear; that guy's style is second to none.

Frustrated, I place both hands in my hair and tug slightly as a means to reduce some of my pent up irritations. Turning my back on the dresser, my attention falls on the closed window. The trees outside are swaying so beautifully; I can almost sense the soothing breeze they feel. They do this almost every night. Dance. Left and right they move without care, entranced, stuck in prayer. It's so beautiful... of course, I realize that staring at trees and finding their sway beautiful is probably really strange, but hey. I am what I am.

Overcome with this unusual desire, my feet take me over to the bed, hands reaching forward until they grab the white edge of the window and push it up. At once the breeze kisses my face with gusto, ridding me of my momentary stresses. With closed eyes, I breathe deeply and fill my lungs with nature's softest sighs. My chest feels full, mind clear, heart open to the world for the few minutes that I spend sitting on the bed. Happiness has been coaxed out of its open cage and now freely roams throughout, enjoying the liberation wholeheartedly. I love this. I love this so much.

"Tae!" a voice calls from outside my closed door. Ah, it's Yoongi. "You ready yet? We'll have to go soon!"

Dropping my gaze down to my current choice of clothing, nothing near sophisticated enough for the
likes of a party, I drop my shoulders with a burdened sigh. "Coming" is the simple reply, holding nowhere near as much enthusiasm as it ought to. Lifting myself off the bed, I trudge over to the dresser yet again and this time, I decide to just wear whatever comes to mind. After a few seconds of digging through the drawers, I find a pair of loose, black slacks that'll do just fine. For a top, I rummage through the contents of the closet, fingers settling on a collared shirt that's most definitely an acquired taste. It's made of a tan fabric, covered in abstract shapes with some colored a vivid red. Glancing at the pants, I picture myself wearing it and figure that it'll do the trick, but I'll have to dig out my old collection of earrings in order to make it really work.

I quickly strip down and change clothes, feeling slightly more handsome afterwards, then head to a small box that sits on the dresser collecting a thin layer of dust. Opening it, I scan through the contents and smile as soon as I find this one long, silver earring that I'd been looking for. Perfect. Putting it on, I take a look in the mirror; time for another attempt to smile. A sheepish grin appears on my face and it's wiped off immediately. Yeah, I'm not ready to be that comfortable with myself yet.

"Tae!" Yoongi says again, a bit more urgent in tone this time.

"I'm ready!" I shout at the door and grab a random pair of socks before heading out of the room. But as soon as my fingers curl around the doorknob completely, I stop myself. What will happen tonight? Deep breaths. And I exit the room to find Yoongi waiting on the other side.

He dons a pair of black slacks, same as myself, only his are more fitting. And gosh, he's also wearing this black shirt that looks like it's made of silk; it's as though the guy's trying to kill me. "Whoa," Yoongi says, his eyes flit up and down. I should feel self conscious, but damn it, I put thought into this outfit. Well, like a few minutes worth of thought, but whatever. Still counts. "You look nice."

A bashful chuckle bubbles out of me, causing me to instinctively cover my mouth. "Thanks, you look really good too." Yoongi simply smiles at me and nods.

"Cute," he quietly says. I hope I'm not blushing, but given that my face just got incredibly hot in a matter of seconds, it's a safe bet that my cheeks are pinkish again. It's too easy for him, I swear. "Let's go down, Sunhee's waiting." We head down together, me taking smaller steps behind him, and greet the radiant model with something along the lines of a happy smile. At least his was, I think mine came out more as a grimace. Oops.

"You both look so handsome!" she squeals, rushing over to hug Yoongi. I stand in the back awkwardly, in the hopes that she won't hug me. Thankfully she doesn't, but the woman comes over to me with an extended hand. "Come on, Tae," Sunhee offers with her pink glossed lips parted in a bright smile. Not knowing what else to do, I take her hand and she leads me into the living room to join them. "Would you mind taking a picture of us?"

Yoongi's face scrunches up in a nanosecond; it took everything in me not to cackle at his prominent displeasure. "Oh Sunhee, does it have to happen now? You'll make us take so many there, and I'm not really a picture person."

"Nonsense, I wanna take a picture with my gorgeous boyfriend. Is that such a crime?" Batting eyelashes, she gives him a look that I know he won't resist. Yoongi's got too much of a soft spot for her to say no to an expression like that. "Please?"

Gruffly, he responds by nodding and Sunhee claps in joy. She misses the obvious eye-roll Yoongi gives her, and heads in my direction. "Will you take the picture, Tae?" the model requests, holding her phone out to me.

"Oh, uhh," I mumble and take the phone out of her hands. "Sure." I mean, saying no would be a
dick move and I'm trying to not upset Yoongi tonight. I've triggered his temper way too much in the past few days. He deserves a break from the anger and all that.

"Thank you!" Sunhee runs over to stand by Yoongi, looping an arm around him so that they're standing shoulder to shoulder. She leans closer, her head leaning on him, and shoots yet another glowing smile.

"Smile hyung," I say teasingly, partially enjoying the look of pain on Yoongi's face. Man, he hates this. "Oh, I need a bigger smile than that."

"Yoongi, come on," whines Sunhee and I cackle internally as the vineyard owner rolls his eyes again before giving a totally fake ass smile. This is too rich. I take a handful of pictures and nod at his girlfriend to indicate that I'm all done. "Wait, one more!" She kisses his cheek, sparking something other than joy within me, but I take the photo regardless. I think Yoongi notices the apparent lack of satisfaction on my face, although he doesn't say anything. That's fine, as long as Sunhee can't see it, I'm fine.

"Okay, it's time to go," he says monotonously, moving away from Sunhee to head over and stick his shoes on. That's kinda peculiar. His behavior feels somewhat different, but it's probably due to posing for pictures. Ironic that a guy who hates cameras is dating someone whose paycheck depends on it.

"Alright!" Sunhee chirps and bounds down the stairs, overflowing with excitation. I come down after her, accidentally making eye contact with Yoongi. Funnily enough, he gives me this knowing and somewhat apologetic look as if he feels sorry that I have to be dragged along for something like this. I agreed to come though, it's not like he's forcing me to. Nevertheless, I return the feeling, figuring that it's easier to do that anyway. Here we go.

~*~

The party's a lot bigger than I anticipated, but somehow it doesn't feel overwhelming. I reckon it's because the place is so huge, it's fucking insane. Whoever owns this house must be loaded... or in a shit ton of debt. I'll assume it's the first option though. The decorations are awfully grandiose. Fancy lighting keeps the place lit but with a dim glow, contemporary furniture sits in its place, each with a purpose. Many of the guests linger around the bar with their wine glasses and other beverages, some quietly socializing while others boisterously make their way from conversation to conversation. Sunhee falls into the latter with Yoongi on her arm. Where does that leave me?

Well, I'm just sitting in a leather armchair with a glass of wine (I gotta have something to do), and observing the socializing lives around me. It's kinda boring; a part of me wishes that Yoongi could sit with me, but something he'd told me previously comes back to mind when I find myself wanting his company. He doesn't feel good enough for her. So maybe with Sunhee whizzing him around everywhere, his self esteem will go up. I'd prefer that over him being next to me. Nothing I say will be as effective in making the guy feel better about himself, which still strikes me as absurd. I don't understand why he can't see how cool and worthy he is. Personally, I think he can do better than Sunhee, but that'll only get brushed off if I tell him. He'll call me crazy or something. So silently sip my wine I will.

A few people have stopped by to make small talk with me, but they don't stay for long after learning that I'm only 18. Not the guys anyway; the women have displayed a tendency to linger. Dunno why, I'm nothing compared to some of these models. In the times when nobody's talking to me, I scroll through my phone and endlessly contemplate whether to text Kook or not. Like, do I really want to bother him? He did mention that he'll be busy or something along those lines and I don't want to smother him. Or come across as clingy, that's just gross. Every now and then I'll look up to see
Yoongi peeking at me while Sunhee converses with someone, but he turns away as soon as our eyes meet. There's no need to overthink an action as simple as looking, right? That can't mean much. Although, I'm willing to bet that Jungkook's gonna have a very different opinion.

I've been sitting around long enough, I think to myself and get out of the armchair. My legs need using so a trip to the restroom will be sufficient, even though it'll be a totally pointless trip. That's fine. There's no way I'm going to sit here and watch people have a grand old time. With long strides, my path is made throughout the party and I find this small (but hella classy) bathroom. Closing the door behind me, I glance in the mirror. Maybe washing my face with some cold water will make things a bit better. Blasting on the cold water, I cup my hands to collect before splashing it onto my face. It does reinvigorate, but I dunno. Doesn't change the fact that I'm not entirely enjoying myself at this event. Ugh.

As I start to head out, Yoongi shows up right in front of me, his eyes wide in surprise. Did he not expect to see me or what? "Hey," he casually greets, lifting his half filled wine glass.

"Hey," I greet him with the same level of enthusiasm. "You enjoying the party?" Brown eyes meet again, causing a fluttering in my chest. Yoongi merely shrugs and I get the feeling that he's almost entirely indifferent about the circumstances. If he is leaning towards something, it's more likely to be the negative. At least that's what I'm getting through his body language and all that.

"It's alright," he says, though slightly exasperated. "I mean, I wasn't expecting to be here tonight by any means, but it's not awful. Sunhee's enjoying herself and that's important."

"But are you enjoying yourself?"

Yoongi tilts his head subtly and gives me this smile that appears to have more meaning than it should. What's with that expression? "If Sunhee's happy, then I'm pretty happy." I wanted to take the chance to tell him that his girlfriend's satisfaction doesn't mean his own and that he most certainly shouldn't blur the two lines together like that, but that window of opportunity closes in my brief moment of contemplation. "I better go back, she'll look for me or something."

I peer behind me before giving him a puzzled face. "Umm, did you not need to go to the bathroom then?" I ask and point at the door with my thumb. As if realizing he actually does need to use the bathroom, Yoongi gasped quickly.

"Oh yeah! I forgot, my bad. Have fun then!" says the vineyard owner strangely, reaching to pat my back in a casual way. He walks into the bathroom, and I start to head back to where the bulk of the guests are, only a bit put off by Yoongi's idiosyncratic manner. Plopping back in the armchair that I originally sat in, I continue to do my observations and whatnot, but yet another surprise comes my way. Sunhee, who clearly drank a little too much wine in the short amount of time that we've been here, walks over to me and takes a seat on the edge of the chair. It's also worth mentioning that the woman positions her legs in a way that's meant to make most men drool just by looking at them. She's too good.

"Sunhee," I address her stiffly. Not trying to be mean, but I don't know what other kind of tone to take. I guess happy would be fine, except I'm not happy and she's tipsy. Gotta nip anything in the bud before it can begin. "Is everything alright?"

She giggles freely, her laugh like the sound of windchimes being whirled in the breeze. "It's a great time, everyone's so wonderful! Yoongi's been really great too." Her intense gaze falls on me, increasing my level of discomfort, and she asks, "How about you? You having a good time?"

Shifting uneasily so that more distance is placed between us, I nod. "It's not too bad," I inform her.
 plainly. All Sunhee does is continue on here nonsensical bout of giggling before placing a well manicured finger on my forehead and running it down to stop at the tip of my nose.

"Enjoy yourself, Tae," she softly says, her hand moving so that it now holds my chin. The tipsy model puckers her lips to make a small kiss sound and lets go of my face, ultimately getting up to sashay away towards the bigger mob of wine filled souls. Okay, this evening is weird. I don't understand what's going on with Yoongi, his girlfriend's making me all sorts of uncomfortable, and I'm not having a good time at all. I know he said he was going to be busy, but at this point, I don't know who else to call.

Taking my phone out of my trouser pocket, I quickly call Jungkook, who answers after the second ring. He's good about answering my calls in general, this was no surprise. "Tae?" he says, bewildered. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, umm," I mumble as I move away to a quieter spot. "I'm at this party that Sunhee brought me and Yoongi hyung to. And honestly, I'm not having a very good time. Yoongi's bored and Sunhee's tipsy so like, it's getting a bit difficult to hang around."

"Alright," the blue eyed Adonis answers instantly. "Gimme an address. I'll pick you up, you wanna go back home?"

"If it's not too much trouble, yeah."

"Okay, I'll be there." Smiling, I hang up the phone and shoot Jungkook a text containing the address. I saw it earlier when Sunhee was entering it into the GPS, and thankfully recall isn't too difficult for me. Rising to leave the house, I do my best to be discreet, but just as I'm about to slip out the open door, I catch Yoongi walking past me. Thank God, he doesn't notice me escaping.

The breeze from earlier has yet to dull, still running through the tree branches and crisp blades of grass. With a stroke of courage — although that's a pretty dumb word for what I'm about to do — I whip off my shoes and socks, then walk onto the green lawn. There's just some sort of charm about being barefoot on grass and feeling all the earthliness under my exposed soles. Might be weird to some, feels only like comfort to me. I stand there for a while, no urge to move, no desire to look back. I'm standing under a painfully empty sky by myself, barefoot on a lawn. And frankly, this is the best damn thing I've done all day.

After roughly 20 minutes, my phone buzzes and I see a car pull up in front of the house. "Hello?" I answer the call.

"I'm here," says Jungkook; I glance at the car in front of me to see a far too familiar person waving at me. Hanging up, I grab my shoes and run to the car, swinging open the door the second I reach it. "Someone's eager."

"You have no clue how much I appreciate you." I buckle my seatbelt and Jungkook rams the accelerator, leaving nothing but dust in our trails.

"I honestly don't know what caused him to behave in such a way," I explain to Jungkook after filling him in on everything that happened during the party. "And Sunhee's being strange too. I guess I didn't know how to handle it." When I look at Jungkook, all I see is my friend staring at the steering wheel with eyes glossed over, empty. "Kook?"

"Hmm?" he hums, not yet looking at me. I place my hand on his arm, and that elicits a reaction. His
beautiful blue eyes make contact with my own dull ones, shocking me. There's hurt behind those brightly colored irises, there's pent up pain. Has it always been there or has something happened to my friend?

"Whoa," I stammer, "Are you alright?"

"What do you mean?" he inquires without much emotion. This is worrying me.

I lean in closer to take a good look. We've got time anyway, we're parked in front of Yoongi's house. "What's wrong? You look sad." I'm compelled to remove my hand from his arm and place it on his cheek instead; his face feels cold. He's normally warm, the only cold thing about him is the rings he wears. Astonishing me further, Jungkook smiles even though his glossed eyes appear more watery than they were a few seconds ago.

"I'm okay. But can I ask you for a favor?" he says unexpectedly. "You can say no if you want."

"Anything to help you out," I reply warmly. I don't know what exactly is going through his mind right now, but if Kook really is upset... then I want to do whatever it takes to make him feel less alone.

"C-can I.." his voice dies out as he redirects his attention to the steering wheel again. "I can't ask this of you." Sighing, I reach out to make him look at me in the face. "I really can't," the dark haired beauty protests.

"Please? I won't be able to sleep tonight if you don't let me help you," I whisper, trying my best to convince him that I'm here. I'm here. "The guilt alone is enough to wreck me. Knowing that you're not in a good spot right now and that I could have done something to make it better on you."

Jungkook stays silent.

"Please, Kook."

He sighs, one of defeat, and shakes his head. "I can't believe this is happening. I don't know how to ask you this. And you can say no."

"I know."

"Can I kiss you?"

The question is so utterly out of the blue, so honest and vulnerable, that I take a moment to register what exactly he's asking of me. Jungkook's never asked to kiss me before, he would just do it and that's also only in front of Yoongi. But we aren't in front of anyone; it's only the two of us in his battered up car. It must have taken him a lot to ask. After wrapping up that moment of thought, I stare at the gear shift before replying, "Mm."

"What?"

"You can." Jungkook gapes at me, not sure how to reply; his movements scream hesitation and overthinking so I take it upon myself to do it. After all, it is a favor he asked of me. Unbuckling my seatbelt, I lean forward to meet his lips with my own. The normally outgoing man turns shy in front of me, not moving under my touch for the first few seconds and then eventually stirs, placing his hand on the back of my neck as he deepens and deepens. It's not like our normal kisses, nothing like them at all. Maybe because this time we aren't trying to prove anything to anyone. But it's not romantic either. I can't explain exactly what this moment is other than that it's happening and the meaning of it is greater than any verbal explanation I can patch together. There are emotions in this
kiss that are beyond my understanding, emotions only Jungkook might be able to make sense of. I don't know. But I know he needs this. I can feel that much. He needs the physicality of it all, he needs the contact. If I'm the one to provide that support for him, then so be it.

After a bit, he pulls away and touches his lips lightly with his fingertips. Jungkook seems lost tonight. "I'm sorry," he humbly says, shaken by his own actions. Whatever happened today must have been big, I've never seen him act so timidly before.

"Don't be. I'm happy to help," I tell him and open the door of the car. Stepping out, I peer in one more time. "I don't know what's wrong or if anything is wrong, but just know that I'll be here in this house should you ever need me."

"You don't need to worry about me, Tae," Jungkook claims weakly.

"Too late. I don't need to do a lot of things, Kook. Doesn't stop me from doing them. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." Closing the door, I turn away to head over to the house; Yoongi keeps a spare key in this one plant by the door, so I get that out and let myself in. I want to ask myself what that kiss was all about, what it made me feel. But honestly, the past few days have been so overwhelming that analysis of these moments will only work to make me more fatigued. I think I'm better off watching TV for a few hours instead.

Not bothering to change out of the party clothes — they're already pretty comfy — I plop onto the couch and begin my mindless channel surfing. After five minutes or so, I find a movie that may be worth watching, so I lay the remote on the coffee table in the hopes that it won't have to be used again for some time. But funnily enough, the front door opens and closes, drawing my attention away.

"Oh, you're back?" Yoongi says as he struggles to take off his shoes. "How'd you get here?" Trudging up the stairs with heavy steps, the vineyard owner sits next to me on the couch. "Did Kook drop you off?" I take the remote and lower the volume on the TV. So much for watching the movie.

"Mm," I say absentmindedly, my mind lingering on the kiss to some degree. It's not as easy to stop thinking about as I'd like.

Yoongi pauses before asking his next question. "How is he?"

"I don't... I don't really know," I sincerely admit. "I can't tell you how he is, because it's kind of fuzzy to me right now."

"He won't tell you if something's wrong?"

"Not right now anyway." He makes a 'tch' sound and shakes his head disapprovingly, like he knows something that I don't. "What is it?"

"It's weird that he'd won't tell the person he loves what's wrong with him; why would he keep things from you?" Yoongi questions. I can't tell if he's trying to hint at something or if he's genuinely curious about Jungkook's abnormal behavior.

"It isn't love. He doesn't love me." Hopefully that sets him straight.

"Why'd you leave the party early?" Okay, well that wasn't expected either; talk about a rapid topic change. Why's everyone off today or is it just me?

I shrug in an attempt to be nonchalant. "I wasn't having that good of a time and..." I decide at the last
second that I need not mention anything regarding Sunhee. "Yeah. That's it, I wanted to leave. Thankfully Kook was available."

Yoongi purses his lips, nodding. He averts his eyes to his fingers, looking at them for a while. The diminished noise of the television fills the empty space hanging between us until Yoongi has it in him to look back up again. "Do you think you could ever love him?"

I stare at him, jaw dropped. Where does he keep getting all these questions of love, I'm so confused. It's like all of a sudden, Yoongi's entirely fixated on who I love or don't love, which makes little to no sense. I didn't know it was his business, or that he cared so much anyway. "I can love him with everything I've got," I tell Yoongi with a straight face, "But it's not the kind of love you're asking about."

"Do you love anyone in the way I'm asking about?"

Oh my God, what is happening right now. My heart thumps so loudly against my ribcage that it feels like my chest will start aching in no time. I don't want him to know that I like him, not yet anyway. This isn't the time for me to say anything, but he keeps asking all these questions and I feel so fucking cornered. I'm scared of this tension. Terrified... but still. I can't lie to him. Facing him, I think carefully about the wording of my response. "I can love someone in the way you're asking about. I probably will."

Yoongi's face reddens and instantly I think to myself that I've said the wrong thing. This newborn tension is growing, teasing, spreading. But the older man only says one thing to me.

"Okay."
And when the lights are flashing like a photobooth

Jungkook's POV

Ever since the visit to Dr. Choi's office, I've constantly been monitoring my heartbeat. Not with a machine or anything. Simply by placing my hand on my chest and sensing the never-ending thump. I suppose it should make me happy, knowing that my heart's still going despite all the struggles. But it makes me wither inside, because I know each beat is like a gasping breath, each beat is one closer to the end. Sounds dramatic, I know. Dr. Choi said death isn't endgame here and his solutions were decent, what with the medications and all. Thing is, I don't want to have to settle for alleviated symptoms; this is my heart that's in trouble. It's not just a piece of me, it's what keeps my trashed body going. I want the problem to be gone. I want to live without counting down or being afraid or anything of the sort. And from what I've been told, the only genuinely helpful route will be surgery.

I guess the best thing in this situation would be to go talk to uncle Jimin, but he's kinda shaken up by it all. The transthoracic echocardiogram ended up confirming that my mitral valve is majorly fucked up so the original diagnosis was spot on. It impacted him more than I thought it would. He's gone all quiet for the past day or two, and every time he looks at me, his eyes water up. I have some inkling as to what he's thinking when he sees me, because he told me in the car ride back home from the appointment. "You don't deserve any of this," Uncle had said, slowly driving, "This isn't your fault. You didn't get what you needed at the right time, because of other people's selfishness. Now you're paying for their careless ways." It brought tears to my eyes; I sat back and stayed quiet. If I'd tried to utter anything, I would have ended up bawling and I didn't want him to see me cry. He was struggling enough.

It happened behind a closed bedroom door, the weeping. I felt foolish for breaking down so easily, but at that moment, nothing mattered. The tears needed to fall. And fall they did, for hours on end without any indication of stopping. A merciless headache accompanied the crying, I didn't know I could go on for so long. When Taehyung called me that evening, it was one hell of a mission to sound okay. But somehow, I pulled it off and before I could really stop to think, I'd offered to bring him back home. Why? I don't quite understand it myself. It's just that he didn't sound like he was having a good time, and I didn't want to be unreliable for him. Being there for him matters to me. I know I wanted someone to be there by my side when I needed it. But nobody really came, no friend stuck around. They left. I was determined never to make that error.

So I'd grabbed my keys and departed, partially glad that I did the bulk of my crying at home. Otherwise I probably would have sobbed the whole way there. But another plus was that it was
dark, making my face difficult to see. Taehyung couldn't spot how puffy my eyes were in that kind of darkness, and that's not what I particularly wanted either. He'd ask questions and I'd fail to answer until he pushed me to some breaking point where I tell him everything. It would make him miserable and I'd sit quietly, upset with myself for being so fucking weak.

While none of that actually occurred, I did something else that night that went beyond my understanding. I asked him to kiss me... and he obliged. No hesitations or anything; that guy just went for it and I don't know why, but it took away so much pain at that moment. I sought comfort in his touch, and I had felt it as soon as his lips were pressed against my own tear covered ones. Taehyung was magic in his own way, with every little movement and gesture. Such intimacy made me forget my "I'm all alone" mindset. That night, I had someone. Someone who wasn't my uncle, someone who genuinely cared about my well-being and was willing to go to great lengths to let me feel peace. I had a friend. And what's more is that he said he was going to worry about me even when I told him not to. That it was too late to stop him from worrying. Damn, did that strike a chord in my failing heart. I know the brunette cares about me and my company, but that night was the first time that I truly felt the extent to which he cares. And it was extraordinary. Just like him.

Harsh sunlight pours through the closed windows, brightening what would have been a bleak room otherwise. My thoughts of the previous days go around in my mind, a cycle with little prospect of being broken. But I know I can't bum around on another person's couch all day, regardless of whether they care or not. There's something important I need to do, important but terrifying. I made a promise to myself after finding out the diagnosis that I have to keep. And laying around lazily is simply a way to procrastinate, something I got real good at around high school. Man, I'd have assignments given to me two weeks in advance, but you bet that I wouldn't sit down to accomplish shit until the night before it was due. I learned at that time that a lot of my best work can be done in a stressful race against the clock. The damned ticking bomb versus my caffeinated state, it gave me a decent rush. Which is likely to be the nerdiest thing I've ever admitted, but who cares.

"I'm gonna head out," I announce, swinging my legs off the couch and planting the bare soles of my feet on the soft, carpeted floor. Even if uncle Jimin doesn't necessarily have much to say to me, I don't want things to be tense in the house. It's not worth it.

Peeking up from his newspaper, he mumbles something along the lines of "please be safe", which brings a small smile to my blank face. Waving goodbye, I snatch my car keys off the little hook on the wall and leave the house, greeted by a repulsive humidity. I only have to take a few steps before beads of sweat line my forehead, hidden underneath a curtain of bangs. All I'm wearing is a white muscle tee with some tattered jeans, a step down from my normally sophisticated wardrobe. The accessories have been dialed down too, I chose nothing more than my usual rings and a dog tag chain. Fits the mood, I guess. But even in more breathable clothing, I find myself getting clammy and it's so disgusting, geez. First thing I do after plopping in the overheated car seat is turn on the engine and blast the damn air conditioning. With my door open, I lean against the soft seat, waiting for it to get cool enough so that I can actually drive without that wonderful, suffocating feeling brought on by these summer mid-days. After a few minutes, the door closes and the bottom of my worn out combat boot rams the accelerator.

Time's running.

Almost an hour or so later, I push the gear shift into park after stopping in front of a house that leaves much to be desired. I imagine it must have been beautiful right after it had been constructed, but now it's a product of neglect and carelessness. An accurate description of the souls living inside its four, paint chipped walls. At least, judging from the state of this house, I'm gonna assume the paint's
Faded red bricks rest atop one another, hidden under creeping vines that never seem to end. Windows sit unopened, with an AC sticking out from one. It emits a faint rumbling noise that I reckon can't indicate anything good. Broken front steps lead to a dirtied front porch, which holds an abundance of garbage on its own. Old toys, broken glass, cigarette butts, a deflated car tire, just to name a few. A lifeless petunia plant sits on the dusty cushion on an old wicker chair, a sight of pure pity. The weeds run amok in the lawn, land that hasn't seen a nurturing presence for months on end. It smells of indifference, but the state of the property cries out for someone, anyone, who cares. Nothing about this home provides a welcoming feel, absolutely nothing.

Stepping into the small plot filled with overgrown grass, I make my way onto the front porch and face a torn screen door. Here goes nothing. With a trembling finger, I press the doorbell only half expecting it to work, and a high pitched ringing sounds at once. Yelling can be heard from behind the front door, soon joined by several feet stomping. Childish shrieks echo above the shrill screeching of an angered mother. My angered mother.

The door flings open, and the screen door stands between the woman who birthed me and myself. Her eyes widen, lips loosening on the cigarette it holds, as she takes in my sudden arrival. "You?" she spits hatefully. Ah, there's the tone I miss so much on a daily basis. It's been so long since I've seen her. She's dressed in an extra large shirt with loose pants, stains on both. Her hair rests in a messily made bun and deep, dark circles steal the youth out from under her once satisfied eyes.

"Hi mom," I greet hesitantly. "Can I come in?"

Not knowing what to make of such an unexpected visit, the frazzled woman nods and turns her back without even bothering to open the screen door. I let myself in, instantly hit by the pleasant smell of what I can only assume to be today's lunch burning in their cramped kitchen. I was right. The walls are coated in chipping paint.

Two children, no older than 8 or 9 years, run around wildly. One has a large, metal bowl on his head and he chases his little sister around, making finger guns. His sister, a pretty little sight, shrieks gleefully while hopping around in her stained clothes. They pay no attention to me, caught up entirely in their little world of make-believe. My step-siblings... I don't even know their names. When I'd last seen them, the oldest was only a few months old. That's how disconnected I've been.

Grunting, mom takes a long drag and lets go of a puff of strong scented smoke, the one I surround myself in daily. Like mother, like son perhaps. "What do you want?" she asks gruffly, using a hand to push her curly, unkempt hair out of her aging face. How much she has changed, how much she has deteriorated since I saw her last. Yet I feel no strong bond, nothing towards her. This woman made her disappearing act from my life back in middle school and since then, there's been nothing more to feel. The rage that once oozed out of me endlessly like something toxic has diminished, more or less. I've grown too concerned with myself to care about being angry with her. To hate her like I used to.

"How are you, mom?" I ask her, wanting this conversation to go well.

"How does it look like I am?" she snaps. "Anyway, what do you want?"

Ah, well. So much for catching up. Rubbing an arm, I gently inquire, "Is there anywhere we can talk in private? I have something important to ask you."

Smirking sarcastically, she gestures towards the dining room, which is a small area right outside the kitchen that holds nothing more than a rickety, round table and a few mismatched chairs. "There, if
you'd like." I head in that direction wordlessly, taking a seat. She does the same, though with a look of pure irritation, and I notice that a pot sits on the stove, its contents far beyond the boiling point. Without telling her anything, I walk over to the pot and remove it from the coiled stove top, shoving under the faucet that I turn on. Smoke arises, smelling of something awful. I don't know what she was attempting to cook, but it must have been disgusting. Not once does the woman get up to help me; she just sits and gazes at the window by the table, disregarding the closed blinds. The kids continue running around, but one's crying now. Not a single fuck given.

Taking my seat again, I start talking. "I won't try to make any small talk here, because I know how much it pains you to look at me. The less of your precious time I waste, the better." She says nothing, still more interested in her drug than her first born. "I've been diagnosed with a heart disease that could be fatal unless I get it treated." That gets her attention. Mom looks at me in astonishment, and I can practically hear her thoughts. Of all things she expected me to come for, this wasn't a scenario she'd imagined. I spare the details, assuming that it'll go over her head anyway so why bother. "It's an outcome of a fever I got when you and dad were going through the divorce. Since nobody took care of me at the time, it had a long lasting impact on my heart, to the point where it can kill me."

"Alright, so why're you telling me all this?" she snaps, already frustrated. "You go years without a single phone call and suddenly you're at my door, telling me you're gonna die? What's this about?"

The familiar taste of my rage comes back immediately, running vigorously through veins, and I clench my fists to control myself. I guess she can still get to me. "You never called. You never looked back. I was your child, don't you fucking dare make it my responsibility to chase after you. I came to tell you this because I'm in a desperate situation right now."

"If you were a good enough kid, you'd come to look after your mother."

I cannot believe her. "How could have I be a good enough kid when the person who brought me into this world treated me with the worth of an insect? Don't fucking kid around with me with this kind of thing, you've got no right to tell me that I had to come after your unloyal ass to look after you," I retort, basically fuming. "I was left to look after myself, a child can barely handle that much."

"Fat lot of good that did," she snorts, "Looked after yourself, and now see where it's gotten you. Dying." Mom takes another drag and I just gape at her, unable to comprehend how a human being can be so terribly cruel.

"I don't want to die," I tell her through gritted teeth. "I deserve better and I want that for myself, but that's not a request that comes at a cheap price. It costs me, something I can't afford."

"So just die then. One less pain for this world," says the woman carelessly.

"No. I'm not letting this go without fighting for what's mine. The cardiologist that uncle's taken me to said that there's treatment. There's medication that'll take away the pain or dull it, but it doesn't fix the problem," I explain and I'm trying so damn hard to hold myself back right now. "The permanent solution is surgery, which I can't afford on my own. My reason for showing up is in the hopes that you've had something, anything, saved for me. I can't ask uncle to pay for such an expensive procedure, but I can't do this with what little savings that I have. Mom, can you help me?"

She look at me with an expression that falls between one of incredulity and irritation before throwing her head back in a heartless cackle. "You poor thing," mom says, lacking even a drop of sympathy, "Look at this house. I've got two kids, a house that's falling apart, and a man whose ass I need to kick daily as motivation to get him job hunting. Do I fucking look like I have money saved? And if I did, don't you think I would've made use of that already?"
"Well, is there any way you could help with saving up?" I plead. "I'd like to have the surgery done by the end of summer at the latest... maybe you could pause with the smoking and the drinking long enough to help raise something for me? I wouldn't come to you unless I really had nowhere else to go, you know that as well as I do. It's been so many years and I've shown up at your doorstep in need of help. Please, I've got to do the same about my addictions in order to add to my savings; do you have it in your heart to help? Please, mom?" I know it's a far-fetched thing to ask from a person who abandoned you, but I couldn't rest easily knowing that I avoided making some effort with her. Whether I like it or not, she's still my mom. And I'm still her son.

"Jungkook," mom says firmly and I know it's a lost cause, "There's been no room in my heart for you, never has been." My eyes sting with tears, but I bite my lip to stop myself. I cannot be vulnerable in front of her, she'll only ridicule me for my weakness. I cannot cry. "You were a mistake from the start, and maybe this is the world's way of telling you that there's no room for you in it. I'd listen to the hint, if I were you."

"You know what, you're a bitch," I blurt out, words escaping before my self control could step in. It's too much, it's just too much to sit here and take.

"Yeah. Says you and every other shitty man that's ever come into my life," mom shoots back angrily, standing up. She's not even caught off guard; it's like these insults have been with her for most of her life. "None of you are ever good for anything, all you do is ruin lives and leave behind a mess for people like me to take care of. I deserved better than this house, better than you, better than every damn thing I've been given!"

"To deserve better, you have to first be a fucking decent human being, and you frankly don't have a single bit of kindness in you!" I yell at her, standing up as well. That rage hits an all time high after years of absence and I can't tell if I want to break something or cry. "Preach to me about what you deserve after you do some good in this world instead of being a damn bottom feeder who can't think of anyone other than herself. You've got two kids to look after? Do it right, and don't fuck up their lives the way you did mine, treat them with some damn respect. These poor children didn't ask to be born, you brought them into this world and by doing that, you made a commitment to their well-being. You don't just run away when things get hard, you stand straight and handle it like a fucking adult, which is exactly what you failed to do with me. You were selfish while raising me. Now I'm paying for your reckless mistakes, so you better learn from this. For once in your life, be a good mother instead of scouting for the next best thing. Because guess what, you tried that and this," I shout while gesturing at the wrecked house, "This shithole is the best you've ended up with. Something you can't blame anybody but yourself for. Because nobody asked you to run, you made that choice."

She throws her cigarette on the dirty floor and smashes it under her shoe. "Get the fuck out of my house!" she screeches at me. The children are now silently sitting on the raggedy sofa, holding hands. Without thinking twice, I storm towards the door. Just before I walk out, mom screams one more time, "Don't you ever think about showing your face to me again, you fucking mistake!" Fine, if this is how she wants it.

"Next time I see you, mom," I bitterly say, the words tasting like poison on my tongue, "will be in hell. Have fun searching for whatever the fuck it is you think you deserve." The white door slams behind me and I sigh exasperatedly. I shouldn't have expected anything different, but I hoped for something better. I hoped for understanding, for common courtesy. Instead, I get yelling and profanities. I know I should have kept quiet, should have dealt with her harsh words internally, but I'm a fighter. It's how I learned to survive.

Jumping over the railing of the broken steps, I take long strides to get into the car. A cigarette finds
itself out of its little carton and between my lips, the toxic taste subduing emotional pain. It lasts for a few minutes, but a stabbing pain in my chest strikes, causing me to toss the stick out the window in regret. Not long before the engine's going again and I'm on the 40 minute ride back to uncle's, heart heavy and eyes glossed over with tears that shouldn't fall but do anyway. I guess this is my lesson for trying to find good where good can't and will never be able to exist. But the thing that hurts the most?

*I didn't even get the chance to know their names.*
And the stars exploding, we'll be fireproof

Yoongi's POV

It's safe to say that things are slowly settling between Taehyung and I, at least from what I'm sensing. A slow progression — painfully slow — the tension lessens day by day, and for once, I'm determined not to screw it up. Which hasn't been the easiest of tasks, because of one sole reason: Sunhee.

She's been coming over more and more frequently, and while I don't necessarily mind the company at all, it doesn't go unnoticed that Taehyung gets incredibly stiff in her presence. On almost every occasion, he goes to his room and stays there until we've gone off to bed. Only then does he escape his isolation to come downstairs to eat or for some water. The reason I personally know this is because once Sunhee falls asleep, I tiptoe out to lay on the couch instead. Can't really answer why I've made a habit of it. At first, it was just due to the overwhelming number of thoughts on my mind, and I felt somewhat suffocated in the bed, so a more liberating (I guess that's the right word) space was needed. Now, I kinda want to be there when Taehyung comes down, even if he doesn't see me. The guy hasn't seen me once, he's that out of it by the time he gets downstairs. Plus I do tend to stay super still and quiet, not wanting to bother him. As much as I'd like to stay up throughout these long nights talking to him, I can't. Maybe it's shyness, maybe fear, maybe confusion. All of the above even.

But when he does talk to me, in the time that Sunhee isn't here, I feel so... fulfilled. Part of me constantly wishes to hear him speak, to have those hushed tones (that sometimes cause a chill to run down my back) break the silence with simply a single, soft word. His voice carries the lightness of feathers, barely touching the quiet that drapes over us, but when it does, the warm ripples throughout the room. Much like a fingertip delicately touching a still surface of water. Yes, that's exactly his voice for me. Every word sounds nicer, even the swearing. And when that warmth reaches me, it feels like nothing I've experience before. Fuzzy and satisfied, yet still on the painful verge of wanting more. It's silly how much a voice, his voice, can do to me. Unfathomable might be a better term for it than silly, come to think of it.

But then there's the other part of me, the one that looks at Sunhee, wondering why feelings have dulled and boyfriend tasks now appear as obligations. I tell myself it's just a rough patch. That's all I can do to keep myself sane, because I know I love her. But then what's making the concept of us so
empty. It wasn't always this way. Conversations grow monotonous, interactions lack passion, the
gestures simply lack all conviction no matter how hard I try. Is that what happens with love? Does it
dull so drastically over time? I can't say for sure, but I hope that the answers I fear are the wrong
ones.

We sit at the dining table on this afternoon day accompanying late June, meaning Sunhee and I.
Lunch is laid out, a non-typical meal of salad, sandwiches, and fruits. Under normal circumstances
I'd go for regular Korean food, but that's not Sunhee's preference. She actually dislikes our native
cuisine in general, and that impacts the meals I'm able to make when she's over. Once in a blue
moon, she'll let me make something a bit more traditional. The rest of the time, she eats like a rabbit.
Vegetables and fruits for the win when it comes to my girlfriend, leaving me to stuff my face every
night with any meat I'll have in the fridge.

"Should I call down Taehyung?" I ask Sunhee before bothering to put anything on my plate. I saw
him for a few minutes this morning and he blasted off into his room as soon as the doorbell rang.
Poor guy's been upstairs without anything to eat all day so far. I hate that he feels so uneasy when
my girlfriend's around; it bugs me to the point that I've been contemplating having a conversation
with him about it. I mean, he's a guest in my house. There's no positive feelings on my end if he's
going to hide from her all the time.

Sunhee nods, her curled locks bouncing up and down. She reaches forward for the salad, and
without thinking, I gently push it away from the bowl. "Let's all eat together," I say quietly, rising
from my chair. "I'll go get him." Not in the mood to explain myself, I head up the stairs, instantly
greeted by the soft hum of Taehyung's music coming through the crack of the door. With a knock, I
peek my head in to see him sprawled on his bed with a blank stare directed at the ceiling. Didn't even
hear me knock. He sings along softly, and it catches me off guard just a bit. I didn't expect to hear
him singing.

For a moment, I forget why I'm there to begin with. Leaning against the door frame, I listen to his
words (well, the song's words) with a strange concentration. "Desperate times call for reckless
minds. I'm intertwined so deep with you. Broken hearts reach for broken fights and spoken crimes
against my soul," the singer croons, her unique voice layered with Taehyung's. He sings so
beautifully, I'm at a loss of what to say. Actually, I don't even want to interrupt him for lunch when
he's so focused on the music. It's like the world's blurred out to him. A peaceful thing to see, really.

My stomach grumbles slightly, bringing me back to my original intentions. Sunhee's gonna get
impatient if I don't come back down soon. "Hey Tae?"

"Mm? Oh, hyung," he replies and gets up instantly. "Sorry, was the music too loud? I didn't hear you
knocking." Grinning sheepishly, Taehyung rubs the back of his neck and I coo a little internally at
how cute he looks with that expression on his face, but of course, none of that translates through to
him.

Chuckling, I shake my head. "Nah, you're good. You sing really well." Just like a drop of red paint
falling into a cup of water, his cheeks blush intensely, causing him to look down in embarrassment.
Aw man, I didn't mean to make him feel self-conscious. I guess I screwed that up way too quickly.
Or maybe I'm overthinking this...

"U-umm, I'm sorry if you didn't want me to listen to you. It's just that the door was open and I came
to call you down for lunch. You looked so serene in your little world that I felt bad for disrupting
you. The song's really nice too, though the lyrics are a bit depressing..." I end up rambling. To my
surprise, the brunette smiles at me and I feel idiotic for getting so worried in a matter of seconds.
"Anyway," I sigh, "Care for lunch?"
"Is Sunhee still there?" he cautiously asks, to which I can simply nod. "Mm, maybe later then."

"Please?" I suddenly say, "You're a guest in my house, and it makes me feel kinda lousy that you're up here by yourself most of the time these days. Even if you're bothered for some reason, can you sit through one lunch with us?"

Taehyung looks baffled, and I can't blame him since I don't even understand why I'm being so insistent about this. "I didn't know it made you feel bad," he mumbles.

"Well, it's just that you're by yourself and I know you like company at times. You don't have any interactions with anyone up here, I hardly see Jungkook over these days. So if you're willing to humor me, I'd like you to be with me today." The boldness surprises us both, I can't tell what brought it on so strongly.

He immediately looks up, something new sparkling in his eyes. "You want me to be with you," Taehyeong repeats as if processing the request like a machine. "Is she spending the night?"

"Dunno," I shrug. "Do you want to do something tonight?" Before I give him a chance to think about the question, I snap my fingers and exclaim, "Oh! Wanna go out tonight? We could go watch a film, grab some chicken, talk, spend time together!" Holy shit, where did all this excitement come from? I'm as startled as Taehyung; I can't remember the last time I had so much enthusiasm about something. Hopefully I'm not scaring him.

"Looks like you've got it all planned," he starts to say, then hesitates. "But do you really wanna spend the evening with me?"

"Yes, I do. This is happening, we're going to have a good time out tonight." With this inexplicable burst of energy, I march forward and take his hand. "Now come with me for lunch." Astonishingly enough, he doesn't protest. Instead, the brunette looks at me with an intensity in his eyes that's a bit off-putting. But I can't bring myself to look away, not when we're so close to each other.

"Umm," he hums almost breathlessly. I swear he keeps peeking at my mouth, but I can't tell if that's my imagination. What's even more strange is that I don't know if I want it to be my imagination.

"Yeah?" I answer in equal softness. I just keep taking in his facial features; it feels like I haven't seen them enough lately. How can a person be so handsome? The crooning of the singer rings in the background, but I pay more attention to my breathing, which feels shallower than normal. This is unsettling.

"Should we go for lunch then?" Taehyung asks, and that snaps me out of whatever spell I'm in.

"Ah. Of course, umm, let's go." The brunette holds my hand tightly as he gets off the bed without another word, and we head downstairs together. My heart's pounding, oh my God. How does one even explain this sensation... I ask too many questions.

Sunhee sighs exasperatedly as soon as we make it down, rolling her eyes as per usual. "Took you long enough." Aggressively grabbing the salad bowl, she places a decent amount of food on her plate, wasting no time in shoving it in her mouth. Did I mention she isn't the most patient when she's hungry, because that's kinda important when it comes to her.

Taehyung takes the seat across from me and I happily take his plate, filling it with a bit of everything today's lunch had to offer. "Ah, I can take it myself," he says weakly, but I'm ignoring that. Seeing as my mood's skyrocketed significantly, I'm gonna do whatever I want for the rest of this day. And it's gonna be great. "Thanks," the brunette responds upon receiving his plate, sending a little smile my
As I begin to pile food onto my own plate, Sunhee asks, "You do remember what's coming up, right?" Shit, I don't. I go through the dates rapidly in my head, but nothing comes up. It's not anybody's birthday or anniversary, there's no party scheduled. Taehyung eyes me in what I'm guessing is mild amusement as I struggle to give my girlfriend the answer she's waiting for — not very pleasantly, might I add. "You have no idea, do you?"

"Ah, well," I reply bashfully, "Is it someone's birthday?" I know it's not, but I'm bound for a scolding regardless. Might as well give a guess. True to my expectations, Sunhee huffs and drops her fork. I peek at Tae, who looks like he's stifling back some pretty intense laughter; I guess I've fucked up. Oops.

Glaring at me, Sunhee angrily answers my stupid question, "It's the dinner with my parents. This weekend." Oh, shit. Of all things to forget, this really isn't one of them. Taehyung's expression changes in a split-second, going from amused to rather horrified. I don't know why he's so affected by this, I'm the one who has to go. And the truth is that I don't want to. Meeting parents really isn't my thing, I get awkward and stuff. Like, I get far too nervous about making a good first impression.

"Oh right!" I laugh nervously in the hopes that she'll find my forgetfulness endearing or something. "You told me about that so long ago, it slipped my mind. Guess that's gonna be an all day thing, right? The family yacht's pretty far."

"Mm," she says, somewhat okay again. Maybe it's the fact that I remember the location of the event. "I'll pick you both up that day and—"

"Both?" I interrupt in a suddenly confused state. "Taehyung's coming?" The brunette stops chewing his sandwich and glares at me in irritation.

"You insisted that I join you guys," he mutters with his mouth full, redirecting his attention to the food in front of him. "I've got no problem staying here though. You guys can go have a blast."

"Umm, no," I snap, "I want you to come with us." His eyes meet my own, both our gazes adamant, making Sunhee clear her throat to get us focused back on her again.

"Whatever, so you're both coming. I'll pick you up in the afternoon, since you're really staying for dinner and all," she explains in between bites. It's interesting that none of her lipstick comes off as she eats. I've seen women start meals with a full mouth of lipstick on and by the time they finish, you can't tell they had it on to begin with. Just a random thought.

I eat along with them, quietness taking over for a few minutes. "Oh," I abruptly say, "Sunhee, you can't spend the night here."

Her brows furrow, mouth pursed in a pout. "Hmm? Why not?"

I peek at Taehyung, who fails to meet my eyes at the moment. "I'm going out tonight. Got some stuff I gotta do, and I don't know how late I'll be. It's best for me to have the house to myself tonight, if you don't mind."

"That sounds sketchy as fuck, hyung," Taehyung bursts out and glances at Sunhee, "He wants to hang out with me tonight, if you don't mind. Dunno why he said it like that, but that's the plan." Oh, I guess my wording was pretty bad, but I didn't really want to tell her that I'm prioritizing Tae over her for one night.

Sunhee's eyes widen in what I think is understanding and she laughs. "Why didn't you just say that?
Had me scared for a moment there, Yoongi," the model jokes before taking a sip of water.

"Aha, sorry. Guess I suck with words." Taehyung shoots me this "you're so stupid" look before resuming his meal and while I don't entirely appreciate the sass, the fact that he's being so comfortable makes me smile. He's acting naturally without Jungkook around. There's no room for me to be annoyed with him right now. Everything is wonderful.

"You sure as hell do," he scoffs, earning a small giggle from Sunhee. I don't know what I felt earlier in his bedroom, but I know what I'm feeling right now, watching him eat with that irritated expression. Doesn't matter if he's snapping at me or that my girlfriend thinks I'm an idiot. Doesn't matter if dinner with her parents is something that doesn't even have a spot on my bucket list. *This*, the strange sensation of having my heart race, is happiness.

I really missed him.
Taehyung's POV

Yoongi's enthusiasm is going through the roof today, and frankly, no part of me understands why. The bulk of his recent time has been with Sunhee, like, it's nonstop. Now all of a sudden, he's all "I wanna be around you", which is definitely a what the hell situation. I mean, I've made my efforts to talk to him in the rare moments without that woman in the house, but none of those have led to any particularly memorable conversations. Small talk, and I think I've already expressed how lame I find that entire concept. His behavior doesn't make much sense to me; why would he want to leave his flawless girlfriend — at least when she isn't hungry — to spend time with me? Possibly because he just wants some guy time, but I dunno how I feel about that.

It's true that I've rarely seen him hang out with any guy friends in the time I've been here, other than Jimin. But he doesn't even come over that frequently to start with. But am I a backup for him for the times that Sunhee's a drag? It's bothersome to imagine that I am, but I guess it's also ungrateful of me to think in such a negative way (as if optimism is an option). Yoongi willingly wants to be around me, and here I am, over analyzing and overthinking instead of being giddy over him. Overthinking should come with an off button, I swear. Think of all the people who would benefit from a mechanism like that.

Anyway, so the vineyard owner's got me baffled with his abrupt attitude change. It's like he's noticing me after several days of giving zero attention to my presence. Seriously, other than my little attempts at chatting, he barely spoke to me earlier this week, and I ended up spending every day in my room, reading. All his time went behind being preoccupied by a certain vixen of a model, and now his eyes are on me. Ordinary me who thought today was going to follow the same pattern we've unknowingly fallen into. Though, the thought of hanging out with him is certainly better than watching him with his tongue down that woman's throat. I'm almost asking myself if he's seeing me in a different light. I want to say he is.

When he came up to my room to call me down for lunch, I sensed a new vibe from him. It was intriguing, unlike the ones in the past. He'd taken my hand — a bold move, if you ask me — and we had this moment, one that nearly caused me to lose all my calmness that I'd attained through the music. The dark haired elder peered at me in this... this strange, alluring way, and maybe I'm mixing
my desires with facts, but it seemed like a brand new type of tension was present between us. You know how if you bring two magnets closer and closer together, eventually a small pull between them is felt? If you continue bringing them closer, they'll forcefully come together, and that's exactly how I would describe the gap filling the space at that moment. Yoongi and I had that faint magnetic pull that played with the danger of becoming stronger had we leaned in any further. He's looked at me in the past, but it almost seemed like he was really seeing me for the first time, if that makes even an ounce of sense. Probably doesn't, but I can't think of another description for it.

Full disclosure though, I had to summon every ounce of strength to keep myself from giving in to that pull. His lips were amazingly close; it was torture holding back the intense urge to connect his with my own. I don't think I've ever experienced a crush on this level before. Generally if I liked someone, they'd like me back and that was that. No complications, no fuss. But the game's changed with the entrance of a man I can't have, even if I tried. It's so damn difficult wanting someone so badly with no prospect of success, it's painful. Fucking hormones making life impossible. Why couldn't I have fallen for Jungkook instead, I'm making out with the guy almost every time he comes here anyway.

After a series of — I'd say fortunate — events, Yoongi's plan changed and now we're going out to a movie. He basically all but shoved Sunhee out of the door once she finished lunch, immediately crashing on the couch for a nap. It's been three hours, and he's still sleeping. Impressive, really. I reckon he can sleep through the night if nobody disrupts him. With all this time on my hands, I could've done the same, except I'm not tired. So I've been exploring the outside of the house barefoot.

The land is absolutely beautiful, picturesque to a point where I'm almost intimidated to describe it. There's no way I can do this nature justice. Yoongi has a fair amount of land surrounding his house, and in the back is the vineyard. It's mildly amusing to me that I've been here for several weeks yet I haven't gone into the actual vineyards. Guess it's time now.

A breeze, one that isn't so typical for the summer we've been having, brushes past the meadow-like plot, pulling me with it. With compelled footsteps, I walk into a random row and reach out, fingertips grazing the soft skins of fresh grapes. The smell is peculiar, both earthy and fruity, but I find comfort in it. Sunshine showers me as I make my way from one row to the next, a soft warmth that tugs my cheeks into a smile. A small bug lands on my hand, walking around with tiny steps. I'm not a lover of all insects, specifically spiders, but harmless ones like this little guy is okay. The small ones are kinda cute.

As the creature crawls off my hand and onto a leaf, I continue going through the current row of grapes slowly. My eyes stay solely on the hand that moves past the grapes. Step by step. One foot after another, cool dirt under yearning skin. Serenity at its finest. Entirely focused on taking in the different sensations, I don't realize that I'm not alone until a pale, veiny hand is placed on top of mine, stopping me mid-step.

"Hey," Yoongi says softly, giving me this smile that's enough to erase my entire vocabulary. "Have you been out here the whole time I was asleep?" I shyly nod and take note of the fact that he's still holding my hand. Could these little moments mean something or am I just being delusional? I really hope it's more than just hand-holding, but that's some intense wishful thinking.

He takes a deep breath, basked in the setting sun's glow. I see him in sunlight everyday, but seeing him here, outdoors in a simple black shirt and ripped blue jeans, my heart feels something stronger than normal. Fuck it, I want to kiss him so bad. Can't he let go of my hand? It'd make things a bit easier on me. At the same time, I pray internally that he holds onto it for as long as possible.
"H-hyung," I stutter terribly.

"Do you like it out here?" he asks unexpectedly, fixing his gaze on the land in front of him. I mumble 'yes', and Yoongi faces me again with a toothy grin. It's cute, his gums show when he genuinely smiles. Dear God, I could just melt. "I'm glad you do, it's one of my favorite places."

"I just," I struggle to say, "I really love nature. There's something so remarkably soothing about being out here by myself. Like, there's all this land to explore and it's hard to make myself walk, because a huge part of me wants to sprint into the vastness of it all. Your vineyard is beautiful."

There's something new in his eyes, I swear there must be. The way he's looking at me isn't the same as a week ago, something has changed. Or is changing, but I have no clue as to what it could be. Jungkook hasn't been over recently, I wonder if that's it. He's been busy with things and decided that Yoongi also needed time to cool down, rather than constantly being pissed at me.

The dark haired vision walks closer towards me; I can't tell if he has any intention of stopping. "Tae," says Yoongi as if he's practically enraptured by me, his twinkling eyes boring into my own. A burning sensation blooms in my chest, a scorching flower, but I can't look away. "Taehyung," he says my name again. It sounds nicer every damn time he says it, what is this? I want to be infuriated with him for making me feel like putty, yet I'm simultaneously wanting to hear more. More of that raspy voice that sounds dark but soothing when it's just soft enough. This is almost dangerous... and I want more. I want to walk closer.

"Yeah?" We walk close enough that I can feel his breath on my face; he's gazing at me with such an intensity that I don't know what to do or say. Everything's in his hands now. Yoongi licks his bottom lip subtly, and the only thing I can hope is that he doesn't notice my breath hitch. He needs to stop, he has a girlfriend. I don't want him to toy with me even without knowing how I feel for him. I can't do this...

"Mm," Yoongi hums, starting to intertwine our fingers together. His gaze doesn't leave mine, not for a millisecond, and I'm too enthralled to look away. This is so painful. "Why do you keep confusing me so much?"

I'm sorry, what? What the hell does he mean by confusing? My God, this man has no idea what I'm having to go through every fucking day just because of his mere existence, and he has the audacity to call me confusing. I haven't even done anything!

"I don't understand what you're saying," I dumbly reply, and of course, he smiles again. "How am I confusing you?"

He lets go of my hand with a sigh. "It's best you don't know," Yoongi cryptically answers, "We've gotta get ready now. Sun's gonna set in a bit, and we'll be out soon after." Well, alright. That helps a lot.

Silently, we head back inside, the tension still unbelievably thick between us. I bolt up the stairs before Yoongi can say anything, and out of sheer panic, I scour through all my belongings to find attire suitable to wear for the evening. Honestly, that man has me so out of it that I don't want to bother putting any thought into anything. Grabbing a full sleeve shirts with holes (I went through a phase in high school where I just made slits in my clothes to be edgy) and some generic black trousers, I shut the door and change rapidly. Almost as if he knows, Yoongi knocks twice.

"Hey, you ready?" Taking a deep breath, I head over and calmly let myself open the door.

"Mmm, let's go."
Groaning, Yoongi's head drops. "Shit," he curses under his breath angrily, while I stand beside him somewhat helplessly. Turns out we missed the chance to buy tickets for basically any film playing at the moment, and the next showings are far later than we intended to stay out. It's funny that he had no idea what film we were gonna see, but now I just feel bad for the guy. He seems to be so disappointed.

"Do you want to find something else to do? I mean, we're in a mall," I remind him gently, reaching for his arm. I genuinely do feel sorry for him, he kept talking about how much fun we'd have and that he hasn't been to the movies in a long while. Sigh, we'll definitely have to go another time (preferably with better planning).

The disappointed man glances up at me and all I can do is smile in the hopes that it'll cheer him up slightly. Even a little bit of happiness counts, in my opinion. "I'm sorry, Tae. I hyped it up so much and we can't even go see it..."

"Hey, it's okay. We'll still have a good time!" Damn, I'm actually trying to be the optimist here. If that's not a sign of me crushing hard, I don't know what is. "I've never been in this mall before. Exploring the different stores could be fun, yeah?"

He indifferently shrugs before responding, "I guess. There is an arcade down on the first floor."

"Wait, seriously?" I gasp, startling the older male. Arcades are fucking great; I'm obsessed with them. Now I'm really hyped. Yoongi nods slowly, which propels me to reach for his wrist without further hesitation. "We're going there."

I drag the pouting vineyard owner out of the theater lobby with determination, but stop in the middle of my path. "I just realized I have no idea where the escalators are..." I mumble to myself, hearing Yoongi snicker behind me. He walks in front of me, still holding my hand, and looks back.

"I'll take you." I followed him throughout the mall until we made it to the first floor, where the arcade was. Luckily enough, it was right by the escalators, so we didn't have to walk much further. As soon as we're in, colors and bright music overwhelm me at every angle. My brain feels overstimulated, but this is exactly what I wanted. I'm excited.

Scanning the room, I spot two empty DDR stations and immediately yank Yoongi behind me in a sprint to the machines. "This first!" I exclaim happily, causing the dark haired man to peer at me incredulously. "What?"

"You expect me to do this?"

I smirk, taking advantage of his disbelief. "Why, you scared of losing? Or are you too old to keep up with me?" That does it. Yoongi's puzzled expression is replaced with a competitive one at once as he steps onto the dance pad.

"You fucking wish," he snaps. And so it begins, our competition. I remember the last time I played this game. It was during sophomore year; Namjoon and I had a big exam the next day, so we decided to spend the time unwinding instead of last minute cramming. It's not even that effective of a strategy anyway. We spent a whole afternoon at the closest arcade, making a competition out of everything. He always beat me when it came to shooting hoops, I owned him with these dancing games. His sense of coordination sucks, a fault for which I'm incredibly thankful. It's nice to have a balance between us.
Unlike Namjoon, Yoongi's not bad at this game. I sneak a glance at his screen from time to time, and he's constantly tailing behind my score. It's too neck and neck for me to conclude that the victory will be mine. All of a sudden, he bursts out into laughter, distracting me. His unfiltered laugh is addicting. It's enough of a distraction that I fall behind on a few of the moves, costing me major points. Damn it, I can't allow this.

"Stop laughing!" I scold him, centering all my focus on the colorful screen right in front of me. "It's distracting."

He scoffs, still paying attention to his game. "Thought you said to have fun? Are you scared of losing now?"

"Umm, no?" I retort, though I'm lowkey worried that I will. "I'm gonna beat you, I promise."

"You're cute," Yoongi suddenly says and it's as if my brain halts in the middle of all thoughts, his words echoing throughout. I can't hear or think of anything else right now. He called me cute... Yoongi really called me cute. Does he mean that?

His voice brings me back to the moment. "Hah," he says triumphantly. I look at my screen and then his, internally cursing at how close the scores are. Had I kept my concentration, I would've had the game in the bag. Damn him for being so good at catching my attention. "I win."

"You got lucky," I snap at him irritably, not considering that poor sportsmanship is probably stupid, especially with arcade games.

"Yeah, sounds like a sore loser," he fires back with this smug grin on his face. Oh my God, Yoongi's reminding me of Jungkook with that expression. That blue eyed guy's face would be permanently frozen in a smirk if that were possible. I'm really seeing a similarity between the two here. "Wanna play something else?"


"Now I can guarantee you that you'll lose at this game," he says, sauntering over to the other wall. "Basketball is my territory."

"Mhm," I agree dejectedly, already accepting defeat before the games start. Unsightly, but whatever. I'm being realistic. He gives me this understanding smile, which only infuriates me more. I wanna beat him.

He puts in the number of coins needed into the slot, and the game begins. The entire time honestly goes by in a blur with me mindlessly throwing ball after ball, and I reckon a point comes where I don't even aim for the hoops anymore. I feel like I'm simply chucking basketballs with zero intention of getting into the hoop. Surprisingly enough, I do get a fair amount of shots in, and by the time it's over, Yoongi's got this pretentious demeanor. That is, until he sees my score.

"Oh," he says blankly. "Good job."

"Huh?" To understand what he's talking about, I compare our scores. Wow, I actually beat the guy. Instantly, I forget my sore loser-ness and smirk just like he did after the DDR game. "Oh, look at that. I beat you."

"Yeah, but just barely," Yoongi defensively asserts, but his reasoning falls upon deaf ears.
"I won, I won, I won," I tease him happily. "You guaranteed that I'd lose, but look at the numbers! Sucks to suck, hyung." He huffs and it satisfies me, knowing I touched a nerve. Call me immature, but winning's fun. Rubbing his nose in it is an additional perk.

He grumbles and turns on his heel, saying something about being hungry. Happily, I run after him out of the arcade, staying hot on his trail until he stops in the food court. "Chicken," Yoongi mutters, heading straight for the fried chicken place. He must really want some meat or something; I think he was most excited about eating chicken earlier this afternoon too.

"You're starving, aren't you?" I ask him, but no reply.

"Is there anything specific you want?" Yoongi asks me instead, sighing as I shake my head no. I'm not picky when it comes to meat, as long as it's meat. "Alright. Go ahead and grab us a booth, I'll come with the food."

"Mm." I bound off to get us seats, and just as I find a really nice spot for us to eat, a store catches my eye. It's a bookstore. Needless to say, I forget all about eating food and go where my feet lead me, right into the shop. The entire place is stocked with books of all kinds, an actual treasure chest for me. Making a beeline for the fantasy aisle, I scan all the book titles. A different sort of happiness overcomes me and I know I could spend the rest of the night just exploring this entire store. That would be amazing.

Just as my hand falls on a book I may like, my phone rings. Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I see that it's a call from Namjoon. Interesting, he doesn't call too often. We mostly communicate through text, but whatever works.

"Yo," I answer as I take the book off the shelf, skimming the back cover. "What's up?"

"Nothing, just wanted to talk," says Namjoon from the other end. "How's it going?"

"Alright, I guess. I'm at the mall right now, Yoongi hyung decided to shoo his girlfriend home to and spend the evening with me."

Namjoon gasps excitedly, and I can hear him sit up on his bed. "Dude, for real?"

"Yeah... but it probably doesn't even mean anything. He probably just wanted to spend time with a guy or something. Too much time with Sunhee can be suffocating, I'd imagine," I inform him, only semi-sarcastic.

"Mm, I dunno. Did this happen out of the blue?"

"Yeah. And," I add, suddenly recalling something, "He's been behaving strangely."

"What do you mean?"

"Like," I start elaborating, plopping down on the floor of the aisle, "When he looks at me, something feels kinda different. As if he's seeing me in a new way or something, I don't know. Something has changed, and I know that's vague, but you gotta believe me."

"I believe you, but you need to give me more to work with," Namjoon says. Can't blame him, I'd want more information too.

"Ugh, okay. How do I put this?" I rack my brain for the correct wording. "Every single time we get closer, it feels like we're being drawn to each other. I mean, I'm drawn to him in general, but it's starting to feel mutual. And I can't tell if I'm reading the signs wrong. He's being touchier than
normal, and the tension's starting to escalate."

"You think he's attracted to you?"

"I want him to be, but I'm scared that my judgment's clouded."

"Have you tried telling Jungkook?" suggests my best friend, making me burst out into a fit of obnoxious laughter.

"I could tell Jungkook that Yoongi gave me a coin and he'd read all sorts of things into it. Telling him that Yoongi looks like he's ready to kiss me when we're in close proximity is like giving a child a basket of candy. He'll go crazy."

"Mm," Namjoon hums thoughtfully, "I can't conclude anything since I'm not actually there and all. I guess just keep observing and see if he sends any other signals? Talk to Jungkook if you can, since he's able to see your interactions. He'll have more insight than I will. What else is new for you two?"

"Umm, there's that dinner with Sunhee's parents this weekend. Crept up on us. Yoongi hyung forgot that he's making me go with them, and there's no way for me to get out of it. I think he really doesn't wanna go either; Sunhee's really pushing it on him."

"Really? That's interesting," he comments. "I think you should tell him how you feel."

"The fuck?" I stammer, totally caught off guard. "Did you not hear the part about him going to meet his girlfriend's parents?"

"I did, and I think you should tell him that night," Namjoon states adamantly. I can't follow his train of thought anymore. "It's better to say something sooner than later."

"Not in my case, Joonie."

"Well, you've got nothing to lose. He can't kick you out of his house. You still have to stay there for a month and a half still, it'll be alright."

"Yeah, but it'll establish this awkwardness between us and that's the last possible thing I want. We just got over this rough patch of not really talking, and I don't wanna jeopardize that by telling him my stupid feelings."

"They aren't stupid, Taehyung. You can't help them," reasons Namjoon.

"Yeah, that's exactly why they're stupid," I retort. "I can't do that."

"Get Jungkook's opinion," he advises suddenly.

"Wha-" I stammer, "Since when did you want me to consult Kook on everything?"

"Since he became the one who knew about your crush before you did," Namjoon shoots at me, "Just call and ask for his opinion. Can't hurt. Ultimately, it's down to you."

"Don't see why this is necessary..." I grumble.

"That's alright. Call him and ask him, then let me know his thoughts. I'll hang up now, bye Tae."

"Bye Joon." He hangs up the call and I'm left staring at my phone screen, wondering to myself why I bothered telling these two people about my crush to begin with. They're meddling too much... but I guess it couldn't hurt to ask Kook.
I dial Jungkook's number and listen to the ringing patiently, book still in my hand. I think I'm just gonna go ahead and purchase it, because the summary sounds pretty good to me. "Hello?" Kook's voice sounds.

"Hey! What's up, how are you?"

"Good as always, you?" We don't always exchange formalities, but a few days have passed since we last conversed. Best get done with the greetings before jumping headfirst into the romance counseling.

"I'm alright, out with Yoongi hyung."

"Really?" God, I can hear that smirk on his face. "What're you out for?"

"Dunno, he wanted to spend time with me at the mall instead of Sunhee. I wouldn't read too much into it if I were you."

"Yeah, but you're dumb," he bluntly says. "So what do you want advice on?" Whoa, he knows.

"How'd you know I wanted advice?" I ask, clearly bewildered. Either he knows me really well or that was an incredibly lucky guess.

"You're out with Yoongi hyung, I just assumed you had something you wanted to ask. Am I wrong?" Kook asks, but I can tell he knows that he's right.

"No. Well, okay. Things have been strange between us. Sunhee's been over lately, meaning our conversations have been limited, but all of a sudden, there's this newfound tension between us, a mutual one. I can't tell if I'm over analyzing, but yeah. And this weekend is the dinner with Sunhee's parents."

"Shit, that'll be a fun time," Jungkook jokes with a dry chuckle.

"Tell me about it. Anyway, he's still forcing me to go and I think it's because he doesn't want to go either. With me, he'll have some company. I've told Namjoon all this; he told me to tell Yoongi the truth about my feelings for him that night. Asked me to confirm with you."

"You know I think you should go for it," he says without any thoughts. "It's better to come clean with something like that. And he can't kick you out or anything, you're the kid of his best friend. He has to deal with you being around."

"But that's exactly it," I say in frustration. "I don't want him to have to deal. It's his house."

"But you're entitled to your emotions, Tae. He can handle this maturely, he's the older one. It's okay for you to tell him."

"But Sunhee..."

"Will be there. What he decides to do with this information is up to him, but you've gotta give him a chance to see if he'll feel the same way about you. Which, by the sounds of it, sounds possible. A push from you may be all he needs to understand that he wants to be with you."

"I dunno, Kook. It sounds nice when you say it like that, but I don't know if I can be confident enough to admit something like that."

A dry voice sounds behind me. "Admit something like what?" Shit.
"I gotta go," I whisper to Kook and hang up the phone, right before turning on my heel. "Ah, hyung." Yoongi hyung stands in front of me, a plastic bag full of food in his right hand.

"You had me worried," he says seriously, "I asked you to find us seats and I couldn't find you there. Of course, I figured this would be the first place you'd run off to."

"Sorry—wait, you knew I'd be in here?" I ask in astonishment. He shrugs nonchalantly, as if that's common information. I don't think even my parents would have guessed where I'd go. Not correctly anyway.

"You're a bookworm. This place is made for you." He notices the book I'm still holding. "Did you find anything worth getting?"

I glance down at the novel and nod. "Mm, it looks interesting. I'd like to give it a try."

"Cool," Yoongi says, walking forward and taking the book from me. "Take the chicken. I'll go pay for this."

"Hold up, I can buy it!" I protest, now holding the bag of food. But Yoongi shakes his head, giving me this knowing smile. "What?"

"Let me get this one thing for you," he requests. "As a gift."

"But..."

"Please?" He purses his lips in a pout, and it's like we switched roles. I'm the older one here, he's the childish one. "I'd be happy if you'd let me do this."

"Agh," I weakly surrender, looking away. "Alright, but just this once."

He beams so widely, it almost makes me grateful that I agreed to the gesture. "Thanks," Yoongi responds gratefully. "We'll go home to eat after this. Lemme go pay real quick."

"Mm, thank you so much," I feebly say.

"No problem. I wanted to do it. Being out with you like this... It's great. I'm really enjoying the time." As I watch him walk off to the cash register with my new book, a fuzzy feeling bubbles up within me. Maybe telling him won't be such a bad idea after all. I don't know how long I can keep my feelings hidden from him; there's still so much more of the summer to go and I think it's only gonna get harder with time. Yeah, maybe I'll tell him.

I'll have to sleep on it.
Taehyung's POV

For the rest of the week, the only thought I've been processing is *should I tell Yoongi how I feel or not?* And believe me, it's been this intense game of back and forth. It's like I'm pulling petals off a damn daisy, constantly going "he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not." I mean, I know he doesn't love me, but you get the gist. It's the same concept, although I do spend a decent amount of time on that question. Things have changed between us, and it's driving me insane because I cannot put my finger on what's different. The best part of it all is that today's the day. Dinner with Sunhee's parents; ugh, it sounds dreadful.

As of right now, Yoongi and I are glumly sitting in her car as she drives, humming to herself. I can't tell if she's oblivious to the overall atmosphere, but it's crystal clear that neither of us want to be here. Dunno how she's blurring it all out; the dark haired man is literally staring out the window without a single word. Meanwhile, I'm doing the same to calm myself down from the anxiety.

From the moment I woke up this morning, there's been a terrible feeling in my chest. It's all tight, suffocating, and I've been on the verge of tears nonstop. It's like a prolonged panic attack. None of this makes sense! There's no reason for me to be so anxious about this dinner; I'm literally just a guest. Yoongi's the one who has a right to be nervous, yet he's sitting there completely indifferent to the world. I guess I'm still debating whether I'm going to tell him tonight or not, but that's still not a big enough reason for me to be this antsy over a little dinner.

"Yoongi," Sunhee says in a singsong voice, taking a look at her morose boyfriend. It makes me a little happy seeing that he doesn't even bother meeting her eyes. "Why do you look so dead? Did you not get enough sleep?"

"Hmm?" he absently replies, "Mm, I slept enough." Raising an arm, he stretches and yawns (which totally undermines his claim, may I point out).

"Way to tell the truth, hyung." I snarkily comment and Yoongi shoots me a death glare immediately. Sucks for him, I'm unfazed by a stupid glare. God knows I've got enough on my plate internally
anyway.

"I'm being honest! We fell asleep early!" he exclaims in frustration, then realizes what he's just said. "Uh, and by we, I mean Taehyung and I. We fell asleep in front of the TV; it was early." I chuckle at his flustered state, practically sensing his internal facepalm. Yoongi's precious when he's all muddled up like this.

"If you fell asleep early," Sunhee sharply says, "Then why do you look so bummed out?"

Yoongi makes a 'tch' sound, groaning right after. "Babe, you know how I feel about meeting parents. I genuinely don't want to do this."

Her grip on the steering wheel tightens, and she smacks her gum even louder. "Well, why'd you agree to this then?"

"Because I know it means something to you," Yoongi says earnestly, "And disappointing you is worse than some stupid worry of mine. I don't want to do it, but at the same time, I keep telling myself that it won't be all that bad. And I'm sure it won't, but that doesn't stop me from internally panicking over this."

"My parents are friendly people. They're really not that bad."

"I know, babe, I know. I'll try to not be so nervous or moody about this, because you're important to me and I don't want to let you down in front of them," responds Yoongi with the utmost sincerity. His statement causes a knot to form in my stomach and the tightening in my chest to intensify further. He really does love her. I don't know why I thought he'd waste even a second of his time with feelings toward me. I'm nothing compared to this woman.

"Thank you, Yoongi," Sunhee contently chirps. Well, the tension between the two of them has gone down significantly... and he's holding her hand. Kill me now, this is absolute torture. I shouldn't have agreed to go. This whole thing was a mistake, even if Yoongi was the one who wanted me to tag along. It's high school all over again; I'm the fucking third wheel with a couple I can't stand to be around. "Oh, we're here!" the model exclaims, and I peer out the window.

Sure enough, a luxurious yacht sits by the docks, and it's the only one here. Are they loaded or something, because this area looks pretty private. I can guess that it takes a shit ton of cash to get a place this nice... then again, it's Sunhee I'm talking about. Of course she's loaded. Far be it from that woman to not have basically everything in the world. Great job, great appearance, a boyfriend that's amazing beyond words. This chick's got it all, and I've got a backseat view of it. How perfectly fair.

"Come on, quickly!" she animatedly says, parking the car and getting out in the blink of an eye. Yoongi peeks back at me with an apologetic smile, as if he's feeling sorry for me. Is he even allowed to do this, he dragged my ass here.

"What?" I snap at him out of the corner of my mouth.

"I'm sorry," he says, sighing, "You're unhappy, aren't you?" No, I'm ecstatic to see the guy I'm head over heels for meeting his girlfriend's parents, and while I'm at it, why don't I just sit in on the wedding too? 'Are you unhappy,' he asks, the nerve of him. I have half a mind to tell him to fuck off, but that's mean and I don't want to hurt his feelings.

"No shit, Sherlock," I quip in annoyance, "I'm mentally equipped for an evening of fun with Yoongi hyung and Sunhee, the world's most perfect couple."

He laughs dryly, avoiding eye contact with me. "Listen, you're gonna make this night more bearable
for me. I know you hate this and it sucks, but I do as well. If that makes you feel any better, of course."

"It doesn't."

Yoongi lets out a low whistle accompanying a shake of his head. "Guess I'm shit outta luck then."

"Guess you are," I coldly retort. I won't hurt his feelings, but that doesn't mean I'm gonna pretend like I'm having the best time of my life, not in front of him anyway. He dragged me here, he's gonna listen to my misery regardless of how he feels.

Sunhee's high pitched voice is heard once more as she slams down the trunk door of her car. "Guys, come on!" She bounces over to the front of the car wearing this ridiculously floppy hat to go along with her floral sundress. It's also worth mentioning that Sunhee's gone very minimal with the makeup in comparison to every other time I've seen her. She still looks gorgeous, but I find it slightly amusing that she's going for the simplistic look in front of her parents rather than her usual glamorous one.

Giving me one last look, Yoongi exhales deeply and closes the car door. Irritated, I push open my own door, then stick my legs out eagerly. There isn't enough room in the car for these lanky things. Following the couple quietly, I stuff my hands in the pockets of my dark jeans, wondering to myself what I could have possibly done wrong to deserve this terrible evening ahead of me. I glance up now and then, and I notice that Yoongi keeps playing with that silver bracelet of his. Man, he really must be on edge... I've learned that he's not one to fiddle with things unless he's severely bothered by something. Maybe I should go easier on him.

At one point Sunhee shrieks and begins running ahead of us. She's spotted her parents, who look like two tiny figures to me. As Yoongi and I get closer, the details become clearer to me, allowing for a proper observation. Sunhee's dad is decked out in... oh God, he's wearing golf clothes and her mom is wearing a sundress just like her daughter. She looks very much like her daughter, though, except with a fair amount of work done on her face. And I mean surgical. There's no way she can have a daughter Sunhee's age without having a few wrinkles on her face. First thing I can think is how young does she think she is? The dad's distinguished, his gray hairs prominent amongst a full, groomed head of black hair. He wears round glasses and a somewhat stoic expression. This entire family reeks of pretentiousness, and I'm almost positive that I'm gonna puke at some point throughout this dinner. Gross.

"Jesus," Yoongi whispers under his breath as he comes to a standstill. He looks horrified; I don't have any inkling about how he's going to fake his way through the entire occasion. This blows.

"Mom! Daddy!" the only elated member of the 'trio' squeals, running forward to hug her parents. "You guys look great, I'm so excited for this!"

Her dad laughs, this rich sound you'd expect from someone who's obnoxiously, well, rich. "Glad to see our little girl so happy." Then to my sheer horror, the man looks directly at me. "Is this Yoongi?"

Fucking hell, he did not just assume I'm that witch's lover.

Thankfully, Sunhee corrects him at once. "No daddy, he's a kid! His name's Taehyung, he's staying with Yoongi over the summer. That's my Yoongi," she says, pointing to the vineyard owner, who reluctantly steps up to shake the father's hand. Great, it's back to being patronizing again.

"Pleasure to meet you, sir," he politely says with a forced smile. "And you, ma'am." The entire scenario is painful to watch; I want teleportation to be a thing so that I could zap myself back to the vineyard. Or to Jungkook. Yeah, being with him sounds pretty fantastic right about now.
"We've heard a lot of things about you; I've never seen Sunhee so in love before," her mom comments through a plastic smile.

"Ah," Yoongi chuckles bashfully, "So it's safe to assume you've only heard good things." Throwing her head back in rambunctious laughter, Sunhee playfully pushes Yoongi's arm. Ew, it's like watching teens flirt.

"Of course they've heard good things! As if there's anything bad to say," she says, beaming. Well, I have to agree with her there. Yoongi's pretty perfect, stupid temper and all. Like she could find a single thing bad about him to discuss.

"Okay, well we'd love to hear more about you two, but let's get onto the yacht first. They're setting up dinner right now and it promises to be spectacular," Sunhee's dad says. Everyone immediately concurs, and I'm going to assume it's because food helps make social interaction tolerable. Otherwise I can't understand the enthusiasm. Food definitely helps me make it through awkward social settings. This is gonna be a grand time.

~*~

Okay, so I thought the outside of their yacht was intimidating enough, but holy moly, the interior is the fanciest damn that I've ever laid eyes on. The massive, white sailboat leaves nothing left to desire at all; Sunhee's parents truly went all out on this thing.

We enter into this lavish space decorated with black leather couches and armchairs, there's like six of them surrounding the room. This big glass table sits in the center of the room with a decorative plant on top, making it all the more aesthetically pleasing. Large windows give a strikingly beautiful view, and as I peek in a little more, I notice that there's a whole dining room right next to this one.

"This is the living room," Sunhee announces, gesturing towards the amazing place, "Make yourselves comfortable! Unless you want me to show you to your rooms first." Wait, rooms? When the fuck did this become an overnight stay?

Apparently Yoongi has no clue either. "Sunhee, what do you mean by rooms?" he hesitantly asks.

"Well, it doesn't make sense to just have dinner on a yacht and leave, does it? No, you guys are spending the night! There's plenty of rooms for all of us, plus you'll be in my room anyway," his girlfriend informs us. "And don't worry about the fact that you haven't brought anything with you. There's pajamas, toiletries, practically anything you need available here for you two."

"You can't be serious," I accidentally blurt out.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Sunhee asks, eyes large and innocent. "I'll show you the rooms then, follow me." Exchanging a puzzled gaze, Yoongi and I walk behind Sunhee as she takes us out of the living room — which has a fireplace, by the way — and a little hallway holding the bedrooms. At least I'm assuming that's what these rooms are. She opens one door and reveals this spacious space containing a king sized bed, a big screen TV, an armchair, and a bathroom. Oh my God, I'm running out of reactions. There's honestly nothing I can say to all this; it's the most frivolous thing I've seen. Man, and I thought I came from a rich family.

"Taehyung, this'll be your room," she says and I stumble in with a dumbstruck expression, unable to believe that this is actually happening. I'm staying in this deluxe room in a boujee yacht with my crush and his girlfriend. "And you," Sunhee says to the dark haired elder, interrupting my train of thought, "You're gonna be next door with me." As I turn around to face them, I watch her lean forward to kiss Yoongi, who reciprocates eagerly. I wanna say get a room, but they have one and
lucky me, it's right next door.

"This is incredible," he whispers against her lips and my insides cry out, telling me to turn away from the people in front of me. It hurts to look. "But should we go up for dinner?"

"Mm, yes." They giggle stupidly before kissing again; I think I see tongue this time, good grief. When they're done rubbing their stupid relationship in my awfully single face, the couple start to head back up to the dining room. I do the same, muttering curses under my breath to keep the anger under control, and once we enter the room, my jaw drops at once.

The strangely simple table is covered with food of the highest caliber. Lobster, some fancy ass pasta, wine, grilled vegetables, some fruits. Even the water comes with slices of lemon wedged onto the rim of the glass. An abundance of silverware surrounds each plate, along with black, cloth napkins that have what I think is the family logo embroidered on it in gold. Damn, I'm starting to feel terribly out of place here.

"Shall we begin then?" Sunhee's mom asks, and it's at this moment that I realize that I don't actually know their names. Like, what is Sunhee's last name? And more importantly, how on earth did I manage to go so long without asking?

"Excuse me, but what should I refer to you as?" I nervously ask her mom, who smiles widely at me for who knows what reason. "It's just that it hit me that I don't know Sunhee's last name. So I thought I'd at least ask..." Feeling stupid should be an area of expertise, because I know that'd be mine.

Sunhee chuckles and answers before her mom can. "I'm Min Sunhee. So you can call them Mr. and Mrs. Min." Would you look at that, she even has the same last name as Yoongi's. It's like they're married already. That's perfect, just perfect.

"I totally didn't realize that you didn't know her last name," Yoongi says in amusement. I nod, a tight lipped smile 'gracing' my face. "That's pretty funny."

"Yeah, it's real hilarious," I mutter sarcastically and take my seat. Once everyone is settled in, we start taking our food. I'm a little surprised that we aren't being served, given the extravagance of this place, but at the same time, I'm grateful. Being served is mildly overwhelming, because I'm one who likes to take their own food. I know how much I'm able to eat and the way I like to eat things better than anyone else, so it's better off not pushing me when it comes to food. I fill up my plate with a large amount of the pasta carbonara as everyone else occupy themselves with the pouring of wine. Sunhee tries to offer me some, but I reject it at once. I can't drink again.

Yoongi, however, accepts a generous amount of it to go with his plate of pasta and vegetables. Sunhee and her family opt for the lobster, which I found interesting, and in the sight of food, we're all too controlled by our hunger to continue making any small talk for the first few minutes. I eat my pasta slowly so as not to appear sloppy in front of the company, taking sips of my lemony water in between bites. It's not just regular water, I soon discover, it's carbonated water. Jeez, these people don't like to go plain for anything.

"So, Yoongi," Mr. Min says, taking dainty bites, "Sunhee tells us you have a vineyard?"

The dark haired man swallows his sip of wine, nodding in agreement. "I do, yes. It used to be my dad's, but he wanted me to take over once I was old enough. So I've been running it for several years now."

"And how are the profits?" Great, they're gonna talk money.
"Mmm," Yoongi ponders for a moment, "Profits have been good. I have a business partner and we manage things together, so there's a keen eye on everything. We're both perfectionists, so we don't like leaving anything with flaws." I don't know why he's so nervous about meeting parents, Mr. Min's clearly loving the guy.

"Excellent, excellent. I'm glad to hear that you're enjoying it. What's the name of the wine, I'll have to try it sometime." Yoongi laughs dryly as soon as the question's posed, picking up his wine glass.

"You're drinking it, sir," he humbly says. Mr. Min's eyes widen and he bursts into a fit of laughter, like the ones rich people portrayed on TV have. It's the type of laugh you'd have to stand in front of a mirror and practice, because it sounds unnatural in every way.

Mrs. Min grins, showing off her pearly smile again. It's similar to Sunhee's. "You must be joking! This is our favorite wine, we drink it all the time! Sunhee, why didn't you ever tell us that?"

"Aha, guess it slipped my mind," says the model insincerely as she resumes stuffing pasta in her face again. Well, she does it more elegantly than that, but making her sound like a pig helps me feel better.

Yoongi plasters a grin on his face to match everyone else's, but I can sense that he's still a bit uneasy. "That's no problem. I'm glad you like it so much."

Suddenly, both parents shift their attention to me. "You're Taehyung, right?" Mrs. Min inquires, to which I give a simple nod. "So tell me, how old are you? And how do you know Yoongi?"

Gulping down some of that awful fizzy water, I start to explain, "Well, I'm 18. And my dad is best friends with Yoongi, so due to some family plans my folks made, I'm spending the summer over on Yoongi's vineyard."

"Ah, I see," says the mom, though I can't tell if it's judgmental. I can't see what she could possibly be judging me on. "So what're you going to study? You'll start college in the fall, yes?"

"Umm," I stall, shifting uncomfortably in the chair, "I don't quite know what I'd like to do yet. Lately, I've been contemplating a career in literature, because I love reading so much. But I don't know yet. There's still time for me to figure things out." Truth? I pull that out of my ass so fast that it even manages to impress me. I've never thought about pursuing literature. Although now that I say it out loud, it could actually be a pretty good idea for me...

"Mm, well it's good that you have some idea of where you want to go. Maybe it'll get better as the summer goes by," says Mrs. Min, and I can't help but think she just took a jab at the career I mentioned. Talk about stuck up. It's worth noting at this point that Yoongi has somehow managed to start on his third glass of wine, and if he keeps drinking at this rate, I reckon he'll have a tough time making it to the bedroom.
"Yoongi is an amazing boyfriend," Sunhee unexpectedly states. We all look at her, unsure of where this is going, but she just continues talking. "He's honestly the best relationship I've been in, and I'm so thrilled you all got to meet each other. I mean, we've been dating for so long that it was about time this happened!"

The vineyard owner simply downs another glass of wine and smiles weakly. "My goodness, you're drinking your own wine awfully fast," Mrs. Min comments in awe.

"It's fine," he says, waving it off. "I have a high tolerance for alcohol in general. I'll be alright." I don't know if I believe him.

~*~

In my opinion, the rest of the dinner goes by in a bit of a blur and everyone splits up. Currently, I'm outside, laying on one of the chairs they have on the deck, just watching the stars. Reminds me of the time Jungkook and I stargazed that one night when I felt lonely after Sunhee came over. Though I experienced more pain at that moment than anything else, I'm glad I shared that moment with Kook. It makes everything about that night better to think about.

Ultimately, I've decided that I won't tell Yoongi about my feelings tonight. I've spent so much time watching how perfectly they all seem to get along together, and I dunno. Somehow, the vineyard owner fits in with them. I stuck out like a sore thumb, but he looked natural in that setting. Minus the ambitious wine consumption.

Actually, I think it's best that Yoongi doesn't ever know what my feelings are. I mean, what will it achieve? It'll establish awkwardness between us, pain for me, he'll have to reject me. It just doesn't seem like a decent solution anymore. He's happier with Sunhee than he can be with me, and those moments where I sensed that he might be attracted to me are probably false. I read too much into things, those aren't an exception. Although, it's a bit heartbreaking to know I can't tell him the truth. I'll have to keep this charade of dating Jungkook up until I leave the vineyard. Then I won't ever see him again, nor will he come to see me. I have to keep pretending until we can go our separate ways forever. That's the only way I'll forget about him.

"You look deep in thought," a calm voice says. I glance over to see a slightly tipsy Yoongi take a seat in the chair beside me, wine glass still in his beautiful hand. "How's tonight going for you?"

"I guess it's not bad. Her parents are nice enough; they seemed to love you," I tell him, not wanting to look at his face. It's a bit painful right now to really see him. "Not as big of a disaster as you'd feared, yeah?"

"No," Yoongi says, exhaling softly. "I suppose not." We sit under the star covered silence for a little while until he says something rather peculiar. "You make me feel funny, Tae."

Caught off guard, I gaze at him as he continues to speak. "When you're with me like this, or like we were at the mall, or the karaoke place, or even sitting at home, I feel so warm inside," Yoongi admits. "Warm and cloudy, but in a good way. It's strange since I've never really experienced sensations like this before. It confuses me, because then I see you with Jungkook. Cool, flawless Jungkook, who managed to make you fall for him in less than a month and have your affection all to himself."

I'm starting to get a little worried about where this is going. "How is that confusing?" I ask slowly.

"Because it infuriates me," the dark haired man acknowledges simply, "It's fine when you guys were friends, but now you're dating and it drives me insane for reasons I don't understand. It's like when I'm with you, I'm happy, but when you're with Jungkook, all I wanna do is take you away from him.
He's not right for you." He must be pretty tipsy if he's being this blunt about his feelings... I don't think I've heard Yoongi speak like this before.

"Every time I see you guys kiss, it makes me want to punch a wall. Every time he's over in your room, I can't help but think of the way he's probably touching you and I don't know, I don't know why I think this way. I've tried so hard to think of other things, but it's useless. I can only think of you two and it's no good for me. That relationship is no good for me."

"The relationship doesn't involve you, hyung," I remind him gently. "I can't tell you why it affects you so much."

"See, that's the thing. I don't know either," he says, and to be honest, this frustrates me to some degree. On some level, he must know that he's gotta get his shit together, right? "I've never felt anything towards another man, let alone one so much younger than me. So when I asked myself if it could be that I like you, I thought that that couldn't be the answer at all." Ouch.

"So you don't like me," I repeat, trying not to sound bitter, "That's good, isn't it?"

He takes a moment to respond. "I thought it was. But then there's no explanation for my feelings anymore. I don't understand why you put me on such a rollercoaster, Tae, and I feel so bad for lashing out at you when I get angry or upset, but it's just... if I have no chance at understanding my own emotions, then who does?"

Now I'm starting to feel bad for him, because I totally understand the struggle he's talking about. It's hard to cope with emotions, especially if they're ones you'd rather not have. You could spend so much time in denial about them or thinking that they mean something else, and it just creates this whirlwind of conflict inside you. How can I be upset with him if he's suffering so much?

"Hyung, can you tell me something?"

"Yeah?"

"Does Jungkook make you jealous?" I'm scared to hear his answer.

Yoongi rises to sit next to me on the same chair and puts his glass down, putting his own two hands together. "I want to say no, I really do. But Tae, there's this ugly thing inside me that comes up whenever I see you two all close and maybe it's because I want to be as close to you as he is since I think you're fucking perfect in every way, but he's your boyfriend. I can't ever come that close even if I wanted to. It's just that the relationship doesn't make sense to me; I can't see you two as a good fit. Sure, he's a decent guy and all, but you deserve someone so much more than decent. It's like when you're with him, you're not all there. What relationship is like that?"

"Well," I say and turn to look at him, "It sounds like you and Sunhee, hyung. You're there but you're not really there. Care to explain that?"

He groans, drooping his shoulders sadly. "I think we're just going through the motions right now. I want to be with her, but I'm waiting to see if things get exciting again. So I can make the next move."

"If you're so in love with her, hyung, how come you leave her every night to lay on the couch?" His eyes widen instantly and he looks at me in shock.

"You knew? All this time?" I nod silently. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"It's not really my place to ask such a question." I chuckle lightly. "The relationship is yours, but I'm asking now since we're talking about all this. Do you go down to the living room for space? To think
about all these confusing feelings of yours?"

"Yes," he simply says, much to my astonishment. Didn't think I'd be spot on with that guess. "Nothing is making sense anymore, Taehyung. And it's driving me insane."

"I'm sorry it's been so difficult for you..."

All of a sudden, Yoongi looks at me, like really looks at me with a gaze similar to the one he had in the vineyard, but with a bit more... pain this time. "Taehyung," he whispers, moving closer to me. I can smell the wine on his breath, but I can't move away again.

"Yes, hyung."

"Do I like you?" he asks me, searching my face for an answer. And I feel so damn awful for not having one. "Please, I don't know why I'm feeling so many things or what to do with these emotions anymore."

He's so vulnerable that it's actually hurting me. "Hyung, I don't know what to tell you. I'm so—" And as soon as I begin to apologize, Yoongi does the one thing I had been wanting for so fucking long. Eagerly, he presses his lips against mine, kissing me with an intensity that I've never quite experienced before. It's different from Jungkook's, dare I say, better. Knowing that we're doing this in quite possibly the worst place ever, I internally decide 'fuck it' and wrap my hands around his neck, pulling him in closer to me.

Yoongi's need is beyond one I imagined. The hunger with which he continues to kiss me fuels my own desire to have him in my grasp. His hands hold my waist tightly, making me truly feel like I'm his. My fingers travel to his hair, tugging as he licks my lips, eventually biting them so that I open for him. He tastes of wine and pasta, but it's so unbelievably perfect. It's everything I want and more. Every ounce of anxiety disappears, every second thought I ever had about whether I care about this man or not is gone, because Yoongi is here with me under the stars, kissing me as if his life depends on it. And I reciprocate, because it feels like my life actually does. My heart depends on him.

"Tae," he says roughly against my lips, yet his tone contains a yearning of sorts. I want to hear him say it again.

I respond breathlessly, my hands still caught up in his jet black strands. "Yes?"

He opens his mouth to speak again, but then we hear a voice calling out, "Yoongi?" Shit, that's Sunhee's voice... and I'm kissing her boyfriend. Senses come rushing back to me, causing me to tear myself apart from him, and I just stand there for a moment, trying to catch my breath.

"I am so, so sorry," I tell him, feeling the tears sting in my eyes and the confusion bubble up again. Only this time, it's eating away at me. "Go to Sunhee. I'll see you in the morning. Bye hyung."

Without letting him respond, I turn on my heel and bolt for the bedroom.

Of all things that could have happened, I did not anticipate this. Yoongi kissed me... and I have no idea how we'll recover from this moment. I have no idea what's going to happen next.
It's been a couple days since our evening with Sunhee's family, and I can safely say that there literally was no better way to completely fuck things up between Taehyung and I other than kissing him. I swear it's changed everything, even the way he looks at me feels different. The gaze in those deep eyes of his holds this confusion, a cloudiness that I wish I could get rid of. I want to turn back time, turn back on the decisions I made, turn back on my wine coated feelings. Stupid, idiotic, uncontrollable feelings. But it's too late for regrets like these; I ought to have been more careful with myself. Why was I thinking so strangely that night, why did I kiss him?

I do not like him.

It was so wrong. So mortifyingly wrong, but simultaneously one of the best experiences I've had in a long while. Maybe that's just the magic of doing things we aren't supposed to. It becomes ten times more appealing, the pull is reinforced, and we find ourselves reaching out for that forbidden realm before our mind can kick into gear to stop us from making mistakes. The temptation of it all disabled any coherent thought I must have had that night, and it bothers me. Taehyung shouldn't be so alluring yet he is. I often wonder what this entire situation says about me. Probably that I'm just a terribly confused guy who has little to no clue about what he's doing with his love life. Which...isn't entirely a lie, so I mean, there we go.

But I can't like him.

Ever since we've gotten back, he's been holed up in his room in a pretty determined attempt to avoid anything and everything to do with me. He won't come down if Sunhee's around, not if Jimin pops by, I've even considered inviting Jungkook over just to get him out of that damn bedroom. I don't have the slightest clue about what he's eating, how often he's eating, nothing is within my sight. But honestly, I know I don't have a right to ask him anything at all. Like, not only did I cheat on Sunhee with my best friend's son, I also made him cheat on his dying boyfriend, holy shit. I've screwed myself over in so many ways, I don't even know where to start. Ugh.

"Yoongi," a voice pierces the suffocating silence that drapes over the living room, causing me to look up from the steaming mug of coffee that currently has my attention. Sunhee places her phone on the table and sighs, turning to her side so that she could see me from the couch. Her long hair cascades down the side of the furniture, she lays in a loose tee which hangs off her shoulder and shorts that do justice for her toned legs. I have trouble processing that I could have cheated on
someone so flawless. Never thought I could stoop that low, but I'll have to tell her it happened at some point. It's a matter of waiting for the right time, even though there will never truly be one of those for such news. "You feel so distant."

My finger traces the rim of the mug, and I can't be sure of a good response. "Hmm? Do I?" Well, that sounds completely absent minded, how convincing.

"Babe, you've seemed off since the dinner. I thought it went well, did something go wrong?" she asks curiously. Agh, I don't know how to answer that. Now isn't the time to tell the truth, but that's just gonna result in another lie, which really doesn't feel like the way to go. Sunhee gets up from the couch and walks over to me, leaning over to hug my back. Her arms wrap around me, and under normal circumstances, I'd hold her as well. I can't bring myself to, not this time round. "Hmm," she hums in my ear, "You're all tense, Yoongi. I don't like you like this."

"I know, I'm sorry," I reply monotonously, rubbing her arm and placing a detached kiss on her cheek, which has already been kissed by the rays of the sun itself. "I'll make it up to you. Is there something you'd like to do today?"

Massaging my shoulders — which actually causes a lot more pain than I'd anticipated — Sunhee takes the time to think about my offer. I'm hoping she doesn't say anything that'll require us to go too far, I'm genuinely feeling a bit lazy today. Bumming around would be my ideal, especially with the abundance of ridiculous wonderings in my head that I'm bound to overanalyze.

"You haven't been to the lake in a while, why don't we go there?" she suggests, the pads of her fingertips rubbing deep into my bare skin. My mind flashes over to the image of the lake I'd always picture with its calming stillness, save for the small water bugs that skid about. My ultimate safe haven rests under that surface of water, which holds the vastness of the sky and the tops of trees in its reflection. Nothing makes me feel more at ease than a swim there. As lazy as I feel, the larger part of me instantly jumps at the mention of going to the lake. It's a no-brainer, Sunhee's right. We're going to the lake.

With a surge of excitement, I push the chair back and stand up, a newfound sense of happiness rushing through every vein. "Brilliant. Let's do it." Clapping her hands lightly, Sunhee squeals before jumping forward to engulf me in a hug.

"I'm so glad," she warmly says, smiling into the kiss she places on my exposed shoulder. Much to my surprise, Sunhee quickly slides her hand underneath my tank top and rubs my chest. "Should we ask Taehyung to join or leave him here?"

Ah, Taehyung. Foolish of me to forget that we ought to ask him, and of course, I'll have to be the one to propose the idea. In one sense, it could be beneficial to drag him out into the sun among the other nature dwellers. Imagine that, Taehyung at the lake. At my lake. I can picture the smile that would appear on his face as he dips his toes in the water, immediately pulling back with a hiss. He'd say the water's too cold and I'd resist the urge to giggle. Or would I let myself giggle? Imagine Taehyung under the soft sunbeams, his honeyed skin being caressed by the breeze that flows through, tousling every strand of his beautiful hair. His hair that I had the pleasure of running my eager fingers through. The grin he'd express, unparalleled in beauty, and the churning of my stomach upon seeing those full lips curl upwards in contentment. Those lips that taste so intriguingly sweet, they may as well be candied. Candied kisser, mystery weaver. I can see him bending down to cup his hands and pick up some water, splashing it onto his face to cool himself off. I can count every drop of water that clings to his skin as if afraid to fall, afraid to leave the surface of an angel himself. My God, what a picture.

I don't want him to agree to this trip.
That's all my heart says with each unwilling yet ready step up the flight of stairs that lead to his door. Knuckles hit the wood sharply as I stand, holding my breath, waiting for the boy to show his face. It's as if I'm preparing myself for an aching chest just by feeling the intensity with which my heart hammers against my ribcage. Please don't come out. Please, please don't come out.

Come out, Taehyung.

I watch with bated breath as the door creaks open, revealing his face through the smallest opening. He raises an eyebrow, questioning, daring, wondering. Beautiful. Swallowing slowly, I stumble through my words in nervousness. The skin of my palms clam up, causing me to hide them behind my back. Shit, I can't remember the last time I've felt so timid. I probably look so moronic to him.

"Are you alright, hyung?" he asks, concern lacing his tone subtly. Taehyung's borderlining apathy, and I can't express how relieved it makes me to know he isn't there yet. "Or are you going to stand here gaping?" The coldness surprises me. I've never known the brunette to show me indifference, and if this is what it feels like to be on the receiving end of it, I'm gonna have a hard time not being nervous around him. No, I can't allow this. I'm older than him, for fuck's sake, I can hold up my end of the conversation.

"I'm fine," I tell him, a bit sharper than intended. Almost instantly, the look in his eyes changes, transforming from something of a cold nature to one of hurt. He didn't anticipate that I could retort. "Sunhee and I are going to the lake, something that I've mentioned to you a few times since you've gotten here. So you in?"

You in. A sentence harsher than the tone it's uttered in. Two words, completely devoid of feeling, completely lacking in kindness. I regret it at once, because I know his anger isn't unjustified. He has every right to hold that night against me. It was I who ruined things, all because I don't possess the minimal control needed to keep our lips apart. Where do I get off thinking that I'm entitled to addressing the brunette in such a way? Hell if I know.

He doesn't reply for a few seconds. It could be that he's contemplating the offer, but before I can exert any self-control, I turn on my heel and start walking to my bedroom to grab my swim trunks. "Never mind. You don't have to come, forget I asked." The words tumble past my lips without a second thought, and I can't understand what's making me behave like this. I can't understand, I can't understand. The feeling of rage claws at my chest, rage directed at myself for being the biggest prick to a boy who I've thrown into the worst of circumstances.

"N-no," his deep voice suddenly says behind me. The door creaks as it opens wider and Taehyung steps out halfway, as if trying to keep me within his grasp. "I'll go," he adds, somewhat submissively. He sounds defeated, and when I turn around to glance at the brunette, my heart softens upon seeing the sad restlessness that's taken over his countenance. I've done this to him. This is my fault. His distress is my fault.

In a softer manner, I tell him, "You don't need to feel obligated to. If you'd like to stay here...feel free to. You don't have to ruin your day by being around me." Further astonishing me, Taehyung appears as though I've just slapped him across the face, but I can't tell what I've said to trigger a reaction like that.

"Do you want me to come?" he inquires indignantly. If I didn't know any better, I'd say he feels insulted. I thought I said the right thing for once, but I guess such fortune hasn't shown up in my cards yet.

I shake my head. "I can't answer that. It's not about me. I just don't want you to feel like going to the lake is mandatory. Plus, I can understand if you don't want to be around me right now. I wouldn't
want to be around me if I were you," I sincerely admit.

He opens his mouth to speak, but is interrupted by Sunhee asking whether we were going or not. Our eyes meet once more, eliciting a fluttering sensation in the depths of my stomach, and the brunette asks, "Will swim trunks be enough?"

I reckon that's not his original comment, but I simply nod. Looking at his eyes is making me feel uneasy, so I avert my gaze elsewhere. But instead, I find myself fixating on the mole he has on his bottom lip. I've never noticed it till now, and the urge to kiss it is bubbling up within me. I want to feel his mouth on mine again, feel our noses bump against each other, feel his breath on my face. It doesn't make sense. I don't like him in that way.

Donning a tight-lipped expression, Taehyung closes the door, leaving me in his absence. Feeling rather lowly, I trudge into my room and begin hunting for a pair of swim trunks. Luckily, I find a blue pair quickly and slip them on, along with an unbuttoned white collared t-shirt. Normally, I'm not one to wear short sleeves in the summer, or ever really, but the mood seems off today. Might as well have my clothing be off as well.

As I step out to go downstairs, Taehyung exits his room, clad in a red pair of swim trunks and an oversized v-neck tee. We're both carrying towels. He seems to bite back a gasp (I guess I must have startled him) and takes in my clothing choice, eyes lingering a bit longer on my bare torso than I would have expected. Without another word, the speechless boy strides down the stairs and I follow him quietly. We meet a beaming Sunhee, who twirls her car keys around her finger. Leaning forward, she chastely kisses me — Taehyung looks away.

"Shall we be on our way then? Do you need anything?" She glances at us, only to be greeted by two heads shaking silently. "Alrighty then, let's go!"

~*~

We walk over to the lake, a mere matter of 10 minutes, though it would have been hell had the breeze not been present. Taehyung doesn't say a word throughout the mini trek, eyes glued to the path ahead of him. Sunhee and I stay together, our arms linked, her chipper chattering distracting me from thinking of things that would only lead me to a mental downward spiral. Once we reach the natural sanctuary, she lets go of my arm with an excited laugh.

"It's so beautiful today, Yoongi!" she exclaims, bounding for the water. Taehyung and I follow her, maintaining a proper distance between us, then drop our belongings in the grass. Taking a seat on the low pier, Sunhee begins gliding her feet across the water, a most peaceful smile tugging the corners of her mouth up. I can't tell what's brighter, her or the sun.

Taehyung and I stand back awkwardly, as if waiting on each other. "You can go swim if you want," I say cautiously.

"I know."

The curtness of his reply stings, I won't lie, but I also know I deserve this kind of treatment from him. "Tae, do you think you could forgive me?" A question that slips out so easily, while deepening the tension between us. I don't know what made me ask.

"I-"

"No, wait. Don't answer that," I respond quickly, cutting him off short, "I don't want to know. Not right now. I'm sorry for asking." Frustrated at myself for being so confused, I rapidly shrug out of my
shirt and head over to Sunhee, leaving the probably overwhelmed brunette behind. I need a swim. She grins widely, reaching her hand out. I take it without hesitation, pulling her in for a deep kiss. "You're lucky, the water's not too cold today," she murmurs against my mouth, pursing her lips together for a peck.

"Great," I respond. A smile is plastered onto my face, though in no way genuine. I have to try to be happy. For Sunhee's sake, if not my own. I hop into the water, instantly swallowed by the welcoming lake. I've missed this feeling.

Sunhee chuckles lightly, her voice like a melody that only brings me guilt. "It's funny seeing your head stick out of the water like that," she remarks and tries to stifle her laughter. "Your head's just bobbing up and down."

Shooting her a smirk, I dunk my head down below the water and resurface, soaking in the serenity being in this lake brings me. Suddenly, Taehyung appears by Sunhee's side in just his swim trunks. Not sparing so much as a glance, the brunette dives in and starts swimming intensely, mindless laps in no clear direction.

"He seems a bit stressed," comments Sunhee obliviously. I watch him swim, his arms moving up and down almost violently, like blades slicing through the unsuspecting waters. How can I mention that his stress, his anger, his irritation is all my doing? She'd only ask me why and I'd have to tell her the truth, ruining her chipper mood. I can't come clean today, not while she wants to be happy.

Deciding that it's best to ignore Taehyung, I make my way through the water casually. I'm not one for aggressive swims, so I slowly wade around, letting all thoughts clear my mind. I've yet to experience a moment of true peace since that night. Even as I'm falling asleep, flashes of the kiss come back to me, sending a jolt through my body and ultimately destroying any potential of sleep I had for the night. It's a living nightmare.

As I switch to a backstroke, my eyes focus on the clear skies above me. With my ears under water, I hear nothing so it's like I'm this isolated speck who has the sky all to himself for a brief moment in time. The water laps around my bare skin, playfully tracing my shape. I should feel calm. But even as I float, looking at the endlessness of the sky blue, I see it. I see Taehyung's face in the skies, the smile he had on his face as we were talking that night. I see myself leaning in to claim his lips with mine, I see the way his hand almost instinctively reached for the back of my neck, I see the hunger with which I ravished him, the desire to drown in him. I see it all. This is torture. Pain in its most unadulterated form. I want him out of the skies. I want him out of my fucking mind.

Get out of my mind, Kim Taehyung. I can't function if the thought of you stays with me. I can't fucking think. I'm breathing, but it feels like I'm suffocating. Stop dominating me like this. Please don't take my breath away anymore. Please...

Don't leave.

"Yoongi!" Sunhee's shrill voice snaps me out of my tormenting thoughts, and I see her pointing at Taehyung, who's splashing around desperately. Oh God, what happened? Not allowing myself time to think, I swim over to him, surprised to see the boy terribly out of breath. He isn't able to keep himself up anymore. Wrapping my arm around him, I keep his head above water as I — while struggling badly — take him back to the pier.

"Take his hands," I instruct Sunhee, who frantically listens by reaching out to grab the brunette as I heave him up to the wooden surface. Climbing up the little ladder that accompanies the pier, I plop myself down by Taehyung as he writhes around helplessly, coughing up water. He moans in agony,
clutching his sides.

"Taehyung, are you okay?" Sunhee inquires in fear as she pushes all her hair to one side. She wraps him in the towel he brought, placing his head in her lap. Taehyung nods, wincing even more. "What happened, you were swimming well!"

Gasping, Taehyung manages to speak, "I haven't gone swimming in a while, and I overdid it. I got really bad cramps and my endurance isn't what it once was. I couldn't breathe well."

Our eyes lock, Taehyung heaving underneath me and my chest immediately tightens. He places a hand on my arm, leading to goosebumps spreading like a wildfire across my damp skin. I never once imagined his touch could do this to me. "Thank you," he said somewhat breathlessly.

I want to sit him up and embrace him. I want to wrap my arms around his bare, thin body, pulling him in close to me, and kiss his soaking head. I want to tell him that it's job to be there for him. I want to feel him breathe against me, exist within my pale arms. I want...I want to reach out and feel his heartbeat under my palm. I want to smother him in kisses, leaving his wet lips for the very end, and tell him it's all okay.

I want to protect him.

So many feelings, so many stirrings. Desire, confusion, affection, neediness. They fight inside of me, a whirlpool with no real direction. But none of those emotions translate in my short two word response. A response that might just ruin anything that drifts between us in this moment. A response meant to distance, meant to establish boundaries, when all I want him to know is that there doesn't have to be any boundaries for us. A response that only shuts down hope.

"No problem."
twenty eight

Runaway now and forevermore

Jungkook's POV

There's no escaping it anymore. Yoongi and Taehyung are both officially whipped for one another, and to be the guy who has to sit back watching this drama play out is both hilarious and cringey. I mean, the amount of self control I need to exert to keep myself from hardcore meddling is impressive, like, I deserve an award. Can't even count the number of times I've wanted to yank them both by the balls and tell them that they're only wasting time with all this back and forth. That they should be brutally honest with each other, because for once, they'll be pleased with the response. They could have been together by now, but one mustn't rush a proper love story, right?

"So you kissed him?" I nonchalantly inquire, laying on Taehyung's bed. I haven't been over in a while, partly since my mood's been so turbulent lately. I haven't had the heart to show my face to the brunette in fear of snapping in front of him; he has enough on his plate to deal with. It's not my intention to stress him out further. That being said, I do intend on informing him of my condition. It's just a matter of timing.

Sighing, the beautiful teen comes and takes a seat on the edge of the bed, shoulders drooping in frustration. "He kissed me," Taehyung says unhappily, turning to look directly at me. "He just went for it. I don't know if it was the wine, or the mood, or what. It was strange; he started talking about how I made him feel funny, how happy he is with me, but how enraged he gets when I'm with you. I didn't know what to make of it, and before I knew it, he was kissing me with everything he had."

I sit up slowly, propping up a pillow to lean on. A small silence washes over us both as I attempt to find an appropriate response. "How do you feel about it?" Sounds dumb, but believe me, it's a question worth asking.

The words "I don't know" slips through Taehyung's mouth softly as he moves closer to me, eventually laying his head on my chest. I squirm around a bit to get in a more comfortable position, and soon I have my arms around the downcast brunette, his pretty fingers playing with my own ringed ones. The subtle fragrance of his hair tickles my nose as I rest my chin on his head, wondering what I can possibly say to make my friend feel somewhat at peace.

"Are you sure you don't know? Or are you hesitating to tell me," I ask him softly, allowing him the time to mull over the question. Taehyung intertwines our fingers together, without any protest on my part, and exhales again, a small puff of trapped air. "I don't need to remind you that I'm here for you
"I feel confused." Okay, it's a start. "He kisses me without warning, claiming he doesn't like me. He's switching between acting kind as he normally is and acting cold, as if I've wronged him somehow. The way he looks at me feels different, but I can't understand if that's a good thing," Taehyung confesses as he twists one of my silver rings. "We went to the lake, and he asked me if I'd ever forgive him. I saw then that he is blaming himself on some level, but before I could say anything, he told me he didn't want to hear my answer yet."

Without really processing it, I begin running my hand up and down Taehyung's arm, feeling the warm smoothness of the boy under my rough palms. "Interesting," I hum, focusing entirely on the words he speaks and the tone that accompanies each sound made by that beautiful mouth of his. "You two haven't spoken about it since then?"

His hair swooshes back and forth as he shakes his head. The comfortable silence in the room is punctured only by the sound of a summer downpour pattering against his window. Lightning flashes loud and clear every so often, demanding that we acknowledge its mighty presence, only to be quieted by bursts of humbling thunder. I could stay like this forever, in all honesty. It doesn't matter if I'm holding Taehyung like this, but if we could stay in this room together with our secrets and chattering and whispers, all while the sky weeps almost endlessly on the other side of the glass, I think I'd be okay. My heart would, anyway.

"I think he wants to talk to me about it, but then again, I don't know." Taehyung's chest rises and falls in yet another sigh, a frequent occurrence throughout the conversation thus far. "If I couldn't read his mind before, it's nothing compared to the muddled mess I face now. He's so convinced that he doesn't like me, but what I felt in that kiss practically screamed otherwise. Hell, I can't even say for sure that we'd have stopped if Sunhee wasn't around. I know I only pulled back when I heard her coming. It seemed the same for him."

"I think he's scared," I say without thinking, instantly shutting my eyes in regret. Shit, I didn't mean for that to slip. That's the sort of thing Yoongi has to express, not me. Too late now though; Taehyung peers up at me with those large, innocent eyes, begging me to elaborate without having to utter a single sound. "Uh, I dunno, that's just a guess."

"No, what do you mean though?" he questions seriously. "Why should he be scared?"

Lazily shrugging, I reply, "Well, if you think about it, he has every reason to be frightened. First off, he's cheated on his girlfriend, a woman who wouldn't hesitate to walk out on him for even a millisecond after finding out. Second, he kissed the son of his best friend, who is also just a teenager." Taehyung listens without saying a word, his gaze directed at the carpeted floor. "Third, he probably thinks he's to blame for the fact that you, my friend, have technically cheated on me."

That gets him. Whipping his head around in astonishment, Taehyung stares at me, slack jawed and wide eyed. "Oh my God, I'm dating you," he says once the realization properly dawns upon him. Smiling, I lean forward and ruffle his hair to cheer him up.

"Not a problem," I remind him cheerfully.

He swats my hand away irritably, immediately fixing each strand. "How can you say it's not a problem," grumbles the emotionally conflicted boy. "He thinks I'm cheating on you, so he probably finds me a low life, and he's blaming himself for kissing me, and he's mad at himself for cheating on Sunhee; this whole situation is a fucked up mess!"

Groaning, the brunette flops back on the bed and grabs a pillow, smothering his face in it. Much like
a child, he throws a tantrum — though silent — as he tosses and turns in anger. The entire display thoroughly amuses me; one day, I'll be able to look back at all these times and think to myself how foolish love can make a poor soul. If they do end up together, and I'll see to it personally that they do, I want to laugh about their stupid actions. What's the point of being triumphant if I can't rub it in their faces? That is, if I'm allowed that much time. It's all pretty blurry at this point.

"I cannot believe this happened, and it's my fault," he whines, "I should have stopped him or something. I should do anything that'll ease his mind about this issue. He clearly doesn't want to like me, and that's gotta feel so damn awful. God knows emotions are a shitshow, and to mix one like love with someone you don't want to like in the first place is so ughhhhh." A loud groan is emitted by the deep voiced teen, and it's after seeing this somewhat pathetic display of regret that I decide enough is enough. Someone's gotta make the first move here, and with the two players involved in this little game, I sense that it could take another month just to normalize things again. Like anyone has the fucking time for this. I know I wanted to take my time with this, but Yoongi's had his turn. It's my move now and the timing is in my hand alone.

Thunder crashes as I suddenly reach out and grab Taehyung's wrists, pulling him up on his ass. "Listen to me," I say slowly, fixating on his eyes so that he understands the weight of what I'm about to tell him, "You know that night I showed up at that party to pick you up?"

His eyes widen yet again, but he nods cautiously. "Yeah."

"I was crying that day. For hours, and the only time I stopped was for that brief period when I was with you," I explain. My heart pounds erratically, acknowledging that yes, I am about to pull Taehyung out of the dark in regards to my health conditions. "Do you know why I was crying?"

"No, you didn't say anything about it, and I didn't want to pry so-" As Taehyung stammers out a reply, I take his hand and place it flat on my chest. He quietly sits, taking in the unsteady pulsations, glancing up at me for a verbal explanation. "It feels nice to be so close to your heartbeat like this," he remarks calmly, and at once, I choke back tears. Out of all things he could have said, commenting on how nice it feels isn't what I anticipated by any means. Imagine that, this starry eyed, velvet skinned boy with a voice that has empathy lacing every syllable to escape those lips thinks that it's nice to come close to my fucked up excuse of a heart.

Nice. Is it even worthy of such a word?

"It's fucking up," I bluntly say, blinking fast to remove the tears that make my eyes sting. "The entire organ." He looks at me, entirely puzzled.

"W-what is that s-s-supposed to mean?" he stammers, lower lip trembling. I don't want to do this to him, but he needs to know. And my announcement of it may seem abrupt, but I know what I'm doing. That's all that matters. "Kook-"

"It means I'm in trouble," I honestly respond, sparing no feelings, "My heart can't do its job properly, and there's really no telling how I'll recover from it. This cold I had way back when I was a kid did its damage well, so now the heart's suffering. I'm not going to be dramatic and say I'm dying or some shit, but that could be the case. Who knows? Because I truly don't." My voice cracks mid-way; soon, I'm staring at Taehyung, watching as a tear slides down his cheek. "There's a surgery that might be able to help me, but I gotta scrape up enough money for somethin' like that. Went to my mom for that, and she basically kicked me out."

"K-"

"Anyway." No, I'm not letting him say anything. Not if I want to keep myself from breaking down.
But right as I open my mouth to say more, Taehyung lunges himself at me, wrapping his arms tightly around my neck and begins crying into my black hoodie. His fingers clutch the fabric tightly, and I can feel his body vibrate as he shakes with each sob, a gasp making him heave every few seconds.

"You're not going to die," he whispers, digging his nails into my back like he's got nothing left to hold onto. "You can't die, you aren't dying, your heart is going to be okay, you're going to be okay. You're going to be okay. You're going to be okay." 

I've seldom developed emotional bonds with people, and Taehyung is one of the rare risks that I've taken. The words "you're going to be okay" sound like a prayer to me now, hitting me with the sudden awareness that the bond that he and I have formed in the past month alone runs so much deeper than any friendship I've ever been able to form. I tightly hold him, closing my eyes and listening to him repeat himself until the words don't sound like words anymore, but a desperate attempt to accept reality. I'm amazed he's so affected, because...this is my reality. Nobody's ever shed tears for my truths, only my uncle. And he knows way more about me than the brunette does, it makes sense for him to cry. But Taehyung...how can he?

"There's nothing to do about it, nothing on your part anyway," I speak in hushed tones, gently pulling the brunette off of me. The sight of his tear stained face results in a shooting pain that travels throughout my chest, but I act as if I don't feel a thing. It's not easy though, this pain is worse than the kind I normally feel. That's purely physical, but this? This is raw, this is emotional suffering. "I have to wait and hope for the best, if I'm even deserving of that much. I'm sorry I didn't tell you earlier, but I wanted to wait. You were dealing with a lot, and it feels like the time to say it is now."

Now, I don't exactly know what is going through Taehyung's mind. I know I've revealed some incredibly personal information about myself, but not even that helps me figure out his next reaction. The brunette comes close in the blink of an eye, pressing our foreheads together. I can see the teardrops clinging to his long lashes, and my stomach lurches in uneasiness. Fucking kills me to know that I've made him cry, despite having my reasons.

"I'm going to kiss you for just a moment," he murmurs, eyes settling down on my own lips, which haven't been touched by him in days. And so he does. Steadily, Taehyung meets my mouth with his own in the purest kiss I've yet to feel, and without a second thought, my hand flies to his cheek to hold it as he connects us effortlessly. It baffles me; he has never asked to kiss me, nor has he ever shown any desire to. Can this be similar to when I asked him in the car? Maybe it is. Maybe he's seeking comfort in me, or maybe...maybe he's trying to comfort me.

He moves away, with me almost leaning forward so that this moment didn't end, and smiles without a trace of pleasure. "I thought it might help if I did that. Y'know," he says, "Make you feel less alone in your pain. Like in the car." Shit, I tried so hard not to be overwhelmed by tears, but he made it impossible. Leave it to him to understand why I asked for a kiss that night. Magic must flow through his veins, I'm almost convinced it does. There is no other explanation as to how a human can be so perfectly in tune to the emotions of a person he met merely a month ago, especially when he's blind to his own.

As I start to weep alongside him, Taehyung reaches over to take my hand. Lightning illuminates the darkening room, and I let out a laugh that sounds of nothing but choked back melancholy. A silhouette of the raindrops falls on his face, streaking his skin with more than just tears of his own, but the sky's as well.

"I'm so sorry, Jungkook," he says remorsefully, wiping his eyes. "I should have asked, I should have said something, I'm fucking selfish. I'm so sorry."

"No, you aren't. Don't let yourself think that way; I'm glad you let me decide the best time to tell you
all this." I tilt my head, reaching out to lightly graze his cheek with the tip of my thumb and remove a
tear. "But do me a favor?"

"Hmm?" he replies, bottom lip still quivering in a pout. His eyes look so...I don't know the word for
it, but there's a sense of deep sorrow about them. This boy feels everything so *deeply*, it leaves me
speechless. I never knew someone could have the capacity to feel the way he does.

"Please don't tell Yoongi hyung, he doesn't know," I instruct him, covering up the blatant lie with a
bitter smile. He nods obediently, and I know he won't say a word. Checking my phone for the time, I
get off the bed as if now's the right time for me to go. "I have something to do. I'm sorry for leaving
things on this note, but you deserve to know."

He sits on the bed, a blank stare on his sculpted face. "I'm sorry," he says again.

"Apology not accepted," I retort light heartedly as I shuffle over to the door. "Because you don't
have a single fault here. I'll never accept your apologies for my bad luck. Bye Tae." Without another
word, I slip out of his room, hearing the thunder roar in the background. I have my reasons.

A curious Yoongi greets me at the bottom of the stairs, holding a cup of tea and the newspaper. He
looks at me questioningly, no doubt wondering why I have tears streaming down my face. I don't
typically cry in front of him, it's a weakness I won't allow myself. But like I said, it's my move now.

"Hey, what's wrong..." inquires the vineyard owner, tone laced with concern. I almost feel bad for
playing puppet master like this, but there seems to be no other option.

Clearing my throat, I wipe my tears and face him. "We broke up," I plainly answer, "He isn't taking
it very well, but it wasn't working out. So I ended things; I got tired of us too quickly and there's no
point in dragging him behind me. That's just extra weight." My own harshness catches me off guard,
as well as the dark haired elder. "May want to go check up on him, in case he gets worse."

Casually, I slip on my shoes and right as I open the door, I take out my phone to type out a quick
message and send it. Yanking my hood up, I leave the house to get doused in the summertime
shower, the teary eyed expression quickly being replaced with the smirk I wear so well.

*Play along. Everything is a lie.*

My *turn* has ended.
The sound of the rain muddles my thoughts as I sit on my bed alone, desperately trying to process the news Jungkook had just passed on. Several minutes have passed and I've only managed to weep quietly without any intention of stopping. Part of me sensed back then — in the car — that the blue eyed Adonis was going through a tough time, but I wanted to respect him and trust that he'd tell me when he felt ready. What I didn't sense was the nature of the problem. I never once contemplated that it was his own body's nature that was failing him so crucially. That he was at war with himself.

When he'd said that his heart was fucking up, I thought maybe it was a joke. Jungkook's always been one for sarcasm, maybe it was one of those times. But the second I pray internally that my friend's words do have a sarcastic twist, life plays me and informs me of his deterioration instead. It's all fucking cruel. Though not more than sadness, I feel anger. Rage at the idea that someone as beautiful and kind as he could be punished by such a terrible affliction. I don't know all the details of Jungkook's life, but I reckon that he hasn't done a thing to deserve the suffering he's been handed.

A ping sounds, lighting up my phone screen again, and I decide to check it. It had notified me of a message right after Jungkook had left, but I ignored it. Wiping the justified tears with the side of my hand, I peek at my screen to see who had chosen to bother me at the moment. To my surprise, it's from none other than the Adonis himself.

"Play along. Everything is a lie."

Eyebrows knit in a newborn confusion as I stare down at the gray text bubble. I don't understand where this is coming from. He was here a bit ago, now he's telling me to play along. What am I supposed to play along to, what does any of the message mean? Jungkook didn't even bother sending an explanation, as if that one cryptic sentence holds enough meaning for me to understand his intentions right off the bat.

"Tae?" a raspy voice says gently, the owner peeking through the slightly opened door. "Is it okay if I come in?"

To be honest, no. I want nothing to do with him right now, not while all this information is hanging on my shoulders. Especially since Jungkook specifically instructed me not to tell Yoongi about it. That caught me off guard, I would have imagined the vineyard owner to be aware of such an ordeal,
given that he works with the boy's uncle. But things have been paused in an odd place between the two of us, and I'd hate to make the situation worse by turning him away when he willingly came to me.

"Yeah," I reply, quickly removing any trace of a tear on my face and wipe my nose. The door opens further and in walks the dark haired elder, in a pair of dark, ripped jeans and a flannel shirt. He wears concern on his face, worrying me further. Has something else gone wrong?

Not a word is exchanged until he stands right before me, his eyes practically boring holes into my own. My vision blurs when Yoongi gazes at me with such an intensity, and I want to look away, but I'm far too weak to turn. Without asking, he slowly sits down on the bed beside me, head lowered and hands clasped. I want to focus on him, but there's too much swimming in my mind for me to concentrate on him, despite his immediate presence.

Yoongi peers at me with a feeling behind his brown eyes that I don't recall seeing before. The anxiety amps up a few notches and I sit in an awkward silence, waiting for him to say the first word.

"I've heard about what happened," he speaks softly, "Between you and Jungkook." Now I'm bewildered. He's not supposed to know, was he eavesdropping? No, I can't believe that he'd do something like that, it's not fitting of his personality. "I'm sorry."

An apology. And a completely unwarranted one at that. I gaze at him cluelessly, Jungkook's words circling my mind like a chant or a prayer. *I'm not allowed to tell him anything.* But if everything is a lie as he said in his message, does Yoongi know? The confusion is beginning to overpower the sadness.

"Why're you apologizing?" I ask him with caution, rethinking each word several times before letting it slip. To further my bewilderment, the vineyard owner suddenly comes closer to embrace me, wrapping me in his arms so tightly that I feel the urge to cry resurfacing. His touch comforts my distressed state, even though I don't necessarily understand the rationale behind his current actions or statements. Not knowing what else to do, I nuzzle into the crook of his neck and place my hands on his back. I don't know how he realized that I needed someone. With closed eyes, Yoongi's scent greets my nose, allowing me to take in the earthy tones of which he smells so subtly of. Of new plants and fresh grass, revived from their dried torment after a merciful rainstorm. He smells of nature and my chest starts to ease up, but the tears resume falling. "It's not your fault," I whisper, biting my lip as I bury my face into his soft skin.

"I'm sorry he did this to you," Yoongi murmurs and uses a hand to stroke the back of my head. "You're such a beautiful person, Taehyung. You don't deserve to be in pain. I warned him about playing with you as if you were another one of his flings, but I should have known he wouldn't listen."

Wait...what?

Not leaving his arms, I ask, "What are you trying to say, hyung?" At that moment, he pulls himself away from me and simply looks at me for a long while, as if memorizing everything about me for a later time.

"He dumped you," Yoongi says, and I swear, I can't remember the last time I've felt so lost in a conversation. "I wasn't listening in on your conversation or anything, but I know. He told me on his way out that you guys are over."

*Play along.* The words click instantly as I think about the unfortunate circumstances. Maybe Jungkook told him that so I wouldn't have to reveal the truth behind my crying. He did it to protect
his secret. Right? That must be it. That has to be the reason.

So as instructed, I nod and Yoongi tilts his head, continuing to look at me wordlessly. It feels...it feels as if he is really seeing me for the first time, and if I've wondered that before, I'm almost positive now. I don't know exactly what he's seeing, but I know that something's changed. The look in his eyes is nearly impossible to decipher now, and it wasn't easy to begin with anyway. But as much as I want to be present in this moment with him, there's no way for me to. I see Yoongi, yet my thoughts revolve solely around Jungkook and his misfortune.

Unable to contain myself, I tremble again and break down in a matter of seconds, reduced into a sobbing mess in front of the man I yearn so much for. Gripping the bed sheets, I allow myself to cry in the hopes that perhaps it will get all the sorrow out of my system for now. I don't know what emotion to focus on anymore. It's a frothing mixture of despair, anger, sorrow, love, and other unidentified tuggings of the heart. I want to hate myself for not realizing Jungkook's pain sooner. I deserve to hate myself for this.

"It's my fault," I mutter under my breath, "I should have known. I should have seen the signs, I should have trusted...but I was a fool."

"No, you're not," Yoongi instantly remarks, and I remind myself that we speak of two drastically different topics. "Listen, I didn't do a good job of letting you know he was bad news. All I did was get angry for reasons that I can't properly understand, and now you're the one hurting. But Tae, it's not your fault." He reaches out to lift my gaze so that it meets his own, honest one.

"There's no fucking way that you're to blame here," the vineyard owner says, shaking his head. Desperation pulls at his tone to make him sound more convincing, but it only hurts me more to know that he's being lied to like this. "You are this beautiful, kind, insightful guy. When I first met you, I didn't know what to think of you. I had zero idea. I thought you were an introverted, generally gloomy kid. But then," Yoongi continues, and there's a change in his voice, one that raises it to hint at optimism, "I got to know you. I got to know your thought process, how mature it is in comparison to those your age. I got to know your likes and dislikes, your ability to look so deeply at human nature and analyze why we live the way we do, why we act the way we do." He pauses to chuckle, and at this point, I'm slowly sensing that his words are meant to mean something more than normal. "I got to see a younger version of myself in you, and from then on, I was captivated by everything that is Kim Taehyung. Because you're more than just that, you're an exceptionally breathtaking person with qualities I never would have expected to see in an adult, let alone a guy fresh out of high school. You drew me in more than you'll ever understand."

Oh my God.

Yoongi smiles sadly as he keeps talking. "I knew Jungkook could be out to break your heart, you're just the sort of soft hearted person he looks for. And it bothered me, knowing that I could potentially have to be around while you get your heart shattered by this whimsical charmer I've known for so long. I just thought you deserved so much better than that sort of drama."

If only he could know whose heart is truly being shattered...given that that's the truth.

But Yoongi's words entrance me; I hear a softness in his tone and I see it in his demeanor. He's changed somehow, or at least, around me. I imagine our kiss has had something to do with it, unless he's felt this way for a long time. He speaks of me with such a fondness that my yearning reappears, and all I find myself wanting is for him to take me as his own. He makes me sound so loved, that it gives me hope that I can love myself someday. The smile enchants, the low rumble of his voice hypnotizes, the gaze of his soft brown eyes bring me closer and closer to the void he carries.
What spell are you casting, Min Yoongi? And why am I the one you've chosen?

"Anyway," he says, running a hand through those locks of his, "I'm sorry for the pain you feel. I don't doubt that you felt something special between you two, and sometimes, I found myself wondering if you'd be the one to tame Jungkook after all. For once, I'm devastated that I'm right. You're too good for this world, Taehyung. And I wish he could have shown you that rather than waste your time with stupid messing around."

*You're too good for this world.*

"Hyung," I boldly say, blood rushing through my vein and heart ramming against my ribcage, my mere existence aroused with every word to slip past that perfect mouth. "I want to kiss you."

Fuck.

He blinks a few times, processing the demand before that sad smile is etched on his face again. "And for some reason," Yoongi says wistfully, "I want to kiss you too."

I find myself gravitating towards him, and maybe it's the wildness of my imagination playing tricks on me, but I swear he moves closer too. "You do?" I ask, throat going dry and the nerves kicking in. I don't know if I'm surprised by his response. After that night, I don't know what else he can do to catch me off guard anymore. My feelings have been played with enough, and it almost makes me wonder if they're better off without being given any value whatsoever. Like, I shouldn't allow these intense emotions for Yoongi to make a difference in my life. I shouldn't. Yet I do, anyway.

That's something that has always struck me about human nature, the constant attraction to what we consciously know is bad for us. I don't mean in simply a lustful way, but almost every way possible. It's as though our psychology is designed for us to never truly be content with what we have or where we are in the present, we want and chase that which cannot be ours. This endless seeking of thrills or acts of rebellion get us into nothing but trouble, so why don't our feet know to stop moving in the direction of recklessness and mindless desire? What do we gain through the extra running? There isn't much wrong with being happy with what we have, why must there be a persistent force pushing us to go after what we can't have? It's a question I've pondered countless times, but an answer has yet to reveal itself. The secret behind human satisfaction. I hope to understand someday.

"I do," Yoongi replies. I notice his eyes flicker down to my lips for a split-second and my hunger for this man amplifies. I want him. I want him with a fervency that can only be shown through action. Not a single word in the dictionary holds even half the passion I feel when it comes to Min Yoongi, not one.

I breathily pose my next question, knowing full well that this magnetism is no longer one sided. "Then why don't you?" Moving closer, I stop when we're nose to nose and I can see the tip of Yoongi's tongue dart out to wet his lips. How badly I want them on my own, how badly I want to be pressed against him. Just like that night.

"I don't want to cheat on Sunhee, Tae," Yoongi explains, his voice airy, breath hot against mine. His breathing is becoming shallower; I'm feeling his want now. The wants of the dark haired vineyard owner I've been pining after for the bulk of the summer. It's all lost time, whisked away into nothingness by the hands of a damned clock. I wish time could freeze. "I've done it once, and I feel awful. I don't want to do that to her again."

"Then why do you want to kiss me?" I inquire demandingly and move away, my anger at his indecision getting the best of me. "Why are you giving me all these fucking mixed signals and pulling away as soon as I step forward, what do you take me for? If you love Sunhee, and I mean
really love Sunhee, then how can you sit here right now and say you want to kiss me? You give Jungkook endless shit for playing with my feelings. Do you honestly think you're any fucking better, hyung?"

"Taehyung, I wouldn't go there," Yoongi says warningly, but I throw his caution to the wind. This is not fair. He can't do this to me.

"No, of course you wouldn't," I spitefully retort. "You say romantic things and you look at me a certain way and you give me feelings I shouldn't have even for a second, yet I'm the one who has to sit and deal with all the damn confusion every fucking time! You bashed on Jungkook not being good enough for me, you claim I'm too good for this world, you fucking kiss me on your girlfriend's parents' yacht after saying all this wild shit about how I make you feel funny and jealous, but I don't see you dealing with the aftermath!" I yell at him, and I know my anger's reached an all time high.

"Taehyung, I'm sorry..."

"Do you understand even a little bit what I've been going through for the past month or so just because of you?" I ask him directly, not caring whether he knows of my feelings anymore. As I said before, maybe it's better off that they don't matter so much. "You make me want you more than I've ever wanted anybody else, you continuously lead me on and close the door in my face, reminding me that you're in a shitty relationship with that woman as if to rub in my face that I'm just a pathetic 18 year old and you're this accomplished, older man. Why the hell would you kiss me like that, hyung? Do you know what that can do to a person, to be kissed by the person they spend so many sleepless nights thinking of only to know that there's nothing that can really happen between them? For fuck's sake, you need to act like a grown-up and make up your damn mind, because I'm sick of being hurt!" I collapse on the bed and begin sobbing again, far too overwhelmed by emotions to do otherwise.

"Taehyung-"

"I'm sick of it," I cry heavily, "I'm so tired of being hurt just because I'm foolish enough to like you, hyung. I don't want to be punished for falling for you, I want these feelings to go away. I want to forget you, but you need to let me do that rather than giving me all this anxiety. I have enough stress and anxiety to deal with, sometimes so bad that I can't make myself move for days. I don't need this." I raise my head to look him dead in the eyes. "Yoongi hyung, I like you so much. I didn't know I could feel so strongly about another person, I never have before. I wish I could know what it's like to love you and show you how much I feel for you. But in the plainest of terms, you're a complete and total asshole. I should like other people and be in a good relationship where the other person can bother to like me back, but I guess that's impossible seeing that all my thoughts and feelings are generally consumed with you and you alone. And I'm done with it. I don't want to like you anymore. You do not get to steal my youth from me."

As soon as the words leave my mouth, Yoongi angrily leaps up and pins me down on the bed, looking down at me with defiance dancing like fire in his eyes. I refuse to turn away, because this is a challenge. I'm not as weak as he takes me to be, and I will not stand for being played just because he's too indecisive to get his shit figured out. But after a while of us staying in that position, Yoongi eventually lets go and backs off. Thunder crashes in the background as the vineyard owner stares at the ground dejectedly.

"I'm sorry I fuck things up so much," he says monotonously. "But despite what I feel, I can't like you. I refuse to let myself like you, Tae. You're my best friend's only son and I love Sunhee. I'm sorry." Getting off the bed, Yoongi walks out of the room without looking back once, and I sit on the bed solemnly.
At least he knows that he can't like me and that I know for sure that we don't have a shot at being together. But knowing the truth doesn't stop the rejection from stinging. Grabbing a pillow, I sob into it, wondering how anything could get any worse. I got the anger off my chest, but I've hurt Yoongi's feelings. What's more is that the confusion hasn't left me yet, but this time, it's Jungkook's. My whirling thoughts are loud enough to blur out the storm, and I lay in bed, thinking to run away from the agony caused by my outburst.

He said everything is a lie. And despite everything that's happened just now, I can't understand one thing. Did he lie about his heart condition too? He's lied to Yoongi twice now about the nature of our relationship, but I don't know if he's lied to me. Could this be it? Is it that Jungkook's not dying after all?

If that's the case...then what is his truth?

I'm so confused.
thirty

A truth so loud you can't ignore

Taehyung's POV

We've landed in the sticky ambience of mid-July, the evenings now more humid and the breezy comforts overpowered by a glaring sun. It's impossible to stay outside for long periods of time, and the air conditioning stays on 24/7. If not, the heat grabs you and coats you thickly until you're either ready to pass out or suffocating. It's awful. I keep a fan on in my room for the majority of the day to save myself from the heat exhaustion. Even with the AC on, my room is warmer than most, since it's on the top floor and has such large windows. The sunlight pours in endlessly with no fresh source of oxygen, often leading to minor headaches on my end.

More than a week has passed since my argument with Yoongi, and it's as though the world as come to a stop. Actually, my world has. He's going on with his daily life, pretending like nothing has happened except along with my world, our conversations have halted as well. He doesn't look at me, doesn't stay in one place with me for more than a few minutes, doesn't smile when I'm in the room, none of that. It's like he doesn't want to share the air I breathe, but he has to against his will. So I've adapted my ways, deciding that there's no point in making him feel uneasy under his own roof. I'm already a burden for far too many people as it is. I refuse to be one for him.

Basically, I don't leave my room more than twice a day anymore. Behind closed doors, I spend time either laying on the bed or sitting on the couch to read. That's all I do. Read. Having read all the books around me already, my focus has shifted to reading and rereading the book Yoongi bought me with such a fervency, it could be classified as obsession.

I've made my way through the piece of historical fiction cover to cover at least three times with no intention of stopping. Hours pass by, the sun rises and falls with page turns, but my eyes never stop taking in the series of dense paragraphs. I want to memorize the scent of the pages, every word, every punctuation mark, every line of dialogue, every little detail. This book is the only thing I have from Yoongi, and I read to etch the contents into my heart with no path of escape. I want to consume all I have of him, and carry it around with me, because though I don't want to love him, I want to keep him inside of everything that makes my existence.

Otherwise, it means I've let him go.
But there are times when my eyes hurt from staring at the tiny print or my chest aches at the thought of knowing that the man I want more than anything rests peacefully on the other side of the wall...and I begin to sink into the solitude. With Jungkook no longer around to help me pass the meaningless hours by, I've relapsed into my high school habit of alienation and silence. I lose the urge to talk to anyone, even Namjoon. I decline calls, ignore messages, lay still for the bulk of a day with nothing but the soft hum of the damn air conditioner adding some texture to an otherwise silent environment.

Sometimes I wonder what my own voice sounds like, because I haven't heard it in so long.

If my mood is up for it, I'll have soft music in the background, but that's been a rarity for the past handful of days. Listening to sorrowful croons only makes me feel worse. It makes me think of him more and more, to a point where it feels like I'm going to die from the pain. The smiles he's given me, the little touches, the acts of kindness, music brings it back to me. I play our last interaction in my mind on repeat, analyzing every glance and touch, every fluctuation of tone, every syllable uttered. I recreate the kiss again, delving into that momentary tidal wave of passion that had overcome us. The Yoongi trapped in my brain can't navigate his way out anymore. There's too many barriers put up to keep him caged. To keep him close to me. Because I can't have the real one anyway.

I try to leave the room about two times throughout a normal day, just to grab myself something to eat. It gets difficult when Yoongi's downstairs. As soon as I hear him shuffling around, I turn on my heel and go straight back into my room to hide, ignoring the acidic grumbling of my stomach. Water tides the hunger over during those times. Then I wait for another hour or so before trying again. If I'm lucky and he isn't in sight, I normally grab whatever fruit is nearby or something small from the fridge to take up to the room. I don't want him to have to lay his eyes on me until he's ready to. I feel like I've become a thief in his home.

Sometimes I get overwhelmed. The tiptoeing around, the need to make myself invisible, the desperate and pathetic craving to get that man out of my damn mind, things like that add up. They add up and they start to eat away at a person. That's how I feel these days, that no matter how hard I work to move past all this, I ultimately won't and all that will remain of the Taehyung that arrived here at the beginning of the summer will be an empty shell of a human. One whose emotions have been drained from him—a direct outcome of a foolish, unrequited crush. A danger he walked into with full knowledge that he probably wouldn't come out alive.

Thoughts of being reduced to an empty person terrify me. And I cry more than I care to admit...but I can't stop myself. I choke back tears every time I eat food in my room all alone, thinking of nothing but the look of regret the vineyard owner had in his eyes when he'd apologized for not liking me. I've had my share of pain, and this is nothing like what I've felt before. Each time I finish his book, I fight the urge to cry as I flip back to the front cover and start again, as if I've made the book my source of religion.

But all this fighting and battling of tears never amounts to anything, because as soon as I strip myself bare everyday and the shower head turns on, the tears flow down the drain with the soapy water. That's the one place I can't stop myself. I've cried every single day while showering, and everyday I come out to face a puffy eyed, heartbroken boy in the mirror who only wants to know what is so bad about him that he can't be loved by the one he seeks with such sincerity.

It's because he is, in all honesty, just a boy. A boy hopelessly in love with a man, who can never give him so much as a second glance. Not because the man doesn't want to, but because that man is too scared. A player of emotions, a dastardly coward. A beautiful faintheart.

Caring for someone shouldn't be this difficult. It shouldn't hurt the way it does. Yet it sometimes
takes away my strength to stand up. It weakens me with each blow, leaving once I'm back on the bed, curled up and weepy. That's the only time the pain walks away from me. When it senses I've got little left in me; pain pities me at that point. Pain has its moments of mercy, but only when I'm nearly broken.

Wanting him is shattering me.

The sun begins to shy away again once its hours dwindle to an end, and my stomach grumbles. Glancing up from the book, I fix my glasses and sigh. Now's the time to slip out for food again. Strawberries this time. Without bothering to check the page number — I've read it enough to know where I am without looking — I slowly get off the bed and make my way to the door. Fingers curl around the cold doorknob as I take a deep breath, and I open it carefully. Lightly stepping out, I peek at his room to face a closed bedroom door. Damn, I don't know if he's in there or not.

Cautiously I head down one flight of stairs before hearing someone speak, instantly going back up a few steps in fear. But it's not Yoongi's voice, compelling me to linger around. I shouldn't be eavesdropping, but something keeps me there. A force I can't quite explain myself, to be frank.

"So how's everything going for you?" a voice softly asks. Jimin's voice; he must be over for business purposes. So Yoongi is definitely down there. My stomach rumbles again in distress, causing me to hunch over and cover my abdomen as if that would shush the cries for food. "We haven't gotten a chance to catch up, a lot's been happening on my end and I haven't had a chance to properly talk to you."

"No problem," that deep, raspy voice says, and my chest tightens at once. Nails dig into the fabric of my shirt as I work to keep myself from crying. I haven't heard his voice in days. I miss it more than my own. "I can't say that much has happened for me."

"Liar. You fucking liar," I think to myself angrily. But how can he tell the truth? In his position, I don't know that I'd have the courage to be truthful either...but that doesn't change the falsehoods he's uttering.

"Really? How's everything? Sunhee? Taehyung?" inquires Jimin curiously. I can almost hear the shrug that answers the chain of questions.

Yoongi sighs. "Taehyung's doing alright. He's been a bit quiet lately, so I'm not bothering him. The summer's been good for him, I think. Jungkook's definitely helped out with that." His voice sounds tight, if that's even possible. But something's being held back, I can gather that much from his tone. Maybe he hasn't told Jimin about the "breakup" or the fact that we even "dated" to begin with.

"Ah yeah," Jimin naively agrees, making me chuckle heartlessly as I continue listening in. "He's pretty attached to that boy. I'm actually amazed with it. Never known Kook to become so fond of someone quickly."

"Yeah, he did get close," Yoongi replies curtly. I picture him with his hand on the back of a chair, those veins on his arms popping out the way they normally do when he feels tense. "But anyway, Sunhee and I are doing alright."

"Yeah? That's good to hear, I'm glad."

"Mm. In fact," Yoongi says and pauses. I inhale sharply, caught on his cliffhanger with a slipping grasp. What is he contemplating? "I'd like for us to move forward with our relationship."

"In what way? Like, asking her to move in?"
"Nah. Well, kind of." I can hear the small smile in his words, his tone rises slightly. "I'm gonna ask her to marry me."

Another pause. I bite my lip harder than I imagine possible as Jimin suddenly gasps in excitement. "You're joking!" he asks in sheer awe. Hah. Like something this cruel could be a joke.

"I'm totally serious," Yoongi confirms, satisfaction weaved into his sentences, "I feel like we've been stuck in the same place for a while, and it's caused things to grow stagnant. Maybe I should've made a move way before this, but I didn't realize that I needed to until recently. It hit me that I'm straying, wandering away from her. And that's not what I want at all. I want us to be in this for the long run."

A metallic taste spreads across my tongue; instinctively, my hand flies up to my lip and I remove it to find blood on the fingertips. Shit. "Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry."

"I'm proud of you, man. That's a huge step and I always thought you and Sunhee fit really well together. She's made you so happy," Jimin reassures. "But what led you to this decision?"

Yoongi hesitates before replying, and I lean forward to hear him.

"You hold my heart in your hands, please don't hurt it anymore. Please let go of what I've given you. Give it back to me. But don't hurt it anymore. "Just a distraction," he simply claims.

A distraction. That's all I am to him. That's all that kiss was, that's all anything was for him. Distractions from the perfect life he leads, distractions that held him back. I suppose...I suppose I was foolish for anticipating he could ever see me as something else. An equal for instance, one he could call a lover. One he could paint into his life, one to expand his world for.

But I'm foolish. I haven't learned from experiences. I've just been moving forward blindly, thinking I'd find that place of belonging. Maybe it just doesn't exist. Nobody has expanded their world for me. I shouldn't have hoped that he'd be the first one who'd know how to.

I should not have hoped.

"Have you bought a ring yet?"

"Nah, but I have some ideas. Hang on." Suddenly I hear him coming up the stairs and though I want to scramble up into my room, back into hiding, I'm frozen. Even if my mind signals for my body to move, there's no cooperation. So I remain there, hearing the footsteps get louder and louder, until the owner faces me for the first time in several days. He wears apathy so clearly on his face, there's nothing in his eyes. Absolutely nothing.

I glance up at him with watery eyes, truly feeling the age gap between us for the first time, and he stares. Maybe I'm mistaken, but Yoongi's eyes reflect a hint of emotion for a second before he begins to walk past me. "You have blood on your lips," he mutters within earshot, and soon he's gone. That one sentence thaws me enough to move, to rise and walk back into my room without looking left or right.

I head into the bathroom and stare at myself. I didn't realize how hard I'd bitten my lip, because
there's a decent amount of blood coating it. Running my hand under some cold water, I wipe it off and place both hands on the side of the sink, gripping it as though I'll crumble without the support.

He's going to marry her. He's going to make her his, and then I'll never be able to walk into his life again. I'm going to leave as this summer end and that man will never look at me again. He won't wonder, he won't care, he won't feel the need to keep me in his thoughts. I'll become a memory, one not worth recalling. Because he'll have his perfect life with the perfect girl. A girl who has flaws, but she's deserving of the word 'perfect' because he chose her. He chose to love her. That's why she's obtained perfection. And I watched him choose her.

The tears won't make it to the shower this time round.

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oof, that was a lot.

anyway, lil bit of shameless promo (actually i'm embarrassed but whatever): i edited the playlist for this fic so now there's three! one for yoongi, tae, and kook (named candied kisser, hues of the sky, and cloudy hearts respectively)—everything can be found on my spotify account zedflame. yoongi's is my favorite, so if anyone's interested in what i listen to as i write, that's there. also, the gif doesn't look centered but there's apparently a lot of white space so i can't center it further
"Thank you, please come again," I politely say and bow while handing the bag containing a vinyl record to the customer. He nods, smiling, before heading out of the store. The man's departure leaves the store bare, and I take the free moment to lean against the counter to rest a little. There's still a few miscellaneous things to do around here before closing time, which was approaching rapidly.

After telling Taehyung about the heart problem — I don't want to refer to it as mine, something about that bothers me — I had gone off to Dr. Choi's for another appointment. We discussed technicalities of the surgery, costs, and all that. He gave me some pain relieving medication for the time being until I could figure out whether the procedure is something I can secure in my near future. Instead of being scared, I'd started working on being a little more involved in the financial process for these visits and the surgery.

So since then, I'd been visiting the city more often in search of a decent job and stumbled upon this little record shop. They wanted an employee who could work from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and seeing as it's my vacation (kinda), the time commitment is no issue for me. The hours are a bit long and tiring, but I'm able to get away if I feel pain or something out of the blue. Anyway, I'd walked in to talk to the store manager, who hired me on the spot, and I was bewildered. He said I have the right look for the store, whatever that means. I think he favors me, because he hasn't made me wear a uniform or anything; it's actually pretty laid back around here. But I've been working for about two weeks now, and the pay's been decent. I'm hoping to save up enough to contribute to uncle so that payment for this surgery doesn't go all out of his own pocket.

"Jungkook," the manager, a bearded man in his mid-30s, says, "You can go pretty soon. I think we're just about done here."

"Really?" I reply, massaging one of my shoulders and wincing slightly. They're incredibly tense. He nods contently.

"All I need you to do is make sure nothing is out of place, and if it is, just kinda re-organize it. Then the night's yours." Nodding, I bow to him respectfully, which somehow manages to elicit a chuckle from him. "You're a good kid," he adds, a new warmth in his tone.
"Ah, thank you." So I quickly make my way around the shop — which is small, thankfully — and fix anything that looked out of place. It didn't take too long; people don't usually come in here and leave behind a shitstorm. One thing I've noticed about people who come to shop at this record store is that they're respectful of music. They know good music and they take care of it, so there's never a day when I have to do any major organizing. The customers are respectful, another perk of the job.

Finishing up, I wish the manager a good night and leave the store, car keys twirling on my finger. As I make my way over to the car and get in, a heavy sigh slips out. Turning on the engine and pressing the accelerator, I head home with all sorts of thoughts floating around in my head.

Sometimes it hits me that I'm working five days a week for nearly 12 hours, for a pay that's okay but could be better, and I wonder if I actually stand a chance. I'm working tirelessly to make this surgery a reality before I have to leave Jimin's, but that doesn't blur out the large part of me that genuinely doubts that it's a mission that can be accomplished. I don't know that I'll make it. Or if I'm worthy of making it any further than I've gotten. Death could be inevitable for someone like me.

Yet I can't help feeling like I deserve better than what I've received so far. It can't be wrong to fight for what we deserve. And even with this failing heart, I know I've been cheated out of a life that could have been beautiful, for a carelessness that wasn't even mine to begin with. I am the way I am, because others prioritized neglect over love. I can't physically bring myself to accept that I deserve these sufferings since I never had a chance to prevent all the pain anyway. Why should I have to die before being given a proper chance at life? I ask myself that often, and it only fuels defiance at the thought of dying. I don't want to die without fighting for the life I should have gotten. I won't.

Only uncle knows that I've taken on this job, but for different reasons. I told him I was bored this summer and that I need to work in order to have something to do with my days, so he agreed. Nothing about money had been mentioned; I intended on keeping it that way. He doesn't need to feel guilty about his income just 'cause I don't want him to pay for my surgery all by himself. It's an expensive deal, he shouldn't even have to deal with this. No matter what happens, he's not my dad. He feels a sense of responsibility for me out of the kindness of his heart, not because he's entitled to my wellbeing. I can't take advantage of that.

I've considered telling Taehyung about this recent progression of events, but I chose not to. It'll only raise questions about why I decided to take the job, and I really don't want to lie to him. He's probably confused enough about everything I just did, so there's no point in mentioning the job to him. Plus, there's a matter of my self consciousness. Taehyung comes from a wealthy family, he doesn't need to worry about money. Now, I'm not holding that against him in any way. It's not his fault or choice to be born under such circumstances, but to admit that I'm poor and that this is what I'm doing just to afford a fucking surgery...It's humiliating. I feel ashamed. I don't care about many things, life tends to be easy come and easy go for me, but the matter of finances is a sore subject for me.

He won't look at me as a poor boy, I know that guy well enough. But I know there'll be a sense of worry, of pity that will seep into his thoughts and taint the image he has of me. The image I've worked hard to create shouldn't be ruined just because I can't afford things as easily. And I'm not one who accepts pity; it's more a jab at my pride than anything else. Neither Taehyung nor I need to be put in such a position.

Half an hour of driving passes with the radio softly playing in the background. The songs take the time away in a nicer manner, so I tend to always drive with music on. If things are rough and I really need a moment to myself, I'll keep it quiet. Anyway, I arrive back home and carelessly park in the driveway, knowing that I'll have to leave the house tomorrow before Jimin even sees the shitty job I did so it honestly doesn't matter.
Quietly, I walk into the house to find my uncle sitting in the living room with a cup of tea. He's reading some article, but after hearing my footsteps, he glances up. I wave half-heartedly, too fatigued to show any genuine enthusiasm. Kicking off my scuffed up boots, I stroll over to join him, plopping down immediately.

"Long day?" he asks curiously, and I nod, eyes fixated on the plain ceiling. "You should eat dinner and go to bed. But don't forget to take your medication. You need to sleep well if you're gonna work hours like these."

"Mmm," I softly hum, turning to look at him. Jimin smiles at me, holding his cup of tea up to his mouth. He loves tea more than anyone I know; his pantry might as well be a little shop just for tea. I find the stuff disgusting. It tastes of subtle nothingness. "I'll do it. How've you been?"

He exhales, nodding. "I'm okay. Not much has happened today, but I did go over to Yoongi's earlier this week. He's got some big news." With a piqued interest, I look at my uncle with a puzzled expression. "He's gonna propose."

"To Sunhee?" I ask without thinking to stop myself. Uncle hums to concur as he sips his drink, pursing his lips together afterwards. "He's going to marry her?" Shit, what happened after I left? I literally left the game to Taehyung and Yoongi's hands, now I hear that he's marrying the bitch. I can't even begin to imagine how the brunette is dealing with the news, assuming that he knows.

"Yeah, he said they've grown stagnant, something about straying lately and wanting to move forward."

I scoff angrily, twisting one of my rings. "Did he say why he came to this decision so suddenly?"

"Funny you ask that, I asked him that, too. He said it was a distraction."

*That fucker.* Something must have gone horrendously wrong if that's how he's referring to Taehyung now. "So that's what Tae's become now," I mumble under my breath, forgetting for a second that Jimin's sitting right next to me.

"Tae?" he inquires, confused all of a sudden. Well, I can't blame him. "What's Taehyung got to do with any of this?"

Sighing, I glance down at my palms for several seconds of contemplation. Honestly, if this is what it's come down to, what does it matter if Jimin knows about any of this? "Yoongi hyung just making some really fucked up decisions right now," I admit, baffling my uncle further.

"What makes you say that?"

"He likes Taehyung, uncle. Like, those two are head over heels for each other. And Tae's come to terms with his feelings, but it looks like Yoongi hyung's struggling with that bit. I just didn't expect him to act like such a headass because of it," I say and laugh dryly.

Jimin sits up straight, placing his tea on a nearby table. "Since when did Yoongi like that boy, what? How long has that been going on?"

"For most of June. He has massive feelings for Taehyung, but he's with Sunhee so that adds some moral complications. Not to mention who Tae actually is, and then his age. Overall, it has the potential to be a messy situation — well, it's actually pretty messed up right now — but, I didn't expect him to rush into marriage to that woman."

"I always thought he looked good with Sunhee."
"I mean, you could be right. I don't like her, I think she's a bitch. He looks better with Taehyung, they're happier with one another," I bluntly state. "Like, you haven't seen their interactions, but it's just interesting. Not only is there this, like, complex tension between them, but they..." I struggle to find the right words. "It's like they're both lost, only finding themselves when together."

Jimin nods slowly, trying to understand. I didn't word that in the simplest way, I know, but I couldn't think of anything else. "I'm trying to follow your logic here."

"Okay, bear with me," I reply, crossing my legs and getting ready to elaborate, "So I know Yoongi hyung's this accomplished dude with a job and all that, but there's something about him that makes me think that he hasn't entirely found himself yet. Like, he hasn't found his purpose or whatever that makes him happy."

"Okay..."

"Right, and Taehyung is this eighteen year old kid, who's super angsty but simultaneously one of the best people you can ever meet in the world," I elaborate excitedly, "He has this issue of belonging. I've noticed it in him, Taehyung really wants to find a place where he feels welcome all the time and where he feels like a priority, not a burden."

"Interesting."

"Tae's found that in our hyung. He's finally found someone he can relate to, who doesn't make him feel bad for being an old soul or a deep thinker. He feels like he can fit in well with hyung, when they're both in good moods anyway. It's like he's been lost all along, but he finds himself when he's with Yoongi hyung. Now in hyung's case, you know the story of Peter Pan, yeah?"

Jimin nods, allowing me to continue. "Okay, so Peter Pan only takes children to Neverland and that's where they stay. They become lost boys, they don't grow up. Eternally in touch with their youth," I say enthusiastically, all traces of exhaustion vanishing through my animated explanation. I don't even know when I thought all this up, but it clicks. It fits their stories so well that I'm on the verge of cackling. These idiots. "Yoongi hyung's like one of those kids who grew up, he left his Neverland. He's so grown-up that he's got no zest for life anymore. But with Tae in the picture, I feel like he starts to feel like a lost boy again. Like, he's back to being young, back to enjoying the little things in life, back to youth."

"Huh," uncle Jimin says blankly, only staring at me.

"So one's a lost boy who doesn't want to be lost anymore, and the other is a grown ass man who needs to feel like a lost boy again. They feel perfection when they're with one another. I know that sounds really strange, but it's the best way to describe their relationship. The smiles they have around one another is more genuine than any smile I've seen before."

"Really?"

"Yeah. You have no clue. Plus, hyung also kissed Taehyung so that's a pretty good sign that he likes him, too," I add at the end, holding back a grin as my uncle nearly chokes on his tea.

"Hang on," he sputters, wiping his mouth, "They kissed?" I nod. "When-"

"Back during the family dinner."

"And now he wants to marry Sunhee? Does she know about this?"

"That, I don't actually know. But I do know he'd be marrying Sunhee for all the wrong reasons if he
goes along with this. He can't handle the thought of Taehyung being with anyone else, I've seen it firsthand. We dated, Tae and I, and you should've seen how pissed off that made hyung."

"Wait, you two dated?"

I shake my head, smirking. "Nah, it was just an act. I wanted to make Yoongi hyung jealous. So that he'd understand that he actually has feelings for Tae and not the she-devil. We broke up though, a few weeks back. Well, I told hyung that we did, it's complicated."

"I'm so confused..."

"We didn't actually date, it was all part of my plan to make our stupid hyung see what's right in front of him. But if he's set on marrying Sunhee, then something's gone terribly wrong," I say, suddenly deep in thought. "I don't know what could've gone wrong. I set it up perfectly, how could it have gone wrong?"

Uncle Jimin clears his throat. "I didn't realize you were so deeply involved in all this."

"I didn't plan to be, but they're morons. If I leave it up to them, well, you see what happens. One gets ready to marry the wrong person, and the other person's probably crying up a storm over all this. I have to be involved," I confess.

"So then what's your relationship with Taehyung?"

Eyebrows knitting together in confusion, I tilt my head. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, do you like that boy? The way you talk about him...And maybe I'm just reading this wrong, since I clearly have no idea what's happening, but you seem to have an interesting fondness for him."

"Oh..." I shrug lazily. "Nah, I don't like him. I know that sounds kinda unconvincing, but there's nothing more to it. He makes me feel a peace of mind without even trying, and we've just become really good friends."

"Are you sure that's all?"

"Positive. I don't have feelings for him. Sometimes I envy him, but I'm not in love with him," I admit suddenly, feeling my cheeks heat up. Jimin's eyes widen instantly at my wording.

"Envy?"

"Mhm." I sigh, feeling my shoulders drop as the heaviness leaves for a second. "He's kinda perfect. Comes from this successful family, with these accomplished and wealthy parents. He's intelligent, unlike other people our age, and he wants to do something with his life even if he's a little confused right now. I dunno, uncle, there's something so pure and beautiful about that boy...He's rare. You won't understand how until you're around him; his passion is pure, his feelings aren't corrupted, he never has underlying intentions. He wants everything genuinely, and feels things more deeply, with more integrity. He's this gem, but he's got no idea how precious he is. I wish I could be that exceptional. I wish I could make someone feel the way he makes me feel."

"You know, if you ask him to talk about you, he may ramble the way do. If you guys are really that close, I think he could surprise you with all the good he sees in you," reasons Jimin. I shake my head, eyes going back to my hands. "I don't see anything lacking in you, Kook. Like, I don't know if you've stopped to think about it, but you're amazing."
I scoff instantly. "That's too good a word for me." At once, the elder reaches over and swats my shoulder, leading me to flinch in surprise. Jimin's mild-mannered, smacking people isn't his specialty. "What was that for?"

"You for being an idiot. Why do you put yourself down like that?"

"I dunno..."

"Well, cut it out. You're great, and clearly I haven't done a good enough job of letting you know that. Yes, you and Taehyung come from drastically different households, and I know your mom especially left you to fend for yourself, but considering everything you've had to go through, I think you're doing pretty well," Jimin says defensively.

"Maybe, but that doesn't stop me from wishing things could have turned out differently. So that I could have been a better person," I respond regretfully.

"You can be a better person regardless of your circumstances. All you need is the motivation to try, and I see that in you. Once we get you this surgery, you can start anew. You can work less and enroll in a college nearby, take classes and get a degree. You can focus on being the person you want to be. You won't want to party or smoke or do these things anymore, because you'll have something to live for. You don't feel like you have that now, which is why you've derailed yourself with all these other distractions. That's how you've decided to cope with it, I suppose, but I don't think you're anywhere close to be a lost cause. You just need that second chance at life."

"Do you think I even deserve that?"

"What makes you ask a question like that? I know you're calling Yoongi hyung and Tae morons, but you're no less of a moron yourself if that's what you think of yourself. You deserve a second chance; nothing that's happened to you has been your fault. Now if you get a lung problem, because of your smoking, then I can't say it's not your fault. But this heart thing came from neglect. That's not on you. You didn't get the support you needed," says Jimin calmly. There's certainly a truth to his words. Maybe I have been moronic after all.

"I don't even know that I'll get this surgery, uncle." I feel tears well up and I can't tell if it's a result of exhaustion or genuine sadness. Perhaps a mixture of both? "The days are slipping, and I feel like it's not gonna happen. I'll have to go back to my apartment and get busy with my three jobs or whatever, and it'll never happen. I'll die there without anyone ever knowing," I ramble, hiding my face in my hands. Sighing, Jimin extends his hands and pulls me in, wrapping his arms around me.

"Hmm," he hums softly, "You will get your chance. You'll get your heart, there's no doubt in my mind that you will." I stay quiet, letting myself be held for the first time in a long while. Feeling someone be there for me. "You'll get your heart."

You'll get your heart.
if the lyrics to youth finish before the story, i'm switching over to lost boy lyrics coz originally that was gonna be the name of this fic. but anyway, lemme know what you think of this chapter and happy reading!!
I stir from my early evening nap as my phone begins to pester me with its endless ringing. Blindly reaching around, my hand lands on the device and I bring it closer to me, peeking at the caller through half-closed eyes. But once I see who it is, I sit up in surprise. Of all people to ring me up, I wasn't expecting one from this person. Which is kinda sad.

"Hello? Mom?" I answer groggily.

"Tae?" she says, her connection crackling unsteadily. "Taehyung, can you hear me?"

Yawning, I nod before remembering that she can't see me. "Yeah, mom. Can you hear me?"

"Yes! Tae, how are you? It's been a while, I know, but I had to call you and see how things were going?" Mom inquires, her tone high pitched and excited. Hyper to talk to her son after more than a month. Though, she could've called before today...Dunno why she didn't. Maybe a wifi issue; overseas calls can rack up one hell of a phone bill.

"I'm alright, things are going fine. How are you, where are you guys now?" I answer, trying damn hard to sound okay. It feels like so long since I even talked, let alone conversed with my mom. It feels strange to use my voice again. She starts talking about how they're in France and how chic everything is, how they're having such a great time, how good the food is, and all that. The enthusiasm in her words honestly brings a small smile to my recently frowning face; it's nice to hear that she's doing so well on her vacation. Plus, she's always dreamed of going to France. I'm glad she got to experience something like that.

"But Tae, how are you? Really? Have you had any time to think and figure things out? Have you had fun?" asks mom in the middle of her rambling. Rolling onto my stomach, I bury my face into a pillow and try to come up with a reasonable answer for her. But what's there to say? I think back to the very start of the summer and all the good memories I've managed to make along the way. "Tae? Honey, are you alright?"

The concerns of a curious mother forces me to sigh and start talking. "I'm enjoying myself here," I say, looking down at the pillowcase. "Yoongi hyung's been a great host and I've made a friend. I
spend most of my time with him. His name's Jungkook; he's the nephew of hyung's business partner. We hang out often, and it's been really good. Umm, Yoongi hyung's taken me out and stuff. We've gone to an arcade, different stores, a lake, karaoke, bookstores, all sorts of things. I like to walk around his vineyard, it's beautiful." As I list out the things I've been able to do this summer, the memory of each comes back to me, the laughter and glances that accompanied each beautifully complex moment. It's been a better summer than I've given it credit for, truth be told. Sure there's been some heartbreaks here and there, but the journey of it all? Pretty damn fantastic. I smile to myself, a secret for nobody else to see.

"Sounds like you're having some really good experiences! I'm happy to hear about that Jungkook person, I'm glad you're socializing!" Ah, her happiness sounds so authentic, I don't know what else to say. How am I supposed to have the heart to tell her about all the tears that came with each smile this summer? "But how about other things? Have you given any thought to college or what you've wanted to do?"

Of course, I should have anticipated a question like that. "I've been reading a lot this summer, and I dunno. It's enjoyable, I love literature and all that. Have since high school. I haven't given it too much thought yet, but what would you think if I wanted to become a professor or teacher of sorts? Maybe literature, maybe history? Nothing's set in stone, but maybe I'm starting to find some direction in all this," I tell her cautiously. Instantly I yank the phone away from my ear as she squeals, no doubt overjoyed that her son has finally found some sense.

"Taehyung, you have no clue how happy I am to hear that. Oh, you'll be such a good teacher, you're so passionate about those things, and imagine having your little students and a briefcase, isn't that the cutest thing!" she babbles in contentment, and I stifle a laugh, amused by her innocence. How is it that she's maintained such a young vibe about her despite having such a demanding job and life? I don't know. Could be a mom thing. "And you can hand back papers and give grades and hold parent-teacher conferences, I can see you being so good at all that!" she continues exclaiming.

"Aha, yeah. Don't get too excited, mom, it's just an idea," I caution her as I sit up on the bed. I didn't realize how much I'd missed her; hearing her voice after so long puts this lump in my throat that I can't seem to swallow, but all I'm thinking of is how badly I want to hug her. I miss her. Suddenly, someone knocks on the door gently before opening it slightly. I peer at the visitor, who happens to be none other than the indifferent vineyard owner himself. Without a word, I wait for him to say what he needs to. "One sec, mom," I say to my mom, covering the receiver, and look at him expectantly. He's well dressed in a baby blue button up matched with khaki pants, the legs rolled up by his ankles. The silver bracelet hangs loosely on his wrist and his hair's been combed with care. It bothers me how attracted I feel, despite wanting to hate him with everything I've got.

Coldly, he says, "I don't know if you planned on eating anything today since you've been avoiding me and all, but Sunhee's coming over tonight for a pretty important dinner. I'd appreciate it if you could come and get your dinner now, I've already cooked the food. Come down and see what you want to eat, and that way you won't have to come down while she's here." He's been avoiding me though, why the fuck am I the only one who's being accused of playing the cold shoulder game? He's just as guilty as I am.

"Alright. I'll be down shortly," I say, equally as harsh, and without another word, Yoongi leaves the room. I guess this is what's become of us. Curt replies and no second glances. No second chances. I suppose it's all just...done now. "Mom, I gotta go now. Dinner time, but have fun on the rest of your vacation, okay?"

"Okay, okay. But Tae, do think more about that idea, alright? If that's what you want to do, I totally
support it," she replies warmly. "Take care of yourself, honey. I love you and I miss you."

The words get caught in my throat as I struggle to repeat them. "I-I love you too, mom. Say hey to
dad for me; miss you both." I think the last I heard someone say "I love you" was when I said my
goodbyes to my parents back in late May. Can't believe it's been so long.

Hanging up the phone, I drop it on my bed and leave my room without worrying about running into
Yoongi for the first time in days. As I bound into the dining room, I see that the vineyard owner
wasn't joking when he said it's an important dinner; he's laid out quite the spread. Numerous dishes,
most of them foreign to me, are arranged on the table with a large bouquet of roses resting as the
centerpiece. He must have spent so long cooking all this, I think to myself while deciding what to
eat.

"Take whatever you'd like," Yoongi says from the kitchen as he rummages through a random drawer
in search of something. I glance back at the table, my appetite suddenly shrinking by the second.
This dinner is for them, I shouldn't have anything from it. So I walk into the kitchen and begin
looking through the fridge for something else to eat, catching the dark haired elder's attention.
"What're you doing?" he asks roughly, startling me.

"Just looking for some fruit or something," I reply nonchalantly.

"Is what I made not to your liking?"

Ah, he cares about what I think. "No, that's not it," I say, turning to face him. Our slightly angered
expressions brings a new type of tension to the table, one we're both unfamiliar with. "It's just that
that dinner is for you two. I shouldn't eat from there, so I'll get something else. Some rice or
something." I go back to scouring the fridge, while Yoongi just huffs and walks out to the dining
room. A few minutes later, he comes back with a full plate of rice, chicken, and vegetables.

"I wouldn't have asked you to eat from there if I meant for all that food to be for the two of us. I
made it with you in mind as well," he gruffly says, holding the plate out to me. "You've been living
only on bananas and berries, don't think I haven't noticed." I stare at him, slightly speechless. "Go
on. If you don't eat this, I'm throwing it all out."

"But that's a waste of food," I say weakly, causing Yoongi to break out into somewhat of a
triumphant smirk.

"Exactly. Best eat it then," he responds, putting the plate in my hands. "Now I gotta find some damn
candles." He goes back to rummaging through the kitchen drawers, leaving me to stand there as
though I'm frozen. I just...I didn't expect him to

He acts so well, I'm beginning to confuse his performances of apathy with his true nature. Yoongi's a
dangerous man. There's nothing more to it; you can't play with someone's emotions like this unless
you knew what you were doing. He's too good at manipulating me for this situation to be left to
chance.

"Thanks," I mumble awkwardly as I leave the kitchen, feeling Yoongi's gaze on me as I walk out.
Going up to my room, I close the door and dim the lights. As I sit at the desk and begin eating the
food, a small moan escapes me as soon as it touches my tongue. His cooking is fucking great, and it
seems like forever since I've had proper food. My stomach's going to owe him a lot. But as I
continue bolting down my meal, Yoongi's words circle around in my mind.

Don't think I haven't noticed.
If he truly noticed, how could he have let me hide for this long? How can he make himself care so little that he never once stopped by and said, "Hey Taehyung, you haven't been eating, and I'm not okay with that." Anything like that to show me that he never really stopped caring, because now I know he still does, instead of convincing me that I've become a nobody in his eyes.

Why can't he ever do the right thing at the right time?

Still feeling pretty drowsy, I finish up the food and leave the plate on the desk as I dive back onto the bed, under a pile of soft sheets. A food coma sounds great right about now, I think while searching my phone for possible songs to play. It's the type of evening to have music on for a little while. Finding something somewhat suitable, I select the song and place the phone on the nightstand, instantly curling up in the bed afterwards.

I haven't done much in the past few days, but I'm exhausted. Without meaning to, my eyes close again and I feel myself giving into the waves of sleep that begin washing over me as though I'm the only pebble in its path. Ah well, it's not like I have anything better to do. I'll keep sleeping.

~*_~

Roughly an hour passes before I stir again, stretching my arms out and yawning widely. But as soon as I do regain some consciousness, a soft knock sounds against my door. "Mmm, yeah?" I say drowsily, expecting Yoongi to pop in or something. But instead, Sunhee appears. Oh God.

"Did I wake you up?" she asks softly and I shake my head. Though I don't give her permission, the model saunters into the room, clad in a slinky, black dress that wouldn't need much effort to take off, and takes a seat on the edge of my bed. "Yoongi left to buy something," Sunhee says with a pout before turning to look at me. "The dinner's gonna get cold."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I tell her dishonestly, not giving even half a fuck about her dinner. I've eaten already, sucks for her.

"Mm. How've you been lately? I haven't seen you since the day at the lake. You really had me worried," she says quietly, and I slowly sit up, removing the covers.

Shrugging, I reply, "I'm okay. That day was a bit scary, but it was my fault. I was swimming too much. Shouldn't have pushed myself like that." Rubbing the back of my neck, I chuckle awkwardly, not sure of what to do to get her out. "Are you feeling lonely?"

"Hmm, what makes you ask that?"

"Well, it's just that you're sitting here. In my room. I can only imagine it's because you've got nothing else to do, so you wanted company." I swing my legs over the bed and let my feet touch the ground.

"Do you wanna go downstairs? I mean, I can keep you company until he gets back. I don't mind doing that at all." I do actually, but that's not the polite thing to say.

"Ah. How're you doing with Jungkook?"

"We're alright. Doing fine," I answer curtly, really not in the mood for small talk with her. She ignored my question.

"Aren't you two dating?" she inquires and I feel myself growing more uncomfortable. I shake my head.
"We ended it for reasons."

"Aw, that's heartbreaking. I don't know how he could leave you. You're so sweet, Tae," she murmurs as she shakes her head. "But anyway, I'm fine here." She places a hand on my leg, a little higher up on my thigh than I'd like, and I can instantly feel the hairs rising on the back of my neck. This doesn't seem right, but I want to give her the benefit of the doubt. She makes Yoongi happy, I can't make her upset.

"Are you sure?" I ask again, carefully removing her hand from my thigh. Luckily I'm wearing full length pants and not shorts. Could've been a disaster otherwise.

"Taehyung," she says suddenly, leaning in closer. "Have you noticed something strange about us?"

The first thought that comes into my mind is my kiss with Yoongi, but I don't know if she knows about that yet. I shake my head, and she comes closer still, causing me to back away anxiously. I don't... I don't like this. There's something wrong here, really wrong. It's too dark, too isolated, too intimate for me to be okay with this kind of closeness. She has a strange look in her crazed eyes.

"No, there's been nothing s-s-strange," I stammer. "Sunhee, umm, you should move back a little bit. I kinda like my personal space." Once I say that, she bursts out into a snicker and looks at me as though I'm a naive little thing.

"You're adorable, Tae," she whispers, her breath hot against my ear, "Are you really meaning to tell me you haven't felt some sort of... I don't know, tension between us?"

"I-I don't know w-w-what you're talking about." I stand up and to my concern, Sunhee does as well, that strange look never once faltering in her eyes. She walks closer to me as I walk back in terror until my back hits a wall. Shit.

Smiling, Sunhee places a hand on the wall, as though she's trying to trap me. We're eye to eye now. I can feel my heartbeat growing erratic, my exhalations shallow in a fear that's almost paralyzing. She runs a finger along the edge of my face, stopping at my chin, and I cringe at the contact. This isn't right, what is she doing? Yoongi could be back any moment, what's he going to think? What do I do?

"You don't need to pretend anymore," she whispers huskily, and before I can say anything else, the woman pushes her mouth onto mine while holding both my wrists so that I'm unable to move, kissing me hard and painfully. One of her hands slips up my shirt and rubs my skin, and though I writhe under her touch, wrenching my hands away from her, she shows no intention of moving away. Her other hand goes up to my hair, tugging it with far too much strength.

"It's alright, Taehyung," she says harshly against my lips. "Shh, it's all okay, baby boy. Nobody needs to know."

Now placing a hand on my mouth to muffle my attempts at screaming, Sunhee begins trailing kisses down my jawline and neck, biting skin, and I can't think anymore. I feel a panic attack coming on as my chest tightens and it feels as though there's no oxygen around anymore.

I can't do this, I can't do this, I want Jungkook, I can't do this. I need Jungkook right now.

Tears spring up in my eyes as I move my mouth and bite her hand, causing the woman to yelp out in pain. With both hands now free, I scream as I shove her with every bit of strength I have, and Sunhee goes flying. Falling by the bed, the despicable model slams her head on the bedpost and she sits there in pain, the straps of her dress resting on her shoulders in a disheveled way.

"You little fuck!" she cries out, holding her head. All I can do is stare in complete and total terror, not
able to move a single muscle. My voice has stopped working. I feel so stripped down, so bare. Like any sense of dignity I may have had has just been stolen from me by this woman. All in a matter of minutes.

Footsteps grow louder in sound until my door suddenly swings open and Yoongi walks in, freezing at once upon seeing the two of us. He takes a moment to look at Sunhee sprawled on the ground, and me standing by the wall angrily with my fists clenched. The three of stand in the dimmed lighting with my music still droning on in the background, without movement. Without a single hope. But before anyone could say a word, Sunhee cries out as she gets up and hobbles over to the vineyard owner, sobbing into his shoulder.

"Babe," she cries loudly, "Babe, I don't know what happened! I just came in to check on him and before I knew it, he was touching me and attacking me. I told him no, but he wouldn't stop." Sunhee throws her arms around him and sobs harder, while Yoongi stands silently.

I...

I don't even know anymore. I don't have it in me to argue and defend myself, say that I was sleeping when she walked in, that she made the first move, that she assaulted me, that she violated me. I can't say anything. I'm too tired.

I've officially lost the battle.

"Tae?" Yoongi says with quieted rage. We make eye contact, and I pray harder than I ever have before, hoping that he could look past the lies and see the tears in my eyes to find truth. To see that I've been wronged here, I'm not the one who made this happen. Please find my innocence.

"Get out."

Those two words hit me harder than anything he's said before. And I know that any mercy, any kindness he may have held especially for me has disappeared. If I've ever had even a fraction of a soft spot in that man's heart, it's all gone now. It's done. There's nothing left for me to fight for here anymore. Everything is built on hatred now.

Run.

Grabbing my phone, I sprint out of the room in my pajamas and down the stairs. As I pass by the kitchen, my eyes catch sight of a small box resting by a bottle of champagne that sits in ice. My heart sinks lower in realization that tonight was meant to be for the proposal. And I'm the reason it didn't happen. It's my fault.

Baby boy. Nobody needs to know, she had said.

Nobody needs to know.

Slipping on some shoes, I walk out the front door and ring up the first person that comes to mind. To my inexplicable relief, he answers immediately and as soon as I hear his voice, I feel myself break down, knees buckling as I crumble straight to the ground. The boy on the other end keeps asking me what's wrong and though I try to answer, I can only cry out the words. Nothing coherent.

"J-J-Jungkook," I sob into the phone, hiccupsing as I lay on the ground. Everything hurts; every place she violated me burns intensely, and I can't breathe. The panic is suffocating me. "Kook, please. Please come get me. H-he's kicked me out." As soon as I manage to mumble the rest of the sentence
out, I hear only four words in response.

"I'm coming. Keep breathing." He hangs up the call and I let the phone fall to the side, my arms limp at my sides.

Jungkook's coming, I think to myself as I suddenly reach for my face and dig my nails into my skin in anger, still feeling her hands all over me. I've ruined everything. The proposal, their relationship, everything. I've hurt Yoongi. The one thing I wanted so badly to avoid, hurting the keeper of my heart, happened. And the keeper? He took what he held and crushed it, leaving nothing but a fine powder to be sprinkled onto the ground. The remains of my heart. The heart I'll never get back whole again.

Breathe, breathe, breathe, breathe, breathe.

Taehyung, it's time for you to breathe.

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sigh.
Jungkook's POV

Uncle Jimin holds the door open for me as I bring a hobbling — not to mention dazed — Taehyung into the house. The elder shoots me a glance of utter bewilderment, and I merely shake my head. I haven't the slightest clue about what's going on. All I know is that Yoongi kicked the brunette out of the house, but Taehyung hasn't been able to tell me why. I'd found him keeled over on the ground outside, wheezing terribly, and he hasn't been able to calm down. I haven't asked him anything, because all I'd receive would be weepy blabbering. There's no point in asking just yet.

"What happened?" he asks as I heave the two of us into the living room, letting Taehyung sit on the couch. "Is he hurt, Kook? What's wrong with him?"

"Can you get him some water first, uncle?" I ask quietly, raising my hand. "I'll answer your questions later, but let's let Tae get settled in first." He nodded and went off to the kitchen. Taking a seat on the small coffee table in front of him, I stare at the boy in front of me with my hands clasped together. Tears slide down his cheeks with no sign of stopping, his entire face is tinged a soft red, nose running despite his sniffling, hair disheveled, shirt falling off one shoulder, dirt on his black sweats. It's a painful sight, but I can't bring myself to look away.

Uncle returns with a tray holding water and a small plate of cookies, which he sets next to me on the table. "In case he wants something to eat," he softly says and I thank him with a small smile. "Do you want me around, or should I let you talk to him?"

"Well, that depends," I reply, looking over at Taehyung, "Tae, do you feel comfortable talking to me with uncle around?" Several seconds pass before the distraught boy moves his head right and left, saying no firmly. Nodding, Jimin places a hand on my back. "I think we just need a moment alone," I tell him.

"That's okay. I'll be in my room if you need me," he informs, eyes still taking in the heartbreaking mess that is Taehyung. "Hope things get better." On that note, uncle Jimin retired to his room, leaving us to sit in a heavy silence that blends in the sound of my friend's crying.
Moving off the coffee table, I sit next to Taehyung and wait patiently. "You can talk to me whenever you want." The words escape me and hang about the tension filled atmosphere, yet I know that I can't push him to tell me anything. It's all about his timing, what he feels okay with telling me. There's no point in being forceful now; it's more than obvious that the brunette is hurting beyond our imagination. "But," I say, reaching forward for the water glass, "You have to drink this."

Wordlessly, he takes the glass out of my hands and drinks it all quickly, noisily, as though his life depended on getting that one last drink of water. Wiping his mouth with his red sleeve, Taehyung gives me the glass before curling up and hugging his knees. I observe him patiently, feeling the internal aching radiate off his body language. It shouldn't, and I can't understand how, but his pain is hurting me as well.

It all happened so unexpectedly. I'd just arrived home from work and after resting for a while, I had gone off to eat my dinner. It was a small meal, but the phone call came as I was finishing up the food. I'd accepted the call to hear a gasping and hiccuping Taehyung on the other end, telling me to please come get him, that he'd been kicked out, that he needed me to come. There was nothing else to respond with other than "I'm coming." He was having a panic attack when he called, I could tell by the way he struggled to speak, so all I could do was advise him to keep breathing.

I've had panic attacks before. Back in middle school, around the height of the parental disturbances in the home, I'd gotten pretty susceptible to random episodes of panic and anxiety. Attacks would take over my entire being, normally showing up when they fought and threw things at each other, so I would run into my room and hide under my desk. I still remember how scared I'd feel every time, curled up and crying and gasping for air the same way the brunette is right now. It's like going back all those years and seeing that part of me resurface in the most agonizing way possible. God, I can hear those muffled cries all over again.

Taehyung suddenly moves, startling me as he falls straight onto my chest, his hands slowly gripping the fabric of my t-shirt. I feel him shake against me as he continues to cry, tears soaking my shirt, his open mouthed sobs going right into laundered cotton. As I slowly wrap my arms around him to give a sense of security, the brunette comes in closer, putting his arms around my neck to cling on tightly. It hurts a bit, but I don't have it in me to tell him that. He needs the comfort right now.

"Tae, it'll be okay," I say helplessly, feeling my own eyes water against my will. "You're okay now, breathe. Take deep breaths, everything is fine. You're in my home now. You're safe, I've got you."

"Sh-sh-sh," he stutters into my chest, "She h-hurt me, K-Kook." Taehyung hiccups after finishing the sentence, and a sinking sensation occurs in my stomach immediately. "I hurt him," the traumatized boy says sadly and clutches onto my shirt desperately. Rubbing his back slowly, I take a moment to gather my thoughts. I don't want to ask the wrong question right now. "Tae, was it Sunhee?" I feel him nod and before continuing, I take a deep breath for my temper's sake. "Do you want to tell me what happened? Or are you not up for that yet."

With steadier breaths, Taehyung pulls apart from me and gazes straight into my eyes. His dark brown piercing my false blue. "Promise me," he seriously says, holding out his pinky finger. "Promise me that this won't leave this room. You aren't allowed to tell anyone."

I start to lock my pinky with his, but then I remember uncle Jimin and withdraw quickly. "I have to be able to say something to uncle," I negotiate firmly, surprising the brunette. "I won't lie to him. But other than that, your secret's safe with me. Is that okay?"

He contemplates briefly and nods, holding his pinky out again. Under normal circumstances, I'd tease him for being childish, but this. He's looking for a tangible promise, a physically binding
contract to seal these words in secrecy. A search for safety. After I lock my smallest finger with his, our hands drop to our sides as Taehyung begins explaining what exactly has him in such a frazzled state of mind.

"I was in my room and all, coz Yoongi hyung told me not to come down. He planned on having a special dinner for Sunhee," the brunette explains, sniffing still, "So I ate early and went to sleep for a while, because the past few days have been pretty draining. There's been a lot of tension between us." I want to interrupt and ask about why there's tension to begin with, but I bite my eager tongue and let him continue. "I thought everything would be alright. But then Sunhee walked into my room after I'd just woken up."

My hands automatically form fists at the mention of her name, not out of anger, but out of fear regarding the direction the events are taking. I'm far too worried about being right to show any indication of rage at the moment. "She sat on my bed," Taehyung says, voice wobbly and uneven. "And we...We talked for a little bit. Yoongi hyung had left to go get something, I dunno what. But I'd offered to go downstairs with her and provide company until he came back. She said she didn't want to, and..." he trails off gently.

"And what, Tae?"

"She put her hand on my thigh," whispers Taehyung, his tone so hushed that I lean in just to hear him. "I moved it away, told her to keep to her space, but it all escalated so quickly. Before I could make sense of anything, she kept coming closer and closer and I was against a wall. Sh-she forced herself on me, doing things I didn't want her to do, and she put her hand over my mouth so that I couldn't say anything."

Rage blinds me momentarily and I suppress the urge to growl, but I remind myself that now isn't the place and time to cause a ruckus. "I tried fighting back at first, but she'd held my wrists so that I couldn't," he says with the saddest sight I've ever heard anyone emit, "Until it got to be too much. I bit her hand and pushed her away. She hit her head on the edge of the bed, but nothing happened to her...Yoongi hyung walked in around that time." Taehyung stops talking at once, reverting his gaze to his hands. Shaking once again, he cries vulnerably and I just wait.

"Wait, wait, wait. That's all there is to do."

"She spoke before I could say anything. I felt frozen, I couldn't move, couldn't even feel words forming. My mind was blank. And before anyone could say anything, she blamed me. Said...that I tried to attack her."

That awful bitch.

"And you couldn't say anything," I murmur softly. He nods, leaning back on the couch in what strikes me as defeat. "So he believed her."

"Told me to get out. I ruined his entire night, he wanted to propose to her and none of that can happen now. She acted so distraught and attacked; I had no way to defend myself, all I wanted was air," Taehyung sadly responds. "I keep thinking it's all my fault and on some level, I believe it. I shouldn't have let her in."

"No." I speak so harshly that it manages to surprise me, along with Taehyung, who glances up at me with widened eyes. "You don't dare blame yourself for this one."

"Mm," he hums, nodding slightly, "I could have stopped her. There must have been something more for me to have done. He looked so angry, and I just knew that he casted me aside at that second. No
more Taehyung in the good books, it was about hating me." A tear splashes onto his pants. "It's hard not to blame myself, I didn't even try to correct her. I just stood there. As if I was muted. But," the brunette adds, "I couldn't think straight, Kook. Everything burned, it ached, there was no air around. The way my chest had tightened in those few seconds hurt so badly that I couldn't think to form words. I was so helpless...Kook, you're shaking."

It's at this moment that I look down at myself, noticing my trembling hands. Veins stick out on my arms and hands in a newfound fury as I attempt to clench, to control myself from lashing out. From leaving the house and going over to Yoongi's to beat the living hell out of him for not giving Taehyung a chance. For not even looking at the boy, at the hurt he so clearly feels, at the injustice done to him. The idea that someone could be that blind to someone's suffering is a concept entirely unfathomable to me. Is he that insistent upon staying with Sunhee that he'd just turn his back on the person he's losing his heart to? How can he even convince himself that Taehyung could be capable of attacking another person, let alone his girlfriend. It's like he doesn't even know the brunette. Is he that cowardly?

A damn fool, that's what he's amounted to. And if I could, I'd beat him into the dirt for it.

"You can't blame yourself for this one," I repeat myself through gritted teeth. Taehyung extends his hand and places it on my own, squeezing my hand reassuringly. Think about that. A boy who has just gone through so much is giving me comfort, trying to calm me down. Yet he's the one being accused of assaulting his love's girlfriend. It's fucking pathetic. "You've done nothing wrong."

He shakes his head, the sadness unwavering in his glossy eyes. "I want to believe that, but had I not let her in or anything, had I pushed her out or even locked my door, he could have been proposing to her tonight. I ruined his chances of happiness almost by existing, and...I don't know how I feel about it."

"God, would you quit being so selfless for one fucking moment?!" I lash out at the brunette, no longer in control of the growing redness. "You're the one being wronged here, she came onto you, Taehyung, she sexually harassed you! Quit thinking about him, he didn't even try to ask you for your opinion, for anything! That coward kicked you out while you were in the middle of a damn panic attack; how can you even consider his feelings right now?" I cry out, choking back battling sobs as the words tumble out without a filter.

"Because I don't want to think about myself right now!" he shouts back with equal strength, shutting me up on the spot. "I don't want to consider the fact that just moments ago, Sunhee was kissing me, sticking her hand under my clothes, making me feel dirty and disgusting, keeping my mouth shut just so that she could get some fucking pleasure out of it!"

I don't know what to say.

"Do you think I want to rethink it all, the disgusted way Yoongi hyung looked at me when he told me to get out? Jungkook, I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think, I couldn't move, I just burned. I burned and burned and burned, her fingers felt like they were seared onto my skin, and I have no way of undoing any of it. If I spend even a moment thinking about myself and how I was wronged, I'll spend God knows how long just crying. You think I want to do that? You think I want to keep crying? Or do you think I'm going to breathe?" he asks demandingly, rendering me completely speechless. Kim Taehyung, what are you?

"I know he's a coward," Taehyung states, "I know exactly how big of a coward he is, but at least by thinking of him, I can somewhat ignore the things that happened to me. It's easier to blame myself than to admit that I'm the one who has been wronged. Blaming myself makes it sound like I can do something to fix it, saying I'm the wronged one puts it out of my control by pointing fingers at
someone so despicable, so unbelievably low that she won't even regret what she's done to me. I know it's fucked up. It's the most fucked up way to think right now, but I can't deal with anything else. This, this is how I have to cope for now."

A silence follows our outbursts, each of us fully processing the packed words of the other. After a while, Taehyung sighs and stands up. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to raise my voice, I'm just, a bit tired of everything right now." Not knowing what to say, I stare at the couch cushion he was sitting on a few seconds ago. "I hate to ask this, but can I freshen up? I didn't bring anything with me and," he says, gesturing at the streaks of grass and dirt scattered on his clothes, "I'd rather not stay dirty."

"Yeah, I'll show you to our bathroom," I monotonously respond, standing up, "I'll get you a fresh towel and pajamas. You can borrow a pair of mine, I don't mind."

"Ah," he weakly protests and holds up a hand, "Don't trouble yourself too much."

"Tae, this is my house. You're under my rules now," I tell him and to lighten the mood even a little bit, the smirk he knows so well finds its way onto my face. Just that small change shifts the mood between us, to my utmost relief. "Follow me."

I take him to my bathroom, immediately grabbing a bunch of products that were laying on the sink counter messily and dumping them in a basket. "I'll be back with everything you need. Here's the shampoo, soaps, all that good stuff." I hurry myself over to the linen closet, thankful that uncle Jimin insists on keeping a clean towel shelf, and grab a gray one before rushing over to my room to find him a suitable set of clothes. Taehyung normally wears comfy, baggy things, I remind myself while searching the drawer. My hands find a pair of loose trousers and a white t-shirt, which seems pretty good for now. It'll do.

Taking the clothing and towel, I go back to the bathroom to find Taehyung staring at himself in the mirror with a glazed over expression. "Hey," I softly call out. He turns to face me, lips curled downward in a disappointed frown. I hand him everything and watch him as he looks through it all, stifling back a small laugh as his eyes land on the underwear. The brunette glances up at me in embarrassment, his cheeks turning a bright pink.

"Umm, you don't have to let me borrow all that," he sheepishly mumbles, and I chuckle lightly.

"It's untouched, don't worry. You can have all that if you want; I'll go back to his house tomorrow to get your clothes, because there's no way I'm letting you go back there for some time. For now, you'll have to make do with my things." I avoid saying his name for obvious reasons, and I know Taehyung notices. "Anyway, go ahead and do what you need to."

"Okay." Just as he's about to close the door, Taehyung stops. "Oh, umm, I can sleep on the sofa or something. Don't overthink about any of that...I'm thankful you're letting me stay at all. So don't let me be a burden."

I laugh emptily, waving a hand to dismiss his thoughtfulness. "Shut up, Tae. For once, you stop overthinking and let someone else think about you. Now go shower; we'll figure out the rest later."

Acknowledging his defeat, Taehyung closes the bathroom door and I head over to Jimin's bedroom at once. Knocking on his open door, I stroll in to tell him the news. "Can Tae stay with us for some time?" I boldly ask.

"Why, what happened?" he inquires, already settled into bed with a book. "I mean, I have no problem with it, but where would he even stay?"
"Some bad shit went on in Yoongi hyung's house; none of it was his fault. It was just Sunhee being the lowlife she actually is," I inform him. "Hyung kicked him out, and now he's got nowhere to go. He can stay in my room, my bed's big enough."

"What exactly did Sunhee do?" Skepticism laces his tone as he poses the question.

"She violated him, if I'm gonna put it nicely." Jimin's jaw drops while he takes a moment to sputter nonsensically at the news. I feel like this shocks so many people, yet I'm not surprised at the fact that she's capable of doing something like this. You can't trust people like her, especially when they've never explicitly given you a reason to. That woman has liar engraved in the small corners of her face. It was the first thing I noticed about her.

"A-and Yoongi doesn't know? Shit, he's gonna propose to her, how can he marry someone like that? How can Sunhee even do such a thing, she's always seemed so sweet..." Jimin says, falling back on his pillow in awe. The fact that he doesn't doubt me at all pleases me to some degree. It's nice to have someone who has that much faith in you.

"I don't know, but you can't go talk to him," I respond, puzzling my uncle further. "Taehyung doesn't want us to get involved, for reasons I'm not entirely sure of. But I know we need to respect them. He doesn't want us to say anything. So you aren't allowed to."

"But Yoongi-"

"He'll figure it out. If not now, then later," I tell him simply. Yoongi's no longer on my list of concerns anymore, that man can go do whatever he wants. "Not our problem anymore. Right now, my priority is to take care of Tae."

Uncle nods in agreement, then glances at the clock. "Kook, you'd better sleep at some point. It's nearly midnight and you've got work tomorrow. So will Taehyung stay here while you're gone? He'll get so bored, I've never really spoken to him..."

Shoot, I didn't consider that. "I dunno. I'll tell him about the job, see if he wants to come along. My manager's chill, if I tell him Tae just needs a place to hang out for the next few weeks, he won't be concerned. I'll figure it out."

"Alright, I trust you. Thanks for telling me all this," he says, surprising me. I didn't expect to be thanked for keeping him in the loop about everything. "I know that might seem silly, but I appreciate you respecting and trusting me enough to say all this. I appreciate it a lot. So thank you, Jungkook."

"Ah," I reply, caught by a sudden case of shyness as I rub the back of my neck, "No problem. Goodnight, uncle."

"G'night, Kook."

Carefully closing his door, I head on over to my own room and see that Taehyung's still showering. Taking the chance to clean up, I grab the scattered clothes and empty cigarette cartons, proceeding to put them where they actually belong (rather than the floor or random surfaces). I take a pillow and dust off the bed to get rid of crumbs that may have been on the sheets since I do indulge in a midnight snack every now and then — honestly a bad habit I've formed over the years. As I finish straightening up the comforter, Taehyung steps out of my bathroom in my pajamas and the towel hanging around his neck. Steam follows him from the shower, and he definitely looks a little better albeit exhausted.

"You feeling any better now?"
He shrugs, taking the towel to dry his sopping hair. "I can still feel her on me," the brunette murmurs, giving me an idea. It's a strange idea, but Taehyung and I have that sort of friendship where I can comfortably do this without worrying about what he might think.

"Here," I say as I step forward and catch his lips in a short kiss. Pulling away at once, I walk over to the bathroom and spit into the sink, feeling Taehyung's gaze on me. I watch the saliva disappear under running water before turning the faucet off and exiting the bathroom. He still looks at me, entirely baffled. "I took some of the dirtiness off you and spat it out," I tell him seriously. "You should be cleaner now."

Taehyung blinks a couple times, trying to make sense of my nonsensical logic, and suddenly he breaks out into a small burst of laughter. Covering his mouth, the boy laughs at me, at him, at us, until the absurdity of the situation has settled in his system. I like his laugh. It's absolutely beautiful. "Why are we like this?" he asks as though we're hopeless, but with a smile. That alone comforts me somehow.

Now it's my turn to shrug. "I dunno, we're just us. This is how we are supposed to be. Would you change how we are?" I ask him, raising my eyebrows. Instantly, he shakes his head. "No. Not for anything in the world," he asserts, and as soon as those words leave him, a warm feeling consumes my body from head to toe. Huh. "So what's the plan? Where am I going to sleep?"

Pointing at my bed, I look at him. "You'll sleep there. I'll take the couch if you want me to."

"No..." Taehyung says, although with hesitation.

"Say whatever you need."

"I want..." he falters momentarily, "I want you to stay with me. I don't want to be alone right now."

"If that's what you want, then I'll do it." The brunette spares me a small smile as he finishes drying off his hair and heads back into the bathroom to place it on the hanger. Once he's about done getting ready for bed, Taehyung lingers around as if he needs permission. "Tae, don't wait for me. Get in if you're ready to sleep," I let him know, laughing internally at how timid he looks. Dude's totally out of his element here.

"Okay." He scrambles into the bed, cozying up under the sheets. It's kinda interesting, seeing him in my bed like this. But I don't dwindle on the thought and begin to get ready myself. As I'm about to take off my shirt, it strikes me that I may not be able to continue my normal nightly routine of sleeping shirtless and all.

"Umm, do you care if I sleep with my shirt on or off?" I ask the brunette suddenly, and his eyes get larger at the inquiry. He really wasn't expecting something like that.

"Do you typically sleep with it off?" I nod, feeling slightly awkward about my normalities, but to my astonishment, Taehyung nods back. "I don't care. It's your home, I'm not about to ask you to do things you're not used to. Besides, we seem to function strangely anyway when it comes to being friends, so whatever."

A strange statement, though true. Heeding his request, I go ahead and slip the shirt off, tossing it on a chair before I slip under the sheets besides the drowsy brunette. "Can you sleep with the lights off?" I whisper while reaching for the bedside lamp. He nods sleepily, and I turn off the lights, letting the moonbeams become the brightest glow in the room. As I settle in, I turn to face Taehyung, who quickly comes closer and cuddles into my bare chest. Resting his arm over my body, the boy sighs.
Oddly enough, I don't mind this. Rather than protesting, I hold him as well, bringing him in more. I feel like I can protect him better this way.

We lay quietly for a while, gradually drifting off to sleep, until uncle Jimin's reminder pops into my head. "Oh! Tae," I whisper urgently, to which he hums in reply. "I have work tomorrow. The whole week actually, and I work almost all day, so do you want to stay here or come with me?"

His eyes flutter open slowly. "Mmm, keep me with you for these next few days, if you don't mind," he mumbles, nuzzling his face into my chest. "I'm tired of being alone."

Nodding, I stroke his hair for a moment. "Okay. I won't let you be alone anymore." On that note, I let my head fall back on the pillow again, eyes closing at once, and sleep once again casts its spell in the room. Feeling the warmth of Taehyung in my embrace, I start to drift off for good, mind numbed to the emotional afflictions of this wretched day.

"Kook?"

"Hmm?"

"What did you mean by 'everything is a lie'?"

His question brings a smile to my lips and I rub his arm gently. "That'll be a conversation for another time. Goodnight, Tae."

Sleep peacefully.
Our faces blue

Yoongi's POV

A cold glass of lemonade sits by a stack of bills that stare me down as I contemplate whether I genuinely want to do anything productive this late afternoon. Sighing, I pick up the drink and take a few sips, feeling the refreshing citrus combat the discomfort created by the humidity of a midsummer day. It feels strange, the whole act of continuing life as though everything's normal. It feels wrong. Like living a complete and total lie.

It all snapped that evening when Taehyung said that he didn't want to like me anymore. Never had I felt so vulnerable in front of him, yet he burst out at me as though he didn't care about my feelings at all. The worst part is that I can't even blame him; if I had understood my feelings better and stopped myself from making the first move on that yacht, we would have avoided this whole mess. There wouldn't be a question of why I'm playing with his feelings to begin with. I deserved to be yelled at. Hurting him has never once been an intention of mine, but it appears as though that's all I'm capable of doing. Causing him pain.

I wanted to tell him I'd leave Sunhee in a heartbeat and be with him, because the truth of it is that he's the one I've fallen for. I can't deny it anymore, these feelings don't make sense with any other explanation. The Yoongi that stands next to him is better than any other version in existence. He's the one I want to wake up to every morning, the one I want to kiss senseless, the one I want to hold and protect. Not her. Anything I've had with Sunhee for the past few years is disappearing, slipping out of our loosening grasps. Over the course of this flying summer, my thoughts, my feelings, my desires have all made Taehyung the center of attention. That night, all I wish I could have said is that I wanted him. Instead I distanced us by saying I couldn't like him. All out of fear.

I fucked up my chance to have him as my own. He put himself out there and admitted his feelings, behaved as the brave man I can't even pretend to be. I live by cowardice, by safety. No risks, no gambling. Only what makes sense. That's what being an adult has made me. A life with Sunhee provides me with certainties of having a good and successful life, a life without controversy or scandals. People don't give me strange looks when I introduce Sunhee as my partner, and they wouldn't if I did the same with Taehyung. They're too polite for that.

But the second we turn our backs, the gossip will leak out and poison the air, poison the beauty of us. It becomes all about how a man of my age is dating a teenage boy, the son of his best friend at that. I might as well give the backbiters a giant gift-wrapped box and tell them to tear it to pieces,
because that's all they're good for anyway. Ruining things. It becomes a matter of protecting an image, that's all it is. How can I be expected to leave this box I've settled into and reach for a risk like the enigmatic Kim Taehyung?

So through a series of lies, one greater than the other, I've convinced myself to marry Sunhee, figuring that once I tie myself to her for good, it'll shut down anything I could have had with the brunette anyway. I started to avoid Taehyung, to minimize our interactions and to let him forget about me. He doesn't want to like me anyway, so it felt like the best thing to do. And for once, the idea gave me such hope of a better, less turbulent time that I found myself growing fond of it. Being Sunhee's husband won't be bad; I loved her once. With time, I can probably find that love again. It's just a matter of time.

I was ready to go through with it all, too. The ring has been purchased, the dinner made, all I needed on the big night were candles. Turned out that I'd used up the ones I normally kept in the drawer. So once Sunhee had arrived, I told her to wait and that I'd be back soon. Not once did I consider that I'd be coming home to see her hurt by none other than the brunette himself. I think any hold I had on sanity left me the moment I walked into his room to find my future wife on the floor in pain.

Without a second thought, I'd kicked Taehyung out. It didn't feel right then. It doesn't feel right now. A sense of balance has been thrown off horribly by the brunette's absence, and no matter how hard I think about it, I cannot wrap my head around Sunhee's words. My first thoughts upon walking into that situation was that maybe that was his revenge. He hurt Sunhee out of anger meant for me, since I rejected his feelings. But I saw the look on his face, the boy was frozen and dare I say, terrified. It doesn't add up at all, even as I sit and recall everything at this very moment. Taehyung isn't the type who can hurt someone like that; I just can't bring myself to believe that he could be capable of something so awful. But then he didn't say a word in his defense, he just ran out. It gives me no other option to turn to, raising the worst question: Who is the real victim?

My thoughts are interrupted with the loud ringing of the doorbell, causing me to flinch since I didn't anticipate having any visitors today. Placing the lemonade by the untouched stack of bills, I rise from the chair and head down to open the door. To my surprise, Jimin and Jungkook stand in the doorway, each wearing drastically different expressions. Jimin appears serious and solemn, whereas his nephew glances as me as if he wants to stomp me into the ground. I can only assume it has to do with me kicking Taehyung out; I bet he's been staying with them for the past handful of days. Can't imagine him going anywhere else, and it's just like Jungkook to swoop in as the hero, despite being an ex-boyfriend. He'll never stop playing hero.

"Jimin!" I say, bewildered by the unexpected visit. "Come in, what's up?"

My business partner shrugs, nodding in the direction of the blue eyed younger. "Jungkook came over to get some of Taehyung's things. I suppose you know he's been over at our place since you kicked him out," he explains, tone almost too accusatory for my liking. "So I accompanied him."

"Ah," I say, my insides churning in hidden shame. "So he's alone at your place right now?" We walk over to the dining table, and Jimin takes a seat.

"No, he's sleeping in the car. He's been tired lately, we didn't want to wake him. Left the windows open and all. Plus, we figured bringing him in here would only cause more issues, so yeah." His voice sounds way too nonchalant; it's making me uncomfortable. It's as though Jimin knows something I don't and he has no intention of informing me.

"He did something pretty awful," I reply stupidly, "I was too angry to think of anything else. I'm sorry he's bothering you when he's my responsibility, but his actions were just unacceptable." At my
response, Jungkook scoffs loudly and rolls his eyes. "I'm gonna go get his stuff," he says, and I can tell he's really holding back on his anger. All of a sudden, it hits me that the both of them are unspeakably angry with me. I doubt that there's anything I can do to change their minds and have them see things my way; not even Jimin seems like he'll be swayed to understand my line of reasoning.

Jimin and I sit in silence as the dark haired boy bounds up the stairs into Taehyung's empty room, the gaps filled with tension and implied aggravation. "So have you proposed to Sunhee yet?" my business partner casually asks, fingers drumming against the wood of the dining table.

I shake my head. "I was going to, but things took a turn. I'm gonna guess you've heard about it," I carefully say, knowing to keep my eyes on Jimin for his reaction. He stiffens up slightly before nodding as though everything's fine and normal.

"Yeah, I've heard a little bit. Sucks that you didn't get to do it, though. You haven't had any other chances since?" he prompts, and I grow increasingly uncomfortable. Honestly, I'd rather talk about anything else at this point to avoid this topic.

"No, not really. So umm, how's Jungkook doing? Has he been going to the cardiologist's and all that?" I quickly pose the next question so that Jimin can't continue the marriage conversation. The mere mention of it causes nausea to bubble up, strong enough to make me want to run away and vomit somewhere. Nothing about our interaction is feeling natural, and I feel like I'm being coated in a thick layer of guilt meant to eat away at my skin.

Jimin takes a moment to answer, humming softly as he nods. "Mitral valve stenosis. That's what he has, and it's pretty bad. He's on some pain relief meds right now, but it won't be enough to keep him going. I've spoken to Dr. Choi, and through a series of tests, he's concluded that surgery's the only way to go for the boy. The damage is too severe for repair, so that leaves us with replacement." He stops to sigh; the sinking feeling in my stomach is getting worse and worse. I knew Jungkook's condition was bad, but hearing about it makes it scarier somehow. "He'll need open heart surgery, and we haven't discussed the details yet. I'm trying to see if I can gather enough money for it, because I can't sign him up for something like this without knowing that I'm financially secure enough to do it."

I had no idea they were struggling so badly. "You mean he might not be able to afford the surgery?"

"I don't know," Jimin responds heavily. "I've looked at my savings and it's not enough for him. Because he'll need to stay in the hospital for a while after the procedure is done for a proper recovery. That'll rack up a bill on its own. Kook's taken a job in the city to help me pay for it all, but he doesn't think I know that. Told me he was bored and wanted something to do, but I know better. He lies to protect that pride of his. A trait of his no good dad." A saddened smile accompanies that sentence, and the man shakes his head in disappointment. "He's working so hard to make this a reality, even went to his mother for money. But she did what she's known for. Treated him like shit and sent him away. That's all my sister's ever been good at. I just can't let him down with this, not when I see how hard he's willing to fight for his life."

"Jimin, I had no clue it was that bad...I'm so sorry, I helplessly reply, staring down at my hands in humiliation. How many bad things I've said about Jungkook and this is what he's been dealing with the whole summer. Never complained once or anything, yet I kept talking shit about his character. I'm worse than I thought he was.

"It's okay, there's nothing you can do about it. It's our problem, we tend to keep it quiet," Jimin says, brushing off my meaningless apology. "So will Taehyung be staying with us for the rest of the
summer? You'll have a lot of explaining to do to his parents if that's the case."

With a loaded sigh, I slump back into my chair. "I don't know what to do about Taehyung anymore, Jimin. Things have gotten so messed up and complicated that I'm at a loss. I keep trying to make plans, plans to get life back on track...But my feelings aren't cooperating."

"What are your feelings, Yoongi?" Jimin asks directly. I can feel his gaze creating holes into my very existence, and my humiliation only amplifies. I don't think I've felt self-hatred this strongly in a long while.

"I..." I struggle to get the words out and pick at skin on my palms to keep myself from meeting Jimin's eyes. "I- I like Taehyung."

"Ah, so it's true," says my business partner, and he sounds so calm about it all that my head shoots up to make eye contact with him. "Jungkook told me you two like each other."

"He knows?" I ask incredulously. Leave it to that kid to figure out my feelings before I could.

"Guess so. He's very observant, you know that."

"Yeah, but I mean, not to that extent," I splutter awkwardly, feeling awfully exposed now. "He never said anything about knowing to me!"

"That's besides the point." Jimin leans forward in his chair and that serious look returns on his face. "But now I have to ask. Why're you marrying Sunhee if you like Taehyung?"

"Are you seriously asking me that? Have you thought about how fucked up the situation is, how bad it'll look once word gets out?" I angrily inquire, yet Jimin remains entirely unfazed.

"That's one thing, but I just don't get why're you're marrying her. I thought you two were a good match, but if you like Taehyung, is forcing yourself to marry her really a solution? Why don't you just break up with her?"

"I'll be alone if I do that..." I weakly reply, and somehow that manages to hit Jimin's temper.

"You idiot! What good are you doing by marrying someone you don't even love and hurting people left and right? I thought you were smart, what's this new level of fuckery you've brought yourself to?" he scolds, and I can't help but wince. Jimin's not one to raise his voice; he's the mild mannered mind, and I'm the hot-headed one. To have him yell at me is a bit frightening, I will admit.

"I can love her again! Who's to say I won't, maybe things just faded for a while, because Taehyung came into the picture. He'll leave in what, like three weeks time? Soon I'll be able to focus all my attention on the vineyard and Sunhee again, and life will go back to normal." But even as I say these words, a part of me knows that there is no going back. The old normal has vanished, faint writing on lined paper that's been erased as if it never existed to begin with.

"You know it won't go back to normal," Jimin slowly says, "You know it's changed for good. It's irreversible."

I glare at him and retort, "How do you know that?"

"The same way you do. It's written all over your face. You can't even believe the lies you tell, Yoongi. So how long do you think you can keep it up, lying to others?" he says rationally. "You have to end it with Sunhee before things get messier. Like you said, the boy's only here for three more weeks. At this point, you're just wasting time. He'll have to go back whether you like him or
not; what's the point in losing this time you two could have used to be together?"

"Why does the world seem to be so against the idea of me with Sunhee?" I grumble childishly. "I just want it all to work out."

"It's not the world being against it, it's really you trying too hard to make something happen that wasn't meant to be in the first place," the man simply answers. As I begin to reply, Jungkook walks down the stairs, his arms loaded with Taehyung's clothes and other belongings. The book I bought him is in that pile, I notice quickly. *He must have told Jungkook to bring it for him.* It stings a little to see him taking those out of his room, to know that the room meant for the brunette has been empty for days on end and will continue to be. I wish he'd come back.

"If you wanna go, uncle, I think I'm good," he says, peeking over the pile of things he's carrying. "Tae could wake up at any point, and I don't want him to get nervous or anything."

"Mm, alright," replies Jimin as he gets up from his seat. I stand up as well, following them to the door with a new batch of emotions swirling around in the pit of my stomach. God, how have we been built to withstand all these feelings without dying? I'll never understand. "Yoongi," Jimin says suddenly in the middle of slipping on his shoes, "Take some time to reconsider what I've said, okay? Reevaluate this whole thing you've got going on with Sunhee. For your own good, Yoongi. She might not be what you think she is after all."

"I will, but I really don't see a need to," I tell him stubbornly. I swear one of them will punch me if I keep talking, but like I said, I'm pretty easily angered. "I've thought it all out, and yeah, things aren't exactly going according to plan. But it'll work out for Sunhee and me, we just need to give it some time."

Jungkook laughs, his voice loud and empty. "Kook, you look like you've got something to say," I growl at the kid, getting a bit too fed up with their meddling. For once, I'd like to make a decision on my own and not be told of the thousands of ways I'm wrong. It's exhausting. Makes me wonder why I bother.

"Yeah," he shoots back, looking half amused and half infuriated. "Wake up and stop being a whole headass." My jaw drops as Jungkook stomps off to the car, cursing under his breath. Jimin stifles a laugh, and I glance over at him with absolutely nothing left to say.

"Now, I don't exactly know what that means," he says sincerely, pointing at Jungkook, "But I do know that I agree with him. See you later, Yoongi. Hopefully you have some time to think about everything." He pauses, pondering over one last thought while I stand in the doorway quietly. "She's no good for you."

I watch the uncle and nephew stroll off into their car, the one where Taehyung sleeps peacefully, and Jimin's last piece of advice somehow strikes a chord in my heart, resonating deeply and without limitation. It spreads over my entire being, echoing throughout my mind as I repeat his words under my breath.

"She's no good for me."
thirty five

There's a heart stain on the carpet

Jungkook's POV

Staring into oblivion — or more accurately, a red wall decorated with records — I lean against the counter and wait for someone to come up with a purchase. It's been a pretty long day; the store's seen a decent flow of people coming in and out, but things always tend to slow down around the later hours. Usually I take the time to go around and fix anything that needs rearranging, but I've already done that this time round. So I'm essentially bored out of my mind.

Taehyung peeks up at me from the couch that rests near the center of the store; I think my manager intended for the store to be a comfy place to hang out in addition to being a record store, and that definitely worked out to my favor. He was eager to have Taehyung accompany me, because that meant he found someone new to talk to. The guy's pretty sociable, and he chats with anyone and everyone when he finds a free moment to. I like that about him. Makes the place easier to be in and it creates a pretty great working environment. I've had managers in the past who seemed to get off on treating the workers like trash. At the time I didn't have much choice other than to continue working; I needed the money to pay for my expenditures. So I quietly endured while people around me quit left and right.

Anyway, so the brunette glances up from his book — yes, the same book Yoongi gave him — and grins at me as though he's trying to say 'hang in there, you're almost done.' I can't stop myself from smiling back and shrugging. At least he's been around these past few days to keep me company. I've enjoyed it far more than I thought I would, and it concerns me. If I let myself get too dependent on his presence, it'll hurt that much more when it comes time for Taehyung to go home. There's no room left in my life for extra pain, I have to remind myself every time I look at that smile on his face. There's simply no room.

Scanning the nearly empty store, I stroll over to Taehyung and take a seat next to him, knowing the manager won't say anything. "Don't you get bored of that book?" I ask, pointing at the already creased paperback novel. He vigorously shakes his head, hugging the book to his chest. Precious. "How? I've never read a book that many times; the idea of it puts me to sleep."

Taehyung spares a small smile as he glances down at the page he's on. "This isn't just any book. This book is all I have left of him," says the boy, and his voice holds a shade of sadness I'm unfamiliar with. I've yet to like or want anyone the way he likes Yoongi, which makes some of his emotions somewhat inaccessible for me. As much as I'd like to relate and empathize with my friend, there are areas where I can't, no matter how hard I push myself.
"Jungkook?" the brunette says and snaps me out of my train of thought. We make eye contact for a second before Taehyung comes closer to put his head on my shoulder and plays with the buttons on my denim jacket. I want to remind him we're outside, at my workplace...but I don't have it in me to. Call it a soft spot. "I miss him," he adds with a sigh, and the simplicity in how he expresses his pining causes my chest to hurt. I hate seeing him feel like this; he deserves better than this. I don't know how long Yoongi will keep him waiting. Time is becoming their enemy now, and they aren't doing anything to fight it. It bothers me deeply.

"I know, Tae. I'm sorry." I glance at the clock, noting that there's about half an hour left till the shop closes. "Hey, you wanna grab food after this? My treat," I warmly offer, poking his cheek. He sits up and just by the look on his face, I can tell he's going to protest to me paying for the meal. "Shut up, I'm hungry and we're getting food."

His expression quickly transforms into a pout and he furrows his brows in a soft anger, eliciting a chuckle on my end. "Why'd you bother asking if you're just gonna tell me to shut up?" Taehyung asks, arms crossed as he leans back on the couch. It's cute when he pretends to be mad, I'm not gonna lie. "But yeah, alright. We'll go grab food."

To tease him even more, I reach over and mess up his hair, laughing as he angrily swats my hand away to begin fixing each strand again. At that moment, my eye falls on the person heading up to the counter, and quickly head up there without another word. Sliding behind the cash register, I murmur a greeting as I take the record from the customer's hand and scan it. As I start to slip the purchase into a bag, the title catches my attention. Classical music. A choice that lacks in popularity, normally sitting on the shelves collecting dust, but hidden gems nevertheless.

Smirking, I put the record in the bag. "You've got good taste," I say to the customer, choosing that moment to really look at them as I hand the bag over. My blue eyes suddenly lock with a pair of stunningly clear, hazel eyes and I feel my vocabulary flying out the window. What in God's name. The woman smiles kindly, her teeth straight and practically flawless, and she removes the bag from my hand. She has a small mole by her upper lip, which somehow manages to enhance her radiance. There's no way she's Korean, everything about her signals foreign in the most enticing way imaginable. My throat has gone completely dry, my ability to form proper sentences disintegrating into sparkling dust.

"Thank you," she speaks softly, the smile unwavering on her lipstick coated mouth. "It's a gift for a friend." Not Korean, but she speaks effortlessly, bringing an unanticipated softness to the language. Every word to slip past those pink lips sound so much more meaningful when her voice is the one to carry them. I can't understand. Her eyes flit down for a second, and though I didn't think it possible, the smile widens until it reaches her beautiful eyes. "Have a good evening, Jungkook." She bothered to read my name tag. I haven't had a customer do that here before. They're respectful, but not curious.

Taking her bag, the woman walks away from the counter and heads out the store. Instinct tells me to yell out and stop her, to get a name, another sentence, another word, anything. Not to let her leave. But my body stands frozen, eyes fixated on her as she gently makes her way outside. She's dressed in a long sleeved, ankle length beige dress that hangs on her slim and tall frame loosely, yet somehow perfect. White leggings peek out towards the bottom of the dress, paired with beige flats. Everything matches with the fading beige, almost faint purple scarf that's wrapped around her face, covering her hair up completely. No jewelry, nothing. Complicated simplicity. A beauty beyond words.

"Hey, you're gonna fall off the counter if you lean over any further," Taehyung calls out, yanking me out of my trance. The woman overhears and covers her mouth in a gentle laugh as she pushes the
door open, soon out of sight but far from out of mind. I can feel my cheeks overheating to an awfully bright shade of red, the one that pops up only when I'm embarrassed. Sauntering over, the brunette stands in front of me and smirks happily. "Would you look at that? Struck by Cupid's fateful arrow," he says smugly, making me blush even harder.

"Shut up," I mutter, pushing my hair out of my eyes and taking a few deep breaths. "That was nothing."

"You kidding me? Your eyes would have popped out of your eyes and rolled around her feet if you let them," he retorts, an infuriatingly arrogant grin plastered on his face. Guess this is what it feels like to be my friend. "I mean, you almost drooled."

"Would you quit it, I didn't drool!" I snap at him, making the brunette instantly burst out into a fit of laughter. Honestly, this is what I get for all those times I teased him about Yoongi. I can't even expect him to stop; it's rightfully deserved. But as upset as I want to be, I can't bring myself to stop picturing that woman. She knows my name, and instead of asking for hers, I let her leave. I don't even know if I'll get to see her again. Ugh.

"I thought you were the smoothest guy in the world," Taehyung seriously says before breaking out in a devilish grin again, "But now I've really seen the evidence. You're no better than I am!"

"She's remarkable," I reply in awe, still breathless from the thirty second interaction. This feeling. It's something like magic, but I know that's not doing it justice. It's better than magic, better than any word I can pull out. I don't know. It's exceptional.

Taehyung gets ready to continue his teasing when my manager (thankfully) interrupts him. "Kook, you're free to go. We're just about done here and it's been a long day. You've worked hard!" the man says with a boisterous laugh, giving me a thumbs up. He's such a good guy; I can't believe I got lucky enough to become one of his employees.

Bowing at once, I thank him and glance at Taehyung. "Time for food," I tell him, grabbing my belongings from underneath the counter. "Don't forget your book."

"Yessir."

~*~

Sliding into the booth that Taehyung had reserved for us, I place the tray carrying a burger and fries in front of him. "Food's here!" I cheerfully announce, taking my seat across from him. He takes one look at the contents and then back up at me as if I did something wrong. I shrug innocently, making him huff angrily. Ah, the guy's too easy.

"There's only one burger," he deadpans, though his tone hints at irritation. Too bad I'm not easily affected by that sort of thing. "You said you were hungry."

I shrug again, unable to stop the smile that tugs at the corners of my lips. "I had to say that so you'd come here and let me buy you food. But that's my favorite burger, and I wanted you to try it."

He scoffs, falling back on the seat and crossing his arms again. Except I think he might actually be upset this time. Understandable; he can't forgive me for everything. "How do you expect me to eat your favorite burger in front of you if you don't have one?" Taehyung asks in annoyance.

"I don't need that burger, I've had it lots of times. I didn't feel the need to buy one for myself." I can see the gears working away in Taehyung's mind until my motives click. His annoyed expression rapidly turns into one holding more disappointment and sadness.
"You're trying to save the money," he says softly, and I nod lazily. I mean, I am. There's no reason for me to blow the money I'm working hard for on burgers for myself; Jimin keeps plenty of food in the house, and I can always have a few fries. It doesn't bother me. All I want is for Taehyung to try my favorite burger, there doesn't need to be anything complicated about that.

Unexpectedly, the brunette gets up and leaves the booth, leaving me by myself for a minute or so. I pop a couple of fries into my mouth as I wait for him to return. "This is how we'll do it," Taehyung's deep voice says upon his arrival, and I look up to see him holding a plastic knife. "We'll each get half," he asserts stubbornly.

Groaning, I slump back as Taehyung slides back into his seat and begins cutting up the burger at once. "Why can't you let me do things my way?" I ask him helplessly, watching him pick up half the meal and holding it out to me.

"Your way is stupid. I don't want to eat alone," he replies, keeping the burger in front of my face. Accepting defeat with an eye roll, I take the food and bite into it, seeing Taehyung's face light up in satisfaction. This boy. He fixes his glasses before proceeding to eat, and just as he's about to take the first bite, he gasps audibly. "Oh!"

"What is it?" I mutter, chewing the food slowly. Damn, I won't admit it to him, but I really was starving and the burger is hitting the spot.

"Everything is a lie," Taehyung says as he stares at me, and as soon as I shake my head to turn away the topic, he nods with just as much enthusiasm. "Yes, you're gonna explain to me what the hell all that was about! I've waited too long for an answer, and dammit, I deserve an explanation."

"Later," I reply, shoving more fries into an already full mouth.

"I won't eat if you don't tell me," Taehyung threatens and pushes the tray towards me in defiance. This kid's too fucking hard to feed, I swear to God. Can't anyone let me do something nice and go along with it? "It's been long enough."

"Fine," I agree quickly, really just wanting him to eat his damn dinner, "Only if you tell me what happened after I left that night." His expression falters in anger briefly, but he recollects himself and nods. Guess he really wants to know.

"I'll do whatever," Taehyung quietly agrees, "Just tell me the truth."

Putting the burger down, I wipe my hands with a napkin and begin explaining, "Okay, so that night, I basically figured that Yoongi really does like you, since he kissed you. But there was a problem besides him dating Sunhee. Us. One of the reasons he got extra guilty about all that has to do with the fact that he thought we were a couple. And yeah, I initiated that whole thing to make him jealous, but it felt like a good time to end that part of the story. It didn't feel like you two could go forward if we kept pretending."

"Okay. But why didn't you just tell me that instead of all that stuff about your heart?" Taehyung asks calmly.

Laughing weakly, I shake my head. "I told you all that to make you cry. I didn't know what else could make you visibly upset enough so that our breakup could be believable. So I told you all that about my conditions and whatever in order to convince Yoongi hyung that we did actually break up and that you were heartbroken over it."

Taehyung sighs heavily at how aloof I'm being about all this. "Then is that why you told me to play
along? You wanted me to play into this little scheme of yours so that Yoongi would buy our breakup?"

"Bingo," I affirmatively reply before reaching for another fry. "Shit, I shoulda bought a drink or something."

"But then..." the brunette pauses for a moment. "The whole 'everything is a lie' bit. Was everything really a lie? Do you really not have a heart condition, why did you word it like that? After that message, I had no idea what to think about you, whether your heart's actually failing or not. I was so confused."

"Ahh, that. I really wasn't ready for you to know about my health issues at that point, and that wasn't how I wanted you to know. In fact, I'd hoped we could have avoided that conversation altogether, that I'd have it all taken care of without you noticing before you left. But like I said, I couldn't think of anything else that could make you sad enough, so I had to speed up the timing and tell you that I have mitral valve stenosis. But I figured, if I said everything was a lie, you'd think that was a lie and then I'd be back to where I wanted. You wouldn't know coz you'd think I lied to you about all that, and I could get my heart stuff done on my own without you knowing."

Taehyung just stares at me, not a single word left for him to utter. "It's kinda messed up, but I dunno. That's just how I operate."

"So you do actually have that disease," he slowly asks, observing me as I nod, "And I take it that Yoongi hyung actually does know about it?"

"Y-you," Taehyung stammers, "You manipulated everyone."

"I did what I had to do."

"Jungkook, that didn't have to be the way to go about it at all," he angrily mutters, but I disagree immediately.

"It's like the game 'Two Truths and a Lie' except with a spin," I reply cheerfully, but I know that my casual approach to the subject is only agitating Taehyung further. "We had two lies and a truth at that moment. Except nobody knew what the actual truth was, because everything seemed like a lie. It's like holding a rose and not being able to distinguish the flower itself from the thorns covering it."

"So then...Is that why you're working? For the surgery and all that, you're really suffering from all these things?" the brunette suddenly asks. I nod slightly. "Has your doctor found any other solutions, anything cheaper?"

"Nah. Open heart surgery is the only way to go for me. Money's an issue so I'm pitching in before I have to leave uncle's. I even considered selling my car, but that's a literal trash heap so that won't make any money at all. It'd be a greater loss than gain. Once I'm gone, it'll be too difficult to get anything done, and the condition's just gonna get worse." Pausing, I go ahead and continue devouring the burger, while Taehyung sits with his food untouched. "I don't want to die," I murmur out of the blue, feeling the weight of the words fall on my shoulders.

"I don't want you to die either," he says to me. "You deserve another chance."

"I know," I concur stiffly. "And that's why I'm trying to get it. Nobody's gonna hand me my second chance. I'll go down fighting if I need to." I look up at the brunette, our eyes locking at once. "It feels
weird being able to talk to you about all this. I didn't want to rely on you more than I already do. You'll have to leave and forget about all this even if you don't mean to."

He smiles at my honesty, baffling me. I can't understand what I said could be worth smiling about. "Rely on me all you want. Even if I leave this place with little chance of coming back, I'm not letting you go. Not that easily. You're one of a kind, Kook, and I'd be a damn fool to forget about you."

Those words resonate within me and I hold back the teary smile it compels. "Alright. Now tell me what happened that night with you and that idiot."

Taehyung's face darkens and he glances down at his food. "It wasn't a lot. Nothing went as smoothly as you'd wanted. He came in and tried to comfort me, telling me how great I am and how he knew you would do something like this. Why does he have such a bad impression of you anyway?"

Smirking, I answer, "I have this image that I maintain in front of other people and to Yoongi, it's like I'm a careless fuckboy who just drinks and parties. Man, if only he knew half of the person he's dating. So he's never really taken a liking to me based on what he knows, and I never bothered to correct him. If a person wants to judge me like that, so be it. I won't ever willingly go and fix their impression, they have to want the truth and come to me for that kind of effort."

"Hmm. Fair enough. So anyway, he's saying all that and it was doing something fierce to my feelings, pushing me to the point where I blurted out that I wanted to kiss him."

"Damn, attaboy!" I cheer on, only to be shushed by the brunette in a matter of seconds. "Attaboy," I whisper, giggling.

"He said he wanted to kiss me, but that he couldn't. He didn't want to cheat on Sunhee again, and I know he was trying to do something good, but it all made me so angry. Like, why couldn't he have had that thought when we were on the yacht? Why didn't he stop then? Was it the wine or what? I just felt the unfairness of it all, and I blew up. Told him I like him and I want to love him someday, but at the same time, none of this felt fair to me. That I'm tired of wasting my energy towards something that would just keep hurting me, and that I don't want to like him anymore."

"That's a lot..."

"Mhm. But I dunno, it had to be said. We stopped talking after that," Taehyung confesses, "And things got cold. That's basically it."

"So then, can I ask you something?" I wait patiently as he debates whether he wants to answer.

"Alright."

"Have you let go of him? I mean, have you given up on him?" I phrase the question carefully, watching his every move. To my surprise, Taehyung smiles a bit, though it's got nothing of joy in it. Entirely sorrow based.

"Giving up on someone is kinda harsh," he says, "It's like not having faith in them to do the right thing, and that stings. I like to think I know him better than that, I know he cares about me. Otherwise why would he bother feeling so emotionally conflicted? He even apologized to me for fucking things up all the time; he knows what he's doing and it bothers him. I don't think I've given up on him; I get that he's in a tough position, believe me. It must be hard on him. I wanted to let go, to give up, but I can't make myself. The more I try, the more obvious it becomes that I can't stand not hearing his voice. Not seeing his smile...Not having him acknowledge me. It eats me up inside until there's nothing but this void. It's insane to feel this strongly about someone, but I can't stop myself."


It's all out of my hands."

A silence follows his explicit truth and we sit under the flickering lights of the fast food joint. The sun has gone into hiding and it's pitch black outside. "It may work out," I say to him, knowing that it won't be that helpful of a claim, but whatever.

"I dunno. Guess I'll hope like the idiot I am." Taehyung glances at me, that mischievous smirk swiftly returning as he grabs a handful of fries. "Now should we talk about that moment you had in the store, coz I'm game for that."

"Shut the fuck up."
thirty six

I left it, I left it with you

Taehyung's POV

I sense Kook dozing off as the TV screen flickers, the actors soon replaced with a stream of film credits. The closing song softly blares through the speakers as I stretch my arms out and nudge the sleeping beauty next to me. Poking his cheek lightly, I slowly stand up to begin folding the blankets, and as I remove the blanket from Jungkook's body, the boy hums softly, only stirring to lay on a different side.

"Kook," I call out quietly, nudging his arm again. No movement other than the soft rise and falls of his chest, his pretty mouth agape, head lolled back on the couch. He seems so peaceful right now, I almost don't want to wake him up. But he hasn't taken his meds or anything, so letting him continue drifting through would be worse. The thing is, peaceful sleep isn't always guaranteed in Jungkook's schedule — every now and then, his breathing transforms into something awful, breaking my own slumber. Shortened, frightened, desperately he takes each breath as if his life could slip from him any second on those nights. His face scrunches up, yet he doesn't wake up, just continues his fight to sleep with those erratic exhalations. It's painful to see, which makes me wonder exactly how much pain he's feeling.

"Hey," I try again, slightly pushing his arm this time round, "Kook, you need to wake up. Don't sleep here, just get ready for bed."

"Mmm," he hums again and moves my hand away. Sighing, I plop back down next to my worn out friend and stare up at the ceiling, wondering what force on this planet would be enough to move this human bulldozer to his bed. Turning to face him, I lean over and blow into his ear softly with full knowledge that I could get slapped. Jungkook has a couple of pet peeves, a discovery I've made while staying with him, and this is one of them. He's not one for people talking or doing anything right by his ears, it bothers him. With this knowledge in mind, I attempt to wake the dark haired sloth up and just as expected, he flails with an irritated expression, his hand eventually smacking me right in the face. The things we do for friends.

Rubbing my nose gingerly and huffing, I reach my last resort. Quickly grabbing the nearest pillow, I smack the boy, finally getting more of a reaction out of him. Jungkook immediately sits up with his eyes half open, hair tousled, and confusion painting his face; it takes a lot of effort not to laugh at how childish he looks.

"Mm, what did you do that for?" he mumbles before yawning obnoxiously. "I was sleeping..."
"Yeah, that's the issue," I retort and get up from the sofa again. "You have things you need to do before going to bed. Have you taken your meds?" At the mention of his nightly medication, Jungkook gasps, confirming my suspicion. "Thought so. Get up and do what you gotta do, then we'll head for the bed."

I have to admit, giving Jungkook instructions feels rather strange. It's almost as though we've switched roles somehow, because since I've met him, all I've done is basically follow his advice or whatever. He's generally been the more thoughtful one out of the two of us, so to be the one hovering over him and scolding him for not taking more care of himself is interesting. Definitely not a role I would have anticipated at any point this summer. Then again, I haven't really anticipated anything that happened so far during this vacation, so what do I know?

Shutting off the TV, he heads off to his room while I stay behind to get rid of our trash. After a pretty long and uneventful day at work, the two of us wanted to spend a quiet evening together, ultimately deciding on ordering Chinese takeout on the way back to Kook's place and renting a movie. Food wasn't the toughest part of the evening, but I will admit that it was a battle to agree on a film together. I didn't think our tastes in movies would be so drastically different. Jungkook only seems to like cult classics, foreign films, and film noir, whereas I'm more into comedies, historical films, and sci-fi stuff. It's honestly a fascinating clash in taste. Eventually we did find something worth watching, one that I'd say leans more towards his taste, but great nevertheless: Valley of the Dolls. The main reason I agreed is because I read a translation of the book in high school at some point and loved it enough to buy my own copy. Thankfully, the movie was no exception. Even Jungkook agreed that it was a good choice for the night.

As I tossed out the last empty carton, I scan the living room again and nod to myself, satisfied with the cleaning. With a flick of the wrist, the lights go off, my figure leaving the darkened solitude. Heading into Jungkook's room, I pass by the boy taking out his contacts. Yeah, I should have realized that his eyes aren't naturally blue, but I guess it slipped my mind. I accepted it without a second thought, frankly. He just looks so beautiful with them, though nothing compared to the way he looks without the contacts in. Never thought someone could make brown eyes appear as something extraordinary, but Jungkook and Yoongi both have taught me otherwise.

"Why don't you just wear glasses?" I ask Kook as he walks back into the room, dressed in his pajama bottoms. It's interesting how I've grown so comfortable with him being shirtless, because I know if I'd been the same Tae from early June, I would have blushed fiercely every time I laid eyes on his exposed body. I dunno what's changed.

Smiling, Jungkook shakes his head as he slips on his glasses momentarily to take his pain reliever. "The day this version of me goes, the blue eyes will, too," he murmurs as the pills leave the bottle and fall onto his palm. Downing them with a glass of water, Kook screws the bottle cap back on and turns to face me, a wistful expression behind thin, glass lenses. "It's kinda part of the whole look, I suppose. The way I present myself."

I take a seat on his bed and nod, although I don't entirely understand what he means. The now brown eyed Adonis picks up on my gap in comprehension, heading over to the bed to sit in his spot. He stares at his hands, gently tracing the lines of his palms while we sit in a safe silence.

"When I, umm, first began experiencing symptoms of the mitral stenosis," he tells me, trying his best not to let his voice come out as shaky, "obviously, I didn't know what was wrong with me. I was a second year high school student. I mean, out of nowhere I was feeling tired after doing the simplest things. Climbing one flight of stairs would leave me breathless, I'd fainted on several occasions or had random bursts of dizziness, and would have to excuse myself from fucking gym class countless times. People would make fun of me all the time for not being able to handle that sort of thing, and
since I didn't know what was happening with me, I couldn't defend myself either."

"High schoolers are assholes," I angrily assert, leaning back into my pillow with crossed arms. "I swear it's just a universal thing."

"I suppose so," Jungkook agrees. "But yeah, after being ridiculed so much and crying to myself about it, I kinda made the conscious decision that it wasn't an image I wanted to keep. I didn't want to come off as this weak kid who constantly had to skip school or took the elevator despite not being disabled or something. In my school, most of the kids who used the elevators were in wheelchairs or had crutches. Meanwhile, I came off as a perfectly healthy but lazy guy. I dunno, it made me feel inferior all the time."

"Man, I wish we had gone to high school together. I would've been with you every step of the way."

The comment gets a small grin on Jungkook's face, giving me a bit of satisfaction.

"I changed things up. Got some jobs and started to make some money. Used that money to buy decent clothing, which led to major changes in my appearance. I used the money Uncle gave me to get some prescription contacts. So old Kook kinda got pummeled into this corner of me, while this new, blue eyed and choker wearing Kook emerged with a smirk on his face. Roaming the halls with scuffed up boots and rings on his fingers, sometimes nail polish if I felt a bit adventurous. And the attitudes changed. I learned that people find me cooler when I look like I don't bother giving a damn about their opinions. It's true that I never stopped crying, but they won't know." Jungkook pauses and looks at me intensely, making me feel as though I ought to hold the comforter up to shield myself. He breaks out into a genuine smile and says, "The smirk is an accessory to those blue eyes you love so much."

"Hey, I never told you I love them," I quickly defend myself, but honestly, that's pointless. This kid's more observant than a room full of Sherlock fans (yes, I actually indulge in the show sometimes).

"You don't need to," Jungkook says as he gets under the black comforter and places his glasses on the nightstand. "It's pretty obvious. You're a fan of it. But I can't blame you, I'm another level when I wear those."

"I dunno. I like brown eyed Kook all the same, if not more," I quietly reply and bring my knee to my chest, resting my chin on it. The dark haired boy peers at me, as though my answer surprises him.

"How can you like this unpolished version of me?" he asks, and suddenly, vulnerability has entered the room and dominated the conversation. This question he's asked me...it's not just because he's curious, it's for reassurance. His posture, the way he's leaning against the headboard, his voice, the way it's almost searching for something that maybe only I can give to him. Jungkook is seeking a reason to hold onto the part of himself that's been cornered for several years, a reason to become the person he is when the contacts come off with his signature smirk, a reason to revert to the way he used to be...a reason to throw the coping facade away.

"It's not hard," I reply and, in a brief moment of unexpected boldness, lean over to hug him tightly. "The you I'm holding right now is the one who deserves to smile. Blue eyes, jewelry, great clothing...yeah, they make up a pretty great Jungkook. But even though I care about him, these past few days have shown me a timid Kook. And I can't imagine how hard that could have been for you given how reluctant and reserved I am socially, even without having gone through your struggles. So I'm glad you did. I'm glad I got to see this side of you. It makes me happy, you make me happy. Regardless of how polished or scratched up you are, I'll be happy. Coz ultimately, these flaws — as you see them — are all just a part of you. Even that heart you hate so much, I care about it. Honestly, Kook, you don't understand just how lucky I am to have you. I'm starting to have trouble remembering what life was like before you."
Leaning into the embrace, Jungkook places his head on my shoulder and sighs. We sit like that for a while, neither of us bothering to interrupt a serene quietude. That is, until the dark haired boy begins speaking again. "You know, you've changed plenty since June. I know it's only been a month, but I'm watching it happen. And it's incredibly beautiful."

"Have I?" I inquire, peeking at the top of his head. He nods against my chest, offering no further explanation. "I don't know. In some ways, yeah. I spot changes too, but I dunno about plenty."

"You were shy," Jungkook responds as he takes my hand. "You were shy and scared, afraid of feelings, afraid of people not liking you."

"I'm still terrified of all those things, Kook," I tell him jokingly. "Nothing's changed there."

"Do you think someone who's scared of feelings and people not liking them could handle the situation with Yoongi hyung the way you did?"

"I handled it like a moron, I don't know what you're going on about."

"Think about it. You stood your ground, Tae. You're not as shy as you used to be, you've gained confidence somehow and it shows. That's not something most cowards are known for doing, they're known for running away. You got fed up with Yoongi hyung's bullshit and actually bothered to tell him off about it. What's more is that you understand now that you deserve better. You think the Taehyung I met several weeks ago could've done somethin' like that? You got freaked out when I tried to smoke a damn cigarette. Literally almost had a panic attack. If I did that now, you'd just take it out of my hands and throw it away," he reasons.

"Well, we're friends now. I'm not really scared of you anymore. And who said I deserve better? I don't know what I deserve."

"You're scared of Yoongi hyung. You're terrified of that man all because you like him, and you still pointed out everything he was doing wrong. I can only imagine how much strength that took. I know your anxiety hasn't gone away, but I'm just saying. Had you initiated a confrontation on that scale back at the start of the summer, you'd be crying over it even at this point and feeling anxious or guilty about what he thinks of you. In the time that you've been with us, I haven't heard you mention him once. What does that say?"

"Nothing, he's on my mind all the time," I mutter as I also start to get under the covers. "I just don't feel like burdening anyone with the ongoing garbage that's now my life. I walk around with his book as if it's my faith. How is that being strong?" In hushed tones I add the one thing that keeps circling my mind, "I didn't even defend myself when Sunhee accused me."

A short pause follows the confession before Jungkook chuckles while reaching over to turn off the lights. "Baby steps, Taehyung. There's only so much a person can accomplish in one summer. You're taking them without even knowing." In the darkness, he moves under the comforter to face me, eyes glossy and sincere. "You know what I think, Tae?"

"What?" I whisper, the dimness in the room stealing most of the sound away from me.

"I think you're fucking beautiful." With that, Jungkook turns on his back and closes his eyes, drifting off to sleep again in only a matter of minutes. I, on the other hand, lay facing him, fixated on this angelic creation, the only one who can say things like that with a serious face and mean it with everything he's got.

Sighing (though with a smile), I close my eyes as well, feeling all my muscles relax as I lose my
It's around 3 in the morning when I hear a harsh and sputtering sound next to me. I open my eyes to see Jungkook sitting up, panting, with his hand on his chest as he heaves with each cough. *He's short of breath again.* For a moment, panic overtakes my mind and I watch my friend hurt as he doubles over, hands never once leaving his bare chest. Getting up, he begins stumbling for the doorway, which is thankfully enough for me to snap out of my frozen state. Scrambling over to him, I position myself under one of his arms so that he's leaning on me as we head over to the bathroom together.

Jungkook covers his mouth as the coughs become more rattled in sound, and to my horror, blood spatters his skin, staining his lips and dribbling down his chin. Not saying a word, I burst into the bathroom with him, watching as the boy lunges for the toilet bowl and proceeds to cough endlessly. Blood spews out and taints the porcelain dark red; the dark haired sufferer clutches onto the bowl tightly, veins popping up on his arms as he continues coughing harshly.

He can't breathe. Every inhale sounds like a last gasp, every exhalation is accompanied by smatterings of a deathly red. I've never seen it get this bad before, I had no idea. He's taking medication, why is this happening? Jungkook groans, slumping over the toilet bowl and sobbing in pain, his hands finally falling to his sides limply. Unable to handle the sight in front of me, I do the only thing that makes sense.

Running into Jimin's room, I turn the light on and call his name loudly, waking him up in a matter of seconds. "Jimin hyung, Jungkook's sick. Really sick, he can't stop coughing up blood. There's *so much* of it," I tell him in a panicked frenzy. "He can't stop."

Without another word, Jimin gets out of bed and we both rush into the bathroom to find Jungkook leaning against the bathtub, the tears flowing endlessly down his cheeks. Blood streaks his arm in his attempts to wipe his lips, and he keeps panting with no indication of stopping. Not a single word is able to slip past that blood coated mouth of his.

"Have you ever seen it get this bad before?" I ask Jimin anxiously, who shakes his head slowly, fear consuming any sleep he might have had on his face.

"He has episodes like these from time to time. They stop after a point, but that takes a while. I've seen it get bad, but this is worse than last time," he explains, voice low in a worried rumble.

I turn to look at Jungkook, who looks fragile enough to break if I so much as touch him. "Well, shouldn't we take him to the ER? Something like that, if this is worse?" To my utter astonishment, the older man just shakes his head. "Why not?"

"It'll die down by then. The nearest hospital isn't all that close to us; in that time, he won't need anything from them. I'm going to schedule an emergency appointment with Dr. Choi. He needs that surgery," states Jimin firmly. "And I'm done waiting to see if it's even a possibility for him. Someone's gotta take care of him if that bastard sister of mine won't. The boy's going to have the surgery, that's my final decision. I don't care how tough it is for me financially, nothing's worth this." We glance at Jungkook, who stares at the toilet bowl with a glazed over look in his eyes as he sniffs, still weeping in agony.

"Okay," I monotonously reply, though almost inaudible, and with a heavy sigh, Jimin trudges out of the bathroom.

"Let me know if he gets any worse, Tae," he says as he heads back into his room. "If it comes down
"Okay." I walk over and sit next to Jungkook on the bathroom floor, watching helplessly as another bout of coughs makes its way from his throat. He leans over the toilet, weaker this time round, and expels more blood, the hopeless sound of his sobs never once absent from each jerky movement.

This is what he's put up with for the past handful of years. Yet he roams around behind that damn facade of his, as though nothing can touch him. But behind hidden doors, this is what he goes through. Unrelenting pain, cries for mercy, an existence weakening with each physiological blow.

And he has the nerve to call me fucking beautiful, the nerve to convince me that I'm not a coward, when he's dealing with all this.

What a blind heart he holds.
Uncle Jimin and I enter the all too familiar cardiologist's office, taking a seat immediately upon our entrance. Words aren't exchanged between us, the silent space filled with stress, concern, hesitance, and the worst of all, fear. There's an undeniable fear hovering in the emptiness between my uncle and I, thick as it is suffocating. Uncle hasn't said much since my episode last night, nor do I remember an awful lot about it. All I know is that I woke up this morning with a strange pain in my chest and a rather distraught Taehyung. Ah, Taehyung.

His eyes were bloodshot, hair disheveled, nose runny. I knew as soon I'd looked at him that he hadn't been able to go back to sleep after my coughing fit. In fact, it appeared as though he stayed up the whole night sobbing—that's what really got me. That brown haired boy feels so much for me, emotions my own flesh and blood can't get themselves to sense. On some level it's remarkable, how much and how deeply Taehyung feels everything. But I felt awful for hurting him, for making him worry enough to keep him up all night. When my uncle came and told me that he'd made an emergency appointment with Dr. Choi, I felt more relief for my friend than I did for myself. What's the point of feeling relieved on my behalf, it's not like anything's going to change through the course of one measly appointment. Hope isn't that kind.

The clock ticks as we wait for the doctor to come in, my fingers anxiously tapping against the arms of the chair, rings clinking on the metal. Thankfully we aren't kept waiting for too long; the door opens a couple minutes later and in walks Dr. Choi with my patient folder and his typical solemn expression mismatched with his optimistic tone.

"Mr. Park, Jungkook, what brings you in today?" he asks while taking a seat, opening the folder and skimming the contents quickly to update himself on any new information. "Are the painkillers not working?"

Uncle Jimin shakes his head and leans forward in his chair, urgency outlining his posture. "Jungkook's had times when he coughs up blood, and I know that's part of the condition, but last night was startling to the point where I didn't feel like I had any other choice other than to bring him to you."
"Did something out of the ordinary occur? Anything abnormal?" Hah, as if coughing up blood isn't abnormal on its own. That's real funny. But Dr. Choi peers at us through his glasses, waiting for an answer and I sigh softly, slumping back in my seat. I'm just too tired for all this.

"The amount of blood he coughed up was alarming, it's never been this bad," uncle Jimin elaborates. "I'd like for him to get the surgery as soon as possible." At this announcement, my head snaps up, going slack jawed at how determined he sounds. "Money's not my priority, we have to do what we can for him."

Exhaling heavily, Dr. Choi nods understandingly. I'm still gaping like an idiot, but there's no way for me to process this information fast enough. "I see," the doctor says, "Well, excellent. So then would you like to talk about everything that needs to be done in order for the procedure to take place?"

"Yes, if there's consent forms to be signed, we'll go ahead and do all that here, talk details of the surgery itself, everything that can be done here to increase efficiency, we'll do," says my uncle, his tone strictly down to business. "I cannot afford to waste any more of Jungkook's time."

"Alright, then the first thing I have to tell you is that this won't be any sort of repair surgery," Dr. Choi says, "It'll be a replacement. From what we've seen of his heart, it's far beyond any sort of repair. Now for valve replacement, there's a couple routes you can take." He pauses to reach into one of his drawers and after going through it for a few seconds, pulls out a few pamphlets and places them in front of us. We each take one, mine being titled 'Mechanical Valve Replacement' and uncle Jimin's being 'Biological Valve Replacement.' Creative stuff.

"What would you recommend, what do each accomplish?" uncle asks while briefly scanning the contents of his pamphlet.

"Essentially, they both achieve the same thing: replacement of the mitral valve. Now there's distinct differences between the two, each comes with their own pros and cons so let's talk about biological first. Biological replacement requires using tissue from either an animal or a human heart donor. These are known as xenografts and allografts, respectively. Jungkook's own heart tissue can be used, though I wouldn't really recommend that route if you do decide on biological. A positive of this treatment is that Jungkook here wouldn't have to take blood thinners for the rest of his life, something mechanical needs. That being said, biological replacements can require multiple surgeries, because of tissue degradation. They just aren't as strong and durable. If tissue wears out quickly, which it does in children and young people in general, he may find himself in here again needing another operation. That's why it's more common for the elderly really, they are able to sustain it for a longer period of time," explains Dr. Choi.

"Okay, and for mechanical?" my uncle asks. I should ask questions, but for now, I'd rather just listen to everything that needs to be said before adding any of my own concerns or input.

"Mechanical, like I said, will require Jungkook to be on blood thinners for the rest of his life, drugs like heparin or warfarin. It's unfortunate, but that's the most that needs to be done to prevent any blood clotting that could build up and become a bigger threat to him in the future. These replacements last far longer than biological ones, the valves typically being made of metal, carbon, or plastic. If you want my professional opinion, I would suggest this route for Jungkook. It'll keep him out of the hospital once he recovers and it gives him his best chance. Even if you asked me as a relative of his, I'd say this procedure would be best for him."

"Okay, and what should we expect? In terms of the procedure itself, how should we go about all of this?" the worried man inquires as I sit quietly and continue listening.

"Would you want me to go through how the procedure will go first or what you ought to do before
that?" Dr. Choi asks in turn, and I'm starting to find this conversation rather entertaining to watch just because he's calm and it seems like if you so much as poke my uncle, he's gonna shoot through the ceiling. He's so tense...but I sincerely appreciate it. He's worried about me, which is a lot more than I can ask for from some people.

"Before that, I'd like it all in order," uncle Jimin clarifies. "Please."

"Alright, so first off is costs. You need to figure out how much your healthcare plan is willing to cover for the operation and how much will have to come from your own pocket. If you've done that already, then I can draw up a list of costs for you that range from the procedure itself to recovery time in the hospital and you can look over that. If you don't have insurance, you're looking at around 80,000 to 120,000 roughly, and if we're talking with insurance, then it can be about 14,000 to 20,000."

Holy shit, I think I lost 10 years of my life just listening to the price of these operations. Pretty sure uncle Jimin's face just got like three shades lighter. He's like a couple skin tones away from being transparent.

"Once that bit is taken care of, we can talk scheduling a date for the surgery itself."

"Can we go ahead and do that now?" uncle Jimin asks unexpectedly. "I'm not too concerned about costs, I'd like to have the date secured before I walk out of here today."

"Whoa, uncle," I interrupt at once, knowing that there's no way I can keep quiet now. "What do you mean costs aren't a concern, you heard the numbers he just said, right? We don't have enough to pay for this, I don't under-"

"Don't worry about this, Jungkook. I've got options that I've considered. It'll be okay," he reassures, though I'm hardly convinced. "So when is the soonest we can get him in?"

Even Dr. Choi seems to be a bit appalled at how quickly my uncle is moving through everything; it feels like a race against time. "Umm, well I'll have to go outside and talk to the staff about it. Would you like me to do that? I can come back with a date for you."

"Yes, if you don't mind. That would be good."

So Dr. Choi leaves his office in search of a surgery date, leaving me with a stone faced uncle.

"Uncle, how can you be so headstrong about this? What do you even mean you have options, what options do you have?" I hiss at him, irritated with how reckless he's being about this whole thing.

"That's my business, not yours," he replies in an attempt to shut me up, but I know better than that.

"If it's anyone's business, it's mine! I can't have you pay so much for a surgery, that's terrible. I'm being a burden to you, I'm not even your own kid and-"

"You're as good as mine," uncle Jimin says firmly. "I don't want to hear anything else about this. The financial aspect is my headache, you just worry about getting the surgery." The boldness in his tone is a clear sign that I ought to drop the matter, which I unwillingly do. We sit in quiet for a little over 10 minutes before the cardiologist comes strolling in again.

"Okay, so the soonest we can fit you in is early next month," he says, and I can sense the frustration on my uncle's face at once. "But we will keep you on a waiting list, and if there's an availability any time sooner, we will call you and have you come in early to get it out of the way. That happens often, so I wouldn't worry about having to wait till the start of August to get the operation done. It'll happen before that if experience has taught me anything."
"Thank you, Dr. Choi. What's next in terms of topics to be discussed?" asks uncle Jimin.

"I think Jungkook should slowly wean off the painkillers so that we can get the drugs out of his system in case his surgery ends up being earlier than expected. I'd like to get him in here later on this week for an EKG to make sure we're completely updated on his heart's recent conditions, for the surgeon's sake. Absolutely no smoking from this point onwards, it can lead to complications in the operating room and we need to avoid that at all costs. You will need to shower the night before the surgery to reduce germs, and normally, patients are hospitalized a day before the procedure. Avoid things like contacts, nail polish, and jewelry, but don't worry. We'll give you a checklist with all this information on it. It'll also tell you what to bring: glasses, extra clothing, medications, whatever you may need, because you'll spend at least about a week in the hospital for recovery. First few days will be monitored in the ICU, and after that week, we'll see how it goes," Dr. Choi rambles on.

"What's the procedure itself like?" I ask him shyly, worried about how gruesome it'll sound. I still need to know, even if I am scared.

"Short version is that since this is an open heart surgery, we will essentially stop your heart and all blood will be sent through something called a heart-lung machine. The surgery generally takes anywhere between 2-4 hours."

"And the long version?"

Dr. Choi scrunches up his face. "You'd really like to hear all the details?"

"As much as possible. This isn't a cheap move to make and I'd rather hear from you what I'll have to expect," I tell him, a little less nervous this time round.

"Alright. First step is to get you connected to the electrocardiogram, which will be done by placing electrodes on your chest. You will be unconscious for the operation, so you'll be hooked up to an IV line that'll provide you with an anesthetic, in addition to the tranquilizer required before you enter the OR. Once you're out, we'll connect you to a respirator so that you may breathe in ease, another tube will go inside your stomach to prevent any buildup of air and liquid, and finally, a catheter will be inserted into your bladder."

"Okay, and what about that heart-lung machine?"

"Ah, yes. So the heart-lung machine is meant to keep oxygenated blood going through your body when your heart is stopped. You'll also need to take blood thinners before that can happen, but we'll take care of all of that. When all that is said and done, we basically stop your heart and let it cool down, cutting into the mitral valve soon after and commencing with the actual valve replacement bit. We'll let your heart start up again when we're done and take you off heart-lung machine. That's about it," Dr. Choi finishes up.

"Isn't there any way to make this surgery less invasive? I mean, open heart surgery at his age is a big deal, it's not the ideal option," uncle Jimin asks, but Dr. Choi shakes his head.

"Not with his level of damage. We need a lot more than minimally invasive incisions."

"What'll happen after I leave the hospital? What'll I have to do?" I inquire, not really interested in what's going to be minimally invasive and what's not. Hell, at this point, I just want to be alive and know I will be for a long time.

"That'll all be shared with you once you're done, but in addition to the blood thinners, you'll have to wear this alert bracelet that indicates that you're on the medication. It's highly recommended. All
doctors and dentists from that point onward will have to be informed that you'd had this operation; you may also hear clicking in your chest, but that's just the valve doing its job. I'd urge you to quit smoking and drinking for good, because if you wind up with other organ complications, things get messy. You'll have to take it easy for a while after coming back from the hospital, no strenuous jobs or anything, okay?"

"Mhm," I nod mindlessly, all the new information swimming hopelessly around my brain. There's so much to be aware of, it's crazy. But still...it's real.

"Let's get all the forms signed then," uncle Jimin announces and Dr. Choi concurs, pulling forms out of the folder.

"Go ahead and sign all these, be sure to read them. Jungkook, you'll need to sign them as well."

We go ahead and scrawl our signatures on numerous sheets of paper, giving our consent and saying that we understand the legal terms of the procedure and whatnot. After handing them back to the cardiologist, he beams at us and stands up, us following suit.

"I'm really glad to see that you can go through with this, Jungkook. Rest assured, we'll do our best to help you," he says sincerely as we walk out of his office together. "Now, I have to tend to another patient, but be sure to make another appointment with my secretary on the way out for that EKG, okay? Good luck, Jungkook." Giving me a pat on the back, Dr. Choi walks off to his next consultation while uncle Jimin approaches the secretary and gets the scheduling sorted out for later this week.

Quietly and slowly, we exit the building and head towards the car, both sighing as soon as we take a seat in the car. "I'm glad we did this, Kook," uncle says, smiling at me. "You're getting your chance now."

When he says that, it strikes something hard in me. You're getting your chance now. The chance I didn't even believe I could end up getting, I just put my name on it. I signed the papers for that chance, it's mine now. Instantly, my eyes well up with tears and I begin weeping (unfortunately), startling the older man sitting next to me.

"Hey, hey. It'll be okay," he says calmly, putting an arm around me and kissing the top of my head. I can't stop these tears, but for once, I'm not crying because I'm sad. I'm crying, because I've just been given the greatest hope. I can just imagine the smile on Taehyung's face when I tell him. My life will be longer, there'll be a chance for me to go somewhere with it. Find my path, find my passion, live my youth the way it's meant to. Maybe I won't be a deadbeat anymore, maybe this is it. This is happening. My life will be under my control, I'll be healthy, and I'll take care of it with everything I've got, because after this surgery, it'll truly be my own.

"Uncle," I speak tearily, wiping my face on the sleeves of my cotton shirt. "I'm not sad."

"Then why're you crying?"

"I'm crying...because I just found mercy."

I have finally found my mercy.
Music blares softly over the speakers and keeps the heads of the customers bopping as they roam around the store in search of their desired records. They chat amongst one another if they can't find what they're looking for, or just to pass on recommendations. It's funny, there's a sense of community within this store alone, one consisting of laid back people who just want to enjoy life in the form of a large vinyl record, and there's just something so fantastic about it all. I think out of all the jobs I've landed, working here is the best one so far. The manager likes and respects his employees, the majority of the customers are enthusiastic and well mannered, and the vibe of the place gives me a chance to escape the stresses that surround me everyday.

I've already spoken to my manager about needing some time off for the surgery, and to my mild surprise, he was astonishingly cooperative about it. I mean, I knew he wouldn't yell at me or anything, but I didn't anticipate him to be so supportive, telling me to take as long as I need until I'm fully recovered and that he'd miss having me around. The sad thing is that by the time I'm out of the hospital, it'll be time for me to leave and go back to my own place. I haven't told him that yet, it's a reality I'm trying to push off—terrible, I know—but I dunno. It's just not information I want to share yet. What makes me feel worse is that by the time I leave the hospital, Taehyung will be gone. He leaves sometime in the middle of August, and I won't be well enough to say goodbye. The timing really feels God awful, though I feel ungrateful for complaining. At least I'm getting the surgery to begin with, a week ago even that was a matter of skepticism.

Speaking of Taehyung, he's also grown pretty accustomed to hanging around the record shop. He enjoys helping me out from time to time and sometimes I even see him talking to the customers about their taste in music, things he recommends and whatnot. It makes me smile to see him interact like that with strangers, just more reassurance that this boy has indeed come a long way from the shy one I met two months ago. Might be strange to think this, but it's almost as though he's bloomed and grown into himself, finally starting to be comfortable with who he is and everything that makes him Kim Taehyung. A better flower than most of those out there, in my opinion. But I'm also biased beyond a doubt. It's fine.

"Hey Kook?" Taehyung calls out as he struts up to the counter and leans against it, peeking at the magazine I'm flipping through. "Do we have any Michael Jackson stuff in this store?"

I peer up at him disbelievingly, because what self respecting music store doesn't carry Michael Jackson music? That's absurd. "Yeah, we do. Check that wall, fourth row. There should be a decent
number of records by him. Why're you looking for him all of a sudden?"

Taehyung shrugs before saying, "Namjoon loves his work and I thought it'd be cool to give him a record for his collection. He's into that sort of thing; since I've only got a few more weeks here, I gotta start thinking of going back. Wanna take a gift for the guy."

"Ah gotcha. Well, happy searching then." He strolls off and I return to my magazine, skimming through the little text blurbs with minimal interest. It's a way to pass time, that's all.

One by one, customers form a line at the register, so I'm soon busied with checking out everyone's purchases and exchanging lighthearted small talk. Sometimes I get excited when I check out people, because a part of me hopes that that girl will return. Classical music girl, the one with a smile pretty enough to shut me up in seconds. But I haven't seen her since we last spoke, and believe me, I've kept an eye out for her with no help from Taehyung, who simply insists on teasing me about it whenever he can.

The store quickly empties up, with most people leaving to get lunch. When my own stomach grumbles, I go over to one of the other employees and tap her on the shoulder, asking if she would take over while I take my lunch break. Thankfully, the girl agrees, so I find Taehyung still glued to the Michael Jackson stuff and pull him away; I don't want to eat alone. We head into the break room and get our food out of the mini-fridge, digging in as soon as we're seated.

"I can't believe how quickly this summer went by," Taehyung comments as he bites into his sandwich, and I only nod quietly. It's not something I really want to think about, his departure. The only reason this summer was bearable to begin with was due to him. He made my life interesting, made me distracted from the normal garbage I occupy my time with. Dare I say he even managed to make me somewhat of a better person in the short time that we've spent together. I wish he could stay. "I don't know how I feel about going home. It's gonna be weird, being with my parents and not going to college."

"You won't go to college?" I ask in shock; I knew he was unsure of what he wants to do, but not that he didn't even consider college an option. He shakes his head before taking a sip of his water. "Why's that? Don't you want to go into teaching?"

"I mean, yeah. But it's too late for me to go in for the fall semester. I've applied to colleges and have acceptances, just didn't bother confirming which I'd go to. So I'll have to wait till the spring term comes around and start from there. Which means months more of sitting around," he casually explains.

"You should just stay around till then," I jokingly say, but the brunette looks at me as though I'm being serious about him staying. Okay, maybe I'm only partly joking.

"Do you want me to?"

I laugh nervously, picking at my salad. "Well, I guess it would be pointless to ask you to hang around for that long. Once I'm out of the hospital, I have to go home too. Then you'd be alone here, or with Yoongi hyung or something." Taehyung's face darkens slightly at the mention of the vineyard owner and I immediately regret bringing him up. "Ah sorry. I shouldn't have mentioned him."

"No, it's really not an issue," Taehyung says unconvincingly. "We can't go forever with not mentioning him, I guess it has to be addressed eventually."

"Not if you don't want to."
"It's alright. There's not much to address, come to think of it. Like, we've gone over pretty much everything. I don't know what else to say..." replies the brunette, suddenly looking rather perplexed.

I nod slowly, thinking of a good question to ask. "How are you feeling?"

He takes a moment to reply and eats his sandwich to fill the pause. Once he's done with his mouthful, he hums lightly. "I miss him. It's kinda painful."

"That only makes sense, Tae. Would you consider going to see him again at any point before you leave? Y'know, say goodbye and get some closure? It wasn't all bad memories with him, you feel for him because he makes you happy," I suggest, but Taehyung leans back in his chair, his expression that of one deep in thought.

"I've considered it. But I dunno, I think it'd hurt too much to see him again. It would be super awkward, and I just don't want to go through that. I miss him, but I can't do that to myself," he responds quietly, running a hand through his hair.

"But then you'd be leaving it on bad terms. Don't you think you'd feel a bit better having talked things out with him, maybe even telling him he's under a false impression about what happened?"

"No, that sounds dangerous. I don't know how emotionally I'll react, things I'll say will be out of my control if I'm too upset. There's no point in hurting anyone or going through this," Taehyung refuses again.

I sigh and put my fork down, gazing at the clearly heartbroken boy in front of me. "How can you be so stubborn about this?"

The brunette merely chuckles and meets my eyes, a tight lipped smile appearing on his face. "Because I think I'm in love. And it's a painful experience...I don't see any reason to go through more pain voluntarily when there's already been a stopping point. Yoongi-" he exhales sharply after saying the name, "Yoongi hyung doesn't need to see me again."

"That's not a very foolproof plan. Your parents are gonna go to his place to pick you up...you'll have to be there in order for that to work out," I point out to him.

"I can be dropped off at the front of his house with all my stuff right before my parents get here and if they insist on talking to him, I'll go hide in the car. Simple," Taehyung says. "And if he wants to talk to me, I'll pretend to fall asleep in the car so that they don't bother me."

"Tae," I softly say, "You can't avoid this man forever. If you love him, then you shouldn't run away from him. I know I'm not in your shoes and these are your feelings that you're dealing with, so it's all easier said than done...but, Taehyung. I really saw a chance for you two."

He bites into his sandwich and chews at an agonizingly slow rate before replying, "I wish I could have seen that chance, too. Being in love with someone you can't have. I think that's one of the worst feelings in the world."

"I'm sorry, Tae. That it had to be so hard."

"Ah well, it's not in your control. You shouldn't apologize for my stupid feelings that get me in all this trouble. We don't need to focus on it anymore," Taehyung says, brushing the topic off. "We have bigger things to discuss. Your surgery is in a little over two weeks, yeah? Have you heard back from Dr. Choi about whether you can get it done earlier? And you have the EKG appointment later today, right?"
"Yes, no, and yes," I answer his questions in order. "Gotta tell you, I still can't believe it's happening. I didn't think it could happen, not with how much it costs."

"Yeah, what's up with that?" Taehyung asks, eyes widening all of a sudden. "Your uncle just stopped caring about the money, I thought that was bit of a drastic move. Does he have, like, savings or something he's planning on dipping into for the procedure, or working extra?"

"I've wondered that myself, but he won't tell me anything. It's strange, he's not one to withhold information from me, but he's being really sensitive this time. I just hope he's doing everything in a way that won't get him into trouble."

Taehyung laughs lightly, and it hits me for a split second that I'm really going to miss his laugh, my God. I've gotten so used to hearing it, it's a sound of comfort for me and it won't be around soon enough. Why does life put amazing people into our lives only to take them away from us in painful ways?

"Your uncle's not a risk taker, don't worry about him getting into trouble. I can tell that much about him," says the brunette confidently. "I think it'll be okay. It all seems surreal, but you better believe it. You're going to get better and when you wake up in your hospital room, I'll be right beside you." He smiles widely and damn, it's starting to hurt. Taehyung, please don't go.

"Thanks, Tae. That means a lot..."

"Well, I love you. You know that, right?" Taehyung playfully says, but it's the first time he's ever said something like that to me. I freeze instantly and he notices my shock, breaking out into a panic right away. "Ah, hah, umm, I don't mean that I'm in love with you or anything, you know I mean that I love you, like, a best friend; it wasn't meant to be awkward, but what was I thinking, I'm an awkward person. Why do I say things like this, I'm so du-"

"Tae, I love you too," I tell him, savoring the taste of the words that I don't get to say as often as I wish I could. "Thank you." He blushes a fierce red and stares at his empty sandwich container for several seconds before standing up.

"No big deal," he says bashfully. "Shouldn't even be news at this point, but aha, I guess it is. Anyway, umm, the lunch break is nearly over so you should get back to your shift." Container in hand, Taehyung rapidly shuffles out of the room with me following him slowly, a smirk tugging at my lips.

We head back to our respective spots, and I open my magazine again to resume the mindless page turning when a record is placed on the counter. As soon as I look up, it feels like my heart's stopped and not because it's failing or something. The woman smiles at me, making my knees wobble as I gaze at her—something I didn't think I'd get to do again.

"H-hi," I stutter, feeling incredibly embarrassed at how shy I've become in the blink of an eye. "You're back here again...another present for a friend?"

"For myself. I like classical music a lot. It's just peaceful." Her voice is soft but comforting, the way the color soft pink makes me feel. Soft pink, the color of her hijab today, adding cheer to her otherwise all white outfit. Soft pink, the color of her delicate lips, which are almost as pretty as Taehyung's. My gosh, she's beautiful and it hits me harder than it did the first time I laid eyes on her. "You okay?" she asks unexpectedly and I snap out of my trance.

"Huh?"
"You were either dozing off or zoning out. Am I really that boring, I haven't even said much," she replies, pouting. I continue stammering, my eyes catching a rather amused Taehyung standing in the background.

"N-no, you're not boring at all. By no means. I like listening to you speak," I blabber, no longer able to control the stream of words tumbling out. "I mean, that sounds creepy coz I've literally only spoken to you twice, but-"

"Jungkook, are you normally this nervous?" she interrupts my rambling, thankfully. I shake my head vigorously and she just laughs. "I see. Well, I have to get somewhere, but it was nice running into you again."

As she takes her bag and starts to walk away, I holler out, "Wait!" It was much louder than I hoped to me, add more humiliation for this guy right now. God, why am I like this? She turns around, appearing a bit puzzled when I leave the counter to stand in front of her.

"Yeah?"

"What's your name?" I didn't even do anything strenuous, yet I'm out of breath. "I...I wanted to ask you last time, but didn't have the chance to. I've been wondering since, except I didn't think I'd see you again."

A twinkle is present in those hazel eyes as she beams at me, no doubt amused by my childishness. "Mina. I'm Mina."

"Mina," I repeat slowly, letting myself get familiar with this name though I've heard it before. I dunno, it just feels different knowing it's her name. "Okay, Mina. Have a good day. It was nice seeing you again."

"I hope we'll see each other again," Mina responds with a nod. "Oh, and Jungkook?"

There goes my heart, dear Lord. "Yeah?"

"You have a bit of food by your lip," she says, pointing at the corner of her mouth and my face heats up so much that I think you can cook an egg on it. I rub my mouth quickly, making Mina chuckle again, and look at her as she nods. "You got it."

After that humiliating little interaction, Mina turns around and walks out of the store, peeking back at me as she's about to push open the door to see me staring stupidly as I seem to do when she's around. With one last giggle, the woman disappears and I exhale as though I'd been holding my breath this entire time.

"Oh good God," I mutter to myself as I plop down on the sofa, soon accompanied by an infuriatingly smug Taehyung. "I don't want to hear a word out of you."

"Okay," he says, grinning intensely. Taking a seat next to me, Taehyung continues smiling until the silence is no longer tolerable and he turns to me, mumbling, "You got so red up there." Immediately, my hand flies out to smack the annoying brunette, who only laughs triumphantly, knowing that he's touched a nerve. "That was adorable, Kook. You basically melted in front of her."

"Listen, stop teasing me. I can't help it, I just see those eyes of hers and I can't think properly. It's like my vocabulary suddenly shrinks to a small handful of words, and I'm left stumbling over my sentences like an idiot. God, she must think I'm so stupid," I groan, aware of how dramatic I'm sounding, but I don't have it in me to care. "She's beautiful," I whisper and Taehyung whistles.
"You've got it bad, Kook. You got her name this time though, that's something. What is it?"

"Mina." A smile creeps onto my face as I say it again, a terribly giddy sensation bubbling up in my stomach and I resist the urge to burst into a fit of giggles. "Her name is Mina."

"Oh boy, look at the smile on your face, Mina owns your ass now," Taehyung remarks, only to get smacked again. "Well it's true! Stop hitting me, it's not my fault you don't know how to talk to girls."

"Excuse me, I know how to talk to girls!" I defensively retort. "Just not that particular girl."

"What a cutie," Taehyung teasingly says and reaches forward to mess up my hair. "I'm happy you got to see her again."

Heart still racing, I slump back on the couch and replay what had just happened, the smile not once leaving my face. "Me too."

Taehyung takes out his phone and checks his message after hearing a buzz, donning a bewildered expression not too long after reading whatever someone sent him. "Hey, are you free next Wednesday?"

Lifting my head up, we make eye contact and I nod after thinking for a bit. "Yeah, I mean, I have work. But if it's urgent, I can take the day off."

The brunette smiles as he shows me the message. It's from my uncle, asking Taehyung if I had availability for next Wednesday, because Dr. Choi had just called him. "Looks like you won't have to wait till August after all," Taehyung chirps happily. "And yeah, it's urgent. Take the day off work."

Staring at the screen, I realize that I'll have to take way more than a day off work. "Oh my God, it's happening." Taehyung nods energetically and throws his arms around me in excitement. "My surgery is next week."

"Mm, I know. It's happening, Kook. You'll be okay," the brunette hums softly against my neck and the smile induced by Mina quickly turns into a smile for something else.

I'm going to be okay.

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hi everyone!! i know i don't normally leave author's notes here (partially coz i'm a little shy and scared to), but if any of you like yoonkook, i have a new story up called 'contritum', which takes place in a fantasy realm where yoongi and kook are both princes of different realms. please do give it a try and if you enjoy it, let me know! also feel free to share your thoughts on this story, thanks for reading!
Though I told you not to worry

Yoongi's POV

"So it's scheduled for next Wednesday," says Jimin, his voice only slightly louder than the gentle sound of blackberry tea I'm pouring into a tall glass half-filled with ice. He thanks me as I slide the drink over to him before pouring my own and joining him at the coffee table in the living room. "I didn't expect him to get in so quickly, even though Choi said it's quite a frequent thing to happen. This is what I get for doubting, right?"

Taking a sip of the cool beverage, I nod afterwards and purse my lips, tasting the sweetness of the blackberries as it spreads throughout a parched mouth. "Nah, it's pretty fortunate. Jungkook must be excited then, or at the very least, relieved. I imagine the both of you are."

Jimin leans forward to place the glass back on the table, folding his hands as he bobs his head up and down affirmatively, though not convincingly so. I know there's more on his mind; random visits from him aren't a norm for us. If Jimin feels the need to drop by and talk about something non-work related, it's likely that there's something more important poking at him that he needs to discuss with me. At least, that's how it's always turned out in the past. Not that I mind, it's refreshing to have the company around. Other than Sunhee, I don't have anyone coming over and I tend not to go out all that much, so any excuse to talk to someone different is welcome.

"I'm relieved, but also worried," my business partner expresses honestly while pressing the tips of his fingers together in what I sense as mild anxiety. "This is open heart surgery, it's no walk in the park. There's plenty of risks associated with it, I mean, they're stopping his damn heart. If anything goes wrong, I dunno what I'll do with myself. The boy's like my own son...he basically is."

"Hey," I say at once, getting the dark haired man to peek up at me. "Listen, he'll be in good hands. They won't just put his life in an incompetent person's care; these surgeons are well trained and experienced. That's not gonna reduce any of the risk factors, I know, but you'll need to remind yourself of these things from time to time. Otherwise you're gonna drive yourself sick from worrying. And this surgery isn't meant to drive you crazy, it's meant to bring you a peace of mind. Both you and Jungkook. If he senses you panicking, it might frighten him as well. I don't know that he can afford to get discouraged, not now. Not with all this...this newfound hope of getting better."

With an expression of deep contemplation, Jimin lets out a burdened sigh, his worries now taking form of carbon dioxide floating in the air around us, each concern dragging the particles down and deepening the tension that hangs about the room. He crosses his legs and looks at me, eyes full of
questions to ask, but I can tell that he doesn't know which one to focus on long enough before jumping to the next. It's understandable—the surgery is a big deal. But the last thing they should do now is overthink everything. Not when there's a chance that Jungkook could possibly get his life back into his own grasp.

"I know you're right. But I don't know how to stop myself from worrying. Believe me, I've tried, and nothing's worked."

I chuckle lightly, bringing the glass of tea to my lips again and taking another sip. "You've got a mother's heart, Jimin," I tell him, somewhat light hearted. The comment's enough to get a small smile from the man, and for right now, that's enough. Better than nothing, if you ask me.

"Someone's gotta have a mother's heart for him, his own mom doesn't have the decency to," mutters Jimin under his breath right as he drinks his tea, words directed more at the ice cubes rather than me. "I haven't mentioned any of my concerns to him, and I don't plan to. He's been so elated, Yoongi. It's kinda crazy—I don't know that I've ever seen him like this before. There's worry and fears of his own, sure, but there's a glow of sorts in his face. He told me he found mercy, and that kinda put things into perspective for me. Maybe Jungkook feels that the world was set on being against him, this surgery being the chance of him being forgiven or something. Though I don't think he's done anything wrong to start with, so I could be entirely off. Who knows what goes through Jungkook's mind."

"God knows I don't," I remark instantly, catching Jimin's attention. "What, he's a complicated kid! It's impossible to read him; he'll say one thing, but mean another. Trying to figure him out is just another jigsaw puzzle that nobody may have the time for."

"He means well. He always means well," the tired man says in response, and I feel a lurch of guilt in my stomach immediately.

"I'm not saying he has bad intentions. It's just that he's not an easy kid to decipher," I clarify weakly, deciding to just drink my tea quietly as Jimin stares at the carpet in silence, mulling over my words. "I think the only person who has any idea of how his mind works is Taehyung. Speaking of, is he happy? I bet he's really helping Jungkook throughout all this, he's good at supporting others."

"Mm," Jimin hums absentmindedly for a moment. "Taehyung's been a huge help around the house. I think part of why Jungkook's been so well lately is due to having the boy around. He's got a friend to confide in, rather than keeping things to himself and it makes me happy to see that. I hate knowing he's bottling stuff up, and seeing him be this comfortable around someone else is good. They suit each other well."

Something about what Jimin says elicits a rather sharp pain to spread in my chest and I take a deep breath to make it stop as soon as I feel it. It's not a surprise that they suit each other, but it hurts to hear...especially when I want him so badly. I can just imagine how happy they are together, never frowning in each other's presence, always cheerful and upbeat. No drama, just harmony. Must be nice for Taehyung, preferable even. He probably loves being there more than he liked it here, and I can't blame him. I put him through a lot of painful emotions with all this Sunhee drama; I guess he's better off there than he ever was in my home. Better off with Kook than with me.

"That hurts you to hear," Jimin observes unexpectedly, and my cheeks flush a warm red, heat dominating whatever serenity the blackberry tea had settled into my body. "I can see it clear as day."

"That's not good," I say quickly, curling up on the couch almost as though I'm trying to hide within myself, though I know it's not an option. "I can't be so obvious. Not when I'm going to marry someone."
Jimin emits a 'tch' sound disapprovingly as he reclines on the couch, his posture giving off more judgmental vibes than the ones of worry he had only a couple minutes ago. "You can't be serious, Yoongi. You're still on this?"

Looking down with a deeply rooted sense of shame, I pick at the corner of my left thumb, a bad habit of mine that I've never quite been able to quit. The corners are always decorated with bits of dried blood, and even though I've made efforts to stop, it's far too much of a subconscious thing for me to control properly. *I wish I could say otherwise, say that I've chosen Taehyung and that everything will be okay. But it's not that easy, when have matters of the heart ever been that simple for anyone? It's like right and wrong blur all sorts of lines when it comes to the heart, to love. Or maybe I'm just not close enough to clear vision, I'm still wandering on a blind path that leads to hazy futures and a sun that may not rise the next day. I don't know.*

"I don't know, Jimin," I voice my thoughts in a mumble, and I can hear the disappointment in his sigh as he gazes at me, his worried eyes filling with sympathy, the kind without pity. "I want to think that marrying Sunhee is the right way to go for me. I've spent every night since Taehyung left wondering about it, and though my feelings are conflicted now, maybe they won't be once I fully commit to her."

"Yoongi, 'maybe' and 'want to think' aren't words anyone wants to use when they're considering marriage. It's not a 'maybe' situation. You marry someone when you love them and they love you back. Marriage isn't something you use as a means to solve a problem, or at least not in this situation. Marriage...marriage is sacred. It's something you want when you've found the person you want to wake up next to every morning and brush their hair aside as you look at them and think *'my God, how did I get so lucky?*" It's something you want when you've found the person you want to share your bad times with, your tears with, because you know that crying with them will help you become stronger. Something you want when you love a person like you've never known to love before."

"I can't say I know that kind of marriage, Jimin," I reply sadly. "My parents didn't last. They didn't see that kind of love, and I didn't see that kind of love as I grew up. I know separation, commitments that don't last, words that don't hold meaning, relationships filled with regret. That's what I've seen of marriage as a child and as a teen. It's not as beautiful as you make it out to be."

"Well, let me ask you this then," Jimin says, "All of what I just described, do you feel any of that with Sunhee?"

Silence.

"I see." A pause follows before Jimin vocalizes his next thought. "I think you should see Taehyung again. Before it's too late."

"Oh, I don't think I could do that," I uneasily respond, cringing at the mere suggestion of facing the brunette again after all that's happened. "There's no way I can look at him after all the drama. He's better off without it, honestly."

"Do you know that for sure, Yoongi? You're making assumptions without really knowing his side of things. For all you know, he might be glad to see you."

I scoff unintentionally, it just escapes me without warning. "Please, after everything that's gone down between us, I doubt he'll be glad. He'd probably reject me if I tried to go talk to him."

"I think you know Taehyung better than that," Jimin rationalizes, "You know he isn't a cruel person, and he's a reasonable one. If you're scared to see him, Yoongi, that's one thing. But you can't make assumptions and use that as an excuse to not talk to him again. He'll leave soon anyway, you should
do it while you still have the chance. There's no guarantee that there'll be another one."

"I know, but-"

"When did you first realize that you liked him?" he asks suddenly, catching me off guard. My jaw drops and I gape like a fish for several seconds before breaking out into an embarrassing stutter, cheeks back to being a bright red again. "It's nothing to be shy about, I just want to know. When did this hit you, that your feelings for him are more than what you originally thought?"

"I-I-I," I helplessly stammer, mind flashing back to all those moments when Taehyung would stutter and how cute I'd find it. Funny how now I'm the one stuttering and it's all because of him. "I guess it was at the lake. I had suspicions around the time he started dating Jungkook, but pushed it aside even though my jealousy caused some stupid cold shoulder-ing on my part, and then I kissed him. But even then, I couldn't be sure. It wasn't until I brought Taehyung out of the water that day and saw him coughing in pain that it hit me. How much I've grown to care for him, more than I do for average person. I'd seen his face in the skies that day as I was swimming on my own. Even with the world tuned out, I couldn't tune him out. He was the loudest thing on my mind and he has been ever since. His laugh, his voice, his pain, his joy. It's all so damn loud. I remember wanting to hold him and just...love him. But I couldn't and that's when I knew that all these stirrings, these messy feelings had built up to something more, something beyond my understanding. And it fucking hurt that I couldn't tell him that I knew. It just feels so bad realizing you have feelings for someone who may not even want you."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I went to bed that night feeling empty and lost," I admit, speaking the truths I'd kept to myself for so long and feeling their weight slowly lift off my drooping shoulders. "He was the last thought on my mind that night, and the first thought the next morning. Yet I still treated him like shit, acting as if I couldn't care less about him for reasons I don't even understand. It's like I was trying to convince myself that if I treated him badly, these feelings would go away coz I formed a dislike for him. It was painful..."

Jimin peers at me sadly and I sigh, my body heaving with the exhalation. "You should have seen his face the day I told you I wanted to marry Sunhee."

"He heard that?"

"Yeah. I went to bed that night feeling empty and lost," I admit, speaking the truths I'd kept to myself for so long and feeling their weight slowly lift off my drooping shoulders. "He was the last thought on my mind that night, and the first thought the next morning. Yet I still treated him like shit, acting as if I couldn't care less about him for reasons I don't even understand. It's like I was trying to convince myself that if I treated him badly, these feelings would go away coz I formed a dislike for him. It was painful..."

Jimin peers at me sadly and I sigh, my body heaving with the exhalation. "You should have seen his face the day I told you I wanted to marry Sunhee."

"He heard that?"

I nod. "He was sitting on the stairs. When I went up to get the ring catalogue, I saw him and his eyes were watery. At that moment it felt like I was making one of the biggest mistakes ever, and his bottom lip was bleeding. My instinct was to ask him what happened, but I fought it. I fought it so much and walked past him, as if...as if his pain meant absolutely nothing to me. When in reality, it was the only thing that truly mattered that day. I couldn't get his expression off my mind."

"You talk of confusion," Jimin says slowly, "but I think you know what the right answer is. Just based on everything you're telling me about Taehyung and your feelings, I think you know. You can't keep fighting it for much longer, time is running out. You need to go talk to him."

"I'm not convinced that this is the right thing to do, Jimin," I desperately tell him as I bury my face in my hands, our tea long forgotten as I let go of the tears I've been holding back since the day Taehyung left my house. "I want to. I want to, I want so badly, I want to see him. I want to tell him everything, but I just don't know that it's right. It could be selfish of me to go and ruin whatever happiness he's got now, I can't do that to him."

"Yoongi, if that's what you call being selfish, then I have to encourage you to be selfish just this
once. Please don't let him leave without clearing your mind. You both deserve it, and you don't even know what he'll say! I can't stress this enough, but you can't assume that you know his heart. If it's hurting you this much, don't you owe it to yourself to tell him and see how it plays out?"

"Not if it means he'll reject me," I reply miserably, wiping the tears off my cheeks. "I had my chance. He told me he liked me, that I'm someone he could love. I pushed him away. I messed it all up with my behavior, I neglected him. Cast him aside. If he doesn't want to look at me after all that's happened, I can't even blame him. Dunno that I'd give myself a chance if I were him."

"Yoongi..."

"I can't, Jimin. I've spent so many nights thinking about this, about him. Maybe it's best that he leaves this summer and we never encounter each other again. I shouldn't seek him out," I explain, ignoring the frustration in Jimin's face. "I can't do it."

"You can't be so cowardly about all this, these are your damn feelings! How can you turn your back on them, on happiness that you might potentially have?"

"I ruined things in the first place. Why should I deserve happiness?" I ask him glumly.

"That's a stupid question." Jimin's about to say more as his phone rings and he glances at the screen, reading the name. "It's Jungkook, I have to take this. Actually, I'll be on my way coz I have to head home and give the boys dinner. But think about what I said, okay? Don't ignore me this time round, Yoongi," he insists, standing up with his phone still buzzing.

"No promises. They'll only be empty."

"Don't do this to yourself," Jimin says and shakes his head. "What you feel towards Taehyung, I can tell you there's many who haven't been lucky enough to feel that way. It's real, it's a gift. Don't waste it just because you're too scared of rejection." He heads down the stairs and towards the door, looking back one last time at my blank face. "How much longer will you keep lying to yourself?"

He opens the door and walks out of the house, leaving me to stare emptily at the spot where he stood a second ago. The words echo in my head, loud, noisy, overbearing. "Argh!" I exclaim, gripping my hair tightly and tug irritably, not caring that it hurts. "I can't do this right now, I need to clear my head," I mumble to myself and stride over to the counter to grab my car keys.

I need to get out of this house.

~*~

At first I had no particular place in mind as I'd pressed the accelerator, zooming through the road as if I was driving to crash. There weren't any thoughts in mind, just the sound of the wind rushing through the open windows, loud enough to take my agitated bursts of yelling with it. I drove and drove, no set destination in mind until I'd found myself parking in the mall garage and heading in.

Aimlessly, I wandered around the mall and my feet did the work, leading me whichever way they wished. It wasn't until I entered the bookstore that I realized that the last time I'd stepped into the mall was with Taehyung. And now I'm standing in his territory. The smell of books calm me, drawing me in to wander, to seek, to explore. I've never really taken the time to look around this store anyway. Worn out sneakers carry me through each aisle, adorned with books of all genres. Fiction, non-fiction, education, science, music, photography, children's, manga, I work my way through each shelf, peering at all the titles curiously, reminded of Taehyung more and more with each passing section.
He would have loved this, a day spent just in a bookstore. Hell, if I'd decided to do that, his eyes would do that thing where they twinkle when he's overly excited and giddy. I first saw that twinkle when we had pizza and spent the night talking, eventually falling asleep on that couch. That was one of the first times I saw his personality peek out. And I remember how impressed I was listening to him speak, how good I felt spending time with him. It was new to me, and I hadn't expected an 18 year old to be able to make me feel such a way.

I remember all sorts of things about him. The first time I heard him giggle was when we went grocery shopping and he asked to buy ice cream, right after saying he didn't have a sweet tooth. He ate it in the car ride home, insisting that there's no point in waiting to have it and giggling again right after sticking the little spoon in his mouth. I remember thinking he had a cute giggle, suiting his personality and that pretty smile of his. I remember wanting to hear more of it and I did hear it, when he was around Jungkook. He always giggled like that around Jungkook, and I remember how it made my blood boil. I wanted to be the reason he giggled like that, even though I didn't know it at the time. I know now. It makes sense now, why I acted the way I did. Why I pressed too hard on the mug and cut my hand when he'd defended Jungkook as we washed dishes. Why I felt the need to protect him from having his heart broken. Why I got so worried when he didn't come home until past 2 in the morning.

The night he had sat down with me and chattered on and on about the book he was reading will always be one of my favorite nights we've spent together. I don't even recall what the hell the book was about, just that he was so passionate about it that I couldn't stop myself from smiling the whole time he went on. I always hoped we'd have another night like that, where he could simply talk about things that make him happy and I got to see him light up with enthusiasm. I liked it more than I could comprehend. I remember the way he stammered, tripping over his words when he'd seen me without a shirt, that day we all decided to go on a picnic, except it rained and we had to run home. I remember how adorable I thought he was. Memories.

All those moments have become memories now, and I swear it's as though they just happened last week. But it didn't, it happened over the course of two whole months. I wish I'd known to enjoy them more, enjoy him more before everything fell apart for us. I wish I could have kissed him longer, held him longer, smiled with him longer. I wish someone could have warned me that this would happen, that I'd fuck things up and that I'd be roaming around a bookstore with all these thoughts of a beautiful boy with a mole on his bottom lip and a kindness so rare ruining me inside. A warning, a red flag, anything would have done just fine. Anything to keep me from the burning I feel these days. Anything to keep me from caring about him the way I do.

Something to tell me what the right path is.

Trudging my feet across the carpeted floor, I scan the shelf of the aisle I enter, eyes falling on a particular title that I haven't seen in years. Instantly I crouch down and pull the book off the shelf, taking in the familiar artwork of the front cover, a used copy. Flipping through the pages, a smile creeps onto my face as nostalgia from a time before Taehyung overwhelms me, a time when this book was all I'd read. Everyone has an item of comfort—for me, it was this book. Since elementary years I'd indulge in the fictional world it held, making it my place of refuge, one that stayed with me until I'd gone off to college. It's been so long that I never once pondered what the title was or why I'd fallen so deeply in love with it. In truth, I'd forgotten all about it after growing up, much like the characters of the story itself would after they grew up. What are the odds that I'd find this novel today?

His smile appears on my mind again.

This is it, I realize as I gaze at the front cover some more. This has to be it, this has to be my
something. Before I know it, I'm dragging myself to the counter and buying the book, swiping my credit card without a second thought. After the cashier hands the item to me in a plastic bag, I walk out of the store in a daze, wondering how I'll give this to the brunette in the first place. But even as the question lingers on my mind, my heart beats in a way it hasn't in a long while.

It beats without guilt, without trepidation, without worry. The bag swings in my hand as I march through the mall with a new sensation of sorts, because...because for the first time in what feels like forever, I think I've done the right thing.

I think I'm doing the right thing.

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lovelies!! i really, really hope this was a good read, yoongi's back and i thoroughly enjoyed writing this update~ for real though, i'm so excited for the next couple chapters of this story, like, i've spent months thinking about them and the emotional turmoil and just ugh yes, i hope i do it justice. it's so exciting, y'all have no clue

please let me know what you think and hopefully this was a good read for you all! love you and thanks for supporting
forty

It's just some don't care

Taehyung's POV

Hey, Yoongi hyung.

Are you doing okay? No, I can't ask that, it's too light hearted. But you know, at this point I don't know what else to do, what else to ask. I'm puzzled...beyond lost, honestly. Whether I'll see you again is a question popping up in my mind a lot lately, and not just because Jungkook has urged me to go to you. It's something I ponder frequently whenever I have a free moment. And not once have I been able to come up with an answer.

I need an answer, hyung. There's nobody to give it to me, and no matter how much I search, no matter how many nights I lay awake thinking about it all, it's all frustrating. These feelings are frustrating, these questions an itch that never ceases to bother, these dilemmas a never-ending train of overthinking. Over the course of this summer, I've felt in ways I didn't know I could—the emotions span from the range of a happiness so pure that it puts all other feelings of contentment to shame to a sadness and anger fiery enough to make me want to break everything in my path.

I didn't do it, you know. Attack Sunhee...in fact, it's the opposite. She hurt me. Touched me in ways I can't bring myself to physically talk about again, said things to me I still hear whispers of on restless nights. I didn't lay a finger on her, hyung. But how could you have thought that I'm capable of such an act?

I'll never forget it. The way you looked at me that night, holding a weepy Sunhee in your arms. There was rage, there was disgust, but the worst part? There was disappointment. At that moment it felt like I had no air, suffocating in our silence and my own untimely anxiety, yet I know that if I'd had a voice that night, even the quietest one, I'd ask you one question: how could you look at me and see what she made me out to be?

I wanted to hate you so much, believe me. I tried and I tried and I tried so fucking hard to turn these lovestruck tugs into repelling thoughts of loathing, yet it all failed. I wanted to hate you for turning on me, but I couldn't. Wanted to curse you out for kicking me out, wanted to show up at your house and slap you with everything I could muster just for once even considering that I could be such a monster. Because, Min Yoongi hyung, have I really shown you me to be belittled like this? Did I spill the contents of my stupid little heart for you to think it was all a lie? And you know what came out of all those attempts to hate you?

Somehow I fell for you even more.
Maybe it's only I who can accomplish such an impressive feat. Try to hate someone and end up
caring about them more. Every time I replayed the words "get out" coming out of your mouth, I
paired them with the hurt in your eyes. And suddenly it feels like it's my fault. For hurting you, for
giving you pain, for taking a part of your life that you treasure and ruining it. I've done nothing
wrong, but I still feel as though some blame is to be carried on my shoulders.

Is this how it all works, hyung? Is this how love is supposed to manifest itself in a person? I ask
myself often, except there are no answers. A common theme to all my midnight inquiries. But I didn't
ask for love, I didn't ask for any of this drama. Thing is, neither did you. I wonder if it's a mistake
that our paths crossed at all, and before I manage to get too carried away with that thought process,
I remember all the beautiful moments we've shared this summer.

Holding your hand for the few, fleeting moments that I did. Seeing you smile and every so often
being the cause of that smile. Joining you for dinner and talking as though we were the only two
people in the world that mattered. Running by your side in the rain. Meeting your eyes in the
vineyard with your hand over mine, your soft voice uttering my name as though it'd be your
undoing. Swimming at the lake. Talking outside the karaoke place about what makes us the way we
are. Even arguing with you, surprising as it may be. Hell, the time I spent yearning for you now
strikes me as beautiful. Yes, they were painful times; it's hard being infatuated with someone you
can't have, but at least I got to know what it feels like. At least I got to know what it's like to press my
lips against your beautiful ones, despite having to rip myself apart from you as we heard the sound
of your girlfriend's voice. At least I got to smile this summer. And it was all because of you.

You've made me cry. You've made me bleed. You've made me hate myself, made me regret, made
me wish I could stop feeling. That alone would be enough for me to let you go, except...except you
also made me smile. I smiled because of you more than I cried, and I know it counts for something,
as silly as it sounds. It counts for this foolish, one-sided love.

This love that I feel, Yoongi hyung, it's not a choice. I hope you never think that, that I chose to love
you. I'd never believe a notion so absurd—you don't choose who you love. It may shock us when we
don't expect to feel love for someone in particular, but there's no switch. Once you start feeling, it
spirals. The only bit you're in charge in is whether that spiral will go up or down.

I want our spiral to go upwards, hyung. Even if you don't want anything to do with me, I'll
remember this summer and this love with fondness. I wish I could face you and let you know that,
but what if you don't want to see me? What if facing me will only upset you? It's thoughts like these
that keep me at bay...I think I've hurt you enough, haven't I? I've made your life turbulent though you
didn't ask for it. All you wanted was to be a nice friend and host a friend's son. Didn't ask for any of
this drama, did you?

I'm sorry I made it so difficult. That's all I'm good for, I know, but I didn't want to make life difficult
for you. Yet somehow it managed to happen, everything slipped out of my grasp. Perhaps it wasn't
entirely in my grasp to start with. I'm sorry.

Hyung, I miss you. Nowadays when anyone asks, that's all I can say. That I miss you. I can't sum it
up in better words than those three. I want to see you, hear your voice, have a conversation, be in
your company once again. Wishful thinking. It's all that circles my mind when I read that book
you've given me; I think I've read it at least 10 times by now. Each time I come across the
bloodstained page number, my heart breaks a little more, but I don't let it stop me from reading.
Somehow a page from one story became part of our story as well, all because of a bleeding lip.
You'll never know about that page. It'll be the piece of our story that I take with me in silence til
everything comes to an end.
You'll marry Sunhee and become a happy person, blind from anything wrong she's done and may do in the future. You'll feel complete, because you'll feel worthy of her love—even though it's her that's undeserving of the love you have. You'll smile and forget that there ever was a boy who entered your life one fateful June and disappeared on a sticky August morning, leaving a trail of memories behind him. You can grow old with her and have that hand to hold without ever feeling insecure of being alone again. If that's the life you get, I think I can be happy. Coz what does it matter if I'm not the hand you hold as we shed our younger shells for wrinkled ones with graying hair?

You've found your place in this fucked up world. Perhaps the only way for me to is to leave all this behind and walk my own path with your name as a distant memory kept tucked away for the rainy days. Who knows?

All these musings, these desires...if only I could have a chance to share them with you. That's all I want to do, talk to you for one last time and leave it on as good a note as possible. You might not believe that Sunhee's the criminal here, and you might think I'm nothing but a liar.

That's okay.

At least you'll know. And I will get to say the last goodbye while looking into your brown eyes just one more time. Because I'm terrified of forgetting how precious they are, how good they made me feel.

Yoongi hyung.

B-

"What're you writing?" a voice says behind me and I quickly fold up the scrap paper before stuffing it into my book. "Ah, something personal?" Jungkook takes a seat next to me on the porch, his hair messed up from sleeping and eyes half open.

"I thought you were asleep," I sheepishly ask him, pushing the book off to the side. He yawns while swinging an arm over my shoulder as he pulls me closer to him.

"I was, then I noticed that you were gone. Got a bit worried that something was wrong," he mumbles sleepily, leaning his head against mine. "Didn't know you were out here for some moonlit journaling."

"Oh, shut up," I retort and lightly shove him, though he comes right back to leaning on me. "I just had some thoughts that needed to be penned."

"About him? At this time of night?"

"Mm."

Jungkook peers at me, and it feels as if his mere gaze has the ability to pierce my entire existence. Boy doesn't even have his contacts in, for fuck's sake. What is it with his magic? "It shouldn't be this hard."

I make eye contact with him as a wistful smile tugs at my lips, one I fail to hide. "What shouldn't?"

He shrugs right as he directs his attention to the cloudy skies above us. "Life."

"Life," I repeat softly and the truth of the words settle in my heart, though it's not a truth anyone really asks for. Sometimes those are the ones we need the most, the truths we don't bother asking
about. "You're right. I wish it wasn't this hard."

A silence filled with nothing but crickets chirping surrounds us for a while. "Tae?"

"Yeah?" We look at each other again and his softened gaze turns into that of mischief as he leans closer to nudge me with his shoulder playfully, an impish smile returning to his lips. I didn't think I'd see that grin for a long while. Forgot how much I like it.

"I love you, best friend," he says childishly and bursts into a fit of giggles, letting his body fall against mine as he loses himself in laughter. I put my arm over his bare back, pulling him closer to me and feeling his arms wrap around me as he tugs me closer to him. We sit here and hug for a long while, chest to chest. Heart to heart. "Everything will be okay, won't it?" he asks suddenly, fingers curling to grip the fabric of my pajama shirt. And it's no longer just about Yoongi anymore. It really is about life.

"I love you, best friend," I whisper into his shoulder and let a tear slide down my cheek, eventually splashing onto his skin.

And amazingly enough...I'm starting to love life. Hardships, heartbreaks, loneliness, and all.

Be happy.
"So what do you think of this, would this be okay to wear?" a puzzled Jungkook asks me while holding up a pair of black sweatpants with a plain gray t-shirt, a style not exactly common amongst his more glamorous pairings. It's around 6 in the evening, and the blue eyed boy and I are in his room to start putting together items to take to the hospital. He leaves to be checked into the facility in about an hour; preparing isn't really a big deal on its own, I've peeked at the checklist that Kook was given, but when I sensed that he's a bit on edge—no doubt from worry—I offered to lend a helping hand. At this point, that's all I can do to try easing his mind.

A light drizzle fills in as our background noise, the sound of raindrops gently falling on leaves and soft earth bringing peace into our otherwise mildly nerve-wracked atmosphere. I'm glad I decided to open the window, Jungkook doesn't do that enough in his room. Shifting around on his bed, I gaze at the clothes in his hand, eyes flitting back and forth from the outfit to his panicking expression.

"It's perfectly fine, Kook. You're gonna need to be comfy so I think those'll do," I tell him and bring one of his pillows to my chest, hugging it tightly. "What else does the checklist say?"

After stuffing the shirt and pants into a backpack, the dark haired boy shuffles over to his dresser to pick up the checklist Dr. Choi had given him. "Umm," he hums in thought as he quickly scans the contents bulleted on the paper, "No jewelry."

"Shame," I tease and watch as he slips the rings off his fingers, letting them fall into this little box he keeps on his dresser, "I'll miss those on you. The jewelry is one of your biggest wow factors." Jungkook says nothing, reaching for his earrings next and placing those in the box, along with the black choker he'd chosen to wear today. When he turns to face me, I can't help but think that he's starting to look completely bare and it's an interesting sight to see. Even when he sleeps, he'll have the accessories on, I've never seen him without it all.

"Contacts next," he mumbles before walking off to the bathroom. In the meanwhile, I glance outside, the cloudy sky seemingly endless. If I didn't know any better, I'd say that nature itself is acknowledging the weight on Jungkook's shoulders, the overall gloominess fitting for the occasion that would be upon us in less than 24 hours. Jimin had decided to go in the night before instead of the morning so as not to let the nerves and anxiety simmer unnecessarily. The surgery is scheduled
for early afternoon, and our plan is to help him get settled in—I don't know whether I'll spend the night there yet, but I know Jimin will. I'd like to make my decision based on how much room they have and whether they'll be okay with two people staying overnight by Kook's side. I hope they let me, coz if not, I'll have to either spend the night in their empty house or drag my ass over to Yoongi's. Needless to say, neither option is remotely close to ideal.

Jungkook trudges into the room, quickly grabbing his glasses and putting them on before he glances at himself in the mirror. "You think I can wear this there?" He peers down at his clothes, a raggedy shirt with some random band name on it and joggers. I don't know why clothes are giving him so much trouble today, it's all pretty straightforward in my opinion. Nothing fancy, just go loose and easy. But I think the overthinking is just indication of how nervous he really is, because it's not exactly apparent in his expression. He looks calm...except to say he really is is as big a lie as saying Sunhee's a saint.

"I think it's fine, Kook." As an afterthought I add, "You're really nervous, aren't you?"

He lightly scoffs, though not in a way to make me feel stupid, and picks up some of the clothes that lay scattered on his floor. "Can you blame me?" the dark haired boy responds quietly, attention not so much on me and more on folding the shirt in his hand. Jungkook makes each fold with care, avoiding unnecessary creases...it's not typical of him. Normally, he just grabs anything that's strewn about in his room and kinda crumples it up before tossing it in a drawer. The only clothes he bothers putting a little more care behind are the expensive ones that go in his closet, but everything in his dresser is a downright, crinkled mess.

"Of course not." Not knowing what else to do, I get off his bed and walk over to him, not wasting a second in wrapping my arms around his body. Resting my head on his shoulder, I sigh deeply as Jungkook eventually reciprocates the embrace, holding me tighter than I expect. "Nobody can blame you, but I need you to know that you'll be okay."

He rests his chin on my head, not saying anything for what feels like forever. "There's never a guarantee, Tae, that any of us will be okay.

Pulling away from him, I stand in front of Jungkook and take a moment to observe all the worry that can be seen in his face, plain as day, yet still hidden somehow. Maybe the only way to notice his anxiety is to deliberately search for it, like I am now. His smiles haven't reached his eyes, his face blank and seemingly indifferent though he's anything but that. His hands, which I'm holding, have a slight tremble to them, the faintest quiver that would probably go unseen if nobody bothered to give him any attention. He can't maintain eye contact for too long, his gaze darting from one direction to another to avoid humiliation from settling in as a red mask over his pretty face.

How beautiful this boy is.

"There's never a verbal guarantee that we'll be okay, Jungkook," I softly remind him, "Nor is there a written one. But, and I honestly did learn this earlier than I expected, there's good in all that happens in our lives. Y'know, oftentimes we have a habit on focusing on the negatives, being blindsided by the immediate downsides of circumstances. How that'll impact us or set us back from what we genuinely wanted to happen. If you look closely, though, at those bad times...there's always something good for us in there."

"That's a pretty optimistic tune you're singing there, Tae," remarks my brown eyed friend skeptically, his brows crinkling in mild disbelief.

"I don't know that it's optimism really. It's just seeing both sides of things. You have to admit that people in general get far too easily fixated on the bad things in life before they start counting the
good, I've noticed it wherever I go. That no matter how much or how little people seem to have these
days, they're unhappy? But what happens when we start to count our blessings instead? The man
who struggles with poverty spends more time being content with his current meal rather than
wondering where the next one will come from. It's not much at all, but it's enough to keep that
person satisfied with what he has for the time being. Yet the person who practically has all three
meals guaranteed mopes around, feeling unhappy coz they feel an emptiness despite being
full. Despite having what so many others crave to have."

"Okay..."

"So it's a mindset thing. Will you be the man who insists on feeling empty even though he has more
than what he needs? Or the one who eats his meal happily, because he knows the other option would
have been no meal at all?"

"But what does this have to do with my surgery? I'm trying to follow your logic here, Tae,"
Jungkook says, sounding beyond lost.

"A few weeks back, you weren't sure you could even pay for this operation. The idea of it being an
actual option for you...it wasn't likely, was it? Deep down, you truly doubted that you could have
this surgery. Now money isn't an issue. You're getting the treatment you need and yes, there are
risks. There's always a risk. But are you going to focus on what could go wrong and make yourself
miserable, or will you focus on what could go right and allow yourself to love life for giving you a
genuine chance?"

Jungkook stays quiet for a while, and I let go of his hands, proceeding to help him put his clothes
away. After the silence begins to grow comfortable in the room, he interrupts it by asking, "D'you
think life is really looking out for me? There's been so much I've had to go through as it is, for life to
suddenly swoop in and start working out in my favor is-"

"Don't question it," I say at once. "What life wants to do, it does. Whether we trust it or not, it'll go
the way it's meant to, so why waste brain power overthinking it? I think..." I pause briefly, thinking
of how I want to phrase my next thought, because this realization matters to me. And I want it to
matter to Jungkook as well. "I think our only goal should be to do our best every day, no matter what
it is we're doing, and trust that even though obstacles will pop up left and right, we'll never be given
more than we can handle."

"Hmm. I guess I've never seen it that way," replies Jungkook thoughtfully as he takes a seat on the
edge of his bed, a pair of unfolded pants hanging loosely from his naked hands. Strange without
rings, I dunno if I'll get over that. "Choosing to see things in such a light is difficult. Sometimes it
feels like we're hardwired to see bad and bad only."

"But see, that's where you're wrong. It's like you just said, the way we perceive things can be a
choice. We are inherently choosing to give priority to the bad side of life, but who's to say we can't
train ourselves to give our attention to the brighter aspects?"

"Tae, after all that's happened to you, how can you think like that? Or give this kind of advice, it just
doesn't make sense. You had your heart broken. You were attacked by an awful person, you've gone
through enough. How can you actively choose to not let it haunt you?"

I stop folding a shirt mid-way and turn around to face the crestfallen boy, slowly leaning against his
dresser. "You know, I'm not letting myself forget any of what you said," I tell him, running a finger
along the seam of the cloth in my hands. "I'll never let myself forget it. And you're right, they were
awful experiences. Except think about this. If none of it happened, would I even be as close to you
as I am? Would I be living here for the past few weeks with you, and be around as you go through
"No, I suppose not," Jungkook mumbles. "But don't you think it would have been better off for you not going through all that crap? I dunno, being my friend doesn't seem like it's worth any of what you've experienced this summer."

"Well, luckily that's not your decision to make. I think being your friend is worth it. At least when I go home and I start on my own path, I can look back on this trip and think 'you know, lots of things went wrong, but at least I got Jungkook out of it.' At this point, that's really all that matters to me. That I got you out of it," I firmly tell him and the way Jungkook looks at me is startling. His eyes are brimming with tears, his lower lip disappearing into his mouth as he bites it to stop himself from crying. "Hang on, this wasn't supposed to make you cry," I feel myself commencing the helpless rambling.

"Dammit, Tae, why do you have to be so good at this?" Jungkook bursts out, laughing without actual joy.

"Good at what?"

"Being Taehyung! It'd be a hell of a lot easier if you sucked as a person. But no, you're this great human and you keep my head above water. Even though we haven't spent a significant amount of time together, you somehow managed to change my life." He fiddles with his fingers as he speaks, and it's an endearing sight to see. "Thank you for doing that."

As I try to put together a poor reply, the door opens and Jimin pops his head in. "Are you guys ready to go? I'm gonna put stuff in the car now."

Jungkook stands up and nods immediately. "Yeah, we'll be down soon. Thanks, uncle."

"Do you have anything you need me to take down?" Jimin eyes the backpack sitting on his nephew's chair and I chuckle. He's a good man, Park Jimin.

"Yeah, that bag's full. You can take it," I tell him, so he strolls in to pluck the backpack up and sling it over his back. "We'll be down in a minute."

"No worries! I'll get the car started then, meet you both down there. Make sure to turn all the lights off and to lock the door," Jimin instructs as he walks out of the bedroom and out of sight. I peek at Jungkook, who takes a deep breath and hides his face in his hands.

"This is happening," he mutters. "Ugh, I can't believe it's happening."

"Well, believe it," I reply nonchalantly as I tuck the last shirt away in a drawer and head for the door. "C'mon, Kook. You've got everything you need, right?" He scans the room quickly before making eye contact with me and nodding subtly. "Cool, let's go then."

Hesitantly, the nervous, brown eyed Adonis rises from his bed, walking out of the room with unsure steps, my own following close behind. But as soon as I leave the room, a lightbulb goes off and I gasp, making Jungkook turn around in bewilderment.

"You go ahead, I'll be right there." I lightly push Jungkook to continue towards the car right as I turn on my heel to make a mad dash into his room. Bursting through, I switch on the light and look around rapidly to find Yoongi's book, which sits on the nightstand. Striding over, I snatch it and rush out, turning the lights off while releasing a sigh of relief.

I couldn't let myself leave the book.
Quickly, we escape the brief exposure to a particularly humid night by filing into the car silently and exhaling in the presence of the air conditioning. It's suffocatingly hot tonight. As we stare out our windows, Jimin finishes up placing the bags in the trunk of the car, closing it too lightly at first and then slamming it down the second time round. He gets behind the wheel and peers into the rearview mirror, eyes meeting the sight of two emotionally burdened friends, each blankly gazing at the dark views before them with their chins resting in their hands.

"Are you guys alright back there? Is it cool enough?" he asks gently, and Jungkook hums in response. "Okay. Let's get going then." Buckling his seatbelt and shifting the gear into drive, Jimin soon begins driving towards the hospital. Several minutes pass in complete silence before he decides to switch the radio on to some random news stationed to ease the nervous tension hanging about us the way dust clings to any surface it can find.

The monotonous voices of the radio hosts bring sleep to my eyes, and suddenly, warmth envelopes my hand with a softness that's no longer foreign. Jungkook's softness. He holds my hand tentatively and to offer him even the slightest bit of reassurance, I intertwine our fingers, his empty ones entangled with my tan ones, and squeeze it momentarily. Though the brown eyed beauty keeps his gaze focused on the land passing him by, I see the corner of his lips curl upward for a second before settling back into the expression of blank anxiety he had on earlier.

We hold hands for the entirety of the car ride.

~*~

Getting Jungkook admitted didn't take too long, much to my surprise. I'd thought it would be this long, drawn out thing, but the process ran efficiently with the nurses assigning him to a room in the telemetry unit soon after we walked in and explained that he's due for surgery the following afternoon. After having him change into a light green gown and getting him settled into the bed, they hooked him up to a number of machines meant to monitor his vitals amongst other important things—I wish I could list them off or something, but I'm no doctor...plus I wasn't paying as much attention as I should have. Got slightly distracted by the fact that all of this is actually happening, and in less than 24 hours for that matter. It's not even my matter, yet I can't help this incredibly heavy sensation in my chest, one that seems to drag my own heart down as though it's been attached to a damn anchor.

"I think this fasting rule is the hardest one they could've given me," Jungkook grumbles unhappily while sitting up in his bed. Jimin chuckles as he places our two bags on a nearby chair in the room and walks up to his nephew afterwards.

"You'll be asleep for most of the eight hours," he speaks quietly, his hand reaching out to stroke Jungkook's forehead. "Not eating for that long won't be something on your mind, I promise."

"Yeah, I know," the dark haired boy mutters and shifts around uneasily, "It's just that a burger sounds so fucking good right now. And I'm nervous about tomorrow, eating my feelings in the form of greasy fast food really feels like the way to go, y'know?"

"Kook, you'll make me hungry," I lightly joke, rising from my chair and walking over to him as well. "But he's right, the time will go by faster than you expect. Just get to sleeping, you need proper rest."

"Are you guys gonna spend the night here with me?"

Jimin and I exchange glances for a brief second, conveniently in mutual agreement about what we ought to do. "They allow two visitors, luckily enough, so I think we'll both stick around," says the oldest. "That being said, I'm gonna head off now and get some work done. Tae, do you want dinner?
I can bring you some."

I peek at Jungkook, instantly feeling bad that he's wanting to eat yet he can't. I don't want to eat in front of him. "I'll take care of that later, don't worry about it. Thanks, Jimin hyung."

"No problem." Jimin ambles out of the room, leaving me with a rather tense Jungkook. Neither of us really talk for several minutes until the quietude just becomes too agonizing for me to bear.

Lightly poking Jungkook on the arm, I gesture for him to scoot over. "Make room," I tell him, and without any questions, the brown eyed boy shifts off to the left, creating enough space for me to crawl onto the bed. I wrap my arms around his torso tightly, my head resting on his chest, and his arms holding me close to his body. "You're scared."

He scoffs, one hand slowly combing through my hair. "Are we at the point where we're just listing out the obvious, Tae?" he asks, tone subdued.

"I don't want you to be scared."

"Hard not to be," Jungkook replies, inhaling sharply and tightening his hold on me. I snuggle into his embrace, waiting for him to complete the thought. "I've looked into the risks for this, Tae. There's just a lot of them, even after the procedure itself. If they can't start my heart back up, then I'm dead. I dunno. I can't help but stress out over this."

Peering up, I meet his eyes and sigh heavily. "Your stress is understandable, but you can't let yourself get too worried about this, you really can't. Right now, all you need to do is get some proper rest, sleep in tomorrow if needed. You haven't been sleeping well these past few nights out of anxiety."

Jungkook's arm tenses up at once. "You noticed that?"

"Tch. It's hard not to, you moron. I sleep next to you, you think I wouldn't realize that you toss and turn like that coz you're anxious? I'm like the king of anxiety anyway," I scold him. "Give me a bit more credit than that."

"Alright, alright. So you're really gonna spend the night here? These chairs look hella uncomfortable," he notes, and I can't help but laugh. Leave it to him to still think about me even though he's the one having this terribly scary surgery and we should all be thinking about him. Man, some people.

"Well, duh. Where else would I go? It'd be weird for me to spend the night in your house without any of you there and the only other option is Yoongi hyung's place, which," I pause to laugh emptily, "isn't much of an alternative, is it?"

We lie on the bed without furthering the conversation for what feels like at least 10 minutes, though it hardly makes us uncomfortable. Sometimes there's only so much left to say. A fact I understand all too well. "Hmm," Jungkook hums, staring off as though deep in thought. Unexpectedly, the beauty leans down and presses a kiss on my forehead, rubbing my arm as he does so. "I wish it didn't have to be this way, Taehyung."

"C'est la vie," I nonchalantly reply, earning myself a rather bewildered expression from my friend. "What, it's French for such is life. It's one of my favorite sayings."

"Since when do you know French?" Jungkook inquires, brows knitting together in disbelief.

"Other than bonjour, I don't know anything in French. I just happen to know c'est la vie coz I read it
somewhere and the phrase has just always stuck with me. Ever since then, I've kinda applied it to my own life, and I dunno. Guess I just have a soft spot for it. Sounds beautiful, doesn't it?"

"Y'know, it definitely does." At that moment, the door slides open and Jimin steps in right as he hangs up a phone call. "Uncle, did you eat?"

"Mm, the cafeteria here is pretty good. Tae, since you're spending the night here, I highly recommend going to eat now. I'll keep Kook company, there's stuff I need to talk to him about anyway," Jimin advises, and I nod in agreement. Slowly lifting myself off the bed, I shuffle over to the chair to grab my phone, then make my way to the door.

"Be sure to remember the room number," Jungkook says when I start to step out, causing me to peek at the right of the door to ensure that I know which room to return to. The number makes my breath hitch and I can picture the page in front of me, the ink now covered in dry blood. Dramatic as it may be, it shakes me up inside and a chill runs down my spine even as I walk off to the cafeteria, wondering if anything more is to come from this or if it's simply mere coincidence.

Room 103. Who could've guessed?
That I got my shit together

Taehyung's POV

The rest of the night passed in a sleepy haze induced by the food coma I unfortunately brought upon myself by stuffing my mouth with at least half the foods the cafeteria served. Side note, it's ironic how this is a place meant for good health and everything, yet the food offered is cheap, greasy fast food. I mean, it's probably more cost efficient for the establishment to have that stuff, but even so, it struck me as awfully hypocritical while I'd munched down a small plate of onion rings and chugged a soda. All that aside, I still manage to wake up before either Jimin or Jungkook can, snapping out of a deep sleep to find myself sprawled on a chair. Must have been one hell of a haze, because these chairs are awful. I don't know how I managed to last a whole night sleeping in one. It's impressive.

Reaching into my small knapsack, I dig around until my fingers settle on a plastic bag in which I'd placed my toothbrush and paste and a hand towel, then proceed to carry it into the small bathroom in the corner of the hospital room. Jimin and Jungkook are sound asleep, so I make it a priority not to be obnoxiously loud, taking light steps and being more than cautious when opening the door so as not to have it squeak. Plus I have an intense hatred for squeaky doors, the mere noise of the hinge is enough to make me grit my teeth in intolerance.

As quietly as I can, I give my teeth a decent scrub before rinsing and splashing some cold water on my face to shake off the drowsiness. Drying the water off with the hand towel, I tiptoe back to my bag, stuff everything back into it, and take a moment to look around the room. I could eat breakfast, no doubt the cafeteria has loads of garbage foods to load up on, but after last night's meal I'm really not that hungry. But I gotta get out of this room and have some time to myself before it's time for Jungkook to get prepped for surgery.

I peer at the sleeping boy briefly, my eyes flitting from his resting self to the monitors around him, taking in the numbers and lines flashing in green and red on the screen. To think, for the next week or two he'll have to be attached to at least one of these beeping things at all times. It's terrible, how much discomfort he'll have to go through from this point on—all I keep telling my anxiety ridden mind is that it'll work out and that whatever's best will surely happen. It's not much, but just enough to keep me from driving myself into the deep end.

After pondering for a solid few minutes, I decide that fresh air will do me some good. Leaving my bag on the chair, I grab my phone out of the front pouch to slip into my trouser pocket right before shuffling out of the room, carefully sliding the glass door behind me. Following a series of conveniently placed signs, I soon find myself stepping out of the hospital lobby, standing amongst
people coming and going. Some in wheelchairs, some with canes, some in seemingly perfect health and the fortune to stand on their two feet. I glance around me, making a note of all the faces I see (though I know I won't remember any). It's just nice to look at, the people. Makes me think of how many stories there are untold and that I'll go my whole life without ever knowing. Coz it's not possible to know the story of each and every one of these people, although it would be a remarkably interesting honor to have.

I keep out of people's way as I begin venturing off on the hospital campus, thankful that the sun has yet to commence its daily glaring at the world. It's gotten real bad this month; I can't stay out for more than two minutes without my skin starting to feel as if it's sizzling. Nothing like feeling like a pig being roasted over a spit, it's a grand time. Anyway, despite having sunlight, clouds hang about the sky, lurking around as though each wisp has its own mischief to stir, setting somewhat of an ominous tone for the day. It'd feel more reassuring if we had clear blue skies and birds chirping, but it's not like we can negotiate with the weather. So scattered clouds and dimmed sunbeams it is.

With each step I feel a bit lighter, taking deep breaths every so often to take the worries off my mind. It feels nice to roam around and see what's happening around here, the campus of the hospital is absolutely beautiful. Some nod hello as they pass me by, possibly wondering why a kid like me appears to be happy while exploring the outside of a hospital, whereas others are too involved in their own concerns to make eye contact. Can't blame them; this is a depressing place to be, all things considered.

Spotting a spurt of water nearby, I instinctively gravitate towards the source, stretching my neck to see where it's coming from. Amongst a small, well maintained area of trees and bushes sits a simple but large fountain. Benches are placed around it and much to my surprise, there's nobody occupying any of the seats. Maybe it's not the sort of day to sit by a fountain for most people given the gloominess, I think to myself while strolling over to a bench and taking a seat. There's something soothing about watching the water trickle down the stone, each droplet finding its way back to the larger pool of water at the base of the structure. Coming out here was a good idea.

The fresh air clears my lungs, smoothly washing off the hospital smell off of me as a breeze creates ripples through my oversized shirt, blowing strands of hair along with it. My eyes are soon covered with bangs again, and no matter how many times I sweep it out of my face, dark brown locks will come back relentlessly to block my vision. I won't move from here, though. It's been a while since I've been able to sit by myself somewhere and just take in nature alone; I'm with Jungkook most of the time, and other than that one night I'd gone out on the porch, I don't really leave the house unless it's for something he needs to do. Truth be told, it all makes me miss the vineyard quite desperately.

Regardless of whether Yoongi was around, I'd always find myself surrendering my time to the beauty and charms of the vast land, its lush green acres and rows of developing fruit tugging me to the soil earnestly. God, I loved being there. Even at night when barely anything could be seen other than the one star twinkling above, the one star that catches your attention and makes you look up only to find that there's so many more embedded in the endless blue, it brought my heart peace. I miss the feeling of having blades of grass brush lightly against the soles of my feet, just enough so that it doesn't tickle and makes me hum in pleasure instead.

Swinging my legs at the bench, an idea strikes me, and I peek over both shoulders to see if anyone's around. Noting that the coast is clear, I slip off my sandals and let my feet sweep across the green underneath them, closing my eyes as soon as the contact is sensed. I take a deep breath as I lower my feet down to set them firmly on the ground, wriggling my toes and just taking a moment to feel the softness of earth that we tend to take for granted these days—all while listening to the never-ending pattering of water from the fountain. Anxiety seeps out, the toxicity being carried away by a gust of wind that whispers of nearing rain and burdened, gray clouds. Nature is remarkable.
The sky grumbles somewhat irritably and I open my eyes upon feeling a knot in my stomach, one that tells me that we're due for a storm that's arrived with no intention of waiting around. I put on my shoes, mumbling a quick 'thank you' to the surroundings before I shuffle off. Maybe that makes me sound crazy, but I don't care. It feels right to thank the world for what it has given us, even if people find it weird. Not like they can recreate such beauty or even hope to try.

I find myself once again in the presence of people flowing in and out of the building, following those on their way in with a newfound feeling of calmness, one that can only be instilled by being around nature (in my case, anyway). Strolling past the automatic sliding doors, I make a beeline for the elevators and press the up button, sticking my hands into my pockets afterwards. The doors open with a ding and I'm more than grateful to find that it's completely empty. As I step in, I skim the buttons on the side before jabbing the one for the first floor. A sigh slips out when the doors close, and my body leans against the wall in mild fatigue, though not as bad as before now that I got to be outside.

"Room 103," I mutter under my breath once the doors open and I slowly navigate throughout the floor to find Jungkook's room. They left the door open, so I walk in to see Jimin standing by Jungkook, who is awake and lying in bed, and as soon as my sight takes in the guest sitting in the chair by my knapsack, I freeze. Another chill runs down my spine, just like the one from the night before, while I continue staring like a speechless idiot at the dark haired man sitting nonchalantly in front of me, his face one I'd expected never to see again.

Yoongi.

Jimin speaks first, slicing the thick tension with his calming voice and placing a hand on my shoulder. "Tae, it's time for Jungkook to go off and get prepped for the operation. The nurses will be here any minute now."

"Oh," I whisper, mouth and throat drier than it's been in weeks. "I-i-is it time?" And so returns the stammer I'd happily done without for the past few weeks as well. It's all coming back, all because of him.

"Mhm." Jimin mumbles, "He's here to give his support to Jungkook, don't panic too much. I asked him to come. I'm sorry if it upsets you. You don't need to talk to him if you don't want to...but it might be in your best interests to at some point."

Unable to formulate any sort of response, I rip my gaze away from the man whose sight makes my hands curl up into tight fists and brings tears to my eyes, choosing to focus on a sleepy Jungkook instead. This is about him. Taking a few steps closer to his bed, I peer at him as he looks up with a rather unwilling and uncertain emotion sneaking around in those brown eyes of his. Instinctively, I reach out and place a hand on his forehead, lightly stroking the soft skin before leaning down to press a kiss on it.

"You'll be okay, Kook. Be brave for me," I tell him softly, lips barely brushing against his skin. At once, his arms wrap around me and bring my body closer to his in an embrace that speaks volumes on its own. An embrace that says 'this might be my last hug so understand clearly that I love you. I love you so much and no matter what happens, I'll need you.' All there is to do is hug him back, which I do, resting my head on his chin and fighting back tears that yearn to fall for so many reasons other than this boy. "I love you, too," I whisper, closing my eyes.

I can't believe he showed up.

~*~
"Okay, so umm," Jimin says, stopping in his tracks to look at the vineyard owner and myself, "this hospital has an OR with a gallery open to observe as they do the operation, they only allow two or three people in there at a time. I think, I think I'm gonna spend the time in there and watch. I can't sit in a waiting room while all of this happens."

I don't know how he can put himself through that, I'm far too squeamish to watch a surgery happen and it makes me feel bad, coz I can't offer to keep him company. He's incredibly nervous, it's etched out on every feature of his face. As much as I want to take a step forward and say 'I'll come with you', I can't. The words would only get caught in my throat and battle their way back down.

"Mm," Yoongi agrees, nodding his head subtly. "I don't know that I'll join you, but if you need me to come with you, I'll go."

"No," replies the uncle, setting his hand on his colleague's shoulder. "Stay here; if something goes wrong, I'll come get you."

"You sure?"

At this point, I don't know if I can handle standing around and listening to them converse about where they're going to be throughout the operation, so I turn on my heel to grab a seat in the waiting room. Almost aimlessly I wander down the hallway until I come across a sign for the surgery waiting room, entering to find that it's only got a couple people sitting around with their magazines. Attention locking in on a chair in a lonesome looking corner, I stride off to take the seat, exhaling heavily as soon as I lean back. Hands covering my face, I slump forward and take deep breaths to steady myself from being on the verge of tears. I can't cry, I don't want to cry over this right now. It shouldn't be about him right now.

I hear footsteps nearing, getting the sense that he's also chosen the waiting room over the surgical gallery. With my heart pounding in fear, I remove my hands to find the vineyard owner sitting with his legs crossed next to me, his eyes fixated on the window on the other side of the room. He says nothing, does nothing, doesn't even bother to look at me.

"It's...been a while," I hesitantly say, cursing the beads of sweat that are forming underneath my bangs.

"Hmm, it has," he responds casually, still not making eye contact. "Have you been well?"

Well, that's unexpected. I figured either we'd have a full blown conversation where we dive into everything at once, or not speak at all. Didn't see small talk showing up anywhere, but I suppose we have to start somewhere.

"Been okay, it's alright. H-h-how're you?" My voice nearly trembles as I ask the question, causing me to take yet another deep breath to calm things down.

He chuckles, his gaze dropping from the window down to his hands, which fiddle with one another. I forgot just how much I love his hands, and my heart thumps obnoxiously at the sight of the prominent veins and the pale skin I daydreamed about touching for hours on end. Goosebumps erupt on my skin and I bite my lip from overwhelming myself with tears in public. It's beyond words, these emotions. I'm actually getting to see him again.

"I've had better days," Yoongi says honestly. "You feeling nervous?"

"I'm always feeling nervous. You?"

"Ah, yeah. I suppose I am." We sit still and neither of us ask any questions, the awkward silence
beating at my eardrums while my heart angrily beats against my ribcage, demanding more. More, more, more. It wants more.

"Why'd you decide to show up?" The question tumbles out before I can even so much as filter myself or my tone, and oh my God, now I've gone ahead and done it. It's out there, but will he answer it?

It's enough to make him look at me. I gulp when our eyes meet, throat closing up and chest tightening as I get to gaze at his face that's right in front of me again, something that wasn't supposed to happen and yet here we are. I can't do this, why doesn't he just answer the question? Who asked him to look at me like this, it's too much too soon, I can't, I can't, my mind screams in agony.

"I suppose I should be here, right? You heard Jimin, he asked that I show up." Leaning back in his chair, he uncrosses his legs and splayed them out as if nothing can touch him, like he's completely unbothered by it all. "Besides, if so much of my money is gonna go into something, I ought to see it through and make sure nothing goes wrong."

"Your money?" And suddenly, things start to click. The other options Jimin had that seemed to have popped out of nowhere, the fact that he refused to tell us where this money was coming from, it all led back to him. He didn't tell us, because he knew it would be a trigger. But at the end, it all takes us to Yoongi. "You paid for this surgery," I say once the realization settles in, my tone one of awe and bewilderment. "But why? You don't like Jungkook, and this operation's several hundreds of thousands. Why would you pay for it?"

The dark haired man shrugs, glancing sideways at me. "I've done a lot of wrong things in the past," he says simply, "and for once, I just wanted to get matters right. Jimin and Jungkook needed help. If it were in their ability, they'd do the same for me, and even if they didn't...this is something I wanted to do for Jungkook."

Easing back into my chair, I stay silent for several minutes with my hands tightly gripping the arms of the seat. There's so much to ask, so much to find out about, so much to say, so much...to be honest about. Where am I supposed to start? Where is all of this meant to go?

I guess there's one clear question to throw out there now. Clearing my throat, I inquire, "When are you going to marry Sunhee?" The moment the words leave my mouth, I shut my eyes and lower my head as though bracing for impact, for a crash that has the potential to leave me paralyzed and broken.

"Ah." He pauses, prompting me to open my eyes a bit and peek at him. "We broke up, actually." The vineyard owner spots the astonishment on my instantly gaping face, deciding to continue with an explanation. "It was a couple days ago. I broke up with her after...after finding out that she's been cheating on me for almost the entire time we've been together."

At this point, how can there be anything left for me to say?

"I was going to propose that night, and somehow one thing led to another and we began arguing," Yoongi elaborated, his voice softening and shaking a bit.

"Hyung," I interrupt him, "you don't need to tell me if it makes you upset. As much as I want to know, it doesn't matter if it makes you sad."

"Nah, I think you of all people deserve to know," Yoongi says, a sad smile adorning his pretty lips. "When we argued, I guess she'd had enough and spilled all of it. How she didn't feel that I was enough, that I was uninterested, that I never gave her much attention. She's been sleeping with guys
since the second year of us dating. I know we were grasping at straws recently, but I can tell you that I was in it wholeheartedly back then. I never, ever thought she'd feel neglected, I showered her with attention. The only time I really began to slip up was this past summer and I genuinely did try to make myself better for her. I guess I should have known."

"Should have known what, exactly?"

The saddened man shakes his head in regret. "That I'd never be enough for her. She'd never really be mine. I told you this before, I always felt smaller standing next to her. Like, it was wrong and we forced it to happen. That she wanted more glamour than what I'm able to offer. And she found that glamour, that lust, that satisfaction in the guys she slept with. They were all models and photographers, hell, I'm almost positive she slept with that one photographer the night she ditched me to attend the party. I've never been enough for her; I suppose as the time went by, I fell for the false belief that maybe she and I were together for something more. Instead, I'm a toy to her. I'm nothing, whereas I spent the past several years of our relationship working to make her my everything."

"It's not that you weren't enough for her, hyung," I firmly reply, now with enough courage mustered to place a hand on his arm. "It's that she's not close to the worth of what you truly deserve."

"I'm a fool, Tae." How pretty my name sounds coming from his mouth. "Being with her has made me do some awful things, I've made hellish mistakes. I fucked up big time, all because I tried to push being with her forever. I-I hurt you. It wasn't my intention to hurt you, but it happened. Messed everything up with you, and I think about it all the damn time. I didn't give you a chance the night I told you to leave. It's a haunting thought, one I fall asleep and wake up to, and there's so much regret in my stupid heart for it," he whispers, eyes teary and mouth pressed against his hands. "I've had enough time to think about it since you left, and I can't believe myself anymore."

Seeing him like this, hurt and dejected, sends a shooting pain through my chest. I helplessly look on at the broken-hearted man, a sense of untamed anger towards that bitch that pushed him to this point of heartache raging on in my bloodstream. I can't remember the last time I've been this furious with someone. She hurt him, used him, manipulated him until she owned every bit of him, and just threw it all back in his face as if he has no value. I feel sorry for Yoongi, because while he's given me my own share of hell, I can't imagine that it's anything like what he's going through. To be head over heels for someone and learn that they didn't respect you in the slightest or love you enough to begin with. It's fucking cruel.

"Forgive me, Taehyung," says Yoongi morosely. "I've hurt you more than I meant to. And I can't explain any of it right now without crying, so I'll keep it for another time if you're willing to hear me out. For now, just know," he pauses mid-sentence to reach out for my hand, "know that I'm sorry for having wronged you like this. And that you have every right to not look at me again out of spite and anger. I won't mind. I've done enough to deserve it."

"Enough of that," I sharply reply. "Whatever your cause is...I forgive you."

He starts to say more, but at that particular moment, Jimin bursts into the waiting room and frantically sprints to our seats. "Yoongi! Come quick, come quick, now!" He tugs urgently at the vineyard owner's sleeve, eyes brimming with tears. "It's Jungkook, they can't get his blood to flow, something's gone wrong!"

My heart sinks into my stomach and it's as though the world's suddenly become ice cold. No. It can't be, it shouldn't be this way.

"What?" Yoongi stands up immediately, putting both hands on Jimin's sides to steady him, eyes searching for clarification. "What do you mean? He's on that heart-lung machine, isn't he?"
I would ask questions, but my mind has gone blank. I don't understand what's happening, I don't understand. I don't understand.

"I know, I know, but something's wrong! Machines are beeping and they're moving so quickly and I can't tell what's wrong, please hurry! Come with me!" He proceeds to dash out of the room with the two of us hot on his trail.

**Jungkook, please be okay.**

We enter the gallery to see the surgeon and his team discussing what to do, exchanging various tools and moving about rapidly. Jungkook lays in the middle, unconscious and covered in a blue cloth. A tube trails from his mouth to a machine, and with a closer glance, I notice that there's various tubes connected to his body. I can't even recognize him. The conversation between the surgical team isn't audible on the other side of the glass, but from the looks of it, they're stopping the replacement to inject a drug into his system. I can't tell what's happening other than that they all look tense and that if something doesn't change soon, Jungkook may be in serious danger.

Yoongi works to calm a sobbing Jimin while I stare inside the operating room, all words trapped in my throat with no way out. The door opens and a male nurse walks in with a clipboard in hand, causing Jimin to leap up from his seat.

"What's happened to Jungkook? Is he going to be okay? What's going on?!!" the uncle shoots question after question at the man, and only after being bombarded does the nurse provide an answer.

"There appears to be a blood clot that's formed and it's blocking Jungkook's blood flow. We've given him medicine meant to dissolve the clot, but it's not doing enough. We have to put the replacement on hold for a moment to go through with a thrombectomy, which will allow us to locate and physically remove the clot. Will you be okay with that?"

"You're basically doing another sort of operation first then?" Jimin asks, his face several shades whiter in terror. "And this will let you get on with the replacement?"

"Yes, Mr. Park. Everything was okay before, going well. We're halfway through the procedure when we noticed this clot, so it has to be taken out before anything else happens. But we need your consent," the nurse explains, and I wonder how he can be so calm in a situation. A boy is as good as dead in the room next to us, yet he seems entirely unfazed. It's unnerving.

"Jimin, give them your consent," Yoongi urges, "You're only losing time otherwise, don't decide when it's too late."

Tearfully looking at the vineyard owner, Jimin nods. "Okay, go ahead with it." The nurse hands him a clipboard containing a consent form, which the older man quickly scrawls his signature onto before collapsing on the chair and sobbing. Once the nurse exits, Yoongi takes a seat next to him and puts his arm over his shoulder in a genuine attempt to console the man. "This was a bad idea, he could've died, he could've died," Jimin whimpers, hiding his face in the dark haired man's chest, clutching onto his shirt while heaving with open mouthed cries.

"You did the right thing, they'll take care of it. You can't fall apart right now," Yoongi comforts softly, "You heard them, everything was going well. Don't fall apart." Shifting in his seat, Jimin throws his arms over the vineyard owner and hugs him tightly, sniffing while trying to reel himself back under control. "You did the right thing," Yoongi repeats.

Overcome with a nauseated feeling, I decide to leave them alone and return to the waiting room. But
as I start to head out, a cold hand grabs my hand and intertwines our fingers. *I know this hand.* Peering behind me, I see Yoongi still being hugged by Jimin, his back facing me but arm extended out to keep me here. Not knowing what else to do, I take a seat next to him and watch the operation unfold before me, the uneasy feeling in my heart failing to waver once.

**Jungkook.**

*You live like fire, intensely and passionately. You sparkle like glitter dusted ashes, the remains of your cigarette addiction. And now...now you're slipping from my fingers like an unreachable smoke. As if the fire's gone out and this is all that will remain. Smoke.*

Don't slip away, Jungkook. Don't let your fire go out.

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The rest of the surgery passes by at an agonizingly slow rate, but from what I could tell, they were able to successfully remove the clot and proceed with the replacement. I did end up leaving the waiting room, though Yoongi and Jimin remained, and sat back in the waiting room to process everything that happened outside of the surgery. Everything Yoongi said.

It breaks me to see him in such pain. Even though he's caused me enough, I can't bear to see him hurting like this, to know that he's been wronged in such a terrible way by someone lowly like Sunhee. But as much as it hurts me, I know it was necessary. I needed to hear this from him, about the regret and the apology. It's the only way for me to reassure myself that there's truly no anger left in my heart for him. It's back to feeling love and purely love. Forgiving him...it allowed me to become at peace with my own heart. Because I know that I hold nothing against him, I know that he's a good person, I know he didn't mean to hurt me. It no longer matters what he did back then, coz he was just trying to do the right thing except in a very wrong way. All I could ask of him is that he realize his mistakes and he has. How can I look at him now and not feel that familiar skip of my heart and clamminess of my palms, knowing that this man has spent the past several weeks being miserable over hurting me? How can I turn my back on someone who cares about me?

I can't.

*I won't.*

Maybe that's why it all goes back to the number 103 to begin with. I *knew* it couldn't have been coincidence when I saw that it was the room we were assigned to. Of all rooms. I wanted to think nothing of it, but there was this sneaking suspicion that I just couldn't shrug off. It followed me, pulled me. That number links us, Yoongi and I. That number holds the day he really took my heart and crushed it, but now...now it also holds the day he came back to tape it back together with tears in his beautiful, emotional eyes. The day I touched his hand again. The day I washed my anger and kept the love. It brought us together somehow, in ways I can't begin to understand. But what I do understand is that this number means something. It's more than just a page number, more than a room number. It's a number with a story, or at least, *our* story.

"Tae?" Jimin says, unexpectedly showing up by my seat. "The surgery's over, do you want to go out now?"

"It's done? Did everything go okay?" He nods, eyes still puffy from all the crying he did earlier. Poor man. "Is Yoongi hyung out there?" Once again, another nod. "Okay, let's go."

We walk out of the waiting area and over to the location of the operating room, standing nervously by the doors in anticipation that the surgeon will come out and talk to us. Yoongi comes over to
stand by my side, though neither of us say a word to one another. It doesn't go beyond a subtle nod and eye contact, but for the time being, that's all we need. Jimin prods at his chin anxiously as he waits for someone to come out with some sort of explanation for what had happened in that room. Despite everything having worked out, I can tell he's still terrified.

After what seems like hours of waiting, the doors open and out comes a doctor in blue scrubs, appearing to be rather exhausted. Jimin runs to him, starting to blabber as soon as he gets his chance, but the surgeon cuts him off to explain the situation before any assumptions could be made.

"Everything worked out okay. We ran into an issue with a blood clot, as I'm sure the nurse told you, but thanks to your decision, we were able to fix the matter and keep going. He'll need to stay in the cardiovascular ICU for about three days, then we'll move him over to the general ICU for about a week. I understand that you're concerned, but he's okay now. We replaced the valve with no further dilemmas and will continue monitoring him until he's recovered properly."

Taking a deep breath of relief, Jimin nods. "Thank you so much, Dr..."

"Kim. Dr. Kim Seokjin," the surgeon says.

"Thank you, Dr. Kim," Jimin replies gratefully. Dr. Kim spares a small smile for the uncle and walks off, probably to get changed, leaving a newly relieved Jimin in our midst. "Well, I guess that's all I can ask for. He's okay," he says, eyes welling up with tears again. "It's evening now, everything took longer than I expected, but that's fine."

"We're just glad he's okay," Yoongi says and I nod in agreement.

"You sure that he shouldn't know that you're the one who paid for this entire thing?" Jimin asks, gasping once he realizes that he let the secret out in front of me. "I mean-"

"It's chill, he knows," the vineyard owner responds. "Jungkook doesn't need to, he'll be fine without that bit of information. Anyway, will you be spending the night here?" Way to smoothly change topics.

"Their ICU only allows one person to stay overnight, so I would like to," says Jimin, glancing over at me. "But Tae, do you want to go back to the house, because I can drop you off if that's what you want."

"I-I," I weakly stutter, unsure of what to say. I'm not particularly keen on being in their house all alone, but at the same time, I don't know where I stand with Yoongi to say otherwise.

"He can go home with me," answers Yoongi, much to my surprise. "If that's okay with you, of course. I have to go home, there's some work to do and it'll get late anyway if we stay too much longer." We look at each other for a split-second, and it amazes me that I'm still processing that we're together in one place again.

"Mm, that's perfect," I quietly concur.

"Great!" Jimin suddenly strides over to engulf the dark haired man in a hug, and I can't help chuckling at how adorable they both look when hugging. "Thank you for your help, Yoongi. I won't forget this."

Yoongi stiffly pats Jimin on the back, making me chuckle once more (except I try to hide it as a cough). "No worries. I'm glad he's okay."

He's okay.
"I'll bring Taehyung back tomorrow to visit," Yoongi says as he pulls away from the hug and inches towards me again. My hand twitches, wanting to reach out for his, but I resist the urge to. Doesn't matter what's happening, I still don't know where he stands on all this. "Should we go then, Tae? You have your bag, right?"

"Yeah, umm," I mumble, tugging nervously at the strap, "it's here. Let's go then." We wave our goodbyes and part ways, Yoongi walking slowly by my side.

"I parked my car somewhere near the second floor, so we'll have to go down there," he informs me as if nothing has changed between us. I wish I could act like things were normal, but so much has changed. All that's remained are my feelings, but will that be enough? Have his feelings towards me changed? I'm nowhere near brave enough to ask.

"Okay."

"Taehyung."

I swallow my spit, hoping to allow some moisture for my throat, but it dries up again instantly. "Yes, hyung?"

"I'm glad I got to see you again," he warmly says and beams at me, his pink gums peeking out past thin lips. I missed his smile, I missed it terribly.

"Mm," I hum, nodding somewhat bashfully. "Me too."

After a relatively quiet drive, we enter his house and I'm soon reacquainted with all that I'd deemed near and dear to my heart this summer. Everything is as it should be in this house, although I don't know why I'd expect something different. Yoongi's not the type to leap off his couch one day to have some elaborate makeover for his house—in fact, I get the feeling he's quite proud of the layout of his place. As he should be, his home is wonderful. It feels so good to be back.

"I think I may just shower and go to bed," I tell him while kicking off my shoes, placing them neatly on the shoe rack. "It's early, but I'm really tired."

"You're not going to eat dinner?" Yoongi asks as we head up the stairs and place our belongings on the counter near the kitchen. I shake my head vigorously, eliciting a light hearted laugh from the handsome vineyard owner. "Don't tell me you're gonna lock yourself up in that room again and not eat for days. That was awful, I hated that."

"No, it's just I don't think I can keep anything down after being in that room and seeing Kook all cut up like that," I reply, wincing just at the thought. "It was horrible, I hate the sight of blood. It doesn't make me dizzy or anything, just extremely uncomfortable. They were cutting into him like he was no different from a chicken or something."

"Well, I mean, cutting into him like a chicken saved him so you can't have it all," Yoongi counters as he heads into the kitchen and grabs a glass, filling it with water.

"True. But anyway, yeah. I can't stomach anything for now, maybe we'll have more luck tomorrow morning." I hope so. Imagine your parents showing up and asking why the hell I let you get so skinny, what would I say to that? I might be friends with your father, but he's hellish when he's angry. Not even I can handle that well," jokes the dark haired elder before gulping down the water.
"Eh, I doubt he'll notice," I respond. I mean, it's true. The minute he's back from Europe, the phone will be stuck to his face again, blowing up with calls about cases and everything else he's busy with 24/7. "Anyway, I'll go shower."

"Alrighty." As I head for the stairs, Yoongi says something that makes me stop in my tracks. "Tae, we should talk about us sometime. Not apologies or anything, us. Just about us."

Turning around, I make an impulsive decision and walk over to the counter to pick up my knapsack. I rummage through it, pulling out the book and quickly finding the folded paper I now keep in it. Holding out to Yoongi, I gesture for him to take it, which he does with a puzzled expression.

"You aren't supposed to see what's written there," I tell him bluntly. "But if we're going to talk about us, then you need to know what's written there. You need to know where I stand on all these matters, coz that's the only way you can make a decision. There's no need for you to read it right this minute, but know that I won't be able to sleep tonight knowing it's in your hands and having no clue what you're thinking. I want you to be honest with me, and to do that, I need to be honest with you. So please...read it."

On that note, I bound up the stairs with an obnoxiously uneasy squirming sensation in my stomach, but I'm confident this time round that I made the right call. We can't move forward until he knows how I've really felt, what I've been through. No matter where he wants to go from this point on, I can't sit quietly knowing that he thinks I attacked Sunhee or that he had no idea how I felt after being cast away. If he still wants me around after that, then I'll stick around. But if not, then that's life.

I hope he understands.

~*~

Drying my hair off with a towel, I walk out of my room—which hasn't changed a bit since I left—and find Yoongi reaching the top of the stairs, note in hand. His eyes are watery and with that, I know that he went ahead and read the note while I'd gone off to shower. Standing still in a v-neck navy tee and a pair of black sweatpants, I watch as Yoongi's footsteps slow down upon seeing me. We stand quietly, facing each other without a word.

He holds up the note. "You're wrong," he says plainly, throwing me off guard. This guy's really good at giving me curve balls; every time I think I'm ready, I'm nowhere near.

"What?" I ask, entirely baffled. "What am I wrong about?"

Yoongi opens up the paper and begins reading, "You found your place in this fucked up world."

I stare at him, at a loss of words. "How am I wrong about that?"

Sighing, Yoongi takes a few steps closer to me and I edge back for reasons unknown. "I'm so fucking lost in this world, it's embarrassing," he admits sheepishly, sniffling. "My life isn't even close to as put together as you seem to think it is. I damn near fell apart these past few weeks, ask Jimin."

At this point, I start to feel myself getting defensive. "Well, if you didn't put up fronts all the time, maybe I'd stand a chance of knowing how you really feel about practically anything. But no, you have to go and act like nothing touches you, like you can't be bothered by any-"

My breath hitches as Yoongi steps forward to hug me, his arms yanking me close to his body and without so much as a second thought, I reciprocate by placing my hands on his shoulder blades. Deep breaths to take in his scent that I missed dearly. Deep breaths to make my heart calm down. Deep breaths to keep myself in this moment and this moment alone.
"You bother me," he whispers against my ear, causing my eyes to widen. "You bother me, Tae. You and your beautiful voice, your pretty, pretty eyes, your sweet lips, your knowledge, your laugh, your moles, your smile, your perspective, your maturity, you bother me with it all."

With each word, Yoongi took steps forward and I went back until my back hit the door of my bedroom. Dear God. "I," I whisper with a dry mouth, "I don't mean to bother you."

"I know," he says, his voice slowly edging towards being inaudible. "But that's why I can't resist you. It's because you just don't try."

What was the damn point of showering if I'm gonna start sweating like a fucking pig now, just my luck. He's getting closer and my words are getting jumbled up, I don't know how to respond in this situation. God, all I want is to kiss him. It's been too long since I've felt those lips.

"Tae, I'm sorry she hurt you," he suddenly says, changing the mood entirely and placing a hand on my neck. The touch of his cold skin against mine sends a shiver through my body, making me gulp as I look him straight in the eye. "I'm so, so sorry. I know my saying this doesn't change anything that happened that night, but I was so awful. She was beyond awful. Someone needs to apologize for her. I'm sorry for not giving you a chance. I'm sorry for making you leave."

"Uhh, it's o-okay," I stupidly say, trying desperately to stop my eyes from continuously sneaking peeks at his lips, which he's unhelpfully licking. Moving his hand up to cup my cheek, Yoongi gazes at me, a sentiment in his eyes I haven't seen since the night on the yacht. "I'm so, so sorry. I know my saying this doesn't change anything that happened that night, but I was so awful. She was beyond awful. Someone needs to apologize for her. I'm sorry for not giving you a chance. I'm sorry for making you leave."

"Taehyung," he whispers and takes the initiative to barely run his thumb across my bottom lip. I could cry, I can't handle this kind of contact. Why is he doing this? "I missed you. And I want...I want our spiral to go up, just like you."

"I want," he says breathily, coming close to me and putting his hand back on my cheek. "I want to kiss you, Taehyung. Can I kiss you?"

"Please," I whisper back and tug his shirt to move him closer to me still. Nodding, Yoongi takes the towel that had been on my other shoulder and tosses it on the doorknob behind me before holding the back of my neck, slowly running it down and onto my shoulder, slipping his hand lightly under the shirt collar to touch it. I can't breathe.

"H-hyung, you know where I stand on this. Now tell me. What do you want for us?" I ask with the remaining amount of courage left in me, although my knees are one finger stroke away from wobbling.

"I want," he says breathily, coming close to me and putting his hand back on my cheek. "I want to kiss you, Taehyung. Can I kiss you?"

"Please," I whisper back and tug his shirt to move him closer to me still. Nodding, Yoongi takes the towel that had been on my other shoulder and tosses it on the doorknob behind me before holding the back of my neck as he pulls me into kiss him. As soon as our lips collide, I throw my arms over him, kissing him back with every pent up emotion I've kept this summer. He pushes me against the wall, his kisses hungry and wet as his fingers tangle up in my hair. I return with equal intensity, licking and biting his lips without any intention of stopping. The small corridor is filled with the sounds of our panting, messy kisses, and uncontrolled moans that slip out regardless of how much we try to stay quiet.

Kissing me harder and harder still, Yoongi's hands take my sides and I tug at his hair for a change, enjoying the ability to make him growl in desire just as much as he seems to like making me whimper every time his tongue touches my skin. I didn't think we'd ever get to do this again.

As I start to kiss the pale skin of his neck, he pulls away at once. "Could you sleep in my bed
tonight?" he asks, somehow innocently. I stare at him for a moment before nodding and going back for his lips, but he pulls back to look at me.

"What's wrong? Oh God, I'm bad at this, aren't I?" I ask him, now thrown on a whole new level of anxiety. "I'm sure Sunhee was a better kisser, it's just that I'm not used to kissing guys who are older and more experienced, the only guy I've kissed is Kook and that was-"

"Stop babbling and let me explain," Yoongi cuts me off and laughs in amusement. "I'm not complaining about how you kiss. I don't think I ever could. It's everything I imagined and beyond that, even. That's one less thing for you to feel insecure about. I want you to know that when I ask you to sleep in my bed tonight, that's it. I don't want to have sex with you, and before you get offended, I'm going to tell you why. I've spent too long pining and wondering what it'd be like to be with you. I've wondered far too long and often about how it would feel to kiss you." He takes my hand and kisses it gently. Damn the butterflies. "I like you, Taehyung. And just as I'm someone you think you could fall in love with, I think the same for you. There's no way I'm rushing the chance I have with you. So I don't want this to be our first time. Let me fall head over heels in love with you first before letting me show you just how much I do."

"You damn idiot," I mutter under my breath.

"What?" he says happily. "I think it's sweet. Almost as sweet as your lips."

"I can't believe this is happening. See, this is why I couldn't get over you," I angrily (though not really) tell him. "I'd try so hard, but then you'd do some sweet shit like this and then it's back to square one! You're impossible!"

"Are you trying to get over me now?" Yoongi asks, tilting his head and pursing his lips into a pout. My knees are gonna give out any second, I swear.

"No," I grumble. He walks over to his bedroom door and opens it, then takes my hand.

"Then come on, my candied kisser. You have your sweetness, let me show you mine," he cheekily says. I huff, not appreciating how quickly he changed the mood of everything, yet at the same time, ecstatic that he wants to take things slow.

"Don't you have work?" I retort and start to open my own door when he pulls me against him in a second, pressing our bodies together.

"Fuck work," he says with a smile, placing his lips on mine again, knowing full well that I'm not going to pull away. God, he's so beautiful and now he's mine. He's mine, I'm his, it's real.

Yoongi.

Min Yoongi.
this isn't the last chapter, we aren't done yet folks
Thunder rumbles as though the sky's an entire pot on the verge of boiling, stirring me from blissful unconsciousness. Peeking through heavy eyelids, my sights falls upon a sound asleep Yoongi, and my heart lurches at once in the best way possible. There's no other way to explain it, I'm simply in awe. To imagine that one day I would be waking up this close to the vineyard owner is honestly one beyond my daydreams, even my night ones. I never dared to venture so far in my fantasies, yet here I am. Laying in his bed across from him, while he sleeps peacefully with one arm loosely settled on my body. Here I am.

Too afraid of waking him, I choose to stay still and simply take in the face that I've missed so dearly. The one I've been deprived of for a couple weeks, but somehow it feels even longer. Maybe that's the desire talking. Or perhaps my heart. I suppose it doesn't matter what made it feel that way, just that it does and now I'm finally next to him again, lucky enough to see this beautiful face of his. The way he sleeps, I hadn't seen it up close before. He's curled up, as though a kitten hugging a ball of yarn, and there's such a precious calmness about his countenance. Lips slightly parted, but not enough to get a glimpse of his teeth, hair messily swooping over his eyes, like a curtain protecting me from his gaze were he to open his eyes.

Bravely (and cautiously) I move my arm gently and reach over to his forehead, lightly brushing the dark strands of hair aside, revealing his closed eyes and long lashes that I've never really noticed

Taehyung's POV
before. *He is so pretty.* If we lived in a time when Greek gods and goddesses conquered the world and bards wandered around, telling tales with their lonesome melodies, I'm sure Yoongi would be considered a son of Aphrodite herself, beautiful enough to capture the interest of Hera, possessing an intelligence that could enrapture the clever Athena herself. How can he not? With skin as fresh and pure as the milk the gods must have consumed endlessly, a mouth delicate like the silk worn by the mighty heroines of the skies above, eyes a plain yet sparkling brown that can only be the touch of a god’s blood for no human could *dare* pass on a pair of eyes as stunning, as alluring, the man is no less than a creation of heaven and heaven alone.

Feeling more courageous, I run my finger lightly along his face, tracing from his forehead to his chin, brushing past his jawline as I do so. Eager to keep the feeling of him under my touch, my thumb hovers over his parted lips, grazing it as if my finger is a feather meant to tickle him pleasurably. "You're so beautiful," I whisper, awestruck and practically inaudible. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. It no longer sounds like a word, but what else am I to use? I suppose there's an abundance of adjectives to describe him: exquisite, angelic, delicate, to name a few. Maybe it's just me, but...I prefer beautiful. The word feels right on my tongue when used for Min Yoongi. He is all the things I've listed; he is exquisite, he is angelic, he is delicate, yet more than anything else, he is beautiful. Strip the word for all that it's become, a cliche compliment exchanged between lovers or in superficial romances, a word expected in any relationship, and truly, *truly understand* the word itself.

Journey from the time when proper Latin flowed from ancient tongues, when *bellus* meant pretty or handsome—ironically as an insult to men back then—to the shapeshifting of the word, *bellus* transforming into *bellitatem*, pleasing to the sense. *Bellitatem* evolved to *beltet*, which birthed the Italian *belta*, the Spanish *beldad*, eventually roaming into the lands of France in the 12th century, where, after dancing with Old French, Anglo-French, and Modern French, it became *bealte* with the 14th century. *Bealte*, goodness, courtesy, physical allure. End the journey in the following century where the suffix -ful tacks itself onto beauty, turning goodness and physical allure into *pleasing to the eye, ear, mind, or soul*. Follow the word back to its roots. Transformation after transformation, the word *beautiful* stands before me as the perfect way to describe Yoongi, because he *does* please. He pleases my eye, his voice a rumbling and low melody for my ear, his words a satiating challenge for my mind, his mere existence a means of healing my soul. He is beautiful.

Unable to stop myself, I push myself closer to the sleeping man and carefully place my lips against his unblemished cheek, smiling as I feel his cold skin against my mouth. Cheek, forehead, nose...lips. *He'll wake up for sure if I kiss his lips,* I think in agony, peering at his open mouth, yearning to press mine on it. I've never known that I could *want* like this before. In a quiet desperation that requires more strength to hold back than I can muster. My heart roars in its cage, demanding freedom, freedom to run and holler and skip in glee, but I have to contain myself. I have to. No matter...no matter how inviting his lips seem.

I turn my back to Yoongi, facing the window, on the other side of which a storm continues growling. We had rain yesterday, I suppose it wasn't satisfied with the havoc wreaked. Came back for more. Gripping onto my pillow, I take deep breaths, begging for the throbbing in my chest to calm down, to give me peace, give me ease. But suddenly, the bed creaks and sheets shift as Yoongi's warmth drapes over me. He moved closer.

Pulling me in tighter with one arm, the older man sighs lightly before making me freeze under the touch of his lips being pressed against my neck. Goosebumps race all over, and I can feel the pulsations growing more and more intense in my chest as lips continue trailing up my neck, reaching for my jawline next. *God, please. I didn't want to wake up.* And then he hums. He hums, turning my face over towards him so that he can kiss with ease, and I lay frozen, a puppet with his master in a sense. Yet it's *nothing* like it at the same time. Some kisses are damp, others dry. The soft sensation
of his breath lingering like a cloud above my skin makes my stomach churn and I try, I try desperately to control myself. But Yoongi comes close to my ear, lightly pressing his licked lips on my earlobes before whispering 'good morning' in a way that runs a chill down my spine.

Now dominated by the pulsations, I turn around to kiss him, forcefully connecting our lips with no resistance from him. Lost under the touch of one another, we melt, bodies of the richest chocolate mixing together. Yoongi moans quietly, encouraging me to go on. I like that I can make him act like this, that I can elicit such *forbidden* sounding noises from his perfect mouth. He rolls me on top of him without our mouths parting even for a second and I continue kissing him, not because I'm hungry for him or because I want him, but because I need him to know. I need him to know that this is how I feel and this is how I've felt and this is how I'll always feel. I need him to know he's beautiful, that he deserves everything, that the hurt he got from Sunhee isn't something he needs to hold onto, that I care about him, that I'm here now. *I'm here now, I'm here now.* That's all I want him to feel from my lips. That I'm here now.

Heavy breathing persists as we part, our foreheads pressed together as we look at each other and burst out into a quiet fit of giggles. "Good morning, hyung," I whisper before chastely kissing him again and falling back on the bed, though wrapping my arms around him as soon as I do. My mouth feels incredibly dry now, but I can't bring myself to care.

"That's one way to wake up," Yoongi says, his voice quiet as he licks his lips, chest rising and falling deeply.

"It was something," I agree in equal quietness. Thunder booms outside, accompanied by the angry sounds of a downpour, rain pounding down on the world as if it has vengeance against the earth and the people on it. "I didn't want to wake you."

"Don't worry about that," he tells me, lips curling upward in a warm smile. "I don't think I'll complain if you want to kiss me awake. In fact, I encourage it."

I scoff and bury my face into his chest, breathing in his scent that comforts me. The scent of freshly laundered clothes. "I know you do," I reply, words muffled as they leave my mouth and hit his chest. "At least now, I do."

We lay in silence until I can't take it anymore and start speaking again. "I never thought this would happen, y'know."

"Mm, what would?" he replies and holds me tighter. I fight back tears from sheer happiness over the fact that he can now hold me in his arms like this without worrying about someone discovering us. That he can kiss me without holding back.

"All of this," I say and absentmindedly play with the sleeve of his t-shirt. "To be able to touch you without being scared. Be in your arms, I thought that would amount to nothing more than a stupid daydream."

"Well," he says with a grin, "give daydreams a bit more credit. They're worth more than we like to think, they hold more meaning than we sometimes want them to."

"Mm." I hesitate to say the next thing that comes to mind, but decide that I'll be gone in less than two weeks, there's no point in swallowing words now. "Hyung, you're beautiful."

He says nothing for some time, staring up at the ceiling in thought as I lay with him, enjoying the way his body feels pressed up against my own. "I'm surprised you can call me that, after all the mistakes I've made," Yoongi finally responds, tone laced with thinly veiled remorse.
"I won't hold that against you. Listen, at the time, you dated her. You felt an obligation towards her and I was a stranger to you, more or less. At least in comparison to her. And yeah, it was something that stung, but I have to be reasonable about this."

"You're too reasonable, Taehyung," Yoongi says, chuckling as he runs a hand through my hair. "I don't know how you put yourself in the shoes of others so easily and forgive like that."

"I don't always forgive," I clarify, "I don't forgive her. I forgive you, because you feel bad. I think that's the sign of someone who deserves to be forgiven, one who makes mistakes and regrets so deeply with a true promise that they'll never do it again."

"I see," replies Yoongi, his expression one of contemplation. "You know, you're beautiful, too. I wish I had better words for how great I think you are, but words are merely words after a point. The rest has to be shown somehow, not spoken."

"Don't stress over that," I jokingly tell him. "I believe you, it doesn't need further showing."

"Well, would making us breakfast be considered a thoughtful gesture?"

I shake my head, pulling away from his embrace. "Whether I was here or not, you'd have to make yourself breakfast; dunno that I would call that anything other than a need to avoid hunger."

He laughs openly, the playful sound tugging a smile onto my face. "Alright, well I need to avoid hunger right now. Brush up, I'll get breakfast ready and stuff. Judging from the looks of this storm, it doesn't seem like there'll be much to do other than stay indoors."

We both get out of the bed and Yoongi starts making it at once. "Will we be visiting Kook?" I ask, feeling somewhat obligated to help him so I join in straightening out the sheets.

"I'll have to speak with Jimin about that. If we do, it'll be at night or something. At least when the storm's died down. It depends on what Jimin says, but I'd like to make a stop at the hospital to see him," he replies, focused on getting the bed made just right. "Hand me that pillow, please."

I give him the throw pillow and he finishes up. "I'd like to see him as well, so let me know what Jimin says. I'm gonna go brush now."

"Mm, okay. Come down for breakfast once you're ready," he says.

"Okay, hyung." Heading into my own bathroom, a feeling of giddiness follows my every footstep until I glance at myself in the mirror. *Maybe this time.* I give in to the smile that pulls at the corner of my mouth, letting lips part in a wide, box-shaped grin, the one I deemed ugly so long ago. But now that I look at myself, the smiling boy in the mirror whose eyes are crinkled at the corners, hair sticking up awkwardly here and there, and teeth showing in unadulterated contentment, I feel something *other* than shame. I feel okay looking at the reflection, seeing that quirky smile. It's a nice smile. I have a nice smile.

*I look nice.*

*I feel good.*

*I am happy.*

~*~

After changing out of my pajamas into something a bit nicer—not that much better though, just an
oversized, beige button up paired with loose, red slacks—I bound down the stairs, my bare feet earnestly taking me to the dark haired man in the kitchen. He's busy fiddling with the toaster oven when I enter, standing at the doorway to watch him work. Even though he's not actually cooking anything, he's got on a cute little apron. The sight makes me chuckle, eventually drawing his attention over to me.

"I'm just heating up the muffins, they'll taste better that way," he explains while pouring coffee into two mugs, the steam flying away from the drink like wisps of smoke. "And I've got our coffee! Two creams, two sugars?"

"Three," I correct him. I can't stand bitter coffee, it just puts a bad taste in my mouth and ruins my mood entirely. "Three sugars."

"Ah, gotcha. I'll remember that from now on," Yoongi replies, smiling as he carefully places three teaspoons of sugar in the coffee and stirs. "Here you go!"

As I take the mug from him, the toaster oven goes off with a ding, signaling that the muffins were done heating. "Hey, I'll get that," I tell him, "You can take the coffee, I'll bring the other stuff."

"No, you don't have to," Yoongi insists and shakes his head. He puts the coffee pot down on the counter, proceeding to push me out of the kitchen with little success. "I can get everything ready, all you need to do is sit and wait," he says with a grunt, still trying to shove me out the doorway.

Smirking, I place my mug on the counter and open up a cabinet, taking out two small dishes. "Will these do for the muffins?" I ask, teasing him with the light-hearted grin that finds its way onto my face. I can't stop smiling around him. It's too difficult.

Acknowledging that I'm far too stubborn to simply throw out the kitchen, Yoongi sighs in defeat as he nods. "But be careful, the stuff in there is real hot. There's gloves right by the oven, put those on."

"Alright, boss," I confirm, grabbing the oven mitts and slipping them on. The vineyard owner takes the coffee out to the dining table, then comes back to grab various fruits out of the fridge. "Is there gonna be more to eat?" I ask in mild shock. Though I shouldn't be surprised, Yoongi takes his breakfast very seriously. I wonder if it's a chef thing, except he'd laugh if I referred to him as a chef.

"Just fruits," he simply says and gets out a cutting board to slice up the strawberries. He washes all the fruits at once, which seem to just be an assortment of berries, and puts them in a large bowl, picking out the strawberries one at a time to slice in halves. There's no sound in the kitchen other than of a knife cutting cleanly through the red flesh of the berries and hands tossing them in the bowl.

Placing the muffins on dishes, I close up the toaster oven and remove the gloves, returning them to their original spot and then walking off to put the muffins on the table. Yoongi follows shortly after, the bowl of mixed berries in his hand, and he puts it in the middle of everything. I had to admit, it adds a bit of color to the meal. If breakfast could always been this appetizing to look at, maybe I would have been more inclined to eat during high school.

We sit and eat quietly for the first few minutes, the warm muffin melting like butter as soon as it's on my tongue, chocolate spreading pleasurably across hungered taste buds. Heating them up was a fantastic idea, honestly. I would have eaten it cold or something. Glad Yoongi's around, otherwise I couldn't learn these sorts of things.

"I actually bought these yesterday, way before I came to the hospital," Yoongi remarks, taking a sip of his coffee.
"Oh?"

"I bought it for you. I was kinda hoping you'd be around when Kook was gonna have the surgery, say yes to coming back here," he explains shyly, cheeks tinting a fair pink in embarrassment. Gosh, how cute of him. But I'm still gonna tease him.

"Our friend was getting surgery, and all that was on your mind was getting me back here?" I ask, doing my best to act disapproving. "Tch, that's a bit selfish, isn't it?"

The pink turns a fierce red and Yoongi's jaw drops, causing him to sputter like a failing engine. "N-n-no!" he says indignantly. "Why would you even think such a thing, I was worried about the boy! I-I mean, I was really stressed going over there, there was a lot at stake and thank God it turned out alright, but seriously?"

"No, I'm joking, moron," I quickly reply, "You don't need to babble, I know your intentions were good."

"Geez," Yoongi says, slumping back on his chair and popping a blueberry into his mouth. "You stressed me out."

"You stress out too easily then," I retort as I reach into the fruit bowl for a handful.

"Hah! You're one to talk," grumbles the dark haired elder, sipping his coffee with a grumpy look on his face. Smiling, I lean over and hold out a raspberry. He eyes it, giving me a suspicious look as though I'm gonna throw it at him.

"I'm sorry," I quietly apologize. "Now eat one and stop looking at me like that. Smile again." He refuses with a huff, choosing to drink his coffee instead. "Alright, if that's how you're gonna be." I rise from the chair and kiss him hard, despite his protesting and as soon as I step back to admire his startled expression, I stick the raspberry into his gaping mouth. "There you go."

Slowly he chews the fruit and swallows, staring at me in wide-eyed astonishment. "You're...I don't even have words for that."

"Yeah, but did you like it?" I ask innocently and he blushes again, accidentally letting a giggle slip. "You did."

"That's not fair, you can't just kiss me to make me smile whenever you want," he whines, something I never actually imagined Yoongi doing. Maybe he's more childish than I thought.

"But you have the prettiest smile." There is no shade of red pretty enough to describe the one that colors his cheeks. "And the prettiest blush. And the prettiest eyes. I could go on," I happily say, watching him get more and more flustered under my gaze. I had no idea he could be bashful, not like this.

"You're ridiculous," he comments under his breath and finishes the last of his muffin, leaving the dinner table to go fall back on the couch. Eating another strawberry, I grab the fruit bowl and follow him, taking a seat right next to the man and curling up. He gives me a side glance and scoffs before scoothing closer to me, pulling me into his arms. "I like you," Yoongi says warmly, rubbing my arm.

"Mm, I figured you do. So what did you have in mind for today?"

"Well, it doesn't look like the storm's gonna die down at all," he says, and as if on cue, thunder crashes outside, making me flinch. Yoongi's hold on me tightens, making us both laugh lightly at how easily frightened I am. "I called Jimin, but he didn't pick up so I'm guessing he'll call back
eventually. I think it's just an indoors sorta day."

"I like this sort of thing," I sincerely tell him. "Cuddling while it's raining, just talking. A lot happened last night, I think...I think we should talk about us."

"Hmm," Yoongi says, exhaling deeply. "What about us?"

"I dunno. You know my side of things, almost in its entirety. But I have questions about you, about when it all began for you. Y'know, the feelings and stuff."

Yoongi's phone buzzes and he pulls it out of his pocket to read the message quickly before replying and tossing it aside. "Sorry, Jimin messaged. We'll go to see Kook tonight."

"Okay."

"Anyway, feelings and stuff." He traces circles on my arm, losing himself in his thoughts. "To be honest, I suspected it since that night we all went out to karaoke," Yoongi elaborates. "But after that, it was just a long period of denial. I guess I tried to force myself into the relationship with Sunhee, forcing something that wasn't gonna be successful anyway. And then we kissed. That..." He pauses to sigh for reasons I can't quite grasp. "That amazing kiss. It only confused me more, sadly. I became more keen on denying that I have feelings from you. And it was stupid, I know it was. It didn't help that you were dating Jungkook at the time, it only fanned the flames. Tried telling myself that I had no business dating you and even if you are the one I want to be with, it'll cause problems between you and your family. Not to mention your dad chopping my head off with an axe or some shit."

"About that. The dating Jungkook thing. That wasn't real to begin with," I say, knowing that there won't be a better time to come clean about that whole messy affair. "Jungkook, he, uh, he wanted to see if you'd get jealous or not, so he proposed this crazy idea that if we dated, it'd speed things up between us."

"Shoudla known," Yoongi calmly reacts, "You two scheme too much for my own good."

"You're not mad?" I ask in shock. I genuinely expected a more heated reaction or something, like, I thought he would yell or something. Not sit and smirk the way he is now.

"Nah, what's the point? I guess at the end of the day, Kook was right about everything. I was being a fool about it all, what with the conflicted thinking and mixed signals I'd given you. It really wasn't fair, when all I wanted was to be with you. I like you, Tae. I don't know that I'll ever get tired of saying that. In fact, I feel so happy just knowing that I can say something like that without worrying about someone overhearing me. I'm happy that it's not the wrong thing to say anymore. Jungkook knew what he was talking about."

"Man, what I'd give to see you say that to his face," I comment, wiping the smirk off his face. "He always knew he was doing the right thing, it was crazy. He's crazy." A moment of contemplation. "He's wonderful."

"At this point, I whole-heartedly agree with you. He is wonderful," Yoongi concurs, playing with my hair slowly. "But I'm glad you two weren't dating to begin with. I don't know that I could compete with someone like him."

"Nah. I love Jungkook and all, but romantically? He's not quite my type." I murmur and move my head so that I can hear Yoongi's heart beat. It's so real, we're really here. I have my head against his chest, and it's raining, and his hand is in my hair, and we're really, really together. I can't believe it. I cannot believe this. "I like you, Yoongi hyung."
He hums softly, the rain filling in whatever silence hangs around comfortably. "I like it when you say that. It makes my heart jump."

"I'm listening to your heart beat and nothing jumped when I said that," I sarcastically remark.

"You know what I mean." He suddenly takes my hand and presses it against his lips. "I'm sorry for not saying anything sooner. We lost time because of my stupidity. Now there's a little over a week left before you have to leave. And I won't see you again for so long."

"Shh," I tell him at once, sitting up straight. "Please don't bring any of this up. Please? Don't think about it."

"We can't avoid the inevitable, Taehyung." The room is illuminated as lightning strikes angrily outside. "The time will pass before we know it."

"Maybe so. But," I pause, licking my lips before continuing. "I spent so long just wondering what all this would be like. Kissing you without holding back, saying 'I like you', holding your hand, all these things, just being with you like this. All I've done is wonder and now, now it's here. I don't want to waste it thinking about what it'll be like once it's gone and I'm back home." Leaning in, I kiss him softly, looking into his eyes as I pull away. His precious, perfect eyes. "Let's stop wondering, hyung," I whisper against his mouth. "Just for now. We'll figure the rest out."

"Okay," the dark haired man whispers back, his eyes searching mine for a bit of doubt, but there's absolutely none in my heart or mind right now that this is what we ought to do. Enjoy what we have while it's around. Jungkook taught me that through his struggles. I learned.

"I like you."

"I like you."

Two hearts. One crystal clear message.

I like you.

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hi, it's been a while. turns out i never posted this chapter on here, which i'm sorry about, but better late than never lmao

it'll take a long, long while before the next update — perhaps two plus months again? i don't typically talk to anyone on this platform, but since there's likely to be a long wait before the next update, i'll go ahead and explain why that is.
i'm a second year college student, working to earn a degree in neuroscience and i'm a pre-
medical student. on top of that, i'm in the honors program at my university + a presidential
scholar + i work at the english language center seven hours a week outside of classes as an
english consultant + i volunteer at an emergency department every weekend + i live at home so
that i can take care of my little sister and help her out with her academics. so my plate is far
from empty and i just haven't had the time nor motivation to sit down and write anything —
not because i don't want to, but because i'm too busy running around for other things, so
when i actually have downtime i'd rather watch netflix or rest or something than write at the
moment. there weren't many updates this past summer because i was taking molecular biology
courses over at my university as well, which was a very time consuming and demanding
commitment.

i haven't forgotten about this story, i still have plans to finish it and i have outlines for the
remaining seven chapters. i simply ask that you all bear with me as i work through my busy
schedule and eventually there will be an update to the story as well as a proper ending. i'm
fine, just incredibly busy and my priorities have pushed writing down to the bottom of my list
where it will remain until i find some free time. thanks for the patience and for supporting
youth. until next time

- tiramisuga

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