**Purple**

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**Summary**

Bruises, when he first gets them, are always the same color.

Purple.

They're always purple.

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"Two meant to be in the ways of the heart, mind, and soul mark the other whenever they dare to touch the flesh of their counterpart."

**Notes**

Hello! I'm crazy excited to publish this story!!! It's been in the works for forever now because school and life and a whole bunch of other boring stuff, but it's ready now :D
I gotta give huge thank you to jiminofficial who gifted me the inspiration to write this fic. Please go check out their work, because it's gorgeous and tugs at the heartstrings and basically makes you want to cry :')

ALSO!!! I didn't use the Rape/Non-Con warning for this fic due to the fact that, though Jungkook fears the partner he has at the beginning of this fic, the sex that they have is not completely nonconsensual. I'll tag this fic with dub-con just to be on the safe side. All other sex between our main characters (whether explicitly or implicitly stated) is utterly and truly consensual.

Other than that, I hope you enjoy! I love you guys! <3

See the end of the work for more notes.

- Inspired by touch me, please, by jiminofficial
Escape

Bruises, when he first gets them, are always the same color.

Purple.

They're always purple.

Whether they be a deep shade of plum or a light mauve, they never strayed from resembling some sort of violet hue. If he poked them, they'd throb once, disappear into the natural tan that was his skin, and come back looking exactly the same (if a bit darker than before). He hated that they were purple, because purple was such a hard color to cover up. Maybe if the color wove around his neck or littered his collarbones he could explain it away as hickeys. Hell, he could even procure a sensible story if it was on his wrists, or his ankles; the usage of rope in the bedroom was not unheard of these days, thus the excuse would suffice.

But. The bruises weren't on his neck, nor his ankles, nor wrists.

Inconvenient.

However, it didn't take long for the purple to fade into blue, then to red, and finally to a sallow yellow. Maybe five or six days. For the bigger ones, possibly a week and a half if they were really bad. Those ones, the bad ones, required two layers of concealer to hide. If he gained too many in a week, he went through his tiny container of concealer within twenty uses, and more often than not twenty uses was not enough to cover what needed to be covered. He hated going to the store to buy more. Sometimes the ladies there would give him weird stares. After he'd become somewhat of a regular, the clerk had taken to discounting whatever items he'd bought (even if he had no coupon and even if there was no discount event going on at the moment) and occasionally throwing in extra products to his bag when his attention temporarily diverted. He'd eventually caught the clerk after this happened for the umpteenth time. He found out the clerk's name was Taehyung, and they became fast friends.

He still doesn't like leaving the apartment to buy the concealer, though. He only does it because he has to.

He only does it because the purple marks his skin.

Jungkook ran a hand down the upper part of his side as he looked in the mirror at the violet marring the space. His torso is twisted at an insane angle, one that Hoseok would be proud of him for achieving if he could hit the pose at practice. Telltale reddish-yellow imprints are settled on the area around the darker color. He stretched further, pulling at the skin with his own fingers, and sighed. He knew without looking that similar marks were on his back.

"How am I supposed to reach those?" He asked no one. Jungkook sighed again, quieter this time, reached for the handle of the bathroom cabinet that was his, and rooted around. God, let this be quick. His boyfriend was going to be home any second now. The brunette himself had returned from dance practice not half an hour ago, exhausted out of his mind, and the last damned thing he needed was Yejun banging the door down and demanding to know what he was doing holed up in here. Jungkook just didn't have the energy to deal with that today.

It took a bit longer than he would've liked since he couldn't reach properly, but he managed to make the purple vanish once a thick layer was applied to the space (it was certainly better than the
first time he'd attempted to do this a year ago. He'd gotten it all over his clothes and hands and had somehow managed to get some it in his mouth. Don't ask him how. He didn't like doing this before bed, either, but he had to start early tomorrow, which meant he wouldn't have the time to do it in the morning.

Just after he'd finished washing his hands, the sound of keys turning a lock greeted his ears. Jungkook's eyes widened, flitting over the water that drenched the floor from his shower, the concealer that was still out, and his own nakedness. Shit! I haven't cleaned up yet!

"Jungkook, I'm home!" A familiar voice called, light and teasing.

*Shit, shit, shit!*

He didn't even want to know what would happen to him if he wasn't there to give his boyfriend his welcome home kiss. Ignoring the panic that had started screaming at him the second he'd heard his partner, he scrabbled to clean the bathroom up (as well as get some clothes on). Concealer, away. Puddles of water, sopped up with a towel. Clean underwear, on. Sweats, on. Shirt...shirt...Jungkook blinked hard. Where had he put his damned shirt?

"Jungkook-ah?" Yejun's tone turned confused. "Are you there?"

"Y-Yes!" The brunette answered. He whipped around the small space frantically. Dammit, fucking hell, he couldn't go out there without a shirt on! Then he would *see* that...he'd see that the purple was gone.

"Where are you?" It sounded like his boyfriend was getting closer. "Babe? Are you alright?"

"I'm fine!" *There, there it was!* Jungkook snatched the article of clothing from where it had been hiding in the corner (how had it gotten there?) and hurriedly tugged it over his head. "I'm fine, I'll be there in one second!"

He heard Yejun chuckle. "I'm counting."

It was meant to be joking, but he'd heard those words too many times in too many harsh circumstances for him to take them as a joke. He patted at his wild hair and opened the door. He was met with the face of a handsome man a slight bit taller than him, strong blonde eyebrows furrowed, hand raised to knock. When he saw Jungkook, his features lit up. The brunette tried not to let his insides wilt in misery at the happy smile he was currently being sent.

Immediately, Jungkook leaned forward and captured his boyfriend's lips in a brief kiss. Yejun kissed him back, lifting a hand to rest on his shoulder. After he had pulled away the hand on his shoulder remained.

"How was your day today?" The younger of the two asked in the most polite way possible.

His boyfriend smiled. Yejun always looked so free and open whenever he grinned like that. Almost like an angel. No wonder he'd gotten a job as a model. "It was wonderful! The photographer complimented me so often, you'd think it would get annoying, but it was actually really nice." He chuckled. Jungkook felt the hand on his shoulder tighten in grip. Yejun's eyes darkened a bit as he leveled a look at him. "You should compliment me more."

Jungkook thought back to something his friend Jimin had once told him: *As people receive compliments, they become kinder, gentler, and more beautiful.* He wished that that was true, because if it was, he'd shower Yejun with them and his blonde boyfriend would never...he would never... "I'm sorry-"
Yejun held up a hand. The brunette immediately stopped talking. "And...you weren't there to give me my welcome home kiss."

"I was in the shower, I wasn't dressed yet-"

"Jungkook-ah, you know what that means." His boyfriend scolded softly, eyes a contrast to his tone with their hardness. "Turn around."

"But-"

"Turn. Around."

Jungkook contemplated not doing it. He thought about pushing past his partner and running like hell throughout the apartment, grabbing his keys, his wallet, his phone, and then getting the fuck out of there. He thought about what it would be like to taste true freedom. Out there, beyond these walls, where Yejun couldn't find him.

He didn't run.

He turned around and bent.

Four rough smacks landed on his ass, another two on his sore legs. Tears of humiliation blurred his vision.

The bruises there stung.

He hated them.

That night Jungkook gritted his teeth as a means of holding in the winces that wanted to escape. Yejun's hands dug into his waist, his breath hot against his abs, where his boyfriend bit down in the next second.

Irritated at the sharpness of the gesture, the brunette hissed. More bruises. More marks.

When they're finished, blood stains the sheets.

It's not Yejun's.

"Hyung."

"Eh?" Jimin's response was almost instantaneous. His expression played on innocent as he gazed at the younger man through his pale silver bangs, one hand cradling his water bottle, the other scraping a small white towel along the expanse of his neck. He was sweating like crazy (they all were) and gulping in air. Jungkook's own chest ached from their vigorous session but thankfully Hoseok was allowing them a ten minute break (one desperately needed).

Nerves bounced about the younger man's stomach, making him feel weirdly sick. He glanced down at the floor to collect his thoughts. He had been trying to bring forth this question for weeks now, but every single time the words died on his tongue; not to mention the fact that he did not wish to worry his friend or burden him in any way. But Jungkook needed out. He needed a way. He needed- "Do you...um, do you have a spare bedroom in your house?"

The mochi's eyebrows furrowed. Lowering his water bottle from which he had been preparing to take a sip, he eyed Jungkook's figure with both interest and suspicion. "I do."
A lump had decided to make a home in his throat, rendering him unable to continue. The maknae nodded, looked away, and said nothing more. Pretending to become fascinated with his dance bag, he walked over and rummaged through it, cursing himself quietly underneath his breath. Dammit. He had been doing so well. Tomorrow it would be, then, tomorrow he would ask properly. Yes. Tomorrow.

Warmth suddenly covered a small part of his back. Jungkook turned around to see Jimin, his expression less suspicious and more concerned. He offered his hyung a smile, which was returned. Jimin's next words were soft rather than teasing. "Kookie, is everything alright? Do you need to stay with Yoongi hyung and I for a few days?"

All of the blood fled Jungkook's face. Here he was, being offered what he'd been attempting to ask for, and now something like fear was gripping him. He was just now realizing something that he hadn't thought of before, and that was that Yejun would kill him if he left. Even for the smallest span of time. He'd ask why he wasn't good enough, ask if Jungkook didn't trust him, because of course he should, they were together, everything was fine and they were together and oh my god he would wake up in a pool of red the next morning, wouldn't he? "No, hyung, it's fine."

"I know that it can get to be a bit too much sometimes." Jimin cut him off gently. "Our practices are a lot, and I know that you go to the gym, too, and you're working to help your boyfriend pay the rent. That's really tiring all put together, Kookie. If you need to slow down for a little while, I wouldn't mind having you over."

Jungkook didn't have the heart to tell his hyung that he'd stopped going to the gym once the purple had spread to his arms and legs. Working out in long sleeves or pants made him extra sweaty and uncomfortable, and working out as intensely as he did was enough to sweat profusely anyway. He would sweat off the concealer within thirty minutes if he didn't cover up. And he could not have people seeing that. So no gym (he credited his impressive physique to morning runs, lifting weights in the house, and lots of pull ups and sit ups).

"Yoongi hyung wouldn't like if I was there."

The mochi rolled his eyes, grinning. "I'd convince him, don't worry." He wriggled his eyebrows. "Or threaten no kisses for a week."

They laughed at that, each picturing the sulky look the producer would wear for the seven days he was deprived of affection. Jimin ruffled the brunette's locks, who swatted at him playfully. "It's alright, hyung, I was just asking because Yejun will be out of town for a few days for a shoot. But I think I'll enjoy the peace of being alone in the house. I'll get to pee with the door open and everything."

Lying, lying, why does he lie so much to his friends?

Jimin's eyes transformed into crescent moons as he laughed again, the sound like the tinkling of a wind chime. He felt even worse after hearing it. He can't take his false truths back, though.

"Alright!" Hoseok's voice rang out. The boys looked over to him just as he finished bringing his hands together in a loud clap. His tone was sunny and his expression even more so when he announced, "Time to get back to work, you guys! If we make good progress by the time we have to leave today, we'll have a good third of the song finished." He brought his hands together again. "Let's do this!"

The song was one that began slow, steadily crescendoing until the bass dropped and the tempo became upbeat and quick, almost as though the artist had chosen to combine Zedd and some kind
of music from the Baroque era. It was a song that Jimin and Jungkook had originally been a bit opposed to when they first heard it—however, after listening to it several more times coupled with Hoseok's passionate explanation, they agreed that it was good fit for the trio: the beginning was fluid and contemporary like Jimin, the middle full of growing energy and hinting at something more mature yet wild like Jungkook, and the end was crazy, bouncy, and fast, identical to Hoseok. They would dance their respective parts in their respective styles, each being the star of their minute or two with the others acting as background dancers or assistants if a particularly complex move was to be hit.

The competition was months away (plenty of time to successfully coordinate this song), but they weren't just to dance a group piece, and were required to prepare separate parts as well. Hoseok had also notified them that they would have to conjure nine pieces total to split into three solo songs each; one for the starting round, one for the second round if they passed, and one for the third if they passed that.

Which, totaled up, basically meant working their asses off.

"I'm thinking that Kookie should do a half turn while he's in a handstand." Hoseok said, squinting as he tried to picture it in his mind. "Then do a popping combination directly after, because that's right when the bass starts to build and become more intense."

"But I twist before that, so I'd have to jump into the handstand and twist again." Jungkook crouched down to slowly go through the motions of the move he was supposed to perform beforehand. The gears in his head turned, trying to see how he would be able to move his hands and arms to the next position swiftly enough. "That's a full 360, hyung."

"I know." The oldest affirmed. "It's a really difficult combination, too...I think you can do it, though. That would make the highlight of your part."

"The highlight has to be as the bass drops." The brunette argued, but got into place anyway.

Music blaring in his ears and two sets of eyes trained on him, Jungkook danced his sequence leading up to the new part without any major hitches (he maybe almost twisted his ankle—nobody had to know that, though). When the time came to try the new combination, he twisted too slowly, noticed his mistake halfway through the handstand, and had to restart. On his second attempt, he was too slow once more, and fell down while trying to correct his error.

"Shit, Jungkookie, are you okay?" Jimin asked, voice full of that same concern as earlier.

The bruises along his legs were throbbing and his hips were screaming at him in pain due to the roughness of last night. "I'm okay. I'll go again."

"Be careful, Kook-ah." Hoseok warned, just as worried as Jimin. "If you really can't do it, we can always think of something else. That's the beauty of prepping months in advance."

"I know." He said with a mixture of irritancy and determination. "One more time, hyung."

This time, Jungkook gets the timing right, going the correct speed. He went to perform the handstand, he knew all at once that his balance was off the moment he was in the air. A twist meant to save his arm from getting snapped had his body slamming into the floor even harder than he had previously at an odder angle. He yelped as fire shot through his side and immediately the others were rushing towards him.

"Kookie-"
"I'm fine." He assured them through clenched teeth. *Ow ow ow.*

Hoseok's fingers latched onto the end of his shirt, near the area his full weight had landed on, preparing to pull it up. Jungkook automatically flinched away. Obviously the eldest noticed this, for he said, "It's alright, I just need to take a look at it, make sure your skin isn't broken or anything." He gently prodded. "Does it feel like you need ice?"

He opened his mouth to decline. Jimin cut him off. "He's going to say no. I'm getting ice."

Carefully, Hoseok lifted up the material. The brunette closed his eyes as he did so, not afraid that he would see the bruises since he had covered them the night before. Everything was going to be fine, he'd press the ice to his side for a few minutes, get up, and continue practicing. No big deal. Everyone always fretted far too much.

The sound of something falling and hitting the ground made Jungkook open his eyes in confusion. Jimin stood over him, gaze stony and...hurt? What?

"Jiminnie hyung, what's-"

"Your side." The mochi pointed at where his shirt was lifted up. "*Your side.*"

At first, the maknae didn't know what he was talking about, and looked to Hoseok. The oldest's mouth was downturned uncharacteristically. Jungkook remained puzzled until he glanced at the stinging area.

His heart stopped.

Purple and blue marks in the shape of fingers stood out in stark contrast to his tan skin. Below them, trailing in a path to his pelvic bone (which was partially visible since he was wearing loose sweatpants) were bruises similar in color but circular instead of straight. Ever-present yellow that meant bruises nearly healed fluttered outwards from the spot. It was almost pretty to look at, in a horrible shocking make-your-blood-turn-to-ice kind of way. He'd admire them if he didn't hate them so much.

Except.

*They should not be visible.*

He'd danced around so much that the concealer had come off on his (now stained with makeup) shirt and unveiled his marks.

Fuck.

Nobody in the room moved or uttered a single word for a solid thirty seconds. Jungkook had ceased breathing as his mind slowly pitched into a blank panic and remained still, eyes flitting between his two friends an uncountable amount of times.

"Jungkook." Hoseok's voice had lost it's sunniness, traded it for the cold moon. "A person can't get marks like this just from falling down."

He didn't know what to reply with. He said nothing.

Jimin breathed in shakily. The wounded look surfacing entirely. "You...you have a...and you...you didn't tell me?"
The brunette understood immediately, head snapping up so fast it nearly gave him whiplash. "No, hyung, I-"

"When I first found out about Yoongi I went to you." Jimin continued, eyes shining, pain evident in his voice. Hoseok had fallen silent to listen to the exchange. "You were the first fucking person I trusted to share that information with and you tell me nothing once you find out you have a...that you have a..." He ran a hand through his fringe, turned away, turned back. "What the hell, Jungkook? For how long? How long have you been hiding this for?"

Jungkook was reluctant to answer. "A year."

"A year?" The silver-haired man sputtered back in a mixture of disbelief and anger. "Your life has been irrevocably changed for a year and you never told me? A year, Jungkook, a year!?"

"I can explain-"

"That's great, that's really great that you want to talk about it now instead of three hundred and sixty five days ago-"

"I wanted to tell you-"

"Then why didn't you? I was here, I've been here the whole time you've been keeping it a secret! I didn't leave to another country, I didn't disappear off the face of the earth, I took off work to take care of you for three days while you were sick with that stomach bug! I've been right here!" The shorter of the two fumed. His cheeks were flushed and his pupils burned with fire. It was a very strange sight to behold, because Jimin rarely got so upset, and Jungkook could count on one hand the amount of times the mochi had gotten this upset with him. Jimin paced for a moment, before adding in a hurt tone, "Is it because you don't trust me? Even after all these years...you don't trust me?"

Something inside of Jungkook broke. "Jimin, no, I trust you, stop saying that shit-"

"If you trusted me you would've told me and come to me and I could've helped you. You know that...that I get marked too." Jimin balled his hands into fists. "You promised...three years ago you promised me..." With sudden passion, he shrieked, "Why, why, why didn't you tell me, why!?"

"BECAUSE!" Jungkook yelled, sitting upwards with all of the force his aching side would allow. "I DIDN'T TELL YOU BECAUSE HE'S NOT MY SOULMATE!"

Everyone froze again.

"H-He's...not?" Jimin breathed, clearly shaken and confused.

Looking down, he said in a very quiet voice, "No. He's not."

"Then how..." The mochi trailed off. His eyes were glued to the molten area of Jungkook's side, no doubt trying to think up where on earth such marks could be obtained otherwise.

There's a way, Jiminnie. There's another way.

Both Hoseok and Jimin seemed to realize something at the same time. The grip on Jungkook's arm tightened. Jimin sucked in an audible breath.

"Kookie..." Hoseok let out. He shook the younger a little. "Kookie, please tell me it's not-"
"Oh my god." Jimin, who was already emotional due to the argument, sounded as though he was on the verge of tears. Not far behind you. "Jungkook..."

"You weren't supposed to find out like this." Jungkook ground out through his rapidly closing throat. Wetness burned hot at the back of his eyes. He watched through blurry vision as they fell onto the wooden dance floor. "Nobody was supposed to find out."

Something warm and solid collapsed into his front. The smell of sugar and the faint scent of Yoongi's cologne. Jimin. "Kook-ah, sweetheart, oh my god..."

It was funny to him how Jimin would be screaming his ass off, swearing up a storm one second, and the next second he was calling the maknae sweetheart. He gurgled out a broken laugh. That was Park Jimin for ya.

"It's Yejun, isn't it?" Hoseok had come and gone, somehow, had gathered tissues and a bottle of water. Jungkook vaguely registered the older asking Jimin to fetch a cloth. A warm hand ran up and down his spine. "He hits you, Kookie, yeah?" When there came no answer, only pathetic sniffles, he coaxed gently, "Tell hyung what's happening, honey, please. Is Yejun hitting you?"

The brunette hesitated. He was so used to it being a secret that divulging such a truth was odd, the affirmation feeling weird on his tongue. He could shrug them off. He could wipe these tears from his eyes and get up and ask for them to let it go. Jungkook would figure it out on his own. He couldn't drag Jimin and Hoseok, his two closest friends, into the fucking mess that was his relationship. He couldn't do that, they already had so much on their plates, prepping and dancing and working and dealing with their own boyfriends. He couldn't.

He couldn't.

He couldn't.

He couldn't go back to that prison cell of a house and get fucked so hard he bled.

Not again.

Jungkook couldn't do that again, not like so many nights before.

"Y-Yes." He forced out. Jungkook couldn't do it again.

Jimin returned with the cloth in hand. He gave it to Hoseok, who wet it with water from the bottle and pressed it to the back of Jungkook's neck. The coolness made him shiver since it contrasted so sharply with the heat building around his head. The mochi's question was asked lowly. "That bastard is hitting Jungkookie?"

Jungkook looked up at him. He nodded.

Jimin held his gaze right up until the very moment he bent over and started to sob.

Two sets of arms enveloped him in an embrace. They rocked him back and forth, whispering reassurances, dabbing his neck with the cloth. Once he'd said the first word, it all wanted to spill out of him and the words rushed and blurred together. "I-He hits me all the time, every day, every day of every week, hyung, I have to go to the m-makeup store so I can cover them up but they come back so fast and I never buy en-enough, it hurts so bad all the t-t-time and they're everywhere and I hate them~"

"Shh, Jungkookie, it's okay, it's all okay now~" Hoseok murmured, continuing to rub his back while
he choked and sputtered.

"I h-hate them, hyung, I hate them-

"I know, honey, I know."

"He w-was so nice at the start and th-then one day he just..." Jungkook felt a tissue being pushed into his trembling hands. Bringing it to his snot-covered nose, he loudly blew. "I d-don't know what happened. It just all went so bad..."

Jimin leaned to the side and nudged their foreheads together. The maknae cried harder. "Is that why you asked if you could stay with me earlier? Because you want to get away?"

"Yes, h-hyung." Jungkook tried to wipe his eyes with the ruined tissue, but Hoseok took it out of his hands and gave him a new one. "He'll kill me if I l-leave though, he really will kill me. He's that b-bad, because we're so h-happy together, why would I want to l-leave?"

There was quiet while the brunette attempted to calm himself down. He went through five more tissues, three gulps of water, and more than a dozen soft touches accompanied by words just as soft before he was able to take in a breath properly. His head ached, but the weight on his chest was a million times lighter. He wasn't alone in knowing anymore. It felt good.

"Now." Hoseok began when Jungkook could properly pay him attention. "We're going to get into the whole why you kept this to yourself for god knows how long thing later-"

"A year." He quietly supplied.

"-why you kept this to yourself for a year thing later." The oldest remedied, his tone careful yet firm. "But right now we need to think of a plan because I don't want you within one hundred miles of that man."

"Jungkookie can stay with Yoongi hyung and I tonight." Jimin said immediately. "He can use the spare room today and for the next few days until we can figure out something more permanent."

"Yejun will ask why I'm staying with you for so long. He'll get suspicious."

"We'll tell him...um...f-fuck." The mochi's eyebrows furrowed. "Hoseok hyung, any ideas?"

The eldest chewed his lip for a moment. Suddenly, his eyes lit up, and he snapped his fingers. If he had the energy, Jungkook would've snorted at the cutesy-ness of the gesture. "I've got it! We'll just tell him we're going through a rough patch in the choreography and that it's easier if Jungkookie just stays with you while we're working through it." When the younger two gave him skeptical looks, he continued emphatically, "It makes sense: Jimin lives closer to the studio, plus, this isn't the first time we've done this. Remember eight months ago, when we were performing in front of one of the best dancers in Puerto Rico? We had to work nonstop then. We're working nonstop now." He grinned slyly. "Even though we're really not. But Yejun doesn't need to know that."

They all contemplated.

"It's not perfect..." Jimin admitted. His next words were grudging. "But it'll work, at least temporarily. Think that you can grab all of your stuff without looking suspicious, sweetheart?"

Jungkook thought to the very few amount of personal items he had (he'd only been a few months out of college when he started dating Yejun; he hadn't owned very many things then, and never really bought anything new for the fear that if he brought it with him somewhere, the memories
"Great!" Hoseok smiled bright, a spark lighting in his eyes. "Time to get you out of there, Jungkook-ah. Mission Free Jungkook From His Bastard Partner, start!"

Praise whatever deity was looking down on him that Yejun wasn't home. It was only noon, so his boyfriend's absence made sense (he usually got off of work at three on weekdays, eight on weekends), but Jungkook was exceedingly thankful anyway. He didn't want to linger there any longer than required, and if Yejun was home, there was no doubt that he probably wouldn't be leaving the apartment until late into the afternoon. Whether those hours would be full of trying to avoid tricky questions or the rough sex Jungkook had grown accustomed to was a toss up.

From: Jiminie

yoongi agreed to drive u from ur house to ours :)  
he said he'll pick u up in 30 min, is that enough time?

The brunette, whom had been in the middle of debating over if he should take his Iron Man hoodie with him or throw it out because he'd had it since forever and it barely fit any more, glanced over at his buzzing phone. Swiping it open, he read the messages and quickly replied.

To: Jiminie

yeah thats enough time. if he hasn't left yet plz tell him thank you for me

A second passed (yes, unfortunately, he was going to have to get rid of it. Shame) before his phone dinged again.

From: Jiminie

ill tell him, no prob

hey jungkookie

i love you and ur gonna get through this ok? all of us will be here every step of the way 3 3

To: Jiminie

thanks hyung

I love you too

With a small smile, Jungkook jammed his phone in his back pocket and continued packing. He drifted into their shared bathroom and took his concealer, his hairbrush, and his secret collection of colored contacts he had hidden away in the back of a drawer. He didn't take his shampoo or toothbrush or anything of the sort: if he did, that would make his departure more obvious. He was sure Yoongi and Jimin would replace many things, but the rest he'd have to buy on his own.

I guess I need to start taking on extra hours so I can help with the bills and the food. He mused, stashing the items in one of his two bags. His favorite clothes soon joined them (not all, because again, his leaving was to be a secret), along with the few books on music theory he owned, one pair of boots, his headphones, and several other small personal things. Each time he entered a different room, a flood of emotions greeted him, most of them unpleasant. He reminded himself
that this was the last time he'd ever have to walk by these walls. No more getting shoved into the edge of the kitchen counter, no more being sent to sleep on the floor if his performance wasn't satisfactory, no more leaning against the wall of the shower and watching the water run red-

Jungkook squeezed his eyes shut. *Stop thinking about it. It's over. I'm going to get out of here.*

Within moments the final item was shoved inside his baggage, the zipper drug across its track until it found its end. He released a breath he hadn't known he was holding. That was it. That was everything.

He grasped their handles in his hands and hurried out of the room. Jungkook didn't want to stay any longer than he needed to. As he made his way to the door, he quickly surveyed everything, just to make sure he hadn't missed something. He concluded he hadn't. Good.

Okay. Phew. He was leaving now. He was going. Jungkook clasped the handle of the front door. A thrill ran through him. He would never come back here again. Never ever. He was *free*. Goodbye apartment, goodbye bruises, and most of all, sayonara hope-to-never-cross-paths-again wish-your-next-lover-the-best-because-they'll-need-it *goodbye-*

The door handle began to turn. The brunette's confusion quickly morphed into panic when he realized that no, it wasn't him turning it out of excitement and he just wasn't paying attention or whatever, it meant someone else was on the other side. Jungkook frantically looked for a place to throw the bags where they wouldn't look suspicious. The couch? The kitchen counter? The floor? Fuck, fuck, he was running out of time!

"Jungkook?"

*Shit. So close.*

"Yejun!" Jungkook grinned brightly. It set a record for his most fake smile ever. He subtly moved his bags behind his legs, grinning harder. Trying to make it seem as though he wasn't utterly crushed, he continued, "You're home early. Did something happen at work?"

"Yes..." The blonde tossed his keys into the bowl on the side table. Yejun's eyebrows pulled together as he looked his boyfriend up and down. "The other model that was supposed to be there cancelled. Something about his partner having an emergency." He squinted. Jungkook awkwardly shuffled to keep the bags out of his view. "Where are you going?"

*Remember the plan.* "To sleep over at Jimin hyung's house."

"Why?" Yejun moved a bit closer. Everything in the younger man was screaming for him to just run past the older man and get the hell out of there, but he held his ground. "You haven't mentioned this. You know that you need to ask permission before you can go."

"It was a spur-of-the-moment thing." Jungkook noticed that his smile was faltering and rearranged his features to appear less downtrodden. "Hoseok hyung announced today in practice that we're going to need to spend every hour we can in the dance studio prepping for a smaller concert that's at the end of this week. It's easier for me to go over there since-"

"No."

"W-What?"

"I said no." Yejun's eyes were cold. He crossed his arms in front of his chest, his gorgeous face set in an unpleasant expression. "You know that I don't do spur-of-the-moment things. You're not
going to Jimin ssi's house. You'll stay here with me for the rest of the afternoon, and when I'm done with you for the night you can call him and cancel."

Jungkook stood in silence as his partner made a move to pass him to put his jacket and bag away. Usually, the brunette would let that be that, slink from the scene with his tail between his legs. He feared more bruises, feared that with defiance came the blossom of purple on his skin. It almost always did. He numbly began to set his bags on the ground, mind hazy but set on unpacking, calling Jimin, and cancelling this whole silly thing. Of course. He'd forgotten to ask for permission. That was protocol. He'd forgotten to ask for...

His grip on the handles of his bags tightened.

*I am twenty three years old.*

Tightened further.

*I don't need to ask permission.*

"I'm going anyway."

The words had exited his lips before he could register what he was actually saying. Jungkook stared into Yejun's shocked face, surprised a bit at himself but not wanting to take the words back. They lingered in the air. Innocent things that provoked such danger.

"What did you just say?" The blonde asked. His tone was one that threateningly invited him to change what he'd announced. Hell, if he apologized and was really good in bed tonight he probably wouldn't be hurt that badly-

"I said I'm going anyway," Jungkook uttered instead of the *I'm sorry* that had meant to come out. "I already told Jimin hyung I'd be there and I don't want to let him down."

A beat passed.

Two beats passed.

Jungkook tensed, bracing his body for the hit that was no doubt about to greet his abdomen. When another two beats of nothing passed by he opened his eyes a bit more (he didn't remember shutting them) and saw that Yejun nodding sagely.

Huh?

"You're right, Jungkook-ah," Yejun said. "You should go if you've already informed him you'd go. It would be very rude to cancel on him now." He smiled a small smile. "I'm sure it's his doing that brought on this little bit of tantrum-throwing, but that's alright. This can be fixed."

Throughout the entire speech, the brunette had begun to relax. He was off the hook! Holy shit, he was actually being let off the hook for his sass and he was going to make it to Jimin's house unscathed! How exce-

A weird blunt sound rang through the apartment. Jungkook noted that it sounded vaguely familiar, and would've liked to have known where it came from, but he was too busy grabbing his face and stumbling backwards and tripping over his bags to pay too much attention to that particular mystery. He pulled his hand away to see a bit of blood smeared on his palm. Yejun had hit him in the face.
Another blunt sound, though this time it was in an area the younger man was well acquainted with. Jungkook gasped an involuntary breath. Pain bloomed from the left side of his ribs, and another hit to his stomach made him curl up and groan. He could make out the shiny black of Yejun's shoe when his boyfriend bent down to his level.

"You're not going anywhere." He hissed, grabbing a fistful of brown locks and yanking them upwards so that Jungkook had no choice but to look in his face. "Not now, not ever, especially without my permission. I don't know what the hell you thought you were doing, talking back, and but I do know that that's never going to happen again." He twisted his hair, making the brunette grimace. "You're not going to be seeing Jimin ssi for a while. I can't believe he advocated this behavior." He twisted his hair around again. "And I didn't get my welcome home kiss. Pathetic. You can't even follow simple instructions." Yejun sneered once and let go of the dry brown strands. Jungkook's head hit the floor with a dull thud. "Try these, if they're not too hard to understand: get up, clean up, and then meet me in the bedroom. Your performance has been awful lately. Time for you to turn that around before I make this-" He aimed one last kick at the younger man's stomach, causing him to heave. "-even worse. Hurry up."

Nausea was crawling about his body. Blood rushed to his cheeks and to his swelling eye, the feeling hot and dizzying. Jungkook subconsciously lurched from his tight position and swallowed back bit of bile. Tears welled as a result of his gagging. No. No puking. He wasn't going to puke. He had to get up and clean up and go to bed. That's what he'd been told, right? And Jungkook was good, he tried so hard to be good all the time and do what he was told but he was just so damn tired of the purple on his skin, and he was tired of the blue and the red and the yellow there, too. How he had to cover them up. How they stayed for days. He was tired of them.

However...his day of escape was not to be today.

So close... Jungkook sucked in more air when he tried to sit up. His side was smarting something awful. So damn close.

Suddenly, he heard scuffling come from a few feet away. Hmm? Was that Yejun? Oh God, was he not finished yet? Jungkook flinched back. He was hit with nothing save voices.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Your worst fucking nightmare."

BAM!

Something dropped like a bag of wet sand to the floor.

Turning around as fast as he could while pressing a palm to his eye, Jungkook saw a dark figure coming towards him, with something that looked like a knife in their hand. Weakly he attempted to scramble away. The hand not holding knife reached for him, no doubt prepared to stab him or maul him or maim him or-

Panic shot through Jungkook.

Beginning to scramble faster now, he let out, "Get away from me, get away-!" He aimed a kick at the figure's knee.

"Ow, shit! Jungkook, it's alright!" What? How did the figure know his name? Confused, the young man glanced into the face of his supposed attacker. "It's me, you brat! It's Yoongi!"

What?
The haze of adrenaline and pain subsided a bit. With his good pupil, he squinted up into a face that slowly became more familiar. All at once, he stopped fighting.

"Hyung." He breathed, relieved beyond measure. "Why...how are you here?"

Min Yoongi stood above him, face as pale as the moon, hair as dark as the night. His normally coldly attractive face was pulled back into an irritated grimace, probably due to the ache in his knee he was currently massaging. He was dressed in his usual lazy attire of all black, and gripped within his right hand was a small pan that Jungkook realized was usually kept in the kitchen. His next words dripped sarcasm. "Well, I was just driving around the neighborhood because I happen to like the way the daisies smell on this side of town, and I thought to myself, gee, I wonder if Jungkook wants to smell flowers too, so I hiked my ass up the five flights of stairs-"

"Not my fault the elevator is broken." The brunet mumbled.

"-and happened to witness your piece of shit boyfriend beating the fucking shit out of you." The older man finished, his annoyed look persisting. His tone softened a bit once he'd gazed at the younger man for a moment. "Are you okay, kid?"

No. "Yeah." Jungkook took Yoongi's offered hand and yanked himself up, stumbling only a little bit. "How did you get in the apartment?"

"Snuck in when I noticed the door was left open." Now that he was standing upright, the height difference between the two of them was amusingly obvious; the glint in the older man's pupils was threatening enough to make up for his short stature. "Made my way to the kitchen and nabbed this thing to use." He twirled the pan and gave a smirk. "Cracked that motherfucker across the side of his head."

Jungkook groaned, leaning around Yoongi to see Yejun down the hall, motionless. "Tell me he's not dead."

"Probably not." The black-haired man threw the pan over his shoulder carelessly. It made a clang noise when it hit the floor. He picked up one of the duffle bags from where the younger man had dropped them a few minutes ago. Jungkook reached down to take the other one. "Come on, I parked the car right outside and left it running. Let's get out of here."

It wasn't until he was seated in the passenger seat of Yoongi's middle-aged chevy with his face throbbing and his life's possessions piled on his feet and listening to the hip hop that played from the radio that Jeon Jungkook realized that he most likely wouldn't see Yejun ever again.

The fact made a feeling rise in him that he couldn't put a name to. It warmed him from his head to his toes and caused his heart to skip a beat as he watched the sharp lines of the apartment fade into the distance.

He had the inkling that it was something like joy.

"-right there against your eye, thanks, sweetheart." Jimin instructed, handing him a frozen bag of peas. Jungkook obligingly took it and held it to the throbbing side of his face. Across the room from him, Yoongi was casually leaning against the counter, trying to make it seem like he wasn't sneaking glances at Jimin. "I have some mild pain meds for your stomach. You want to take them with coffee or water?"

"Hyung, really, I can barely feel it-"
"Shut up, Jungkook. Coffee or water?"

"...water."

"Yoongi, can you please go get them?" The mochi adjusted the maknae's hand so that it was holding the peas better. He glanced behind him; from Jungkook's limited vision, he could only half see the no doubt pleading look he was sending his soulmate.

If anybody else had asked him to do it, Yoongi would've told them to fuck off, but since it was Jimin asking he grudgingly peeled himself from his spot and traipsed to the hall. The man with platinum hair fretted about him some more, jostling the pillows surrounding him, adjusting the blanket that was spread out on top of him. When he ran out of things to do, Jimin resorted to tracing the frayed hole in the side of the fabric. Looking down at it, he remarked, "We're probably going to have to buy a new one soon. This thing's falling apart."

Jemin and Yoongi weren't exactly poor: the latter had a job as a producer at the studio he ran a few miles away, and the former took up any dancing job he possibly could (when he wasn't competing with Jungkook and Hoseok, of course). Still, Jungkook knew that with the amount of money his presence begged added to his own low wage job at the coffee shop, the three of them weren't exactly going to be swimming in money. He held his tongue, instead humming noncommittally in response to the comment.

Yoongi came back a minute later with the pills in hand. He gave them to Jungkook, whom took them with the cheesiest smile he could muster. After Jimin had gotten up to get the water, he coaxed his voice into a higher pitch and asked teasingly, "Oh, hyung, couldn't you go make me a sandwich? Fluff my pillow? Tickle my toes-"

"Yah!" The shorter of the two made a shoving motion at him. Jungkook neatly dodged, laughing into the bag of peas.

"C'mon, wouldn't you do anything for me if I asked?" He made kissing noises.

"You brat." Yoongi hissed menacingly. The tips of his ears were bright red.

Jungkook just laughed harder. His stomach ached like all of hell in response.

Somewhere in the midst of their tussling, Jimin came back into the room. "I swear to God, you two, if blood or vomit gets on the carpet I am not going to be the one cleaning it up."

They stopped. The brunette gulped down the medicine (which tasted gross, just saying) and settled back against the pillows.

Jemin went to go sit by Yoongi. The two stayed a reasonable distance away from each other. "I would tell you to get some rest-" Jimin started. Jungkook raised an eyebrow. "-but Yoongi wants to know what's going on. I couldn't really explain much to him before he left to pick you up. And..." His small shoulders lifted and fell. "I want to know why you hid this for so long, sweetheart."

Nothing happened for a moment. Jungkook looked down at the floor, breathed in, breathed out. They can know. It's okay. He's not going to hurt me anymore. "Yejun's not...you guys won't tell anyone what I tell you?"

Dual reassurances met his question, one a bit more enthusiastic than the other.

So he told them.
He told them about when he first met Yejun, how he was so handsome, and so nice. He visited the coffee shop Jungkook worked at and slipped him his number on a note that read, *you're cute. call me? ;)*. He told them how Yejun came over one night to watch a movie, how they ended up having sex on the couch. He told them how when they touched, he didn't mark Yejun and Yejun didn't mark him, so he knew that they weren't soulmates, but Jungkook didn't care. He told them how Yejun convinced him to move in with him at his much nicer apartment on the high class side of town. He told them about the first time Yejun hit him. He told them how Yejun kept hitting him. He told them how he didn't cover up the bruises at the start, not until people saw them and started assuming that he had a soulmate, that *Yejun* was his soulmate. He told them how the hitting got worse. He told them how he suddenly didn't want everyone to think Yejun was his soulmate, how he ended up at the makeup store, testing out concealers to see which one matched his skin tone. He told them how his hips and thighs ached on days he was too good. He told them how the water ran red on days he wasn't good enough. He told them how Yejun threatened to hurt him if he told anyone. He told them that he hid it because he was scared, scared of Yejun and scared nobody would believe him. He told them why he stopped going out, why he only went to work or dance practice and no where else. He told them he got tired of the purple and he didn't want to see it on his skin any more. He told them he didn't know how to escape.

He told them how sometimes, at night, when everything hurt too much, he cried and cried and wondered if he would ever find his real soulmate.

He told them how he wondered if his soulmate would love him, even if he was the one who gave them bruises.

And at the end of his story, Jungkook shook while the peas remained pressed to his swelling eye, and he was pulled into a hug given by Jimin. Once Jimin finished squeezing him and moved away, Yoongi held him tight for a while. And they got up and told Jungkook that he was welcome to stay there as long as he liked, and that it was no problem at all, and even though Jungkook didn't believe that it wasn't a problem he nodded is head and laid down when his hyungs told him to get some rest.

He was awake a quarter of an hour later when Jimin stopped Yoongi in the hall.

"Yoongi hyung."

"Yeah, Jiminnie?"

Jimin stepped closer, shortening the amount of space they purposefully kept between them. Yoongi seemed to automatically step back. It continued until the older man was backed against the wall, fingers trying to get a grip on the plaster.

"I love you." Jimin whispered. Jungkook heard Yoongi's breath hitch.

The mochi reached for his soulmate's wrist, which was covered by the long sleeved jacket he wore. Bringing his uncovered hand to his cheek, he added, "Even if you mark me."

Jimin nuzzled into Yoongi's palm, appeared to breathe him in, and pressed a kiss into his skin. Yoongi's whole body was trembling as he hesitantly stroked his soulmate's temple, looking as though it was something he'd done a thousand times yet never done before.

When they pulled away, the entire right side of Jimin's face was purple.

Jungkook closed his eyes.
In the morning, around six if he had to guess, Jungkook woke. Out of habit, he glanced to his left to see whether or not Yejun was awake too, remembering at the last second that he wasn't still in the apartment. Yejun may or may not be awake; it didn't matter anymore. He wouldn't be hit if he stayed in bed (or at least, on the couch) for a little while longer.

The smell of something savory was coming from the kitchen.

*Food or sleep?*

His stomach growled.

...*food.*

Rising, he wrapped the blanket around his shoulders and followed the smell. He found Jimin bent over the stove, back to him, cooking what seemed to be doenjang soup. His hyung was quietly singing a song as he stirred the pot, bopping his head to the beat Jungkook couldn't hear. He turned around in the middle of a verse, face lighting up once he noticed the brunette standing there.

Jungkook pretended he didn't notice the handprint-shaped, maroon-colored bruise that stretched from the mochi's temple to the upper part of his jaw.

"Morning, Kookie." Jimin smiled. "Do you have time to eat before you leave for work?"

"Yes, hyung. My shift doesn't start until eight." He replied, ambling over to the small circular dining table and plopping in a seat. "Want me to sneak a few donuts for you?"

"I like glazed." The platinum-haired man turned back to the food. Jungkook chuckled.

Since they'd been friends for ages, making conversation wasn't difficult. Divulging your deepest secret? No problem. Chatting about meaningless shit that sounded like nonsensical babble to every other human being on the planet? Easier than easy. During while Jimin was describing the awful haircut of the person standing in front of him at a store he'd visited a week ago, Yoongi entered the kitchen, looking closer to a disheveled cat than Jungkook had even known was possible.

Yoongi paused, staring at Jimin's face.

"Good morning, hyung." The mochi greeted softly with a smile that could only be described as caring.

The older man stared a bit longer, before bowing his head and shuffling towards the coffee maker. His "Good morning, gorgeous." was barely audible.

They all sat down to eat five minutes later. Jungkook noticed that Yoongi didn't look at Jimin the entire meal.

Due to another habit (because around this time at the apartment he'd usually have to excuse himself from the table to go apply concealer to his neck), the brunette ate the steaming food quickly. He thanked his friend for cooking, and went to do the dishes. The sound of the water against the bowls and silverware almost drowned out the whispers that rose up in his absence.

"Is it because you feel bad?"

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry, Yoongi. It doesn't hurt. I'm alright."
Jungkook knew Jimin was lying (he of all people would know just how painful fresh bruises were), and Yoongi must've known he was lying too; however, every word of that lie was said out of love.

And that, he thought, made the sting of the horrible purple bruises hurt just a little bit less.
"You're fired."

Jungkook stood in silent shock, blinking down at his manager. He was currently making someone's order, a cappuccino, with his fingers prepared to tip the container that would pour the foam over the top of the drink. Thinking that there was a possibility that he had heard his supervisor wrong, he stuttered, "I-I'm sorry, what, manager-nim?"

The brunette would've liked to have said that the short man hesitated before repeating his statement as though he regretted what he said to some degree, but no such thing occurred. His manager, with his arms folded and expression firm, said again, "You're fired, Jungkook ssi."

Neither man moved for a good minute. Jungkook swallowed, trying to moisten his suddenly dry tongue. "I...sir, I can't just...I need this job, I'm living with two other people and we're barely making ends meet these days-

Manager-nim waved him into silence. "Do you think that you're the only one with that kind of story working here? Half the kids I have in the kitchen are still in college. Their parents don't support them and this job is all they have. You aren't special in that regard."

"So why am I being fired, manger-nim?"

The shorter man sighed. "I run another shop a few miles away, and it's become more popular than this one. Less people are coming here and more are going there. The taxes on this place are starting to override the business profit, and being overstaffed in an unpopular place is...well, in short, I may as well be throwing money down the drain." He sighed once more. "Which means that I need to let some of you go. You're one of the oldest people here and you're out of college. You can find work elsewhere."
Jungkook finally set the half-finished drink down on the counter. His coworkers (now they would be ex-coworkers, wouldn't they?) bustled about and pushed past him and the manager. He stepped out of their way with his usual polite excuse; the words felt bitter and faintly nauseating. No no no, I can't be out of work, how am I supposed to pay for my part of the bills this week? Shit, I promised Jimin that I'd put out more than my share this time around..."Can't I work at your other shop?"

"No. I have enough people working there right now." The manager-nim began to shoo him from his place behind the counter. From the time it took to get to the door from there, Jungkook had numbly removed his apron from around his neck and handed it to his former employer. "Goodbye, Jungkook ssi."

"Wait-" He was being shoved out the front entrance, quite literally. Customers were starting to stare. "Manager-nim, please-"

"Goodbye."

It was another five minutes before he could bring himself to move from his spot, in front of his workplace where the glass doors had just been shut in his face. His feet knew the way, guiding him when his mind set itself on autopilot. The bus that he took home every day was scheduled for five o' clock; the one good thing that came out of this situation was that he'd been spared the mercy of trying to find proper transportation home as his manager had chosen to let him go at the end of his shift. A quick look at his phone showed off the time. 4:40. So he didn't have to run like hell in order to make it. Good.

That brief peek at his phone also showed off a message from Jimin. The reminder that he would have to tell his friend of his sudden unemployment made his heart sink down to the bottom of his stomach.

From: Jiminie

yoongi and I were thinking about going out tonite

prob won't be back until 2 or 3 am

r u ok if ur alone

It seemed like a bit of a silly question to ask since Jungkook was a rather well-built young man (despite his slenderness) who was capable of defending himself, but the three of them had been on guard ever since he had moved in. Yejun knew that the maknae planned to stay with Jimin and they worried over when or if he would show up at the front doorstep to do god knew what. He'd actually arrived there once before, about a week into Jungkook's stay: Yoongi had been the only one home at the time and had merely shut all the lights off and refused to answer the door. He later reported that the knocking and ringing persisted for the better part of two hours. Ever since, they'd been on the lookout.

Jungkook knew that he needed to find his own place soon. He was putting his friends in danger the longer he remained in their home. And anyway, though they'd assured him that he was welcome to remain as long as he liked, the original plan was for him to stay with the pair for a few days, not a few weeks. He'd well overstayed his visit. He needed to pack up and go as quickly as he could, once he was able.

He ground his teeth.

That would be great, if I had money to put towards my own place, from a JOB.
To: Jiminie

I'll be ok hyung
you two have fun

From: Jimine

ok...

we're gonna be with some of yoongi's friends from the studio
call if you need anything, okay? I'll hear the ring thru the drunken slurring, promise

To: Jiminie

I'm gonna be fine, hyung
don't worry

Jungkook was seated on the bus, earphones in and listening to IU when his phone beeped again.

From: Yoongi hyung

the pepper spray is underneath the kitchen sink
and there's a baseball bat behind the headboard of my bed in mine and Jiminie's room
just in case you need them

To: Yoongi hyung

what the fuck, hyung O_O

From: Yoongi hyung

watch your language, brat
tell Jimin about the baseball bat and I'll shave off your eyebrows in your sleep

The brunette blanched, typed out a rushed assurance that no, he would not tell Jimin, then sat back in his seat to watch the scenery go by.

Jungkook was scrolling through eBay wishing that he had possessions to sell. He really didn't have anything to his name except a few clothes and personal items that he would never sell no matter how much someone offered (the friendship bracelets he and Jimin had made as a joke but secretly loved, a shell that his mother had given him when he was small, an old CD of his first choir concert in primary school), and the fact depressed him a bit further. No job, no possessions to sell, no money.

God, when was he going to tell them?

There came a loud bang at the door. The brunette immediately shot up, startled. Was it Yejun? What was he going to do if it was him?
Shit, he was going to have to grab and use the bat, wasn't he?

The bang sounded again. Then came a key turning in a lock, the hinges swinging forward, and giggling.

Oh.

They were home.

"And...what was his name?" Jimin's voice, bubbly and brightened from alcohol, wondered aloud. "Nammm...jam? Namjam? Holy shittttt, Yoongi, he was so funny and polite, you've gotta keep him around."

Yoongi's tone was patient and a bit...strained? "Namjoon, gorgeous. He does really well in the studio, so I'll keep him around for as long as I can before-" Jungkook rounded the corner at that moment. The sight he was met with was one he'd had yet to witness previously: the mochi was stumbling about, giggling like a maniac, cheeks flushed the color of red roses. His soulmate was trying his best to steady him, but that was kind of impossible to do without getting too close. Yoongi looked up, and his face melted into one of relief. "Jungkook-ah, help?"

Understanding, the maknae walked forward and, ignoring the slurred nonsense emitting from his best friend's mouth, picked him up and threw him over his shoulder. Jimin squeed.

"Kookie-" The platinum-haired man cooed. "You're strong and stufffff, you could carry me around everywhere all the time...a new way to move around!" He laughed to himself. "Not by car, or by train, but by KOKIE!"

"Sure, hyung." Was what he could think of to respond to that statement with. "How much did you drink?"

"Only a littleeeeee."

"Actually, it was five drinks total. Within an hour and a half." Yoongi corrected from his place behind them, moving in step to their room. "It's a fucking wonder he hasn't passed out yet. He'll probably have a hell of a hangover in the morning, though."

Jungkook refrained from rolling his eyes. Barely. "Yoongi hyung, I know that you love to get Jiminie wasted for shits and giggles, but this is a little over the top, even for you-"

"It's not my fault!" The older man protested. They'd reached Jimin and Yoongi's shared bedroom: it was a medium-sized area with a single dresser, a desk cluttered with sheet music and notes, and two twin beds that were pushed as far away from each other as they could possibly be within the space. Jungkook set his friend down on the one clearly his (Yoongi would rather chop off his pinkie finger than have sheets that were pastel orange) as gently as he could. "I left the table for a little while to talk to a potential intern, and I came back to this!"

"Who was he sitting with?"

"Namjoon." Yoongi shook his head. "I think he just wanted to be nice to Jimin...I guess Jimin just kept asking for more alcohol and Joon was too polite to tell him no and kept buying him drinks."

"Wah, when I meet this Namjoon guy..." Jungkook said, the words carrying threat and promise as he gazed down at his inebriated best friend.

Surprisingly, Yoongi jumped to the unknown guy's defense. "He's alright. Just a bit of a pushover."
"Joonie was nice!" Jimin pouted from his bed.

"Too nice." The brunette sighed while Jimin continued to pout. Carefully, he leaned forward and brushed his slightly sweaty platinum bangs from his eyes. "Please, hyung, get some sleep. You'll feel better if you do. I'll bring you some water."

He made to leave the room. Yoongi stepped up to take his place by the bedside. Jungkook wasn't able to exit before hearing Jimin utter, "Hyung...come to bed with me..." And Yoongi's nearly silent, "I'm sorry, gorgeous, but I can't." That was given in reply.

The next day, with Jimin groaning through a headache in bed, with Yoongi drinking so much coffee he might as well inject himself with it, with Jungkook wondering what in God's name he was going to do with all his extra time, he told them.

They'd said a lot of nothing, only nodded and accepted it.

Jungkook felt horrible.

A week later, Jimin missed practice because he was taking on so many random dancing jobs. Hoseok and Jungkook practiced the dance together. It didn't feel the same.

A week and a half after that, Yoongi sold the dining room table and replaced it with a cheap foldout.

Jungkook felt horrible.

Being at the gym exercising like any other normal person would do shouldn't feel so odd, yet somehow it managed to. Jungkook hadn't been to a proper gym in something like seven months, when the purple spread to places he couldn't easily cover up (and even if he could, he'd just sweat the concealer off), so he'd just forgone going and took to running in the mornings, performing push ups and pull ups, and using dance practice as a means of staying active. It worked for all those months, a sort of monotone colorlessness that kept him in shape yet wasn't very exciting. Walking into the place, seeing so many different people, smelling the chlorine from the pool, examining the overly-priced protein shakes...it was faintly familiar, albeit a tad bit strange after going so long without experiencing such things.

The brunette also wasn't used to wearing such revealing clothing quite yet: a tank top, to him, was in no way to him risqué, just weird to wear. On top of concealer, he made a point to wear longer-sleeved clothes, hoodies, pants and jeans, the like. Shorts and tank tops were again familiar, and again a little odd.

He supposed that the most difficult change that he'd had to go through within the past few weeks (which included forcing himself to slow down when he was eating, forcing himself to not take cold showers simply because he was used to them, forcing himself to wear clothes that unveiled more of his skin) was the lack of application of his concealer. It was something he'd done every single day for nearly a year. After two weeks passed and the bruises had mostly faded, there was no need to keep using it. Jimin told him he didn't necessarily have to throw it out if he didn't want to, so Jungkook found himself holding onto his tiny container of makeup and opening the lid to look at it from time to time.

Which totally wasn't unhealthy or...yeah. He was okay. He was fine.

He was fine. Nobody was going to hurt him anymore. No more purple on his skin.
Adjusting the settings on the treadmill in front of him (did it always have so many? No...this must be a newer model or something), Jungkook rolled his shoulders, hopped on, and pressed the start button. He began at a slow jog, trying to get used to the feeling of the track underneath his feet and not the sidewalk or hard ground. Once he'd mentally adjusted, he sped up a bit. He pulled in a deep breath: oh yeah, he could definitely smell the chlorine, and the sweat, too.

Damn, but he'd missed this. It really had been too long. He'd started with quitting the gym, and then what was it? The movies? *That's right!* Jimin had been a bit hurt at first when he rejected the invitations to go out and watch some of their favorite films, but after this happening several times, he simply ceased in asking. And then it was...ah, right, he stopped visiting the doctors office when he was ill. He just couldn't stand it after a while, the way the nurses would look at his marks with awe and a bit of jealousy, ask who the lucky person was that was destined to be his, and how long had they been together, and what were they like, and wow, *wasn't it great having a soulmate?*

He sped up further.

After the gym and the movies and the doctors office, he stopped going to visit Yejun at work. That had really pissed the blonde off: he had told Jungkook he didn't care what he did with his life, he could just stay in the apartment like a hermit crab if he wanted, but he had assumed that the brunette would exclude his workplace from the list of places that he couldn't go to any more due to the bruises all over his fucking skin. Yes, Yejun had been really, really angry when he stopped seeing him at work. No way in hell though was he going to drop by and have his boyfriend show him off like some sort of trophy and pull up Jungkook's sleeves to unveil the marks and hiss lies about why and how they had gotten there, and then the photographer and the gorgeous models would look at him with those same stares of envy the nurses would give, and...and...fucking hell, but Jungkook didn't like being looked at like that. Forget that: he just didn't like being looked at. He sped up again. His breathing came faster now.

Those people didn't get it. Having a soulmate was not something to be covetous of because it wasn't all glitz and glamour and loving each other forever. It wasn't making sweet love underneath the moonlight, it wasn't holding hands on top of the table or playing footsies underneath it, it wasn't magic. It was pain. It was awful. It was finding the one that you were meant to be with, yes, and once you found them you weren't allowed to be with anybody else. Ever. Whatever happened when soulmates touched for the first time, when bruises first blossomed across skin, it was permanent and unforgiving. You were tied down to that person until you died, or until they died; and when either of you did, the other person still wasn't free. You and your soulmate couldn't love anybody else, that was just it. The universe or fate or whatever didn't allow it. You'd never burn as hot with desire, you'd never feel properly happy again, you would be haunted by an emptiness in your heart that no one else on the planet could fill.

He sped up and ran ever faster.

Jimin had explained it to him, the very day he'd found out about Yoongi. It was three years ago, when they were still in college, the mochi's hair bright orange and Jungkook's own his natural onyx. They were sitting on one of their beds, papers and books cast aside, whispering in the dark. With moisture rimming his eyes, Jimin had told him of man he'd met on the bus, with mint green hair and his dark pupils accented by smoky eyeshadow. He was a rapper, and older than him by two years, he found out later. All he had been doing was searching for a place to sit when he'd accidentally stumbled and dropped one of his books. The stranger had hesitated for a moment before bending down to pick it up the same time Jimin had. Not a second after their hands met,
bright purple marks had bloomed on Jimin's fingers.

It was all over, then. The mochi gripped the material of Jungkook's shirt and cried his heart out. Though his sobbing, he had mumbled over how he hadn't believed it, he didn't want to, he couldn't; and he was made to believe when he'd gotten off the bus and gone to his girlfriend's abode to talk with her. Immediately, he felt the emptiness in him. He kissed her and felt nothing, he said. He said it was like someone had reached inside him and ripped out all his love for her and he couldn't get it back. He never would.

And so Jungkook held him while he cried, rocked him back and forth and played with his hair, and agreed when asked if he would to tell Jimin if ever such a thing happened to him. He would not keep that secret from his best friend. He'd promised, and promised he'd go to Jimin if he needed help.

He broke his promise the morning he looked in the mirror and saw a bruise darkening the color of his skin.

And as he'd continued to break his promise, Yejun continued to break him.

With a startled gasp, Jungkook's mind was ripped from his train of thought as he realized he was sprinting with all of his might and that his breath was getting caught in his chest and his legs were screaming at him in protest. He stumbled slightly, hands flailing out to grasp the bars on either end of the treadmill, catching him before he could fly off completely. How the hell was he supposed to figure out how to slow the damn thing down? Spotting a bright red circular icon, he hit it.

The treadmill beeped. Jungkook set himself down, still running, and found himself ramming into the front of the control panel. An ache formed in his lower abdomen. It had abruptly stopped. Pulling himself from the machine, he grimaced and massaged the area, swearing under his breath. He glanced up to see several people looking his way with expressions that ranged from stupefied to a typical are-you-stupid-do-you-even-know-how-to-work-out-is-this-your-first-time-at-a-gym-you-pabo. The brunette, cheeks burning, quickly glanced away.

Jungkook didn't like being looked at.

Not far from the death trap of a treadmill he'd nearly killed himself on, neon green benches sat empty. The maknae picked up his water bottle from where he'd set it aside earlier, and checked the time on the overhead clock while he chugged it down, making his way over to one of them to sit. An hour. Shit, he'd been here for an hour already? He hadn't noticed...he guessed that time flew when one was lost in their thoughts. He really should focus more, though: gym membership was costly and he couldn't afford (actually, he, Jimin, and Yoongi couldn't afford) to be whittling away hours inside of his head. He was able to be here until the end of the month until the membership expired, and Jungkook was kidding himself if he believed he'd have enough money by that time to renew it, so he had to take advantage of every single second he had and be productive.

He finally reached the benches and sat. Moving his hand from his sore belly, he massaged his tired legs. He wore an old ratty pair of shorts that reached his knees, yet even with the length, he felt exposed. Jungkook moved his fingers to his calves, studying the clear skin. He poked and prodded. Nope. No purple. Not since weeks and weeks ago.

I really need to stop thinking about this. The brunette closed his eyes and removed his hand, releasing a large breath. This is getting old. I can't move on if I don't stop thinking about it. I know that. I know not everything has to do with the bruises. I'm okay now. I'm okay. I'm not being hit any more. I'm not being shoved into a cold shower or fuck with until I bleed every night or anything. I'm supposed to be alright now.
Jungkook breathed in again, and released it. It exited shakier this time.

*Why am I not alright?*

"GOOD JOB, BABE!"

His head automatically snapped up, eyes searching the relatively quiet floor for the source of the loud disruption. His pupils settled on a young man, probably twenty-something, hair a deep flame red and clutching a phone in his hand that had a cyan case that had a...Jungkook squinted. Was that a unicorn?

The young man raised both of his hands in the air, rose from his seat, and began to mime cheerleading moves. "YOU'RE DOING GREAT! I BELIEVE IN YOU!"

The brunette looked to his right, where the cheering was directed at, finding a taller man with pink hair jogging on one of the death traps. He shook his head at the overly-dramatized scene and continued running. After another minute of boisterous cheers and weird dance moves, the young man sat down.

Jungkook cocked his head to the side. There was something weirdly familiar about that man. The one with the phone case. His cat-like but attractive face was pulled into a similarly familiar boxy smile. Mischievous and happy. Where had he seen it before? He was sure he had, on multiple occasions. No, no...he couldn't have. He would've remembered someone who cared so little for social norms (like, not screaming your ass off in a near silent building) and was so good looking, to add to that.

Just as the maknae was about to shrug it off as his mind playing tricks on him and continue on with his day, the young man looked up.

Right at him.

And he *squealed.*

"Oh my god! I didn't expect to see you here!" He called, voice still loud and uncaring. Jungkook winced, sensing the stares of the other people around him bore into him. *Please don't look at me, please don't look, there's nothing interesting to see here people move on with your day damn it-"* "Yah, Jungkook-ah! Why haven't you dropped by in like forever?" The young man's tone turned teasing. "What, haven't you missed me?"

Jungkook 1) did not know how this familiar stranger knew his name, 2) had no idea where he hadn't 'dropped by' in forever, and 3) did not want to have a conversation that consisted of shouting across the floor at each other. The stranger grinned brightly and made a 'come on over' motion as the brunette stood to do just that.

The man got up to bow once he finally stopped in front of him. He bowed in return. As soon as he had straightened, the man was off again. "It's so weird, we haven't seen each other in so long! Did you start going somewhere else to shop?" He paused, thinking to himself. "Ah, yeah, that would make sense. I think we stopped carrying your skin tone like three weeks ago, and it's a pain in the ass to have to mix shades-"

"My...skin tone?" *What?*

"Yeah." The redhead said, giving him a look that implied that that was the most obvious thing in the world (but was still polite in giving said look). "In concealer colors."
Jungkook gave a blank stare for a solid thirty seconds, brain whirring and trying to put together all of the puzzle pieces. That face, he knew Jungkook's name, the concealer...those facts could fit nobody other than-

"Wait, are you...Tae?" He asked, shocked and incredulous. "Kim Taehyung? From the makeup store?"

The man whom was indeed Kim Taehyung smiled even bigger. "That's me." He mocked pouting a little bit, crossing his arms over his chest and sticking his lip out. Coupled with the unicorn-themed phone case, it was, frankly, an adorable sight. "Is my face that forgettable?"

"No, no!" Jungkook rushed to assure him. Dammit, not even a few sentences in yet and I'm already making a shitty first impression. On someone I already know.

"No, no!" Jungkook rushed to assure him. Dammit, not even a few sentences in yet and I'm already making a shitty first impression. On someone I already know. "I just haven't been to the store in a while...your face isn't forgettable, I promise." The brunette smiled a bit. "Except when you tried to wink at me while sneaking stuff into my bag. I'd gladly forget that expression."

"Hey, that's called being smooth, Jungkook-ah!" Taehyung's mother must've never told him that pointing was rude, because he was jabbing in the direction of Jungkook's chest with his pointer finger insistently. His features were playful, though, so Jungkook realized he wasn't actually offended. "I flirt with all of the cute boys like that. And they fall for it every time."

"All the cute...oh. Jungkook felt his cheeks get a bit hot. Luckily, Taehyung was not the only one gifted with slick speech, and he returned with, "And you give all the cute boys thousands of won in free makeup?"

"There's only one cute boy around here, and it's my boy." A new voice announced. Jungkook whirled around to see the man Taehyung had been egging on earlier, the one with pink hair, sidling up to the pair. His face was utterly gorgeous, like, unfair crazy how is that even possible kind of gorgeous, with softly slanted eyebrows, a tall, thin nose, and rosy lips. He could be a model, easy.

The new man (whom Jungkook got the feeling was older that either the or Taehyung) finally stopped once he was positioned beside the Taehyung, and looked Jungkook up and down. He seemed to be scrutinizing him. The brunette tried not to shuffle his feet underneath the potent gaze. The man paused in his examination to turn and give Taehyung a dazzling smile. "Actually, there are two cute boys, and you must admit that I'm cuter."

"Are you trying to proposition this one?"

The redhead rolled his eyes, the gesture slightly frustrated. "No, babe, I told you I was going to start looking for someone next week. And anyway..." Taehyung glanced towards the maknae. His already deep voice lowered to a level that made it clear Jungkook was not supposed to hear. He leaned in very close to the taller man, and whispered something. Jungkook wondered why he didn't just stand on his toes and murmur in his ear.

Whatever Taehyung had said, it caused the pink-haired man's eyes to widen a fraction, and he appeared to be at a loss for words as some sort of realization dawned on him. As quickly as his astonishment arrived, it faded, and the man's disposition changed abruptly; his features shifted from slightly standoffish to friendly within an instant. Oh, fuck, please don't tell me I've met another handsome psychopath. Give me at least another month before I have to deal with handsome psychopaths again. "Well, it's nice to meet you, Jungkook ssi! I'm Seokjin. I'm the guy Tae here whined to over how much he missed seeing you." He bowed.
After he had returned the favor, Jungkook sighed in apology. "Sorry about that. About, you know, not coming to the shop any more."

"Damn, was it really because of the concealer color? I can try to beg my boss to bring it back, but she's stubborn as all hell, I swear~"

"Uh, actually, it wasn't because of the concealer." The brunette thought for a second. "Or, wait, it kind of was. I actually stopped needing to use it a few weeks ago. I haven't had to go out and buy more, so..." Jungkook smiled to further his apology. "I should've asked for your number or something so we could keep in touch. You were really nice."

"Aww, see, the winking did work, you wanted my number!" Taehyung punched the air in victory.

"Uh, just to text you, like in a friendly way~"

"It's okay, Jungkookie, just admit that I'm hot shit and I get all the cute boys' numbers~"

"Did you literally just call yourself hot shit right now~"

"Bet your ass I did, I think Seokjinie's confidence is wearing off on me~"

"Too much, apparently, how are you going to keep the cute boys you give makeup to around if they think you're egotistical~"

"Because, again, I'm hot shit, and cute boys want the hot shit, no matter what the hot shit is like as long as they're still hot shit."

"That...made no sense."

Laughter bubbled up in Jungkook at the end of his final sentence that was warm and happy. He let loose a few giggles at Taehyung's ridiculousness, watching as the older man did the same. He really should've asked for his number; two months was too long of a time to go without their amicable yet sassy banter.

Seokjin was laughing a bit too. His smile had turned kinder by the end of their playful argument. "You don't take Tae Tae's crap. I like that." His face became gentle. "So, Jungkook ssi, how's everything going with your life? What do you do?"

"I-" The maknae started, about to carry on with work at a coffee shop. He hurried to correct the rest of his sentence before it exited his mouth, finding that admitting he was unemployed would garner too much embarrassment on his part. "I-I'm a dancer. Who only does so competitively and not as a source of income."

"No wonder." Taehyung's eyes trailed the curves and bends of Jungkook's exposed arms and legs. The brunette fought the urge to cover himself. "You're killing the body game, Jungkookie. Wish I had the energy to jump and jive around and all that. My dancing is shit though."

"It just takes practice." Jungkook answered, thinking back to his beginning days. "You'll fall a lot and mess up even more often, but...it's great. It's fun. Makes the struggle worth it, you know?" He laughed a bit. "Even when your legs are killing you and you haven't taken a break in three hours and your throat feels like a desert. The fun of it all makes that stuff matter a lot less."

"You dance for a company? Backup in music videos and things like that?" Seokjin asked curiously.

"Uh..." He really couldn't call the trio of him, Hoseok, and Jimin a company, could he? "Not
exactly. I only actually dance about three times a year, when competition season rolls around. All the rest of the time, I'm practicing."

"Sounds like hard work." The redhead commented. Jungkook, thinking back on the countless times he'd nearly collapsed from either stress from an incoming competition or from pure exhaustion, found himself nodding. Yes, it was hard sometimes. "I hope they're paying you well."

Without thinking he answered, "The money from the competitions is more than enough."

Seokjin's eyebrows furrowed. "Didn't you say that you only dance thrice a year? You only get paid thrice a year, too? That's enough?"

*Fuck.* "I-I mean, it's, uh..."

Taehyung, with his own brows pulled together and a slightly disgruntled expression on his face, commented, "I have a friend who's a dancer. He works a ton of odd jobs because he says he just doesn't make enough from the competition wins. And that's even *if* he wins."

*Double fuck.* "It's, well, we usually win-"

"Jungkookie." The redhead cut him off, all humor gone from his tone. "Are you working?"

Since hiding behind a shell of lies was something he'd only recently crawled out of, his first instinct was to dive right back in and make something up to ease the worry from his friend. He opened his mouth, about to fabricate some bullshit, but his eyes landed on Seokjin. The older man stood tall, wise, almost like a mother, crossing his arms and looking down at him with his features screaming *lie to my boy and you will regret it and I also want to know if you're alright so don't even think about trying to hide it.*

He didn't need to lie to these people. He really, really didn't.

So he wouldn't.

"I'm...no. I'm not working right now." The maknae uttered quietly, his pupils moving from Seokjin's stern face to the carpeted ground. It was a nice carpet. He kind of wished it would swallow him up.

"Did you quit?" Taehyung asked.

"...no." If only that had been the case. The reality was just a bit more awful and humiliating. "My boss fired me because he's overstuffed. I was the oldest one working there, so he let me go so the other college kids there could keep their jobs, since, you know...it was all they had."

"That's horrible." Taehyung said sympathetically. He reached out and laid a careful hand on his shoulder, the warmth of him radiating through his touch. It felt nice.

"If you need anything at all, please, let us know if we can help." Seokjin's own voice was soft.

 Anything at all? Jungkook looked up at him and tried for a weak smile. *Like enough money to pay for this months rent, and because I'm a bad friend, next months rent too since I probably won't be out of their apartment yet?* "Thank you for your offer, but I'm alright. I wouldn't want to trouble you or anything."

Taehyung made a scoffing noise. "Trouble? Sure. I have the feeling you'd never be any trouble, Jungkookie. Even if we spent all day around each other all the time even though we don't which
sucks. But still. If we did, you wouldn't be any trouble."

Something began to chime. It was the redhead's watch, the screen flashing white over and over. He dropped his hand from the brunette's shoulder to tap at it and read the notification that came up. "Ugh, shit. It's the boss." He tilted his head towards Seokjin. "She wants me to come in and work the late shift tonight. Like, the late late shift. Until midnight."

"Again?" The rose-haired man sighed. "That's the fourth time this week, Tae."

"I know." Taehyung swiped, and the notification disappeared. He appeared displeased. "I'm sorry...ever since that girl with the caramel hair left, I think her name was Joy or something, there's been barely anybody there to run the register and Jackson can't do it because he goes to his boyfriend's concerts at night and Emonie can't work the late shift because her grandma is coming down with something and I feel too bad to put it on her and-" He suddenly stopped ranting, freezing in place.

A certain look crossed his face. The same one from before, when he had been loudly cheering Seokjin. The person in question seemed to know that look, for he immediately started shaking his head the moment he saw it. "Tae, whatever insane thing you're thinking this time, no-"

Taehyung unfroze to pout; a second later, excitement that had stemmed from nowhere began to make him jitter and jump around like an excited puppy. "But this is different! This time I'm helping someone!"

"That's what you said last time, and the time before that, and the time before that."

"This really is different babe! Jungkook-ah!" The redhead gripped Jungkook's arm tightly, taking him by surprise. A wild grin spread on the other man's face. "I know how we can spend more time together and you can get back to working! You can work with me at the makeup store!"

"What?"

"Oh my god, this works out perfectly!" Taehyung was on a roll now. "Here, gimme your phone, I'll put my number and Seokjin's number and my boss's number in it so you can text us. The second I let my boss know that she's got a potential hire, she'll be wanting to contact you asap. You know how to work a cash register, right?"

This was all moving way too fast for Jungkook to keep up. "Yeah, I know how-"

"Great!" Taehyung entered the contacts into the brunette's phone, handing the device back to him when he was finished. He was positively giddy. "Don't worry about not knowing the ropes, I'll teach you. Soon you'll be able to differentiate between contours and highlighters in two seconds flat!"

Highlighters? Jungkook wondered, thinking of the bright neon-colored school supply. "I, wait, I don't know anything about makeup, your boss-"

"-won't care, so long as you can make change and not steal from the machine. And like I said, I'll teach you." Taehyung smiled. "I'll call you as soon as I set up the interview, okay? This is gonna be awesome!"

Just then, Taehyung's watch beeped again, more insistently this time. Apparently, along with working the late late shift, she needed him to come in right at that very moment. Something about the girl Emonie having to leave early. The redhead informed her that he would be there in twenty minutes, which meant that he and Seokjin had to leave right that very second. They hurriedly
bowed to one another and bid their goodbyes, Taehyung's eyes shining with hope. Seokjin repeated
that it was, all in all, very nice to meet him, and he hoped to see Jungkook soon. Grabbing his lilac
gym bag, he waved, and was promptly led away by Taehyung, still babbling about how excited he
was. The two turned a corner, and were gone.

Jungkook stood there a minute after they left, his phone heavy in his hand. He'd just managed to
reconcile with an old friend, make a new one, and find a job. In less than forty minutes. He could
scarcely believe it.

Maybe...

Maybe everything was going to be alright.

Just maybe.

Nobody was home when the brunette opened the door and locked it behind him. Jungkook wasn't
surprised: Yoongi had been busier and busier at the studio lately, trying to finish a project that was
due at the end of the week, and Jimin had to frequently visit him to remind him to eat and
occasionally made pit stops at night to bring him home so he could sleep. Jimin was also busy with
those dance jobs, so he was home less too. His heart felt a million times lighter knowing that his
hyungs wouldn't have to work themselves to the bone any longer, for now he could put forth his
share of the rent (which meant less sleepless nights for Yoongi, and Jimin having the time to attend
practice as well as get more sleep himself).

The brunette shuffled to the tiny guest room that he occupied. It was a plain, bare room that had a
single twin bed in the middle of it and white walls that were devoid of any marks. He set his bag
down on the bed and pulled out the little he'd put in there; his water bottle, a towel, and a pair of
cheap flip flops he'd gotten the other day in case his feet were too sore in his tight sneakers.

He hummed a tune while debating if he should get in the shower. It was rather early in the
evening, so he could probably jump in for a quick rinse off and have enough time to make
something for dinner. Despite their money troubles, Jimin made sure to keep the pantry well-
stocked, so there were most likely ingredients in there that he could throw together to make decent
bulgogi or something-

Ding dong!

Hmm? Are they home already? Jungkook wondered, exiting the room and making his way down
the hall. They're supposed to be home in two or three hours...

There was a peephole in the door, at a height that the maknae had to crouch a bit to reach. He
never really used it, since nobody other than he, Yoongi, and Jimin ever stopped by. Jimin was
always nagging him to use it ("There could be some psycho out there that you're letting stroll in!"
He pointed out, pacing in front of the brunette. Jungkook had scoffed. "There's one already in the
house, Yoongi hyung." "I'm going to fuck you up, brat." "Love you too, hyung.") and he brushed
him off all those times. Since he was actually unsure of the visitor this time around, he decided to
try it out. What could it hurt?

Jungkook leaned down, feeling a bit silly, and peeped.

His blood turned to ice.

Standing right outside the door, not two feet away, looking more pissed than he had ever seen him
before (which was saying something), was Yejun.
Oh my god!

The maknae stumbled backwards, his breathing picking up. He did nothing for a long moment, only stared at the wood in had shock, half horror.

It's not really him. Jungkook blinked hard. It's not him, he's gone, he can't hurt me any more, he's gone, I got away, he can't be here this is not real this is my head making it all up he can't-

A pounding noise came from the door, so loud and unexpected that the brunette jumped.

"Jungkook. I know you're in there. Come out. Now."

Even though Yejun couldn't see him he started to shake his head furiously. No no no no no. Jungkook's body trembled, and he blinked and blinked and shook and this isn't real, it's not real, it's not real...

"Jungkook." Yejun sounded angrier. "I said now." The door rattled like someone was pounding at it again.

Through his haze of growing panic, Jungkook remembered a piece of information that could help him. Yogi had told him about an object he could use for self defense. The baseball bat. The one behind Jimin's bed. He tore his gaze away from the shaking door and sprinted back down the hall to said room. He saw the orange of his hyung's bed sheets (why...why is my vision getting so blurry?) and blindly reached behind the headboard. Something smooth and solid greeting his fingers. He hoisted it up, and sure enough, it was indeed a metal bat.

Thank you, Yoongi hyung, for being a psycho and worrying about Jiminnie's safety. Jungkook gripped it as loosely through sweaty palms and walked to the door. It still rattled; Yejun's voice poured through from the other side, hissing and seething.

"You will come out right now, Jungkook-ah. How dare you think that you could get away from me. How dare you, leaving me, someone who did nothing but care about you and running your mouth to your pathetic friends like a whore."

Everything was shaking. Shut up, shut the fuck up you liar, you're the reason the purple was on my skin for so long, you're the one who brought me pain. You never cared! He wanted to say. The words couldn't come out.

"I will break this door down, and I will come in there and drag you back. You will be severely punished for this, this unbelievable treason. It'll hurt to sit down, to lay down, to do anything once I'm finished with you." Yejun gave the door a good solid bang. Jungkook flinched. There was a break of quiet before he roared, "GET OUT OF THERE RIGHT NOW YOU COME-LOVING BITCH!"

Jungkook tried to lift the bat. He saw what was going to happen next in his head: Yejun would break the lock on the door and run at him, and he'd swing the bat and crack his ribs and call the police while he was on the ground. He'd keep him on the floor until the police came and arrested him. That's what would happen. No problem. Easy.

But he couldn't. He couldn't pick the bat up. Confused, the brunette looked down at his arms. He screeched and dropped the object.

His arms were covered in bruises.
Black and blue and purple climbed up his arms in a terrible pattern, sallowing his skin, ruining the natural tan that resided there. He rubbed at them desperately, sobs climbing in his throat. *Come off, please come off, there are too many there are way too many I can't cover these up please come off why won't they come off, please-*

Nausea was causing his stomach to turn. He swayed, steadied himself, tried to stay upright. Yejun was still banging and cursing at the door, and really, Jungkook should run or fight or something. His head was spinning, filling him with thoughts: Yejun pushing him against the mattress, looming over him, choking him, breaking him. Bit by bit, tearing him apart, never letting the purple leave his skin for good, marking him up, lying about it, *yes, yes they were soulmates they were so happy together, no no no, help me, help me please I'm going to die like this, he's going to kill me and my body will be purple before they put me in the ground.*

He thought he'd gotten away.

Jungkook's sight tunneled. He fell over and hit the floor hard. There was a pain in his chest greater than the pain radiating from his arms, too great, it throbbed. He was scared. He was scared before, scared after, scared now. He thought he had gotten away and he thought that with getting away he'd be alright. He'd heal and be strong again and be alright. He'd move on and fight if Yejun came back and he'd be alright. He would be alright, that's what he told himself.

Shivering, with the pounding of the door dull in his nearly deaf ears, Jungkook watched as the world grew darker and darker.

*Why am I not alright?*

Chapter End Notes

Namjoon will for sure be present in the next chapter, and like this one, the next chapter will be sometime within the next two weeks :D Shout at me in the comments!
Chapter Summary

If normality helps overcome irregularities, then the boredom that comes with such a routine is nothing if it makes one new.

Chapter Notes

Ahhh I'm so sorry everyone! This chapter is a little late and that's like kind of awful, but I really wanted to make it longer than the previous one and also give y'all a chapter with really good quality. I hope it makes you guys happy and that you enjoy it!

This is where they meeеееet and Namjoon and Jungkook will for sure interact far more in the next chapter! :)

Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was dreaming about his soulmate.

He didn't know how he knew it was them, but he did. Perhaps it was the sense of *rightness* when their eyes met, the warmth, the deep contentedness in his soul. Whatever it was it had Jungkook's breath catching in his throat, his lips pulling into a large smile as he gazed at the one he was destined to be with.

They grinned back at him, pupils shining, expression just as happy as his was. They approached him slowly yet eagerly, a cautious oxymoron of pent-up excitement and energy. Jungkook stepped forward as well. The closer the two became, the warmer the feeling in his chest got. It grew hotter and hotter and hotter, making his heart thump faster and faster. He held his soulmate's gaze and knew all at once that they felt the same thing.

Now they were mere inches from one another. The brunette also knew that the heat in his chest would dissipate if he only held his other half's hand, and he reached for it. His soulmate's features melted into sadness and they pulled away before he could touch their skin. He looked at them questioningly.

His soulmate shook their head with that same sadness, pulling away a bit further while sending his seeking hand a wary glance. Suddenly, he understood; yes, it was possible that if he touched them, the heat might fade...

Or it would explode.

*But I love you.* Jungkook said, though his voice made no noise. *I'm not afraid.*

His soulmate gave no reply.
He stepped towards them, a motion that was mirrored by them stepping backwards. The heat instantly started to cool. Jungkook's eyes widened and he held a hand to his heart, disliking the feeling immediately. He would much rather become a victim to the fire of passion than be a slave to the chill of solitude. He walked forward another step, and this time, his soulmate took three steps back. Their face crumpled with an unexplainable grief; they shook their head, stepped back again, appearing ready to bolt if he got any closer.

No, his heart wasn't freezing or burning up, it was filling with a sludge by the name of helplessness. Please...please don't go. He begged.

They opened their mouth to reply, and what exited was, "...ah."

Jungkook blinked. What?

His soulmate said, "...ook-ah..."

One of his cheeks began to feel kind of cold. Not the same kind of cold that tamed the flame in his chest, it was a cold on a far lesser degree. Still a bit bothersome, though. He lifted a hand and rubbed at the area.

"...ake...wake up..."

_Wake up?_ Why did it feel like his body was a million times heavier than it had been a moment ago? He shrugged his shoulders, trying to get the weight off, blinking rapidly. His sight was beginning to go black.

"...ungkook-ah! Wake up!"

And his soulmate was waving at him, smiling with a tinge of sorrow laced within the sweetness of the gesture, bowing their head. Jungkook didn't care if he was being submerged in a tub of ice water with a thousand pounds of rocks to keep him company (since that's what he currently guessed was happening to him, based on the sensations), he was getting to his soulmate, _damn it all._ Determined, he broke into a run.

Abruptly the voice screamed. The sound was so loud he fell to his knees and clapped his hands over his ears, flinching.

"JEON JUNGKOOK! WAKE THE HELL UP RIGHT FUCKING NOW!"

Everything was gone. His soulmate and their void of nothingness were gone, the iciness in his chest was gone, the weight was gone and he was flying up up up and he breathed in and tasted the air that was very faintly sweet, a kind of sweetness he knew, a kind of sweetness he usually associated with...with Jimin.

Jimin. Jimin and Yoongi and moving into the apartment and rent and coffee and the bus and death traps and bruises and red hair and the gym and money and makeup and baseball bats and opening the door and bruises and purple and dark and-

And waking up.

Jungkook's eyes snapped open.

His eyelids fluttered while he attempted to clear the gritty haze that had fallen over his vision. He tried to move (ah, so his cheek was stuck to something cold...that made sense now) and found that the process of doing so was slowing, made even slower by a hand that was on his hip, shaking him
as though there was no tomorrow. The brunette made to bat at the hand. It stopped rattling him, and someone above him inhaled sharply to let it out in a broken sigh. "Jungkook, god, can you hear me?"

Yes, yes, I can hear you just fine and wow that light is really bright. He croaked out a "Who...?"

"It's hyung." The voice answered.

At that, Jungkook couldn't help but snort as he continued to gather his bearings. "I've got a lot of hyungs..." He sniffed. Yeah, that was definitely Jimin's perfume that he wore more often than not. "Jiminnie?"

"Close, brat."

Finally the film over his pupils cleared. He found himself gazing up at an ivory-skinned figure with dark hair and even darker eyes. Nope, not Jimin, so... "Yoongi hyung?"

"That's right." Yoongi affirmed. Though his expression appeared typically uninterested, it was clear that something was worrying him. There was a slight crease in between his brows and a subtle downturn of his lips that sold him out (unbeknownst to him). "Wanna tell hyung why you're on the floor?"

"I'm..." The maknae shook his head, still a touch disoriented, and continued, "I'm on the floor?" He sniffed again. "Why do you smell like Jimin hyung?"

"He dropped me off five minutes ago." Yoongi, he now noticed, was completely dressed in outdoor wear. He hadn't even removed his shoes or jacket yet. His nose and cheeks were colored a soft scarlet, most likely from the cool weather outside. But...that couldn't be right...it only got moderately frosty late at night. Yejun had arrived at the birth of the evening. How had so much time passed by so quickly? "Left to go pick us up some hot dinner."

Jungkook tried to sit up. Yoongi reached out to help him, delicately moving his body into a sitting position. The brunette gazed around at his surroundings; everything appeared to be normal, save for the bat laying about two feet from the pair.

A...bat?

It hit him then in one grand rush. Sucking in air, he reeled as his mind was bombarded with memories. Yoongi steadied him when he began to sway and lean back.

"Hyung. H-Hyung." He choked while he gripped at Yoongi's arms so tight it was probably cutting off the circulation. Wide-eyed, he met his hyung's concerned gaze. "Yejun. Yejun was here."

The worry vanished to be replaced with anger. "That son of a bitch came here again?" He seethed, expression murderous. "I fucking swear, the next time I see his ugly face I'm going to grab the biggest pan we have and-" His furious monologue abruptly halted as he stared at Jungkook. "Did he...was he in the house? Did he hurt you?"

Jungkook checked his bare arms, prepared to be scarred for life by the sheer amount of marks there. His bare skin greeted his pupils. There were no bluish or purple marks to be found; one blemish tarnished what would've been perfectly smooth skin, merely a scrape that he'd earned earlier that day when he was flailing about on the treadmill. "I...no, he didn't come in...I grabbed the bat because I thought he was going to break down the door or something, but he never came inside."
"Then why the hell were you passed out on the floor when I walked in?"

The brunette tried to think. He'd felt very overwhelmed...like everything was rushing at him all at once and he couldn't stop it. It might've been a...

"I think I had a panic attack."

Yoongi was quiet for a moment. He turned his head away, which was not enough to muffle the string of swears he uttered under his breath. "Shit, Jungkook. When did this happen?"

"In the afternoon, when I got back from the gym."

"Jungkook." The older man's words were serious and for some reason, the maknae had the feeling that whatever he was about to say next was going to freak him out. "It's ten at night. You've been out for hours."

The brunette just looked at Yoongi. He'd been unconscious for hours. For hours.

The moment he came back to himself after listening to the shock-induced white noise humming in his ears for the better part of a minute, the thing that exited his mouth first, garbled by anxiety, was "Don't tell Jiminnie hyung."

If there was one thing that could be said about Min Yoongi, besides the fact that he absolutely adored Park Jimin, it was that protected his friends with a fierce passion, a passion that was like a hot iron that would burn or melt anyone whom got too close if he so desired to wield its heat.

But again. Min Yoongi adored Park Jimin, and he would rather give up the passion for good than hurt his beloved with the flame.

That's the logic that Jungkook was counting on, anyway. He counted on it when the two of them finally got up from the floor, the producer supporting him with one arm. He counted on it when they stowed the bat away. He counted on it when he sat quietly on the couch, scrolling through his phone while Yoongi put something semi-interesting on the television. He counted on it when Jimin came home, smiling prettily, brandishing the plastic bags that had steaming bibimbap and japchae and yukgaejang that smelled heavenly. He counted on it while they were seated on the floor, tearing into the food with their chopsticks and talking about their days. He counted on it when Jimin asked Yoongi casually what he'd done after he'd dropped him off at home, cheeks stuffed with hot beef.

Don't say it, please, hyung. Jungkook made eye contact with the older man sitting across from him, mentally pleading. If you say it Jimin will worry his ass off and we both damn well know he doesn't need that. I'm fine.

Yoongi broke their shared gaze and told Jimin he'd just watched some TV and waited for his soulmate to come back.

And while Jimin blushed a bit and teased back, Jungkook thanked his lucky stars that his hyung was psycho crazy protective over Park Jimin.

Admittedly, the uniform wasn't that bad.

He'd had to surrender his jeans, which sucked a bit, but the obsidian slacks that he was given to wear instead were comfortable and stylish (and they made his thighs slimmer, a bonus in his eyes).
Jungkook was allowed to pick out the color of his shirt from yellow, orange and pink (all colors that followed the theme of the store, since it was named *Sunbeam*), and chose one that was pastel orange. It was a calming color and accented the pants quite well.

Unable to resist since he was in front of a sizable mirror, the maknae twirled a bit. His reflection mimicked his movements, smiling a little, pupils running over the entire ensemble. Yeah, he could get used to dressing like this for work. It was definitely a step up from an old t-shirt and an apron.

Someone knocked on the bathroom door. "Jungkook-ah, are you finished? I wanna see how you look!"

The brunette started slightly at the noise. Shit, he'd probably been in here for way too long. Now was not the time to stand around and look semi-decent. He was supposed to be working. "Be there in a sec!" After taking one final glance he scuttled to the door and opened it.

Kim Taehyung was leaning against the wall dressed in his own work getup. His shirt was a deep magenta and his pants the same black as Jungkook's. In true Taehyung nature, he had placed little cute animal stickers and tiny hearts around his name on his name tag, bits of self expression that suited his persona perfectly. He grinned when Jungkook stepped out clutching his regular clothes in his arms. "Damn, Jungkookie, you've gotta stop looking so good in everything. You'll steal all my cute boys away."

Okay, first of all, Taehyung looked like a fucking model, and if he wore a trash bag he'd still look like a fucking model. Secondly, Jungkook did not look like a fucking model, and sincerely doubted his appearance was even remotely close to his friends, despite their similar outfits. So, uh, no. No stealing of cute boys was to occur. Jungkook snorted. "Yeah, right."

"What? I'm serious!" Taehyung contradicted himself within the protest by saying it laughingly. The maknae rolled his eyes and fought the upward tilt of his lips as he made a shoving motion in the older man's direction; he was promptly shoved back at. "Yah, yah, I give you a compliment and this is how you repay me?" They continued to mess around, the small area behind the store with the staff bathroom and break room echoing with their combined giggles.

"He can repay you by restocking and testing the lipsticks before we open." A voice, cold and feminine, announced from down the hall. Both men immediately ceased their fooling around, heads snapping towards the tone. The woman the words emitted from was dressed in a modest sky blue dress that reached her knees, her hair tied up into a high ponytail, the makeup adorning her face impeccable. Without a doubt she was the one in charge.

"Byun Yunseo-nim." The redhead bowed to her. Jungkook followed suit. As she approached them, he apologized with a polite smile, "I'm sorry. We'll get him started right away."

Finally the sound of her heels clacking against the floor came to a halt. She fixated her gaze on Jungkook. "I assume that you are Jeon Jungkook? My new hire?"

"Yes, sunbae-nim." He nodded.

"Excellent. Taehyung has told me much about you." She paused, looking at the maknae up and down. "Namely that you know how to operate a cash register."

Jungkook shot Taehyung a sideways glance. The older man lightly shrugged. "I do know how. I used one frequently at my last job."

"Which was?"
Christ, this was feeling more and more like an interrogation. Should he give her his date of birth? Credit card number? The name of the place where he hid the body? "I was a barista at a coffee shop, sunbae-nim."

"Hmm." Yunseo's gaze turned slightly predatory. "And the reason you moved from that job to this one?"

Jungkook's breath caught in his throat. Okay, whoa. To an outsider, the question didn't seem so odd, but in Korea words such as those were considered borderline rude in their invasiveness. His reason could range from what had happened to him, being let go, or could be far more personal, such as his own leave due to depression by death of a family member (a topic typically only discussed by close friends, if brought up). Either way the question was rather personal, and its answer something the brunette wasn't ready to share quite yet.

The redhead seemed to note this. "Actually, sunbae-nim, I just realized that I forgot to re-organize the makeup brushes that the customers use as testers, you know, the ones that are always full of different colored junk?" He grabbed Jungkook by his new uniform shirt and began tugging him down the hall while keeping up his string of babble. "You know what else I just realized? I forgot to clean them yesterday night! Wouldn't want the customers rubbing bacteria all over there faces, right, sunbae-nim?" She raised an eyebrow. "Great talk, we should really go start now, I'm sure you'll see more of Jungkook ssi later-"

Then they rounded the corner and Yunseo's face disappeared.

Taehyung took Jungkook's hand in his and lead him throughout the store. Shaking his head, the maknae asked, "Is she always like that? So..."

"Cold? Sophisticated?" The two rounded a corner. There were three posters there, all with woman whom had gorgeous eyelashes. Jungkook glanced at the products on the shelves, all in shiny, silky yet brightly-colored cases. Hmm...that must be the mascara. "Kind of stick-up-her-ass like?"

The younger man cracked a grin at his friend's honest description. "I was thinking something-crawled-up-her-ass-and-died like, but stick up the ass works too."

"Oh, you're going to fit in great here." Taehyung laughed, guiding them towards the front of the store. "Jackson says the exacts ma thing all the time. Just not to her face, because she scares the shit out of him."

Sunbeam was a store that had walls made entirely of glass, which, from the early morning until mid to late afternoon, allowed the sun to seep inside and light up the interior with its rays, causing everything to sparkle appealingly (non coincidentally, of course). It was actually all the shimmering that caught Jungkook's eye hen he'd first walked past it on the street. He'd walked in, thinking it looked nice and that the theme was cute, planning on buying something for Yejun. He'd ended up...well. What he bought that day wasn't exactly for his now ex boyfriend's use.

Stop thinking about it.

The older man finally stopped tugging him forwards and instead stopped to yank him to the right. Jungkook was met face to container with all sorts of different tubes on display, the tops of their caps all out of color order. His eyes widened. There were so many. Even disorganized, the display was impressive.

"Wait..." He saw a glowing sign above all of the tubes that read 'lipstick'. "Are we really going to go through all of these?"
"Uh huh." Taehyung nodded, eyeing everything with a vaguely displeased expression. "We really are. There's no point in giving you the rundown on the cash register and customer service, since those are things and skills you picked up from your old job. What's more important right now is teaching you makeup; what the different kinds are, the tools you use to apply it, and how to glam someone the fuck up."

_Oh God._ "So...what am I supposed to do?"

"Exactly what sunbae-nim told us before. You gotta organize and test all of the lipsticks."

Taehyung must've seen the horrified look on the other man's face (because fucking hell there must be at least seven thousand of those little tubes on the display), because he giggled and patted him on the shoulder, smiling assuredly. "Don't worry, its your first day! I'll help you."

For the next forty minutes, Taehyung graciously walked Jungkook through the process of going through the products. He only struggled with the whole color aspect for a short while (he had been unaware until now that blue could be broken up into, like, thirty different tints and shade that went by names like 'Deep Ocean' and 'Cloudless Sky'. Who even comes up with this stuff?); the testing portion required him to sacrifice both of his wrists. Taehyung instructed him to roll his sleeves back as he did the same, and one by one, they pulled down the tester lipsticks, unrolled them, and tested them on their skin. There were nearly as many tester lipsticks as there were lipsticks for purchase, so by the end of those forty minutes both Jungkook's and Taehyung's wrists were a mess of colored lines, and the display looked far more pleasing to the eye (and was overall better, since dried up sticks were thrown away).

Jungkook breathed a sigh of relief when his friend announced that it was time for a break. They slumped against the shelves, flexing their fingers and letting the sun warm their faces. It was a Sunday, so _Sunbeam_ wasn't open until noon. It was eleven now so they still had a little while before customers started pouring in.

Taehyung was in the middle of explaining to him where and how to apply blush when the front door of the store opened. In walked a handsome man, probably in his early thirties, carrying a large box and a clipboard. The redhead's speech faltered before stopping completely, his gaze locking on the man. Jungkook glanced towards the man, whom was talking with their boss all the way in the back, watching his tan face smile politely as he no doubt asked for her signature for whatever he was holding.

"You have a thing for delivery boys?"

Taehyung sighed, almost wistful. "I have a thing for any kind of boy, as long as he's hot." He bit as lip while he continued to watch the man. "Damn, but look at those arms..."

The brunette had no doubt that his very attractive friend could stride up to the guy and get his number, or even get a date with him tomorrow, but something was poking the back of his mind the moment he thought that. It was a memory of Seokjin gazing at him, and asking, _Are you going to proposition this one?_ And the way Taehyung flirted with him all the time, so casual about it, and now, checking out other guys...maybe he'd been wrong before in assuming the two were together?

"Tae." The redhead hummed. "Are you and Seokjin dating?"

The older man's head snapped in the direction of the question so quickly Jungkook was frightened he'd given himself whiplash. With furrowed brows and a confused expression, he replied, "Yeah, Seokjinie is my boyfriend. Has been for...shit." He scrunched his nose like he was trying to recall something. "Three and a half years? No, I think it's closer to four..."
This news, to say the least, surprised the maknae. "Oh. Then why..." A beat of quiet in which the two just stared at each other. Jungkook shook his head. It was way too personal of a question to ask. He shouldn't be pushing the boundaries of this friendship so early in the game for the sake of his own curiosity. "Ah, never mind."

Taehyung smiled softly. "If Seokjin and I have been together for so long, why am I checking out guys? Why do I flirt so often? Why did Seokjin ask me the other day if I was going to offer you sex?"

Though the last notion had his cheeks burning, Jungkook nodded. "Yeah. Sorry."

"Don't be sorry. It must look really weird from the outside." The redhead drew in a deep breath. His face grew solemn as he explained. "The day we met was at a college party that I had snuck into. He was almost ready to graduate with an Associates degree, and I was fresh out of high school, barely nineteen. He and I were both standing outside one of the bathrooms at the host's house because we had friends that were puking their guts out in there and we were waiting for them to come out. I was kind of drunk and he was so damn gorgeous and..." Taehyung looked at the floor. "I leaned into him until our arms were touching. He started yelling and shoving me off of him, and I remember thinking, oh god, is he okay, what did I do? It turns out that everywhere I touched him the skin was purple like someone had taken his arms and slammed them into a wall or something."

Jungkook lifted a hand and rubbed it along Taehyung's shoulder, trying to comfort. There was a moment before the story continued.

"I won't tell you all of the rest, how we came to be and all that, because it gets pretty boring." He chuckled weakly. "But we ended up together, duh, you already know that, and...it was horrible. I couldn't touch him and it was killing me because I wanted him so badly. Obviously he couldn't touch me either, especially since he was a model when we first officially got together, and he still is, so we needed to find a way to let go of all the stress. So Seokjinie and I sat down one day and told each other that we knew there was no one more perfect for us, that we wanted each other more than we wanted anyone else, and...we made a deal." Taehyung finally glanced back up, right into Jungkook's eyes. "One night stands only. No kissing, no second date, no nothing. Just sex. And both of us have to meet the person first, just to be sure they're not a creep. That's how we cope."

The maknae opened his mouth to say something, apologize or express his awe at their strength or whatever, but right then his head snapped forward in an abrupt sneeze. His body shook with how powerful it was, and when he came to, it was to Taehyung laughing.

"Bless you!" He cackled. Jungkook grinned, a bit embarrassed, yet glad that the tense and serious mood had disappeared.

"Thanks."

"Thanks hyung." The redhead ruffled the younger man's hair, who batted at him. "After all the personal shit I just told you, I demand to be called your hyung! It's basically a right at this point!"

Chuckling, Jungkook finally managed to get his friends hands out of his hair. He stuck his tongue out at him. "Okay, hyung, thank you."

There came a sudden crackling sound above the two. The voice of their boss rung throughout the store. "Kim Taehyung! Report to the storage room to count the new inventory." It crackled off.

"Fuck, inventory is so boring." The older man bemoaned. He lugged himself up, bracing his weight against the shelves. He stretched and rolled his eyes. "Of course she would ask me to do
it...you're okay on your own for a little bit, Jungkook-ah? I'll be back before the store opens to help you, if you need it."

"What should I do next?"

It took a few seconds for Taehyung to think of something. "Oh! You can throw out any of the old concealers we have, if they look cracked or muddy, or dry, or just weird in general. They're-

"I know." The brunette said nearly silently. I know where the concealer is.

His hyung blinked. Realization struck his features. "Right. Sorry, hot stuff, of course you know where it is, you bought it all the time. I'll be back as soon as I can to help you, okay?"

"Okay."

Taehyung waved at him before disappearing down the aisles of makeup.

Jungkook heaved himself into a standing position (too afraid to lean his weight on the display, for the irrational fear that the whole thing would topple over), brushed the dust and floor guck from his slacks, and maneuvered his way to the concealer section. It took a bit longer than he would've liked it to take (though in his defense, the store was huge, and he'd never tried to get to the concealers from the lipstick section), but he eventually got there.

He spent a good moment or so just watching the makeup, like it was going to spring out and attack him. Which was silly. He was fine. It was just makeup and that was all. He could do this. The task was mundane. A child could do it.

*So why don't I stop staring at it like an idiot and get to it?*

Leaning down, he scanned the circular containers with the same critical eye he had examined the lipstick with. Luckily, there was a tiny trash can nearby, so it was easy when he began plucking them off the shelf to toss them away. Dry, dry, muddy, way too dry, okay that one was like Sahara Desert kind of dry, Jesus, another muddy one, dry, dry...

Each hit the bottom of the bin with a satisfying sound. Jungkook liked to think, as he threw away unsuitable concealer and hummed a tune, that with each one discarded he was discarding a bit of his past as well. See, he was doing good! He was doing great. He was...

He froze.

*His past.*

The maknae's fingers clenched around the container he had been squinting at. Without warning the world fuzzed out, back in, then out. He couldn't hear right. He could only hear the own nervousness of his thoughts as he approached the concealer display, sensed his own anxiety, his own questions, asking if this was a good idea. If it made him weak. If it made him strange to not want other people to know how purple and sore his skin was.

Fear. Fear that he was going to find out. That he was going to be *livid*. That he was going to smack him or hurt him or kill him or-

*Help me.*

Jungkook noticed that his body had hit the floor the second his head knocked against the tile. Even then, the feeling was dulled, numbed. He was breathing way too fast. Something was cornering
him choking him suffocating him and *I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe*  
"...ucking fuck, Jungko...can you h...can you hear me!??"  

*Can't breathe can't breathe can't breathe*  

"Jungkook-ah! Jungko...-ah! Jungkook-ah!"  

*He's going to get me track me find me pin me down like he owns me*  

"...all Jimin-ah, okay? Jungkook, I'm going to call Jimin. I need you to hang in there, please, fuck, please hang in th..."

*I'm scared I'm scared I'm scared*  

"It's Tae, shit, Jiminie, he's shaking, he's on the fl...ine earlier, I promise, shit, shit, he's not breathing right...I don't know! You need to get here fas...hurry. *Hurry.*"  

And then...  

Nothing.

"I'm so pissed at both of you it's not even funny." A definitely pissed-looking Park Jimin practically snarled. He paced back and forth in front of the couch in the living room where Jungkook sat, hands clutching a cup of tea, body wrapped in every blanket there was to be found within the apartment. Despite both of these things, he felt cold. "I would expect this from Jungkook, because he's just stupid about this kind of shit, but I *never* expected for you to lie to me about this, Yoongi."

The person in question was seated in a lounge chair to the right of the maknae. His expression was pulled into a light scowl, and his fingers were gripping his jacket so tightly that they were turning as white as milk (that was quite a feat, since the producer already had ivory-colored skin). Yoongi's mouth twitched as though he wanted to say something. He did not speak.

Jimin shook his head. "What the hell was going through both of your minds the *first* time it happened? *'Oh, Jungkook looks mostly okay, absolutely positively fine, so we shouldn't tell Jimin that he had a severe panic attack or bring him to the doctor or anything, we should just go on like normal.'*"  

The brunette spoke aloud without thinking. "It wasn't like that."

"Oh really?" He turned to his friend, eyes alight beneath his platinum bangs. "What was it like, then?"

He fell silent. Yoongi shifted in his seat but again did not offer his own opinion.

Jimin paced with more vigor. "What would've happened if Tae hadn't called me? Yoongi would've just come and picked you up and when I asked you what was wrong you both would've lied to me again?"

The youngest and the eldest in the room met eyes. *Yes.*

All three of the men were quiet for the next several minutes. Jimin continued to walk back and forth, features agitated and conflicting. Jungkook blew on his large cup of tea and took a sip. He shivered a little at the warmth, huddling deeper into the cocoon of blankets; it was some sort of inner chill, he supposed, that was making his body feel like ice. That was to be expected though,
since he had felt this way after his first attack...numb and cold and unwell in general.

Breathing deeply (as well as a bit unsteadily) the maknae closed his eyes. It was okay now. It was okay. It really, really was okay. He was here now, home, and Jimin and Yoongi were here and everything was okay. Well. Maybe his job wasn't okay. Vaguely, he pondered over how his new boss felt about the whole incident: her newest employee, barely able to make it through the entirety of his first shift. Christ, but he prayed that Taehyung would somehow convince her to let him come back and start over. It was a faint hope.

Jungkook opened his eyes to see that Jimin's pace had slowed considerably. He seemed to have calmed down some. Upon closer examination, he noticed that his short friend looked...tired. Really, really tired. Bags were underneath his eyes and there were obvious shadows. They weren't as deep as Yoongi's, but they were indeed there. The brunette's stomach sunk with guilt.

"I'm sorry, hyung." Jungkook murmured, circling the rim of the cup with his pointer finger idly. He gazed down at the yellowish liquid. It brought no comfort.

The mochi sighed softly, before halting his rhythm completely and sitting on the floor in front of his two companions. "I know you're sorry, Kookie." His pupils darted around listlessly. "I just...I just want to know why you keep lying to me." He turned to his soulmate, whom was still quietly sitting. "And I want to know why you lied, too, hyung."

"Yoongi hyung lied because I asked him to."

"I want to hear it from him." Jimin's eyes remained on his partner.

The eldest man finally showed a sign of life by shifting in his seat. For a long moment he said nothing, possibly considering waiting Jimin out until he got bored and turned to Jungkook for answers. That might've worked if Jimin wasn't the second most stubborn person in the world (the first being, he would admit it, Jungkook himself). Yoongi sighed, most likely realizing this, and started, "He gave me a good reason."

"Which was?"

Yoongi bit his lip as though to hold himself back. There was a beat before he uttered, "He said that it would worry you. And I agreed."

Jimin threw his hands in the air: at another time the gesture might've been one of exasperation, but in the half-hearted way that he performed it, it was more puzzlement than anything else. "Of course I would worry. I worry when my best friend is hurt. That's not at all unusual or unhealthy of me." He lowered his hands. "Shitty reason."

"Not a shitty reason, hyung." Jungkook replied.

"Jungkook, what kind of friend, what kind of person would I be-"

"A fucking overstressed, overworked one." Yoongi interrupted. His nose was beginning to scrunch in irritation, lips twitching with splenetic. "Jimin, you've been working your ass off every since Jungkookie lost his job. You're exerting yourself way too much and don't you dare try to tell me that you aren't, because you've never looked so tired when you come by the studio at night, never. You only bring food for me and you say you'll eat later but you always fall asleep right when we get home so you never do." The black-haired man sat up further and began spitting the words of his rant with the speed of the rapper he was years ago. "You told me the other day you're considering telling Hoseok that you can't go to practice anymore because you've picked up so
many random dancing jobs. You said you're probably going to have to stop dancing to music you actually like with one of the greatest choreographers in this damn world and that it's going to kill you because dancing is your passion, it's your life, gorgeous. We didn't tell you, I didn't tell you, because you're stressed enough as it fucking is and I don't want to see the person I'm in love with fall apart."

Jimin's lower lip wobbled. He made no noise as the tears flowed down his face, exposing him, making him raw. Jungkook had only seen him like his once, when he'd first told him about Yoongi. It broke his heart then.

It broke his heart now.

The expression on Yoongi's face had become gentle. There was no hard crease between his brows, no clench to his jaw, only caring in his dark pupils while he gazed at the crying man. "You want to throw it all away because you want to take care of Jungkook and I. You feel like you need to. You think that this is all you. It's not." The eldest's breath hitched, yet he pushed on. "We're together, the three of us, until Jungkookie leaves. We're together under this fucking roof. We can figure whatever this is out together."

Wetness was burning behind Jungkook's own eyes. He couldn't help it; the passion in his hyung's speech, the truth in it, the love, had made one final crack in his broken heart and caused a leak in the dam. Yoongi did not cry, but he looked damn close to it.

Sniffling, the brunette said thickly, "That's why we didn't tell you." His exhale staccatoed. "I'm sorry, hyung."

The room became quiet once more. It was different than a few minutes ago, when the air had been charged with tension and anger and bad things. Now it was just sad.

Solemn and sad.

Jimin made a tiny noise in the back of his throat. Jungkook knew what he wanted. He also knew that he wouldn't get it. The brunette could unravel himself, go to him, hug him tight. He didn't. Right now, what with sadness and guilt and shame settling upon his shoulders, he felt wrong doing so in front of Yoongi right now, taunting him like that. He couldn't. So he didn't, though it was what both friends needed.

Eventually, after several more minutes of emotion, Jimin wiped his eyes and nodded. "Okay. I'm...I'm sorry too. I know you guys meant well. Just please, please don't lie again, okay?"

He and Yoongi agreed without hesitation.

"And Jungkookie..." The mochi regarded the younger man. "I did consider dropping out, leaving you and Hoseok hyung to compete without me. It was a dumb idea." He cracked a (slightly watery) smile. "I'm staying with you two pabos."

Jungkook let out a chuckle while the corners of his own mouth tilted upwards. "Good. It would fucking suck if you weren't there."

"Yoongi's right, though." Jimin continued, dropping their gaze and breathing deeply. "We need to work this out together. We need to be alright together." He did not look at the maknae when he said, "Jungkook, maybe you should talk to someone."

"I am talking to someone." He replied back easily. "I'm talking to you."
The glare that Jimin lifted his head to give him was unimpressed. "You know what I mean, Kook. You should talk to someone who knows what they're doing. A professional. Maybe that can help you feel better about everything that's happened and...I don't know. Maybe help you with these attacks."

Jungkook's grip on his cup of tea tightened. His teeth ground together and he tried his best not to snap at his hyung (duly noting that it didn't take very much to push him over the edge these days, or close to the edge, anyways, a fact that made something in him sick). "No. I'm fine."

"You're not fine, Jungkook." Yoongi offered from his place on the chair. "Now, I'm usually against this kind of shit. I think getting through stuff on your own is the best way to learn from pain."

"Not helping, hyung." The mochi said.

"I'm not finished." The eldest man crossed his arms over his chest, his sentence effectively shushing his soulmate whom allowed him to continue. Eyes focused on the maknae, he went on, "But even I draw the line at passing out on the floor for hours, not once, but what would've been twice if Jimin hadn't gotten you. You're not fine. You need help, Jungkook."

"I'm not talking to any professional." The brunette grumbled, sending Yoongi a glare. "I'll get over this ridiculous panic thing and--"

"The panic isn't ridiculous."

"Yes it is!" His heart ached with the emphasis of the word. All of his pent up feelings from the past few weeks poured out of him as his body shook beneath the blankets. "It's stupid and inconvenient and such a fucking burden on other people. It's embarrassing. It makes me feel ridiculous that even after all of this time I still can't get a grip and move the fuck on like any other normal person, that I keep thinking and going back to before. I should be able to handle this on my own. I don't need, ugh, god, I'm not going to a therapist's office and spilling my guts to them just for them to ask me how it makes me feel."

Jungkook sensed a laugh wracking its way through him. It sounded bitter and wrong when it finally exited his lips. "That's even if they believe me! That's if they don't think I'm an attention whore for whining about getting bruised up all the time, wonder why I was whining about having a soulmate, that's if they don't think I'm out of my damn mind and prescribe me anti-psychotics or...or..." He shut his eyes. There was a pause that lasted several seconds before he could bring himself to finish. "I have to do this by myself. I have to."

Neither Jimin nor Yoongi commented for a good moment or two. Jungkook finally realized that he was trembling, that his teeth were chattering, that his eyes had filmed over with moisture again. He swallowed, settling back against the couch. More shame bloomed in him as a result of his outburst. He could never keep his mouth shut, could he? Always bitching to other people about his problems, whining and complaining. Never satisfied.

*I'm such a fucking god-awful person.*

An apology was on the tip of his tongue (even though he had meant what he said and really did wish to handle his panic by himself), because really, they were just trying to help him, and everybody was already emotional, and he wasn't doing anything to make it better. Before he could utter a single word Jimin looked up at him and asked, "Is your tea cold?"

Jungkook blinked. He'd completely forgotten he was clutching the beverage. Why its temperature was of importance to his friend, he had no idea, but obliged him by taking a sip. Ew. "Yeah, hyung. It's cold."
Without further elaboration, the platinum-haired man rose from his spot, took the cup from the brunette's hands, and walked into the kitchen. He and Yoongi sat there and listened as the sink turned on. There was a splash. Another splash, gentler. Within thirty seconds Jimin returned with a steaming cup, freshly poured, and handed it to the maknae. He whispered his thanks, feeling it warm his fingers.

Jmin stared at him while he stared back. He knew that his hyung was breaking him down, trying to figure it all out, find the source of his words...yet, all the shorter man said was a simple, "Okay."

The brunette raised his eyebrows. Okay? No yelling? No telling me I'm being a pabo? No fighting with me to do what you think is best? "Uh...what?"

"Okay." He repeated, nodding his head in Jungkook's direction. "If you want to do this by yourself, okay. I won't make you go out to talk to someone. It's your life and your choice. It's not fair for me to tell you how you're supposed to cope with this." He breathed in, still holding their shared gaze. "But. If you want to heal on your own, you're going to do it right."

"Do it right?" Jimin nodded once more in affirmation. "Like how? What's right?"

"I'll tell you what isn't right." Yoongi chimed it. "Doing nothing. You can't let it all wash over you and go with the tide. Moving on will be a lot slower if you do nothing to help the process along." He jutted his chin towards the brunette. "You're stressed and you need to do something to take your mind off of it."

"I'll work."

Yoongi rolled his eyes. "I meant by doing something non stressful."

"Uh..." Jungkook wracked his brain for activities that could occupy him. "I could go to the gym...at least for another week. Then the membership expires."

"So? Renew it."

"Can't. Don't have the money to."

"Uh, hello?" Jimin butt in, giving the maknae a look. "That was before you had a job. You can afford to renew it now, Kookie."

Jungkook shook his head. Images of his prim boss flashed to and fro in his mind, her sharp heels, bold questions. "Not any more I don't. After I freaked out in the middle of her store I doubt the boss is going to want to keep me. Hell, I wouldn't want to keep me."

"I already texted Taehyung." The mochi replied a bit too quickly. Jungkook narrowed his eyes at his friend. "He said that he convinced her that it was a one time thing and that it wouldn't happen again. She believed him. He told me she wants you back in as soon as possible." Jimin grinned. "Taehyung might've told her that you were kind of a super good makeup artist to sway her."

"Fuck. I can't even tell the difference between highlighters and contours. "How am I going to fake my way through that one? And Jimin hyung-" Jimin had seemed a tad too eager to move onto a different topic of conversation. "How do you know Tae? Why does he have your number?"

"Don't try to change the subject, kid." Yoongi, like the psycho crazy protective soulmate that he was, had noticed Jimin's discomfort at the topic, pushing it onwards. Jungkook glared at the platinum-haired man, whom merely smiled innocently. Unfair, hyung, unfair! Not all of us have scary producer men as our soulmates! "You've got a job, which means you have more money,
which means you can renew your gym membership. What else? And for fuck's sake, try to think of an activity you're not sweating your ass off to do."

He thought for a moment as he drank his tea. What was a stress free thing he could do that was entertaining enough to not bore him, yet still tame enough for him not to obsess over? Suddenly, an idea popped into his head. "I could start having sex again."

Immediately Jimin and Yoongi began sputtering.

"Jungkook, what the hell-"

"Why is that the first thing that came to mind-?"

"Let me explain! Aish." Jungkook talked over their questions and swears. "What if part of this panic thing is like, I don't know, built up stress? I haven't gotten laid in two months or something like that. That's the longest I've gone in a while. Maybe if I'm active again the panic will lessen." He shrugged his shoulders. The logic made sense to him. And it was a stress free activity, so everyone won, really. Even if the thought of intercourse made him feel a little nervous. And uncomfortable.

*I can get over those things, right?*

"Who would you be having it with?"

"Uh." He couldn't very well say a prostitute, could he? Hoseok would never look at him the same if he found out. Taehyung and Jin were an option, except they weren't, because despite how open and okay with it they might seem, Jungkook didn't want to get involved with any potential drama (which would be counterintuitive and add to his stress). Maybe at a strip club he could pay for a service or...or...yeah, okay, he hadn't entirely thought that through.

"Exactly." Jimin concluded. His eyes softened. "You shouldn't be having sex with random people anyway, Jungkookie. Yejun put you through hell. It's not right of me to tell you whether or not you're ready yet, because that's just shitty, but you should at least trust the person that you're with. You should feel better about yourself and feel better mentally. Then it's real stress relief."

Though the brunette wanted to insist that he could get back into it right away, and that he would be fine, the ill feeling in his gut was agreeing with Jimin's words. He was still too messed up to become so intimate with another person. Deep down, he knew that needed to try something else until he could handle it.

"There's dance practice. That plus everything else has got to be enough to keep me busy. The gym, work, dance practice. It's good enough."

The three chatted lightly amongst themselves for a short while longer. The brunette's cup of tea was almost empty by the time Yoongi's phone rang with a pleasant chiming sound and he had to excuse himself to pick it up. It turned out to be someone from the studio; one of the vocalists the elder had been working with to produce a song was threatening to quit for unknown reasons.

Jungkook glanced to Yoongi for affirmation. After two moments of consideration, the black haired man nodded his consent. The maknae sighed in relief. Point one Jeon Jungkook, zero universe.

The three chatted lightly amongst themselves for a short while longer. The brunette's cup of tea was almost empty by the time Yoongi's phone rang with a pleasant chiming sound and he had to excuse himself to pick it up. It turned out to be someone from the studio; one of the vocalists the elder had been working with to produce a song was threatening to quit for unknown reasons.

Jimin had to go with Yoongi as the mochi had been with Hoseok when he had received the call from Taehyung and had had to use his hyung's car, meaning he had to drive Yoongi to the studio and return Hoseok's car to him at his house. They hastily bade their farewells with Yoongi all but tugging Jimin out the door (he couldn't actually do that, because, you know, but he might as well
have been). Jungkook waved at them and said goodbye as well.

With his tea now completely gone, his body warm underneath the blankets, and the apartment silent, Jungkook sighed. He got up from his spot and made his way to the kitchen sink, washing out the cup methodically.

It was time.

It was time to make himself new.

...or try my best to, anyway.

All of the days began to blur together after a while, or, maybe they didn't, and perhaps only seemed like it because he kept himself so busy. He hadn't been this preoccupied in a while, and the rigorous day to day routine forced his mind to such exhaustion that there was no room in his head to panic. He didn't let himself.

He couldn't let himself.

Monday through Friday it was the same thing over and over, five times repeated. He would get up early, take a shower, make breakfast for everyone in the apartment (if Yoongi had left super early that morning for the studio, then he'd just make it for him and Jimin), get dressed, and head off to work. Jungkook hadn't known whether or not to thank Taehyung or clock him across the side of his head on his first day back ("An experienced makeup artist? Me? Come on, hyung, she's going to eat me alive!"), but despite the bump his panic had initially caused, everything went smoothly from then on. He and Taehyung would get a lunch break at noon and go out on the town to eat. They'd come back, and the redhead would spend the afternoon drilling him on makeup; what to apply where, what the latest trends were, what brush to use, everything. After a week or so, when both Tae and the boss trusted him more, they let him close up on Tuesdays and Thursdays, if only because those were the nights where the rich upper class ladies from uptown flocked the lipstick and concealer sections and Jungkook could talk them into buying just about anything. Each other weeknight, he headed off to dance practice and worked his ass off for the remainder of the evening.

Saturdays and Sundays he went to the gym (and on whatever rare morning he could snag on a weekday), though in the morning of the former he was at dance practice again. He figured out how to use the treadmills, did laps in the pool, lifted the free weights. On one particularly trying day, when he'd felt as though his mind was still too full of everything while he was excising, he'd spotted a flier that advertised a self-defense class that took part once every Saturday evening. He was already familiar with a martial art, but...what could it hurt to learn more? Jungkook began loyally attending every meeting, learning a different style of hitting and twisting and God but did it help to know, to really know, that he could protect himself.

And when all of that wasn't enough for him, he found himself staying after the class had adjourned for that night, lingering by the punching bags. The brunette threw himself at one, punching it with carefully calculated angles and all the technique he had picked up. Sometimes he got everything out in ten minutes. Sometimes it took two hours. His hands tended to come away horribly bruised and sore after one hundred and twenty minutes, which gave him a fright each time it happened; that was when he conceded and ceased in hitting the bag once the two hour mark was met.

It didn't take long for Jungkook to find sleep any more. It rushed at him quickly and he was out like a light. He had no time to worry or ponder or remember. He lived one day at a time, moving through life at a leisurely yet speedy pace, going through the motions of his routine.
And it wasn't that bad, honestly.

It was consistent. The same. Good for him.

Jungkook felt good.

Jungkook...

Was bored.

"Hyung, does it taste okay?" The maknae asked, mouth half full. Yoongi merely looked at him. Rolling his eyes, he finished chewing, swallowed, and repeated his question.

The elder's expression became a tad surprised. "Yeah, Kook, of course. It tastes great. Your meals always do." As if to prove just how good it tasted, he grabbed a large portion of kimchi with his chopsticks and shoveled it in his mouth. In contrast to this display, Yoongi had barely touched his food (and despite his relatively tiny frame, he was an avid eater), signaling that something was up.

Jungkook paused, chopsticks hovering over the food. It was early in the morning and Jimin was still asleep. The two were eating a casual breakfast while they drank coffee, quietly conversing. Yoongi had hardly drunken his coffee (something that he needed to survive the day or else he might as well be one of the undead) either. After he quickly glanced at the drink to confirm this, he asked, "Is everything alright?"

"Everything is fine." Was the clipped reply.

"Right." The brunette took another bite of kimchi. "And I'm thinking about getting back with Yejun."

"What?" Yoongi's eyes widened, expression half confused, half enraged. "Jungkook, why, that no good bastard-"

"Aish, calm down, hyung. I was kidding." Jungkook shook his head while the producer exhaled in obvious relief and sunk back into his chair. "Don't think you can bullshit me. Something's up."

"Language, brat." The black-haired man scolded, but there was no bite in his words. He sighed again and closed his eyes. The younger man leaned forward to stare right at his hyung, unrelenting. Yoongi made a disgusted face. "Ugh, God, I know that face. You're not going to let this go."

"That's right, might as well tell me-"

"Stubborn as fuck-"

"Language, hyung, there's children around!"

"Fuck you." Yoongi crossed his arms over his chest. His tone lessened in its intensity. "Alright. Fine. If I tell you, you can't tell Jimin, okay?"

Ooooooh, was Min Yoongi hiding something from his beloved? Whatever could it be? Jungkook's curiosity increased. This shit just got juicy.

"You remember when I got a call from that vocalist who was hellbent on quitting on me in the middle of a project?" The brunette nodded. "Well, I though that I had convinced them to stay until it was finished. Thought I had them, too...but they exploded yesterday and started screeching something about 'how I'm impossible to work with with all the tweaks and adjustments I make',"
which is crap, because any good producer does that, to make sure the sound is the damn best that it can be...and they hiked up and left. Said they didn't want any part of the project any more." Yoongi rubbed his eyes. His stress was apparent. "Now I can't use anything that was recorded, both because it doesn't sound quite right yet and I don't want to go through all of the legal shit in case I release it and the vocalist sues, and now I have no fucking song and I'm freaking the fuck out."

"...that's awful, hyung."

"Yeah." The producer glared at him. "I don't want Jiminie to know because I'm still trying to keep worry off of his shoulders. Otherwise I would ask him to..." Yoongi's body suddenly locked up. His features froze, and his mouth hung agape as he continued looking at Jungkook.

It carried on for the better part of twenty seconds until it started to make the maknae feel uncomfortable. He still didn't like being looked at. "What is it?"

"You..." With the speed of light, Yoongi shot forward and grabbed Jungkook's wrist, yanking him up from his seat. The pair stumbled at the abrupt imbalance; in no time at all, the elder man was ushering Jungkook to the front door.

"Hyung, what the hell-!"

"Jungkook-ah, you can sing."

"I, wait, what? No I can't-"

Yoongi snorted, snatching his keys from the hook by the door, and plucked his leather jacket from the couch. "Now who's the one spewing bullshit? You have a degree in Vocal Performance. You can sing."

"I-" Jungkook was literally being shoved out the door. "I can sing decently, dammit hyung, I'm in a hoodie and sweatpants-"

"It's Wednesday. Do you have off today?"

"Yeah, I have today off-"

"Great." Yoongi bumped him out of his way so he could lock the door behind them. "Then you have no excuse to not help me create one of the best pieces of music you'll ever fucking hear."

Jungkook had only been to Yoongi's studio once or twice before; the first time it was due to the fact that it had been snowing like all of hell and Jimin was too sick to pick up his soulmate, so Jungkook had had to go there and drive him home. The other time was when Jimin was running late to dance practice and needed the brunette to come get him (why he was at Yoongi's studio, the maknae hadn't thought to ask). This time, there was no driving to and fro, no taking a brief peek inside, calling someone's name, and disappearing back to the car. He was here. Actually here.

And mostly disgruntled because he hadn't been able to finish his breakfast.

Yoongi uncharacteristically babbled nonstop the entire ride there, about vocals and what kind of sound he was thinking about and mic testing and a whole bunch of other words that Jungkook only half understood. Probably because he'd been talking so fast that his Daegu accent had leaked in, slurring his words and making it hard for someone from Busan (read: Jungkook) who grew up hearing light, bouncy tones to tune his ears to the gritty darker sound and comprehend.
Though the black-haired man hadn't had a single drop of coffee, his eyes were alight, his hands jittering. He parked the car unevenly, hopping out and hollering for the maknae to do the same. Jungkook unbuckled to follow.

Immediately, once he opened the door and stepped inside, he shivered at the warmth of the space. The first room was one meant for comfort; two couches sat in the center of the room with a short table in the middle, separating them. There was a small TV mounted on the wall, and a door to the left, where the bathroom was most likely located. The walls were all deep browns and soft tans. The color scheme did not alter when Yoongi led him deeper, walking into a second room that was clearly the actual studio. Jungkook's eyes grew large in a similar fashion to how Yoongi's had when his idea had stricken him. There must be thousands of dollars of equipment in front of him, supported by a long table. Or...well, maybe it wasn't exactly a table, but it was strong and it was holding the soundboard up and everything.

Yoongi shrugged out of his coat, tossing it on a lounge chair that was against the far wall. Two large, comfy-looking chairs were behind the equipment, with a view (through a glass window) of a typical recording setup. A mic, padded walls, small room. The door was two feet away. "Okay, Kook." He glanced at Jungkook. He no doubt saw his hesitance. "Please. This is a big deal. I'm in deep shit if I don't release something soon. I need to at least try with you."

A beat.

Two beats.

What would be so bad about adding color to the bland normality of my life? Jungkook took a deep breath. It's been a while since I've sung, but...maybe I can help.

Reluctantly, the brunette made his way towards the recording rom door, opened it, and stepped inside.

A peculiar hush greeted him. Not even his own inhales and exhales made any noise, or so it seemed. It was so quiet. Everywhere, even inside of his head, was quiet. Waiting for something.

With the door closed behind him, Jungkook approached the headphones balanced on top of a hook by the mic. There was stool in the room he hadn't noticed before, presenting the option to sit, yet his nerves would let him do nothing save stand. He picked up the headphones and placed them on his head, pupils searching for Yoongi through the glass.

The producer held down a button in front of him, his own headphones on. His voice sounded in the maknae's ears. "Thank you, Jungkookie...okay." They both waited for Yoongi to tell him what to sing. The older man bit his lip. "Sing anything you want, yeah? Give me something soft and pretty. Those are the only two guidelines."

Soft and pretty... Jungkook wracked his brain for a song. Something jumped to the front of his mind. That's...not bad. I can sing that alright., I think...

"You can start whenever you're ready, Kook." Yoongi added gently.

The brunette breathed once. Closed his eyes. Let the tension loose from his body.

And sung.

He forgot how long he was singing for. It could've been hours, though in reality it was probably only a few minutes, tops. Jungkook just let himself go, enjoyed the steady hum of the words as they flowed off of his tongue and into the mic, admired the beauty of the syllables. It brought him
such peace to sing like this. That was why he'd decided to major in something musical in college; he had never wanted to let go of this feeling. The feeling of being free.

The feeling of being him, just the way he was, with music to write out the staff along the treble and bass clefs that was his life story, all of the notes and accents and crescendos and decrescendos and syncopations and all the rest of it.

He was almost disappointed when the song finished. But that was silliness. One couldn't sing forever, no matter how badly they wished to.

There was silence in his ears. The rush of emotions he'd had before he started flooded his system, including the nerves. His eyes snapped open. Oh, no, had he sung poorly? It had been too long of a while, hadn't it...

There were two men on the other side of the glass. Not one.

Jungkook immediately looked down, took the headphones off, and slowly exited the room. What met him on the other side were those same two men, one he knew, the one whom had dragged him here not however many minutes ago.

Then the second, with hair the color of wheat, full lips, and sparkling pupils that rested behind black rectangular frames, was a man that he certainly did not know and that was so blindingly attractive he made the brunette embarrassed that he was only wearing an old hoodie and sweatpants.

The two just stared at each other. Finally, the man's to die for lips pulled into a stunning smile.

"Hello." He said politely, voice so deep Jungkook thought he could feel it vibrating in his bones. "My name is Kim Namjoon. And..." His features became slightly awestruck. "Your voice is beautiful."

Chapter End Notes

The next update is, you guessed it, in the next two weeks (possibly a bit sooner since this was so late). SHOUT AT ME IN THOSE COMMENTS MY FELLOW ARMY!!! FIGHTING! >.<
Move

Chapter Summary

Move forward, move back, move about, move in.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! This chapter is so crazy insane long it's not even funny, but I hope that with its crazy insane longness that you all enjoy it. There's some major namkook in the beginning and the end and it makes me so happyyyyy :) You know, I'm a huge fan of Namjoon and Jimin, and I just can't get enough of them. They're such a perfect couple, and I just can't help but feel so happy just thinking about them. I really hope you all enjoy this chapter as much as I do.

Also, I wanted to touch on something really quick: I firmly believe that main two (or more) characters involved in a romance story should take some time with each other to really fall in love--I always find myself missing the buildup of tension whenever romance feels rushed and like the characters haven't interacted with each other enough to feel as strongly as they do towards each other, hence why even though Namjoon was introduced in the last chapter, he's only present in half of this one (because their lives aren't completely intertwined yet). However, they're with each other far more in the next chapter (once reading the end of this one, you'll see why) so please stay tuned!

Happy reading!

For the life of him, Jungkook could not remember the last time he had blushed so hard. A true, actual, honest to God face-probably-the-color-of-a-tomato kind of blush, the kind of blush that coaxed his insides into becoming fuzzy and hot and moo-gooey. If he bothered to concentrate he might've been able to answer his question (perhaps it was the first time he'd ever seen Jimin, stunned by the other man's effortless prettiness, or perhaps it had been sooner than that, an automatic response when his mother had first begun to praise his dancing skills years and years ago), yet all he could really focus on was flushing and stammering and turning the brightest shade of red to ever grace the planet.

"Damn right, Joon." Yoongi, whom was sitting in the swivel chair beside the tall man, smirked at the brunette. "He's good, isn't he?"

"Better than good." Kim Namjoon was still looking at him. And Jungkook was still blushing. Blushing way, way too hard. "Incredible. Where did you find him, hyung?"

"Off the side of the street. I was eating lunch at that really good American place down the road, you know, the one we go to when we're both tired as fuck and want to eat something that's absolute shit for us?" Namjoon nodded at Yoongi's words, seemingly knowing the place he spoke of. "And there he was, walking down the sidewalk right where my car was parked after I'd finished, singing some random song. I asked him if he wanted to work with us and he said...well."
"He said what?"

"He said..." The black-haired man made his voice tinny and dreamy. "Oh, producer-nim, you're so handsome and nice, I would love to work with you, this is an opportunity I've been waiting for my whole life-"

So, yes, the man Kim Namjoon was crazy good looking, but that didn't mean Jungkook couldn't hear. He rolled his eyes. "Okay, that's not what happened-"

"Quiet, brat, don't ruin the story-"

"I didn't even get to finish my breakfast-"

"A necessary sacrifice that you made for your favorite hyung."

"You keep telling yourself that." Jungkook chuckled, amused at the expression of faint annoyance on Yoongi's usually neutral face.

Huffing, the older man turned to Namjoon, whom had been listening to their banter with a small smile. "Joon, this is Jeon Jungkook. Maknae of the group, Jimin's best friend since high school, and goes by Jungkookie, Kookie, Kook, or insolent brat, depending on what mood you're in at the moment." The brunette's hand twitched. He fought to suppress the urge to flip Yoongi the finger, because the amount of disrespect that would show would most likely get him maimed and he liked his body with all of its limbs attached, thank you very much. "Kook-ah, this is Kim Namjoon, but you already knew that. He's one of the fastest rising producers in South Korea, and he was paired with yours truly about...seven months ago?" Yoongi looked to the blonde whom affirmed the time length. "Apparently a mutual contact of ours thought we would work great together. She was right, even if we were at each other's throats in the beginning."

"Honestly, I thought hyung was going to throw a chair at me one time." Namjoon's bright pupils grew wide behind his glasses, owl-like. "I was scared for my life."

"Oh please. It's not like I actually threw it." Yoongi slouched casually in his seat. "I almost threw it. But that's not the point. We're a good team. Even if you're a bit of a pushover sometimes."

"Only times when I have to choke down my blinding producer rage and admit the melody you composed is better." Though the words appeared to be harsh ones, they were not said with mean tone, and Yoongi grinned at them in good humor. Jungkook supposed that they had most likely quarreled often, yet after a while, the two had grown used to one another and could speak freely without offending the other person with their differing opinion or sass. It was an impressive feat, one that Yoongi had accomplished with two other people (Jimin and Jungkook, respectively). The maknae opened his mouth to comment on this, when a thought hit him and he halted.

Wait a minute.

Kim Namjoon...a bit of a pushover...

Oh, fuck me sideways.

Jungkook's eyes narrowed into a glare. So this was the guy, huh? The guy who'd gotten Jiminie wasted all those weeks ago? Who reduced him into the giggling mess in the night and was partly responsible for his raging headache and nausea in the day? He crossed his arms over his chest and frowned. "Hold up. You were the one who got Jiminie drunk. Not cool."

Namjoon gave an expression that was truly puzzled. His previously warm tone transferred into the
same polite one from earlier. "I'm sorry...I don't know what you're talking about."

"Hyung, it was him, right?" Jungkook turned to Yoongi, whose features were also confused. "Remember? When Jimin was so wasted he couldn't walk and I had to carry him to bed? This is the guy, right?"

Somewhere midway through his insistences the black-haired man's face changed into one of understanding. He reluctantly nodded his head. "Yeah, kid, this is the guy Jimin sat with."

That was all the confirmation he needed. Jungkook rounded on Namjoon, upper lip pulling up in a half snarl. "My hyung was stressed the hell out then and has been stressed the hell out for the past several weeks. He's small and slight and he shouldn't have had that much alcohol at once and for all we know he could've had so much that he blacked out or got alcohol poisoning. You could've cut him off. His speech carried fire and bite. Maybe a little much of both, but this was his hyung he was defending here. Jimin could've gotten majorly fucked up on this guy's watch.

Yoongi scowled. "Jungkook, calm down. Namjoon couldn't have known about Jimin. We didn't even know."

"He has eyes, hyung." His eyebrows pulled together so hard that he could feel the crease it was making in his forehead. "He should've noticed how drunk he was. One more drink and Jimin might've-"

"Fuck, Jungkook, he's alright now and that was forever ago-"

"Yoongi, it's okay." Namjoon shushed the heated words exiting from the elder man. He turned to Jungkook, who was still fuming, and raised his hands with both palms facing outwards in a gesture of peace. His deep voice was soft, nearly a hum. The brunette tried not to let that fact get to him. "I understand where you're coming from. I would be pissed too if it was one of my close friends arriving home so wasted when I knew they weren't completely okay. "That's right asshole, I'm pissed. Jungkook began to hotly return with a quip. Namjoon hurried on before he could get more than three words in. "I'm sorry. I really didn't know he was unwell or stressed. He seemed fine to me, very happy, and I wanted to show Yoongi hyung that I respected his partner. I should've told him no when he asked for more alcohol."

Jungkook said nothing. He locked his jaw.

"I'm really sorry, Jungkook-ah." The blonde uttered while he held his gaze, and damn it all, it sounded so sincere, like he actually meant it. "It won't happen again. I promise."

It took a few seconds. No matter which way he poked and prodded at the apology, though, he couldn't find anything faulty about it. Jungkook sighed. Hmph. Fine. The handsome new man was forgiven. "You're forgiven." The maknae made his voice slightly threatening, which wasn't all that difficult. "I will mess you up if he ever comes back like that again. Doesn't matter that you're probably older than me and it's disrespectful or whatever. I can still break your arm. Or both of your arms."

Instead of acting affronted, or snapping back with a retort, Namjoon let out a laugh. Jungkook's anger dissipated just like that at the sound. And his face got hot again. "Noted. I'll keep my promise so that I can keep my arms."

"God, Jungkook, why do you always go straight to injuring people or some shit?" Yoongi spoke over the blonde's receding giggles. He shook his head. "Quit your job at the makeup store and become a bodyguard or something, you terrifying muscle pig."
Jokingly, he flexed (even though you couldn't see his muscles that well underneath his flabby hoodie) and made kissy lips. Namjoon's laughter kicked up a notch and Yoongi made a disgusted noise.

"How about getting back in that booth there and singing instead of showing off like you're in one of those crappy self-deprecating ads for casual wear you see in magazines?" The elder man suggested with both humor and seriousness in his tone. He gestured to the room through the glass. "Show us more of that vocal talent instead of your...muscle pig talent."

"Shut up, hyung." Even Jungkook giggled a bit. At that particular moment, he noticed the dryness of his throat...ah, right there, a few feet in front of him was a water dispenser with disposable cups. He walked to it, filled up a cup, and took a sip. He grinned wide. "I work hard for my muscles. They're art." He paused before he could take another drink, cup halfway to his mouth. "Well, I kind of work hard, excising is fun, but they're still art."

"Right." Yoongi snorted. He waited a moment before he continued. "Seriously, though, Jungkook-ah."

"Seriously what?"

"Get back in the booth."

"...uh...why?"

"Yoongi hyung and I want to hear more of your voice." Namjoon put in. Just then the brunette realized the other man was wearing a black beanie that his long fingers reached up to adjust. The blonde smiled and pushed up his glasses. Damn, he was really cute. "It's gorgeous. We think that it would sound amazing on our upcoming project."

"I mean, it kind of has to, Joon, that shit needs to get out into the world soon-"

"Wait." Everything that the two were saying was catching up to him. He jutted his chin towards the booth. "You want me to sing again?" They must be joking. That was like, a one time thing, just feeling out his voice. Surely they didn't actually think it was good enough. That was silliness.

Yoongi said, "Yes, now get your ass back in the booth, Kook."

A beat.

Something wasn't right here. The maknae's eyes flicked between the two men, back and forth, skeptical. "You're messing with me."

"Why would we do that?"

"Uh." Alright, so maybe he didn't have a completely 100% logical answer to that question yet. So? There was a greater chance that they were yanking his chain than sincerely wished for him to sing for them. He shifted his weight from foot to foot. He felt their stares drilling into him. "You know there are people out there who can do way better than I did, right? Me singing for you is like..." Jungkook struggled to find the right word. "I mean, Yoongi hyung, your songs are masterpieces. Using my voice is a joke."

Neither man offered their opinion for a good minute. Finally, Yoongi leaned forwards, looked Jungkook right in the eye, and said, "Jungkook. If there's one thing you know I don't joke about, it's my music."
This was true. The brunette couldn't argue with that statement. He wanted to, but he couldn't.

He slowly nodded, downed the rest of his water, threw the cup in the small trash bin beside him, and made his way quietly back into the booth. He placed the headset over his ears. There were two voices speaking to him now, asking if he could go mezzo piano or belt or just sing any other song he could think of.

Namjoon's pupil's met his through the glass.

Jungkook blushed again. This time when he sung, he resolved to shut his eyes tighter than before. Far tighter.

Despite his best efforts, he had another panic attack.

Jimin was there with him when it happened. The two were out at a coffee shop grabbing something to drink, a nice, easy, peaceful morning. He hadn't felt stressed or pressured or anything; on the contrary, ever since he'd sung for Namjoon and Yoongi in the studio a few days prior, he'd felt somewhat relaxed. Some of the invisible built-up pressure that had been haunting him had just...faded. He'd been fine. Good. Almost great.

His hyung had ordered something Jungkook deemed ridiculously sweet, a sort of caramel frappe with mountain of whipped cream on top along with chocolate drizzle (the whole ensemble was something, in all of his months working in a coffee shop, the brunette had yet to see). His own drink was something far tamer, a hot peppermint tea concoction that they were still making despite the holiday season being long since over. Jimin had made fun of him for getting something so adult since he was the youngest. Jungkook had claimed that his friends drink was equally as childish as his was adultish.

It had been nothing, nothing at all, that had set him off. He'd glanced around the shop through the glass cases to view the array of pastries for sale, when he'd caught a glimpse of a girl. She didn't stand out in the slightest. Her clothes were actually kind of plain. But she was clutching a pen in one hand, wearing a bashful smile, scribbling something onto an empty cup that was clearly to be given to the excited boy sitting across the table from her. It was a sweet thing. Cute.

Something that Yejun had done to first grab Jungkook's attention.

That's when it suddenly became harder to breathe. The walls were closing in and it was dark, it was far too dark for it to be morning time, how was it so dark? Jungkook had reached across the table for the mochi's hand to grasp it in a vice-like grip. It took Jimin less than three seconds to figure out what was going on; he grabbed the taller man and rushed him into the boys' bathroom. The brunette's equilibrium was severely trying by the time Jimin ushered them into the largest stall, the handicap one, and had shut and locked the door.

Jungkook had fallen to the floor while wheezing like there was no tomorrow, pulling in breaths that were high-pitched and growing more so with each passing moment. Everything was so cold and dark and help me help me please I can't breathe hyung help he's going to get me I can see him help me I can't breathe-

The platinum-haired man dropped to his knees to pull Jungkook into his lap. His body shuddered and shook something awful. He curled up into a ball, seeking the warmth that seeped through Jimin's jeans, tears leaking down his cheeks like a silent faucet.

They stayed like that for a while, Jungkook in his hyung's lap, Jimin petting his hair and
murmuring soothing words of praise and assurance, rocking them back and forth. His words were heavily laced with the dialect of Busan, of the sea and birds and the sun, of both of their origins. It helped. It helped a lot.

It was only when Jimin had fallen into a short bout of quiet, merely continuing to run his fingers through the maknae's deep brown locks, when his sobs had softened into whimpers and softened further into nothingness, that both men got up. They unlocked the stall door to make their way to the mirrors and sinks. Both looked like a wreck, Jungkook more so than Jimin; he averted his eyes from his puffy red face and splashed cold water on himself. He came up for air, then splashed himself again. Like the water could magically wash away the tear tracks, like it was a special eraser, one that you used to hide yourself from the world and everyone in it and dammit, dammit, dammit, this wasn't supposed to be happening any more. He was fixing himself.

Jungkook shut off the sink.

Today had been proof that it didn't work that way. You couldn't peel open your brain and rewire it or beat your consciousness into submission or slice at your heart until all the pain dared not to return. It doesn't work that way, it can't work.

A hand lightly touched his shoulder, rubbing up and down his back. The brunette met Jimin's tired eyes.

Because no matter how distracted one becomes, or busy, or diligent in forgetting, panic doesn't just disappear.

The following night, Jungkook took Yoongi and Jimin to the furniture store and bought them a new dining room table.

They threw away the cheap foldout the moment they arrived back at the apartment.

Jungkook felt better.

From: Jiminie

cookie you need to come home

To: Jiminie

why hyung, what happened

is everything okay

From: Jiminie

everything is

well its not too great

plz get here asap

From: Yoongi hyung

kook get your ass in this apartment right the hell now.
Jungkook swore as he pounded his way up the stairs. For some weird reason, the elevator was broken again (seriously, Yejun's place, and now this one. Were elevators supposed to break down this often? He was pretty sure that they weren't), and he had to vault up to the third floor as fast as he possibly could on foot. On the second floor landing his shoelace came undone and he nearly broke his collarbone tripping and banging into the stairwell pole. Thankfully, the journey the rest of the way up presented no issue, allowing his mind to race with possibilities as he climbed the final set of steps. What could the landlord possibly want? They hadn't been late on rent since six weeks ago before Jungkook had gotten his current job at Sunbeam. They hadn't broken anything. The neighbors had never filed any noise complaints or anything of the like as far as he knew. No matter the direction he looked in, the brunette couldn't find the problem.

Fucking hell, do not tell me someone decided that our apartment was the right place to stage a murder. Or sell drugs.

His keys tinkled as he procured them from his pocket; finally he reached the door to the place he shared with his friends, about to shove the appropriate key into the lock. There were voices arguing with each other on the other side that made him pause. He listened. Three voices. One Jimin's tone, one Yoongi's unmistakable growl, and someone unfamiliar.

Jungkook opened the door.

Okay, good, there was no blood or caution tape or anything, so that ruled out murder (though the look on Yoongi's face, which was visible from where he was standing, suggested that one might take place soon regardless). A quick sniff of the air ruled out any drugs with an odor, like marijuana. Syringes or brightly colored pills or bongs were absent as well. No death, no drugs. Phew.

All three people inside did not cease bickering upon his entrance. Setting his gym bag on the couch, Jungkook made his way to the kitchen carefully. Even if it wasn't illegal substances or illegal activities, based upon the sheer heat that was in the words being exchanged by the three, it wasn't unicorns and butterflies either.

Yoongi stood in the same place Jungkook had spotted him as he came in, the expression on his face still deadly. Jimin was beside him while maintaining their usual habitual distance. Another man, very short with a black polo and fine mustache, was several feet from the pair with his arms crossed.

The brunette bowed to all three due to the presence of a stranger that demanded the formality. Yoongi and Jimin gave smaller bows back, while the man Jungkook guessed was the landlord did not bow. This caused a hint of irritancy to creep into Jungkook's bones. It was highly disrespectful to not return a bow, nonethematter if the person whom did not return it was older. Yoongi seemed to notice this, and snapped, "It's impolite to not bow back to our dongsaeng."

"I'm not returning the bow of a thief." The landlord hissed. His torso remained locked in place, unbending. "I'm to assume that he doesn't know of your current situation?"

"He doesn't need to know." Jimin's features morphed into a mean scowl. The expression looked almost wrong on his usually docile face. "There's no situation. You're getting your money. We haven't been late for six weeks. There shouldn't be a problem."

Jungkook's brow furrowed as he glanced from the landlord to his friends and back. So it's money, then. "I'm sorry, but what's going on here?"
"I'll tell you what's going on here." With a shaking finger the landlord pointed to Jimin and Yoongi. "Those two have been cheating me out of their rent for two months now. Their lease states that there can be a maximum of two residents in this apartment and two only. Inviting a third person to help pay rent violates that lease since the original residents are paying less than what they agreed to."

"The rent is still getting paid!" Yoongi's eyes were alight. "You're still getting the amount that we agreed to! Who cares if there's one more person? We're still paying the rent, and on time. The sum is still the same."

"The sum is the correct amount of rent that I charge two residents, not three living under the same roof. In that case, the sum increases to accommodate the third person."

Through gritted teeth, Jungkook asked, "And what would the sum increase to?"

The landlord fixed him a steely glare. "Since your friends have been doing this under my nose for so long? Cheating me out of so much money? No, your sum doesn't increase." A pause as he turned his glare to the other men in the room. "You're being evicted. All of you."

Dead silence.

The brunette met eyes with his best friend. His thoughts were slow, fuzzy, dumb. Jimin was blinking back at him with the same numb gaze. Moisture started to film over the mochi's pupils accompanied by a barely constrained wobble of his lower lip. From experience, Jungkook recognized that look and its exact implications: if nothing happened in the next five seconds his friend was going to break and it was not going to be pretty. Jimin would hate being so vulnerable even if he had no control over what his anxiety made him do in stressful situations.

The maknae wasn't going to let that break happen.

Without thinking he offered, "What if I could pay you back all the money you claim you lost?"

My money...all that money that I've been saving up so I could move soon...all that money to pay for food and the new bills and my own new things...it has to be enough to pay off this man. It has to be.

The landlord raised a brow. He shrugged. "If that was the case, then the two original residents would be allowed to stay and pay the usual rent until their lease is up." Though Jungkook suspected he tried not to be audible, he could hear Jimin's shaky sigh of relief. Yoongi let out a similar one through his nose. The following words froze that relief in its tracks. "The third person would be evicted instead."

Fuck. Jungkook's heart raced with a sudden spike of stress. I would have no money, nowhere to go! I can't...but then Yoongi hyung and Jiminie hyung would have no place to go. Fucking fuck.

The producer didn't like these options either. "That's bullshit. You're being paid back in full. You can't kick out-"

A yelp rang out that echoed along the metal pots and pans in the kitchen space. Everyone turned to Jimin, whose cheeks were a light pink. His left hand was massaging an area above his right wrist. The mochi smiled apologetically. "S-Sorry. Carry on."

"Are you alright, Jiminie?" Yoongi's voice oozed honey (something that on the regular would be achieved solely if somebody's dying wish was to hear that tone of voice). He looked his partner up and down, searching for the source of his discomfort.
"I'm fine, hyung." The platinum-haired man insisted. He was obviously trying to hide something from the landlord, whom was watching them warily like some stunt was about to be pulled. He spoke lower. "I wasn't covering my wrist. You, uh, brushed against it and I wasn't ready."

Immediately the older man backed away from him. "Fuck, I'm sorry-"

"It's okay, it just surprised me-"

"Wait a moment." The landlord cut in. Three heads turned to attention. He made a motion between Yoongi and Jimin. "Are you...soulmates?"

There was a moment in which the two in question just stared at each other. The black-haired man was the one who answered. "Yes. We are."

"Proof, if you will?"

Jimin's teeth visibly ground together. For a moment, Jungkook thought that he would refuse to show him, whether it be for the sake of Yoongi's pride and privacy or his own; nevertheless he slowly removed his hand from his wrist and lifted the area so it was clearly seen. A deep magenta bruise, about a toothpick's length and a toothbrush's width, stood in harsh contrast to the rest of his skin. The brunette could bear to look at it for a moment or so before he made himself turn his head away.

Not here. Not now. I'm not going to freak out here and now. No.

The landlord's previously crossed arms now took residence at his sides. His features had lost much of their coarseness and his gaze was far less hardened. It was as though a flip had switched in him that made him a lighter, more amicable man. He gestured to Jungkook (who was still trying to prevent the bruise from entering his line of sight). "And him?"

"What about our dongsaeng?" If Yoongi hyung keeps calling me that, I'm going to start thinking he's soft for someone besides Jiminie.

"Is he both of your soulmates as well?"

Shocked, the maknae realized that the man was fully and completely serious in asking the question. The three men glanced at each other with wide eyes. Truth be told, having two soulmates wasn't necessarily unheard of, it just wasn't very common. It usually happened to people whose soulmate died and fate chose to grant them another one (a gift or a curse, nobody really knew). What was rarer than a person having two soulmates was both of those soulmates being alive.

Jungkook, similarly to all the other kids his age, had taken a course on soulmates in high school. He'd read in a textbook somewhere that a scientist passionate about numbers had calculated all sorts of odds for soulmates: the probability that you find your soulmate? One in one hundred. The probability that your soulmate is of the same sex? One in five hundred and twenty six. The probability that you had two soulmates? One in seven hundred eighty nine thousand. The probability that both of your soulmates, if you had two, were alive?

One in two billion.

"Why?" Jimin asked, aware, as every man in the room was, of these odds.

Smiling a rueful, sad smile, the landlord said, "My wife is my soulmate. We were lucky, or unlucky, however you want to call it, and we found each other young. I remember how hard it was
to be even a few feet away from her in a classroom. I couldn't even think about her sitting in the back of the bus while I was in the front. I still know the feeling." He tilted his head towards Jungkook. "I'd be willing to let your friend stay if the three of you are soulmates. I wouldn't want to be the cause of that painful distance."

Though the deal was a lovely one that would solve every one of their problems, its terms couldn't be met. Yoongi was not above ruthlessly lying in order to get out of something, and usually Jimin and Jungkook went along with it if it saved all of their asses, but there was no way to fake this one or back up something false with evidence. To prove this, the brunette went and grabbed both of his hyung's sleeves to tug them forward. Directly in the landlords line of sight, Jungkook grasped one of their hands in both of his.

Jimin's palm was slightly sweaty, his fingers short, skin unmarked save for the new splash of purple. Yoongi had the calloused hands of a pianist, long thin fingers, and an icy grip.

Neither bruised him. He didn't mark them, either.

It took the landlord a good moment of studying their joined hands. He nodded slowly...

...and began to walk towards the door.

"Wait!" Jimin squeezed the brunette's hand once, then let go to follow. Yoongi released his hand without affection to instead shoot Jungkook a nearly nonexistent smile. "What are we supposed to pay?"

The landlord opened the door. Without a look behind him, he announced, "Your friend pays me and you two stay until your lease expires. He has a week to leave before I call the police. Or, he doesn't leave or pay, and I call the police on all three of you. Goodbye."

BAM!

Standing in shock at the fact that his own door was slammed in his face, Jimin turned to the two other men. Yoongi did not meet his gaze and instead made a face at the now closed door. "Bastard. No good bastard. It's unbelievable, pulling this shit right now."

"It's fine, hyung." Jungkook soothed, even though he felt like doing anything except soothing because what the fuck just happened right now. "I...I needed to start looking for a new place anyway."

"That's crap, Kook-ah." The mochi snorted. His eyelids drooped as he placed his back against the door and slid down it. The entire discussion had obviously drained him. "Why would you do that?"

"I was supposed to be here for a few days at most, remember?" Jungkook thought to weeks and weeks ago, when the plan to escape was first brought up, its shoddy details voiced by a passionate yet determined Jung Hoseok. "And then I lost my job, and then the panic started happening, and we lost track of time. I lost track of time." He sighed. "I should've left a while ago. Then this wouldn't have happened."

"It's not your fault he's an asshole." Yoongi carried on with the expletives as well as carried on scowling. "You can still live with us, Jungkook-ah. We'll make it work."

"How?" The brunette asked helplessly. "We can't keep lying to him! You'll get kicked out too and you know damn well that you and Jimin hyung can't live in the studio. If I don't pay up and move out, you'll have no place to go."
Nobody countered the statement. It was true: if all three of them were kicked out, living arrangements would be crumpler than they were before. They couldn't live at Yoongi's production studio, because it literally just wasn't doable, their families were on the other side of the country so that option was out, and even combined the money that Yoongi, Jimin, and Jungkook were making wasn't enough to put a proper down payment on an apartment in the area for a solid two weeks (true if they added in Jungkook's savings as well). Even so, it would be a struggle to convince a landlord to accept their residence, since no doubt their current landlord would spread the word of their supposed deceit and would put it on all of the records.

The way that Jungkook saw it, this could go two ways: he paid up and was screwed, or he didn't pay up and they were all screwed.

It was clear which option he would pick.

"Jungkookie." Jimin glanced at him with defeat in his pupils. Yeah. He knew which option Jungkook was going to pick too. "What are you going to do?"

Cry. Probably panic some more. Call your parents and talk about moving in with them. Watch as the little life that I have falls apart.

"...I don't know."

Alright, so the order went like this: first apply primer that was specific to whatever product you were using. Set the primer with loose power for a shorter wait. If the client wants a bolder look, brush contour in the hollows of their cheeks, the shadow of their forehead, and the sides of their nose. Then accent the non-contoured areas with highlighter, key areas like the chin and cheek bones and the brow bones. Focus on eyes before anything else, because the look of the eyes tends to decide what colors to use and where for the rest of the look. And then...wait, shit, he missed a step. Wasn't he supposed to blend the contour? And blend the highlighter too? Or was he supposed to blend them together...yeah, right, and make a cakey mess? He could've sworn that they were supposed to be blended together though, why waste time and blend them separate-?

"Yah, Jungkook-ah."

Jungkook snapped out of his reverie, lifting his chin from where he had been propping it on his hand. He noticed that he'd absentmindedly been chewing on a lip lining pencil, pulled a grossed out face, and attempted to discreetly toss it into the makeup bag that was assigned to him (since, you know, he was a 'makeup artist' now and everything. Thanks Tae) that he kept by him at all times.

He stifled a yawn while he did so. "Yeah, hyung?"

Taehyung rounded the corner of the counter that carried the cash register, and was also, coincidentally, where Jungkook currently stood. It was ten at night and they were the only two in the store, about to close up. Despite the late hour, the redhead looked none the worse for wear. The maknae envied him. How could a person glow like that so late in the evening? "I'm gonna head out now. You're okay closing up?"

Jungkook had closed up so many times now it was basically routine. It was something easily taken care of. He waved his hyung off. "Of course. I think I'm going to stay for a little while longer and read that brochure on the latest makeup trends this season. I want to have a bit of a heads up on what the clients might start asking for."

Taehyung shook his head, unworried. "You can take the brochure home, Jungkookie. No need to stay till a crazy ass hour like midnight or something."
"Oh thank god." The brunette breathed. He set his chin atop his palm in his previous position. "I thought I was going to have to redo the inventory and update the log to make it look like I did something so sunbae-nim wouldn't get suspicious."

Chucking, Taehyung fondly ruffled Jungkook's hair, whom swatted him away. "Aish, Kook, such an overachiever! You know the boss trusts you now."

"I know. It never hurts to play it safe, though, especially with her."

"Yeah, true."

There was a small bell that chimed whenever someone opened the front door of the store; just then, it did. Jungkook opened his mouth to begin with something like sorry but we were just closing feel free to come back tomorrow. The words died on his tongue as Taehyung's face lit up.

"Well, well, the boys are working late tonight." Seokjin grinned. He was dressed as though he had just come from photoshoot: being a model, he probably had just come from photoshoot. His jeans were tight, leather, with spiky buckle. The jacket he wore was of the same style, overlapping a sheer black top that just barely covered his pale stomach. His brown orbs were lightly lined and his rose colored hair was artfully fluffed up. In summation, he looked fucking good, and his face gave away that he knew he looked fucking good. He casually strolled up to them (though it was clear he had come for Taehyung, if the expression on his face was any indicator). "Ready to go home? The car is outside."

"I just need to check on something really quick, and then I'll be ready, babe." The person in question traipsed off for a moment with a smile, leaving Jungkook alone with Seokjin.

The older man gave him a once over. Usually the brunette would blush or coax his eyes to the floor or something; in his current state of exhaustion, his mood made him force out a groggy, "Take a picture, it'll last longer."

Seokjin raised an eyebrow. One side of his perfect mouth quirked up. "You've gotten bolder, Jungkook ssi. I'd almost call that sass."

It was sass. Jungkook prepared to deadpan that out loud, realized quite suddenly that he was talking to somebody older than him, and hurriedly corrected his slouched posture to bow. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to disrespect you. I'm tired is all."

A high-pitched laugh sounded from Seokjin. The maknae blinked, not expecting the noise itself nor the immediate comparison to windshield wipers that popped into his brain. "Ah, I'm kidding, Jungkook-ah. Tae loves me too much to give me attitude. Most of the time, at least." He leaned down onto the counter with sparkling pupils, as though he was about to divulge a secret.

"Although, speaking of pictures...Taehyung's been telling me that you've been finding yourself bored?"

"Uh..." Well, he wasn't so listless any more, now that he had to find somewhere new to live. "I'm not so bored now, but a stress reliever would be welcome."

"Excellent!" Seokjin straightened. "Then you can come with me tomorrow at my next photoshoot."

Jungkook's eyes widened. What? A photoshoot? "Go with you?"

"Of course! You can come as my guest. Sample the food that's laid out, chat with the other models, maybe make some connections in the industry, yeah?"
"Why would I need to make connections in the modeling industry?"

The older man tilted his head to the side. "Well, with your physique, it wouldn't exactly be difficult to land an offer with a photographer. It pays well if that's what you're worried about."

From somewhere within the store Taehyung's voice popped up. "He's saying you're hot enough to be a model!"

Okay, now he was blushing. He really needed to get that under control because at this point he might as well paint his cheeks red. "T-Thanks, but I'm alright."

I insist." Seokjin pressed, though he remained polite and warm. "At least for fun. You don't have to make connections. Come and enjoy yourself. A break in routine is nice every once in a while."

Jungkook pressed his lips together while he thought. He had been following his routine to the tee the moment he'd decided to implement it into his life, the only break being when he'd sung for Namjoon and Yoongi. The point of it had been to keep his panic at bay...but that was redundant now, no? He'd panicked again even with his routine. And to be completely honest the constant repetition of it all was beginning to grate on his nerves the slightest bit. He needed to let loose in a tame way, a way that didn't include throwing himself at a punching bag until his mind was empty.

Another thought nagged at his brain. Who else did he know that was in major need of a stress reliever, was unarguably gorgeous with a face and body that the photographers would love, and who also didn't have anything to do tomorrow? "Can I bring a friend of mine?"

"Absolutely. The more the merrier." The man with rose-colored hair smiled. Just then Taehyung announced that he was finished, loudly bade Jungkook goodnight, and called for his soulmate as he opened the door to head to the car. As he walked to join his boyfriend, Seokjin said over his shoulder, "You have my number, yeah? I'll text you the address of the place to meet up tomorrow. Have a good evening, Jungkook-ah!"

For what must've been the thousandth time Jimin voiced, "Are you sure I look okay?"

"Hyung." Jungkook rolled his eyes as the two stepped into the elevator. It was a sleek, fancy, yet modern mix of what appeared to be black and white marble with golden trim. The brunette was trying not to seem as though he was intimidated by the sheer wealth of the entire place (from how tall the building was to how many receptionists were at the front desk to how many people were bustling about in a lobby that relied on a heavily jeweled chandelier as its sole source of light) and it was clear that his best friend was trying to do the same. They were failing utterly. "You look fantastic."

"You're supposed to say that though, because you're my friend." The mochi argued, his stress evident. His small frame was dressed in grey jeans, an oversized sweater the color of cream, and charcoal dress shoes. All of his piercings were in, all silver, too. He'd even gone the extra mile and smoked out the edges of his eyes with soft brown shadow. It was no lie; his appearance was near flawless.

Jungkook had opted to wear a long sleeved pinstriped dress shirt paired with black slacks that hugged his legs. His shoes were also dress shoes, and also black, and his own piercings were in (he'd almost lost the nerve to switch out his regular sphere-shaped cartilage piercing for a tiny heart-shaped one; it was Yoongi who told him to just put the damn piece of metal in his ear and move on with his day). "When have I ever told you that you looked good when you looked like
"Never." Jimin relented after a moment of pondering. "Because you're a brat like that."

The brunette threw a hand up in the air. "Why does honesty automatically default to brattiness?"

"You could at least give your hyung the benefit of the doubt!"

There was quiet for a second as their elevator approached their floor. Both men fidgeted, unable to express their nerves any other way.

"Thanks for bringing me to this, Kookie." Jimin said softly. The noise was barely heard over the hum of the elevator's ascension. "I've been really stressed out lately. I know that you're stressed too. Thank you for thinking of me."

Jungkook tilted his head to meet the platinum-haired man's gaze. "No problem, Jiminie hyung. You would've dragged me along if it was you."

"True." Jimin giggled. "Or-"

"If you asked Yoongi hyung he'd just be staring at you the whole time."

"What's so wrong with that?" The mochi batted his eyelashes innocently.

Jungkook made a retching sound as the elevator door opened and the two stepped out. "It's almost like you want me to become corrupted."

"You're already corrupted." Jimin led the way down the plain hall, knowing of their room number. The walls were littered with artful pictures of pretty person upon pretty person. Plants dotted the place, alive, green, well kept. If the chandelier hadn't done enough to confirm the fanciness of the establishment, the fact that they were able to keep plants alive (something that 95% of the human populous was unable to do) was the definite deciding factor. "No thanks to me and all thanks to the first boy you ever hooked up with back in high school. What was his name again?"

The brunette didn't answer (it wasn't important, he had just been some jerk experimenting and then dumped him and...yeah. It wasn't important). Eventually they reached a door that had the room number Seokjin had texted Jungkook the previous night portrayed in swirly script. Jimin reached out a hand, turned the knob, and they stepped inside.

Jungkook had never been to a professional photoshoot before. Horror stories of models being belittled, forced to starve themselves, and thus developing eating disorders or something equally upsetting was about as far as his knowledge extended; relaxed photoshoots, he guessed, took place in homey settings like the woods, or someplace with flowers, or...just anywhere with life. Stuffy buildings that screamed wealth weren't exactly warm and comforting.

This place wasn't like that though. Yes, there were quite a few sharp edges to the room: harsh lines cut into tables to depict a minimalistic style, lights in the shape of cold cubes, a spotless floor that shone like one flat pearl. Hints of personality covered up everything else. The deep red couch with a fluffy rug in front of it, the colorfulness of the food laid out on the table (bright vegetables and chocolate covered strawberries and what looked like really expensive cheese), pink roses that accented hidden corners or open spaces. It was lovely, a stark contrast to the cold strictness of the rest of the building.

"Whoa." Jimin gaped. His eyes were comically wide. "This place..."
"Jungkook! Over here!"

They turned to seek the source of the familiar voice. Sitting on a chair in front of the backdrop, completely at ease, was Seokjin. He was dressed similarly to how he had been the previous night, outfit carefully coordinated yet nevertheless perfect. His smile grew when the pair approached him.

"You must be Jungkook's friend Jimin." Seokjin greeted Jimin. He rose to bow, and the gesture was returned by both of the younger men. "Nice to meet you. I'm Kim Seokjin, but I think Taehyung's told you enough about me that you already knew that."

"Yeah." Jimin admitted. "He likes to talk about you a lot."

"Aish. Well, I can't complain. I am the best!" The older man laughed good-naturedly. "If either of you are hungry, feel free to attack the food. The photographer should be here within the hour."

"Really?" The mochi's eyebrows pulled together. His confusion stemmed from the readiness of the set they stood on. The lights were on, camera equipment set up, props arranged. It seemed slightly odd that a place so professional wouldn't have their photographer here already. "Everything is already set up. Shouldn't he or she at least be here early?"

Seokjin hesitated. "Actually, we're the ones who are here early. An emergency, or what could be called an emergency in the modeling world, came up. I had to request a makeup artist for this morning, and the company is having trouble finding one on such a short notice." His features became worried. "My manager urged the photographer to get himself a proper breakfast and shooed him out. He's in his office now trying to get me someone." The troubled expression smoothed over. "Don't worry about it. Everything will be ready in time."

As he talked, he guided the two towards the layout of food. Jungkook pinched a chocolate covered strawberry between his pointer finger and thumb, and Jimin grabbed and munched thoughtfully on a carrot while he listened. The maknae paused in lifting the treat to his mouth to stare hard at Seokjin's face. He was already wearing makeup (his eyebrows were filled in, his lips shone with pink gloss, and his eyes were lined thinly with kohl), so why did he need someone to come in and fix it?

"What would you need a makeup artist for?" Jungkook squinted. No, he was right, Seokjin was all dolled up. "Your makeup is perfect."

The older man's hesitation lasted longer this time. He then pulled in a deep breath to let in out in one big rush. "There's no use hiding it from you two. I'm bad at keeping secrets anyway." He reached up to begin unbuttoning his high collared shirt. Jungkook barely had time to even react to that before the fabric was yanked down past Seokjin's collarbone and Jimin was choking on his carrot and w-wow holy shit that was a lot of purple.

"Taehyung got...a tad too excited last night. Couldn't stop himself." Seokjin voiced in explanation. He gestured with the hand that wasn't stretching his shirt down to the portrait of bruises that decorated his neck. There was no rhyme or reason to the marks; they were each dark and prominent and marred the skin. "I didn't remember they were there until I got here thirty minutes ago."

Neither man gave a reply. Jungkook set down his strawberry and turned his head away so that Seokjin wouldn't notice the way his face was blanching. Jimin reached out a hand to grip his wrist. Grounding him. Steadying him. Thank you, hyung.
"I'm sorry. I've clearly made you two uncomfortable-"

"It's alright." The mochi said reassuringly, letting go of the brunette to reach for his own sleeve. Rolling it up, he revealed the bruise that he'd received from Yoongi two days prior, still healing. "I get marked too. Happens so fast sometimes that I forget they're there. No worries."

"You...you get bruised?" Seokjin's voice quieted to a whisper.

"Yeah." Jimin smiled. Jungkook knew him well enough to tell that it was laced with wistfulness and something sad. "I do. Still love my soulmate, though. He always acts so scared once he realizes he's done it. Which is kind of funny, actually, because he's literally the grumpiest person I've ever met. Wouldn't tell someone sorry if it saved his life." He let out a soft laugh, sobering swiftly. "Tae Tae probably gets frighted out of his mind whoever he touches you, accidentally or otherwise. He doesn't mean to hurt you. He just...wants you is all."

The older man nodded slowly. "Thank you, Jimin ssi. I'll take those words to heart."

The maknae forced his gaze from to ground to Seokjin. "I can cover them up for you, if you wanted."

"How?"

"With makeup, obviously." He smirked half-heartedly. "Taehyung sort of lied to our boss in order to get me my job back. Told her I was some large scale makeup artist. I had to learn a few things so that our cover wouldn't be blown." Jungkook jutted his chin at the older man. "If you have concealer in your skin color I can fix you right up. Or I can mix colors that will match you best. Whichever you want."

"That would be amazing, Jungkookie." The rose-haired man commended. "I'll contact the photographer and my manager and tell them the news. Thank you very much."

It happened rather fast then: Jungkook ushering Seokjin into a chair that was located in front of a vanity located off set, pawing through the drawers for concealer, mixing, swiping, testing, mixing again. Asking the model to take his shirt off. Turning a bit red. Using a brush and dabbing at the purple until it disappeared, something he'd done so many times before, except on himself and he'd never had a fancy brush to do it with. Jimin opening the door for the photographer, chatting with him and helping him set up.

It took about ten minutes to be executed properly, yet after that, a person could hardly tell there was any makeup on the area in the first place. It was a good thing too, as the shirtless photographs were actually the ones the photographer wished to start with. Seokjin rose from the chair and ambled to his place in front of the backdrop.

The shooting began. It was entertaining for Jungkook and Jimin, who did a lot of nothing save snack every so often (in their defense, they had missed breakfast) and chat with each other. Whenever Seokjin had a break or the photographer was adjusting his equipment, the three would joke and throw playful jabs, then the shoot would move forward. They learned that Seokjin used to go by Jin in high school, and had a show he ran called 'Eat Jin' during that time. He loved to cook, he said, and did it whenever he had spare time.

"That's a perfect match for Jungkookie, since he loves to eat!"

"Shut up, hyung, I work out a lot. I need the calories!"

"You're welcome to stop by my and Taehyung's house anytime for dinner, Jungkook. I always tend
"to make too much food anyway."

"...thank you."

"Thank you hyung."

"Has Tae been rubbing off on you, because he insisted that I call him hyung in the exact same way. Aish, I can't even keep track of how many hyungs I have now-"

"Like I said before: the more the merrier. A dongsaeng can never have too many hyungs."

"You can say that because you're the oldest-"

"Excuse me." The photographer interrupted. He was a broad stylish man with pale purple hair. Gesturing between Seokjin and the backdrop, he continued, "I've gotten all the pictures I need. All that's left to do is contact your manager and tell him we're finished. Have a good rest of your-"

"Wait." Seokjin said. Jimin and Jungkook gave him curious looks that mirrored the one the photographer wore. He pressed on. "Would you mind staying behind a short while longer to photograph my companions here?"

Both younger men began sputtering and protesting. Seokjin waved them down, quieting their voices for a the time being.

Surprisingly the photographer turned to them with an inviting grin. "I thought that you would never ask! You're both gorgeous models. I'm shocked that I haven't seen you at any parties or gatherings recently, or heard about you from my friends. Your names? Ages? How long have you been modeling for?"

The sputtering resumed, louder in volume, from Jungkook and Jimin, each trying to convince the man that they were no models. Neither the photographer nor Seokjin paid them any mind, dragging them in front of the backdrop.

Jimin went first rather shyly. The maknae knew that most of it was a front: Jimin was actually quite the charmer, and even if he didn't believe he was good looking, he knew other people thought he was and knew how to take advantage of that fact. It only took a few minutes and a couple words of praise from the three remaining men in the room before he really started to show off. The poses in the beginning were innocent, but as the mochi bloomed he got more daring (mimicking Seokjin by pulling his loose collar down to bare his sharp collarbones, biting his lip with a smile, lifting the bottom of his shirt up to expose a sliver of pale skin). Everybody was clapping and laughing by the end of it. They gathered around the camera to take a gander at the pictures, and sure enough, Jimin was stunning. Some of the pictures were so downright risqué that the mochi was covering his face with mock humiliation. All in all, if Yoongi and Jimin weren't soulmates and he ever found those racy photos, Yoongi wouldn't be able to keep his hands off of the younger man for days. Jungkook voiced this aloud, and was rewarded with a loud laugh and a smack to his arm.

Then it was Jungkook's turn.

"Sorry I'm not more...dressed up." He apologized, moving to the place in front of the backdrop where Jimin had previously been standing.


What confidence? The brunette struggled to get into a suitable position; ultimately, he wasn't able
to do so, and chose to take direction from the one in charge instead. He followed the photographer's instructions to the best of his ability, leaning his head back to expose his throat, smiling at the camera, running a hand or two through his hair ("Isn't that Jiminie's thing?" "Jungkook, I know where you sleep at night." "Hyung, I can't make this kind of shit up-" "Sorry but in which bag do you keep your retro collection of IU CD's?" "Okay, okay, I'm sorry! Damn.").

Their impromptu photo shoot finally finished. Jungkook was too embarrassed to look at what a mess he was, letting the other men crowd around the camera to take a look. Jimin wolf whistled, and Seokjin granted him an impressed glance.

"You really should consider a career in modeling." Ten minutes later, after they had bowed and thanked and the photographer was ready to leave, he was giving a still embarrassed Jungkook a kind grin. "You're absolutely lovely and wonderful with taking direction. Your friend is fantastic as well. Ask Seokjin for my number. Contact me if you or your friend would ever like to feel what it's like to be in front of a camera again."

Jimin, whom had overheard, joined his friend in their resumed protesting that thank you that was very nice but they actually weren't models or professional or anything and like this was kind of a one time thing for fun so uh maybe a no on that contact-

"They'll be in touch with you soon." Seokjin guided the man to the door with sweet, "Very, very soon. They're just shy is all. You know how beginners are."

Jungkook swore that you could hear he and Jimin frantically trying to do damage control from the elevator all the way down the hall.

Three days before he was scheduled to depart to God knew where, Jungkook received a letter in the mail.

It was nearly midnight and he'd just returned from his self defense class. Well, the class itself had let out two and half hours beforehand, and he'd lagged behind to have a go at the punching bag as he usually did. He opened up their mailbox to extract five pieces of mail. Flipping through them as he climbed the steps, he noted that one was for Jimin, three were junk, and one was for himself. The address on his and Jimin's mail was one he didn't know.

Once inside, he set everything except for his letter down on the dining room table (no doubt to be noticed the following morning) and brought it with him to his room. The brunette peeled apart the sticky seal to discover three items inside.

They were photos of himself. Or a man that looked exactly like him, anyway. The young man depicted in the pictures was attractive, clean cut; gazing into his eyes made something deep in a person's belly stir. He radiated a different emotion or feeling in each picture, the first one softness, the second one neutrality, and the third one...was rather sultry, if he was being completely honest.

Is that really me?

A note had fallen out of the letter when he'd shaken it to dislodge the pictures. In an unfamiliar script, it read: Thought you should have these and appreciate how great you look. I had a lot of fun with you and Jimin, and I hope the three of us can do this again sometime. The offer to join Taehyung and I for dinner still stands, so call me or text me when you know that you're free. And hurry! It's impolite to keep your best looking hyung waiting! -Kim Seokjin

Jungkook's breath caught.
A sudden surge of emotion rose in him, so strong he had to set the note down for fear he'd accidentally crush it in his fist. Three more things, then. Three more things that were utterly his own. He owned so very little. But these things were his, they were of him, and he owned them and he could take them wherever he wanted or hide them anywhere he wished because they were his, this solid good memory was his.

He ended up staring at each of the three pictures for a long time. Eventually, Jungkook tore himself away, gathered them in his hands, and tucked them away in one of his two bags.

Sleep came quickly.

"Jiminnie hyung, promise me that you won't drink too much."

"Why else do you think I'm bringing you along, Kookie?" His hyung countered as the two approached the bar. It was nothing like the clubs he was used to going to (on the rare occasion he did go. Mostly he went because Yejeun wanted company), bright and pounding with bass and loud. It had an overall calm appearance of warm browns and hues of orange and green. Of course it matched Yoongi's tastes perfectly, giving away why the producer had chosen the place to meet at. "You're here to monitor me."

"I thought I was here to relax." Two days. Forty eight hours. That was how much time he had until he was being kicked out and he still had no place to go. Relaxing was something distant in his mind. There was nothing wrong with trying, though.

"That too." Jimin continued to pull him along. As the drew closer, he grabbed for his hand and laced their fingers together. It was habit the two adopted in settings such as these that could potentially make one of them, namely Jimin, uncomfortable. His best friend had told him that the creepers tended to stay away when Jungkook was by him (something about his height and muscles and glare, which the brunette didn't understand quite yet) so the two acted as though they were together to keep Jimin safe. Jungkook, as per usual, would let go of him the moment he was in Yoongi's sights.

Because again. Yoongi was crazy protective over his soulmate and would readily fight anyone who dared get too close. Most people didn't challenge the menacing hurricane known as Min Yoongi unless they wanted a broken nose.

That was the entire reason why they were here, actually: not to witness Yoongi break people's noses (something Jungkook found both terrifying and hysterical) but rather at the short man's request. Interns were popping up left and right that begged for his attention and there were simply too many to have face-to-face interviews because Yoongi just didn't have time. So here they were now, at a modest bar, to stay for a few hours while Yoongi made his rounds.

Easy.

Upon entering, Jungkook immediately spotted the older man. He was in a booth towards the back of the place, nursing an appropriately sized bottle of fruit wine. It was most likely his first, seeing as he appeared quite alert. Or as alert as Yoongi could get, anyway. He led Jimin in the direction of his soulmate, shouldering past the crowd, politely stepping past people.

There turned out to be someone already there with Yoongi whom had been hidden behind the booth and by the people. Jungkook didn't know him: some intern he was speaking with, probably. Jimin let go of his hand to walk in front of him, waving to his soulmate.
"Please excuse the interruption." The platinum-haired man bowed to the nervous-looking intern, whom bowed his head in response. Jimin smiled at his soulmate, leaning down and kissing his hair. "Jungkookie is going to keep an eye on me, okay? Don't worry."

Yoongi eyed him skeptically. "Alright, gorgeous. Take it easy for me until I can join you. I should be finished with this one in a few minutes."

"I'll be at the bar." The mochi blew him a kiss and pivoted on his heel to walk away. "C'mon, Kook!"

"Jungkook-ah." The producer stopped him before he could leave. Though his pupils strayed on Jimin's retreating figure, he eventually met his gaze. Something like a smirk grew on his face. "You remember Joon, yeah?"

Kim Namjoon? The super hot guy that had complimented his voice a week and a half ago? Oh, yeah. Jungkook remembered him. How could he not? "Yes, I remember him."

"He's been hinting to me to send you his way if I saw you at all tonight." Yoongi was definitely smirking, though the brunette had no idea why. He took a sip from his drink. "He headed over to the bar a couple minutes ago. You should drop in and say hello or something. You made an impression on him, kid."

Jungkook’s heart skipped a beat. Sure, he hadn't really thought much about Namjoon lately (okay, maybe sometimes at night, or when whatever was on TV was boring him, or when there was nobody at the store and he was alone and...okay so maybe he'd thought about him a bit), but that didn't mean he wasn't interested. Really cute guy taking a liking to him? Could he yell hell yes any louder? "O-Oh. I guess I'll go find him then." He glanced between Yoongi and the potential intern, whom much resembled a sly cat with a clueless mouse. "See you later tonight, hyung."

The brunet bowed and headed off. Thankfully, though the place was definitely crowded, it wasn't packed to the point that Jungkook wasn't able to move properly. In no time at all, he'd arrived at the bar, and slid onto a stool. He gazed around, trying to find Jimin, to no avail. Alright, if he didn't see him in fifteen minutes he’d go look for him. Jimin deserved a little free time without a chaperone. Jungkook dug into his pocket, pulled out seven thousand won, and slapped it on the counter. "A glass of soju, please."

The barman nodded then swiped the money from the counter. It took twenty seconds for his drink to arrive (what he'd ordered was a rather typical Korean alcohol, anyway) and he was tilting the glass back. Before he was fully aware of what he was doing, he realized he'd drained half the glass. Shit. He needed to slow down. He wasn't here to get wasted, he was here to watch out for Jimin, maybe get buzzed at the most. This would be his only drink of the night. Shame...he missed consuming alcohol every now and then. There just wasn't the time nor money nor energy to do so any more, he supposed, plus it was bad for his health-

Another seven thousand won was placed on the counter as someone slid onto the stool beside him. A warm, deep voice requested, "I'll have a glass of whatever he's having. Thank you."

Jungkook smiled. "How do you know I didn't order something god awful like vodka?"

"I guess I'll just have to take my chances." Namjoon grinned back. He looked handsome tonight, dressed in a black dress shirt and jeans with a fashionable belt. His hair had been combed. He also lacked glasses, something that Jungkook liked because now he could see just how expressive the brown orbs were when they weren't hiding behind rectangular frames. "How has your night been?"
"My night has barely started." The maknae replied, tracing the rim of his glass with the tip of his finger. He chuckled. "I'm supposed to be chaperoning Jimin to make sure he doesn't get wasted again." He squinted and gave the older man a once over (trying not to let his gaze linger too long because wow he really did look good). "You're with me right now though, so I guess he's fine."

Namjoon shook his head. His glass was placed in front of him; he reached for it, took a sip, and jokingly said, "Well, I'm a dangerous man, so it's good that I've got you to keep me in check."

"Yoongi keeps you in check often enough without me there to help." The brunette glanced over to where the man in question sat. He was alone now and didn't seem bothered by that fact in the slightest. He was probably going to seek out Jimin soon, so maybe Jungkook was off the hook for a few more minutes. "But I'll gladly lend him a hand if my assistance is needed."

A low chuckle resonated from the blonde (the maknae swore he could feel the vibrations of it in the wood). There was quiet for a minute or so between them, a minute or so that Jungkook used up wondering about Namjoon. He truly barely knew anything about him, besides the fact that he was older than himself but younger than Yoongi, and that he was a well-known producer on top of being well-liked. What better way to get to know someone than to ask questions? "How old are you?"

Namjoon lifted an eyebrow. "Twenty five. You?"

"Twenty three."

"That makes me your hyung."

"Yeah, yeah." The brunette made a batting hand motion in the blonde's direction. "Big surprise there." He took a gulp of his soju. "Do you have any siblings?"

"One sister, and she's my noona." Namjoon's expression remained teasing, tone languid. "Are we playing twenty questions now?"

Jungkook shrugged. "Why not? I don't know much about you and you don't know much about me. Why not give it a go?"

"Fair point. Okay then, Yoongi hyung tells me you're friends with Jimin. How long have you two known each other?"

"Since high school. He's my best friend and I can't imagine my life without him. Did you go to college?"

"Yeah. Got myself a degree in creative writing, which was one of the best decisions I've ever made."

"Creative writing?"

"I love to write. Poems, short stories, long stories, everything. It's been a passion of mine since I was little..."

And they simply carried on like that, a smooth flow of conversation that about eight questions in transformed into full fleshed out answers, stories, and riddles. They told each other of time shown they were little (Namjoon of the time he nearly killed himself swallowing too much bubblegum, Jungkook of the time he'd been dog walking, lost all the dogs, and had had to chase each one of them down), voiced their opinions on K-pop and modern music (they were both adamant that more hip hop needed to get out there into the Korean world as well as the Western one), and spoke of
wishes of their futures (Jungkook expressed his want to see America while Namjoon expressed a desire to run his own production studio some day). It was nice fulfilling talk, creating the kind of feeling you get when you've spoken about everything and anything and genuinely had a good time. Jungkook...liked talking with Namjoon.

Currently he was hiding his face in his arm as he bent over the counter laughing over the blonde's story. Namjoon's giggles (born of his embarrassment, no doubt) surfaced one in every while during his descriptions and made the brunette laugh harder.

"Y-You what?" He cackled. His clear high-pitched laugh was ringing out far louder than was sociably acceptable. He was past the point of caring.

"I thought it wouldn't happen twice!" Namjoon said in an attempt to defend himself. "Because what are the odds? I didn't think it was possible--"

"Oh, fuck, hyung!" Jungkook's stomach was starting to ache. And yes, he was laughing this hard completely sober. He'd finished his drink long ago. "You c-can't touch a-a-anything! Quick, t-take your hand off the c-counter before it cracks in h-half!"

"You're cruel." Was all Namjoon said in response. "So cruel it's unbelievable."

Two people approached the pair from behind. One reached for Jungkook's hair and messed it up, the action followed by a voice saying, "For hell's sake, Kook, Jiminnie and I can hear you all the way across the room."

"S-Sorry, hyung." Jungkook surfaced, wiping at the tears of mirth that welled in his eyes. "It's just that, that Namjoon hyung--" Right then he looked over to the older man, who was smiling and still looked so damn embarrassed and then new peals of laughter began coming out of him in waves (though quiet and more controlled, there was no doubt that he was crying now).

"Is he laughing because you told him that story about the time sunbae-nim left us in his office and told us not to touch anything and you legitimately touched and broke everything in the room--"

"Yes." Namjoon stressed.

"Well, they don't call you the god of destruction for nothing, Joon." While Namjoon proceeded to protest that nobody called him that and who were they and why was everybody so cruel to him and Yoongi answered him in that low grumble of his, Jimin balanced his chin on the brunette's shoulder to talk with him.

"You feeling okay?"

"That depends." He answered, his high finally receding. "How drunk are you? Have I failed as your best friend and a human being?"

"Nah, Yoongi hyung's been watching me all night. I swear he's part hawk." Jimin dug his chin into a tender spot in Jungkook's shoulder, a gesture that was greatly appreciated. Jeez, he was going to have to get a massage or something soon, working out was taking a toll on him. "I meant about everything. After tonight, you've got a day and a half left to figure everything out. You've been figuring things out, right? Setting things up?"

The questions (that were not fun, not twenty in number, and would not lead to a nice conversation) yanked him abruptly back into the reality that was his situation. He hadn't been figuring things out, actually. He'd been trying to. All he'd managed to do was drop off his savings at the landlords place as payment for the rent they supposedly owed. That was all he'd done productively in the
past five days.

"No." Jungkook finally said. "I, ah, haven't been setting things up yet."

Jimin sighed deeply. "I'm sorry, Kook. About everything. I should've known-

"Hyung, we're getting to a record here for the amount of times I've had to tell you to shut up because you're talking nonsense. Jiminie, you couldn't have known. It's okay." The maknae petted his friends platinum locks. "I should be thanking you for letting me stay as long as I did. I owe you and Yoongi hyung a lot. I just...don't know what I'm going to do yet."

"What you're going to do about what?" Namjoon inquired, peeking at the conversing pair. Jimin unattached himself and moved away (aka body language for you have to explain this one).

*No no no, he thinks I'm sort of normal, I can't let him know I'm about to become homeless. That's humiliating.* "I, um-"

"Jungkookie, you can trust Joon-ah." Yoongi had seen the expression on his face. Dammit. He really was part hawk. Screw him. "It's okay to tell him. He'll understand."

"Understand what? Is everything okay?"

*Might as well get it out in the open, then.* Facing the blonde, Jungkook let out, "I'm being kicked out of the place that I'm staying right now-

"Correction, he's staying with Jiminie and I, and it was our bastard landlord that wants him out." The producer put in. "Continue."

"-and I have tomorrow and half of the next day to figure something out. Or else the landlord calls the police and all three of us get booted out." Jungkook found his gaze glued to the floor. "But I've got nothing. I've gone through all of my options and...they're not good." He shrugged. "I'll be on the streets for a few weeks before I'll be able to place a down payment somewhere. That's what it's going to come down to."

A hand settled on his clothed knee. Jungkook met the sparkling eyes of Namjoon, handsome face gentle. "It doesn't have to come down to that."

"What else can I do?"

Namjoon appeared to paused for a moment. Whatever had made him hesitate, he overcame it, and said, "You could move in with me."

The maknaes, shocked, sought any signs of dishonesty or trickery within the words. Like a week and a half ago, he could detect none. But still. Even if the offer was genuine..."I couldn't do that to you, I'd be too much of burden, you're busy-"

"Nonsense." The blonde insisted. His eyes shone brighter. Jungkook didn't feel trapped in them, like he'd heard so many describe the feeling before; he felt alone, singled out, bare. "You wouldn't be a burden at all. It's what friends do for each other." He paused again. "Would you like to live with me for a little bit? At least until you get back on your feet?"

*All I have to do is say yes. Jungkook's mind wasn't catching up to the words the older man was saying. Was this...was this really happening right now? Move in with him. Be safe. Get a proper meal every day. Get to know him better. I can pay half his rent until I move out, help buy the groceries, clean...* Namjoon's gaze remained locked on him. His stomach gave an interesting lurch.
And honestly, would living with him be so bad?

All I have to do is say yes.

Jungkook nodded. "Yes."
Learn

Chapter Summary

You learn something new every day.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! Okay, first of all, I have to just throw out there that I didn't even realize that almost all of the scenes in this chapter have a main element of food in some way shape or form and that I legit had no idea until I was going through and rereading and I'm like, "Okay, cool, a food scene...and another...and...okay what the hell?" Sorry for that repetition!

Second of all, this chapter is crazy long, like really crazy long, very descriptive with major fluff here and there, so I wanted to apologize if it seems like it drags a bit! I'll try to fix that for y'all in the coming chapters.

Third: there seems to be a note error that keeps repeating the ending notes I wrote at the first chapter at the end of all of my other ones. Please disregard it! (since, you know, the story is obviously more than two or three chapters)

Fourth: WE HIT 1000 HITS OH MY GOD????? THANK YOU SO MUCH!!!! YOU'RE ALL AMAZING!!! I LOVE YOU, MY FELLOW ARMY!!!

PLEASE ENJOY THIS CHAPTER!

"...she should be able to make a copy for you." Namjoon was saying as he extracted his keys from the front pocket of his pants. One of Jungkook's bags was slung over his shoulder and he maneuvered his arm around it so he could insert the key into the lock. "I called her yesterday and she told me it should be ready tomorrow or the day after. It'll probably be in my mailbox or in an envelope tucked into the side of the door. Feel free to grab it whenever you like, okay?"

With a quick twist and turn, the door was opened. Jungkook didn't step inside just yet: he took a moment to instead study the look on the blonde's face. His features were...tight. Antsy. If he were't such a naturally composed person, the brunette suspected that he'd be visibly jittering, or that his hands would shake. Was he rethinking his offer? Was he uncomfortable sharing his home with someone he's known for only two weeks? "Thanks, hyung...ah, are you okay with this?"

The older man's brow furrowed. "Why wouldn't I be? I'm not your boss, I shouldn't tell you when you can get your key-"

"No, no." Jungkook shifted his weight. His next words were quiet. "With me moving in with you. Are you sure you're okay with this? I'm not...intruding or anything?"

Namjoon's face softened, and he turned away from his doorway to meet eyes with the younger
man. His lips tilted upwards in a sheepish smile. "Yeah, I'm sure of you moving in with me. I have no problem with it. I just..." His speech faltered. "It's been a while since I've had a roommate."

Jungkook snorted. Lucky ass. "I can't remember the last time I didn't have a roommate. The privacy must be nice."

This earned him a chuckle. "There's that. And the fact that I can use the bathroom in the middle of the night without worrying I'll wake anyone up, and I can stay up late without bothering anybody, and I don't have to worry about the food that I hoard being eaten. But it...it gets a bit lonely at times."

"I guess so." People were always around Jungkook (including the times he didn't want them to be) so having a healthy social life as well as constant companionship was unavoidable, both before and after he escaped Yejun. Needing to work hard for people to surround you must become draining after a while with no success, for those whom have to seek shoulders to cry on and laughter to share and smiles to spread tend to end up with only themselves in the end and...and he was making loneliness way, way too complicated. "Well, don't worry, I'm not after your food. Just your spare bedroom."

"Good, because I'm territorial as hell over my food. We'll be able to live together just fine." The blonde grinned. He stepped away from the entrance and jutted his chin in it's direction as he did so. "You're the guest. It'd be impolite if you didn't enter first."

There was no need to stall, balk, or hesitate. He'd given his permission. Practically asked for this (even though part of him was still reeling and couldn't believe it). So Jungkook grasped the strap of his bag with both hands, took in an inaudible breath, then stepped inside.

Truth be told the interior was not what he was expecting. The layout was familiar, the same as Yoongi and Jimin's apartment with the kitchen and dining room to the immediate left upon entering and the living room to the immediate right. Also like his other hyungs place, the living room had a big couch that covered most of one wall that had a coffee table directly in front of it. However, that was where the contrast began: for one, everything was crazy clean and meticulous-looking, to the vase that carried a single flower that sat in the center of the dining room table to the way the pots were organized on the stove. There wasn't a speck of dust on anything. Jungkook wasn't a messy person by any means, but damn, he wasn't neat to this extent. Just looking at it all was starting to make him sweat.

Much of the furniture gave off a different vibe than the cleanliness sent. Every seat appeared cushy and like something you'd want to sit in for days. The coffee table was wood, not glass, and had rounded edges to sooth the harshness of the look. Picture frames dotted the deep brown walls here and there, mostly of obscure things like trees or water droplets or animals (he noted that there were no family photos up). With a start, Jungkook realized that many of the items in the room were similar in style to those that he'd spotted in the studio, particularly the couch and seats, which meant that Yoongi had most likely left the decorating to Namjoon. Interesting.

The brunette tilted his head to the side. A startled gasp rocked through him. The entire far wall was completely covered by wooden bookshelves that were in turn piled with books. It was organized by color and then by size in a stunning display that pleased the eye as well as the mind. Their musky scent reached him from across the room, strongly reminding him of a library.

"Wow, hyung..." Jungkook, mesmerized and forgetting his previous uncertainty, walked slowly towards the shelves. They legitimately covered the entire wall, from floor to ceiling. Amazing. "Have you read all of these?"
"Most of them." Came a deep voice from behind him. Namjoon had followed him inside, and he too was gazing at the books with something like fondness. "Whenever I go to the bookstore I always tell myself that I'm there to look and not buy." He shakes his head at himself. "I end up splurging anyway. **Every single time.** It's a horrible habit." Reaching out, he ran finger down a book with a blue spine. "I just love them too much. God, that makes it sound like they're my children or something, that's so weird-"

"I think it's great." Jungkook interrupted. He had forced his pupils from the shelves to stare at Namjoon, whom carried a lovely rose-colored flush on his cheeks, possibly from embarrassment. He'd never met somebody with so many books, who cared about them so much, who kept them in such good condition and had nearly read them all. It was stupefying. Hell, Jungkook could barely get through twenty pages without nodding off. The Korean translation of *A Tale of Two Cities* had almost been the death of him in high school. Seriously. "I think it's really, really great, hyung."

Namjoon blinked and retracted his hand. Just like that, whatever dreamy spell had been cast upon the blonde was broken, and his tone snapped back to that of a polite host instead of that of a wistful reader. "Thank you, Jungkook." Readjusting the bag on his shoulder, he moved from his position in front of the shelves to the hallway. "Let's get you settled in and your stuff unpacked."

**Oh. Right.** The brunette went with him down the hall. The end of it came quickly and he was offered two choices: open the door on the right or go through the doorway on the left, where Namjoon was setting the bag hanging on his shoulder down. He made the smart decision and went left. "Where does the other door go?"

"That's my room." The producer replied. "You can go in whenever you like. I'd just appreciate it if you knocked first."

"Of course." Jungkook surveyed his own temporary lodging. A tiny twin bed, a low dresser, a full-length mirror, a bathroom off to the side, and an empty shelf. More than enough to sustain him and his few belongings. He walked over to where Namjoon stood by the bed, deposited his bag on top of the sheets, and began to unzip and unpack. He had a grand total of four pairs of jeans and two pairs of black slacks he kept for work that his host kindly folded and put into the dresser for him. Then came his array of white shirts and work clothes, his sneakers, a few nice dress shirts, gym clothes, and varying personal possessions. As both men worked to put everything in its proper place, Namjoon continued with his string of babble (something Jungkook guessed arose from nervousness).

"I usually spend most nights at the studio with Yoongi hyung, but since you're here now, I'll try to come home earlier so we can have dinner together." Namjoon's eyes widened. "I mean, only if you want to, you can eat whenever you want I'm not going to stop you I swear-"

"I'd like that." Jungkook said, averting his gaze. He felt his cheeks flush and busied himself with folding a shirt. "If we could eat together sometimes. Cooking a meal and having nobody to share it with gets kind of boring after a while, you know?"

"I can't remember the last time someone cooked me a meal. It'd be nice to have one of yours." The blonde sighed mournfully. "Whenever I cook something blows up. Like the oven."

The brunette had to lean against the wall as the first bouts of laughter shook him. "You really do break everything! Yah, it's not funny, I get hungry over here!" Namjoon grumped, throwing a shirt at him. It missed. He threw another.
Jungkook had always prided himself in being a fast learner.

Perhaps he struggled somewhat academically, though nevertheless he was proficient in any other skill (whether it came to agility or strength or dancing. He could do it all, and do it all well), and if he wasn't yet, he made himself so. For instance, he'd realized rather quickly on his first day in choir class that he was an absolutely wretched sight reader who could barely keep rhythm. This fact upset him greatly; he knew that he could sing decently, and he wanted to stay in the class, but he would be removed if he wasn't able to pass the midterm exam. It included an entire 24 measures of music that he'd have to read correctly right on the spot.

So he started skipping lunch to spend time in front of the piano in the choir room surrounded by sheets upon sheets of basic rhythm exercises. He spent hours practicing away in that room, sitting on the small bench, bent over the ivory keys plunking everything out excruciatingly slowly and wondering if the crick in his back was going to become permanent if he kept this up.

Three weeks later, he passed the midterm with flying colors and was permitted to remain in choir.

Jungkook was also good at learning people; learning their faces and gestures and smile and eyes. He could tell when Jimin was silently freaking out over something or other, noticed whenever Yoongi was having a particularly good day, offered to help Hoseok when his hyung was unsure about choreography and was trying to seem as though he had something when in reality he didn't. He knew these things through constant exposure and repetition, over and over and over, until the expressions were branded into his brain and he could see the signs.

The same thing happened with Namjoon. Slowly but surely, Jungkook learned his newest hyung: he learned that Namjoon hated black coffee (one early morning Jungkook had brewed them a pot, forgone adding cream or sugar since Namjoon seemed the type to dislike both and watched with bewilderment and no small amount of amusement as the blonde flew upwards from his seat and spit out the sip he'd taken into the sink), he learned that Namjoon was literally the clumsiest person on the entire planet (he'd just asked for the remote, that was all; still, somehow, Namjoon had managed to break the remote and the television and accidentally tear a giant hole in Jungkook's blanket within a grand total of fifteen seconds), learned that Namjoon frequently fell asleep at the desk in his room surrounded by books and pencils with their erasers nearly gone which left the maknae to shake him awake and put him to bed properly.

He learned other things, too. Like that the blonde had dimples that were really cute and whenever he smiled Jungkook felt the urge to poke at them cause they made him look so squishy. Or that whenever the two went out somewhere (to the studio, out to eat, wherever) Namjoon would always hold the door open for him, every single time, even when the brunette made fun of him and made some remark about chivalry in the modern world. Or that Namjoon had apparently made it his mission to pick him up when he was at the gym late, throwing himself at the punching bag to empty his head. On one of those nights he'd egged on the reluctant producer to throw a punch at it. It was feeble and lacked any power whatsoever and Namjoon made such an offended face as though the punching bag had betrayed him and Jungkook had laughed so hard that he wasn't able to get up until his hyung threatened to leave without him because not everybody is as muscular and fiery as you Kook-ah so get up right the hell now before I leave your sorry ass.

Namjoon slowly learned things about Jungkook, too, as the two opened up to each other: ordinary
things like his irregular sleeping pattern and the hours he worked and about his deep friendship with Jimin. It's enough. He doesn't have to know everything about him, he's not really that interesting of a person to begin with, but Namjoon learns enough, enough so that when Jungkook throws out the mushrooms in the fridge he doesn't get offended and knows that if he's home late at night and Jungkook isn't there the younger man hasn't been murdered, he's at the gym or at dance practice, and comes to understand that Jungkook likes quiet sometimes and invites him into the living room so they can watch a film together and-

And the routine is nice. This addition, Kim Namjoon, is...really, really nice.

It's almost too good. He feels like...maybe he's feeling too happy.

However, that's nonsense, as Jimin tells him once he expresses this to him. That's nonsense and honestly, what's the matter with being too happy, if that's what he is, he needs some happiness in his life anyway.

Jungkook doesn't tell him that happiness is more often than not the eye of a storm, because he forces himself to stop thinking about it too much after that.

"Jungkookie-"

"Wait, wait, hyung, I'm almost done!"

"You've been working on her for two hours-"

"Art takes time!" He snapped loudly, not taking his eyes off of his client (who visibly flinched at his raised voice. He quickly apologized). "It's not like you'd be moving any faster!"

"I would be if there was some sexy tall thing waiting by the register asking for me!"

Jungkook was only half listening, still focused on filling in the clients eyebrows and trying to make sure he wasn't doing it too boldly. His own eyebrows pulled together. "Eh? Someone's asking for you?"

Taehyung rounded the corner of the back to where the brunette was working (he'd usually be in the front of the store since customers technically weren't allowed back here, but this woman had wanted a particular shade of eyeshadow and eyeliner and Jungkook had needed to dig around the inventory for something suitable. He ended up not finding a perfect match and had invited her to the back so she could pick out the colors herself. There was a chair in the hall of the back, so he just chose to do her makeup right then and there instead of wasting more time). In his peripheral vision he saw his friend roll his eyes. "No, someone's asking for you. Tall guy, really sexy even though he looks tired as fuck, he's got glasses." Jungkook made no move to show recognition. "Says his name is Namjoon?"

*Oh shit-* The maknae started violently and fumbled the brow pencil he was using. Thankfully it hadn't been pressed to the woman's skin or else she'd have a large line drawn right across her face. He pressed a hand to his heart and turned to the older man, whom wore a curious expression. "I-I, uh, he's asking for me?"

"Yeah." Taehyung nodded. "Has been for the past five minutes. I told him you were busy, but he said he'd wait. Do you know him? I'll kick him out if he's some creep who's stalking you-"

"It's okay, I know him. He's my roommate." *Why is he here at work?* Jungkook quickly added the finishing touches on his client, thanked her for her business, and watched as Taehyung led her out
to the register to pay. He swiftly packed up his makeup supplies and zipped the bag closed, following the pair out. *Shouldn't he be with Yoongi hyung or something?*

Sure enough, Namjoon was standing in front of the counter, a hand clutching his phone and another hand holding onto a paper bag of some sort. Of course he looked insanely good today like he did every day. Nevertheless the mere sight made his heart go briefly out of sync and his breath catch. Jungkook bowed to the customer once more then made his way to the other side of the counter and asked in his most polite tone of voice, "Is there any way that I can help you?"

"Oh, no, it's alright, I'm just waiting for som-" The words were tumbling from the blonde's mouth before he had fully removed his phone from his line of sight. Namjoon finally glanced up, and his speech cut off. His eyes widened behind their frames. "Holy shit, I couldn't even tell that was you! You sounded so nice." His pupils swiftly narrowed to become suspicious. "Who are you and what have you done with Jeon Jungkookie?"

"I can be polite sometimes!" Jungkook pouted. "Just not to my hyungs because they bully me."

"Not true-"

"Yeah, right, like two days ago when you and Yoongi hyung tossed my water bottle back and forth for like half an hour and wouldn't let me have a drink?"

"...fair point."

"I'm not right about these things." The brunette sniffed. He had planned to arrange his features into a faux self-righteous expression, but faltered once he noticed the smell. "Whoa, something smells really good. What is that? Tae Tae, did we get a new perfume or something?"

"It's not perfume." Namjoon chuckled. He lifted the paper bag onto the counter to slide it the short distance across. It was an ugly brown, stained with grease, and smelled absolutely divine. Jungkook swore that his mouth started watering. Napkins were quick to join the empty space beside the bag. "It's food from the American place down the street."

The maknae wasted no time and practically tore the thing open at the words. Sure enough, inside there was a container of fries, little packets of ketchup to go with them, and a big juicy burger whose appearance of melted cheese, crispy lettuce, and fluffy buns was almost sinful. His stomach rumbled loudly and suddenly he wasn't so upset over the breakfast he'd forgotten to eat this morning.

"I got you this too." Namjoon reached behind him to a shelf that carried primer, snagged a cylinder off the top, and slid that over as well. A milkshake with whipped cream and a cherry on top and by the looks of it it was chocolate and oh god Jungkook was going to *cry.*

He didn't cry though. Staring at the food, he glanced from it to Namjoon, it to Namjoon, and back again. Tentatively he reached in the bag, pulled out a fry, and popped it in his mouth. His resulting grin was wide and genuine. It was such a sweet gesture as well as one much appreciated. Something about it made his tummy feel warm. "Thank you, hyung, you're the *best.*"

"Aish..." Namjoon rubbed the back of his neck shyly as he watched the younger man begin to dig in to the food. "It was no problem, Jungkookie." There was a moment where Jungkook was in heaven and the world was light and everything was *great-* "Uh, do you wanna...wipe off your face first?"

Jungkook paused, the burger nearly at his lips. He sent his roommate a puzzled look. *Wipe off my
"Uh." The blonde's gaze zeroed in on his mouth. For some reason, he quickly glanced away and cleared his throat. "You're wearing lip gloss. My noona says that, uh, it comes off easily."

_Huh?_ Jungkook set the burger down (so close yet so far) to spin around and try to locate a mirror. Remembering that he carried a tiny compact mirror in his makeup bag at all times, he rooted around his bag (that he'd brought out with him), procured the reflective glass, and proceeded to stare at himself in mute horror.

There was no other word that could be used to describe his face besides a mess. Atrocious would work too. Liquid eyeliner was awkwardly lining his left eye, a single eyebrow was only half filled in, he had about three different colors of blush on his cheeks, the socket of his right eye smoked out with black and grey, a line of dark brown contour was smeared along his chin and part of his jaw, and yes, his lips were shiny with glittery pink gloss.

He really needed to stop testing out the products on himself before using them on a client.

The brunette groaned, both at the notion that he'd neglected to clean his face, and at the notion that his face had been like this in front of Namjoon. "Tae, could you toss me a makeup wipe?"

"Sure thing, hot stuff." The redhead plucked one from the counter to throw to him.

"Thanks hyung." As he rubbed the wipe all over in an attempt to get everything off, he asked, "Isn't that American place kind of far down the road, Namjoon hyung?"

"Sort of. I was on my way down this street anyway, so I figured there was no good reason for me to not grab you something." The producer shrugged, still timid.

Jungkook smiled. "Thank you again. It's really nice of you to do this."

"You can pay me back by doing the laundry for the rest of the week." Namjoon smiled back cheekily.

The brunette rolled his eyes. "You were cool for a whole sixty seconds there, hyung." He deposited the wipe into the garbage as the blonde quietly laughed. Jungkook returned to the burger that was, at this point, almost begging him to sink his teeth into it.

Just then, the older man's phone rang. It was Yoongi calling to check in with him and tell him that he needed to get back to the studio. Namjoon said goodbye and waved as he went out the door. Jungkook, mouth full, made a heart shape with his hands and waved back.

The instant Namjoon was out of sight Taehyung was sauntering up to him. Oh, no, he knew that sly smirk. "So..." He drawled, stealing a fry. "Who was that?"

"My roommate." Jungkook took a long pull of his milkshake. Delicious. Fuck, he'd do the laundry for longer than the rest of the week if Namjoon kept bringing him this kind of food at work.

Taehyung tutted. "Seemed like a bit more than that, don't you think?"

"All he did was bring me food, hyung, like good friends do, unlike someone I know." The maknae playfully jabbed, licking the salt off of his fingers. He dodged the hand that reached to swat at him with a laugh.

Just then, a loud group of four girls entered the place, giggly and pointing. Taehyung huffed at the
younger man as he returned to the register while whispering, "This conversation is not over yet-!"
Before turning to the lot with a huge smile and asking how he could assist them. They seemed rather undecided as to what they wanted; that is, until the redhead cheerfully informed them that there was a makeup artist on hand that could give them all makeovers if they pleased. Jungkook watched in despair as the girls squeed their agreement.

He supposed that the rest of his meal was going to have to wait.

---

From: Tae Tae
hi jungkookieeee :) :)  
To: Tae Tae
oh god hyung you put two smiley faces
what did you do
From: Tae Tae
well damn
what if I just felt extra happy today? :'(  
To: Tae Tae
U feel extra happy every day tho
From: Tae Tae
tru
I was txting u to ask if u wanted to come over for dinner
To: Tae Tae
tonight?
From: Tae Tae
no next Thursday
my wedding day
or jimin's wedding day
or my parents anniversary
To: Tae Tae
ok hyung I get the point
From: Tae Tae
can u stop by within like an hour or so
Something that Jungkook vowed to stop doing was assuming what people's houses looked like. He'd already been taken aback by Namjoon's place (and continued to be taken aback, despite the fact that he lived there), and now he was about to keel over and wheeze at Seokjin and Taehyung's house. Or should he say mansion because even if the doorman corrected him and told him that it was merely a 'small manor', it looked like a fucking mansion so that's what he was calling it.

Though the same doorman had assured him that it was perfectly alright if his shoes remained on if that was what made him most comfortable, the brunette toed them off anyway at the entrance, because no way in hell was he going to walk on carpet that probably cost as much as his college tuition with dirty soles. His socks were acceptably clean, making him breathe a sigh of relief when no imprints were left on the expensive flooring when he walked about. The doorman had advised him to go up the stairs to what was apparently Seokjin's private kitchen as both the man in question as well as his companion awaited him there.

Wood that didn't creak when stepped on was also a new one for him. Jungkook tried his best to not slip on the wooden stairs and grasped the handrail delicately as he rushed upwards. There were twenty, thirty, forty steps...he lost count. This place was massive. Finally he was at the top, very sure that if he was in worse shape he would be bent over trying to catch his breath.

Shit. Jungkook looked to and fro between the two hallways presented to his left and right. All of the doors were congruent in appearance. I forgot to ask where exactly the private kitchen is.

Turns out, he didn't have to, for the moment he turned around to trek the long journey down, he caught ear of two familiar voices engaged in banter. They had arisen from the hallway on his left, the second door. The brunette cautiously yet determinedly walked towards it, grasped the golden knob, and twisted.

"But babe, I'm starving!" Taehyung whined. Though he couldn't see him, the maknae could picture the pout set on his face without much difficulty.

Seokjin sighed. "Tae, you're not starving, you ate three hours ago."

"Three long, long hours."

"Uh huh." The older man returned. A pause. Then, "Jungkookie texted me a few minutes ago saying that he'll be here soon. When he arrives I'll let you start sampling, okay?"
Taehyung's already deep voice dropped a decibel. "C'mon, Seokjinie, Kookie won't know that I ate up the rice cakes...not unless you tell him...but you wouldn't do that, would you? You'd keep a secret for your boy, right?"

Jungkook decided just then to make his presence known and save both the rice cakes from being eaten solely by Taehyung and his oldest hyung from whatever fate the redhead had in store for him. Rounding the corner, he said, "You asshole. You were going to eat all the rice cakes without me?"

The scene set before him wasn't one completely unexpected: Taehyung was standing on his toes, craning his neck so that he could reach Seokjin's ear, a hand running up and down the latter's clothed arm. Seokjin was at the stove (so where the smell was coming from), his body angled towards the younger man's touch, the tips of his ears beginning to turn pink. The redhead set himself down properly, narrowing his eyes at the brunette. "Aw, really, Kook-ah? I almost had him, too!"

"Why doesn't it surprise me that you're not at all ashamed of yourself and your manipulative ways?"

"When it comes to rice cakes, I get serious." Taehyung crossed his arms over his chest. "Those things are delicious and if I ate them all myself I wouldn't feel guilty."

"You're horrible to your dongsaeng, hyung, depriving him of his nutrients-"

"Jungkook you can barely retain any nutrients. You could legitimately buy three of everything from the bakery down the street, eat every single morsel yourself, and still be hungry."

"True. But you'd do the same thing."

"Wah, look at that, a dongsaeng insulting his hyung, the nerve, what would our eommas say-"

"Oh my god, you two, I'm a second away from forcing you both out and eating dinner alone."

Seokjin's tone was stern as he pointed his spatula at the younger men. They chuckled at each other and at the older man, the mock annoyance in the air that had been created as a side effect of their bickering instantly disappearing. Jungkook continued to laugh while he opened his arms wide, knowing what was going to happen next. Sure enough, Taehyung swiftly bounded over to throw himself in the maknae's arms, hands reaching for his brown locks and disrupting their neatness.

Jungkook swung his hyung about in a circle. After he'd set him down in order to dislodge their hug and their laughing had calmed some, he asked Seokjin in a bright voice, "Whatever you're making smells amazing, hyung. What is it?"

"Jjajangmyeon to start." The cook answered as he gestured to a closed pan that had steam puffing out at a steady rate. "A little bit later we'll have the tteokbokki, which is what the rice cakes are for, which means that neither of you rascals can eat them."

"But..." Taehyung's lower lip poked out. "What about sampling?"

Seokjin hesitated for a moment. Resolutely, he set his spatula down, ambled to the refrigerator, and pulled out something that looked extremely similar to haemul pajeon. Jungkook didn't try to restrain his smile of delight; the last time he'd had such a dish was months ago, back before he'd met his ex boyfriend. It was a homey, delicious food, one he and Jimin loved dearly. "Don't eat too much, alright? You need room in your stomachs for dinner and dessert."

Taehyung eagerly relieved the older man of the large plate of food. Seokjin made a move to return
back to the stove and continue cooking, but the redhead put a hand on his arm to stop him. He appeared as though he wanted to do something and an unknown variable was preventing him from performing the action. He tilted his head to the brunette. "Jungkookie, would you get freaked out if I...uh..."

Jungkook did not understand for a moment. It wasn't until Taehyung's hand crept up to grasp his soulmate's collar and tug him down a bit did he realize what his friend wanted. "O-Oh. No, I'm okay. I'm getting better with...everything." He gave his best attempt at an honest grin. *Don't be selfish, don't hold people back, bruises are an everyday part of life and I have to get over it.* "Go ahead."

The redhead needed no further encouragement. He leaned upwards while pulling at Seokjin's collar until his lips connected with the older man's cheek. It lasted a brief second; then Taehyung was letting go, clutching the food in his hands, making his way back to Jungkook and Jungkook tore his eyes from the splotchy purple mark that had surfaced on his friend's skin and followed Taehyung out and into the lounge room.

"You don't need to ask me permission, hyung." Jungkook said. They each sat on opposing side of the same couch with the plate of haemul pajeon between them. Thankfully Seokjin had wrapped up chopsticks and left them on top of the chilled dish, and they snatched up a set so they could dig in. "He's your boyfriend and soulmate. You can kiss him whenever the hell you want."

Taehyung was the one to take the first bite. He chewed thoughtfully. "I mean, yeah, but how shitty would it be if me if I didn't take your panic situation into consideration beforehand? If I didn't take into account how you're feeling? I know that stuff still gets to you, Kookie, don't even try to tell me it doesn't."

"What, the affection, or the bruises?" He asked around a mouthful.

"Both." His hyung answered gently.

Jungkook didn't say anything, continuing to eat. Taehyung was quiet too, for a minute or two, before he suddenly paused. The younger man glanced up when he noticed the redhead had stopped eating, noticing the growing glint in his eyes. "Hyung..."

"Speaking of affection." Taehyung purred the word, poking at Jungkook with his chopsticks. The brunette at once knew where the conversation was going to go before it even got there. "This Namjoon guy. What the actual fuck is up with him, like, randomly walking in the store and bringing you food?"

Jungkook felt as though they were high school girls gossiping about relationships in the bathroom while they should be in math class or something. And...that was a strangely specific comparison. "I don't know, he just did it. You were there." He shrugged. "Namjoon is just really nice."

"But like-" Taehyung popped a piece of food into his mouth. "You acted so different with him, Jungkookie."

"How?"

"You actually looked like you meant it when you said thank you, you called him the best, you wiped off your face when he commented on how it was covered in makeup, and if it was anyone else you wouldn't have given a flying fuck and you would've just eaten the burger, makeup and all-"

"The redhead made a *hmph* noise as the maknae repeatedly shook his head, shooting down every supposed reason. His eyes narrowed in challenge and *aish* he was using his chopsticks to point
"Tell me he's not cute."

That's safe enough. "He's cute."

Taehyung pressed further. "Tell me he's not hot. Smoking hot."

Obviously Namjoon was hot, whether he was wearing dressy clothes or pajamas, he was hot. His intelligence was hot, too. His thought process and the way he worked through things was just...it left Jungkook in awe every time. "He's hot."

"Tell me he's not sexy as fuck."

"Tae, that's..." He couldn't finish his sentence. Ah, fuck, was he blushing? Dammit.

"See, there!" His hyung crowed victoriously. "You didn't want to call him sexy! Why?"

"I don't..." He's my roommate, he's just a friend, I don't even know his sexuality, I shouldn't think about him in that way, right? "I don't know."

"Oh, for Christ's sake, Kook-ah, don't get stubborn now, I'm on the verge of a life-changing discovery!" Taehyung's eyes had lost their glint and instead sparkled. "So? Why won't you call him sexy?"

"Tae, are you pressuring our poor maknae?" Praise everything. Seokjin stood in the doorway, a hand on his hip, disapproving frown set on his face, effectively rescuing Jungkook from imminent doom. He shook his head. "You sound like a girl in a high school bathroom gossiping to her friends."

Glad to see I'm not the only one who thought that. The redhead rolled his eyes. "I'm not gossiping, I'm discovering." He wriggled his eyebrows at Jungkook. "Discovering that Jungkookie has a crush on this Namjoon guy."

Abruptly the brunette choked on his meal. "Wha-!?"

Seokjin rushed over just as he succumbed to a violent coughing fit, pounding the space in between his shoulder blades, asking him if he was okay and if he needed anything to drink. Jungkook waved him off, still hacking while garbled noises pushed past his throat as he tried to swear at Taehyung (who was cracking up at his state of distress). The eldest in the room briefly left and returned with a glass of water regardless. Jungkook thanked him as well as he could and took a long drink.

"At any rate, dinner is ready." The pink-haired man announced. Taehyung perked up. Seokjin fixed him a glare. "No more pushing our guest to the brink of death. Wait until after we eat for that."

"It's nice to know you care about me so deeply." Jungkook said, voice hoarse.

Seokjin traipsed back into the kitchen to grab the food. Over his shoulder he called, "You can't die before eating the greatest meal you'll ever eat in your life. The life goal of many gluttonous people is to seek and find the best food they'll ever consume." Clinking, rustling, tinkling. The eldest man reappeared balancing three bowls overflowing with steaming noodles and beef. "Since this is yours, you're free to pass away afterwards. It'll make for an exciting cover story on the news."

"Rich model Kim Seokjin subject to rumors of homicide. Is this the last strike of a long string of murders, or is he only beginning?" Taehyung said in the voice of a news anchor as he received his
bowl. He snapped his chopsticks together once, twice, then excitedly dug in. "Mmm! Actually, babe, could you turn on the news? I wanna see if they caught the six-year-old shop lifter that keeps stealing bubblegum."

Seokjin sighed out through his nose. "I'll never understand why you follow that story. She's a child who's swiping candy. How is that interesting?"

"It's interesting because she's a child who's swiping candy and they haven't caught her yet."

Taehyung smiled when his soulmate grabbed the remote and turned on the television, flipping it to the news station. "I mean, she's gotta be really smart if she's been able to get away with it for two whole months. We could be watching the birth of a world villain."

"Whatever you say."

The three ate in relative quiet for several long minutes, eyes on the TV, mouths busy slurping and chewing. Seokjin was right; this really was the best meal that Jungkook had ever tasted. Every bite was juicy and savory. It beat his own cooking any day. He'd have to request an invitation to come over again (for the food and the company, of course). The brunette had settled nicely into the comfortable quiet, thoroughly enjoying his meal, when a word from the sentence Taehyung had spoken a moment ago sparked a question inside his brain.

"Tae Tae."

"Mmm." Taehyung hummed to show that he was listening. His body angled itself towards the younger man the slightest bit.

"You never told me you and Seokjin hyung were so well off." Jungkook's tongue poked out as he tried to fish out an elusive piece of meat tangled in the noodles.

"What, does it bother you?" Seokjin asked, turning his head inquisitively.

In all honesty, Jungkook didn't really mind it, per say, but he couldn't lie to himself and say he wasn't intimidated by wealth (at least to some degree). He'd been born into the middle class, remained there most of his life until he hit sixteen, then was demoted to lower middle class as he worked two jobs in order to try and support everyone in the household. He strayed from the popular people with money because they seemed either uptight and unapproachable or they were snotty and rude and he didn't wish to approach them and make friends.

But now he had rich friends.

Does that bother me?

"Not really." He answered. "If you were prissy or acted holier-than-thou or some shit, then it probably would. I was just...wondering why Tae Tae hyung works at a makeup store if he doesn't have to. Because the money comes from your modeling, right, Seokjin hyung?"

"It does." The eldest man nodded in affirmation. "In the beginning I was modeling for smaller companies so I didn't make as much and Taehyung had to work-"

"-and I got really bored all by myself at home with nothing to do." The man in question added. "I tried everything. Even knitting, and Jungkook, knitting is difficult as all hell. Seriously, those old ladies who do it daily have major skills."

Seokjin pointedly coughed. Taehyung sheepishly sunk back into the couch. "So Taehyung had to find a job. He went to a lot of different retail stores, worked as a waiter, every kind of job that you
could think of." His expression became reminiscent, like he was being sent into the past. "Then he got a job at **Sunbeam** because he could do makeup so well, which is something I hadn't known about him. I asked him to do my makeup for me before one of my shoots was supposed to start...it was stellar. Taehyung asked if he could take pictures of me as soon as I returned home. When I did, I was tired and moody. It had been a bad day and the photographer had horrible manners and my manager scolded me any chance that he was able. I'm usually a very confident person, and I felt terrible." He leveled his gaze at Jungkook, whom was paying rapt attention. "Taehyung requested that I pose for him, so I did, and I just thought they were for him to look at when he got lonely or missed me, since it was rare we saw each other because our schedules were so hectic." The roseg-haired man chuckled softly. "He went behind my back and sent them to the company I currently model for, who you know is very selective and wealthy. They loved the lighting, the angle, the scenery, they loved every single one of the shots. They loved me and asked me to sign a contract with them."

"And tada!" Taehyung threw an arm in the air, mouth full of noodles. "Here we are now. Seokjinie's modeling money eventually added up to be enough to buy a really nice place. So here we are. I work at **Sunbeam** to take the edge of the boredom, not cause I need to, y'know?"

Jungkook nodded. The redhead leaned over and bumped their shoulders together good-naturedly. Both men grinned and began to get into a bit of a wrestling match (something the maknae had never attempted to do while eating on an expensive couch). Before they could do any colossal damage, Seokjin was yanking at Jungkook and pulling them apart and swearing that **the next time Kookie came over they were going to cook the food themselves dammit.**

"Let me have one more go at him-" Taehyung said, reaching for the younger man.

"Hyung." Jungkook laughed and shoved at him. "You know that I'm strong enough to crack open a pineapple with my bare hands, right?"

A truly shocked face met his own. "Okay...Jungkookie, you need to stop going to the gym. Cracking open a pineapple is step one. Step two is getting big enough to eat your hyungs."

"Step two is getting big enough so that when my hyungs bully me I can bully them back." He giggled, stealing a piece of meat from the older man's bowl, taunting him with it, then popping it in his mouth.

"You're such a meanie!" The victim pouted, moving further from the brunette and clutching his bowl protectively. "Just wait until a day in your life arrives, you're gonna need me to save your ass, and I'll remember this moment and use it as an excuse when I'm not there-"

Their bickering continued for the next ten minutes while they finished up; about five minutes after that, Seokjin gathered their bowls and brought back tteokbokki to conclude the dinner portion while they continued to chat. It was delicious. All three men inhaled their portions and the two whom had not cooked it voiced their thanks. Jungkook really thought that he'd be able to make it to dessert, but his stomach was too full, and he didn't think he could cram anything else in it without making himself sick.

"Thanks a lot for having me over, you guys." Jungkook said when the three returned to the kitchen. They were huddled around the sink as the water ran, washing the dishes. The homey and familiar sound of the plates, silverware, and bowls clicking together was soothing. "I had a great time."

"Of course, Kook-ah, it was no problem at all." Seokjin smiled dizzyingly. "You can have dinner with us whenever you'd like. Just make sure to tell Tae Tae a few hours beforehand so that I can whip up something special."
"You don't have to make anything special. Honestly, hyung, even if you cooked really cheap ramen from the store, it would taste amazing."

"Hmm." The rose-haired man pretended to think. "You're right, it would."

Jungkook let out a laugh at the older man's unabashed confidence. Taehyung just bemusedly shook his head and continued his part of drying the dishes.

The television's volume rose a notch as a song (most likely being played at the end of a commercial) sounded from the other room. Seokjin gave a delicate wince. "Jungkookie, would you mind turning off the TV? My hands are covered in soap."

He left the room to tend to the task. It was an ad for a new children's toy that was on the screen, which more than provided an explanation for the high-pitched tune blaring from the speakers. "Oh, god, it's a commercial for one of those MooMoo things."

"They're popular now?" Taehyung's surprised voice came from the kitchen, barely loud enough to be heard over the running water and TV racket.

"Apparently." Jungkook called back. Since the lights were mostly out in the room, he had to feel around for the tiny remote. Curse high tech televisions that possessed tiny, sleek, impossible-to-find remotes. His fingers were eventually met with the cold plastic, and he pointed it at the screen, ready to press the power off button.

He stopped.

Yejun.

The news station had resumed broadcasting, the anchor sitting straight and prim in her chair, pointing to the left with her hand to a picture of...of Yejun.

In handcuffs.

What the fuck is going on?

Jungkook's gaze locked on the screen. Numbly, he turned the volume up.

"...update on one of the more interesting cases we've been following for the past few days." The news anchor announced. Yejun in handcuffs was replaced with Yejun on a runway somewhere, dressed to the nines and looking impeccable. "Former professional model Ryu Yejun was fired two days ago from his job when the police arrived at his place of work to investigate claims of stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual predation. The police were tipped off by two anonymous sources two weeks ago that presented the original claims and were able to provide evidence in the form of previous victims of Ryu Yejun's abuse." The news anchor glanced down at her paper. "Reportedly, four men and two women have been beaten physically at his hands, and have suffered severe emotional and psychological trauma. Many victims were said to be nervous in speech and posture and very hesitant when it came time to provide their stories."


"Ryu Yejun first denied these claims and was then resistant to arrest. He had to be escorted from his place of work while being held by two police officers. Currently, he remains at the Seoul Police Station in a cell and awaits a meeting with his lawyer to discuss the date of his hearing." The announcer shook her head. "You've gotta feel for those poor people. Hopefully he'll be in jail for a
long, long time. Now onto our next story. Authorities were shocked earlier this afternoon when they discovered..."

The remote clattered against the floor.

"Jungkook-ah?" Seokjin. That was Seokjin's voice, wasn't it? Wasn't it? "Are you okay?"

He's gone. Jungkook continued to stare at the television though his gaze had gone sightless. Vaguely, he registered his knees starting to shake. This wasn't a panic attack, it didn't feel like it at all. It was different and made him feel floaty and disconnected. He could sense it. The disconnect of his brain from the rest of his body. Was he here or there or there or here? He's gone. They got him.

Yejun is in jail.

"...Jungkook?"

He can't get me any more.

"Hot stuff, are you alright? You're kind of pale."

I'm safe.

"Seokjin, fuck, I think he's having another panic attack-"

"No." Jungkook whispered. He could barely hear his own voice. It sounded distant, too. "No, I'm...I'm fine."

A cool hand pressed testingly against his forehead. He made out a blurry head of pink hair floating about in front of him with eyebrows in a slightly darker tone pulled together. "What's wrong, Kook-ah? What happened?"

Words. What were words. How did he command them to dance and spin along his tongue, exit him with breath, twist those around him up until their love ran out.

He's gone. I'm safe.

"I think we'll take you home." Taehyung said, slow, soft. He laced their fingers together. "Okay, Kook? Seokjin and I will take you home."

He must've nodded or given his verbal okay, because the next thing he knew his hands was being tugged upon and he was being led down the long, long stairs. The three had gotten out the front door with the farewell of the doorman in their ears when Taehyung stopped everything and ran back inside. A moment later he was puffing and carrying Jungkook's shoes with him, which the younger silently slipped on. Then...fuzzy. Bumping and jostling and a steady hum of vibration. A hand in his hair. Petting. If he'd felt like himself, he would've brushed off the affection, insisted that he didn't need to be coddled like the child he most certainly was not, but he did not feel like him. Jungkook couldn't feel anything.

He was hollow and he did not understand.

Am I...

The brunette's sightless pupils looked straight ahead. He blinked slowly as the petting continued. His surroundings hummed. In shock?

But he's gone. I should feel good. I do feel good. I'm just...
Shocked.

Shocked that I'm safe.

Shocked that he's finally gone.

"Jungkookie."

Jungkook was ripped from the blank, all-consuming wave that was the nothingness overriding his mind. He recognized his surroundings; it was the familiar small lawn that the residents of Namjoon's apartment complex shared. He lived here. For how much longer was he supposed to leave here until he was to find a place of his own? "Yes, hyung."

"Hot stuff, look at me." Taehyung grasped his forearm. For a short second, everything sharpened and gained clarity, and Jungkook was aware of the concerned sheen in his friend's gaze. His hyung smiled. "Thanks for coming over tonight. Let me know whenever you wanna come over again, okay?"

"Okay."

"Are you sure that you're alright?"

"Yes."

"Can you get up the stairs on your own?"

"The elevator...was fixed. I'm okay."

"Okay." Taehyung lacked hesitation and pulled him into a hug. He was warm. The maknae buried his head in his friend's shoulder. They squeezed each other tightly for an immeasurable amount of time before separating. Jungkook watched the redhead get into the car and watched Seokjin wave to him. He waved back and witnessed their departure.

Things got fuzzy again. Gravel, the smell of the grass, the beep of the elevator button, an enclosed place, moving up up up, stopping.

Key. The brunette reached inside his pocket for the key he'd received a while ago from the landlord. Flick flick flick on his keyring until he found it, then into the lock it went, twist, shove. Jungkook stepped inside and locked the door behind him. It was quiet inside the apartment. Nothing stirred. He didn't know how late it was, but it probably wasn't late enough if the light in Namjoon's room was on. For some reason, his brain was picking up on things like that, the light being on, the musky yet clean smell of his roommate that hung around the place, the fact that there were no dirty dishes in the sink, the silence that thickened the air-

Something shattered.

It was loud.

There came a thumping noise from Namjoon's room, growing closer and closer until all at once the handsome man himself was poking his head out of the doorway, his glasses slightly askew, voice smooth and deep. "Is everything—oh, god, Jungkook."

"I— I'm sorry." He heard himself saying. Why was emotion rising in him without any preamble? What the hell was wrong with him? "It w-w-was an accident. Are you m-mad?"
"What?" Namjoon asked. He stepped into the hallway and walked into the living room, wary of the pieces of glass that were scattered along the floor. He approached the younger man cautiously, hands held out in front of him, facial features gentle. "I'm not mad, Kookie, it's just a lamp, I can get a new one." A breathy chuckle exited him and Jungkook's heart seized. "I break things all the time. We're both used to it by now, huh?"

The brunette swallowed, nodded, tried to take another step. His feet did not cooperate and he stumbled.

"Hey hey hey, whoa whoa, Kookie." Namjoon sprung forward at a speed much greater than Jungkook ever suspected he could move at. He caught him before he could hit the floor (or hit the floor and give himself a nasty gash with a piece of glass), swung him around out of the danger zone using their combined momentum, and held him tight. Perhaps it was a bit too tight, since Namjoon's long fingers were digging into Jungkook's bare arm a tish too forcefully to be comfortable, but the softness of worry in his eyes balanced the tight hold of his grip. "Take it easy."

Jungkook still felt bad about the lamp. "That was your f-favorite lamp-

"Jungkook, don't be ridiculous, it was just a piece of furniture. It can be replaced." The taller man soothed. He must've seen the tears running down Jungkook's face and instantly started hushing him. "Don't cry, Kook-ah, I'm not angry. What happened? Did someone hurt you while you were out?"

Jungkook could not help but feel glad that his hyung was a man of many faces, that he could be bookish and clumsy and sweet once instant and strong yet tender the next. "No, n-nobody hurt me. I'm actually..." He broke off mid sentence to let out a warbled laugh. "I d-dont know what's wrong with me. I don't know why I'm c-c-crying." He sniffed and smiled a small smile up at Namjoon. "I f-feel great."

I feel like falling apart and then putting myself back together.

But I feel great.

He's gone.

"You're sure?" Namjoon's grip was lessening, but Jungkook stayed close. "Nobody touched you and you don't feel sick and you're just emotional?"

"Yeah." Jungkook breathed. He gazed into dark pupils that rested behind black frames. "Yeah, I'm sure."

They stared at each other for a moment longer, until older man released him properly and the two stepped back from one another. Something had passed between them as they pulled away. It was as though...he couldn't quite put his finger on it...it was something almost...magnetic?

Like my hopeless attraction to him? Jungkook subconsciously stepped further away at his thoughts, looking downwards. Like the utterly hopeless draw I feel to him? He's nothing like me at any angle; he's intelligent and wise and handsome and unbroken and he doesn't like me that way. He's...he's being nice. That's all he's always been to me. Nice and kind.

And that's it.

I'm not ready yet, anyway. It's too soon to have a...a crush, if this can even be called that.

"I think..." The younger man began slowly, moving still further even though he wanted to do
nothing more than press close even though a part of him did not know why. "I think I'm going to go to bed, hyung."

"Oh." The producer said rather simply. He stayed in place.

"Yeah...I'm...sorry, it's been a really long day and I..." Go. Get away. I'm not thinking right. I'm still in shock. "I'm sorry again about the lamp, hyung, I promise I'll clean up the glass in the morning and cook you breakfast-"

"I'll handle the glass." Namjoon offered, eyes trailing the maknae's retreating figure. He bit his lip. "Wait, um, before you go to bed..."

Jungkook paused with one hand poised to twist the knob that would open his bedroom door. He looked at Namjoon, whom appeared conflicted. He gave him time. That was the best thing to do when the blonde's beautiful mind started to contradict and think around itself.

"...nothing." Was the final consensus. "Good night, Kookie."

"Night, Joonie." The brunette said. He felt the sharp gaze on him that was abruptly cut off the second he closed the door.

Namjoon was awake for the next hour cleaning the glass: Jungkook knew this because he spent that hour plus the entirety of the next three tossing and turning in bed, caught between crying to release his pent up emotion or succumbing to the numbness that was his head.

One hundred and forty two minutes.

One hundred and forty two minutes of growth, of change, of refinement and comradery. At least, that's how Hoseok liked to word it.

Both Jungkook and Jimin preferred to call it one hundred and forty two minutes of pain, sweat, body aches and utter hell.

"Don't get me wrong." Jimin panted, sprawled out on the floor like a starfish. "I love you both and dancing is my life. But we are never going that long without a five minute break ever again."

"Agreed." Jungkook (who had sweat in places he didn't even know he could sweat) heaved in response. "Or without water. My tongue-" He stuck it out and poked at it for emphasis. "Isn't moist."

"You're horrible students." Hoseok, whom was also breathing with difficulty, pointed an unsteady finger at his companions. "Back in my day-"

"Oh my fucking god don't start spewing some bullshit about how much longer the teacher made you go without food or water or air in your day because hyung even though you're my hyung you're legitimately only two years older than me." The mochi said in one giant rush, sucking in oxygen like there was no tomorrow at the end of his sentence.

"And you're not our teacher, you're our-" Jungkook tried to find the word within his exhausted thoughts that were yelling at him to collapse and sleep right then and there. "Coach. You're our coach. Because-" His hands scrabbled at the mirror like it was going to slow his descent. It didn't. ",-we're a team."

Hoseok didn't voice any response. The dance room was filled with their heavy gasps, though
besides that, it was noiseless while they sat or laid down in crumpled heaps on the floor. Jimin caught Jungkook's eye and sent him a weary thumbs up.

"By the way." The platinum-haired man said out of nowhere. His teammates turned to him, paying the best attention that they could. "Congrats on that asshole getting into jail. I didn't get to tell you at the beginning of practice. That shit was all over the news."

"Oh, yeah." Hoseok sent his own thumbs up. "That fucker is finally gone. Did you celebrate once you found out, Kook?"

"Nah." The brunette had a stitch in his side. He rubbed a hand along the area, grimacing. "Went into shock."

"Nice." Jimin laughed once. "You know what? I think my body is going to go into shock too because I can't feel my legs Hoseok hyung."

"You'll survive." The older man ignored the bemoans of no they wouldn't. "We'll take a fifteen minute break to make up for it, alright? Then it's back to work." At the pace of a snail he picked himself up and into a standing position. Hoseok walked to Jimin, grasped his hands, and started heaving him upwards. "C'mon, you two, you know it'll feel worse if you're on the ground."

That was true. Jungkook reluctantly rose from his spot, feeling icky and gross and way too hot. His limbs shrieked their protest while he did so, and continued to shriek as he crossed the room to grab his gym bag and search for a water bottle. He found his and forced himself not to down everything inside in one go. In his eagerness some spilt on his shirt and shorts and chin; he wiped at his mouth messily. Oh, good lord, that was much better. Hydration was important. Even if he'd maybe gotten the water all over himself. Perhaps he should find a remedy to his soaked clothing.

"Hyung, I'm gonna change before we continue."

"Eh?" Hoseok glanced up, still holding onto an unwilling Jimin. "Oh, yeah, go ahead."

Jungkook didn't feel shy changing in front of his hyungs any more. During when everything with Yejun was happening, he'd excuse himself to the bathroom if he ever had to swap clothes, just to make extra sure nobody would see his marks, regardless if they were covered with concealer or not. Nowadays, it wasn't as big of a deal since there was nothing to hide, and he experienced no shame or timidness peeling off his shirt in front of the other two.

"Jungkook-ah, what the fuck is that?"

Alarmed at his hyungs suddenly surprised tone, the maknae twisted around to face Jimin, shirt with elbow-length sleeves in his bag and clean tank top in his hands and ready to be pulled over his head. "What the fuck is what?"

"On your arm." The mochi (whom was in a sitting position) jutted his chin at the younger man's right arm. "What happened?"

He lifted his arm and looked. There, on the upper part of his bicep, was a bruise colored a deep purple that spread out almost until it reached the innermost side of his arm. His eyes widened. Experimentally, he poked at it, recoiling at the painful throb it gave. Where had he gotten it from? "Ow. I...I didn't even know this was here."

"Really?" Hoseok squinted. "How did you miss that this morning, Kook-ah? It's...I'm not trying to make you freak out, but it's kind of...big."
"Yeah, it is." Jungkook was expecting some sort of major panic attack to bring him to his knees in the next ten seconds, but he felt none of the signs. He was still repulsed by the bruise; it just wasn't making him freak out right away. Maybe he really was getting better with this stuff. He poked it again, sensed the throb, then felt the room begin to spin. His palm smacked against the mirror to steady him. Alright, maybe he wasn't completely better. It was a process.

"Yah, don't give yourself a panic attack, pabo!"

"Sorry." Jungkook shook his head at himself. He pulled his hand from the space. "I must've gotten it when I broke Namjoon's lamp last night. I bumped into it and it toppled over. Must've been one tough ass lamp."

"You broke Namjoon's lamp?" Jimin inquired.

Defensively, he said, "I was in shock!"

The mochi just giggled at him. Jungkook launched himself at his hyung, ruffling his sweaty hair, trying to pin him to the ground while they swore and playfully pinched each other. Hoseok yanked them off with the promise that he'd cut their break short if they insisted on using it improperly; in response, the two younger men pulled him into their wrestling match, tickled him silly, and that was decidedly the end of that.

It was silent in the apartment again: on a Sunday evening, with the blinds up and the orange of the sunset cascading across the living room, birds chirping quietly outside, the room cozy and smelling of books, Jungkook found that he didn't mind too much. With Yejun, evenings like this were often short lived, as the brunette was called into the bedroom around this time and was usually too tired and broken afterwards to appreciate the remainder of the night. With Yoongi and Jimin, he tended to leave their apartment and let them have the night alone together while he headed to the gym and didn't come back until late, when he was sure they'd be in their separate beds, asleep.

With Namjoon... well, the older man had brewed two mugs of some sort of delectable tea, given the shorter man one with a smile as warm as the sunset, and headed off to his room to finish working on the lyrics to a song he wanted to present to Yoongi. Jungkook was a person whom typically required constant stimulus, but for now, he was curled up on the floor with a belly full of liquid, and he couldn't deny that it felt nice.

He reached out and stretched like a cat, hearing the pop and crack of his bones. He sighed and let himself go limp.

Oh, to be content.

Namjoon must've put something in that drink because Jungkook really did feel quite happy. He had a job, one that he had the privilege for working at with a friend, on top of that. His other friends were securely within their own place of residence, with no threat of eviction. The man that had been (and sometimes still was) the source his distress was locked up. He had new friends. He had a place to live, albeit temporarily, and it was great.

This thought caused him to bite his lip as a sliver of anxiety wormed its way into his mind. He was supposed to be leaving Namjoon's place soon. He had more than enough money to rent out a place of his own, and since Yejun was in jail, he wasn't threatened in any more of a way than he was normally, thus eliminating any excuse he could possibly have to not go.

Jungkook traced an idle finger along the wooden panes of the floor. He enjoyed this apartment.
enjoyed Namjoon's company, had grown accustomed and used to it. It's not like he'd never see the blonde again after he left: they could call or text each other at any time and meet up, and they'd see each other at the studio. His attraction to Namjoon, though...his attraction was making him want something more personal. It was making him want to be close. In Namjoon's face. Around his books. Around him.

That's enough. He chided himself. Don't create problems where they aren't.

He shooed his ponderings from his head and continued to lay there. The sun's low rays beat on his back, providing a substitute for a blanket. Jungkook closed his eyes. Maybe he would sleep. What could it hurt?

Just as he was teetering on the edge of unconsciousness, he subtly shifted so that he'd be more comfortable. The action caused a pain from his right bicep to ache sharply. It effectively jolted him completely awake with a groan. The maknae was usually good with ignoring the pain that bruises brought him, just not when they caught him off guard, like now. He jostled about to try and arrange himself differently to flirt with the idea of getting a few extra minutes of rest; however, the damage had been done, and Jungkook mourned the drowsiness that swiftly evaded him.

Now that he was completely alert his mind was buzzing at him again. He thought of activities that he could do that wouldn't disrupt his roommate, sighing in frustration through his nose. So much for going without any stimuli.

A tiny stereo landed in his line of sight. It rested on the counter of the kitchen before the room broke off into the living room. Ah, well, like Jung Hoseok never failed to say: if one has nothing better to do, dance.

Jungkook got up and meandered to the small device. There was a plug in it, the end of the wire also a plug, presumably to connect his phone to. He retrieved it from his pocket, snapped the cord into it, and scrolled through one of his playlists labeled Practice for Contemporary Style. He pressed play. Immediately, the room was filled with the soft beginning notes of a piano.

The maknae grinned.

As he spun about, he tried to recall what Jimin had told him when he requested some pointers. You know as well as I do that dancing is mostly mental and only a little physical. You've gotta think in the way that the music sounds, Kook-ah. The range of music you dance to fits your style and your personality, fast-paced, powerful, full. Contemporary is a lot slower. So slow down your thoughts. Hell, try not to think at all. Jimin had adjusted his arms, legs, torso. Now try. Remember, limbs loose but core tight. Go.
He tried to keep his movements careful, thoughtful. Jimin had told him that if he couldn't empty his mind (because he couldn't no matter how hard he tried) to come up with a story his body was attempting to tell. Jungkook huffed, mind still whirring yet not empty, and went for a spin.

The brunette slipped, then brought his foot down hard to save himself from taking a tumble. *Phew.* Jungkook had to stop for a moment and get back into position. With a sigh, he turned around, eyes up, and nearly jumped five feet in the air when he saw that someone was watching him.

"Oh my god." Jungkook held a hand to his heart, laughing breathlessly. "You scared me. How long have you been standing there?"

"A while." Namjoon answered from his spot by his bedroom doorway. He was leaning against it, arms crossed over his chest, cheeks flushed a bit at the embarrassment of being caught. He stepped forward into the room. "I've never seen you dance before, even though you talk about practice all the time...you're really good."

"I wish." Jungkook said longingly. "I'm fucking terrible at the contemporary style. I always move too fast or too harshly. That's why I'm...uh, that's why I'm practicing right now." Heat gathered in his cheeks. "I'm sorry if I bothered you."

"You could never bother me, Kookie." The blonde insisted. Just like with many things Namjoon said, it was hard to find any falseness within his claim. Even so, Jungkook couldn't completely believe him. Namjoon stepped back. "I'm probably the one bothering you, actually."

"Hmm." The younger man hummed in response. He continued to hold Namjoon's gaze, before closing his eyes and saying, "Well, I don't mind if you keep bothering me."

Jungkook caught ear of the music that was still playing, gentle, soothing, still soft, and swayed to the left and right. Keeping his eyes shut, he branched out from the simple swaying to sliding across the wooden floor, spinning once twice thrice, swerving downwards to bring everything back up again, and his mind was finally somewhat blank and that made moving just a bit easier. Though everything was measured, controlled, his heart was beating as fast as the blades of a helicopter could beat and he didn't know why.

There came a slower part of the song, causing him to open his eyes languidly. Namjoon was still there, watching him, teeth digging into his full lower lip, cheeks bypassing pink and blushing red, and fuck, why, why did his heart speed up? *Damn* this hopeless attraction.

He said, "Dance with me, hyung."

The producer bowed his head with a chuckle. "I can't dance."

"Namjo-"

"No, I-" He glanced up. Jungkook saw the genuine nervousness in his dark pupils. Namjoon made a helpless hand gesture. "I honestly can't. I'm horrible at it. I was born with two left feet that almost tripped my new brother-in-law when he was dancing with my noona at their wedding."

Giggling, the maknae tilted his head to the side. "C'mon, hyung. I promise that you won't trip me."

"Don't be so sure, Kook-ah." Nevertheless, Namjoon stepped up into the center of the room. Jungkook expected him to at least sway a little like he himself had been before, but the older man merely stood stock still. "Uh. What do I do?"
Don't laugh, don't laugh at his adorable face. Jungkook bit the inside of his cheek. "Maybe start by moving?"

"Oh. Right." Namjoon still didn't move. Don't laugh, Jeon, I swear to god."Move like how?"

"However you want." The brunette demonstrated by giving a small spin (that ended too harshly, but was anybody really keeping score at this point?). "Move with the music."

"Okay. Okay." The blonde breathed in unsteadily. He then proceeded to bend his knees, do a weird half twist, jump, then land and almost fall over. "How was that?"

DON'T LAUGH JEON JUNGKOOK WHAT WOULD JUNG HOSEOK SAY. "That was...that was something. Really something, hyung."

"You're laughing at me."

"I'm not!" Jungkook cried indignantly. Namjoon just gave him a look. "I'm not laughing!"

"You're almost laughing, which is as good as actually laughing." The producer claimed, trying the spin again. "Ugh, that was worse, that was definitely worse. Could you just...teach me something?"

Teach him something? He sifted through his thoughts. He didn't know many dance routines that went with this type of music, since it wasn't his usual style. There was one that he knew most of, the one that Jimin had taught him months and months ago just for fun. Maybe that would work. "There's one short routine that I know that requires two people. I could teach you some bits."

And so he did. He stood a ways from the taller man, instructing him and acting as his mirror, miming the moves. Though his dancing might or might not be horrendous, Namjoon caught on quickly to the basic steps, and soon enough he could do it without asking Jungkook to repeat anything. When he moved to go switch the song to the one they were to dance to, he saw Namjoon silently mimicking the parts he was unsure of. The man acted as though he was the one going to a competition.

Then the music commenced.

They started a few feet from one another, spread out. Jungkook was the one to start, beckoning his partner closer, and Namjoon's character awoke. The latter's steps were mechanic, uneasy, still nervous, but the brunette smiled at him each time and was pleased to note that as the song progressed his hyung grew more confident.

Jungkook's head finally wove together a story for him to follow: two people, lost within an abyss of their own lives...yes, that was the closing and slamming of the fists against the air...breaking through the containment...a leap, jump, spin, all mirrored...then the story changed to become more real, more based on his own life. Instead of Namjoon across from him, it was Yejun, cold sneer set upon his face and claws for hands. Jungkook danced out of the way as the man made swipes at him. His image faded to be replaced by Jimin, tears gathered in his eyes yet a smile widely set on his features. He and the mochi twirled around in perfect unison. Next was Taehyung, bright, explosive, and he stumbled on his jumps without shame or regret. They swerved close to one another, not close enough to touch, just close enough to reassure the other person that they were there, and then they veered off. Seokjin, with his hair of roses, posed in a self-righteous and elegant pirouette. They didn't interact physically; Jungkook sensed the his motherly touch from across the room regardless. Hoseok grinned at him even brighter than Taehyung had, the sun, skilled and stunning. Obviously he danced better than the younger man, whom admired his finesse.
Then Namjoon was back with his calculating eyes and unsure steps, twisting this way and that, wobbling. He was appealing despite his struggling, sending Jungkook a smile as he regained his lost footing.

The piano crescendored, notes becoming louder and louder, and as the two whirled around to finish everything off Jungkook saw Yoongi at his own piano, a master of its ivory keys and a follower of its musical possibilities. His fingers swept along the keys, the treble portion racing racing racing by as fast as his heart and the bass coming down short and bold and brash and then-

Done.

Both men stood in the middle of the room, breathing hard, facing each other. They were close. Centimeters apart. Jungkook had never been this close to Namjoon, close enough to see the patterns in his brown pupils, to see how small and thin his nose was, how full his lips, how handsome. He wanted to breathe him in and never stop breathing him in, that scent of musk and clean things and the pages of books. He'd never noticed the tiny details: how Namjoon's right hand was smeared with ink, and some had rubbed off on his eyebrow. The slight unevenness of those eyebrows. The small piercings in his ears.

And honestly, standing here, cheeks blushing, breath hitching, Jungkook wondered who cared. Who cared if Taehyung was right and that he had a crush on Kim Namjoon? Who cared who cared who cared-Namjoon was quirky and passionate, especially in the studio when Yoongi had left the room and the two were fooling around with the equipment, and when Yoongi was in the studio with them, complimenting Jungkook's vocals and coaxing him into trying things he hadn't thought of before that sounded ten times better than whatever they'd recorded previously. Namjoon was smart as hell and Jungkook always lost to him (rather happily) whenever they played the occasional word game to fill the silence at the dinner table. Namjoon cared: whether he showed it by cleaning the dishes before Jungkook woke up or bringing him lunch like he had the other day or teasing him playfully or giving him advice whenever he asked for it or a million other small gestures that added up to a staggering amount of niceties.

And Jungkook fucking liked him, dammit.

"Namjoon hyung." He whispered.

He watched as Namjoon swallowed. "Yeah, Kookie?"

They stared at one another just as they had the night before, silent, wondering. Namjoon's eyes were flicking between holding their contact and Jungkook's trembling mouth.

_Hopeless attraction._

_Remember?_

_Hopeless._

The brunette broke their shared gaze and brought his hand up. _Finish it and go on with your night._ "There's one more part to end it. We clasp hands and bow."

Wordlessly the producer brought up one of his hands. There was a millisecond just before their skin touched that Jungkook considered dropping his hand, wrapping his arms around Namjoon's neck, standing on his toes, and kissing him. Giving in to his attraction, hopeless or not.

Their skin touched.
Pain bloomed along the maknae's palm and wound up parts of his fingers. Not a ferocious pain, but uncomfortable and sudden. He ripped his hand from Namjoon's, the warmth of his skin a ghost, and stared at it in horror.

It was purple.

It was the purple of a bruise, of the bursting and carnage of blood vessels beneath the skin, of a mark that he knew from experience wouldn't completely heal for days. It was there when it hadn't been a moment ago.

What...Jungkook turned his hand in the dying light, to be sure that his head wasn't playing tricks on him. It wasn't. The bruise was very much real and very much there. "M-My hand."

"Your hand." Namjoon was staring at the bruise. His skin was draining of its previous blush to replace it with a whiteness comparable to a sheet. "Did I...was that me?"

"I t-t-think so." It couldn't have been anyone else, there was no one else there, he hadn't banged into anything or knocked something over or anything of the sort and the bruise on his bicep was Namjoon too. "Oh my god...that means we're...y-you're my..."

Namjoon whispered brokenly, "You're my soulmate."

Jungkook's breaths began to whistle in and out unevenly. This wasn't his usual kind of panic attack, this was different, this was fear and terror and changing and he stumbled backwards a step. Two steps. Grabbed blindly for a handle he knew was there. Yanked.

And ran out the door.
Chapter Summary

Sometimes all it takes is another person to bring someone back to life.

Chapter Notes

Oh. My god. I am crazy sorry this update came later than my usual two weeks; it was Easter, and then the ending wasn't turning out the way I wanted it too, and then life hit. And it's still insanely long. I AM SO SORRY

But holy shit is the Namkook really coming into play. Namjoon himself is absent a lot in this chapter, but he's in 90% of all of the chapters that are to follow this one, so please don't be disappointed! Kookie just needed to realize how much he needs RM in his life before they really got together.

Other than that, please enjoy! I love you lots, my fellow ARMY! :D Scream at me in those comments!

From: Namjoonbug

Kookie are you alright

I'm so sorry

We should talk about this, Kookie, please

Please let me talk to you

Are you safe?

Are you coming back home?

14 More Unread Messages From Namjoonbug

Jungkook barely glanced at his phone as it vibrated yet again. It was sitting on the edge of Jimin's bed, as far away from him as it could get before falling off. The screen kept lighting up to brighten the dark room (as well as to show off his lock screen picture, currently that of he and Taehyung making silly faces) and to illuminate Jimin's concerned features. Well, they had been concerned an hour ago when the brunette had first barged into the apartment; now they were just tired. Jungkook's recount seemed to have aged him a decade. It almost made the man in question feel bad, but...

He had to keep a promise, and this had been it.

"You should text him back." The mochi said. He was settled against the headboard, cradling one of
Yoongi's Kumamon stuffies, staring at the vibrating phone. "He's worried about you."

"I know." Jungkook returned. Yes, he knew Namjoon was worried, probably worried out of his damn beautiful mind. "But I had to tell you like I said I would."

Jimin's gaze transferred from the phone to his best friend's face. He seemed a bit hollow. "That you did."

There was quiet between the two. A lot of the crying and shaking and storytelling had already taken place, leaving them with their own thoughts as time ticked on. The brunette buried his head in his hands (mindful of the fresh bruise decorating one of them) and sighed. "How bad is it going to be?"

"How bad is what going to be?"

"The bonding pains."

Jimin's eyes widened, and he abruptly sat up. "Who said anything about you experiencing bonding pains?"

"Me." Jungkook countered. His friend still looked mildly puzzled, so to accentuate his point he reached over for his phone, clicked it into sleep mode, and tossed it to the other side of the room on top of Yoongi's bed. A rather blatant I'm ignoring him.

"Jungkook, no." The platinum-haired man had been completely awakened from his previous state of laxity. "You need to leave soon and go back. You have to. I'm not going to sit on the sidelines and watch you get sick like I did." When he gave no response, Jimin grasped his arm and shook him. "Kook-ah. Don't you remember how horrible I felt?"

The sad part was, he did: after discovering that Yoongi was his soulmate, Jimin (angry with life, angry with fate, angry with everything) had refused to see him or talk with him. On the third day of no contact whatsoever, the mochi began showing signs of stress. He was twitchy, restless, irritable, snapping at Jungkook and Hoseok when they asked him what was wrong or if he was alright. He insisted that he was just fucking fine thank you, and they let him be. The fifth day, Jimin could barely pull himself out of bed to go to class, claiming that he was dizzy and tired the entirety of the day.

The seventh day was the day that Jimin cracked. He croaked out to Jungkook from his curled position on their dorm couch if he could please track down his soulmate by the name of Min Yoongi and bring him here because he felt awful and he really wanted to not feel awful if that was at all possible.

Jungkook didn't know what happened between the two of them when he dropped a rather exhausted-looking Min Yoongi off at their dorm: he just knew that when he came back three hours later, his hyung was okay again, and that was really all that mattered.

"Yeah." The brunette nodded. "I remember, hyung."

"Then you know that if you stay away from him for too long, you'll go through the same thing." Jimin let go of his arm, allowing his back to rest against the headboard of his bed once more. His tone softened. "It's a wonder you're not suffering any effects already. It usually starts instantaneously after separation."

"Oh, it's started, trust me." There was a faint drowsiness that the maknae had an inkling was not due to the lateness of the hour. It merely graced the edges of his brain, but it was indeed present.
"It's definitely started."

Quiet. The wind blew by, the apartment was still, his phone vibrated on the other side of the room-

"Why won't you go back to him, Kook-ah?" His friend asked, voice low. "It's only going to get worse, it'll get so much worse. You know this. You can save yourself the pain. Why won't you-

"Because of this, hyung." Jungkook raised his arm to show off the purple on his hand, a light violet in the moonlight. Merely looking at it caused an unsettling shiver to run down his spine. I'm being bruised again. Purple. All over me. Again, even after I ran from it. It followed me. "Because of this. Because of the bruises. I don't want any more. I don't want to be around someone who will give me more. I can't..." The brunette tore his eyes away and gritted his teeth. "I can't have a repeat."

"Jungkook-ah..." Jimin sighed. He reached upwards and massaged his temples (which Jungkook noticed was his silent I'm trying to get through to you gesture) before turning his impatient gaze on the younger man. "I know what happened to you fucked you up. It would mess anybody up, even Yoongi. Yejun was twisted and evil and every other bad adjective in the book and there's a spot in hell reserved just for him." The platinum-haired man huffed. "Namjoon is nothing like that. I mean, yeah, he got me wasted that one time, accidentally, but I'm fine now and you two made up and you text me all the time about how great he is and how well he treats you and how the fuck you're going to keep your feelings for him under wraps and...and god, Jungkook, you can't let this hold you back from something amazing."

"Let this hold me back?" The maknae sputtered disbelievingly. "I'm not holding back, I'm protecting myself!"

"Why?" Jimin easily rose to the challenge the younger presented, eyes narrowed, expression hard. "Why, Jungkook? Why do you have to protect yourself?"

"Because...because..."

"Say it. Say it, Jungkook."

He was shaking. There were no tears, but he was shaking. "I'm...it's because I'm... Can't say it, it's too deep, too personal, it makes me weak and not strong, it makes me pathetic-"

"Sweetheart." Jimin said. "If you say it, if you admit it out loud, that does not make you weak, do you understand? You're not weak, Jungkook-ah. So tell me-" The volume of his tone increased. "Why do you have to protect yourself?"

It's okay. It's Jiminie and it's okay.

Jungkook exhaled unevenly, his answer choked and honest. "Because I'm scared."

"See." Jimin crawled over to the brunette's side of the bed, gently took his trembling friend in his arms, and went through the beginning motions of calming him. "Was that so hard, Mister Tough Guy? Mister Golden Maknae?" The mochi booped his nose, rocked him back and forth on his lap, let his words he kept carefully constrained within the Seoul dialect to slip into his native Busan one. "Mister Muscles With A Bunny Smile? Mister Annoying But Cute Brat? Mister-

"Okay, okay, hyung, I get it." Jungkook stuck his tongue out at the older man knowing the full force of the effect was softened by his current position. Actually, speaking of his current position..."Why does it feel like we've done this before?"

"We did. Three years ago." Jimin continued to rock him. "Except I was in your lap and I was
"You're still a pabo."

"Oh my god, only Jeon Jungkook would be able to say something like that to his hyung in a situation like this. You're awful."

A moment of silence.

"Hyung?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you. You're my best friend."

"I love you too, Kookie. You're my best friend and I wouldn't trade you for anybody else, ever."

Another several moments of silence.

"Hyung."

"Yeah, Kook-ah?"

Jungkook slowly separated himself from his hyung's arms so that he could look at him properly. "I really am scared. I'm freaked out. This..." He lifted his purple hand the slightest bit. "This on top of everything else that I feel for him is too much. I need time. I need space. I need to...to think without him there."

Jimin considered these words. Chewing his lip with uncertainty, he asked, "Are you completely positive, Jungkook-ah? You know what's going to happen to you."

"I can handle it." He insisted. "I can handle it. "And it'll last two weeks and that's it-"

"Thirteen days, actually." When the younger man gave him a confused look, Jimin supplied, "This isn't the first time he's touched you, remember? I'm willing to bet one hundred thousand won that the mark on your bicep was him, too."

"Oh. Jungkook blinked. I forgot about that one. "So thirteen days, then. I can last thirteen days. That's enough time to...figure this all out."

"Okay." Jimin relented, hands up and palms forward to show peace. "I still think you should at least talk to him, but it's your life."

Silence.

"So, uh, I haven't found a place for myself yet."

"...Jungkook."

"Please? It'll be for thirteen days tops."

"Fine. But for the love of everything, don't get Yoongi and I evicted."

Now, he understood. It was a lot to handle people constantly moving in and out, not paying rent,
overpaying their rent, dealing with their complaints. It was a lot to constantly be checking to make sure that mail wasn't stolen and keys weren't lost and everything was in working order. And yes, it was a lot to do this all by oneself, alone, with little assistance from your family or friends whom most likely knew nothing about property management.

Despite these things, and the knowledge that the apartment complex wasn't over-the-top fancy (and had literally nothing on the place that Taehyung and Seokjin lived in), Jungkook drew the line at the utterly atrocious appearance of the couch in the lobby.

"Have you sat on that thing, hyung?" He asked, eyeing the frayed piece of furniture with disgust. Jungkook was not snobbish or proud: it legitimately looked like something the landlord had hauled out of the dumpster. It didn't match the rest of the modest and plain style of the rest of the small lobby in the slightest bit. "Or gone near it and contracted some weird disease?"

Jimin, whom was opening his mailbox, distractedly said, "The coffee maker is by it so of course I've gone near it."

"Hyung, there are twenty different stains on that thing, and at least two are probably come."

"Jeon Jungkook!" The mochi hissed, expression indignant. "Don't say that so loud, damn!" Tutting disapprovingly while he returned to the task at hand, he questioned, "Am I going to have to wash your mouth out with soap?"

The brunette snorted. "If anybody is going to do that, it would be Seokjin hyung. And noooo-" He trilled, nudging at the shorter man. "You're not going to have to. Don't act like you weren't going to say it if I didn't."

"Still." Jimin stressed. Jungkook knew that he wasn't actually upset with him: it was obvious his hyung was trying to fight down a smile. He reached in the mailbox, pulled a few envelopes out, and locked it. Turning, he gave the couch a calculating stare. "I will say, it's really ugly. The landlord brought it in a week after you left. God knows why."

Just then the very man they were speaking of popped up from behind the lobby counter. Jungkook caught Jimin when the older man flew backwards in surprise, pressing a hand to his heart and breathing heavily.

Speak of the devil and the devil shall appear. "Ah ha! You're back! You, Park Jimin, you're sneaking your friend into your apartment again, aren't you?"

"I'm not sneaking him in!" The platinum-haired man protested, still clutching at his chest. "Have you been behind there the whole time?"

"Yes, I have! And I'll have you know that that couch has sentimental value! It was the first couch that I was able to buy on my own and have to myself after graduating college!"

"That explains the come stains." Jungkook whispered. Jimin smacked his arm.

"So." The landlord said. He placed his fists on his hips and straightened to become as tall as his small stature would allow. "How long has he been here for? How much rent do you owe me?"

"None." The maknae snapped. "I've been here for three hours. That's all."

"But you plan to stay?"

More than ever at the moment, Jungkook wished that Yoongi was there so that he concoct some suitable lie that would benefit everybody. The producer just had a way of doing that. However, Jungkook did not have a way of doing that, so he grudgingly replied, "Yes. For the next thirteen
The landlord looked like he wanted to start spitting a retort right off the bat, but for some reason, he paused. "Thirteen days? That's specific."

Neither man said anything in response.

When the landlord raised an eyebrow, clearly waiting for the reason behind the less than two week stay, the brunette lifted his hand. The lights of the lobby were bright enough to fully showcase the deep maroon of his bruise, stretched along his palm and wound around his fingers. "I found mine."

The landlord immediately dropped his arms, posture becoming passive at the sight. His eyes were wide. "I'm...sorry." Another pause. Jungkook said nothing while the older man collected his thoughts. "Are they...nice, at least?"

"...he's perfect." Namjoon was intelligent and wise and clumsy and attractive and creative and caring and everything in between. "And that's the problem."

Needless to say, the landlord did not question him further, and instead told him that he was allowed to stay as long as he liked without having to pay rent. He apologized quietly to the brunette again (because he had found his soulmate, a gift and a curse, or because he was the one whom was bruised?) and went off.

Jimin grasped Jungkook's unmarked hand as they made their way to the elevator. He squeezed it and smiled at the younger man, whom smiled the best he could back.

I can handle it.

The next few days...were rough.

They were very, very rough.

For the first two days, Jungkook felt fine. There was that nagging drowsiness at the edges of his brain, causing him to fall asleep faster when he returned to the apartment from work or the gym. It made him sluggish for the better part of the morning, something that Yoongi did not appreciate (due to the fact that in a moment of sloth-like movement, he'd nearly spilled the entire coffee pot all over his hyung while attempting to refill his cup for him), but by the afternoon he was alright. It also made it easier for him to daydream, so when nobody was at the counter at Sunbeam and he had no clients, he was staring off into space lost in thought instead of organizing or testing new products or anything productive, like he'd typically be doing.

Then the third day came around. It was a day that Jungkook knew the moment he woke up was going to be a bad day. He didn't know if it was the strength of the fatigue increasing, or the fact that many little things that he wouldn't care about on a regular day were annoying him, or that he felt like he couldn't focus. He mixed up blush and eyeshadow, couldn't make correct change, and tripped thrice at dance practice. Nothing was going his way.

"Uh, Kook-ah?" Yoongi said that night at dinner. The three of them were present at the table, eating dinner (well, two of them were: the brunette wasn't hungry). Jungkook had prepared it, seeing as that's what he had done before he left to spend a month with Namjoon, and saw no reason to discontinue the routine. Yoongi had to call his name twice more.

"Yes, hyung?"
"Did you taste this before you served it?"

"What?" The maknae asked. His tone was laced with confusion. "Why?"

Just then Jimin made a gagging noise. Jungkook quickly turned to him; the mochi's face was screwed up into one of disgust, and he looked like he was about ready to spit out his mouthful. Jimin noticed that Jungkook was staring at him, appalled, and swiftly rearranged his features and gave a thumbs up. With what seemed like great difficulty, he swallowed. "It's great, Kookie, don't worry."

"It tastes awful." Yoongi deadpanned. The platinum-haired man glared at him. He carried on, though his words were less harsh than his previous ones. "I'm telling you that because it tastes like pure salt. You don't mess up like this when you cook, kid. Are you feeling alright?"

Jungkook ate a bit of Jimin's food. Yes, his hyung was right, it was gross and way, way too salty. How was that possible? He used crazy amounts of pepper in this dish, not crazy amounts of salt. How had he mixed up salt and pepper? Such a stupid mistake. He grasped his hyungs bowls, pulled out the kitchen garbage, and promptly dumped their contents inside. Turning to the stove, he said, "Can you wait a couple minutes longer to eat dinner? I'll make it right this time."

"Jungkookie, it was fine how it was, you didn't have to throw it away-"

"Yes I did, hyung, it was fucking inedible." He scowled at himself. Was he paying so little attention to his surroundings that he couldn't cook now?

"Sweetheart-"

"It'll be ready in twenty minutes." The brunette pointedly grabbed the salt and moved it so that he wouldn't be able to easily reach for it and mistake it for pepper, which was the stupidest thing on the planet to do. "I swear it will taste better."

Jimin and Yoongi didn't comment on their freshly prepared dinner once they received it, except to say thank you once they'd finished eating. Yoongi fluffed his brown locks while he walked past him as a means of apologizing for his earlier remarks, fingers teasing, and yet...yet it wasn't comforting. It was almost...almost...

Invasive.

No. No, hyung is being nice, he's being really nice. Nothing is wrong. I'm fine. I'm handling this.

I can handle this.

On the fourth day the maknae was more tired, but for some reason could not shake an unpleasant feeling that rested upon his shoulders. He still snapped too much at Jimin and Yoongi and didn't care and it concerned him deeply that he didn't care; he apologized the best he could and blamed it on his lethargy. When he fired a particularly biting insult at Hoseok after the older man informed him that he was performing a move too slowly, both men older than him had reprimanded him harshly and said that his tiredness was not their fault and that it gave him no excuse to sass whomever he liked. Jimin had supported Hoseok during his lecture, however, there was a knowing gleam in his eye, and a bite holding his lower lip. He knew what the younger man was going through.

The mochi called Jungkook into the living room and tried to convince him to see Namjoon, to at least call him, text him, even. Anything. Jungkook refused. He could do this. He could last. Only a little over a week remained. Just ten more days. He'd just...he didn't know, he'd lock himself up in
the spare bedroom whenever he wasn't out and about so that he wasn't hurting others when they didn't deserve it.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh days, he didn't have to force himself to go through with his solution. The fatigue that had clouded his brain had finally combusted into a blanket of exhaustion and he couldn't get out of bed. He didn't feel the usual kind of ill or anything: it was as if he hadn't slept for a week and his mind was screaming for him to rest. He was unconscious often, most likely seven eighths of the hours that made up those three days. Jungkook frequently dreamt of Namjoon, of his dimples and shy smile. He dreamt of his lanky figure lounging in his recording studio chair, earphones on, bobbing his head to a beat nobody else could hear. He dreamt of sitting beside him, of listening to him speak, of his laughter, of innocent things that lacked any sense whatsoever. It made him feel lonely when he woke up (a fact that he did his best to deny).

With the arrival of the exhaustion brought the arrival of a headache that pounded behind his temples, dull and painful, and its persistency made him crave sleep all the more. During his few waking hours, he was swallowing as many pain pills as he could without poisoning himself, trying get rid of the bothersome ache. Nothing worked, not even several pills from Yoongi's stash of stronger medicines. The brunet managed to drag his body out of bed for brief periods of time when the pain of the headaches kept him awake, straight to his computer, and he researched bonding pains.

There was no cure, no remedy, nothing to make any of it better except contact with your soulmate or waiting until the two week long period that bonding pains took place during ended. It disappointed him to a degree that he couldn't explain, though deep down Jungkook expected nothing different. Every other piece of information he read was something he already knew: bonding pains were only present in soulmates that distanced themselves, it lasted two weeks, it's hard for anybody save soulmates to help each other during this period. A dozen unhelpful articles later and he was crawling to bed, pulling up the covers messily, and falling asleep.

On the evening of the seventh day, after Yoongi had come and gone with dinner, the maknae's dreaming that made him fuzzy and content ended abruptly and he was yanked into reality. Immediately upon awakening he was hit with the feeling of loneliness and sadness and a longing for Namjoon's warmth beside him and...and hell, he'd told himself that he could do it, that he was going to make it...

At this rate, Jungkook didn't know if he was going to make it any more.

The brunette lifted his hands and pressed his palms to his eyes. His bruises were almost completely healed now, so he didn't have to worry about his hand. A craving, yearning, stressed part of him almost wanted the bruises to come back, because that would mean that Namjoon was with him and Namjoon had touched him and stop stop stop shut up shut up I can do this I can handle it there's six days left and that's nothing, nothing at all, I'm fine and I can handle it.

The eighth day, fatigue still clung to his bones, but he could get up and function and start living life again. Much of the exhaustion had traded itself for the longing that had become his thoughts, the faint sadness that he experienced without Namjoon there, and the beginnings of anxiety (which, he figured, was that unpleasant feeling he'd sensed several days prior). Taehyung, on the other hand, still acted chipper and like his usual excitable self, and Jungkook hadn't been aware that he was worried until the older man approached him at work.

"Hey, hot stuff." The redhead greeted. As always, his appearance was stunning though he was wearing his normal work uniform. "How're you feeling today?"

The snappish, irritable portion of the bonding pains had passed, so his response was appropriate
and he didn't have to do damage control right after. Glancing up from his current project (he was doing inventory, counting the number of contours they had in stock and in what shade. He kept losing track of what number he was on and had to continually start over), he said, "Good. How're you, hyung? It's been a few days."

"I'm fantastic!" Taehyung grinned. He leaned on one of the cold metal racks that contained product, watching his friend. "Seokjin and I went on a date yesterday. We visited a new ramen place that just opened up in town, and I've never been so full in my life. We got ice cream afterwards. It was fun."

Jungkook ignored the way his heart clenched with yearning at the description of the date. He wanted to go on a date with his soulmate too, dammit. "That's...that's awesome, hyung."

To his surprise, the redhead instantly stopped smiling in favor of staring him down. With narrowed pupils, he said, "Jiminnie was right. You really are going through the hell they call bonding pains. Usually you're way happier when I talk about Seokjin and I." The maknae's eyes widened. "You're crazy, Jungkook-ah, and you must be in a crazy amount of pain. How many days has it been? Three? Four?"

"...eight." He answered. Taehyung's intake of breath was audible, as were the stunned curse words he muttered afterward. "Jimin hyung told you?"

"Yeah. He told me everything." The redhead sighed deeply. "Don't be upset that he did. He's worried about you, Kook-ah, and so am I. It's not healthy to be going this long without any kind of contact, hell, most soulmates who are separated at least text or some shit. What the hell are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking that I need to think because frankly the idea of getting bruised again in any way shape or form freaks me the fuck out." Jungkook returned to counting inventory knowing it was pointless.

Taehyung didn't respond for a moment. The reason for this was one Jungkook knew (and felt some remorse exploiting), and it was that Taehyung could not relate. He didn't get marked like Jimin or Jungkook, so he had no foundation or background to argue against him with. The brunette thought that that was going to be the end of that; instead, he was yanked upwards, the pencil and pad of paper he had in his hands flying out of his grip, and his friend was pulling him down the hall. "It's decided, then. We're going out because you look dead inside and it's my duty as your second closest friend to fix that."

"Tae, I'm not finished-" On a regular day Jungkook would put up a fight and resist the manhandling, but his tiredness wasn't letting him.

"It's close to noon so I'll tell sunbae-nim we went on our lunch break early." The older man stated matter-of-factly. Using one hand to hold Jungkook's jacket, he whipped out his cell phone with his other and started punching in a number. "I'm gonna need some backup."

Ten minutes later, he and Taehyung were sharing bench underneath a tree at a park that was a short walk from their place of work. Fresh breeze blew around them, lifting their hair and carrying the faint scent of flowers. They were also methodically pulling the petals off of said flowers, something Jungkook was sure was some sort of torture for the poor things, but his hyung claimed that it was cathartic and it would give his hands something to do while they waited.

They weren't idle much longer. Soon enough, a familiar voice called out to them, and the sound of running feet in a steady rhythm skidded to a stop in front of them. The brunette had expected Seokjin. It was the face of Park Jimin that grinned at him instead, his left hand holding onto a bag
of food. "Hey, Jungkookie. Hi, Tae Tae. Sorry it took so long to get here, the ramen place was packed."

Taehyung waved him off. "Are you kidding? You got here faster than the Flash, and honestly, what more could I ask for?" He suddenly gasped. "You mean the ramen place that just opened down the street?"

"Duh." Jimin sat down on the stone path in front of the pair and began digging through the bag. He procured chopsticks first, giving his companions the utensils before he took them for himself.

"Oh my god, you're my savior." The redhead groaned. He eagerly swiped his to go container of ramen from his friends hands. "I thought I wouldn't be eating this shit for another few weeks. Seokjin would pester me for days if I asked to go back so soon because he'll claim that I don't think his cooking is good enough." Pure happiness etched its way onto his face when he took his first bite. Through stuffed cheeks, he continued, "Which we both know is crap because Seokjin is skilled enough to cook in a five star restaurant."

Jungkook ate his food at the pace of a snail instead of wolfing it down like his friends were (partly because it was really spicy, and partly because his appetite had somehow disappeared ever since he'd separated himself from Namjoon). It occurred to him that this was the first time he'd ever seen Jimin and Taehyung in the same place at the same time: they talked about each other on occasion, but he'd had yet to see them together. It was bizarre witnessing their personalities collide, not bad, just different, especially in a casual setting such as this. He expected the first time he'd see them interact to be somewhere extravagant like Jimin's wedding, not in the middle of a park.

Taehyung was adamantly chatting to Jimin, whom was nodding and humming and replying verbally whenever his mouth wasn't full. He made a wait gesture to the redhead right as he was in the middle of telling him some grand story, and said, "Hold up, Tae, Kookie looks like he's gonna explode from the amount of questions he wants to ask."

"Really? I thought he looked more...constipated."

"Hyung!" Jungkook laughed once despite his drowsiness, swatting at the arm of the perpetrator, whom giggled and dodged it. The mochi had a point, though. He really did have a few questions he wanted to ask. Rounding on his best friend, he crossed his arms over his chest and demanded, "How long?"

"A year and a half." Was the immediate response. Jungkook blinked. That was...quite a while. It might not seem so to other people, but Jimin had a hard time hiding things from Jungkook, and for him to keep this secret for a year and a half was really something.

"Why?" He realized how accusatory the word sounded and backtracked. "I mean, not that it's a bad thing, it's great you two are friends. I meant how."

The platinum-haired man jutted his chin at Taehyung, a signal for him to tell the story, which of course meant that the beginning was overly dramatic. "It was a dark and stormy night in the city of Seoul, South Korea. Two souls bumped into each other on the sidewalk, their umbrellas getting caught in one another. The man by the name of Kim Taehyung had a sophisticated, deep navy umbrella, while the other man, Park Jimin, had one the color of a rose that was lined with some sort of pink animal fur. Struck by a sudden curiosity, Park Jimin invited Kim Taehyung into nearly bar, where they proceeded to-"

"Yah, that's not how it went at all!" Jimin protested, throwing the extra pair of chopsticks that was in the bag at the younger man. "You asked me to go inside the bar with you, not the other way
Jungkook was more perturbed by different detail. "Jiminie hyung, you have an umbrella with pink fur on it?"

Jimin's cheeks turned the color of cherries. The brunette and the redhead were clinging onto each other laughing crazily while he sputtered out an explanation. "It's magenta and it was a gift! I couldn't just throw it away, I had to use it!" He pouted into his container of ramen as the two continued to cackle. "You're both terrible friends, you know that?"

"Oh, shut up, Jiminie, you know we love you." Taehyung gasped out, reaching the end of his hysterics, wiping at his eyes as he grinned. "Right, Kook-ah?"

"Yeah." Jungkook was dabbing at his eyes with a spare napkin, still letting out random giggles he couldn't keep in. This was also the first time he'd really laughed for eight days. It felt good.

Almost as if the redhead could read his mind, his hyung nudged at him with his elbow. "See, you're looking less dead already!"

"I still feel like shit though." He replied, because though this was helping, he couldn't lie to himself. The strange unpleasantness was still making his skin prickle. "Bonding pains are hell."

"Aish, serves you right, you stubborn-ass!" Taehyung said, his tone half teasing and half honest. He tutted. "Staying away from your soulmate for that long. You're such a pabo, Jungkook-ah." Without warning, he made a move to steal some of the brunette's food. Jungkook defended his ramen as valiantly as he could. His friend won over him easily, though instead of eating the portion he took, he returned it to his owner and gave a fond look. "You better get better soon, Kook-ah. We miss you like how you were. Maybe not ecstatic all the time, but you were kind of happy, right?"

Jungkook thought to before he found out Namjoon was his soulmate (oh god, even thinking about him increased the weird feeling. What was this?), specifically to the time directly preceding the knowledge, when he'd been curled up on the floor. Yes. I was happy. "Yeah, hyung, I was."

"Then after this hell is over, Jiminie and I are gonna try our best to make you feel that way again. Right, hyung?"

"You bet, Tae." Jimin grinned as Taehyung bumped the shoulders of he and the maknae together. The sensation of lightness and hope was growing, and the unpleasantness was shrinking a bit, there yet not on the forefront of his mind. Jungkook was grateful that the older man could help to pick him up when he was down. The brunette, while gazing at the redhead, asked, "Jiminie hyung, why didn't you introduce Tae and I sooner? Why did you wait until we met on our own?"

Oddly, the mochi remained silent. Jungkook suspected that he was thinking at first; a turn of his head proved him wrong. Jimin had quietly resumed eating. After a full thirty seconds of no answer, the brunette repeated his questions. It was then that Jimin glanced up.

"Do you really want to know the answer to that, Jungkookie?"

"...yes." Jungkook replied warily, not liking the nervous gleam that had gathered in his eyes. "I'm sure." I wouldn't have asked if I wasn't sure.

It took another moment of his best friend fidgeting until he answered. "I wanted to. Tried to a couple times, actually." He paused. "But..."
"But what?" Surely it couldn't be that bad.

"You were..." The platinum-haired man sighed. "You were with Yejun. You rejected me every time I wanted to set something up because you said you were busy with him." He shrugged lightly. "It's alright now, though, we're all together-Jungkook-ah, are you okay!??"

At the mention of Yejun's name, the unpleasantness that he abruptly knew without hesitation was anxiety suddenly roared past his ears, filing his mind with darkness and fear and choking, choking, he was choking and he couldn't breathe, can't breathe, not again not again why can't I breathe again-

"Jungkook!" That was Jimin above him, his strong arms pulling his shaking body from the bench so he didn't fall off and hurt himself. This wasn't anything like he'd felt, not at all, this was pure blind fright like someone shoving you into a haunted house and telling you they'll never let you out and he would be left to stumble about in the blackness alone. This was his regular panic times ten. "Sweetheart, stay with me, hey, hey, it's okay, I'm right here-"

"H-H-Hyung?" His teeth clacked together he shook so badly.

"Yes, that's right sweetheart, hyung is right here, it's going to be okay." He heard Jimin swear. "Fuck. He hasn't had a panic attack for four weeks, not even after he found out Namjoon was his soulmate and he got bruised-" At Namjoon's name, another strange wave of terror and craving and sad longing washed over him and he whimpered. "Sorry, sorry, it's okay, it's okay-"

"H-Hyung, it's getting d-d-dark." I can breathe better. Now I can't see.

Taehyung's warm hands were there, cradling his face, forcing their eyes to meet. His voice sounded like it was wavering. "Jungkookie, hot stuff, you need to stay awake, okay? Me and Jiminie are right here. You're safe."

"Tae Tae and I are going to take you home, okay, sweetheart?" Someone was lifting him up off of the ground, he was moving, and the thought occurred to him that he was far too big to be carried but he was so frightened he let it happen.

Rumbling and cars and Tae Tae and Jiminie and gripping at a shirt and scared. It blurred together. It was like when he'd been in shock except not, it was so not like he was in shock, this was far worse, god please make this stop I'm so scared.

When the three got back to the apartment, the maknae was placed in bed, shivering and croaking his apologies and was shushed and tucked in. His hyungs remained in the room with him until most of the fear passed and he'd fallen into an uneasy sleep, clutching both of their hands. Somewhere between here and there and there and here in the realm of consciousness, Jungkook sensed his shoes being tugged off, the blankets being tightly secured, and low voices.

"Anxiety is one thing people can experience when they're going through bonding pains." Someone whispered. The brunette felt the light sensation of his hair being pushed from his face. "Jungkookie's been doing fine. I guess the stress the bonding pains are placing on him threw him into overdrive."

"That's scary as shit, Jiminie."

Quiet.

"Jimin."
"Yeah?"

"Is Jungkook-ah going to die?"

Another beat of quiet. His hair was moved again. "No. He's not going to die. He probably feels like death, but he won't die. Bonding pains don't work like that. They're meant to push the separated soulmates together, not make sure they stay away from one another so...permanently"

"Thank god." Rustling. An already insanely low voice lowered further. "Jiminie, why won't Jungkook see Nam-"

There was a clicking noise and a squeak. The door, most likely. A new voice that was rough and growly spoke. "Jimin? Taehyung? What the hell-"

The new voice was promptly shushed. Movement, bustling, silence, four more breaths and Jungkook was asleep.

Namjoon's dimpled smile haunted his dreams.

The morning of the ninth day arrived. Waking up was an awful feeling: not only was he struck with the usual longing that he experienced after dreaming of his soulmate, but his body housed a weird chill that was a shadow of the anxiousness he'd experienced the day before. Jungkook sat up in the guest bed, wincing while he massaged his temples, trying to rid himself of the unpleasant feeling. He didn't want it to rise up on him and to have to go through whatever that was again.

A warm shower helped the anxiety (though not the headache or ever-present tiredness). Calmer now, the brunette wrapped a towel around his waist, exited the bathroom and padded to the dresser to find something to wear. He rifled through his options idly. Black shirt. Purple shirt. Both too small because he was borrowing from Jimin, but he'd have to make do, just as he'd done for the past nine days now...

I miss my own clothes. The thought occurred to him suddenly as he held up the black shirt. He sighed, put it down, and turned to gaze at the plain room before him. He guessed that that was what bothered him about it, that it was plain, impersonal, the entire room put together as though it was something to be borrowed. This was of course true as this was the guest room and wasn't made for permanent residence...and yet. I miss my own things.

All of his few worldly possessions resided at Namjoon's apartment. His white shirts and baggy lazy clothes and hoodies. The framed picture of his eomma and appa holding hands and smiling. A shell from the beach that his mother had given him, a several CDs, amongst other items. This was the longest he'd gone without having them close by.

And to hell with it. He was childish and in pain and sad and craving and he missed having his own stuff, dammit.

Would it hurt to at least get some of my clothes back?

Jungkook walked to the kitchen to find Yoongi there already, lounging on top of the counter while he sipped coffee and skimmed papers. The older man nodded to him. The maknae bade him good morning and fixed himself a bowl of cereal (a small one, since most of it would go uneaten anyway). Jimin wasn't awake yet and wouldn't be for a while, so it was to be the two of them spending a few passive moments of the new day together.

Hmm...Jungkook squinted at his hyung as he swirled the cereal around with his spoon. I wonder...? Might as well give it a shot. "Yoongi hyung."
"Yeah, Kook?" The producer briefly glanced up from whatever he'd been reading.

"Do you go to Namjoon hyung's apartment a lot?" *Fuck, even saying his name hurts.*

Yoongi raised an eyebrow. He set his papers aside, signaling that he was concerned with the question. At least his attention had been snatched. "Sometimes. He writes most of his ideas down at his desk and forgets to bring them in. We grab lunch and then go there to get them." He sipped his drink. "Why, are you planning on breaking in?"

The brunette didn't even need to break in. He still had his key. "I was kind of hoping you would, actually."

Now the pale man set down his coffee. Which meant that this was as alarming to him as being notified that his studio was burning to the ground, and that was saying something. "What the fuck? Why would I do that?"

"I, um...I was wondering if you could bring me some of my clothes?"

Yoongi just stared at him. Jungkook stared back, unrelenting. Finally, the older man said, "You're being a little bitch."

"What?"

"You heard me." Yoongi's tone was becoming colder, as were his eyes. "You're being a little bitch. You have legs and arms. You can drive your own ass to Joon's apartment and grab your shit yourself."

"No I can't-"

"You can and you're being stubborn about it!" The black-haired man accused. A scowl marred his face. "Hell, Jungkook, being around him would make you feel a million times better. Your headache would go away and you'd be less tired and you wouldn't have a fucking panic attack in the middle of the park just because someone said your ex's name."

"I'm not doing this for fun, hyung!" Jungkook gripped his spoon tightly and resisted the impulse to chuck it in retaliation for the last jab.

"Then why are you doing it!? It's beyond stupid!"

"Hyung, you know what it's like having a soulmate. It hurts. And I..." His exhale lacked steadiness. "I don't want any more bruises. I don't care who gives me them. I don't want them."

Yoongi gazed at him for ten seconds more. Then he hopped off the counter, snatched his beverage and papers, and retreated into the hallway without another word. The makkas pushed his cereal aside to have room to bury his throbbing head in his arms. No matter what anyone said, no matter how bad the pain and the longing got, this was better than bruises. This was better than being marked and crying and revolving in a constant cycle of fiery want and holding back. The bonding pains would only last three more days after today, and then they'd both be free.

*So what if I never feel as happy with someone else?* His heart screamed its protest at the thought. It shrieked so loudly it was a shock Yoongi didn't come running back to the kitchen at the sound when Jungkook pictured Namjoon with someone else. *So what if I never burn as bright or last as long or feel as much?*

*I won't be bruised.*
I won't be marked.

The temptation to touch doesn't exist.

That has to be worth it.

Several hours later, he was settled on the couch with Jimin while they watched a kdrama. They were sharing a tiny box of cookies between them (though honestly the mochi was doing most of the snacking because...yeah.) and quoting the characters at every opportunity. Jimin was voicing his dislike towards the main character’s love interest because to him she was 'fake as hell' or something like that, and they were interrupted by the front door opening and closing,

"Hey, hyung." Jimin twisted so that he was facing the door, munching on a cookie. "We're watching that kdrama with the fake ass chick, do you want to-" His pause in speech did not escape Jungkook and the younger man paused the TV and looked away from the screen to the front door where the black-haired man stood. His expression wasn't grumpy like usual, nor did his features soften when Jimin addressed him. He almost looked...upset? "What happened?"

"I..." Yoongi shook his head. "I went to try and get some of Jungkook-ah's things."

The platinum-haired man's eyebrows furrowed. "Why?"

"He asked me to this morning, on his behalf." He...he actually went? The maknae blinked in surprise. A quick once over of the older man showed that he was empty handed. But then where are my clothes?

Jimin asked his question for him. "Where is everything, hyung?"

"Namjoon..." Yoongi gave a breathless laugh, empty and wrong. "Namjoon wouldn't let me take anything."

Jungkook froze.

Nobody in the room moved an inch. Breath was barely audible. A pin could drop and it would carry the sound of an atomic bomb.

"What does that mean?" The youngest eventually asked, pupils set on his eldest hyung whom remained at the entrance.

"It means he...he legitimately refused to give back any of your stuff." Yoongi brought a hand to his forehead and leaned against the wall for support. "I told him that you wanted some of your clothes and he said he couldn't give them to me. Like he couldn't make himself do it." He swallowed heavily. Jimin and Jungkook remained silent until he continued since there seemed to be more. "He said that he needed...he needed your things around because it was the next best thing to having you there."

The brunette had been unaware that his dead heart was a creation of ice (or was it stone?); for right then he heard a deep crack inside him and could only assume that it was his cold heart beginning the painful process of cracking in half. "W-What?"

The producer shrugged. "Said it hurts less when he's surrounded by your stuff. Makes sense, too, whenever we're out together he looks like a truck hit him. Earlier he was tired but actually looked like a human being. Had color in his skin and everything."

It hurts less when he's surrounded by my stuff. His heart thudded, thudded, thudded, the tear
growing bigger and bigger (how was that possible? How was it possible for stone to be torn in half?). Another line of Yoongi's speech caught his attention, and he perked up from his spot with wide eyes as his next words exited him without a second thought. "He looks like a truck hit him? Is he okay?"

His hyung rounded on him all of a sudden, a snarl pulling at his upper lip. "Of course he's not fucking okay! He's going through the same shit you are, Jungkook!" Jungkook gaped at him. This upset Yoongi further, and he leaned forwards towards the younger man, hissing. "Just because you haven't been keeping in contact with Joon doesn't mean that I haven't. I have to see him every day at the studio, and every day he's gotten worse. He's restless and he can't focus and his head is killing him. And fucking fuck, I've never seen the bags underneath his eyes look so purple." The brunette was still gaping, still in shock, his heart frozen and mind reeling and soul working itself up into frenzy when Yoongi brought his hand down hard on the arm of the couch, causing both of the other men to jump. "Didn't you do your research, Jungkook? Didn't you research? Did you forget already one of the most important component of bonding pains, you stubborn ass brat!?"

He had, in fact, researched and found nothing new or of use. Bonding pains lasted for two weeks upon initial contact, if the pair of people or multiple persons were separated, he knew the symptoms and that they could vary, it could be cured through contact with your soulmate...

Cured through contact with your soulmate.

Because...because both soulmates wanted to be by each other while going through bonding pains. That's why contact was the cure.

Both soulmates experienced the pain.

Both.

Namjoon.

"Oh my god." Jungkook gripped at the couch, eyes widening impossibly further. Namjoon. "He...he's going through bonding pains too. Oh my god. Why hasn't he-" He gazed at Yoongi helplessly. "If he's hurting that bad, why hasn't he tried to come after me? Why has he only texted?"

"Namjoon cares way too much about other people, that's why." The producer sighed with frustration. "He feels bad that you're the one who gets bruised. He doesn't want to push you. Or your feelings. Because he cares way too fucking much and wanted to give you distance and time if that's what you wanted."

Guilt roiled over Jungkook in powerful waves. Namjoon was suffering too. He was tired and in pain and hurting. He'd been like this for nine whole days.

And he respected the brunette and was giving him space instead of knocking on the apartment door and demanding he come out so that his pain would dissipate.

I'm so selfish.

Yoongi left the room after that, fists curled tightly at his sides, muttering underneath his breath. Jimin got up (after patting his best friend on the head in sympathy) and followed him to calm him down. A second later, their bedroom door slammed shut.

Jungkook was alone, sitting in the middle of the couch, his heart on the verge of being completely snapped in two, exhausted and longing and wanting and in pain and feeling so, so guilty.
It was then that he concluded the inevitable.

He was going to have to contact Namjoon.

"...won't you save me, save me, ah oh, save me..." Jungkook glanced down at the notepad in his hands. It was the early morning of the tenth day, and he was in Yoongi and Namjoon's studio, sitting inside the recording booth reading music. It was no clean-cut staff, not in the slightest: notes were scribbled at, crossed out, drawn with arrows to signify moving up a line or space. Quarter notes gave the illusion that they were half notes, as the person who'd written them in their place had erased, changed their mind, and erased again. The lyrics were the worst of it all; they were in messy, cramped handwriting, obviously spur of the moment. Syllables were shuffled about in strange places at attempts at rhyme and reason. They were also written in two different languages, Korean at one line, and then what Jungkook guessed was English at other lines. He'd worried for a moment over that, because Jungkook didn't know English, but his fears were quelled when he realized that whomever had written the English down had kindly bracketed it together and written the Korean translation beside it. Someone was secretly bilingual, then.

The brunette was here on his own personal mission. Since both he and Namjoon had been (and still were) rather out of it the past several days (on top of Jungkook's refusal to see his soulmate) none of the three of them had been in the studio all at the same time. It was frustrating the hell out of Yoongi, making him antsy since he and Namjoon needed to release something soon, so Jungkook had taken it upon himself to come early and take a look at what the two were working on so that he could get caught up. The first thing he'd seen when he'd walked in was the incomplete music with the title 'Save Me', and a sticky note on top that read, get Jungkookie to practice this asap, need to see how his vocals will fit in.

And he was only doing what the note had said, really.

Though unfinished, it was a gorgeous song, one about the sweet desperation of needing someone else's love, of dependence, of fondness and many other wistfully sweet things. Jungkook wondered if Yoongi had had Jimin in mind when writing it.

Alright. Enough messing about, time to actually record some of this so that his hyungs could take a look at it later. The maknae reached for the stool, plopped into it, checked the closeness of the mic, and started from the top.

He had the recording running the entire time without break or pause, so instead of spurts of the same thing sung over and over with tweaks like one would usually hear, Yoongi and whomever else listened would hear it when Jungkook paused for too long as he tried to make sense of the scribbled lyrics. They'd hear him start over once he got two lines in and noticed he'd messed up a word. They'd hear it the one time he accidentally sucked in air too fast and choked, coughing harshly.

Though the final product was as messy as the song he was singing, Jungkook ended with a final, "I need your love before I fall, fall..." that vibrated softly. He sighed and set aside the music for the first time in one and a half hours. Well, that was it. He was done for the day. He needn't stay here any longer, for he knew that Yoongi and Namjoon were to arrive later, and he couldn't be here while they were for obvious reasons...

Namjoon.

Jungkook halted, teeth holding his lower lip. Namjoon. His name caused that same overwhelming guilt from the previous day to bubble up in him, and his heart experienced a familiar tug (or painful
rip, however one wished to observe it). Namjoon was going through so much suffering because of the maknae's own fear. Was there nothing he could do to ease the burden? To help with the pain without actually having to be in his presence?

For a second he considered texting him. His phone was out of his pocket and in his hand before he found himself unable to do it; not because he couldn't physically perform the task, but because he was frightened that he wouldn't be able to resist the temptation to call him, ask to come home, and get wrapped up in those warm arms, gaze into his intelligent eyes, and...and...nope. Jungkook rattled himself as if it would help dismiss the train of thought and returned his phone to his pocket.

No calling. No texting. What else could he do?

Jungkook found his eyes level with the mic. It occurred to him that it was still recording.

Maybe I could...

Tentatively, with an amount of nervousness in him that he would never voice aloud, he said, "Namjoon?"

Nobody answered him, of course. But that was it, that was the loophole. Jungkook could sit here and talk all he pleased and he...Namjoon would hear him yet not be able to reciprocate. His dead torn heart panged; he wanted to hear the voice of his soulmate reply.

No, though.

This is how it had to be.

The brunette moistened his lips. Pretended Namjoon was sitting on the other side of the glass, watching him. He'd be smacked around by Yoongi if he gave Jungkook too much praise for the elder's liking, and his full lips would quirk up in a secret smile directed at the maknae as he shied away from the discipline. There was one time he'd even winked, like Jungkook's supposed talent was something kept special between them. And though Yoongi would continue to roll his pupils and chastise, remind that they needed to work and that Jungkook needed to try again, the compliments did not stop pouring from Namjoon's mouth and his small smile seldom left.

The Namjoon he imagined on the other side of the glass seemed so real to him, so tangible, that his next words wavered when he uttered them. "J-Joonie hyung?"

A rush of adrenaline surged through Jungkook as it hit him that he was talking to his soulmate, and he gained the bravery to continue. He said the first things that came to mind. "I m-miss you, hyung. I miss you so much. I miss the apartment and the smell of the books and eating dinner with you and seeing you every day and...and I'm so sorry." His breath hitched. "I'm so sorry that you're in pain because of what I decided to do. I'm so fucking sorry, hyung. These past ten days have been hell without you and they've probably been hell for you too and I'm so sorry, God, I hope you're not mad." Jungkook laughed once. "Even though you have very right to be. I kind of hope that you'll be pissed at me the next time we see each other, I deserve it and I'd feel even worse if you weren't...I hope...I hope we see each other soon...and then we can talk. In a few days once the bonding period is over, we'll talk, of you still want to see me." Panic injected itself into his veins as something he hadn't thought of hit him. What if his soulmate didn't want to see him? What if...what if his soulmate didn't want him? "If you still want me at all. If you still want me after the crap I've put you through. Because I still w-want you, I still want to see you, you did nothing wrong and it was my own fault that I ran, don't think any less of yourself, please, it wasn't you, hyung, I..." Jungkook closed his eyes and shook his head. Too much. He'd talked too much already. Fucking bonding pains making me spill all of the pent up emotion in me. "I'm sorry. Bye, Joonie hyung."
Jungkook got up, exited the recording booth, and pressed a square button that he knew meant *End Recording*. He reached to massage his temples. His head was throbbing something awful.

Another minute passed and he was gone.

"That was clever."

"...replacing the two percent milk with skim?"

"What the hell, *no*, you brat. That was one of the worst decisions you've ever made in your life. That stuff tastes like shit. I should throw you out for doing that."

"Jiminnie hyung would protect me."

"Not after he tasted it too. Argh! It's *vile*."

"It's *healthy*. You wonder why Jiminnie and I have muscles and you don't, hyung."

"Keep sassing me and you're gonna find out just how much muscle I've got, Jeon. And I wasn't talking about the milk."

"What were you talking about, then?"

"Leaving that message for Namjoon-ah. That was clever."

"W-What? He heard it? What did he...did he say anything about it?"

"No, he didn't really care about it that much. Didn't even listen to the whole thing before shutting it off."

"...oh."

"Oh my god, Kook-ah, if being in love makes you this gullible, I don't think I want you and Joon to get together any more. *Of course* he listened to the whole thing. He replayed it three times."

"I am not it love with him. It's *barely* a crush. Secondly..."

"What did he say? Well, he didn't really say anything besides that he missed you calling him hyung. And..."

"...and?"

"He looked better after he heard your voice, Jungkook-ah. Less stressed. More relaxed than I've seen him in a week and a half. He practically melted all over the equipment while he listened. Said your voice made the pain fade a bit. So...thank you for doing that."

"Yeah. Yeah, no problem, hyung."

---

**From: Yoongi hyung**

*are you off of work today, brat?*

**To: Yoongi hyung**
no

but I have the morning shift with tae

I'm free mid afternoon

**From: Yoongi hyung**

good

**I need you to come to the studio**

**To: Yoongi hyung**

y? I was there yesterday

**From: Yoongi hyung**

because I want you to, thats why

we still need to go over some of the lyrics

there are some things I want to fix

**To: Yoongi hyung**

uh

ok hyung

whatever you say

**From: Yoongi hyung**

good

**get there soon**

**ill prob be there at 2:15**

**wait for me**

It was currently 2:37 and there was no sign of Min Yoongi.

Jungkook exhaled through his nose, turned to the side, and seized thrice in a row. It was the eleventh day and he was sick. Not sick of experiencing bonding pains, (which he was) but actual coughing sneezing head pounding more than it usually did congested kind of sick. It wasn't anything crazy, only serious and annoying enough for him to have to wear a black mask at work, and to put each of his clients on hold for another day. Though he wished for it to pass quickly that would most likely not be the case and he'd probably be sick for the next two days until the time that the bonding pains lasted for ended.

Great.

On the bright side, at least he wasn't bedridden.
The brunette sighed and shifted his weight from where he leaned against the wall and checked the
time again. Another five minutes passed and Yoongi still wasn't there, and it was starting to
concern Jungkook. Despite his lazy nature the older man was actually quite punctual, so when he
said he was going to be somewhere at a certain time, he was there. The fact that he wasn't here was
cause for worry.

Suddenly there was bumping and bustling noise from across the room. A single door lead out into
the storage room, and the storage room to outside, so Yoongi must be coming in through there.
Thank god. He'd thought that he was never going to show up.

The doorknob rattled, shook, and someone stepped inside, babbling away carelessly. "Hyung, I got
everything that you wanted. All of the sample tracks are here and so is the track from the first
album. I was thinking that we could pull different elements from the tracks, combine them, and add
our own original harmony on top so the music doesn't sound recycled-"

The person froze and dropped everything that they were holding.

Jungkook heard his phone clatter to the floor. It hardly mattered to him, for there was something
else that mattered far more standing right in front of him, his friend, his hyung, his soulmate with
that gorgeous fucking face that looked so tired it was scary and yet his intelligent eyes were
widened in such a comical way that the sight almost made the maknae keel over with laughter.

He didn't laugh.

What left his mouth was a low whine, a sound he'd be embarrassed about making if he was
anywhere else but he was here, he was here, he was ten feet away and all Jungkook had to do was
run across the room and jump into his arms and the pain would stop. "Hyung."

"Jungkook." Namjoon stumbled forward, breath hitching audibly, expression bewildered. "Are you
really there? Am I..." He blinked rapidly. "Am I dreaming again? I swear to god, if my head is
pulling a trick again because of these bonding pains-" His words abruptly cut off. The brunette
could finish the rest of his sentence for him: If this is fake, I won't be able to take it.

"Hyung, I'm here, I'm here, I'm really here, you're not dreaming." Jungkook's mouth trembled as he
spoke. Everywhere was trembling. There was not a single atom in his being that was still. "I'm
here."

"Your voice." Namjoon breathed. "Your voice is way prettier in person than it was in my dreams.
My dreams could never get your voice right." In wonder, the taller man gazed on. "How are you
here?"

"Yoongi hyung told me to meet him." His heart was thud thud thudding and sewing itself back
together bit by bit, while his soul kept asking him why he uttered such meaningless words, why
wasn't he professing his care, giving love, why wasn't he making Namjoon his? His legs dragged
him forward without him fully understanding what was going on, and in no time at all, he stood no
more than twelve inches from his soulmate. His soul told him to close the distance, to touch, taste,
feel. "I think he...tricked us."

"I think so too." Namjoon was gazing down at him, his features still full of awe, and Jungkook had
never noticed until now but he really liked that his hyung was taller than him, he liked it a lot. He
liked Namjoon a lot. He'd been so silly to run away. Why would he ever do that when everything
he needed was right in front of him?

His soul tugged at him, and he moved closer, closer, and a thrill ran down his spine when
Namjoon, his handsome intelligent amazing Namjoon, didn't pull away or push him back, he was leaning in too, he wanted him too, all the signs were there, and at that moment Jeon Jungkook craved nothing more than to feel those full lips against his.

So silly to run at the start. Why had he...

Wait.

Jungkook’s brain kicked in and he recalled something with strange clarity. Day five had been one of three he'd spent in bed unable to get up; but he had, he remembered, he had gotten up, he'd dragged himself to the computer to research bonding pains and come up, at the end of one article, there was a tiny arrow that led to a footnote. It had read: Upon reconciliation, soulmates may experience a rush of euphoria similar to adrenaline and will want to make physical contact with the person they have been separated from for a period of time. This euphoria is a byproduct of the sudden lack of pain the soulmates experience as well as the excitement of their souls at being within one another’s presence after so long. This feeling tends to be stronger the longer the reconciliation has waited to take place, therefore, soulmates that have been separated for more than seven days shall experience a much more powerful rush than those separated less than a week. It is recommended that there are no bystanders nearby as the reconciliation is happening, as the euphoria can quickly turn to viciousness or possessiveness while others besides the soulmates are present.

Which meant...

Shit.

Faster than he had been lured forward, the maknae dug his toes into the carpet and jumped out of the way. It was not a graceful move; he ended up slamming into some of the recording equipment, and hissed at the smarting in his side as he peeled himself off of it. He swiftly maneuvered around until he was as far from the other man as he could possibly get with his back pressing into the wall. He remembered now. His brain had saved him. His soul was rejoicing, that's all this was, and the bonding pains were fading away. That was all. That was all because if he got too close and their skin touched then the purple would bloom along him and mar him and hurt him and he remembered now.

He remembered why he'd run.

Namjoon wore a look of pure shock. He stood right where Jungkook had left him, an arm stretched out as though he was about to loop it around the younger man's waist (thud thud thud went his heart at the thought). It dropped to his side. After a second of hesitation, he made a move to step closer.

"Jungko-"

"Don't come near me." It hurt like hell to say the words. It hurt even more to see Namjoon's face fall. Nevertheless, the blonde took an obedient step back. The brunette closed his eyes for a moment, breathed, and opened them on an unsteady exhale. "Stay back, okay? Please just stay back."

"Okay, okay." Namjoon said passively. His hands raised in a gesture of peace. He seemed to have snapped out of whatever trance they'd been in, too, for his dark pupils were much clearer than before. "Whatever you want."

Silence reigned in the space between them. Jungkook heard more than felt his fingers clutching at the wall as though he hadn't already gone as far as he could go. Their breaths whistled in and out, the younger man sensing the pull on his soul the other man had on him, the temptation to draw
nearer, and fought it with everything in him.

"I'm sorry." Jungkook eventually gritted out. "That...I don't know what that was. I shouldn't have gotten so c-close to you-

"It's okay, I..." Namjoon stayed true to his word and did not move from his side of the room, opting to grab at a chair to his left like it was grounding him. "I don't mind. It made the pain go away."

His hyung carefully asked, "How are you feeling?"

Incurable headache? Vanished. Clogged sinuses? Cleared. Exhaustion? It was like he'd slept for a month and was completely recharged. His soul didn't ache and he no longer craved the man in front of him fiercely. Well, he did, his soul did, but it was different. It was less desperate and more calm, like Namjoon was something he knew he could have and only needed to wait to devour.

Hell, even the air tasted sweeter. He was good. He was great.

For the first time in eleven days, Jungkook felt alive.

"I feel a lot better. My headache is gone." He looked up at Namjoon. Admittedly, the blonde appeared less tired than he was a moment ago; the shadows underneath his eyes seemed to have disappeared. "What about you, hyung?"

"I feel amazing." Namjoon breathed, a tiny smile pulling across his face, revealing his dimples. "More awake and less like a zombie. Like...I could sit down and have enough focus to make some really great music right now. And...my appetite came back all of a sudden. I could eat eight servings of kimchi right now."

Jungkook could do nothing save nod. Yeah, I could eat ten. He shifted further, body stiff and legs rigid.

Quiet.

"Jungkook." His hyung said softly.

Jungkook closed his eyes and did not respond.

"Jungkookie."

Nothing. He'd give him nothing. He'd wait until his soul wasn't yanking with such power, wait until the excitement died down, and then he'd go.

"Baby."

Warmth immediately coiled in his belly at the pet name, uttered with such gentleness. Well, that was new. Jungkook's pupils snapped open, and he threw an incredulous look at Namjoon. "What was that?"

"That was me baiting you and you falling for it." His hyung responded. The brunette gave a half scowl. Namjoon didn't break their stare and continued, "You haven't contacted me for eleven days. You didn't text me, you didn't call..." His bit his full bottom lip. "Why? We could've talked about this. I know that this is a major turning point for you in your life, but it was a major turning point for me, too." Jungkook flinched. Guilt pooled in his gut to replace the heat. "Soulmates are supposed to...they're supposed to work things out. We're a team now, Jungkook-ah."

"I don't want to be a team." Was what he said stubbornly back. "I don't want to be part of this kind
"I don't want to either." Namjoon dropped his eyes to gaze at his own hands, and for a split second, Jungkook imagined the horror that a person would be filled with if they were to do nothing but hurt the one they were made to be with. "But we're together now-"

"No, it's...no. We're not together. We're not. We're just two friends who happen to be soulmates and that's...that's the end of it."

A faint pink colored the blonde's cheeks. It was such a light rose that you almost couldn't see it if you weren't paying attention. Despite this he pressed on. "It would be better if we were together, though, we wouldn't be so sick, we'd be happier, we could...I don't know." Namjoon's blush became more prominent. "Maybe we could try to be happy together, if that's what works best."

Something like panic at the very thought (of being with Namjoon, no, it was the thought of the temptation, and of the bruises) caused the maknae to protest with the first thing that popped into his head. "Hyung, I don't even like you."

Jungkook forgot that his words, as Namjoon's soulmate, would pack a harder than intended punch. The taller man visibly deflated. "You don't...like me?"

"Shit. I do like you. I'm lying because I'm scared and I'm terrified you don't like me back and I'm a little bitch. I like you. I do like you, as a person, and I'm."

He realized a second too late that he'd said yet. The brunette glanced away out of shyness. Great, now his neck was burning up too.

'So then get to know me.' Namjoon insisted. Why, why was he fighting so hard for them? Why couldn't he just let this go? Why was he holding on so badly? "Take the time to get to know me, Jungkookie." His calm tone gave way to something more stressed, more needing, and it could only be the tugging in his soul that made him sound so. "Can't we at least try? We won't know if we don't try, for both of our sakes."

"No, no, we can't...we shouldn't do that, hyung." Can't. Marks. Bruises. Temptation. All over again.

"Why? Why won't you give us a chance, Jungkook-ah?"

A beat.

Two beats.

Jungkook finally looked up. Namjoon's fists were clenched at his sides, expression wistful, and he was still biting at his lower lip. He was worried, he was caring, he was handsome. He was perfect. Perfect for Jungkook. The universe, fate, whatever it was, it said so.

But...

I don't want a repeat.

I don't want any more marks.

Please, no more marks.
"Did I ever tell you that I had a boyfriend, hyung?" He began. Namjoon shook his head negatively. Jungkook chuckled, the noise empty. "Well, I did. He was great. We went out a lot together, to dinner or to the movies, it was always one of the two, and he wouldn't let me pay for anything, not once. He was wealthier than I was, so the places we ate at were more high class than I was used to, and the food was more expensive, which made me feel even worse about him paying even though I knew I couldn't afford it. There was one time where he bought me a really nice shirt and jeans as a gift and the night I wore them we walked around the higher end of town all evening. He said he was...he said he was showing me off, because I looked so good in them."

Jungkook got lost in the memories for a moment. Without preamble, he said, "I think it was four days later that he started handcuffing me to the bed."

Namjoon's sharp intake of air was audible.

"I can't remember how it happened the first time." Jungkook had already cried so many useless tears. He didn't want to cry more. He lightly shrugged to hold them at bay. "I was eating dinner, something that I made, because he couldn't cook to save his life...and then we fucked afterward, on the countertop. I was tired because I was working two jobs then, so I told him I wanted to stop after one round and go to bed." No. Tears. "He was so understanding because he was just so nice, you know? And he said of course, we could stop, it was no problem. And then..." He made a listless gesture. "He moved us to the bed and we didn't stop. It felt good, and I was tired, and I felt bad because we were both so busy and we hadn't been having a lot of sex lately. It hurt. I didn't worry about it because hurt before and I just...sucked it up."

One beat, two beats, three beats, four.

"I woke up and one of my hands was handcuffed to the bedpost. I was there all day. I missed work and dance practice. He took my phone so I couldn't use it to call anyone." Jungkook took a deep shuddering breath. "A-And then he came home. He told me that I was disappointing him because we weren't as active. Said I never lasted long enough and that he was always unsatisfied. And then he just fucked me right there on the floor." He paused. "I bled a lot. More than I ever had before. All through it he was telling me that he came first, that he always came first in my life, his needs were before anything else. I cussed at him and he h-hit me. I tried to hit him back and he pinned my arm down. He told me that this was how it was going to be if I denied him again. He got me out of the handcuffs and pushed me in the shower because I was getting blood all over the carpet and he didn't want to have to hire someone to clean it and have to explain it to them."

Another beat.

"Whenever I was b-bad, he just handcuffed me to the bed. I resisted him a lot at first. Every time he'd just hit me and drag me back to the bed. I forget when he stopped fucking me on the floor and started hitting me from there. I didn't leave because I thought he was going to get better, that maybe if I just listened to him we would get better, and I-" Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry- "I got bruises all over my body. Everyday, even after I stopped resisting him, he'd hit me and there would be all of these purple marks all over my skin and they would hurt so badly and he started telling everyone we knew that we were soulmates so that...so that no one would k-k-know." He scrubbed at his traitor eyes. "Fuck, hyung. He hit me every day."

"How long, Kookie?"

"A year." Jungkook whispered. "We were together for a whole year."

The sixth beat of silence passed.
"I'm so sorry." Namjoon sounded like someone had twisted a knife through his gut, which was weird, because that's exactly what the brunette felt like had been done to him as he recounted his tale. His voice was rough and ocean deep and as honest as ever. "I promise you, I promise you, I'm not like him. I'll never touch you-"

"But that's the thing, hyung, that's the fucking thing." Jungkook squeezed his eyes shut against the tears, the back of his head thumping against the wall in his frustration.

"What is?"

That burn, that ache, the calm craving and muted hunger. It lingered on the surface, ready to break free. Even now, feeling like crap, sure of his feelings yet unsure if they were returned despite Namjoon's words, terrified of gaining more marks, of the purple splashed along his skin. Even now it was difficult to hold himself back because "I want you to touch me. So fucking bad."

The blonde didn't reply for a good moment. Slowly, ever so slowly, he stepped forward. His strides were long, so he covered quite a bit of ground in the small space, but Jungkook did not stop him even though his fright screamed at him to. Namjoon drew closer and Jungkook just shook and battled his pathetic tears.

His hyung stood as close to him as the two had stood a scarce fifteen minutes before. So close that when the brunette look up, he could count Namjoon's eyelashes.

I like you. Jungkook's next breath stuttered in time with his rapidly beating heart. I like you but I'm scared to get more bruises. I'm so scared to relive my past, Joonie.

"You're my soulmate." The producer started. He reached out a hand and it rested in the center of the maknae's chest. He could feel the heat of Namjoon's palm through his shirt and almost whined again and pressed closer or did something foolish like cover the taller man's hand with his own. He stared deep into calculating eyes. "I will protect you. I won't touch your skin and bruise you. I-I missed you so much, Kookie. The apartment got lonely without you. I was late meeting Yoongi at this studio five times because I'd fallen asleep at my desk and you weren't there to wake me up. I missed your cooking and I missed how well you listen to me when I ramble and I missed your laugh and I-" His flow of words halted. Namjoon leaned in, pupils searching. "I know that the situation we're in is complicated, but...I want to try with you. I want to try and see if we can do this." He hesitated. "Do you want to try with me?"

The blonde's eyes were sparkling with passion. Jungkook could live off of that passion for the rest of his life, be happy. He would never feel more alive. He was reminded of Jimin telling him that he shouldn't let his past hold him back, and Taehyung calling him a pabo for staying away from his destined half for so long, and the knowledge that with Namjoon, he was safe. He was in constant danger, and yet, he was safe.

And by God, he was ever so hopelessly attracted to Kim Namjoon.

"Okay." Jungkook nodded. It was like a giant weight was lifted from his shoulders, and his soul purred its contentedness. He allowed himself a smile. "Okay. We'll try to work this out. Together."

Namjoon sighed his relief. He pressed his palm a bit harder against the brunette's chest, the latter's heart hammering at the action and the warmth.

"Kookie?"
"Yeah?"

"Let's go home."
Touch

Chapter Summary

Touch is one thing that can drive people apart. And yet, others it fuses together.
It is up to the people in question to decide whether or not touch is the flower of death or the elixir of life.

Chapter Notes

Oh ma gods this chapter is two days late AGAIN and it's super long AGAIN and I'm a bit ashamed of myself AGAIN but ITS FINALLY HERE :D

I promise promise promise I'll try to make the next chapter shorter: after that, though, there's one more main chapter and then the epilogue! I'm so freaking excited that this story is finally coming full circle. But don't weep yet! We've still got something like forty thousand words to go :)

ALSO. Something I wanted to talk about real quick was the sex in this chapter: I was reading earlier in the week over how real pop stars have been driven further apart when fans sexualized their relationships, and I wanted to say that this work is purely fictional (obviously) and is not meant to sexualize the real, honest relationship of leader and maknae that Jungkook and Namjoon share. I have no idea why but I felt the urge to say that

Please enjoy! Screech at me in the comments my fellow ARMY!!!

(And also I got BTS Superstar and I'm kind of addicted to it?? Help?????)

Two days later, the bonding pains ended.

It probably would've been a lot more significant if Jungkook had stuck to his original plan and not made contact with his soulmate for thirteen days; the feeling of the pain disappearing most likely would've made him weep with joy. However, since Namjoon had managed to convince him to return, the effect was rather anticlimactic since there was no pain present in the first place.

Despite the lack of discomfort, the absence of the bonding pains was obvious. Jungkook blinked awake slowly and immediately sensed the difference: the frenzied energy he experienced when he was in close quarters with Namjoon (whom slept in his own bed not thirty feet away) had calmed a tremendous amount. He wasn't being shot up with adrenaline anymore. Something solid and tangible replaced the barely contained energy, something secure.

Something that, when he focused on it, made him think of Namjoon.

The brunette removed himself from his small bed to pull on a shirt (one of his own that fit properly,
thank everything). He stretched while walking towards the door, yawned, and made his way down the hall to the kitchen. He noted that his hyung's bedroom door was already opened, and wondered how long the older man had been awake for.

Jungkook scratched his head and was in the middle of letting out another unabashed yawn as he finally reached the kitchen. Padding towards the fridge, he set about gathering ingredients to whip up a suitable breakfast. The maknae was so focused on the task at hand that he started in surprise once he turned around and saw Namjoon lounging on the couch in the living room, engrossed in a book. Sunlight streamed in through the blinds and gave his lean figure a glow-like appearance. As always, the sight of him caused Jungkook's breath to hitch.

"Good morning, hyung."

The blonde took a second before he glanced up. Upon doing so, he smiled. "Morning, Kookie. Are you making breakfast?"

"Nah." Jungkook turned on the stove, snagged a bowl, and began cracking eggs. "I thought I'd let you take over for a little while. You know that I've been dying to try your cooking."

Namjoon just snorted at that, to which the brunette chuckled. If the producer tried his hand in the kitchen the fire department would be in the building in less than fifteen minutes. Needless to say, it was a given that Jungkook did all of the cooking, and any other suggestion carried both silly ridiculousness and actual danger.

There was peace for several moments. Eggs were mixed with herbs and poured into a pan. A spatula was grabbed and fruit was pulled out. Namjoon eventually set aside his book and set the table with plates, napkins, and utensils. The food was finished soon after, and the two sat at the tiny table and kept to themselves while they ate. It wasn't as though they weren't getting along since Jungkook returned, quite the contrary. It was just that some mornings were full of jokes, sass, and deep conversation, while others were silent yet loud with the buzzing of thoughts.

"This is delicious, Jungkook-ah." Namjoon commented, taking a big bite from his portion.

"Thank you, hyung."

Another minute of quiet.

"Jungkook-ah."

"Mmm." Jungkook glanced up with a mouth full of food.

Namjoon was loosely holding his chopsticks, plate three quarters empty, his eyes thoughtful. "Do you...did you feel any different when you woke up? Yesterday was the last day..."

The younger man swallowed. Yes, the day before had been the last day, and yes, he did feel a difference. Not as dramatic as one might think, but the difference was undeniably there. He nodded. "I feel different. Like..." A small amount of heat gathered in his cheeks, and he glanced down at his breakfast. "It's not as hard to tell myself that I can't touch you." Realizing how that sounded (and face burning hotter) he hastily corrected himself. "I mean, my s-soul isn't acting insane when you're around, you know? It's...everything is a lot calmer. That's what I meant."

His hyung was chuckling. Namjoon tried to soothe this mirth with another bite of food, speaking up once he'd finished that bite. "Anything else? You're not uncomfortable, or in pain or anything?"

Christ, but Namjoon is going to worry himself to death. Jungkook shook his head. "I'm fine. Are
"Better than I was three days ago. Much better." The older man lightly snapped his chopsticks together in thought. Smiling softly, he continued, "I can feel our bond now. Before it was sort of...wildly floating around. Trying to find its place in you and in me. Now it's settled and found its balance, right in between us, and it's almost as though I can reach out and grasp it."

Jungkook blinked at the extended metaphor. That was actually really accurate. "Yeah. It's exactly like that."

Eventually they finished their shared meal. The brunette gathered the plates together and set about washing them, whistling while he worked. His shift didn't start for another hour and a half, so he had plenty of time to get ready; shower, brush his teeth, text Jimin to let him know he was still alive, begin mentally drafting his apology speech to just about everyone he knew (because, let's face it, he'd acted like an asshole and he knew it), tidy up his room somewhat so that his hyung wouldn't spaz out if he managed to catch a glimpse of the cluttered state of the floor...

Namjoon braced his arms against the countertop right in front of Jungkook and the sink he was working out of and watched him. His gaze was unrelenting and the brunette could sense it boring into his head while he ducked his face and continued to wash, rinse, dry, and repeat. The traitor heart of stone he had that was sewed together again jumped into his throat with nervousness. He cleared it loudly, face heating up once more.

Honestly. Was he a teenager? It shouldn't be this hard to get himself under control around a man he was attracted to. Seriously. Namjoon wasn't even doing anything.

"Thank you for cooking this morning, Kookie." A voice of velvet said lowly.

"You're welcome, hyung." Jungkook noticed that he'd been aggressively scrubbing the same plate for forty seconds and switched it out. "I don't mind. You know I like doing it."


The maknae huffed a laugh and heard his soulmate do the same (too focused on the foamy bubbles in front of him and the bubbles in his stomach to dare to glance up). Namjoon moved away after another moment to prepare for his own day, leaving Jungkook trying to recall how to breathe correctly and also a bit pissed at himself because really, Namjoon had only thanked him, that's all. And Jungkook...

...Jungkook really needed to stop psychoanalyzing such small things and start his day.

What a day it was, too. Now that he was in his right head, the brunette had no excuse not to get everything that needed to get done done today. First on his list was heading off to work and yanking himself into his boss's office, bowing, and asking her to please pardon him and the many days he'd taken off these past few days, he'd work longer hours and close everyday for the next two weeks if that's what she'd like (and though his heart ached a bit at the fact that it would mean he wouldn't be joining Namjoon for dinner for two whole weeks, he could bear it). She waved him off with a polite smile full of hidden things, informing him that Taehyung had let her in on his situation when she'd asked for a reason behind his absence. Jungkook expressed his gratitude, hauled himself from her office, and made his way to Tae whom was the first person on his never stop saying sorry to list.

Surprisingly, the redhead downright refused to accept his apology, and pulled him up from his low
bow whilst shaking his head. "It's not your fault you were going through hell, Kook-ah." He paused as he rifled through the cash register and took count of the bills there. Taehyung raised both eyebrows. "Well, actually, it kind of is, you were being a pabo. But still. For someone who went through hell you didn't act like it."

"Are you kidding? I was horrible."

"Oh please." Taehyung flapped a hand out in emphasis. "If it had been me, I would've whined nonstop and acted like I was entitled as shit. You'd have to put tape over my mouth before you stopped me. You just acted like a sassier, more exhausted version of yourself." He shrugged. "Nothing wrong with that."

"Wait...has it ever been you?"

"Fuck no." His hyung laughed. "The moment I found out Seokjinie was my soulmate I stuck to him like glue. No way in hell was I gonna experience bonding pains. The stories freaked me out too much." His shoulders lifted again. "So I can't give you crap even if I wanted to. I can't even completely understand what you went through. I forgive you, no problem-"

Jungkook launched himself at the older man and hugged him tight. Taehyung clutched him just as tightly back while the younger man whispered thank you in his ear.

While they were still embracing, Taehyung asked, "Why can't you be like this all the time, Jungkook-ah? You're so polite and nice, I don't get any disrespect, you're a nice obedient-"

To combat the assured last word of that sentence the maknae quickly peeled their bodies apart, teasingly danced about in Tae's face, swiped the bills he was counting from his loose grip, and promptly ran about and dodged as the older man gave chase. Just like that, things returned to normal between them.

Next on his list was Hoseok, and subsequently, what was next in his schedule was dance practice. The three of them danced together with words of pure professionalism exchanged between them (for the competition was approaching steadily and their group piece still wasn't completely finished and they had to focus), stopping once in every while to drink water or use the bathroom. On one of the bathroom breaks, when Jimin went alone, Jungkook bowed to his sweaty hyung and said his woes. It took several minutes of saying he was sorry, that he had no excuse, that he loved his hyung dearly and didn't know where he'd be without him since he was a great mentor. Hoseok had his arms crossed over his chest and his expression was indecipherable. Jungkook looked up, worried; but with a quiet Hobi hyung? the older man's stony face broke out into a sunny grin and he was ruffling the younger's hair and hugging him and swinging him around and cooing about how he'd waited for this day his entire life (the day his dongsaeng laid his heart bare and his feelings were made clear, that is) and Jimin walked in on them playfully tussling about on the floor, smiles nearly splitting their faces, cheeks nearly bursting from the effort it took to hold in their giggles.

Jimin was to drive Jungkook home that day. Climbing in the car together, they turned up the radio and sang to IU and Girls Generation and Big Bang and laughed so hard when the other began to parody the lyrics that the glass of the car windows might have shaken. Once they arrived at Namjoon's apartment, the brunette requested that his hyung wait for another moment in the car, and with a giddy heart his raced upstairs and back down again. He opened the drivers side door and presented a large bundle of flowers to the mochi who he knew secretly loved them and grinned wide when Jimin squealed in a rare moment of pure joy. There was an I'm Sorry card that stuck out in the middle of the bouquet, but Jungkook didn't even get the first words of his speech out or start to point at the card before Jimin was hugging him so tight he couldn't breathe and was saying that
he was forgiven and that he understood and that the younger man staying with him had presented no problem at all and he'd do it once more in heartbeat if he had to and holy shit but these flowers are gonna look so good in the dining room, Kookie, thank you!

The brunette's keys were warm in his hands when he used them to unlock the door. He swore he could still hear Jimin yipping with happiness from down the stairs. That boy liked flowers with an intensity that was astonishing. It was almost as intense as Yoongi’s passion for coffee. Almost.

Namjoon was home before him and was sprawled out on the floor with his earbuds in his ears and his foot thumping against the floor in a steady rhythm. Jungkook sensed the rest of him warm up and his soul outright purr once he saw him. It was a pleasant feeling.

Jungkook barely had a chance to slip off his shoes and hang up his thin jacket before his soulmate had removed his earbuds and was greeting him with a smile. While the younger man prepared dinner, the two chatted to each other about their days, commenting and laughing and pouting and teasing. The blonde spoke for some length of time about the book he was currently working on, something completely obscure like the exact inner workings of plants with their xylem and phloem and pistil and pollen and Namjoon might as well have been pursuing a career in botany instead of making music with the way he talked about it. Jungkook lacked the knowledge to contribute something worthwhile, so he simply listened and asked questions in places where it was obvious Namjoon was begging him to but not saying so aloud (Cute, he noted). The entire ordeal carried a rather domestic feel to it (one that Jungkook couldn't say he disliked) and he went to bed with blushing cheeks, a smile, and his heart racing along.

Once he'd handled Yoongi (something he did the following day with a quick trip to the studio, another low bow, and yet another ruffle to his brown locks) the giant weight named guilt that had resided on his shoulders lifted. Well, nearly all of it; there was a large bundle that still nagged at him, one that reminded him of how little he’d thought of his soulmate during their time of separation, how selfish he'd been, how sorry he still was. Jungkook knew he’d never get anywhere with saying sorry over and over, so he devoted extra time he had to trying to make Namjoon as happy as possible as subtly as possible. New books that Namjoon wistfully voiced about getting appeared in the bookshelf or on the coffee table some days. They went to a pet shop at night once, where the maknae had set something up with the owner, and Namjoon was allowed to touch the frogs and pet the lizards and other reptiles. And after some snooping and careful listening and asking Yoongi, Jungkook bought a Ryan plushie online, one with a little black hoodie and earphones, wrapped it in a bow and set it on his soulmate’s bed for him to discover when he came home.

These things had to be kept on the down-low because Namjoon was too nice and if he found out that Jungkook was 'going through all this trouble for him', he'd refuse to let it go on. And the brunette wanted to keep spoiling him as a means of saying sorry, shouting it with a whisper, and so it was kept hush hush.

After a while, Jungkook realized that he'd stopped going out of his way to do nice things for Namjoon because he felt bad.

He just did it because he liked him.

And at the same time, it occurred to Jungkook that his hyung was among one of the greatest minds in South Korea and had no doubt figured out that it was the younger man doing these things. And he was letting him. He was letting him spoil him. Maybe because there was an off chance he didn't mind...or maybe because...he liked it?

It made the brunette's stomach swoop with butterflies.
Though, after everything was set aside, cut down, sawed up, morphed into a new shape, a new mold to take on, Jungkook's life resumed its normal routine. Work, the gym, dance practice, the studio, home with Namjoon. Sometimes he went over to Seokjin and Taehyung's house and they would eat together and watch movies on the huge TV. Whenever he and Jimin weren't dancing together and they each had a free moment, they met up and got coffee or ramen or drinks or met up to practice some more, just the two of them. Yoongi redirected his voice less and less in the studio, evidence that the music was nearing completion, and with their shared spare time they went out to a bar or a park and talked until two a.m.

It was a lot of the old with a shit ton of welcome new mixed in, and Jungkook was happy. He had his life back and he had a dependable gorgeous soulmate on top of that.

It was just...well.

It wasn't that he wasn't happy, because he truly was glad, utterly and completely.

Jungkook just wondered sometimes. That was it. He wondered sometimes if he'd misinterpreted Namjoon when they'd been in the studio alone together, when he said that he wanted to try. Try to...what? Try to work this out, of course, that's what he'd said...but he'd also said that they should try to be happy, together, if that was what worked best for them. But did happy together mean together together? Or did it imply coexisting? Was he referring to simply being in the same space with peace surrounding them? Because Jungkook was certainly happy. He really was. He had an inkling that Namjoon was happy too, which meant that they were both happy, which meant that they had succeeded in trying to work this out and they were happy together.

But not...together together.

Not happy together like...like boyfriends together.

Just two friends that were soulmates happy together.

And yet.

At times when Jungkook was wide awake, staring at the ceiling in the middle of the night, he couldn't help but wonder. The purring in his soul whenever he was around Namjoon forced him to do so. He wondered over the small things his hyung did: how he complimented Jungkook and how his ears lit up every time he did so, how he'd attempted to bake three times and decimated the kitchen each of those times and claimed he was baking cupcakes for Jungkook, how on some occasions when the maknae went to put Namjoon to bed when the older fell asleep at his desk he saw novels open in twos and threes that were all romance, how their banter turned from friendly to playful to suggestive every once in a while. And just as Jungkook went out of his way for his hyung, his hyung did the same for him, and every time (and it was a lot of times) he was happy, and yet his soul yearned to lean into him, to grasp his hand and intertwine their fingers, to cuddle and snuggle and bury his nose in Namjoon's neck even while he knew he couldn't because his soulmate was enrapturing and fascinating and tender and perfect nonethematter how many flaws he had.

On those nights, Jungkook wondered if Namjoon liked him too. In the way that boyfriends liked boyfriends. That he'd meant for them to be happy and to be together like that while happy.

He couldn't help but want it. Just a little.

Despite this, though. Despite that, the brunette said to himself on another one of those evenings spent on the opposite end of the couch as Namjoon while the two talked, the blonde babbling
excitedly about prose and connotation and fulfillment and Jungkook listening with rapt attention like always...

Despite that, Jungkook was happy.

And truly, what more could he ask for?

"Your sweat is going to get all over the car seats." Namjoon complained, eyeing the definitely sweaty man entering his car warily.

Jungkook threw his gym bag in the backseat, yanked the door closed, and buckled his seat belt. "Sorry, let me work on that. Give me a minute while I focus my energy on magically drying the water dripping down my body in places I didn't even know it could drip. Hold on, it'll only take a second."

The blonde rolled his eyes and peeled off of the curb to navigate through the gym parking lot and get them home. "So sassy. Has anyone every told you that pretty mouth of yours is going to get you in trouble one day?"

"So I've heard." He giggled, uncaringly propping his feet up on the dash and sagging into the seat as the sore tiredness that came from working out began washing over him. "Yoongi hyung tells me every day."

"That your mouth is pretty?"

"No, that it'll get me in trouble." Jungkook didn't comment on the casual flirting. It was something Namjoon did on occasion, and instead of questioning it, the brunette chose to enjoy it. It was his crush instigating, not the other way around (most of the time). Sue him. "And if he did tell me that, I'd slap him, find Jiminie, and watch hyung slap him."

Namjoon bit the inside of his cheek, a nonverbal way of saying that he was trying not to laugh. "Of course. Violence is always the answer. You sound like a well-rounded human being."

His answering grin was lazy. "Thank you, hyung. It's about time someone noticed."

Their drive was mostly silent until they were about halfway to the apartment stopped at a red light. The maknae teetered on the edge of semiconsciousness, his body submitting to the exhaustion lurking in his muscles form the exercise. Namjoon spoke up. "I'm not going to be able to eat dinner with you tonight. I'm going out somewhere."

Jungkook raised an eyebrow. His head lolled to the side so he could see his hyung, whose body language gave nothing away. He decided to give in to his curiosity. "Going where? Got a hot date?"

"I'll never have a 'hot date' with someone for as long as I live." Namjoon said, and Jungkook had to stop himself from countering that with a teasing not if you dated me. "I'm going out with...uh." He floundered until he found the words he wanted to use. "Some people."

"Some people." He repeated. The older man didn't elaborate and only made a smooth left turn at the light that was now green. "Well. That doesn't sound too vague. Should I mentally prepare myself to get a call from you at four in the morning about how some gang tied you up and left you in some warehouse somewhere?"

The blonde snorted, though the corners of his lips turned upwards. "No, you don't need to mentally
prep yourself for that, because it won't happen." Jungkook didn't say anything and continued to
stare. Namjoon sighed and glanced at him, eyes flickering from his own pupils to the road and
back again several times. "Don't worry, Kookie. They're people I know and trust. Nothing bad is
going to happen and if shit hit the fan they would have my back, just like I'd have theirs."

Jungkook chewed his lip for the next few minutes. Quietly, he asked, "Can I come too?"

"With me tonight?" The younger man nodded. "Why would you want to?"

_I wanna spend time with you outside of the apartment and asking you to go anywhere sounds too
similar to a date and I don't want to make you feel weird even though you're my soulmate. _"I...um, I
guess we just...don't see each other outside of home these days? We haven't had a night alone in
two weeks, Joonie hyung."

"The last time we had a night alone you fell asleep on the couch." Namjoon smiled and executed
another turn. "You looked adorable drooling on the pillows."

"I was _tired_. I danced for almost four hours that day." Jungkook pouted. His hyung looked like he
wasn't going to budge, so he pulled out his secret weapon: the eyes. He coupled that with a
pleading tone and went for it. "Please, hyung? I'll stay out of your way. I just want to get out of the
apartment for a night."

Ah, there it was, Namjoon was hesitating. "I don't know..."

"Without you I'll be cold and alone."

The older man laughed at that. "Yeah, right. You'll probably eat dinner and then go to bed right
away. Sleep is more important than moping to you." Namjoon glanced over, saw Jungkook's pout
that was fighting the urge to turn into a grin, and shook his head. "You know what? Why not. It
could be fun."

"I can go with you tonight?"

"Yeah. But you have to get ready fast. I was planning on dropping you off and leaving right away."

"Can we get dinner on the way back?"

"I wish. We probably won't be finished until early in the morning, so you should eat now so your
stomach isn't an empty hole at midnight. Or at one or two in the morning, if we stay that late."

Jungkook raised both eyebrows. Midnight? It was nearly seven thirty now. Whatever was going on
was going to last until midnight or later? Interesting.

In the time it took to blink an eye the two arrived at the apartment, and upon Namjoon's urging,
rushed inside as quickly as their legs would allow. They couldn't slow the elevator ride up (and his
hyung was practically bouncing up and down with impatience at that). Jungkook used the time to
ask the taller man what he should wear, to which Namjoon replied _something edgy._

The moment that the front door was open the two were off. Jungkook shot into his bedroom while
he heard dishes clacking together in the kitchen, no doubt the older man reheating leftovers or
something for them, and went straight to his closet. He changed out of his sweaty gym clothes and
realized he was still sticky, so with a holler of "I'M GETTING IN THE SHOWER HYUNG I'LL
BE TWO MINUTES!" he rinsed himself off. He swiftly dried and yanked on his outfit of choice
(black skinny jeans with a chain to accent, an onyx tank top with a see-through back to show off
his shoulder blades, and finished it with sneakers and a bit of eyeshadow smoking out his eyes
because he hadn't been out on the town in a while, and also, why the fuck not) and traipsed into the kitchen.

"Hyung, is this okay?"

"Yeah, that's fi-" Namjoon's eyes widened once he turned around properly. His jaw slowly dropped. Jungkook just stood there, slightly confused but blushing at being looked at for so long, before the blonde cleared his throat. "You look great. Amazing."

"Thanks." He replied, albeit slightly shyly.

They bustled about the kitchen and shoved food down their faces. There was a purposeful distance that existed between them that hadn't been there previous to them finding out they were soulmates, a good two or three feet that they seldom pushed the boundary of. Namjoon was especially touchy about it, possibly because he was so insistent on not hurting Jungkook accidentally, and therefore moved out of the brunette's way if he got close to the counter he stood by, or needed to reach around him to get something. Jungkook sort of wished he wouldn't, sort of wanted to feel the warmth of his skin through his clothes, sort of wanted to get up in Namjoon's personal space and lock their lips together while cupping his face in his hands.

Sort of. That was the whole *wanting to be Namjoon's boyfriend* thing coming out and rearing it's greedy head.

The distance remained during the ride in the elevator to the car and during the run towards the car. It remained on the drive there, to wherever there was, hidden underneath light chatting and inquiries. Jungkook stopped recognizing buildings about twenty minutes into the ride, and had absolutely no idea where they were headed around the time the clock struck eight fifteen. It should've made him uncomfortable, but with every foreign twist of the steering wheel, his excitement grew.

"...ert." The maknae suggested. He was guessing their final destination with limited success. "We're going to a concert and you and your friends are VIPs or something."

Namjoon granted him an appraising look. "That's the closest you've gotten so far, I'll give you that."

"So it's music-related?" He was given a nod. Jungkook clapped happily. "Fuck yes! The last musical event I went to was Jiminie hyung's final contemporary dance recital and that was years ago."

His hyung chuckled and said no more. The younger man settled on looking out the passenger side window to pass the time instead of pestering the blonde. Thankfully, he didn't have to look long, and soon the car was slowing down and stopping.

Jungkook couldn't have exited the car any faster than if someone was tugging him out themselves. He eagerly slammed the door, walked up to Namjoon (who was locking the vehicle), and...he blinked, surveying the area.

"Hyung, why are there so many cars parked here?"

Namjoon offered nothing save a secretive smile that had blood rushing to the brunette's cheeks. He followed him as the taller man guided them onto the sidewalk, off of it, and down a darkened alley made darker by the lack of lampposts around. Jungkook barely saw two feet in front of him, so he stuck as close as possible without pushing the limits of their habitual distance. They crept onward
After a short while, the maknae's ears perked up once he caught wind of a low thumping noise. Almost like an electronic bass. The sound grew louder as they pressed on, a rumble added to it, and then the sound of many feet against a floor, and more bass. His own soles wanted to thump in time with the beat. He found himself subconsciously bopping his head along with the rhythm in compensation.

Finally, they approached a door at the end of an alley that was dimly lit with two men standing on either side, arms crossed over their chests and neutral expressions on their faces. They looked shady as hell. What had to be kept on such a lockdown that the door protecting it needed guards? Jungkook narrowed his eyes once he saw one of them sizing him up, mentally flipping through moves of self defense and how to most effectively take the guy down if he rushed him.

"Is that you, RM?" One of the men asked gruffly. Surprisingly, Namjoon nodded affirmatively, and Jungkook whipped his head from his hyung to the other men in shock.

"Better do well, man. There's a fuckton of people who came tonight."

Namjoon only smiled. "It's Suga and I. Trust me, we'll be enough to keep the crowd satisfied."

"Keep the crowd satisfied? What the hell? Jungkook shifted closer to his soulmate and murmured, "Namjoon hyung, what."

"Who's he?" The guard whom had first spoken asked, jutting his chin in the brunette's direction.

"He's with me."

"He's with me." The blonde said without missing a beat. "I'd appreciate it if you could keep an eye on him tonight. Make sure nobody gets their hands on him before the show starts."

"No problem. Good luck tonight."

"Thanks."

"Thanks." Namjoon replied easily. He turned to Jungkook (who was all sorts of wide-eyed and confused and maybe a panicking a bit because who on earth wanted to touch him and what show and who was Suga) and said gently in that honest way that he did, "I have to go get ready now, which means you're on your own getting inside. It shouldn't be that hard to push through everyone and stand anywhere you like." His eyes shone in the blackness of the night. "And the Kim brothers here will be watching you since I can't."

"Hyung."

"Hyung. The maknae interrupted, head still reeling. It was late at night. Lots of people. Dark alley. Guards. Which added up to, if he was not mistaken: "Is this an underground concert?"

The older man bit his full lower lip. "Something like that."

The old man bit his full lower lip. "Something like that." He became nervous suddenly, clearing his throat and glancing away. "I really hope you enjoy the show, Kookie."

Jungkook just stared and tried to find any sort of sense in what was happening. Soon enough, though, the guards were shooing Namjoon off (and why did they keep calling him RM?), his lanky figure disappearing once his body weaved around a turn in the alley. The Kim brothers ushered him forward and even opened the door for him, and let him lead them down a long flight of stairs. The bass got louder the deeper he went, pounding with such force he was sure it replaced the beat of his own heart, and the noise and chatter and stomping of feet became louder too.

Within the following moment, Jungkook found himself standing at the bottom of a stairwell and gazing at a crowd that must've been made up of at least several hundred people. It was obvious that the space they were in wasn't meant to support so many, but people were crammed everywhere they could possibly cram themselves into: they sat on top of tables, on top of the ruddy bar, on top
of other people. There was barely an inch of room between any person and trying to get through the crowd close to the stage that looked like it was forever away was near impossible, something the maknae quickly discovered once he shook himself from the shock and moved past the bottom of the stairs. He shoved forward with little success; in an instant, the Kim brothers were in front of him, parting people with their presence alone, and he followed close behind them before the crowd could swallow them up.

Jungkook stole a second to really glance around the place. Dark, low ceiling, a bit of smoke in the air that was a mix of that of a cigarette and that of someone smoking weed, pounding bass and flashing lights. Vibrations pounded through the ground and hummed at his feet, and he took deep breath in and promptly began to feel exhilarated. A smile grew on his face while he passed more people, got closer to the stage. He hadn't ever attended an event like this. This was new. This was intriguing. But the question that rose above the start of the thrill was...

What role did his sweet, handsome soulmate play in all of this?

In the middle of him making a mental note to ask Namjoon if he could bring Hoseok here some other time (his hyung used to dance underground, and though he'd moved on from it, it was evident in his eyes when he danced solo that a part of him missed it), the Kim brothers stopped. Jungkook almost rammed into them.

"RM and Suga are going to be on tonight. Pretty sure you already knew that. They're way popular with the people, so things can get little wild on the floor sometimes." One of the brothers said, his voice barely heard over the bass. "RM told us to keep an eye on you, so if anyone starts getting handsy with you, let us know. Wave at us or something. We'll take care of it."

"Thank you." Jungkook gave a little half bow, the best he could do in the confined space. The Kim brothers nodded to him and made their way back the way they'd come as the crowd parted once more. By the grace of god, he heard one of them mumble underneath their breath, "Who knew RM would get himself a boyfriend?"

Heat rose to warm his cheeks. The brunette pretended that he hadn't eavesdropped and instead turned towards the stage. He was so close that he could almost reach out and touch it, if he stretched his arm as far as it could stretch. He smiled again. Whatever this was, it was going to be fucking fun.

A few more minutes went by in which nothing crazy happened. Some girl mistook him for her ex and shouted at him for a good thirty seconds before realizing that she'd made a mistake. A drunk guy spilled something five people over. The stage lights dimmed.

The...the stage lights dimmed! Jungkook perked up instantaneously. The bass slowed then stopped and the air was filled with the sound of several hundred people whopping and hollering their anticipation. The maknae joined them, clapping and shouting. Abruptly every light in the room went black, and though it took a minute, the crowd quieted. Jungkook just breathed while his eyes gazed around sightlessly. Tension. Excitement. Thrill.

Suddenly, a repeated beeping noise blared from the speakers, and the stage lit up red. The crowd cheered. Jungkook didn't know why; that is, until two figures made their way onto the stage, an equal distance apart, one much taller than the other, and the intro to the song played. Then the lights came up, the people yelled their encouragement, and Namjoon, his Namjoon, dressed in black attire with a bandanna tied around his forehead, offered up a small wave, wink, and then brought the mic to his mouth.

"Whatever you do, I will kill for. Whatever I do I'll be real for." His deep voice snarled, and
Jungkook stared with his mouth hanging open. *Oh my god.* "Look at me straight, this right here is *beast mode,* guys smoke when girls cheat, I smoke beat this a *beat smoke. Who the man told you crazy? Who the fella told you crazy? I'm better than ya lazy, rather than those who do hip hop through a keyboard, I live a hundred times harder, they look at rap like it's general, *too many generals,* uncertain, ambiguous all of them, have some manners..."

Namjoon continued to spit pure fire at rapid speed, jutting his chin, furrowing his eyebrows, completely in his element. He went to the edge of the stage and some of the crowd would rap with him, and he'd point the mic their way. Jungkook was so lost in looking at him, in his own genuine awe that *holy shit that was his soulmate and his soulmate was a fucking badass,* that he'd forgotten the other figure on stage. He finally looked at them once the mic left Namjoon's mouth and he fell silent, his own intelligent orbs fixated on whomever the figure was.

The lights focused in, and...

"*Hyung!/?*" The brunette squawked, eyes now as wide as saucers. Nobody heard him or paid him any mind, not like he'd expected them to, but Min Yoongi himself stood upon the stage dressed similarly to Namjoon and heard him, and sent him a signature Min Yoongi smirk before launching into his own verse.

"Suga aka Agust D, my second name-" His gritty voice growled. "When I walk in the streets, they whisper my name, from Daegu to Apgujeong, my beats that have been laid..."

He went on and on, Namjoon whooping every now and then, the crowd whooping with him and the dynamics of everything increasing steadily. Everyone (Jungkook included) got really loud once Yoongi rapped an entire two stanzas faster than the word fast itself, so slick with words that bit and tore and it was *great.* The entire building knew the end of it and the walls shook with the resulting "CHOP CHOP CHOP!"

Jungkook was still in shock over the fact that his hyungs were up there on stage, rapping like they were made to do it, revving up the crowd and owning their lyrics. He jumped and jived when ever things got little nuts, swayed and bopped his head to the beat, trying to catch Namjoon's eye the whole time.

Once he did, it happened to be at the exact right moment, because Namjoon sent him a wild, energy-charged grin and it left the maknae so breathless that he almost missed it when he started rapping. "*Bitch I'm a monster, I rap with a prospect, yeah, I rap with a mindset, I'm a suspect, sucker where ya rhymes at, where ya lines at, I'm the king, I'm the god, so where my emperors at? I parachute on my Neverland, I'm a Peter Pan so this will never end.*" He kneeled and yelled out, "You know when I ride on my G5 you sit first class and satisfy and I KEEP GIGGLING!"

It hit Jungkook that he hadn't understood a single word of what he'd said, because he'd just rapped fully and confidently in English which made very little sense, and then something clicked: Namjoon was bilingual. Namjoon was the one who'd written the English words in *Save Me.*

*I'm so proud of him.* Jungkook cupped his hands over his mouth and screamed along with the crowd, high off of the vibe and rap and underground and Namjoon. *That's my soulmate up there.* That's my soulmate.

Too soon, they were rapping their final songs and with a ferocious "*Yah!*" Yoongi brought everything to a close. The crowd roared to drown the quiet that usually accompanies a final word, and Namjoon and Yoongi stepped forward bowing and smiling. Everyone was going utterly bonkers, throwing things, hooting, stomping their feet. The energy was tangible in the air.
"Thank you all for coming tonight!" Namjoon called through his mic. Everyone kept screaming. "My name is Rap Monster, and this is Suga. We hope you had an amazing time tonight like we did. There's nothing that we enjoy more than performing for you. This crowd has been awesome." His handsome face smiled wide and his dimples were put on display. "We'll be back again in two weeks! Until next time-"

Yoongi lifted his mic and they said in unison, "We love you!"

They waved and slowly backed off the stage while the crowd saw them off. Jungkook stood rather close to the stage, so when everyone decided that it was time to pack up and leave, he was at the very back of the long wait that it would be to even get to the entrance. He was so high that he hardly thought it mattered, he could wait there for ages if he had to, but the Kim brothers had other ideas and were soon ushering him off to the side and behind a curtain to backstage. They hurried him along, so he wasn't able to see much, and led him to an entryway in the back, where they instructed him to wait. He could barely question why when they'd disappeared and two more familiar faces replaced theirs.

"Hyungs! Joonie! Yoongi!" Jungkook's voice was almost gone due him screaming himself hoarse throughout the night. He didn't care, all he cared about was that night and rapping and how and when and why. He spoke swiftly, words littered with cracks, squeaks, and jitters. "That was so fucking cool! Yoongi hyung, I didn't know you could rap that fast, what the hell, is that even humanly possible? Did you write the lyrics yourself? Of course you did, what kind of question is that. Does Jimin know?"

"Jimin doesn't know, no." Yoongi answered. His words were stern, but his face fought a gummy smile. "I love him to bits, but this is something I chose to keep for myself. His private way of letting loose and being alone is through dance and I rap. Secretly." He wagged a pale finger in Jungkook's face. "So don't tell him, alright? Give hyung this one chance to be young and free."

"I won't tell him, I won't tell him-" The brunette turned his eyes to his soulmate, who somehow managed to look cute in his edgy rapper getup, and laughed. "Joonie, you were spectacular, you sounded so passionate, and I didn't know you spoke English! You were the one who wrote the English in Save Me." No affirmation was asked, but Namjoon nodded his head with a chuckle anyway. "I knew it! Yoongi hyung's English is shit-" Said hyung whapped him on the arm. He didn't feel it. "Can you say something else to me in English? God, that's so fucking cool, you're so fucking smart."

His soulmate's pupils were soft. He merely looked at Jungkook for a moment before he said, in his deep tone, "I think you're beautiful."

The brunet blinked. How many syllables was that last word? "What did you say?"

Namjoon bit his lip, considering. He shook his head. "Nothing. It was about how loud the crowd was." He grinned at Jungkook's pout. "I'll teach you some English another time, yeah? We should get going. I like to leave right away so I can beat the traffic."

Yoongi and his fellow underground rapper gave one another a tight side hug; then Yoongi was snagging a towel and wiping the sweat off his neck, and throwing a water bottle to Namjoon, and his soulmate was leading the way out the door.

Cold air hit Jungkook's face. Just then, he realized that he was sweating too, and the blonde read his mind and passed him the water bottle once he'd taken a drink. The brunette didn't know the way to the car, especially from the rear of the establishment, so he let his hyung go in front of him while he trailed behind. Jungkook couldn't stop giggling, still weirdly high.
"Rap Monster?"

"It was that or Strawberry Shortcake."

"Bullshit."

"You know me so well. I just like the way the words sound together. It's got the amount of...I don't know, toughness and growl I always wanted my stage name to have." Namjoon shook his head, smiling. "Did you have fun?"

"Have fun?" Fun was an understatement. "Hyung I died and went to underground heaven. It was fucking amazing. I had a great time." He jogged up until he was walking beside his soulmate, maintaining their purposeful distance. "Thanks for letting me come along. I never thought you'd do something like this."

"Why, because I'm not cool enough?"

"No, because you're so soft and squishy. Like a marshmallow." Jungkook threw his head back and really laughed, good and hard, uncaring about the volume. "Oh my god, I can call you Marshmallowmon. Rapmallow. Mallowmon." He keeled over and slapped his own knee, still cackling. "Does this mean that I can call you Monie now? Monie hyung?"

Namjoon laughed too. "Monie hyung, yes. But I swear to god I'll disown you if you start calling me Marshmallowmon, baby."

At the pet name, Jungkook's heart leaped, and with it, he disregarded the careful space kept between he and his soulmate, leaping at him along with his heart. Namjoon stumbled a few steps while the maknae held on tight. He was warm, so warm, he hadn't felt this warmth for a long time, and he burrowed his head into his soulmates chest as his own soul unraveled itself from its stressed, tight ball and hummed its contentedness.

It took a second before the blonde returned his embrace, far slower and with far more care. Jungkook sighed happily, pressed closer, as close as he could possibly get, close enough that he could smell the mouthwatering musk that layered his hyungs skin. He must've pushed the boundaries and gotten a bit too close, for a dull pain bloomed along both of his arms. Bruises.

He lacked panic and only felt relief.

"Jungkookie, I, I just-" Namjoon sounded out of breath. He began to pull away. Jungkook refused to let him go.

"I like this." He murmured into Namjoon's shirt. "Hmm. I feel so happy right now, Joonie. So fucking happy."

"...like, super happy?"

"Mmm hmm."

Namjoon sighed. The brunette's hair shifted with the pressure of his exhale. "That would be our bond, baby."

"Eh? I'm bonded to you, of course I'm happy." Jungkook said without properly thinking.

"I, no, uh-" He heard it when the taller man swallowed to steady himself. "Soulmates can feel their partner's emotions when they're really strong. So you feel happy because...because I'm really
The maknae giggled. He didn't mind the high, not one bit. If these were the exact emotions Namjoon was experiencing, that only made him feel like they were more connected. He lifted his head to gaze into his soulmate's dark eyes with a lazy smile on his lips. "Good. You deserve all the happiness, Joonie. All of it. Every ounce." He giggled again. "And all of the marshmallows. You deserve all of those, too."

"Aish." The word was without bite.

They parted after another few minutes, cheeks glowing, pupils shining in the moonlight. Jungkook subconsciously rubbed at his new bruises, and when he did so Namjoon looked immensely guilty and tried to apologize, but he shushed him and the two carried on, walking closer than they should, the entire way to the car.

Jungkook's stomach fluttered, spun, and dipped the entire ride home.

And that.

That was when the ache started.

"Jungkook-ah."

The maknae glanced up from his spot on the bed, one arm propping up his head, the other propping his phone in front of his line of vision. Namjoon was standing in his doorway, handsome as ever with his hands in his jean pockets and dimples on display. He smiled. "Hey, hyung. What's up?"

"I was thinking..." The taller man bit his lip, gaze not leaving his own. "I was wondering if you'd ever thought about us having sex."

Immediately blood rushed to Jungkook's face at the words as his eyes widened. He swallowed hard, phone suddenly forgotten, and debated over whether he should answer honestly or not. Of course he'd thought about it: he'd thought about it while he was in the shower, he'd thought about it when he was home alone, he thought about it at work when he wasn't working on a client, and dare he admit that he'd thought about it more and more often ever since they'd become soulmates. Thought about Namjoon kissing him, about pressing him up against a wall, about fucking on the couch or kitchen counter or dance studio floor where they could see themselves in all those mirrors or-

"Um." Jungkook cleared his throat so his voice wouldn't crack. "I...why would you want to know?"

Namjoon raised an eyebrow. Voice a bit lower, he responded, "I wanted to know if we were on the same page."

And holy shit if the brunette wasn't blushing like there was no tomorrow he was choking with shock on top of that. He felt his whole body heat up underneath the blonde's dark pupils. "I-If we were on the same page? What the hell are you talking about?"

His lanky hyung shrugged, slowly ambling his way inside. "I've been thinking about you more and more these days." His eyes wandered down Jungkook's figure, something that made the maknae want to preen and at the same time shy away. "Your lips. Your collarbones. Your waist." The final phrase was a soft, hungry snarl. "Your ass."
Jungkook sputtered, unable to respond to that. Because what the actual fuck.

Namjoon's chuckle was deep and velvety. "Maybe I should've been more obvious. You look shocked."

The brunette stared at the older man in bewilderment. "Yeah, you could say that."

Was he dreaming? He must be. Namjoon would never look at him like that in real life, like the younger man was something he desired, something he lusted after, something he wanted. That was the kind of fire in his hyung's eyes right now, and by god, Jungkook wished for it to consume him and burn him up until he turned into embers floating listlessly in the air.

Namjoon...Namjoon was looking at him in the way that Jungkook secretly wanted him to.

"Kook-ah."

"Yeah?"

The blonde drew closer, ever closer, and the maknae found himself backing up until the headboard prevented him from moving any further. Namjoon still had a ways to go, and crawled onto the bed until he and Jungkook were only a foot and half apart from each other. Jungkook's breath was speeding up, leaving in silent gasps, and he swallowed again. Namjoon inched forward and he closed his eyes.

Nothing happened. Instead a low voice right by his ear uttered, "You want me, don't you?"

He didn't reply. A warm hand rested on his knee, and at the pace of a snail, began traveling up his leg. Jungkook shuddered, embarrassed over how much a such a small action started to rile him up, but then Namjoon's teeth bit down on his earlobe and his mind abruptly went blank.

"C'mon, gorgeous." The blonde murmured. His hand was on the inside of the younger man's thigh and fuck, when had his pants gotten so tight? "It's okay to tell me. I won't laugh. I want you too."

Namjoon's mouth moved to begin assaulting his neck, and Jungkook nearly bit his tongue off holding in the whine that wracked his lungs. He slapped a hand over his mouth to keep in the louder noise that followed once his hyung found a certain patch of skin and started sucking.

"Let me hear you." The older man said, pulling off so he could continue mapping the brunette's throat with his lips. Jungkook tried his best to remain quiet, to keep it in, but he was finished the second that wretched hand found the center of his legs and lightly squeezed.

His entire body arched up, keening at the pleasure that shocked and sizzled in his bones, and a broken moan finally escaped him. Oh fuck. Oh fuck, but he hadn't felt something like that in a while. The hand squeezed again with bit more force, and Jungkook grabbed a fistful of Namjoon's hair and instinctively rolled his hips upward. "F-Fuck, hyung."

"What? You didn't like that?" Namjoon retracted his arm, though remained attached to his neck. The loss of contact made the maknae shake his head frantically and whimper. "So you didn't, hmm? That's a shame-"

"No, I liked it, I-" Just then the producer started pressing kisses to the underside of his jaw and shit, shit, his hips bucked up again. "I loved it. Please-" The hardness in the front of his pants met with solid friction. "Mmmph, please t-touch me again."

"Not when you're humping my leg like a bad boy." Namjoon guided took both of his wrists in one
of his own hands and held them above the younger's head. Jungkook knew he could easily break
his hold, but found that idea largely unappealing. Something about the knowledge that Namjoon
had partial control over him was...not terrible. "And I don't give bad boys rewards."

The brunette shook his head once more, fiercer this time, his hips reluctantly slowing. "I'm good,
I'll be a good boy. Please touch me, h-hyung."

Namjoon smiled his usual kind smile, though Jungkook could barely focus on the cuteness of it
while his mouth was agape and his fingers were twitching and that lovely pressure returned. Heat
pooled in the lower region of his stomach when Namjoon's palm ground downwards onto his bulge
and he almost suffocated due to the unsteadiness of his breathing. Everything was too good, he was
dizzy, his soulmate wanted him and nothing had ever felt better in his entire life-

"You're so pretty, Jungkookie." The praise had his hips going a bit faster, breath coming with
increased haste. "So fucking pretty. You put every other boy in South Korea to shame. You're
amazing."

Jungkook whimpered, head spinning at his soulmate's words. He was getting close. He didn't care
that it hadn't been that long and he was already approaching his climax. All that mattered was that
he got there. "Hyung, h-hyung, touch me."

"I am touching you, gorgeous."

"N-No, unzip my pants and-" Another moan vibrated through him. "And t-t-touch me there."

"I'd love to, Kook-ah, believe me, I would." Namjoon's smile was pure seduction. "But I think that
you can come from this alone."

A sassier part of him that never died or quieted no matter what pointed out that he hadn't come in
his pants since he was nineteen, a little over four years ago, and that had been while he was
grinding up against someone who was doing more than just kissing his neck and palming him, and
thus, doing so now was nothing short of insanity. But looking at his soulmate, into his eyes that
crackled with power and want, he thought he just might do it.

"N-Namjoon hyung..." Jungkook's eyelids fought to close as the heat pooled lower and lower and
increased in intensity. His head lolled to the side. "I'm almost...there..."

"Such a good boy." The words were snarled and oh hell that hand sped up and touched him just
right and Namjoon wanted him and then he was, he was-

"Fuck!" The maknae gasped, his pupils flying open. His fists were curled tightly into the sheets and
his heavy breathing rang loudly inside his small guest room. It was dark, pitch black outside with a
hint of moonlight seeping in through the blinds, and he was alone.

Jungkook shifted to his left and inhaled sharply. Alone with a raging hard-on, then. Great.

He realized just then that he was breathing quite loudly, immediately shutting his mouth and
perking up his ears. He listed for a good moment or two. There were no odd sounds from the
hallway or the bedroom over, so Namjoon hadn't woken up and heard him. Thank god. He'd never
be able to live down the embarrassment.

Starkly aware of his, ahem, situation down under, Jungkook scrubbed his hot face with his hands,
blocking out the faint memories he'd had of the dream. How warm Namjoon felt against him. How warm Namjoon felt against him. How he'd praised him. How he'd wanted him, just like the brunette wanted him. His head started to fill
with images, and he mentally batted them away the best that he could.
He could give you that. His head whispered to him. Or was that their soulmate bond? He could give you all of that and more.

Jungkook gritted his teeth against frustrated sob. No he fucking can't because if he touches me I'll bruise.

That was the one thing that solidified his dream into just that, a dream: it was that wherever Namjoon touched him his skin hadn't bruised. That wasn't real. That was fake. It was all fake, the whole thing. The praise, Namjoon wanting him, every single one of those sweet words he'd said dripping from his lips like chocolate, his lustful gaze, each thing was not real and the only fucking thing that was real was his fucking boner.

Damn it all.

He tried to return to sleep, to will away his arousal. He couldn't though, because every time he closed his eyes he saw Namjoon's handsome face teasing him, remembered the feeling of his hands on him, and it drove him crazy enough to keep him hard and awake.

Disgruntled and frustrated with himself, Jungkook hauled himself out of bed and went into his tiny bathroom. The noise was going to be loud and would probably wake up Namjoon anyway, but this solution was better than getting no sleep. He told himself he'd apologize in the morning and cranked the shower on. He also told himself that the moment he stepped in, he'd turn the water from lukewarm to cold. It didn't end up happening. He apologized to Namjoon, sure, but the water temperature got hotter instead of colder, and the night ended with him pressing his back against the tiled shower wall, biting into his knuckles to keep in the sounds he made as he came, the name of his soulmate mouthing silently by his lips while he shuddered through the aftershocks.

Jungkook cleaned himself off, trembling all the while, ignoring the three tears that managed to escape him and mix in with the rest of the rushing water. The water was shut off, and new pajamas were put on. One was supposed to feel better after climaxing; the brunette felt tired and lonely and pathetic. He turned each light off, went to his bed, pulled the covers up to his chin and had to wait another hour before his messy mind would let him fall asleep.

"I can make it better-"

"Yeah, yeah, we know." Taehyung waved a hand around in the air dismissively while half of his straw remained in his mouth. "And you can also skate backwards, hold a handstand for forty minutes, train a penguin to fly, and swim to America."

Jungkook rolled his eyes. "I'm just saying-"

"The consistency isn't right, it'll get too watery because they added in too many ice cubes, this isn't the right amount of whipped cream." Jimin sipped his coffee innocently. "Anything else I'm missing?"

"If hanging out with you two old men means that you're gonna gang up on me, I don't know if we should do this anymore. You might start whipping out your canes and using them to abuse small children and I don't wanna stand in your way of having that kind of fun, you know? Or you might challenge each other to walker races, and I can't participate in this seeing as I'm young and vivacious, so I'll have to leave anyway to give you both a fighting chance."

Apparently his age served as permission enough for Jimin to beat the shit out of him if he expressed his opinion whatsoever, for in the next instance he was being slapped rather harshly on
the arm by an irked mochi, and the palm was soon followed by a fist. Jungkook caught Jimin's hand on his third jab and flung it in the opposite direction (not with a much force as he could use, of course. If he did the older man would fly out of his seat). They made incriminating noises at one another for another second before Taehyung called their play fighting to a halt.

"Watching this lovely rendition of MMA fighting is fabulously entertaining, trust me-" It was his turn to get jabbed by Jimin. He tutted and returned the favor. "But this meeting of wise minds was called for a reason. So!" He clapped his hands. "Let's get this shit started. Our men are picking us up soon and we need to get down to business before they get here."

"We could just run in the other direction and hide until they found us." Jungkook suggested, sipping his tea.

Jimin slowly nodded in agreement. "That's a good plan. Yoongi hyung can't run for long without getting tired."

"Namjoonie hyung can't run, period." The brunette chuckled lightly at the mental image of his soulmate flailing about gracelessly with his lanky limbs. His best friend giggled as well, no doubt able to picture it too.

Taehyung pouted. "But neither of your soulmates would kill you if you did that. Running from Seokjinie when he wants to catch you is like signing up for death by starvation."

"I'd cook for you." Jungkook offered, and his hyung beamed happily.

"Seriously, though." Jimin pulled out his phone, checked the time, and returned it to his pocket. "Let's say what we need to say and gossip like the little shits we know we are and are proud to be. We're not going to get another opportunity like this for a while with each of our schedules piling up." His platinum locks bobbed when he nodded to the youngest of the group, hair shining in the afternoon sun. "What's up, Kook? You were the one who called us here. Is something going on?"

With both pairs of eyes on him, the discomfort of being looked at too long nagged at his brain, and Jungkook fidgeted. There were a lot of things he wanted to talk about: did Jimin know Yoongi had an underground persona and still rapped because Jimin had a knack for knowing things he shouldn't know, how was Seokjin doing since they hadn't seen one another in a while, did Taehyung want to see him, Jimin, and Hoseok dance at their competition whose date was closing in...there was one thing, though, one thing he was curious about. It was a delicate subject, so it would have to be brought up lightly, yet he needed to know.

Their patient silence unnerved him, and, yanking his eyes from the table, he blurted out, "Is it possible for soulmates to have sex?"

He didn't know what he was expecting; maybe for them to at once begin teasing him, or brush him off, or squawk in disbelief. Whatever it was, he certainly hadn't expected Taehyung to lounge in his seat and give a wise nod. "Ah, the age old question we've all asked ourselves at one time or another. To have sex, or to not have sex."

Jimin's gaze was curious and steady. Cat-like, almost. "Where did that come from, Jungkook-ah? It seems a bit out of the blue." Jungkook bit his lip and tried to think of an answer more suitable than 'I've been having wet dreams about my soulmate lately and I was just wondering if that was our bond trying to tell me something or if I'm acting stupidly hormonal because I have a massive crush on him.' His pondering must've lasted too long, for Jimin sat up and his pupils narrowed. "Is Namjoon pressuring you into something you're not ready for?"
"What?" The brunette asked in shock. "No, hyung, he's not pressuring me. He never has."

"Did he ask you about the sex situation at all when you two got together?" The redhead questioned, taking a sip from his beverage. "Like, did you two talk about anything?"

"I, well, we've talked about stuff, um, not sex-"

Taehyung snorted. "That's just you two being bad boyfriends to each other. You gotta talk with him and work something out, Kook, the key to every relationship is communication."

No way in hell am I communicating to Namjoon that I come to the image of him. No way in actual hell. Jungkook chewed his straw, opened his mouth to respond, and paused once he noted an error. "Wait, did you just say we were being bad boyfriends?"

"Sorry, that sounds harsh as fuck, I-"

"It's fine, it's fine. We're just...we're not dating."

Both shorter men stared at him for a solid thirty seconds. Finally Taehyung broke the quiet with two raised eyebrow and a "You and Namjoon hyung aren't together?"

Jungkook's mind whizzed as he tried to put his current relationship with his hyung into words. "We're not together but we're also..." Casually flirting with each other? Not seeing other people and aren't looking to? Spending most of our days with one another like some fucking married couple? "...not together."

Now the mochi's eyebrows were the ones to lift. "So if you're not together...why are you asking about sex?"

Oh, no reason in particular. He was only having these reoccurring dreams once every two or three days that featured Namjoon and him fucking and it was driving him up the damn wall with craziness because his head was starting to confuse the dreams with reality and he felt something in his soul sag with disappointment the moment he woke up and remembered that none of it was real, none of it actually happened, and he was so selfish because he wanted it to be real so badly. He wasn't content with being Namjoon hyung's friend, he wanted to kiss him, feel what it was like to be the subject of his stunning smile every day of every week, he wanted to go on date with him and listen to him babble about the stars or plants or whatever and tell him that his brain was beautiful and his passion was beautiful and every lyric he wrote was beautiful and he was beautiful and by god he wanted Namjoon to want him too and fuck he was so mentally and emotionally and sexually frustrated and maybe if he could convince himself that this wasn't possible, that his dreams truly couldn't be made into reality, then maybe he could calm down and move on with his life and the hot ache inside him would finally leave.

Jimin and Taehyung gaped at him. Jungkook realized he'd spoken each of his thoughts out loud and promptly shut his mouth.

"Jesus, Kook." The redhead breathed, tilting his head to the side with concern. "How long has this been going on?"

"The wet dreams thing or the having a crush on him thing?"

"Both."

"The dreams started a month ago." Jungkook sighed tiredly. "I thought they would go away. Thought I could take care of it. That's why I didn't bring it up sooner. And...um...I've always been
attracted to him but I...I didn't start thinking of him as my crush-" Embarrassed, he spit out the rest of his sentence at the speed of lightning. "I didn't think about wanting to be his boyfriend until we moved back in together and I realized that's he's an amazing person."

The three men at the table mediated on this for a moment. Jimin suddenly said, "You know, I thought you two were dating too and were just keeping it a secret or something."

Jungkook did nothing save quirk his eyebrow slightly with puzzlement.

"Like maybe Namjoon hyung has only been with girls before and you were his first boyfriend and he was struggling with coming out sexually or something so you were keeping your relationship hush hush." He continued, not speaking to Jungkook or Taehyung, but into the warm air of the afternoon. "Or neither of you were ready to say that you were official, because I get that. Being in a relationship with your soulmate is both heaven and hell and it takes effort and time and getting used to so you can see if either of you can even bear it. Or maybe you wanted to surprise us or something, wanted to keep us guessing or assuming for the fun of it, or maybe you didn't want it to be a big announcement thing and wanted it to be an unspoken establishment." He met eyes with his younger best friend. "And on the rare chance that you two weren't dating yet, I never thought it would be due to neither of you confessing to each other. Because that, Jungkook, that's just some of the stupidest shit I've ever heard."

"Hyung, I can't confess to him." The maknae had had this argument with himself a thousand times, and this time, whilst he bickered with someone besides his own reflection, the ending conclusion would be no different.

"Why?"

"I like him but that doesn't mean he likes me. Joonie hyung is so fucking nice and I know him, he'd want to make me happy, even if it meant he was unhappy, and he'd agree to dating me and then he'd be miserable."

"Oh my god, Jungkookie." Taehyung said, his tone exasperated. "Namjoon fucking adores you."

"Yeah, we're friends-"

"He literally looks at you like you're the most precious thing on the planet." The redhead went on. "Jiminnie told me that whenever he and Namjoon hang out, Namjoon always talks about something quirky you did that day and how cute he thinks you are. You even told me he flirts with you and says your voice is gorgeous and compliments your cooking and Christ, that clumsy-ass man has a crush on you, you pabo."

"But hyung...hyung, what if he only likes me because of our soulmate thing?"

"Jungkook, you know that not all soulmates stay with one another or even like each other." Jimin pointed out. "Namjoon hyung likes you. A lot, and not just because you're his soulmate. That's a bonus."

The brunette's head spun and his fingers clenched while he contemplated the idea, the mere prospect of Namjoon liking him back, of having a crush on him, and his soul whooped and eagerness rushed through his veins and yeah, if that was real, he supposed that it wouldn't be too bad. He couldn't know for sure, not unless Namjoon told him himself, but...

A bold thought flitted through his mind. Why not make a move and give it a try? Maybe he wants me like I want him. Only one way to find out.
Taehyung yawned and stretched for a long five seconds. "Glad that's cleared up. If you're still hung up on the sex thing, you can always do what Seokjin and I do."

"Have sex with other people? No thank you, hyung, I'll pass." The mere idea of intercourse with anyone but Namjoon made him feel a bit ill. Actually a lot ill. "How come you and Seokjin hyung didn't try to fuck at the start? Why did you turn to other people right away instead of at least attempting?"

The redhead thought about this for a moment. He shrugged his shoulders delicately and said, "I'm not careful enough. If Seokjin was the one bruising me, there's a possibility that we could handle it, but I'd get too excited. I wouldn't be slow and gentle like he would. I'd forget that I could hurt him and..." He trailed off, not completing his sentence. Jungkook understood without him needing to carry on.

"I didn't have sex dreams about my soulmate though." The platinum-haired man added with a smile as he finished his drink.

"Me either." Taehyung snickered. Jungkook would've hit him if he could reach that far. "Shit, Kook, you must be really attracted to him."

"I can't control my thoughts when I'm asleep, hyung-"

"Yah, Jimin-ah!" A familiar gritty voice called out. Each man turned in their chair to see Yoongi, Namjoon, and Seokjin a short distance away, close enough to be heard if one of them shouted (like Yoongi had) but not close enough to be heard if they spoke at a normal volume. Namjoon was twirling his car keys in his fingers, and led the two men beside him in raising their available hands to wave at their soulmates.

Taehyung made a happy noise from somewhere in his throat. At the sight of his soulmate, Jungkook nearly had to stop himself from doing the same while he smiled and returned the wave. "Looks like our men are here to pick us up! Damn, they look good, don't they?"

"They always look good." Jimin rested his chin on his palm and waved too, words uncharacteristically dreamy.

"Forget good." Jungkook eyed Namjoon's full lips, long legs, and dimples that he could spot from where he sat. "They look fucking amazing."

"We should stop getting together to gossip and we should just fanboy over our men." The redhead put in, his friends murmuring their agreement.

There was general quiet as their soulmate approached them, nothing save wordless yet heartfelt farewells that were passed between eyes and Jungkook whispering his gratitude to his hyungs for talking with him. The two groups had almost met when Taehyung said, "Hey, Kook-ah, wouldn't it be interesting if Namjoon hyung knew you were having wet dreams about him?"

Jungkook tensed as horror overtook him.

"I wonder what he would say. What kind of face he would make-"

"Hyung don't you fucking dare I will lose all of my respect for you faster than B-Free lost his fanbase three years ago-" Jungkook hissed menacingly, jumping out of his chair to intercept the redhead before he could reach the other group. Jimin started laughing.

"I'm surprised you haven't woken him up with the noise you must make." Taehyung teased good-
naturally, and the brunette was gonna kill him if he took it there, he swore. "Like..." The redhead breathed in deeply and Jungkook wasn't fast enough to cover his mouth before he let out an obscenely loud moan. "Oh Namjoon. Oh my god hyung."

Namjoon and Seokjin hesitated, obviously confused, while Yoongi continued on unfazed to meet with a cackling Jimin and equally hysterical Taehyung, the latter of which was running about in an effort to evade the brunette's grabbing hands. Jungkook felt hot flush gathering in his cheeks and neck and cursed his friend ten times over.

Everyone managed to settle down once Jungkook inevitably caught his hyung and wrestled him to the ground. He held him there and tickled him mercilessly until Taehyung was almost screeching with laughter mixed with an apology and then, and only then, did he let up. The maknae brushed himself off and stuck his tongue out at Jimin, who was still giggling.

"Do I want to know what that was about?" Yoongi crossed his arms over his chest, expression usual vaguely disinterested. "Or will it scar me for life?"

"It'll scar you for life, hyung." The mochi got a grip on himself and stood up. He shot Yoongi a bright smile, and the older man's bored look immediately softened around its edges. "We should really be getting home. I have that dancing gig early in the morning and I wanna have enough time after dinner to watch Steel Rain."

"See you at practice then?" Jungkook glanced at his hyung long enough to see him nod once before he was turning and he was the victim of the presence that was Kim Namjoon. "Hi, Joonie hyung."

"Hey, Kookie." Namjoon grinned. His blonde hair shone in the sun. "Sorry we kept you waiting so long. Seokjin hyung's car broke down and Yoon and I had to pull over and help him fix it."

"I helped fix it." Yoongi corrected while Seokjin blew Jungkook a kiss. "You spilled oil everywhere."

Namjoon didn't say anything. He scuffed the ground with his foot and mumbled, "I tried to help."

He's adorable. The brunette's heart swelled. He must've had a particular look on his face, because Tae shot him a wink, and Jimin sent him a particular look in return. He ignored them (and low key loved them with everything in him).

"Don't worry about it, Namjoonie hyung." Taehyung announced with his signature boxy grin. "It gave us enough time to gossip and we never have time for that any more." He faced Seokjin, whose appearance was impeccable and strongly motherly. "Ready to go? There's a shop that you wanted to check out downtown that closes soon, right?"

"There is indeed." The oldest of the group confirmed. "It was great seeing you all. Thanks again for helping me with my car, Namjoon-ah and Yoongi-ah."

"No problem, hyung." Yoongi answered for a sheepish Namjoon. He jutted his chin in the direction he'd come from and said, "Let's go, gorgeous. I'll see you at the studio tomorrow sometime, yeah, Kookie?"

"Yeah." Jungkook replied. He watched from his soulmate's side (or, as close as he could get to his soulmate's side while they retained their appropriate distance apart) as his friends left one by one, and then he was alone with Namjoon and it was time for them to go themselves.

And so they went, the brunette noticing how the blonde shot him sideways glances every now and then, and with his heart thumping loudly in his chest, offered him a fond smile and began to
mentally write out his confession speech.

Because good god, he had a crush on Kim Namjoon, and he wanted the older man to be his.

It was a regular morning. Everything about it was normal lacking a single thing out of place. The hour that Jungkook was awake at was regular, the amount of sun shining through their windows and onto the living room floor was regular, even the meal that he was currently eating was regular: eggs sunny-side up with a small portion of toast on the side.

Nothing was unusual.

Except his semi-hardness, of course.

Jungkook shuffled in his seat uncomfortably, clenched his fingers around his toast to the point where he almost crunched it, and gritted his teeth. He'd woken up about twenty minutes ago from another dream (one that was highly detailed) and wished to do nothing more than carry on with the rest of his day and pretend that the hell that was going on wasn't going on and that his erection would die down with time. It was partially working, so long as he kept his mind from straying to Namjoon (which was difficult, but he was managing) and a cold shower was next on his list of things to do before his day officially started. His hyung would never know.

"Hyung isn't even up. The brunette comforted himself with that, continuing to munch away at his breakfast. Let's see, what was there to do today...drop by Sunbeam, firstly, he'd promised Tae he'd recount the inventory to be one hundred percent sure they weren't without any products...he would have some free time then, maybe he'd hit up the gym and swim a little...then to the studio to meet up with Yoongi, then-

"Jungkook-ah."

Jungkook nearly toppled over he was startled so badly. A deep voice had cut through the quiet peace of the morning and given him a fright. Which meant...shit. Namjoon was awake.

"Morning, hyung." The maknae said casually without turning around. Remain calm. Think unsexy thoughts.

The blonde didn't say anything more. Jungkook thought...well, he didn't know what to think, honestly, so he kept his head down and moved his food around the plate and-

"Jungkook-ah, I don't think that I can do this any more."

He froze. Shock and confusion traveled through his system, and...well. Now his boner had died. So that was a positive. Slowly, he spun in his seat to see his soulmate leaning against the wall where the hallway met the kitchen with an unreadable expression adorning his features. His eyes were steady on his own.

Clearing his throat, Jungkook started (and tried to keep his tone anything but crestfallen), "Okay. Okay. I just need a day or two so I can contact Jimin hyung and gather up my stuff. Some of it's gotten mixed up with your belongings, I think. After that I-" He had to clear his throat again when emotion rose in his chest. So silly. So silly to think Namjoon would want him to stay. That Namjoon would want him. Such silliness. "I'll be gone."

Surprisingly the blonde's eyes widened imperceptibly. "Wait! Wait no, that's...that's not what I meant."
Oh. "Oh." It was pathetic how much relief that statement brought him. "What did you mean, then?"

Namjoon bit his lip. He exhaled sharply, inhaled, then said in a swift rush, "You're really horny right now, right?"

Jungkook's jaw hadn't dropped faster in the entirety of his life. The producer's cheeks turned red. He stood his ground with his question.

Feeling his own hot flush creep up his face, the brunette answered, "I...yeah. How did you know that?"

The blonde now took his full bottom lip into his mouth and this was serious conversation and Jungkook could not get distracted by such things. "You've been horny for the past month, haven't you?"

*What the fuck.* Jungkook just looked at him, blushing. *Have a really been that loud? I thought I was being quiet enough in the shower. I thought I wasn't...that he couldn't...*

"Jungkook. Please answer me. Am I wrong?"

"No." He said. "No, you're not w-wrong. Hyung...hyung, how did you know that?"

Namjoon brought up a hand to massage his own neck. "Do you remember, a month ago, when I brought you to that underground concert?"

"Of course." How could he forget? And how did this pertain to Namjoon being aware of his desire?

"Remember how happy you said you felt? Because of our bond?"

It took a second for it to catch up to him. Once it did, Jungkook wanted to curl up into a ball and die or crawl into a dark cave and never come out. "Oh my god. You've been feeling my desire because it's so strong. You've been feeling my desire for a-" He wheezed. Yes, yes, please let him expire of embarrassment right now, please god. *A month. Oh my god. I'm sorry hyung. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, it wasn't me, it was my head, I'm sorry, I've been having these dreams and my soul keeps telling me they're real and I know we're just friends and I'm okay with that, I swear, I don't know what happened to me a month ago that triggered it."

"You're okay with that?" Still. Still, Namjoon's expression gave nothing away.

"Okay with what?"

"I'm not." The blonde's entire face was red. His voice, though, was strong, sure. "I'm not okay with us being friends."

Silence.

"So..." Gears in the younger man's brain shifted. "So you want us to be acquaintances."

Namjoon's lips curled into a soft half smile. "No." He went on, "I really like you, Jungkook."

*I really like you, Jungkook.*

*I really like you.*

*I. Really. Like. You.*
"Because we're soulmates, right?" His breathing came faster. He was getting worked up. He was edging into the counter, yet at the small time leaning towards Namjoon, drawn towards him.
"We're soulmates and soulmates really like each other."

"That's what I told myself in the beginning too." The blonde took a step forward. His eyes never strayed. "Soulmates are supposed to feel attracted to one another. That's just the universe, or fate, or whatever." Another step. "And the more time went on, the more and more that idea seemed stupid. Maybe it had some truth, but that wasn't the sole reason why I liked you." Another step. Too close. He was getting too close. "You're funny. You're passionate and you express it so well whenever you sing. You've got the prettiest voice on the planet. You care deeply about others. You-"

"Stop." Jungkook shut his eyes. No. His crush wasn't professing his care, didn't like him back. Such silliness and he wished Namjoon would stop being so silly. "Please stop."

"Jungkook."

He refused to answer.

"Jungkookie, baby. I like you."

Nope, nope, it was too good, he couldn't possibly accept this, he was dreaming again, wasn't? He was still in bed on the fifth day of the bonding pains and he was dreaming. That had to be it. It had to be.

"Jungkook." That deep, rich voice was right in front of him. "I...I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner. I'm sorry you went through hell for a month-"

"Hyung, stop, you can't-"

"I have a crush on you." Namjoon leaned in further. "And I want you. Just the way you are."

There was calm. The morning air buffeted against the window. His breakfast sat untouched. His heart of stone finally reverted to its normal beat, one two, one two, one two, a mantra that was the pattern of his life. Jungkook thought to months and months ago, when he was being stomped on, hit, pushed around, made to be a trophy, a phony, fake. A pawn. He'd been miserable. Then everything changed. He was none of that now, not here with Namjoon, not here with his real soulmate.

He gave thanks and hoped that later, he would remember to tell Jimin that yes, calm always came before a storm.

"Namjoon."

"Yes?"

Jungkook opened his eyes. Once he met his soulmate's gaze, the calm snapped sharply in half and gave way to a roar of bottled up emotions being set free. They became one with his blood, one with him, and the maknae had yet to want someone quite so badly. His next words were ripped from him. "Touch me."

Blur. That was what everything was. A blur, then heat, hands on his waist tugging him off of his chair and the two of them blindly moving about, trying to find somewhere, anywhere to lay down. The couch was the closest thing; Jungkook spotted it first and pushed Namjoon down, scrabbling to get on top of him and feel the hot press of his long fingers, to feel the pressure, to feel him.
"I can't, I can't kiss you, you'll get hurt-"

"My neck." Jungkook braced his hands on his hyungs shoulders, leaning down so Namjoon just had to tilt his head upwards the smallest bit and his mouth would be on him. "I'm gonna get hurt anyway. Doesn't matter. You can kiss my neck."

Hesitation about any of what they were about to do vanished once those full, pretty lips finally, they finally grazed his skin. The feeling wasn't describable: familiar pain mixed with flashes of pleasure in a combination that made his breath hitch and his head spin. Kisses, deep and long, were pressed into his Adam's apple, the lower part of his jaw, his clavicle. Teeth gently bit down on his pulse point, and at the sensation Jungkook gave into the gut instinct to move his hips in a pelvic grind. Namjoon's teeth clenched a bit harder around the fluttering thrum of his pulse and he ground onto his lap again.

"Jesus Christ, Jungkook." The blonde gasped once he pulled his mouth off, his hands moving to grasp the younger mans hips. "You don't want to go slower-?"

"We can-\textit{mmph}." A particularly hot stab of pleasure muddled his brain. "W-We can go slow and make l-love and that kind of shit l-l-later." His fists curled and became full of Namjoon's shirt. "R-Right now I just want to f-feel you."

The hands grasping his hips coaxed him down further while Namjoon moved his own hips up. Since they both moved at differing angles, the friction increased, and Jungkook quietly moaned. It went on, once, twice, thrice, and then one hand was leaving and trailing up the outside of his shirt and his nipple was rolled in between the older man's fingers. The brunette mewled shamelessly in response, arching towards the hand.

"Beautiful." Namjoon's voice was husky and it was decidedly the sexiest thing he'd ever heard. "So beautiful."

"Y-You're beautiful too." He returned, his own hand reaching reaching reaching and then, he was touching Namjoon's face, his cheekbones and his eyelids and lashes, his deadly soft lips, and his hand hurt like hell and turned purple instantaneously but he couldn't have cared any less. "Handsome and-" He twitched when his nipple was pinched, sighing breathily. Jungkook almost forgot what he was going to say next. ",\textit{and s-smart}."

The Namjoon in reality was different from the Namjoon in his dreams: less dominant, aggressive, less willing to take power from him. His Namjoon was sweeter, slower, took care to ask before he touched bare skin and was powerful and gentle at the same time. It turned him on like crazy.

"Hyung." How he was forming words, no matter how short, was beyond him.

"Yes, baby?"

\textit{Yes, yes, that's me, call me that every day, I want to be your baby.} The brunette, through glassy eyes, snapped his hips downward and begged, "T-Tell me I'm good. Please tell me I'm a good boy."

His soulmate complied instantly. "You're a such good boy, Jungkookie. Always so g-good to me...always so good." Namjoon's words slurred and broke as he ushered them out as fast as possible. His pupils were blown wide, grip tight, skin flushed. His praise was making something in Jungkook click, release a wave of hormones and euphoria and he didn't know what but it made everything ten times more intense. "You've never been bad, not o-once, y-you've just been sweet and pretty and god, you make me feel so \textit{happy}. My good boy..."
I'm Joonie hyung's good boy. The maknae could barely keep up with the intensity, and something was building, building, heat in his stomach was coiling. His. He said so. He said I'm his good boy.

"Jungkookie, I'm close." The blonde warned, though he couldn't fathom why it would be warning, or how it could be, when he was moaning like that. "R-Really close."

"S'okay-" His breath whooshed out of his lungs when one of his soulmates fingers accidentally brushed the bare skin of his side underneath his shirt. The pain lasted a moment only, and then the touch was gone. "I'm...going to...come t-too..."

And it was two, four, five times of bucking their clothed hips against each other that Namjoon came. Jungkook soon followed, eyes rolling into the back of his head as he tried to choke out hyung. His vision went white and his body shook and shook and shook in a way it hadn't for a year and a half. At the edge of his consciousness, he was aware that his soulmate was feeling the same thing, he felt his desire and care and protectiveness, and he reached out to him, pulled him into an embrace, and-

Over.

Jungkook slumped on top of Namjoon's longer body, sleepy and tired. The blonde caught him (marking his arms in the process, but that was to be expected) and laid his head above his own heart, so Jungkook heard it slow from its speedy race. He drowsily nuzzled his nose into the area, kissed it, lightly grazed it with his teeth.

"Can't do that..." The producer mumbled, sounded just as weary. Jungkook thought he was displeased with the action, but Namjoon's smiled sleepily. "'s too soon for me to get hard again, baby. Give me fifteen minutes." He lifted an eyebrow. "Are you okay?" He blinked, eyes clearing somewhat. "Shit, Jungkookie, are you alright? Where are you..."

The maknae lifted a finger to his lips. The bruise on his hand obviously showed, something that mattered little to him at the moment. "My choice, Joonie. I let you touch me. I'm glad you did." Namjoon began to protest as well as he could in his current state. He was shushed again. "I'm fine. Better than fine. I haven't had sex in months and that was the best sex I've ever had."

Namjoon chuckled. Jungkook felt the rumble of it. "Fully clothed sex on the couch is what gets you? Damn, if I would've known..."

They laid there for a moment.

"Namjoonie."

"Mmm?"

"I have a crush on you too."

"I know, baby." His dimples appeared. "And I can't remember the last time I felt so glad." He ran a hand through the younger mans hair. Jungkook closed his eyes and purred. "We ruined our pants. Let's go get cleaned up, and then we'll talk more, yeah?"

And, if he was being frank, nothing had ever sounded better.
Emergency

Chapter Summary

There's been an emergency.
Please remain calm.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! A million 'I'm sorry's' for the chapter that's a little late, and also for the fact that the chapter is bit of a filler, and also that the ending is so rushed :)

However! There's a lot of setting up for the final main chapter that's set up in this one, because I felt like Kookiemonster's relationship needed a bit more time to grow before they become as close as they will during the next chapter. I hope you enjoy the fluffy moments they share in this chapter, and I hope that you're eager to FINALLY see everything fall into place the next chapter (all of the weird moments, how's, who's, what's, and why's).

Please enjoy! Scream at me in those comments, my fellow ARMY! :DDD

Carefully (and while half naked), Jungkook assessed the damage.

There was a small splotch along the edge of his pelvic bone, misplaced, purely accidental. Nearly the entirety of his right hand was covered in purple, a byproduct of using his whole hand to touch Namjoon's face. His neck looked like someone had mauled it, or tried to choke him: a ring of bruises littered the skin there, some in the obvious shape of lips, others not. They resided upon his collarbones as well. He dared to trace one, the pad of his finger a ghost against his skin, and the action made him tremble. Not because he was scared, or because he felt as though he'd break down and panic at any given moment. No...no, it merely reminded him of the sensation of a particular someone's mouth there, and the intensity of the memory caused hm to shake with wonder.

That was the craziest part. He wasn't panicking. Didn't feel ill in the slightest. He should be screeching, ripping out his hair, falling to the floor in a pathetic heap and wordlessly begging for the hyung he knew he had that carried the dialect of Busan in his words. He should be livid. Afraid. He should be so afraid and distressed.

Jungkook was calm.

Just...calm looking at all the purple marring his skin.

Curiously he reached for his neck to feel the marks there, watching his reflection in the bathroom mirror copy him. The glass was fogged, thick with condensation from the hot shower he had exited not two minutes previously, water droplets dripping and leaving long clear lines in their wake. The whole room was steamy, actually, a bit unusually so: Jungkook tended to take shorter showers,
seeing no purpose in lingering if he was clean. He'd stayed underneath the spray for a while today. Soaping up, rinsing, pondering. Thinking about Namjoon. Thinking about what they'd just done. Thinking about how they were to move forward now.

He'd meant to dress quickly as compensation for his lengthy wash. And yet...yet, he found himself parked in front of the mirror, staring.

Someone knocked on the door. The brunette turned to it, fingers securing the towel wrapped around his waist (the sole thing he was wearing). "Yes?"

"Jungkookie?" It was Namjoon's voice. Soothing and deep and velvety as always. His words were called through the door quietly. "Are you alright? You've been in there for a while. I got worried."

Jungkook glanced at his reflection. "I'm fine, hyung." A pause. "You can come in."

Tentatively the door opened to reveal his soulmate. Namjoon's hair was slightly damp from his own shower in his bathroom, and he wore fresh clothes. His eyes struggled to meet the maknae's once he'd stepped inside and closed the door to not let in all of the cold air. He didn't get any closer. "How're you feeling?"


No answer came. Jungkook looked away to see Namjoon's head bowed, fingers fiddling with one another, eyes resolute on the floor. Another sigh traveled within him, but this one rattled with something bitter on its way out. "You regret it."

Namjoon's head immediately shot upward, eyes wide. "No, no, of course not! I don't regret...what we did...I just..." He bit that lovely full lower lip of his while his pupils returned to the floor. Quieter, he went on, "I regret hurting you."

Oh. Well. That made a slight bit of sense. Jungkook tilted his head at the same time he shook it. "Hyung, it's alright. I'm okay, see?" He gave a little twirl, careful not to slip on the wet tile. "I'm all in one piece. I'm not angry with you. I asked for it." When Namjoon still wouldn't look at him, he said slightly teasingly, "What, am I not pretty any more?"

"Of course you're still pretty." The blonde replied softly. "You're gorgeous. Always."

Jungkook swallowed as his face began to heat up at the words. *Kim Namjoon is going to be the death of me one day.* His next question wobbled on the line between joking and serious. "Then why won't you look at me and appreciate the view?"

The blonde snorted something that sounded like a laugh, finally glancing up. His eyes trailed the younger man's half bare body; underneath his gaze, Jungkook felt even more exposed than he had grinding up against him on the couch (and while doing that, he'd felt pretty damn exposed). Namjoon nodded. "It is a rather nice view."

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Namjoon's face broke into a shy smile. Giggling, he walked forward towards the taller man. Clear panic flashed across Namjoon's features when he showed no signs of stopping, part of a protest leaving his lips before Jungkook grasped his shirt sleeve and tugged him to the mirror. His soulmate balked once Jungkook positioned him behind him with a command of 'stay right there'. He swiveled on his heel, huffed on the glass and used his unbruised hand to wipe at the surface until the two figures standing in front of it could see both themselves as well as each other.

Namjoon's cheeks were flushed. Even so, once Jungkook met his pupils through the mirror, he
looked away again. The maknae decided that Namjoon just wasn't getting it and chose to show him what he meant instead of just telling him it was alright when the older man clearly believed it wasn't.

"Hyung."

"Yeah, Kookie?" The producer's voice was rough.

"Have you ever gotten into a fight before? Like a physical kind of fight, where you punch and kick and stuff?"

A moment in which the blonde thought. His reflection shook its head. "No. I've experienced a few heated verbal confrontations, but they never escalated to the point where fists were thrown."

"Okay." That made this a bit more difficult; however, not completely undoable. "I've gotten into a couple fights. Most of the ones I got into were during high school. Jimin hyung was really well known because he was such a good dancer, and because he's really good looking. The moment he found out that he was bisexual, everybody in the whole school knew about it. Girls had been trying to get with him for years, or at least get him to touch them, to see if he was their soulmate. They weren't too bad; they'd verbally harass him sometimes, brush shoulders or elbows with him, gossip amongst themselves like girls do. But the guys...the guys were a whole different ordeal."

Jungkook's brow furrowed at the memories. "Hyung is small and he wasn't as muscular as he is now. The guys would shove him into lockers if they didn't like him because he was 'part fag' or some bullshit like that, and they'd shove him up against lockers if they did like him. I was supposed to meet him in the dance practice room at our school one day and he was late and Jimin hyung just isn't late to dance things like that no matter what kind of dance thing it is. I walked around the school until I found him with some random dude, shoving him off and cussing him out. The guy wouldn't let go of his arms and kept trying to kiss him. He was three heads taller than Jiminie and a whole head taller than me."

There came a pause in his story. Namjoon hadn't moved from his spot a few inches behind the younger man. "What did you do?"

"I hit him." Jungkook deadpanned. The producer appeared a bit surprised. The brunette shrugged lightly. "He hit me back, obviously. And we...got into it. It was pretty bad. There was blood on my face and in my mouth, but I could tell that I was winning. I had him pinned to the floor and I was smacking the crap out of him. Jimin hyung had to pull me off. And then we went to the dance room and I washed my face off in the sink and then we practiced until he drove us home. That was it." Jungkook's features relaxed from their tight concentration. "Almost every fight I got into after that was because some asshole was all over my best friend. Except for this one time I was at a bar and I was trying to break up a fight but somebody punched me and I was so wasted and out of it that I swung back at them. It's a fucking miracle I didn't get arrested. That was when I was..." He hummed. "Twenty one. Yeah. I was twenty one."

Namjoon stared at him through the mirror. "Why are you telling me this? Not that I don't love learning things about you, because I do, but...why?"

"Thought you'd never ask." Jungkook raised his bruised hand. The blonde flinched. When he continued, his voice was gentler. "After every fight I'd always get these horrible bruises. My knuckles would be blue or purple and sometimes I'd have a black eye and I'd have marks wherever I'd gotten hit, my arms, my shoulder, my jaw." He met and held his soulmate's gaze. "Those marks represented pain. Pain and anger and the want to purposefully hurt someone and all sorts of other bad things-"
"Jungkook-" Namjoon's flush had vanished to be replaced with the paleness of a sheet. He sounded like he was sick.

"I'm not done yet." The maknae cut him off. "Do you see the marks on me, hyung?"

"Y-Yes, I see them-"

Jungkook grasped his soulmate's covered wrist and abruptly maneuvered it around his own body so that Namjoon's long fingers hovered a centimeter above the purpled skin of his neck. The blonde tried to jerk back, but the younger man held him in a vice-like grip.

They stayed like that for four whole breaths.

"These." Those. The landscape of deep maroon that discolored his skin. "You didn't make these because you wanted to hurt me. These, hyung, all of these-" Here his own voice broke. "You made them because I asked you to. It wasn't against my will. They're marks of care. It's not hate or anger or anything like that, it's...it's our souls not able to touch each other correctly because the sheer amount of care in them makes our blood vessels blow up and..." Jungkook smiled a watery smile. "M-Maybe we're not supposed to think about it like that. Maybe that's wrong. Maybe I should think that whenever you touch me I bruise because my body wants to remember where your skin brushed mine last. But I'll never think that you knew touching me would hurt me and you didn't care about me paying that price." His grip loosened as he concluded with a shaky, "Never anything like that, Namjoon. Never."

Something wet dripped on his bare shoulder. Jungkook realized his soulmate's eyes had welled and spilled over. He'd had yet to witness Namjoon cry; he was nearly silent, his shoulders shook, the whites of his pupils in the beginning stages of turning a swollen pinkish-red.

"I'm sorry I hurt you, Jungkookie." Namjoon whispered.

"You didn't mean to, Joonie." Jungkook whispered in return. "It's out of your control."

"I can control if I touch you or not."

"Not when I'm begging you, demanding you to. Trust me, I know. If the roles were reversed..." He swallowed. "It would be really hard for me to keep my hands off of you. It's hard now to keep my hands off of you knowing the consequences. But." Jungkook steadied himself, breathed in, out, felt the tears on his shoulder, heard the beat of his own heart. "It's not your fault. Whatever happens to me, however many marks I get...'s not your fault Namjoon. It's not your fault."

The brunette could tell that his soulmate didn't fully believe him. That was okay, though. They'd work on this. They wouldn't always fall victim to the hazy frenzy of pleasure, not like how they had earlier, yet even if they did, or even if they made contact accidentally...

It was going to be okay.

"Are you sure that you don't have a degree in Creative Writing like me?" Namjoon sniffed, a wary smile lifting the corners of his mouth. "You're really good at this motivational stuff. You could write a novel full of that shit. Title it 'Soulmate Therapy for Beginners' or something."

Jungkook sensed another giggle bubbling in him. "I'd be an awful writer. I'd get maybe like, ten pages in and then just say that everybody's relationship with their soulmate works differently and call it a day."

Namjoon chuckled. His cheeks were pink again. The color brought out the redness in his lips and
the brightness of his hair. "Sounds like you."

"Mmm." The brunette was full-blown grinning now. "Yeah, it does."

The two carefully separated from one another with sideways glances and their emotions all over the place and their hearts running a million miles per hour. Namjoon stepped towards the door, opened it, and quietly informed his soulmate that he was going to make them both tea and then they'd talk a bit more.

Jungkook easily agreed to his. The smile Namjoon sent him in response gave him tingles down to his feet. With a small wave, he closed the door behind him.

"What's on the agenda for today, Kookie?"

"I have to drop by work so I can recount the inventory, then I have a bit of free time, and then I'm meeting Yoongi hyung at the studio so we can finalize some of my vocals."

"...um. Would you happen to know how long you'll be with Yoongi hyung?"

"I dunno. Two hours? Three? Why?"

"Nothing, I was just...thinking..."

"Oh, God, we can't have too much of that-"

"Yah."

"I'm kidding, hyung. What are you thinking up in that wonderful brain of yours?"

"Well...we usually eat dinner at home, yeah?"

"...yeah."

"Maybe we should. Um. Maybe we should go out to a restaurant or something. If you want to."

"A restaurant?"

"Yeah. A nice one downtown. Just sit and eat and talk for a while. I, um, only if you wanted to, I know that you're probably going to be tired after working with Yoongi since he puts so much indirect pressure on you and your voice and maybe, maybe we shouldn't do that, sorry-"

"Namjoon hyung. Did you just ask me on a date?"

"I, well, uh, I think so?"

"Did you mean it? Did you really really mean it?"

"...I did. Really really mean it."

"Then yes. Yes, I'd love to go out with you tonight."

"Really?"

"Really."
I think I'm going to need to see a chiropractor. Jungkook thought whilst he felt the entirety of his lower spine crack. He gently unwound himself from his knotted position and twisted the other way. This time, the crack traveled lower, and the tingly aftermath of it made his leg buzz. His exhale was unsteady. Because that doesn't sound healthy. Like at all.

The brunette eased himself out of the stretch until he was sitting straight-backed and crossed-legged in front of one of many of the dance room mirrors. His reflection gazed at him. He watched it in return.

Several beats passed in silence.

Jungkook blinked slowly. I wish Namjoon was here.

At the thought, he simultaneously rolled his eyes and smiled. Of course. He'd been apart from his soulmate for a grand total of two hours and he was already missing him. How ridiculous. They'd spent most of the night yesterday stargazing and whispering to each other in the warm air, and had gone on a coffee run together this morning (meaning, they'd spent plenty of time together recently for Jungkook not to miss him so fiercely). Namjoon had had to leave to join Yoongi at the studio to finish the second to last track on their project, Jungkook had had to go to the dance building so he could practice the contemporary part of his, Hoseok's, and Jimin's dance (alone, without his hyungs there. Call it pride, but he really wanted to show them that he could move past the portion he was struggling with without their help. They'd given him enough assistance. It was time to master this shit), so the pair had to part ways. Before they had separated directly outside the coffee shop, Namjoon flashed him a kind grin that showed off his adorable dimples and leaned down to kiss his hair. Jungkook's cheeks had lit up the color of a fire hydrant.

Hyung has been doing a lot of sweet things like that lately. Jungkook brought his knees to his chest while he recalled the last few weeks. Before their first date, he'd remembered that he'd accidentally stolen two shirts of Jimin's when he was moving from his and Yoongi's apartment to Namjoon's, and popped in for a quick visit after he'd left Sunbeam for the day (Taehyung was absent taking a sick day. Which really meant he was spending time with Seokjin). Jimin rose hell the moment he saw his best friend, screeching about how he was going to march over to Namjoon's apartment and, quote, 'drag him into the street by his dick and force him to watch me cut each of his balls off with a dull knife'. The maknae was more than a little alarmed until he realized he hadn't covered up any of the bruises he'd gained that morning from his and Namjoon's...excursion...and his neck looked like someone had grabbed a hold of his throat multiple times and squeezed. Jungkook informed him (in the least amount of detail possible) of how he'd obtained such marks. Jimin gradually calmed down before cheerfully accepting his shirts. Yoongi witnessed the entire ordeal from his favorite chair, a smirk on his lips while his eyes trailed the mochi's figure as he skipped to put the clothes away.

"What the actual fuck." Jungkook gulped out, raising a hand to his rapidly beating heart. A faint sense of terror lingered in his brain while he replayed his friend's threat in his head. The producer raised a questioning eyebrow at him. "I knew hyung could get feisty, but Jesus Christ, that was borderline psycho."

Yoongi shrugged. "I think it's hot."

"You're the only person I know who would think sadism is hot."

"Shut up, brat, you're freaky too."

"I...what?"
His hyung's smirk deepened. "Jiminie tells me you have a thing for rope. And lace panties. Innocent little Jungkookie isn't so innocent, is he?"

"I-" Jungkook sucked a deep breath in so he wouldn't actually kill Jimin. *Please let him know about the rope thing and the panties thing and not about the rest of my turn ons.* Yoongi looked like he was going to say more, but he got cut off by the brunette abruptly calling, "JIMIN HYUNG, YOONGI HYUNG IS KINKSHAMING ME!"

"BULLSHIT!" Jimin screamed back from his room. *YOONGI'S JUST AS FREAKY AS YOU ARE, WHY THE FUCK WOULD HE BE SHAMING YOU.*

Neither man in the living room could say anything, so Jungkook hightailed out of there and thankfully was not murdered by Yoongi when they met up at the studio later that day.

Then came their first date. Namjoon brought him flowers. The restaurant was amazing, the food was amazing, and the company was far more than the word amazing could begin to describe. They talked about everything and anything, much like they usually did; before they knew it dessert had been finished and the two were fighting over who was to pay the check.

"Baby, let me do it-"

"No, hyung, I'd feel too bad, let me pay-"

"But we wouldn't want ink to get all over those pretty hands of yours, would we?"

"Oh for fuck's sake." Jungkook huffed, crossing his arms over his chest. Namjoon had chuckled at his blushing face as he signed the check. "That was the fakest compliment I've ever received."

"Oh, really?" The blonde mused. When the maknae nodded, he leaned over the table and caught his gaze. His rich voice deepened. "Then how about this one: your prettiest characteristic isn't something physical. It's not your eyes or your lips or your hands, although those are plenty gorgeous-" The brunette swallowed as Namjoon came closer. "It's your personality. It's how hard you work to make Hoseok-ah and Jimin-ah and Yoongi hyung proud. It's how soft you are with the puppies at the pet store. It's how patient you are with me whenever I'm rambling on about something that makes perfect sense to me and yet makes no sense to you. But you always encourage me and ask questions and support me. You support everyone." He smiled. "That's your prettiest asset. You."

Words escaped him. How they came so easily to his soulmate, he'd never know. Because he'd spent so many years diligently studying them, perhaps? How they bent and warped and whirled about one another? How, how and why, let him know why the words evaded him.

"I really want to k-kiss you right now." Jungkook stuttered with wide eyes.

Okay, so, the words weren't gone, they just made him look like an idiot.

Namjoon sighed, his own gaze flickering from the brunette's pupils to lips to neck that was still marred purple. He moved away and settled properly in his own seat, their normal distance restored. His tone was quiet. "I want to kiss you too, Kookie."

After their ride home and the *good night's* they bade, the next day was upon them. Namjoon gave him space the majority of the morning, but kissed Jungkook's covered wrist (he was wearing long sleeves) once the younger man made to leave for work. Jungkook couldn't keep the smile from his face for more than a few moments before remembering his soulmate's compliment and the kiss. Taehyung teased him relentlessly.
Their relationship slowly evolved. It was those kisses to clothed parts of their bodies (wrists, shoulders, upper arms), and lips pressed to hair in the mornings and evenings. Then Jungkook gathered his courage and asked Namjoon on another date, to which the taller man eagerly accepted, and they spent an afternoon at a museum at the center of Seoul dedicated to the history of music. Both of them were so excited about some exhibit or other that they kept grabbing the others sleeve and dragging them off in a certain direction, and then they'd have to backtrack to find the exhibit they'd abandoned, and then they'd get lost, and it was a lovely continuous cycle until they had to leave. The ghosts of kisses didn't become scarcer after that; their time spent together grew more intimate. They went for walks in the park. They composed song lyrics together. Sometimes, late in the night or early in the morning when the sun wasn't up yet, they would wear socks and pull on winter gloves and dance in the middle of the living room, classical music playing very quietly from Namjoon's tiny stereo. The blonde would stand on Jungkook's feet and the younger man would guide them around in the dark, careful and languid. They'd twirl about, and sway together, and sometimes, if he dared, Jungkook would softly sing along to the rhythm, and Namjoon's deep voice would join him in an offbeat baritone hum.

On one of those nights, where their clothed bodies were pressed together, the brunette could feel his soulmate breathing as their chests moved in sync. Jungkook dipped his head while they slowly swayed, nuzzling the space where he knew Namjoon's heart to be, then pressed his ear there so he could hear it beat. It did not surprise him that it thumped in time with his own.

"I think." Jungkook breathed, eyes closed. "I think I keep expecting to be shocked when we fit so well together. When we glance at each other at the same time, when we breathe together, when our hearts beat at the same time like our own metronome-" He paused. Namjoon said nothing, though Jungkook knew he was listening. "And then I remember that we're made for each other. You're made for me and I'm made for you. We're soulmates." He lifted his head and met the older man's eyes. "Isn't that crazy, hyung? That two people who are so different can fit together, just like that?"

"I don't think it's too crazy, Kook-ah." Namjoon murmured. He unclasped one of their joined, gloved hands, lifted it and caressed the maknae's cheek. "They say opposites attract, yeah? Maybe there's some truth to that." His hand dropped. Jungkook laced their gloved hands together again. "Besides...if we were too similar, you'd get bored of me."

"I could never get bored of you." Get bored of Namjoon? Get bored of his clumsiness and intelligence and lanky limbs and witty mouth and kind heart? In what world?

The blonde pressed his lips to the brunette's covered shoulder, and lightly spun them around.

Jungkook forgot how much longer they danced that night.

A long, long time, it seemed.

They'd dance and go on dates or not go on dates and hang out instead and eat dinner together if the chance arose and none of it felt suffocated, none of it felt rushed, there was no ache or burn or hurt and there was balance. Jungkook went to the work and gym and dance practice and went to the bar once in a while with Yoongi and saw movies with Taehyung and Jmin and accompanied Hoseok to a special expert dance course that was taught by one of the greatest contemporary dancers in Canada and once in a blue moon modeled with Seokjin and went over to his and Taehyung's house to eat dinner afterward and at the end of the day he had his Namjoon, he had his soulmate, and though they slept in separate rooms and couldn't touch they made it work the best that they could.

Jungkook was so happy. He'd been happy before, but this was something else.

Now he felt something close to complete.
Pulling his head from where it was resting on top of his knees, the maknae exhaled. He found himself staring at his reflection in the mirror and chuckled once he saw the red mark on his forehead from where his skin had been pressed to his knee too long. He got up, stretched once more: with his mind still full of Namjoon, he wondered if the day would soon arrive that they would make themselves official. Everybody already thought they were; Yoongi and Hoseok teamed up on the regular to playfully pester him about why they weren't officially boyfriends yet since they acted so much like they were, but Jungkook didn't let it go to his head. This was one thing he was okay with taking slow. He was happy with Namjoon the way they were. The title of boyfriends would change virtually nothing. They'd make it official when the proper time came.

"Time to get to work." Jungkook announced aloud to no one. Sauntering over to the stereo, he clicked play, listening as the first notes of their group song played.

Getting into position, the brunette waited, waited, then began. There was a lot of popping and locking in the beginning, sharp movements that he aced. He continued like this for a minute, and when the music started to change and become softer, he twirled and fluttered with imaginary wings to the edge of the room. This was the part where they'd perform three powerful moves each; first Hoseok would twirl thrice then sink into the splits, and Jimin was to run at him as though to barrel him over, at the last second executing a no-handed aerial jump over him. Then the mochi would pull his hyung with him off the center of the stage as Jungkook did a forward flip and walked on his hands towards his opposing corner. Then they'd come together again. Jungkook shook himself, took in a deep breath, and flipped.

It went alright, but once he got into the walking handstand, his equilibrium faltered, as it had not yet failed to do. Scowling, the brunet popped out of the handstand, reeling backwards once his weight landed on the floor unevenly.

He ran into something that emitted heat. Jungkook faltered. Huh? Someone's here? I didn't even hear them come in. Did Hoseok hyung sneak in to watch me? Ugh, God, he's gotta stop doing that-

"Long time no see, babe."

Three things hit him at the same time after the voice spoke.

One: the person he was backed up against was taller than him.

Two: the only people in his immediate friend group taller than him were Seokjin and Namjoon.

Three: Namjoon didn't call him babe, he called Jungkook baby, and Seokjin didn't even know where the dance practice building was.

The brunette whirled around. The moment he met eyes with the person behind him, he shoved them away with as much force as he could muster, heart seizing with horror.

Defying all possible reason, or logic, or chance, there standing a mere five feet from him, was Ryu Yejun.

Jungkook hadn't seen him in months upon months; he looked different now. He was paler, dirtier, hair unstyled and messy. His clothes were simple, a bit oversized so they hung off his frame. His face was devoid of any kind of makeup whatsoever. Usually, even in the apartment, he'd be wearing some kind of concealer or highlighter or something, but without the makeup there the darkness of the bags underneath his eyes and the sallowness of his skin was more apparent. It was most likely due to lack of exposure to sunlight. And Yejun probably hadn't seen the sun in a while because...because he was supposed to be...
"You're supposed to be in jail." The maknae sputtered. He took another step backwards. *What the fuck is going on right now. What. The. Fuck.*

"What kind of greeting is that?" Yejun snorted, crossing his arms over his chest. Even dirtied and sallow and pale, his stance was predatory, as were his eyes. "No 'I missed you so much', no 'I was counting the days until you came back'. I'm almost offended."

*I've got to be dreaming.* Jungkook swallowed around the lump of he didn't know what that was in his throat. Though the proof of Yejun's presence was right in front of him, he could hardly believe it to be reality. *This isn't happening right now. My abusive ex boyfriend of a year isn't standing right in front of me with a smirk on his face. He's in jail. They took him away. The police took him away. Maybe I'm still in shock. That's got to be it.*

*That's got to be.*

Jungkook pinched his arm.

He remained awake.

This wasn't a dream. This was reality. This was really happening.

Nothing had ever seemed so nightmarish.

Yejun must've seen him pinch himself, for he laughed and spread his arms. "Thought you were dreaming, hmm? Sorry to disappoint, but I'm really here, babe. Ryu Yejun in the flesh. Incredible, isn't it?"

"How-*" The brunette forced the lump down, clenched his fists, and pushed on. "How are you here?"

The blonde's grin grew too wide. "Well, that's a rather broad topic. How am I here, on this Earth? How am I here, in South Korea? How am I-"

Jungkook's patience ran out despite his terror. Hot irritation pulsed through him and he hissed, "*How the fuck are you here watching me practice?*"

Yejun raised an eyebrow. A warning. "It was simple, really. The breaking out of jail part. You'd be shocked at the kinds of favors you can get if you seduce the right man. If I hadn't wanted to find you so badly I could've lived quite a comfortable life there given the circumstance." He tilted his head. "The oaf they called the head of security in my section was easy game. Almost no fun. The second my hands touched him I was as good as free. Disgusting sleazeball." He bushed at his shoulder, as though to brush off the feeling of someone's hand there. His eyes narrowed. He began to stalk forward, lips pulled tight. "Finding you was a bit more challenging. Once he'd cleared me, and I'd tased him, I waited until he was unconscious and rifled through his filing cabinets. Nothing was in alphabetical order, a nuisance, if you ask me, but I eventually stumbled across my file. Everything about me was in there." Yejun flapped a noncommittal hand. "You know how those things are. It's not *really* anonymous. Their names are written down for reference in case they need to be called in or something of the like. And would you like to know whose names were on that little note?"

Jungkook dared to sneer at him. "Not particularly, but I have the feeing you're going to tell me
anyway."

"Smart boy. Insolent boy but smart." Yejun purred with threat in his undertone. Something about it made the maknae feel vile. He chuckled and sing-songed, "One Min Yoongi and one Kim Seokjin. Those names ring a bell?"

Jungkook's breath caught. Yoongi and Seokjin were the two anonymous tipsters? They'd found other witnesses and...they'd help put Yejun in jail?

What?

"You seemed shocked. Oops. I guess they didn't tell you. Sorry if I spoiled anything." The blonde smiled. "I used the high tech recording and computer system to track the phone they used to make the call. Some kind of musical production studio came up on the map. All that was left for me to do was to ask around the area. I found out that apparently, Jimin ssi is Yoongi ssi's soulmate, and Jimin ssi is a part of your dance group you used to tell me you were practicing so hard for. A little more digging and here I stand."

"You're..." Creepy. A stalker. A son of a bitch.

"Amazing, I know." Yejun crooned. "And now look, I've found you, and there's no reason for you not to return to me and for us to pick up where we left off."

The maknae stiffened. "We left off with you kicking me in the stomach."

"Exactly."

Before another second could pass, Yejun was stalking forward with his hand raised. Jungkook ducked out of the way just as the blonde's fingers met with the mirror. His mind was screaming at him in blind panic, a kind of panic he hadn't experienced for many weeks, and he could do nothing more than block and move out of the way each time the older man surged towards him. He came forward over and over and over, teeth bared, nails sharp. One of his hits met the brunette's chin, and he stumbled.

"Ow, fuck-" Jungkook cussed. His bodily instincts kicked in and the next time Yejun approached him, one hand cradled his jaw and the other shot out reflexively to block the punch he threw. The blonde faltered for a moment, as did the brunette, both shocked at the younger man's action: Jungkook rushed forward with memories of his self defense class swirling in his head right beside the panic. In the following second Yejun was keeling, fists clutching his abdomen, and Jungkook had moved out of his immediate reach.

I just did that. The sting of his chin becoming an afterthought, Jungkook raised his hands in front of him and took up a defensive stance like how his teacher had taught him. I just hit him back.

God, it felt good.

"You've been learning while I've been away." Yejun righted himself, features slowly morphing into something ugly. "Learning to fight back. To stand up for yourself. I would suppose your soulmate had something to do with that behavior, wouldn't he?"

He knows about Namjoon? No. Impossible. The brunette blinked at the other man with shock. It proved to be a mistake, as Yejun snagged a hold of his arm and started yanking at him. Jungkook pulled in the opposite direction. The blonde snarled, "Oh yes, I know about him, about that fool of a man that's yours. That computer system and the locals really are helpful. Yes, a tall, whimsical good-for-nothing buffoon is what he sounds like-"
"Shut up about him." Jungkook snarled back, gaining a bit of ground. At the insults directed towards his soulmate the anger in his gut grew hot and tar-like. "Don't you dare talk about him like that."

"And why not? Because you like him?" Yejun tugged, and he gained some ground this time. "Pathetic. I can hardly see what's appealing about him, especially since he bruises you worse than I ever could."

The maknae's breath caught; it was the hesitation that the other man had been waiting for, apparently, for Yejun took advantage of the way he faltered and grabbed a proper hold of his arm, yanking him to the ground. Jungkook's back met the floor harshly.

He squirmed to get up, but a foot rested atop his left ribcage, forceful enough to make him stop struggling (mostly). Yejun stood over him, his expression nauseatingly vicious. It made the panic in his blood begin to rush through him again, though fainter. "You never should've run away, Jungkook. Never should have made those friends, never should have told them so much. I lost my job, I lost my reputation, I lost my life-" With each word, his foot pressed harder. Jungkook swore he felt his bones creak in protest. "And the only thing that I have left is you. All I've ever had is you. And I'm going to break you in whichever way I please, and maybe, maybe, if that starts to become too boring, I'll find your lousy excuse for a soulmate and make him watch."

The brunette huffed, "-er...ill...ing..."

"I'm sorry, what's that?" Yejun eased up the slightest bit.

Jungkook gasped out, "I was never and never will be yours you fucking deranged out-of-your-mind sick excuse for a human being."

Yejun froze. The younger man sensed something in him twist with a strange glee at the blankness of his features and smiled up at him.

Yejun lifted his foot and stomped down hard.

He shrieked both at the burst of pain and at the horrible cracking sound he heard. It was so unnatural, so wrong, it crushed his breath and caused his body to spasm in discomfort. The blonde moved off of him, waited for him to get up, that same blank expression of his face. Through blurry eyes, Jungkook saw him hold out his hand, palm upturned, move close. "It looks like you've learned your lesson, babe. You know you've got to be punished when you're bad. You've just been especially bad lately, yes? Now, take my hand, leave this place, and go home with me."

Jungkook looked at him with his ribs feeling like lava. Looked at his outstretched hand. The anger in him kept replaying the insults towards his soulmate, the threats, all the pain he'd ever gone though because of this man. And as he thought, his panic vanished, and the roiling anger within transformed into a kind of rage so pure, so strong, that the brunette's mind shut off and he met Yejun's eyes.

Howling, Jungkook flung his fist forward to hear a ill-sounding crunch beneath his knuckles. The blonde stumbled backward so quickly he bumped into the large mirror behind him, clutching his nose. The maknae ran at him, the pain in his chest forgotten, numbed out: his being short-circuited as he grabbed Yejun by his hair and without preamble slammed him into the glass. Once more. Again. Again. Something shattered. Something cut his face.

*Again.* The rage within insisted, so he slammed him into the glass again. Or...well, it was broken glass now, but that hardly mattered.
Yejun clawed at his hands, kicked him. Jungkook almost laughed at how weak his attempts were. Again into the broken glass his head went.

"Not so smug anymore are we? Are we babe?" The maknae couldn't recognize his own voice. He held the blonde's arms and whirled them around. "You tyrannical, insane, you're fucking insane, that's why they locked you up, locked you up to rot like you deserve, breaking me-" Jungkook threw another punch. Yejun stumbled into the middle of the room. "-not leaving me alone long enough to glue myself together again-" Another punch. Another stumble. "-the mindless, endless day to day torture of my mind, over and over and over, against my will, taking me against my will-" What was he saying? What was he saying anymore? "-you horrible, awful, evil, God, go to hell you fucking crazy-ass motherfucker who fucked me up so badly!"

Somehow they'd gotten to the floor. Somehow Jungkook was on top of Yejun. Somehow his hands just continued to hit and hit and hit at the man beneath him as though he could beat all of the suffering he'd experienced into him, so he could feel the barest semblance of the psychological agony.

This was for the bruises. This was for the purple. This was for handcuffing him and holding him down and raping him. This was for an entire year that was lost. This was for all of those panic attacks.

This was for everything.

Then suddenly, someone was screeching. It wasn't Yejun. Yejun looked barely conscious. It was somebody else screeching. Screeching his name.

"Jungkook! Oh my god, Jungkook-"

"Christ, Jimin, get him off of him, get him off-"

That same someone was pulling at his arms so he couldn't punch anymore. Jungkook fought their hold, but they were strong, surprisingly so, and eventually he let them pull him away from the bloodied face of his ex boyfriend. Eyes locked on those perfect eyebrows finally messed up, the brunette said through clenched teeth, "I'm not done. I'm not done. I'm not finished yet, he's still there-"

"It's okay, Jungkookie, it's okay." The voice tried to soothe. It trembled. A hand smoothed his hair. "It's okay now, you got him. You got him. He's finished."

"I got him." Jungkook breathed. He glanced down. His hands were covered in blood. He realized that he was shaking. "I g-got him. I finally got h-him, hyung."

Everything came into abrupt focus once Jungkook returned to himself. He blinked. Hoseok was leaning over Yejun, fingers pressed to his throat, and a phone pressed to his own ear. He nodded at whatever the other person was saying and removed his fingers. Jimin was crouched behind him, running a hand through his brunette locks, rocking the two of them side to side slowly. The maknae had the feeling he was missing something, because how could they have gotten here so fast?

"How did you two get here?" Jungkook asked.

"Jimin found out from Namjoon that you were practicing alone today. We wanted to join you and grab lunch afterward." Hoseok had finished the conversation on the phone and hung up. His usually glowing skin carried a greenish tinge. "But all of this blood is making me want to hurl.
Let's postpone lunch, yeah?"

The mochi nodded, an action Jungkook felt rather than saw. "I second that. More importantly, when the hell are they going to get here and please tell me it'll be soon because from this angle it kind of looks like he's not breathing hyung."

"His pulse is strong. Don't worry." The older man reassured him. "They said it would take ten minutes at the most since the station isn't that far."

"Who's coming here?"

Hoseok walked to the maknae. Bending into a crouch in front of him, he too smoothed back Jungkook's hair. "He's got a pulse so he's alive. Alive doesn't mean in good shape. I called for an ambulance." He glanced at Yejun and quickly looked away while the green color in his skin grew a bit more vibrant. "Damn, but that's a lot of blood, Kook."

Jungkook finally looked over, like really looked over, and saw just how much scarlet was covering his ex boyfriend's face and the floor. His own stomach gave a clench. "Yeah, hyung, that's a lot of b-blood."

The three (or four, if Yejun counted) waited in silence until a soft wailing broke the quiet of the room. The wailing of a siren.

Even swifter than the wailing began, it approached, and grew louder. Then suddenly Jimin was coaxing the pair of them upwards, his tiny hand grasping the younger man's to pull him up, and then the two were moving to the side of the room that wasn't covered in broken glass. Hoseok was hurrying to the door, opening it; then he was swiftly stepping aside as people in uniforms rushed inside. Abruptly the small space filled with noise, shouting, calling for medical supplies, the stamping of dozens of pairs of feet.

A woman kneeled down and began mopping the red off of Yejun's face, He stirred slightly but made no further motion otherwise. A stethoscope was placed over his heart and the woman was quickly surrounded by three other people checking the blonde's vitals. There was such hustle and bustle, so different from the dead silence of before. Jungkook watched it happen in front of him only half paying attention. He was still reeling over the fact that this had actually just happened, and so fast.

"Excuse me."

The brunette met the eyes of a middle-aged man dressed like a paramedic (probably because he was one) staring at him. Jungkook cleared his throat. "Yes?"

"You've got quite a gash on your face, from the glass, I presume?" He questioned. The younger man blinked and was instantly aware of the sticky hotness slowly traveling down his cheek. It ached. The man squinted at his hand, and pointed at it. "Your pinky finger is bent at an odd angle. Does it hurt?"

Yes, it did indeed hurt, it was swelling up as they spoke. "I'm fine."

The paramedic slowly nodded at him. "Alright. Fair enough, young man." He turned to call, "I'm gonna need another stretcher in here, please!"

"I, what, I don't need to go to the hospital-" Jungkook was being pulled from Jimin and suddenly laid down on a stretcher with three pairs of hands preventing him from getting up.
"You're displaying multiple signs of passive shock, you've got a cut on your cheek, your pinky finger is broken..." The paramedic lifted an eyebrow. "It's better to be safe than sorry." He raised his hand and shouted, "Wheel them out, let's go!"

"Hyung, do you remember that one time when you were like, 'Jungkook-ah, I think I want to go against the system and become a vegan for a week just to see what it's like?""

"Your imitation of me is fucking awful you pabo, but yes, I remember. Why?"

"Because the food here is even worse than that fake meat shit you tried to force me to eat with you."

"Jeon Jungkook."

"Literally, Jimin." Jungkook speared the thing on his tray whose appearance was closest to meat and held it up for him to see (which was dumb since Jimin was legitimately sitting next to him though who really cared at this point). "This is the definition of depression right here. Do you see this? I had some of it earlier and it tasted like cardboard."

"How much cardboard have you been eating lately? Enough so that you can compare the tastes?" The mochi snorted, dodging when Jungkook dangled the mystery meat in front of him. "When you pay hospital fees, you're not paying for five star meals, Kook-ah. You're paying for them to provide other services like saving your life."

"I know that." He flicked the meat on his tray with a splat noise. "Still. I never thought I'd ever eat anything worse than your vegan stuff. This is an important milestone. You should take a picture, immortalize the moment in your and Yoongi hyung's bedroom."

"Tempting." Jimin relented. "Very tempting. I have to pass though, eventually Yoongi hyung would get to it with markers and soon you'd be unrecognizable."

Jungkook nodded sagely. "You're a good friend."

The two sat for a few moments in quiet. Around them, the hospital bustled with life: through the panes of the glass room he was in, Jungkook could see other people like him laying in their hospital beds eating their soggy dinners, nurses walking about, doctors rifling through papers. There were only five rooms like this in the entire hospital, a tad surprising since so many of the population had found their soulmate, yet the hospital they were in was a relatively small one. The brunette had heard that some of the grander establishments had something like two hundred to three hundred glass rooms. He wondered how such things were built.

"Did you find out when they'll let me go yet?" Jungkook asked, tilting his head towards his best friend. Okay, the food may be crappy, but the pillows were actually kind of nice. "We've been here for hours. Not that the service here isn't great...I just kind of want to move around again."

"Nobody's told me anything besides your list of injuries." Jimin answered. The platinum-haired man leaned back in his char, crossing his arms over his chest. He puffed at his bangs. "I'd put down thirty thousand won that they're going to keep you overnight, Kook, so don't get your hopes up."

"I hope they don't. It's not even that bad."

"Jungkook, two of your fucking ribs are broken-"
"But my lungs weren't punctured." The brunette countered. "It doesn't hurt, Jiminnie, I swear."

"That's because they gave you pain meds."

Jungkook didn't respond to that though it was a valid point. He instead narrowed his eyes at his best friend and asked, "You're not staying overnight, are you?"

"I wish I could." Jimin pulled out his phone, glancing at it to check the time. "I've got a job bright and early in the morning. Yoongi hyung is either picking me up or picking both of us up, depending on the doctor's verdict."

The maknae swore when a thought occurred to him. "Shit, I forgot that we didn't take your car here."

"Why, what's wrong?"

Jungkook chewed at his lip, fingered the thin sheets of his hospital bed, mind whirring. "Nothing, it's fine. I'm sure he doesn't know. Yoongi hyung wouldn't tell him."

Jimin suddenly sat up, the younger man raising an eyebrow at the quick transition. "By him, do you mean Namjoon hyung?"

"...yes. I don't want him to-oh my god, hyung, you didn't." Jungkook knew what the guilty look on the other's face meant and it wasn't anything good. "You didn't text Namjoon hyung-"

"I had to text him, alright? What was I supposed to do, not let your soulmate know that his soulmate is in the hospital?"

"Yes." Jungkook stressed, closing his eyes and thumping his head against the headboard of the hospital bed. "I don't want him to worry about me-"

"That's just stupid-"

"Let me see, hyung, what did you text him?"

Jimin reluctantly brought out his phone and handed it to his friend, whom grasped it with a bit of difficulty due to his casted pinky. He typed out Jimin's passcode, opened his messages, and groaned.

To: Namjoon hyung

hey hyung, how's your day going?

From: Namjoon hyung

It's going great, Jimin-ah!

Yoongi hyung finally seems happy with our project and he wants to release it soon

I'm so excited I can hardly believe it :)

To: Namjoon hyung

that sounds amazing hyung! I'm happy for you! you've both worked so hard :D :D

so um completely related topic
but i actually have something kind of serious to tell you
promise me you wont freak out

From: Namjoon hyung
...something serious?
Is everything okay?

To: Namjoon hyung
i mean its better now but like
even tho its better you should still know

From: Namjoon hyung
What happened, Jimin?

To: Namjoon hyung
so
jungkookie had an emergency

From: Namjoon hyung
What!? Is he okay?

To: Namjoon hyung
he's ok! he's fine hyung
he's in the hospital now so hes ok

From: Namjoon hyung
he's wHAT!

To: Namjoon hyung
hyung you said you wouldnt freak out

From: Namjoon hyung
I MOST CERTAINLY DID NOT!
WHAT THE FUCK
WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK
WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM I FUCKING SWEAR TO GOD IM GOING TO FUCK SOMEBODY UP

To: Namjoon hyung
actually kookie fucked him up pretty badly for you sooo

From: Namjoon hyung

HE GOT INTO A FIGHT?

To: Namjoon hyung

yes that asshole yejun got out of jail somehow or some shit but they've got him locked up again

From: Namjoon hyung

they better have his sorry ass locked away because i'll fucking take out the biggest knife i can find and mince his fingers carve out his eyeballs and gut him like a fish then cut off his dick and shove it down his throat so that he chokes on it

To: Namjoon hyung

O_O hyung what the hell, did the devil just take over your body, jesus christ

that's intense even for me

we're at the hospital closest to the dance studio, i know you're coming, and bring yoongi with you because hoseok hyung left to get himself food and kookie's being a brat

From: Namjoon hyung

Be there in ten minutes

The last text was sent five minutes ago. Jungkook tossed his friend his phone back. "Oh my god, he's going to freak out when he sees me, I'll never be let out of the apartment again-
"

"Kook-ah, calm down." Jimin tucked his phone in his pocket, took the younger man's unfinished meal from him, stole the bread off of the tray, wrinkled his nose and promptly dumped the rest of it into a nearby tiny garbage can. "You know hyung isn't like that, he won't explode or anything. He's not Taehyung." A corner of his mouth tilted upwards. "Or me."

"Even if he's not like you two, he's a worrywart. The last thing I want him to feel is anxious or helpless."

"What were you going to do if they released you tonight? How were you going to hide the giant bruise on your chin or the cut on your face?"

"I was..." Well, he hadn't actually gotten that far in planning just yet. His head had still been reeling from the incident that occurred not hours before. And the pain in his ribs, that too. "...going to pray that he was asleep and use the last bit of the concealer I still have to cover the bruises...then...shit, I don't know. I just don't want him to worry any more than he has to, Jiminie."

"You're both such a cute couple it's almost gross." Jimin grinned cheekily, poking at Jungkook's unbandaged side teasingly. "Even worse than Yoongi and I."

"You sound just like him, except that he would be more explicit. And we're not an official couple yet hyung." The maknae was in the motion of beginning to return his light jabs when he spotted two blurs, one with bright hair and one with dark, one significantly taller than the other, race down the hall on one side of his square glass room. "Yah, Jimin, turn around!"
Jimin twisted in his seat. They watched as the blurs finally slowed to normal speed, the tallest of them pausing to talk to a nearby doctor while the shorter one peered around at the other glass rooms. The doctor appeared slightly irritated at the interruption, but nevertheless pointed directly at Jungkook's room and walked off.

The man, whom the brunette knew without a doubt was Namjoon, whirled in place and the two met eyes. Jungkook felt a familiar feeling of security, warmth, and attraction coil in his belly once he met his dark eyes. They smiled at one another; but Namjoon's smile faded as his gaze traveled over his face and over his body, pausing at his torso and hand. Jungkook saw his mouth move. In a term of endearment or a swear word, he couldn't tell.

Namjoon seemed to call for Yoongi, gesturing to Jungkook's room once the older man pivoted to face him. Unsurprisingly, Yoongi's eyes sought Jimin first and foremost. The brunette chuckled when the mochi set him a little heart with his hand. Jimin lowered his hand after a moment, asking, "How long do you think it'll take them to figure it out?"

"With my baby's brilliant mind?" Jungkook sighed, tilted his head to the side, pondering. "Thirty seconds. Probably less."

"Wanna time it?" Jimin questioned softly as the two on the other side located the glass door, and with it, the barcode scanner attached to it.

"Nah." Jungkook replied just as quietly, watching as Namjoon didn't hesitate to lift the purple hospital wristband that was on his wrist to the scanner so he could gain entry. "That would be too sad."

Just as Namjoon's wristband had finished scanning a negative beep sounded. It was heard on both sides of the room. The blonde's eyebrows furrowed while he read the message on the screen. Jungkook knew what he saw. Error. Your code is invalid.

Namjoon tried again. Again the negative beep sounded. There was a screen on the inside of the room that showed the error message as well as the number on Namjoon's wristband, which was 100228-2. The third time he was denied entry, the blonde reached for the door handle anyway and tugged it. It wouldn't budge. His struggle was visible when he dug his heels into the ground and really went for it. Nothing. Namjoon glanced up with confusion swirling in his pupils.

Using his free wrist the maknae lifted it so that both Namjoon and Yoongi could see the numbers on his purple wristband if they squinted. 100228-1.

In most every hospital across the globe, whenever you checked in, you were obligated by law to inform the hospital if you had a soulmate or not. If you didn't, and the person you were visiting didn't, you didn't get a wristband. If you didn't have a soulmate but the person you were visiting did, you got a yellow wristband that opened the glass door when scanned by the scanner. If you were the soulmate of the person you were visiting, you got a purple wristband, and the computer that ran the scanner denied you entry into the room. These rules had been put in place some fifty years ago, when the scanners were poorer and the rooms weren't made of glass (that came later, since the staff realized that if soulmates couldn't at least see each other while they knew the other was sick, the healthy soulmate would grow ill too), to keep soulmates from harming each other. Of course, this could be done so without them being separated by a wall, since obviously soulmates didn't live like that, but hospitals were not supposed to take any risks. And any risks meant any risk possible. There was no chance for accident if the chance didn't exist at all.

Namjoon seemed to have just figured out why the computer wouldn't let him in. His soulmate's face was struck with realization in the next second. Jungkook could only offer him a wobbly smile.
paired with a wave while Namjoon's features cracked into something crestfallen. Yoongi lightly shoved him out of the way and tried his own purple wristband. He too was denied entry. His pale face became bewildered and he tried once more.

*Error. Your code is invalid.*

Yoongi looked up right as Jimin held up the violet accessory adorning his own wrist. 199867-1. The older man's swearing was barely heard inside of the room as Yoongi's number flashed on the screen before it went blank: 199867-2.

Yes. Even soulmates that weren't actually sick were kept apart when visiting the one who was ill.

No risks possible.

Namjoon and Yoongi paced outside of the door, mouths moving rapidly as the taller man explained what the problem was as his friend listened. They paced some more, grabbed at their differently colored hair. Finally Yoongi whipped out his phone and tapped at it. Jimin's cell buzzed. He read the text out loud.

"*Joon figured out why we can't get in, and I'm pretty sure you two already know.*" The platinum-haired man exhaled deeply through his nose. "*Did Hobi come here with you? Please say that he did because if he didn't I'm 100% certain Namjoon is going to grab him by his collar and drag him here himself so we can get in.*"

Jungkook sent his hyungs a thumbs-up. As if on cue, Hoseok entered the hall with half finished energy drink under his arm, lips pursed in a lazy whistle. Both men rushed at him and a scuffle ensued while Hoseok visibly sputtered and held onto his drink for dear life as his friends grabbed onto him while trying not to draw the attention of the staff. Yoongi held his skinny wrist underneath the scanner; three seconds, a positive beeping noise, and then the room got much louder.

"*This is my what, third time meeting you, Namjoon hyung, and you're already getting all up in my business? I just feel like our relationship is moving too fast.*" Hoseok was saying, pressing a hand to his heart acting modest but flattered. Yoongi closed the door behind them, in the middle of shooting something sarcastic at his friend, but Jungkook's sight was swiftly filled with Namjoon, his beautiful Namjoon, cheeks pink and hair messed up and smelling so good.

The blonde came at him with the same speed he had Hoseok though he was far more careful. The brunette didn't lean away as he approached, just assuring, "*Joonie hyung, it's not as bad as it-*"

Abruptly his body was brought close to a solid chest and he was hugged tight, so tight that if it weren't for his pain meds he'd be screeching at the throb in his ribs. Namjoon was careful not to let the skin of their faces touch, or that of their hands or necks, and he burrowed his cheek into the younger man's shoulder murmuring low enough that only Jungkook could hear him. "*God, Kookie, I was so worried about you baby, I was so fucking worried about you-*"

"*I'm okay, Joonie, I'm okay, it doesn't hurt anywhere.*" The brunette shushed him, daring to run a careful hand through his soft blonde locks, soul humming in contentedness. "*I'm all in one piece.*"

"*Jimin told me you got into a fight that you were in the hospital, god, I almost yanked out part of my hair I kept pulling on it so much and I-*" Namjoon snuggled their clothed bodes even closer together, if such a thing was possible. Jungkook kind of couldn't breathe. He didn't care. His soulmate's voice got lower, throatier. "*I thought I was going to have to tear that guy Yejun's throat out. Where did he hurt you, Jungkookie? I'll track him down and make sure he never sees the light*
of day again if that's what you want."

Jungkook continued to pet his soulmate's hair, purposefully ignoring the part of him that was starting to get riled up with thrill at the fact that his soulmate wanted to protect him, wanted to mess up someone's life if Jungkook requested that he press charges for him and try to. Knowing how Namjoon worked Yejun would have a life sentence by the end of the week no matter what he protested. "No, it's fine...he'll get locked up for a few years or so and that's enough for me." They finally separated. The brunette missed the heat. "I got in a few hits too, you know."

"More than a few hits. So many that he's hospitalized as well." Jimin put in, at the end of making a kissy face at Yoongi. His smirk was wide. "It's actually brutal enough to get Jungkookie here arrested."

"What?" Hoseok, Yoongi, and Namjoon squawked at the same time.

"Relax, he's not getting arrested." The three sighed in relief, clutching their hearts with their hands in seriousness this time. Jimin giggled. "They're letting him off with a statement that his actions were self defense against a known criminal and perpetrator. Daebak, eh?"

"That's one word for it." Namjoon relented with his expression still vaguely startled.

The doors outside of the room that opened into the hall parted for the last time. In walked nobody other than Kim Taehyung and Kim Seokjin, both wearing yellow wristbands, and Taehyung wearing a giant bag that he was barely able to carry. The five men in the room watched as they casually scanned their wrists and walked inside to be greeted with dead silence.

Jimin shifted in his seat.

"Do I even want to know how much you told him?" Jungkook deadpanned. Wasting breath on their out-of-nowhere entrance would be just that. Wasted breath.

"Oh, it wasn't a lot." Taehyung scoffed, waving his hand dismissively in the way that he did. Traipsing over to his bedside, he patted his friend on the head and pulled up a chair to sit next to Jimin. "Just about your broken ribs, your cut cheek, your demolished pinky, about that asshole Yejun, and that the food here was shitty and I needed to get Seokjin and we had to get here ASAP for the good of humanity."

"Right." Jungkook said, secretly conspiring to steal Jimin's phone and screw up his contacts list so finding someone would be that much more difficult.

"Your wristbands...aren't they supposed to be purple like ours?" Yoongi questioned as he showed his wrist.

"They're supposed to be, yes." Seokjin walked with more grace to the edge of Jungkook's bed and sat down on it. His rose hair was so light and fluffy that it could've passed for cotton candy. He grinned. "Nothing that a little lying couldn't fix."

"Oh my god, that's like four different laws broken right there." Namjoon buried his face in his hands while he bemoaned. "Even more than Yoongi hyung and I just broke by coming in here."

"Rules were meant to be broken, hyung, or else they wouldn't exist." Taehyung informed him brightly, clapping his hands. He started to root through the giant bag that he had brought. Random parcels of food flew from his hands in varying directions: a hearty sandwich to Hoseok, bibimbap to Namjoon, kimchi to Yoongi and Jimin, and ramen for he and Jungkook. "Here you go. Seokjin prepared it for us. He didn't want Kookie to become malnourished during his stay."
"The hospital food-?
"-looks and tastes like cardboard. I'll happily eat the ramen." Jungkook accepted a pair of
chopsticks with his good hand. He used them to point at Seokjin. "By the way, how the hell did
you and Yoongi hyung manage to gather enough evidence to put Yejun in jail in the first place?"

Seokjin started in shock, and Yoongi surfaced from his first bite of kimchi with a "Wwhhthhh!? Hrmmphh?"

"Apparently psychopaths have this thing about talking to you before they attack you with their
fists. He told me the story of how he found me. Traced it to your phone, Yoongi hyung." The
brunette dropped his gaze to slurp at his food, cursing under his breath at the liquid that dripped
down his chin. Namjoon paused in eating his own food, grabbed a napkin, and dabbed his face for
him. Jungkook heart didn't melt. It didn't. "Wanna tell me how that came about?"

"It's Jimin's fault, he told Taehyung in the first place."

"What the fuck, Yoongi!"

"I mean, you did."

"We're getting divorced."

"We're not even married." The producer's cheeks were the faintest tint of red even as his answer
was growled at his soulmate.

"What the hell is going on right now?" Hoseok asked nobody from behind his sandwich. "This is
moving way too fast for me. Yejun used to beat the shit out of Kook-ah, but he got arrested
because he was anonymously turned in. The two people who turned him in are Yoongi hyung and
Seokjin hyung. Yoongi says that Jimin told Taehyung about Yejun, which somehow leads back to
Seokjin? Seriously. Am I going bonkers or does that sound convoluted?"

There was silence.

Somebody cracked their knuckles. Everybody in the room turned to stare at Taehyung, whom had
set aside his food and folded his arms behind his head, expression borderline devious.

"Gather around, children." He announced whimsically. "Eomma's got a story to tell."
Dance

Chapter Summary

Instead of dancing your heart out, dance your soul out instead. It'll feel more special that way.

Chapter Notes

*peeks out from behind bush* oh hello my fellow ARMY I didn't see you there how's your day been?

AAAHHHHhahahahahhhhhhh this chapter took so long to crank out, three whole ass weeks, and it's literally the length of almost three whole regular chapters. But like. Namkook. Scenes. Final main chapters. I'm sorry but like I'm also not sorry because this chapter came out so right and I'd rather give y'all good content late than crappy content early :') Thank you for your patience, everyone!

In other news, a quick note about this chapterrrr: in it, JK performs 'Rainism', which is an actual song he performed in real life. If you wanna get a feel for what that particular scene is like, please go on YouTube and look up his dance number. It's basically the same thing and in the story he wears the same outfit as he does in real life (except in the story I gave him a choker, but that's the only difference). Please go check it out if you haven't because it will shake your world (and if you're like me and seen it like twenty times already because BIAS THINGS, watch it again and get your world re-shook)

All that's left after this is the epilogue, which will come out much faster than this chapter did, promise! Thank you for your love and support and sticking with this story! MY FELLOW ARMY, ENJOY, AND FIGHTING!!!!!

"Am I allowed to take a moment and recap all of that?" Jungkook asked, staring at the redhead that was currently draped over Seokjin's lap, still puzzled despite the rather lengthy tale.

Taehyung nodded. "Go ahead. I know it was a lot."

A lot was an understatement. The youngest man in the room rubbed at his eyes with his good hand, grateful that medication was running through his system else he would've felt a headache start to pound in his temples from the sheer amount of information that had just been unloaded onto him. The group of seven stayed silent as he gathered the words that he wanted to say, something he was also grateful for. He stayed quiet and thought.

During the telling of Taehyung's long and intricate story, they'd eaten their food, stolen a little bit from everyone (a bite out of Hoseok's sandwich by Yoongi, an eighth of Jungkook's ramen slurped by Namjoon, Yoongi's leftover kimchi eaten by Jimin), and piled the barren remains into the tiny garbage in the hospital room that was now bursting with a surplus of their trash. At the very bottom
of the pile were two purple wristbands that the two producers in the room had torn off their wrists: they'd already broken the law, they said, so they might as well try to not get caught while doing so. Doctors had been peering inside the glass room periodically due to the size of the group crowding around the bed, too many eyes, too many opportunities to get busted, so off the bands went.

After the empty food containers and wristbands had been disposed off, everyone gradually dispersed around the room to get comfortable as Taehyung's low voice hummed word after revealing word. Yoongi and Jimin laid out on the cold tile floor with their heads beside each other as they listened. Yoongi slouched in a seat about a foot away from them, constantly moving and wincing as the story was regaled (no doubt from the poor quality of the plastic hospital chair). Namjoon had settled on the opposite end of Jungkook's bed, knees bunched up to prevent his feet from resting on Jungkook's pillow, since his legs were so long, a hand absentmindedly resting on his soulmate's covered leg. Taehyung himself parked his butt on Seokjin's lap, but in being as energetic and restless as he was no matter the hour, changed his position multiple times while he told the tale: getting up to pace without tripping over his friends on the floor, leaning against the glass door facing Jungkook, then finally ending up where he was at the moment, haphazardly sprawled across the limbs of his boyfriend while taking care that their skin didn't touch. How Seokjin was able to bear it, the maknae lacked clue, though he supposed that if he was in the eldest's place and it was Namjoon whom wished to lay on him, he'd be content so long as his soulmate was.

The story recently came to a close, and now here everybody sat, waiting while Jungkook tried to wrap his head around everything. It was nearly too overwhelming. He decided to break it down slowly as well as from the beginning, for that was the sole way he was going to properly absorb everything he needed to.

"Okay. So." Jungkook removed his hand from his head and belatedly craved to have the processing power within his own brain that Namjoon had in his. "Jimin hyung met Tae Tae hyung a year and eight months ago or so when you two went into a bar together. The reason Jimin hyung was out of the apartment was because he and Yoongi hyung were fighting." He received nods and continued on. "Jiminnie started telling him about the fight and everything that went down. After he was done he started telling Taehyung about me, and how I had just gotten into a relationship with a guy and how I was never around anymore, which is why he couldn't talk to me about the fight and was talking to Tae Tae." The brunette paused in his simplified recollection to grimace. "I'm sorry about that, hyung."

"It's fine, Kook-ah." Jimin replied from his place on the floor. He didn't look up and merely continued to braid together parts of Hoseok's hair (more like knotting it than braiding it, but the older man's eyes were closed and he didn't seem to mind). "I was bitter because it felt like you didn't have time for me anymore, and everything was still so new with Yoongi even though we'd been soulmates for a whole year...aish." He shook his head. "It was ages ago. Don't worry about it, sweetheart, getting caught up in past fights is no good. You would know."

"You're right, I would." Jungkook couldn't help but to lift the hand that his broken pinky was casted on. Flexing the fingers there, he remembered just how many boys bigger than him he'd had to fight off of Jimin, just how many times he'd resented them for the trouble they caused. He spotted Namjoon staring at his cast with a pained expression, and lowered his arm. "Anyway. Taehyung went home and talked to Seokjin hyung about Jimin, so after that Seokjin hyung knew about their friendship, and he knew that when Taehyung was out he was most likely with Jimin, since I wasn't hanging out with Jiminnie much outside of dance practice because of my relationship."

Jimin did glance from his beauty project this time to shoot Jungkook a look that clearly read say
"A few weeks after that Tae Tae hyung wanted to get a job, and he jumped from place to place because he couldn't find one that fit. Then he found Sunbeam and worked there for a while. Nothing new happened."

A beat. Taehyung voiced the next part to prompt him. "Then you came in for the first time, Jungkookie."

"Right." Jungkook agreed. "Then I came in for the first time, and I kept coming in, and I kept buying concealer." His features were quizzical once he turned to the redhead. "But you didn't know what I was using it for, did you?"

"No, I didn't know at the time. I didn't even know who you were. I just gave you discounts 'cause I thought you were cute."

Almost imperceptibly Namjoon's hand tightened on Jungkook's covered leg. The brunette's eyebrow twitched at him in question. Namjoon said nothing, so Jungkook let it go. "Then the day came that I ended up telling Jimin and Hoseok hyung about my bruises and how I'd gotten them, how I was using concealer to cover them up. Jimin and Hoseok hyung came up with a temporary plan so that I would be safe, which was that I would live with Jimin and Yoongi hyung for a few days until we could figure out something more permanent..." The brunette got lost. "Help me out here, this is where I start to get messed up."

"I wasn't stupid, so I knew that Yejun would deduct that you were staying with me. I was certain that he'd try to come for you." Jimin chimed in. Now he was arranging Hoseok's hair strands into a strange flower-like shape. "That's why you were only supposed to stay with us for a little while, until you could get your own place farther from town somewhere he wouldn't know about. I also knew, though, that you didn't have enough money for all the travel expenses, because I wanted you as far away from him as possible and I was thinking, 'farther away might mean out of Seoul, and that's a pretty pricey move, especially unplanned'. I called Taehyung and told him that I had a friend that needed a place to stay. He asked who: I was still pretty pissed and also kind of hysterical from your confession earlier, and I wanted to give Tae a good reason to house someone I thought was a complete stranger to him for a week or so, so I ended up basically telling him the entirety of what happened to you.

"About Yejun, about the bruises, about how he was lying to everybody about how you got them." Taehyung added. He picked up from there. "Naturally, I pieced together that it was you, because no other customers at Sunbeam came in and bought concealer so often. I called Seokjin hyung and asked him to come home from work so we could talk about potentially keeping another person underneath our roof."

Jungkook's mind was slowly replaying the past months in his head as the broken-down version of the story progressed, mentally filling in gaps, adding information. He remembered something due to his current state and the place they were at in the story, voicing, "Wait. Seokjin hyung, did you ever work with Yejun? Model with him or anything?"

Seokjin nodded. "That's actually an essential part of the story that was just about to be told. Why?"

"I just remembered...when I was trying to get out the door to leave for good, Yejun stopped me. He was home from work really early and I had no idea why. He said he came home because the model he was doing the shoot with had to leave due to some issue. That model was you, wasn't it?"

"It was." The man with rose-colored hair affirmed. A small smile graced his perfect lips. "See,
you're not as slow as you think you are. You're piecing it together."

"Ahem." Taehyung coughed, giving the two mock glares at being interrupted. Jungkook stuck his tongue out at him while Seokjin poked his side. He slapped the older man's knee in retaliation. "Where was I before I was so rudely interrupted? Ah, yes, right: Seokjin coming home from work. Basically, Seokjin was okay with it, he thought it was awful what was happening to you, and he was more than ready to accept you under our roof."

The eldest man in the room interjected again. Taehyung pouted, but silently allowed it. "There was one huge problem, though, and it was that Yejun had been to our house multiple times already."

The brunette shot him a confused look and he quickly explained. "When you have a house as big as mine, you wind up hosting a lot of the parties that come after big magazine shoots. Models, their managers, and photographers are all there. It's a huge thing. Meaning, Yejun had been to our house before, and he'd most likely visit there again, on several occasions. We figured that we'd have to keep you more than a week despite what Jimin said, so we concluded that the risk was too big."

His smile soured slightly. "I wanted him as far away from you as possible as well."

"I'm glad that we all agreed on that at that point in time." Jungkook said dryly though a grin lifted his lips regardless of his tone. "The rest I know a lot better. I live with Yoongi hyung and Jimin hyung, Taehyung gets me a job, I meet Namjoonie hyung." At the mention of his soulmate's name, he lightly nudged him with his leg, and was rewarded a dimpled smile and pat in return. "-then move in with him. Now, this is where shit gets weird." He pointed at Yoongi (whom was curled up in a little ball, knees hugged to his chest) and at Seokjin (whom still had his soulmate covering half of his clothed body). "Then I find out from the news that Yejun gets arrested. Turned in anonymously, apparently, but he told me that it was actually you two." His eyes flickered between them. "How the hell did that happen? How did you two even know each other?"

Yoongi blinked, uncurled himself, and stretched. The popping of his bones was audible; Jungkook made a mental note to take him with when he snagged the chance to go to a chiropractor. Lazily, the black-haired man shifted so that he faced the maknae. "You remember when I picked you up, yeah?"

"Yeah, you cracked Yejun over the head with a pan."

"You did what?" Jimin paused in his task to gap at his soulmate. "How many times did you hit him?"

"Once was all it took. Nice and swift. Just..." The producer mimed holding something and swinging it sideways. "Dropped like a sack of potatoes."

Hoseok lifted an arm. "Remind me to never piss you off."

Yoongi gave him a look, like, your very existence pisses me off but I still somehow care about you. Huh. That kind of talent must be something that he and Jimin shared. "Anyway, Kook-ah, seeing him hurting you like how he was before I intervened...I believed Jimin's story about what was happening with you, I did. Seeing it first hand made it a lot more real. And it made me angry. Even after I hit him in the head, I was still so fucking angry at him, at everything he'd done, how he was going to walk away unscathed while you had to hide. It wasn't right. I wanted him to pay, I just didn't know how to force his dues from his hands."

"This is where I butt in again." Seokjin didn't even bother to look apologetic about it either. Yoongi shrugged and let him continue. "I asked you and Jimin to come modeling with me and you helped me out and we had a fucking blast. That photographer keeps asking me to bring you two with me to Japan in a few months to do a shoot there, by the way-" Jimin and Jungkook immediately groaned
"Jungkook, you drove off, and Yoongi-ah came to pick up Jimin. We were talking about being on the receiving ends of the whole soulmate thing, since he and I both get bruised, how to cope with it, how to not let it get to you." At these words, Taehyung's complexion blanched, and he shifted off of the taller man and moved until an entire seat separated them. Namjoon swallowed, removed his hand from its spot atop Jungkook's covered leg, then scooted over a little so their bodies weren't so close. Yoongi appeared to press against the back of his seat a little firmer despite the fact that he was already a respectable distance from Jimin. Seokjin noticed his mistake and winced. "I'm sorry, you three, that wasn't right to say. It's not like it's in any of your control."

Jungkook saw the three exchange looks with one another that were almost haunted. He didn't like it. Tapping the blonde's shoe, he waited. Namjoon's pupils settled on him and he pointed to himself, mouthing, Not your fault.

The producer struggled to hold their gaze. Jungkook's stomach dropped in disappointment as Namjoon increased the distance between them with eyes trained downwards. He wished he could climb from the hospital bed, crawl up the lanky body that belonged to his soulmate, and kiss his worry away, slowly, languidly, bit by bit until Namjoon wouldn't be able to worry about anything except the pressure of Jungkook's mouth on his own.

By God, if he could do it, he would.

He would in an instant.

"I'm sorry." Seokjin apologized once more, quietly. There was no reviving the atmosphere for the three whom marked, though, so he pressed on with the story. "Jimin-ah and I were talking, and Yoongi-ah was there to pick him up. Jimin suddenly said that he had to go to the bathroom for some reason, so that left Yoongi and I alone. He asked me about you, Jungkook, and your situation, once he found out you'd been modeling that day too. He asked if I knew anything about it and what my feelings were. I told him I hated what had happened, how I wished to change it if I could. Yoongi revealed that he'd been doing some digging but couldn't find enough evidence to turn Yejun in. Your presence would've made a fair enough case; he didn't want to involve you though, neither did I for that matter, you'd already been through enough by the hands of that man. We talked some more, discovering the amount of connections the other had. We teamed up to go find the skeletons hidden in Ryu Yejun's closet. And we did." Seokjin glanced at Yoongi. "We found them. Victims. Got recordings, letters they wrote, some even volunteered to testify in court. Then Yejun got arrested. That was that."

Jungkook stared at his hyungs. What he really wanted to do was ask just how, how had they found those victims, how long did they search for, how and why and how. Yet all that exited his mouth was a shaky "Thank you, Seokjin hyung and Yoongi hyung. For going through that trouble to protect me. T-Thank you."

Yoongi's usually stormy eyes halted in their swirling and rumbling to soften. His smile was nearly invisible. Nevertheless, it was there, and that meant it counted for something. "Our pleasure, Kook. Seriously. Watching the police arrest him on the television was so fucking satisfying."

"Agreed." The eldest said.

The brunette faked a sniffle, raising his good hand to wipe at his cheeks. "I knew you cared, I knew it, I knew deep down you had a soul Yoongi hyung-"

"Don't push it, brat." His hyung grumbled. His words lacked bite, carrying fondness instead. "I know where you sleep at night and I'm not afraid of taking advantage of that information."
"That's unsettling on so many levels-

"Wow, hyung." Jimin sniffed. He'd finished messing around with Hoseok's hair, legs now hooked around the leg of Jungkook's hospital bed, gaze trained on his soulmate. "You wanna sneak out of the house at night so you can see another man. Appalling, utterly appalling-

"It's the height that gets them, Jiminie, you're short so you're less appealing-

"Shut the fuck up Jeon, first of all you're shorter than your soulmate too, and second of all I'm still growing."

"You're still growing at twenty four?" Taehyung snorted, mouth shaped into his trademark boxy grin. "What a medical phenomenon. So how many nanometers are you growing each month?"

"I swear to God, if I had something close by to throw at either of you, I would do it and aim for your eyes. Or nuts."

"Such violence in such a small human." The redhead tutted. "C'mon, Jiminie, you've gotta work through this so you can be a happier you. Acceptance is the first step."

"Acceptance-!?" Jimin started to sputter while he pulled himself up from the floor.

As if on cue to halt the bickering, there came several sharp raps on the glass door. Seven heads turned towards the noise to see a rather disgruntled-looking doctor on the other side. He made a pointing motion behind him. They craned their necks to see, but couldn't make out the wording on the sign on the wall. After a moment or so of this the medical practitioner's patience ran out and he used the green wristband he wore to unlock the door. Poking his head inside, he announced in a tired voice, "It's ten at night, everyone." as though it was to explain anything with any sort of clarity.

The group blinked at him.

He sighed. "Which means that visiting hours are over for everyone within the group except one person. Whoever is staying behind has until midnight to exit the hospital." They continued to look at him. The doctor rolled his eyes. "Decide who's staying behind quickly, or else I'll have to kick everyone out."

Only when he had closed the door and retreated from the immediate hall did the seven's breaths come easier. Hoseok shook his head. "I thought he was going to bust us."

"Me too." Jungkook tried to control his exhales so his heart would stop racing. "Is it already ten? When did we get here?"

"You were wheeled in at one, so you, me, and Hoseok hyung have been here for nine hours." Jimin replied, standing properly and rolling the joints in his neck. Hoseok got up as well, copying him. "Everybody else joined at...six? Seven?"

Damn, time really flies. The maknae watched as each of his hyungs rose from their spots. Seokjin reached for Taehyung's covered wrist and held him as he jolted away. Granting him a soft smile, he leaned towards him, whispering something in his ear. Whatever it was had the redhead's cheeks flushing, head nodding. Once he was fully stretched out, Jimin walked to Yoongi, stood on his tippy toes, and kissed his soulmate's hair. "Let's head out, yeah? I've got that dance job in the morning and I wanna cram in as much sleep as I can get."

"Of course, gorgeous." Yoongi murmured in reply, waving goodbye to Jungkook as the pair made
their way to the door.

"Waaaaaaait, Yoongi hyung, can you drive me home please? Pretty please?" Hoseok whined, lips curving into a cute pout. The producer sighed at him. "Please? I've got no other way to get home since I rode in the ambulance here. My car is still at the dance studio."

"Shit, so is mine." Jimin groaned. He tugged at Yoongi's sleeve. "Let's take the poor man with us, hyung."

"As long as he doesn't turn on the radio and start screaming along to I.O.I." The older man relented, though not without a bit of grouchesness, and headed towards the door to open it. Jimin told his best friend to get better soon, blew him a kiss, and he headed out. Hoseok followed him, chuckling.

"I won't, I won't. I'll scream along to rap instead." He cackled, reveling in the expression on Yoongi's face. Just as the door was about to close, he peeped back inside. "Yah, Jungkook-ah, you know that the date of the dance competition is closing in on us, right? You think you're going to be healed by then? If you're still unwell then I'm going to pull you out, because I don't care how much is on the line, your health is more important-"

"I'll be healed by then." Jungkook assured him, even if he himself didn't know if he truly would be. He would have to be. He wasn't giving up something so precious, something that he'd donated so much of his blood, sweat, and tears to, due to the fact that he was wheezing a little. Yeah, no. Not happening, sir. "Don't worry, hyung. I'll be dancing with you and Jiminie."

Hoseok's features were skeptical; he nodded and accepted his answer regardless. Seokjin, Taehyung, and Namjoon remained in the room with him, Taehyung's eyes following Hoseok's skinny figure as he darted gracefully down the hall to join Yoongi and Jimin. After they'd disappeared, he asked, "Jungkook-ah, is Hoseok hyung single?"

"Yeah, he's-" Jungkook stopped mid-response. Narrowing his eyes at the redhead, he continued slower. "He's single. Why?"

"Hmm." Taehyung said in response. He chewed at his bottom lip thoughtfully.

The brunette got what he was thinking before he said anything more. "You think he's cute?"

For the first time ever, the redhead actually appeared flustered at admitting that he was attracted to someone. "I, he's, well, he's really nice eye candy, I mean, not to objectify him or anything like that, he just, looks really nice-"

"I think he's very attractive." Seokjin hummed, some of his pink fluffy hair getting in his line of sight as he tilted his head in contemplation. "We should talk to him about us, Tae."

Taehyung hesitated. Jungkook felt compelled to support their pursuance of his dance instructor and close friend, so he chimed in, "Hoseok hyung is like sunshine. He's always really happy, optimistic, seeing the bright side of everything. He can be strict as hell, but that's what makes him a great teacher, his diligence and his sense of perseverence." The maknae regarded a fidgeting Taehyung carefully. "Hyung is lonely, too, even if he doesn't admit it. He's twenty five now. The last time he was with someone was when he was twenty. He waited as the two standing across from him processed that. "It's harder to be the light of your own life than the light of someone else's. He needs someone to be that light. Or multiple someones."

"What if he's-"
"-open to a polyamorous relationship and is totally accepting of the circumstances?" Jungkook shrugged. "I guess you won't know until you ask him."

Seokjin let out a squeaky laugh at the look on Taehyung's face (which was, put simply, confounded). Gripping his sleeve, he tugged at his younger soulmate and ushered them towards the door. "Thanks for your encouragement, Jungkookie-ah. Let's leave these two be now, Tae, c'mon."

It was only then, when Seokjin and Taehyung were out the door, out of the hall, their backs vanishing behind the large hospital double doors, that Namjoon shifted from the spot he stood at on one side of the room. Jungkook watched as he carefully pulled on the jacket he'd brought with him (previously discarded on a chair), observing the willowy length of his limbs, their bunching and scrunching at the simple action. His attention was so caught by it that he didn't realize Namjoon stood right beside him until his velvety voiced hummed out, "Hi, Kookie."

The brunette didn't care how many times his soulmate said it; he loved the sound of his nickname rolling off that tongue. Glancing up at him, he returned, "Hi, Monie hyung."

Namjoon visibly suppressed a grin at the name. He didn't comment on it, instead reaching out to run a hand through Jungkook's hair. He preened at the feeling and chased his soulmate's fingers once he'd finished. The tingling sensation on his scalp was ever so pleasant. The blonde obliged him, stroked his locks again, and said, "It's getting pretty late. I think I'm going to go and let you rest, okay?"

Jungkook paused in confusion once Namjoon finally pulled his hand away. Furrowing his eyebrows, he stared up at the taller man. "Wait, what? You don't have to go, I'm not tired yet-"

"You've been through a lot today, baby, you should be catching up on sleep, relaxing. Visitors have to be out by ten anyway-"

"-except for one person who can stay until midnight." Didn't Namjoon want to stay? Maybe not...maybe he was tiring of seeing the younger man night and day every single day of every week. Perhaps he wanted a night for himself. "I...well, it would be nice if you could stay behind a little longer, but if you want a night for yourself you can go home, Joonie. You're really tired too. I won't be offended." I'll only be kind of disappointed, but that's because I like you too much.

Namjoon hesitated now. His uncertainty was written across his face, features easier to read than any of the books he claimed to own, appearing as though he was battling with himself. "I, um, I didn't think you'd want me to stay."

"Of course I want you to stay, hyung."

"Oh." The blonde blinked. He looked more like an owl now than ever before, especially when he tilted his head to the side like that. He turned slightly to snag a chair, halfway finished dragging it to Jungkook's bedside when he uttered with insecurity, "Are you sure I'm not bothering you? You don't want to rest?"

"I don't want to rest. I want to talk to you." Jungkook whispered. One more nail in the coffin was all it was going to take. He gave his best pleading eyes, carved his tone into something gentle beyond imagination. "Stay."

Namjoon searched his face for a moment. He nodded, dimples on display with the small smile he sent. "Okay."
The older man finished lugging the chair to Jungkook's bedside. He plopped himself in it ungracefully, something Jungkook forced himself not to giggle at despite the calm atmosphere, and propped his elbows on the edge of the bed to cradle his head in his hands, closing his eyelids. The maknae found himself watching him again as he breathed in and out, basking in the dead quiet of the room. It was seldom (if never) like this when any of the others were around. Jimin, Hoseok, and Taehyung were bright, loud, sarcastic and fun; getting them to quiet down was quite the challenge. Whenever Yoongi didn't speak, he glared at you, and made one feel as though he was peeling apart their persona layer by layer. Seokjin's silences were nice but lacking in true balance: that is to say, Jungkook respected him since he was his hyung, would respect him regardless even if he weren't, it was just their difference in age that made the younger one feel just that, younger, and Jungkook could not help but dislike feeling so young though he knew he was not.

Namjoon was different, though. Even preceding the discovery that they were soulmates, Namjoon's silence was noticeably different. Rather than just being there, it felt as though it was an actual thing, a presence. The producer's noiselessness was his own presence filling any room he stepped into to the brim, sometimes hidden underneath all of the other sounds present, yet still distinctly there. Now, when he was alone with Namjoon, the lack of sound that was his presence amplified everything by ten so that Jungkook sensed his inhales flitting past his bronchial tubes into his alveoli, swore that he could hear the hush of the air conditioning turning on, and if he knew no better he would've said that he felt the strength of the living themselves, and how they teetered upon the chasm of death countless amounts of times within the hospital.

Or perhaps it was their bond making everything so sensitive. So tangible.

If it was, Jungkook didn't mind.

The blonde shifted his balance. The movement caught the brunette's eye, and his own gaze trailed up the seams of Namjoon's dark jacket to meet his equally dark pupils. Expression unreadable, the older said, "That was quite a story."

"Haven't you heard it before?"

"Nope. This was my first time." Namjoon admitted, much to the younger man's surprise. He didn't know why he was so astonished; he had just assumed Namjoon knew about all of his past once their relationship had started to develop, since said development carried such ease and smoothness. Which was...a really stupid thing to assume. "I knew some stuff about that asshole Yejun from bits and pieces of stories that you've told me, but besides that, I learned about as much as you did from the whole thing. Probably more, since you experienced half of it." He shrugged loftily. "It was nice to listen to, to finally catch up with everything." Namjoon looked at Jungkook for a moment. His tone quieted a significant amount. "And it...it made me realize how much I still don't know about you."

The maknae nudged his soulmate's covered arm, voice teasing. "You know a lot about me, hyung. You know my favorite band-"

"IU." Namjoon answered instantaneously. He shook his head at himself. "But I know that because you play their albums nonstop in the car so you can sing along to them."

"You know my favorite activities-"

"Dancing, singing, you like to write music even though you think you're bad at it when you aren't, playing darts...you do most of those things every day, though..."

"You know where I wish I was on late nights-"
"Laying out on the beach with the sand gritty in between your fingertips, the ocean smelling of salt and occasionally rolling in to touch your toes, with the stars stretched out above you in a void that seems endless. I know that, Jungkook, because you've told me with wistfulness in your voice over a dozen times, how could I not remember?" The producer rubbed at his face. Obviously frustrated, he went on, "But those are simple things, non-idiosyncratic, not deep or anything like that. I just feel like I don't know enough. I should know what you look like when you're extremely happy, like you're about to burst out of your skin at any minute. I should know the little things that make you uncomfortable or sad, things you don't pick up on but you express subconsciously. I should know the kdrama you act like you hate but secretly love. I should know at least some of those things. And I don't." Namjoon squeezed his eyes shut and sighed. "And it's...it frustrates me that I'm not picking up those kinds of things. Or I am, but I'm doing it so slowly."

Jungkook felt his heart thud thud thud in his chest, beating with curiosity and empathy and other emotions he couldn't name, yet for some reason the question that bubbled up and boiled over to slip past his lips was, "Is that why we're not boyfriends yet? Because you think you don't know enough about me?"

It was something that a tiny part of his brain begged the answer to. He was happy with Namjoon and their relationship just how they were right now; though with the playful questions followed by jabs given by Yoongi and Hoseok, with the attraction purring within his soul each time he laid eyes upon the older man, with the evolution of where they stood in each others lives...he didn't mind not calling Kim Namjoon his quite yet, but Jungkook could admit, it did sound kind of nice.

"I-what?" The blonde asked, features arranged into a look of peculiarity. "No, no, that's not it, baby. I wanted to wait to ask you officially. Date you longer, get to know the intricacies of your personality better, take in the time to soak in you and not rush anything. I wanted to...I still want to do all those things that new couples do before officially getting together, staying together...like...like meeting each others parents and stuff like that."

Jungkook regarded his soulmate. He didn't say a word at first, opting to move around in his hospital bed so that the pillows cradled his neck in a more comfortable manner. He grasped the thin sheets, tugged them up for warmth, shifted a bit more to face Namjoon (whom still appeared earnest). Staring at him he stated, "You'll never meet my parents, hyung."

Namjoon didn't move an inch. "...why?"

"My parents are dead."

Neither man uttered a single audible breath. Now one really could hear the air conditioning turn on, it was that silent. The heels of a nurse working the late shift clacked against the floor leading through the all then through a door somewhere.

"They've been dead for seven years now." Jungkook carried on. He knew somewhere in his mind that he was looking at Namjoon, at his soulmate, it was just that he was also getting the feeling that he wasn't truly seeing him. "I was sixteen when it happened. A freak car crash. Or maybe not so freaky, depending on how you look at it, because my dad was speeding on a rainy day and if you wanted to you could just call that irresponsible." Yes, Namjoon must be transparent. He couldn't see him at all. He actually couldn't see the rest of the room, either. "They were on their way to see me compete in a dance competition, one that I'd begged them to go to. The last time they texted me was to say that they were running late, but that they'd be there. I was so fucking excited, hyung. I wanted to impress them so badly, to show them that I was passionate about dance and that it would take me far in life and I'd make them proud. I performed the best I ever had that night. I didn't think it was strange that they didn't text me or call me to let me know they were there. I just
thought they were, thought I would see them afterward."

More silence.

Jungkook swallowed.

"I took it hard. Really hard. They were in my life and then suddenly they weren't, suddenly the house was empty and the bills were racking up and I had no job and I was alone and depressed and panicking because I thought I was going to have to drop out of school and become homeless. Then Jimin hyung's parents took me in even though they knew they couldn't afford it. They let me live with them anyway. Looking back it was kind of nice, because that way we could all mourn together. Jimin was my best friend, and Jimin's parents were my parent's best friends. It was nice to...to have other people there who understood." Jungkook saw it now as clear as day. The expressions on their faces the first night he slept over. The face Jimin's eomma made the first time he really cried in front of her. All of it. He saw all of it. "I quit dancing and started working to help them pay for me. I had two jobs; one at a diner that lasted for about six hours after school on weekdays, and once I got off at eight or so, I'd change and work from eight thirty to about three at a huge refrigeration stockroom, helping load trucks and stack produce. Each week I handed Jimin's parents both of my paychecks since I couldn't figure out how to pay off my parent's monthly bills for the life of me. I got lucky after two weeks or so, when my house was put up for sale, which meant that I didn't have to pay for it anymore. I still kept up with my two jobs, though. Just to be safe."

Nobody said a word until Namjoon whispered, "What happened next?"

"Well, it turned out that keeping both of those jobs was a smart choice. I was ending my junior year when people started to talk about going to college and it hit me that that had been the last thing on my mind for too long of a time and I had no idea what I was doing with my life. Jimin decided that he wanted to help me...find my way, I guess, so he went to my boss at the diner and convinced him to give me a shift that started two hours later but still ended at eight. He won that argument and shoved me into choir with him." Jungkook blinked at the memory. "I'd forgotten how much I loved music. I did really well in choir, so well that I was noticed at concerts and offered multiple partial scholarships for Vocal Performance. That's where keeping those jobs comes in. If I hadn't kept them, then I wouldn't have been able to pay for the rest of my schooling, wouldn't have ever gotten my degree." He thumbed the hospital sheets. "I wouldn't...I wouldn't be here."

Namjoon hadn't said a single word during the entire recount. He didn't say anything now, either, just stared at Jungkook with a gaze that the brunette couldn't dissect.

Finally, his voice murmured roughly, "I'm so sorry. I know that nobody wants to hear that, but I really am. I'm sorry you had to suffer so much, struggle that hard." He carefully reached out, laid his hand on the maknae's covered hip. That action coupled with the warmth the hand carried, coupled with the current atmosphere, had Jungkook repressing an involuntary shiver. Namjoon's gaze met his. "And I'm proud of you Jungkookie. You wouldn't believe how many people can never recover from things like that, sink into sadness and never get out. But you stayed alive through it. You struggled that struggle. And that's amazing of you. It's amazing of you to go through the hell you've gone through and still hold your head high, still be so strong. I'm so proud of you, baby." He squeezed the younger's hip. "They'd be proud of you too."

Jungkook sensed tears building up behind his eyes. They stung. He nodded, struggling to hold them at bay as he bit his lip hard, and nodded again. "Thanks, Joonie. T-T-Thank you."

I miss you, eomma and appa.
"I wish you were here."

"You can cry if you want to, Jungkookie." Namjoon said softly, rubbing his hip in a repetitive, soothing motion. "I won't judge you. Sometimes you've gotta let it out, yeah?"

"Y-Yeah, it's just-" The brunette sniffed. Raising a hand to wipe at the tears threatening to fall, he let out a rueful chuckle. "I've already cried so much in these past few months, hyung. I don't wanna cry any more. It gives me a headache." He scrubbed at his eyes. "Jesus. I've probably cried a whole ass river by now. I can check that off of my bucket list, then."

"You had 'cry a river' on your bucket list?"

"Duh." Jungkook finished wiping at his eyes and was now looking at his deep-voiced soulmate. "It's been on there for years now, right above 'become a kpop idol'. Now I've got more crossed off than Jimin hyung." He grinned a little. "He's going to be so pissed once he finds out that I'm beating him."

Namjoon just stared at him for a good moment. Abruptly he hid his face behind his arms and started to laugh. It was a nice laugh, a unique ha ha ha that caused his eyes to scrunch up and anybody surrounding him to wonder if he was expressing glee or if he was wheezing. Once he surfaced, the gleam in his pupils portrayed such fondness that Jungkook couldn't help but to smile a genuine smile, couldn't help but not miss the beat that his heart skipped. "You're incredible. Absolutely incredible, did you know that?"

"Now I do." The maknae lifted his shoulder sassily. Namjoon snickered at him. Relaxing the pose after a second, eyes still locked on his soulmate's, he tentatively asked, "Do you feel like you know me a bit better now?"

"I do." The producer said. "I feel like I know you the tiniest percentage of a bit better, but yes."

"One of the most significant moments of my life is barely a part of a percent to you?"

"There's more to you than the defining moments of your past, baby. There's you in the present as you are now. The past remains concrete, but the present you is always changing. So yes. That's only a small percentage of everything that there is to possibly know about you." Namjoon's dimples appeared. "I should be the one thank you for sharing. Especially since it's something so personal."

"I don't mind." Jungkook said, because he didn't mind, not in the slightest, couldn't bring himself to. "I trust you."

Namjoon looked down, shy suddenly. "If you keep telling me how highly you think of me, my head is going to get so big that I'll get stuck in the door when I try to leave."

The mental image made the brunette giggle. He reached out the best that he was able, petted the taller man's soft blonde hair. It was silky underneath his fingertips. As he twirled the wheat-colored locks, the older man lowered his head until it rested atop Jungkook's covered stomach, joints loose. The younger man's breath got caught in his throat once Namjoon nosed at the area, pressed a kiss to the sheets that protected his skin, and closed his eyes. It was a rather intimate move. "Namjoon hyung."

"Mmm?" His soulmate hummed without opening his eyes.

"Can we be official?"
Namjoon slowly opened one pupil. Through a half smirk, he murmured, "I didn't know you wanted to be my boyfriend so badly."

"Well, you know." Jungkook gently scraped his nails against Namjoon's scalp, enjoying the shudder that wracked through the blonde's body as a result. "I'm already your soulmate, so I thought, why not add another label just for fun."

Namjoon slowly lifted his head from where it was resting. His dark pupils carried a fire; not a wild one of destruction, rather, one that was steady and calm. "Jungkookie?"

"Yeah?"

"Can I...can I kiss your wrist?"

Jungkook offered up his wrist without hesitation, gaze locked on his hyung. Namjoon paused in wait for the younger man to pull back. When he didn't, he carefully took his upturned wrist in both of his own hands. Jungkook flinched at the abrupt pain that bloomed along wherever their skin touched, yet the warmth and sizzle of their connection was saying yes instead of no, urging him forward towards the person whom caused his blood vessels to burst.

Then came the soft sensation of a pair of lips on his skin. It was a brief, loving thing, one that coaxed his insides into jelly. Namjoon was pulling away in the next instance, though not without a playful tugging of his skin with his teeth. What would've been a breathy sigh came out a breathy giggle. His soulmate merely winked at him and released his wrist.

It's entire circumference was deep purple, with a bruise in the shape of full lips in the center.

"I would kiss you properly, but-"

"It's okay." The brunette said while rubbing along the bruised area thoughtfully. Without thinking, he continued, "I kind of like this better. This'll last a little bit longer, so it'll take longer for my skin to forget that I'm yours."

I'm yours.

Namjoon stared at him for a good solid minute. He blinked.

In the following minute, he grinned with such brightness that Jungkook would've mistaken him for the sun.

From: Jiminie

ITS ABOUT TIME

i thought you two were going to wait until you were old and grey before you finally got together

To: Jiminie

you're the only one getting old and grey, hyung

i'm still young and pretty

From: Jiminie

stfu
seriously tho

congratulations kookie

im so fucking happy for you, sweetheart
u and joonie hyung are beautiful together

To: Jiminie

thank you hyung :)

From: Jiminie

so like who am i allowed to tell

can i tell yoongi that i found out first and can i rub it in his face

To: Jiminie

yoongi hyung already knows, joonie told him

From: Jiminie

dammit

have u told hoseok hyung yet

To: Jiminie

not yet

From: Jiminie

dont

i wanna save it until after the competition so I can hear him bitch about being the last to know :)

wait ur dancing with us, right?

To: Jiminie

of course i'm dancing with you guys

i'm not dropping out because my pinky still doesn't bend all the way yet

also seriously hyung i think you're a sadist

From: Jiminie

what gave it away

shit yoongi hyung is calling me i gtg

but im glad that ur dancing with us, were gonna kill it!

bye kookie, fighting!
To: Jiminnie

bye, hyung! FIGHTING!

"Morning, Joonie."

Jungkook sleepily dragged his feet towards his boyfriend (whom was sitting at the dining room table drinking tea, reading a book on sociology, and was impossibly wide awake at six in the morning), blinking the tiredness from his eyes as he pecked the top of his head and made his way into the kitchen. He had a busy day ahead of him and lacked the desire to cook something fancy for breakfast, so he decided that a simple bowl of cereal would have to do.

"Good morning, baby." Namjoon glanced up from his book to smile at his soulmate. The brunette sent him a small smile in return, the gesture spoiled by the yawn that snuck up on him to distort his features. He heard Namjoon chuckle and murmur something that sounded like "Cute." He lightly scoffed to display his disagreement with that statement but didn't comment on it and continued to fix up his breakfast.

"How're you up so early, hyung?" Jungkook stifled another yawn as he poured milk. "How do you manage to look so awake and stuff?"

"I've found that I feel better throughout the rest of the day if I wake up earlier." Namjoon sipped his drink. "I always had to get up early for school and reaped the benefits from that, unlike my friends who would sleep till noon if you let them, so I just kept doing it into adulthood." He shrugged at Jungkook, who was now sitting across from him. "I just feel more energized if I wake up early, that's all."

" Hmm. Maybe I should start doing that." The brunette mused. He spooned cereal into his mouth with an ease that came with years of consumption. "I always feel so tired in the mornings."

"I could start waking you up when I get up, if you want."

"Let's just share a bed. That way it'll be easier to get up when you do."

Namjoon froze at the suggestion. Jungkook saw the panic flitting hither and yonder within his expression; he buried his spoon in his meal to hold both hands up placatingly. "Hyung, I was kidding, we're not going to do that."

Visibly the other man relaxed. Neither person uttered another word while they polished off their meals (if tea counted as a meal, though Namjoon would argue that it did since he was, well, Namjoon). Just as the blonde made to rise, Jungkook muttered, "Although, it would be nice to sleep in the same room."

A sharp clack sound caused the table to shake. Namjoon had set down his empty mug, features no longer panicked rather than hardened. Despite the words his face clearly shouted, what exited his lips was soft. "Jungkook-ah."

The maknae knew what he meant without him having to say any more. "Namjoon hyung."

"We agreed on those rules for a reason-""Firstly, I wasn't in my right state of mind when we were drawing all that crap up, I was doped up on your kisses and pain medication," Jungkook's cheeks burned while he admitted the primary cause of his lack of focus. He barreled onward nonetheless. "Secondly...us sleeping in the same
Namjoon shut his eyes. He ground his teeth so forcefully that the noise of it reached his soulmate's ears. "You're right about that. But that's pushing it too far, Jungkook. That's pushing the boundaries too far."

"Yoongi hyung and Jiminnie hyung sleep in the same room." The younger man pointed out, albeit quietly.

"Jimin-ah and Yoongi hyung have been soulmates for three years. They've gotten used to the..." The producer hesitated. His own cheeks flushed pink (a color that looked gorgeous adorning his cheekbones, no matter if such a thing was born of embarrassment). "They've had time to get used to the pull their bond has on them, how to calm themselves if they feel things are getting too far out of hand. They're souls are somewhat sated with each other, which is how they can share that kind of space for that long." He shook his head. "Our bond is still too new and we shouldn't be pushing it."

Jungkook found himself staring at his fingers that were laced together in his lap. Namjoon was right. He knew he was right. Even if sleeping in the same room didn't violate the rules they'd put in place, temptation would be too great of an obstacle regardless.

Damn my soul aching for the man in front of me. Jungkook unlaced his hands to rub at is temple. Damn it.

Two and a half weeks previously, while Jungkook laid out in his hospital bed, he and Namjoon spent about an hour talking with each other about their relationship moving forward. It was nice to do so, since some of the development of their relationship so far had been rather ambiguous (with neither person really knowing what the other was thinking at times). They started with the eager agreement to become official; following that, they set out to establish rules for their own safety (really, it was Jungkook's safety as he was the one who got bruised, but the brunette knew that Namjoon didn't want to say that out loud) going forward.

Rule number one: even though they were boyfriends now, they must still maintain their usual respectable distance from one another unless Jungkook gave Namjoon explicit permission to come closer.

Rule number two: no more drinking alcohol. Though they weren't avid drinkers in the first place, eliminating a liquid that had the potential to cloud their minds and jumble their thoughts from the equation was kind of necessary.

Rule number three: the pair should have a box of thin disposable gloves in their house to use for emergencies. If Jungkook got hurt, then Namjoon would put the gloves on so he could help him. If Namjoon got hurt, Jungkook would put on the gloves so he wouldn't hurt himself while helping him.

Their list continued on like that, small restrictions put in place to keep them safe and sane. Jungkook agreed to abide by the rules once his soulmate asked him if he approved of them all; he really did want to keep his promise and follow them, he really really did, he didn't want his soulmate to have to constantly worry about hurting him.

Yet there were exceptions to ever rule. Except these rules. These rules had no exceptions, no wiggle room, no loopholes.

For some reason, his own soul did not like that, and it was beginning to ache again.
"I'm sorry, hyung." The brunette spoke up. He sighed, dropping his hand from where it was massaging his head. "You're right. We shouldn't push it."

Silence crawled by while Jungkook refused to look at his partner. Namjoon asked with knowingness in his tone, "What's wrong, Kookie? What's bothering you?"

"It's just...the rules make it hard for us to be intimate." Ah, fuck, his ears were burning with blush again, weren't they? Jungkook kept his eyes on his fiddling hands. "My soul is trying to convince me that it's not getting enough. That I'm not getting enough, even though I am, I'm getting more than enough, and I know we made those rules so we can keep our distance better, so you don't have to worry about hurting me by accident." Oh, Jesus, why was this so hard to say? "I'm sorry, I'm rambling, this isn't making any sense." Say it, say it, get it over with. Taking a deep breath, he blurted out, "The more we keep our distance, the more I'm drawn to you. I want to get closer when we move farther away. And everything is telling me I'm spending too much time apart from you, and so I'm...m-my soul is starting to ache again and I'm trying to calm it down so we don't have a repeat of before." His brain flashed with memories just as his cheeks flashed with heat. "Not that I don't want a repeat. Um. Sorry."

Finally he gained the courage to glance up. Namjoon stood still as he stared at the younger man, his position unchanging as his brows furrowed and his lips parted in confusion. "A repeat of...before?"

"Uh. You know." When the blonde shook his head negatively, Jungkook made a gesture with his hand that explained absolutely nothing. "When we were. Um. When you confessed to me and then we ended up on the couch?"

Realization dawned on Namjoon's face. "Oh."

"Yeah." Jungkook shifted in his seat, face burning. "My soul kind of wants that as compensation for spending so much time apart."

Namjoon peered at him. Something like a teasing half smile appeared on his face. "Do you kind of want that?"

Did he kind of want it? The brunette's eyes trailed along the sharp, long lines of his soulmate's figure, the collarbones his shirt exposed, the full prettiness of his lips. His stomach sparked with desire. Swallowing, he tore his eyes away. "Even though it's kind of not possible, yes, I do want that. A lot. Because you're, you know."

"I'm what?" Oh, Namjoon was definitely teasing him now. Nevertheless, Jungkook took the bait.

"Y-You're-" This shouldn't be so difficult. Complimenting his soulmate shouldn't be so difficult. Seriously. There were a million things he could say about his beautiful boyfriend. All there was to do was pick one. Or two. Or three. "You're really smart, and you're passionate, and creative."

Jungkook's heart pounded as he locked gazes with Namjoon. "And you're the most attractive fucking person I've ever seen in my entire fucking life. Like Jesus Christ. You could send people to Hong Kong with one glance."

The older man's breath hitched. The grip he had on his mug loosened, and his pupils dilated the slightest bit.

That charged moment sat there for just that, about a moment or so, then Namjoon dropped his gaze.
and moved to the sink while his deep voice said, "I'm sorry I asked. I'm the one who's pushing it now. Thank you for the compliments, baby."

Jungkook watched him rinse out his mug as his soul urged him to pounce on the taller man, spin him around, shove him up against the counter and make out with him until he couldn't tell up from down or down from up. He did none of these things. Instead, he shakily stood up, handed Namjoon his plate so he could rinse that too, pressed a lingering kiss to his soulmate's clothed shoulder, and left for the bathroom to get ready for his day.

*Kim Namjoon is going to be the death of me, I swear.*

"...so then he was like, 'I'm afraid you're too short for this ride', which like what the fuck does that mean, because Yoongi was tall enough to go on and he's literally one centimeter taller than I am." Jimin ranted, words warbled by the heavy breaths he took in once in every while due to the massive dance bag that was slung over his shoulder (Jungkook had offered to carry it along with his own bag but his best friend refused to let him, claiming that the younger man was still recovering from his injuries and he couldn't do that to him or something absurd like that). "So then Yoongi got pissed, as he does, and nearly gave the guy a black eye once he heard him call me a midget."

"One thing...I'll always admire...about Yoongi hyung...is his...even temper." Jungkook huffed. Okay, yeah, maybe he was still bouncing back from his injuries, but whatever. Walking from the food place down the street to the dance studio was tiring previous to getting his ribs broken anyway.

"He was just defending me! What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing...at all...hyung." The brunette puffed back. There was nothing wrong with Yoongi defending Jimin, nothing wrong with that at all, except for when he broke people's noses and gave black eyes and, you know, borderline got into enough altercations each month to qualify for at least a week or so in jail.

Eventually, the two approached the entrance to their dance studio where they were to meet Hoseok for their second-to-last group rehearsal. Jimin held the door open for Jungkook, something he regularly would've scoffed at but today wheezed a thank you for. They lugged their bags through the hall and into their usual dance practice room. Hoseok hadn't arrived yet; they took the time to set their bags aside, gather in the middle of the room, and begin stretching.

Jungkook ignored just how hard he was breathing as he slowly pulled his leg to his hip. He was fine. Really. It just took him longer to get his breath back.

"Jungkook-ah, are you sure you want to do this?" Jimin asked as he copied the stretch. His pupils rested on his best friend's gasping figure. "Hoseok hyung and I will figure something out. Your health comes first."

The maknae gritted his teeth at the suggestion. This would be the hundredth time or so that the subject had been brought up, and for the hundredth or so time, Jungkook answered, "I'm fine, Jiminie. Seriously. I'll be able to compete in a week. My pinky is mostly healed and the bruises are mostly gone. So are the cuts."

"And your ribs?"

"Feeling peachy." Jungkook grunted as he switched legs.
He saw the platinum-haired man open his mouth, possibly to bicker with him; he never got the chance to say whatever it was he wanted to say for none other than Jung Hoseok strutted into the room just then. His hyung's expression brightened once he spotted his two dongsaengs stretching. Setting his own bag aside, he joined them in their preparation.

"I see that they fixed the mirror." Hoseok commented, jutting his chin in the direction of the shiny new piece of reflective glass that sat snug against the wall. Yes, it had been fixed from where Jungkook had slammed Yejun into it, at the hefty price of one hundred thousand won (apparently they charged extra for having to clean up the blood. Who knew). "Excellent. Now we can practice without hurting ourselves."

The two younger men hummed their agreement. The stretching continued for a good five minutes, since all three knew what it was like to try and dance with tight limbs and knew the earlier start time wasn't worth the pain. Jimin did his own special set of stretches, where he eased himself into an effortless splits, forward and front, bent himself in half, and other movements he could accomplish with his crazy flexible body. Jungkook and Hoseok were left to watch on with envy as they conducted their own less gravity-defying moves.

"Yah, Jungkookie-ah."

"Hyung?" Jungkook replied, doing his best to hold onto his breath while maneuvering his torso to one side.

"That redheaded friend of yours Taehyung texted me last night." Hoseok said. His expression gave nothing away. "He was really sweet, called me sunny and optimistic, which was really kind. We talked for a while and I invited him and his soulmate to come watch us dance next week."

"Did he tell you anything else?"

"...no." His hyung replied with his tone laced with a bit of confusion. "What else would he have said?"

Jungkook bit his lip to stifle his smile. "Nothing." Taking it slow, are we, Tae Tae? I'm impressed.

Eventually, the three finished warming up, and Jimin and Jungkook stood in wait with their arms crossed to receive their instructions for the day. Hoseok's hands hung limp at his sides, eyes sizing up his two students that doubled as friends, scrutinizing them. They waited.

Hoseok gestured for them to sit down, so they did. Once everyone had gotten into a comfortable position, the eldest in the room criss-crossed his legs, held his hands together in front of him.

"We're going to start practice in a minute. Today we'll be focusing on our weaknesses: Jimin, your third solo dance is one that we need to go over. Currently, it's your shakiest, and if you make it to the final solo dance you should end it with just as much strength as you began it with. Jungkook, you're still struggling a bit with the contemporary part of our group piece, your movements are still too harsh for the gentleness of the twenty four measures. I'll be working on my own second solo dance, because I'm struggling with a connection that's right before the bridge of the song." Hoseok gazed at them steadily. They didn't move. His features softened. "I know that I usually save this stuff for performance night, but I wanted to say, right here where it's private and there aren't a shit-ton of people behind a curtain and we aren't as anxious, that I'm really proud of both of you. We've worked our asses off on this group routine, and on our solo songs, and I couldn't ask for partners who devoted more time to practice, to trying to perfect the steps, to learning the ins and outs of the rhythm. So thank you both, Jiminie and Jungkookie, for fighting so hard." He finished with a dazzling smile. "We're going to do great, yeah? Now, let's start. Jungkook, we'll begin with your
Jungkook nodded his consent. Jimin helped him get up, grinning as Hoseok's skinny figure rose and walked to the pair of speakers that sat in the corner of the room that begged to have their play buttons pushed. "Hoseok hyung is a real motivator, isn't he?"

"He is. I hope we can make him proud." The brunette replied honestly.

"You know that he'll be proud of us no matter what, Kookie."

"Still." Jungkook insisted, turning to see Jimin nodded his head in understanding. Despite his assurance, he didn't want to disappoint the older man either. Hoseok had worked longer and harder than all of them. He deserved to win the solo part and the group part. The maknae sighed. "I wish we had more time."

"Me too. One week passes by so quickly when it's the week that leads up to competition." The mochi murmured. His dark pupils sparkled when the music started up. He lightly clapped Jungkook on the shoulder. "Worrying can wait. Nervousness makes the legs stiff, anyway. For now, let's practice!"

Seven days flew by like no seven days Jungkook had ever experienced previously.

In retrospect, nothing particularly special happened that made it seem as though the days passed at a quicker rate. Life merely went on: Jungkook cooked breakfast and dinner for he and his soulmate to share while they conversed with each other about their respective days. He went to work, constantly asked Taehyung about his attraction to Hoseok, and constantly got into playful wrestling matches over the subject. He visited the gym twice early in the morning to swim. On Tuesday he and Yoongi went out for afternoon drinks (Yoongi was the one doing most of the drinking, since Jungkook abided by the whole no alcohol rule) and to speak about the elder man possibly beginning to tutor the maknae on piano. Thursday was a day that was jam-packed with activity, so much so that the brunette collapsed into sleep ten minutes after walking in the apartment door. Friday he stayed up late again, though this time not due to a crazy schedule, instead because it was one of those nights where he and Namjoon would wear gloves and socks and spin around the living room floor (something that technically breached their usual distance but mattered little just then as long as their skin was covered). That night felt particularly romantic for some reason, and Jungkook couldn't force his eyes from the soft, handsome face of his soulmate, feeling his heart of stone flutter out of time when Namjoon gave him a dimpled smile that was everything warm in the world. Perhaps it was a bit bittersweet too; he'd wanted to stand on his tippy toes and kiss his hyung's breath away at the grin. He didn't, as he wasn't able, and traded breathless kisses for a playful nudge and another half twirl in Namjoon's arms.

And before he knew it, Sunday arrived.

Competition day.

May the hell begin.

"Do you think I should bring my toothbrush?" Jimin's voice crackled from over the phone. Jungkook had the tiny device smooshed in between the crook of his neck and his shoulder while he bustled about the apartment, packing up his own belongings.

"Why would you need your toothbrush? We're gonna dance, not model." The brunette answered distractedly. He stood in his own room, gaze frantically skirting around, searching for what he still
needed to pack.

The mochi hummed discontentedly. Jungkook gave in and walked to his small bathroom, rummaging for deodorant and a hair brush. "Maybe I should..."

"Hyung, if brushing your teeth right before we go on will give you that confidence factor, then bring it." He said. It took several more moments of digging until he found what he was looking for. Hurrying out of the bathroom, he tossed the items into his partially full dance bag, and continued his quest. "Personally, I'm more worried about my clothes accidentally ripping and bringing an extra pair of everything just in case, but you do you."

"Oh shit, you're right, I should bring two sets of my dancing outfits too." Jimin murmured. Jungkook could almost see him on the other end of the line, chewing his lip while he too rushed about like a madman attempting to get everything he would require shoved into his dance bag. Yoongi would probably be watching him with a slightly concerned (and mostly disinterested) look upon his catlike face. Or he'd be sitting on the counter drinking coffee and ogling Jimin's ass. One of the two. There came some rustling noises, then his best friend spoke up again. "You're bringing your makeup kit, right?"

Jungkook, whom had been rolling his lone pair of black socks into a tight ball, answered quizzically, "Why would I do that?"

"Obviously because you're going to be doing my and Hoseok hyung's makeup." The younger man sputtered, partly indignant, partly questioning. "Oh, calm down. You've gotten so good now that you're above the skill level of the makeup noona's there, Kook. You know what'll make us look best."

"What about me? Who's doing my makeup?"

"You are." Jimin cackled through the phone while Jungkook swore at him. "Relax. If worst comes to worst and you run out of time, which you shouldn't, you look great without makeup anyway, so you'll be fine."

"Oh yeah? And who says I'm doing you two first?"

"You'll be doing us first because we're your hyungs." Jimin replied sweetly. Jungkook was going to cuss at him again but got cut off. "By the way, Jungkookie, you know that American place that opened up not far from my and Yoongi's apartment, right?"

"...yeah."

"It's your turn to buy the pre-competition meal!" The platinum-haired man informed him cheerily. "I bought it last year and Hoseok two years ago. It's your turn, Kook. Hyung and I want something from there, mmmkay? Thanks for being such a sweetheart. Now, I'll see you at the studio in...an hour and thirty minutes with the food, yeah?"

"Yeah." Jungkook groaned in dismay, dragging a palm down his face with exasperation. He loved his hyungs, it was just, Jesus Christ, how did they manage to shove that much more work onto his plate within so little time? "See you there, hyung. Love you."

"Love you too!" Jimin chirped. The call ended.

The maknae tossed his phone onto his bed and fisted both hands in his hair and tried not to rip out his brown locks. The day of competition was always stressful, besides the fact that it was the day they competed in front of judges; a plethora of things needed to be packed, food to eat and use as
fuel prior to the competition had to be bought, the three had to meet at the studio at a certain time to take the bus deep into Seoul to the competition theater together, Hoseok had to check them in on time or else they lost their spot...the list went on. It was insanity, the kind of insanity that occurred once a year that sped up blood, numbed heads, and raced hearts.

All for the prize of five million won.

So, in retrospect, was the stress worth it if they won? Yes.

At the current moment while Jungkook's blood pressure spiked so high he thought he just might combust? Not so much.

"Namjoon hyung!" The maknae called loudly. It was ten in the morning right now, which meant his soulmate was definitely awake. Sure enough, a messy head of blonde hair poked in the doorway of his room after twenty seconds of waiting. Namjoon raised a curious eyebrow at him. Jungkook croaked desperately, "I have one million things to do right now and I can't do them all. Can you please help me?"

The taller man blinked. It came to the brunette that he probably looked like a whiny mess right now, and he thus expected his boyfriend to comment on this, but all he said was, "Of course I'll help, baby. What do you need done?"

Jungkook scooped up his phone from where he'd thrown it and tossed it in the general direction of his soulmate. He heard the sound of something being fumbled. He shook his head as he walked back into his bathroom. His poor, clumsy Namjoon. What was he to do with him? As he pulled at his drawers to retrieve his makeup brushes, primers, and other such things, he instructed, "I need you to call up that new American place that opened up by Jiminie hyung's place and place an order. You know the one I'm talking about, right?"

"Yup." Namjoon returned. The distinct beep boop beep of dialing sounded, and a deep voice asked, "What do you want me to order?"

"Anything." The younger man snagged the eyeliner he'd been looking for and closed one drawer. "Something greasy and delicious? And if they have a salad, can you get that too, because I know Jiminie or Hobi hyung is going to want something remotely healthy anyway."

"Got it." Was the reply. For the next few seconds, the maknae compiled everything he needed to glam his hyungs up in his arms, traipsed into his room, and dumped it all in his dance bag (a bag that at this point was nearly stuffed to the brim). Jungkook was so focused on the task at hand, and focused on thinking about what else he might need, that he didn't notice that Namjoon was talking. Well, he did, he could tell that he was talking...the brunette glanced up right as his soulmate uttered a particularly long phrase. He could tell Namjoon was talking, he just...couldn't understand him.

"Without mustard, please. Yes, three cheeseburgers, no mustard." Namjoon said, lips moving with ease and fluency. "Also, would you happen to have salads? Great, yes, I'd like two of those, dressing on the side. Pardon, what was that?" He paused to listen attentively, and laughed once. "Yeah, if you could include a bunch of napkins, that would be great. Thank you. It's a to go order, and it'll probably be picked up in...thirty minutes? Maybe a bit sooner. Alright, thank you very much, ma'am. Goodbye."

With that, he hung up the phone, and held it out to Jungkook. "I got you all cheeseburgers plus two salads. I also got three bottles of water. Is that okay?"

His partner slowly took his phone back, eyes bulging almost out of their sockets. "It's...it's great,
The blonde chuckled. With a teasing smile, he said, "We'll see. It takes a lot of time, dedication, and memorization."

"I'm willing to commit."

"Because you wanna learn English, the world's leading lingua franca and arguably the most useful language to know, or because I can speak it?"

Jungkook didn't reply. His ears burned.

Namjoon laughed again, pupils holding Jungkook's own, dark and full of fondness. "You're adorable, baby. We both know you'd give up after a week." He winked. "But you're cute, so I'll tutor you anyway."

"Uh..." Too much English too fast and not enough time to remotely begin processing. "What was that?"

Now the blonde's cheeks flushed the color of a rose. "I said that you're adorable. 'Cause you are." Clearing his throat in shyness, he dropped his eyes and asked, "What's the food for? Are you, Jimin, and Hoseok having a guys night or something?"

"I wish. A guy's night out would be a lot less stressful." Jungkook sighed through his nose while the tiniest of smiles formed on his lips. "Tonight the hyungs and I have a dance competition that we've been training for since last year. That's why I go to practice so often, to prepare for the contest...but yeah, that's tonight. And apparently it's my turn to buy the pre-competition food."

Namjoon's eyebrows raised. "That's...tonight?" The brunette nodded his confirmation. A second of hesitation passed before the taller man's deep voice uttered, "Can I come?"

Jungkook blinked at him, taken aback. Namjoon wanted to come see him dance? Wanted to...waste a free night away to support him? Calm, my rapidly beating heart. "You want to?"

"Of course." Was the response he was given. "You and Jimin-ah and Hoseok hyung worked your asses off for months on this. Why wouldn't I want to go and cheer on my friends and my beautiful boyfriend?"

At the words 'beautiful boyfriend', Jungkook blushed, looked down at his half-packed bag, then said, "You wouldn't mind making a few pit stops while we drive to the dance studio, would you?"

"Not at all. What else do you need?"

"People. Three more of them, to be exact. If you're going to come, I can't leave the rest of my hyungs in the dark." The younger man giddily scooped up his belongings, started to punch number six to his phone, and snagged Namjoon's keys from where they rested on the dresser to throw to him. His grin was wide when he passed his slightly frazzled soulmate while he walked out of his bedroom into the hall, shouting, "C'mon, Joon, let's go!"

So, okay.

Nervousness was something to be expected. Anxiousness was as well. They were two emotions that weren't terribly uncommon to experience anyway; for some people, one or the other was a part of everyday life. Jungkook typically suffered from the former whenever a client gave him vague
instructions or details on the look that they wanted, leaving him to pretty much wing the entire thing and pray that they didn't hate the look he gave them afterward (in his defense, he could protest that they just weren't specific enough, but still). The latter popped up once in every while, rarer now that he was out of college and didn't have to worry about losing his voice from singing so often or stress over completing his AP Music Theory packet for the class of the same name by the end of the week. He actually hadn't felt either in quite some time. Why would he, since he had Namjoon around, calming him, firing him up, or making him feel as though he was soaring?

Right now, however, both nerves and anxiousness were hitting him with so much force his body was trembling and his stomach was dead set on regurgitating the burger he'd eaten an hour beforehand.

"Jungkook-ah, your hands are shaking." Jimin commented lightly. He sat in a makeup chair with a knee slung over another, fingers laced while they rested in his lap. All around him, dancers wearing haphazard parts of their outfits bustled about, faces tight, steps frantic. Everyone whom could possibly cram into the area backstage was crammed into the area backstage, and as a result of that everyone was trying not to knock others over as they hurried around (fruitless, really, in Jungkook's opinion. He'd been nearly trampled over a grand total of four times in the past fifteen minutes). People were talking and some were yelling and honestly, some peace and quiet while he did his hyung's makeup would be fantastic.

"I know, hyung." Jungkook replied through clenched teeth, attempting to steady his fingers through the sheer force of will. It wasn't working. The shakiness was forcing him to work slower than he'd like to, for fear that the wing of Jimin's eyeliner would come out like a squiggle instead, and he wasn't pleased. His own makeup wasn't done yet, and their group went on in...how many minutes? "When do we go on again?"

"We're the second group to go, so forty five minutes. Relax, Kook, you've got plenty of time." The mochi obediently stopped moving his mouth the moment Jungkook requested he do so. Gloss was swiped over his full, pouty lips. Once the maknae was done with that, he continued, "Why are you so nervous, sweetheart? Usually Hoseok hyung is the one freaking out. Are you still worried about the contemporary part of the group piece?"

"It's not that. Tilt your head up to the left a little, hyung." The brunette bit his lip in concentration. Jimin remained as still as a statue, and soon enough, his apple-like cheeks glittered faintly in the lights of backstage. Neutral pastel colors decorated the rest of his stunning features, accentuating areas like the sharp line of his jaw, his brow bone, the shadow of whatever forehead didn't hide underneath his platinum bangs. His silver-grey outfit was already on, which, combined with the makeup, gave him the appearance of a flighty fairy. Jungkook nodded in satisfaction. "You're finally done. Where the hell is hyung so that I can get started on him?"

"Jungkook-ah-"

"Jiminnie, have you seen my pants?" A loud, bubbly voice broke through the sounds of the talking backstage. Hoseok seemed to appear out of thin air beside Jimin, his button-up silk shirt a muted scarlet, eyes bright with anticipation. Evident of his question, his bottom half was bare except for underwear. Someone bumped into him, and he reached out a hand to grip the arm of Jimin's chair to steady himself. "They said that they kept all of our shit together but I can't find my pants anywhere."

Jungkook grabbed Jimin by the wrist, tugged him out of the chair, scooped up his squeaking hyung, and plopped him in the mochi's place. Hoseok spit out a few 'yah's!' in protest to the manhandling, shushed when the maknae used two fingers to tilt his chin up to begin working.
"I saw your pants earlier when I put my outfit on, hyung, it's probably still there." Jungkook used darker tones to deepen the natural contour of Hoseok's cheekbones. His eyelids were next, things that the brunette tended to quickly and with soft red shadow. "Once I'm done with my own face I'll help you look for them."

Hoseok's nose scrunched at his no-nonsense tone. Angling himself towards Jimin (whom stood next to the pair with his arms crossed), he asked, "What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing's wrong with me-"

"He's nervous about tonight for some reason." The platinum-haired man dodged the swipe Jungkook made at him before returning to work. "I already asked him if it was because of the part he's the worst at in our group dance, but he said no." He faced Jungkook, who did not return the favor, still working. "If it's not that, then what is it? Is it the fact that Namjoon hyung is here?"

At the mention of his soulmate's name (and the fact that the very man himself sat in the huge audience somewhere, no doubt reading over the program diligently) Jungkook's face flushed. "It's not completely that, either." His two hyungs started to ask more questions. He cut them off with, "Aren't you two conscious of the fact that the others are out there, too?"

All three men fell silent. On top of the audience of several hundred people, ten of which were judges that sat in the very front and scrutinized their every move, their entire friend group was present. Namjoon was there reading over the program, sure, but Min Yoongi sat right next to him, most likely reading over his shoulder since he was too lazy to grab a program for himself. The two Kim's, Taehyung and Seokjin, probably sat next to them, whispering to each other and to the others. They wouldn't just be performing for strangers, people that they knew and cared about would see them as well. Jungkook, Jimin, and Hoseok had been doing this together three times a year for years; the only time anybody they knew had come to see them was Yoongi, who'd come to one show last year after Jimin told him, and he'd been gummy smiles and congratulations and drinks afterward and it had been fantastic to see his hyung looking so proud, even if they hadn't won.

Now it was different. Now there was a tiny entourage out there cheering them on. Now there was a family.

Now, more than ever, it mattered that they did their best.

"I'm conscious about it, but it's not worrying me." Jimin said slowly. "Why is it worrying you?"

Jungkook paused in defining the arch of Hoseok's brow. His hands fell to his sides in time with his sigh. Eyes on the floor, he said quiet enough that only his hyungs could hear, "You both know that none of us have won the solo category ever. You know that we've gotten third place in the group category once, two years ago. You both know that I'm really competitive, and that I've been fine with not winning, because I always know that we do our best. But now..." He inhaled deeply. Shut his eyes. Exhaled. "Now I want to win. So much has happened this past year, I've overcome so much, moved forward in ways that previously I could only imagine. And now my soulmate is out there, and Jimin hyung's soulmate is out there, and Taehyung hyung and Seokjin hyung are out there...and fucking fuck, after all of this crap happening, I want to win."

Warm hands grasped his own. It was Hoseok, his smile kind and brotherly. "I really want to win this year too, Kook. So, so badly. We've worked hard and we deserve it. Us, as a group, we can be selfish and say that we deserve it, with the amount of hours we've put into this." He brushed a piece of hair from Jungkook's eyes. "But you've gotta remember that we didn't come here to win. We came here to try to win, and it would be fucking fantastic if we did, but that's not why we came
"That's right." Hoseok's grin wasn't wobbly at all, it was the very sun itself. "It's okay to have that want, that passion, that drive to be the best. The key is to let it fuel you, not drag you down and worry you, and know that even if we don't win..."

"We've still got soulmates who are the sexiest men in the room, so at the end of the day, who really wins?" Jimin piped up, features triumphant.

The maknae had no idea why but that question coupled with the look on his hyung's face made him burst out laughing. Tears of mirth jumped into his eyes when he heard Hoseok's cackle and Jimin's musical laughter join him in a symphony of sound. He bent over to put his hands on his knees, makeup brush still in one of his palms, grin splitting his face.

"Oh my God, that's the truest thing I've ever heard in my life." He wheezed out, only making his hyungs laugh harder.

Hoseok was hiccuping. "I w-was-hic-going to say some-hic-thing like we did our-hic-best, but that w-works-hic-too."

It took several moments (and some strange looks from the other dancers backstage) for the three to calm themselves. Body still rattling with the occasional rouge giggle, Jungkook returned to Hoseok's face to finish him off. "Oh, Jesus, I needed that right now. Thanks, Jiminie."

"No problem." Jimin grinned. "I'm always here whenever the truth's gotta be spoken."

"Preach." The oldest of the three lifted his hand up, and Jimin high-fived him.

"Excuse me." A woman approached the group dressed entirely in black, from her heels to the lipstick she wore. She held a clipboard in her arms. A coordinator, then? Jungkook braced himself for the remark that she was going to make about the noise, but she merely checked the clipboard and asked, "Are you the Bangtan Boys?"

Hoseok was the one whom answered. "Yes, that's us."

She offered up a tight-lipped smile. "As you're well aware, the competition is to begin in thirty minutes. You were scheduled to be the second group to go on, but two of the dancers in the group preceding yours have fallen ill. Bangtan Boys has now been moved to the first slot. Please be in your starting positions two minutes before the show starts, alright?"

They nodded at her; she turned and was swallowed by the backstage crowd.

"Well, it looks like we're going on sooner than we expected." Hoseok stated unnecessarily. Jimin and Jungkook blinked at each other. "No problem. Kook-ah, finish me up so you can do your own makeup, and Jimin, you're going to have to help me find my pants. Your outfit looks good on you, Jungkook."

Jungkook said a preoccupied thanks in response to the compliment (for the group piece, he was currently dressed in a flowy ensemble colored wine purple. Later, for his three solo pieces, he'd put on a black suit) and swiftly added the finishing touches to his hyung's face. Truth be told, Jimin and Hoseok were gorgeous enough without the extra stuff on top, but without highlighter or lipstick or gloss, their features would look dull underneath the lights, and they'd get docked points for presentation. The brunette needed the makeup for the same reason. Plus his face. Was not
gorgeous like Jimin's or Hoseok's.

To the mirror he went, then.

Hoseok grabbed Jimin and off the two went while Jungkook squeezed through the crowd of people so he could get to the tiny preparation room set aside just for his group. It was barely big enough to fit in a vanity, a small couch, and their things; it sufficed, though, and that was all that mattered. Hurriedly, the maknae peered at the mirror and went at his own face with the brushes, eyeliner, purple blush-

Something in the room buzzed loudly. It was enough to startle Jungkook from his reverie, enough to have him jumping with swear words clumsily exiting his partially done lips. It emitted from his own bag. He planned on ignoring it. It buzzed again. And again. And again. Sighing, he set down his things to reach around his bag to try to find his phone somewhere in its midst. Procuring it finally, his sour expression immediately melted away.

From: Namjoonbug

Hey, Kookie

I just wanted to tell you good luck tonight

I know that you're going to be amazing, and me and the rest of your hyungs will be rooting for you the whole time :)

The final text was a selca of Namjoon, Yoongi, Seokjin, and Taehyung, faces excited and smiles wide. Yoongi's grin was gummy and soft, so rare to see of him. Taehyung's boxy smile was ruined by the bit of tongue poking out on one side, his eyes positively glittering with giddy anticipation. Seokjin looked immaculate in his suit, a powder blue thing that complimented his hair and made his expression all the more motherly. And Namjoon...Jungkook giggled at Namjoon. His face was tilted upward in a futile attempt to remain in the shot, nose crunched up, lips making a kissy face, and a quarter of his head missing. Something warm settling in his stomach to chase the nerves away as he gazed at their faces. God, what was he going to do with these people that cared for him so much?

To: Namjoonbug

Thanks Joonie...you're all the best :')

Clicking the phone into sleep, he noted that he had about ten minutes until he had to get into starting position. Jungkook's eyes widened. Fuck. He wasn't ready yet! He tossed his phone back in his bag, using every skill he had to complete his look.

Ten minutes later, Jungkook felt a hell of a lot more ready, and was waiting for his teammates by the edge of the curtain. The announcement had just been made that the show was to begin in a few minutes yet there was no sign of either man. His foot tapped out a jittering beat. Hopefully they'd found Hoseok's pants and the eldest of their group of three wasn't going out there half naked-

As though they could read his mind two figures stumbled towards him from the depths of the thinning backstage crowd. Jimin and Hoseok, in the flesh (and yes, Hoseok wore pants. Thank God). The former gave him a breathless grin and whispered excitedly, "Are you ready, Kook-ah? This is going to be so great. We can do this."

Hoseok abruptly looped an arm around each of their waist and pulled them close so that their heads
rested against each others. "I have never been more proud of any dongsaengs in my life. Let's go out there and give them everything tonight. Nothing less then our best." Jungkook and Jimin nodded passionately. Hoseok's eyes twinkled. "Let's fucking dance."

On cue the audience erupted into applause. Their breath collectively hitched in panic: that meant that the curtain was about to go up and they weren't in position yet and they were ripping away from each other and flying out onto the dark stage and scrambling to get in place and **what the fuck the curtains were coming up and it wasn't so dark anymore**-

They stayed deadly still in front of the crowd, awaiting the beginning notes of their song. Jungkook's eyes were closed, his heart beating way too fast in his chest, it was so loud that every person in the venue could probably hear it.

And then.

The music began, and with it, so did they.

There's a weird sort of thing that happens to performers when they're on stage for real, not just practicing in front of a mirror miming parroting fixing. It's sort of like a mind going numb and unfeeling in a way, but still so very there, aware of everything, even though it was as though one was deaf and blind. At least, that was how Jungkook felt. Oblivious, light, slowly baring a part of his soul to the people there. Showing them that this was a part of him. This was him. The movement, the harsh locking of bone, smooth slide of muscle, delicateness of a spin that transformed into a lunge. The music led him Jimin, Hoseok about, fluid and in time. They danced for a millennium upon that stage with naked feet and sightless pupils, just feeling. Forever and ever and ever they danced. Forever the deaf numbness that created such peace within his mind reigned on.

As with all reigns, it came to an end.

Jungkook was brought back from whatever place his head had gone to at the roar of applause that assaulted his eardrums. People rose from their seats and lifted their clapping hands above their heads, a polite way of portraying that if they weren't expected to be like that, polite, they would be out of their seats hollering their approval if not for the formal setting they were in. The maknae let out a breath he hadn't known he'd been holding, felt months and months of stress slide off of his shoulders, and he smiled.

He glanced to his left to see Hoseok and Jimin smiling as well. They caught his eye and beamed at him, to which he beamed at them in return. Turning his eyes to the crowd, he sought out a tiny group of four, searching and searching. He wasn't able to find them before he had to walk to the middle of the stage and give a bow of respect to the ten judges that sat in the front, whom did not clap or smile but nodded instead, and his hands were being tugged and the loud approval of the crowd was muted behind a heavy curtain.

There was barely a moment to spare simply breathing in the darkness letting the muffled sounds die on the other side of the curtain: the three turned away to hurry to their preparation room to change into their solo performance outfits. Jimin shook the youngest's shoulders in contained glee, an action that had the maknae grinning and accepting the energy-charged rattling without protest.

In another minute they were there. They locked the door behind them, rushed to their respective bags for their outfits, and started to strip. In the middle of wiggling out of the pants he'd struggled to locate, Hoseok said, "That was amazing, you two, we definitely scored a spot in the top three for sure."
"Top three would be nice." Jimin hummed, smiling at the thought as he kicked off his shoes. Jungkook peeled off his shirt (secretly thankful the color was dark enough to hide any sweat stains) and the mochi abruptly let out a whistle. "Damn, Jungkookie, look at those fucking abs."

"Jiminnie, Hoseok hyung was trying to rope us into a moment there." The brunette rolled his eyes and tossed the shirt aside.

Jimin waved his comment off while he shimmied out of his own bottoms. His dark pupils danced. "Ooh, you know what we should do?"

"Hyung, we were gonna have a team moment."

"Team moment can wait, this can't." Jimin stated. Hoseok (whom was currently pulling on a pure white long-sleeved shirt that resembled a cloud woven into fabric) snickered and let the younger man continue. "You should let me take a picture of you shirtless to send to Namjoon hyung."

Jungkook balked, fingers too busy yanking down his purple pants to reach out and stop his friend from grabbing the brunette's phone. Jimin presumably opened the camera, and cackled like a madman. "Or I could take a picture of you like this...in those panties."

His cheeks flushed with heat, and in one swift motion, Jungkook held his new pair of tight black slacks in front of him to hide the lace from view, hissing, "You know I wear them for the confidence factor."

"Can't really blame you on a night like tonight." The platinum-haired man waited until the maknae was half-dressed, his upper body bare, before the sound of a camera shudder sounded in the room. Jungkook swiped at his best friend, whom danced gracefully out of the way laughing crazily. Another second and then the picture was sent. Jimin relinquished the object to its owner and continued to get dressed, snickering all the while.

Groaning in dismay, Jungkook observed the photo of himself; his hair was sticking up in tuffs from removing his top, his entire face was red as a tomato from the playful jab about his choice of undergarments, and his pupils were so wide with surprise at the fact that the picture was actually being taken that he looked positively shook. And he was shirtless. Great. He watched as the message changed from delivered to read, as the three little dots popped up, disappeared, then reappeared.

**From: Namjoonbug**

Jungkook what the fUUUUCCKkk

Jesus christ baby

You made me choke on my own spit

The dots popped up again.

**From: Namjoonbug**

I thought watching you dance was the hottest thing I've ever seen

But this tops it

yep this definitely tops it oh my GOD you're so fucking hot, baby
Jungkook’s cheeks were burning for a different reason now. He resisted the urge to hide his face in his hands as the final messages popped up.

From: Namjoonbug

The next group is coming on so I have to put my phone away

Good luck on your solo dances, my sexy little bunny ;P

That's it. Jeon Jungkook has died and gone to heaven. Those last words killed whatever small amount of sanity he had left and he burned up on the spot.

"What did he say?" Hoseok asked. He was fully clothed now and looked like a dream (which was kind of the point, since the first song he was dancing to was called Daydream).

From behind his fingers, Jungkook mumbled, "He called me his sexy little bunny."

Both Jimin and Hoseok squeed and cooed. The brunette stuck his tongue out at both of them, returned his phone to his bag, then finished getting dressed with his cheeks still on fire. Out of the corner of his eye, Jungkook saw Hoseok stretching as a means of loosening his muscles and getting the jitters out: he pulled his cell out again and snapped a quick picture. His shutter was silent so his hyung paid him no mind.

To: Tae Tae, Eatjin hyung

thought you'd like to see a picture of your mans

From: Tae Tae

he's not our mans

From: Eatjin hyung

Yet

To: Tae Tae, Eatjin hyung

holy shit

did you just say 'yet'

From: Tae Tae

NO HE DIDNT AISHE BABA WHYYYYY

From: Eatjin hyung

Yes I did indeed just say 'yet'

Tae and I are going to talk to him tomorrow about possibly joining us, if he'd like

Jungkook was being called by Jimin to touch up his makeup; he sent a heart eyes emoji and put his phone away for good. As he gathered his brushes and palette to begin working on the mochi’s eyelids the older of the two babbled away in what his two teammates could tell was nervousness. Twisting his hands together, he said at the speed of light, "So the first person going on is Hoseok hyung, in twenty minutes, and then Jungkookie a little after you, and then me. Hyung, you said
"Right." Hoseok nodded. Most likely because he needed something to do he repeatedly glanced at the clock in their room. "Instead of doing callbacks for every dance, you just dance your three songs right then and there. If you dance well enough, you move into the next round right away, and so on. Actually-" His head swiveled towards the time again. "I go on in fifteen minutes now."

Fifteen minutes passed by nearly as fast as the past seven days leading up to the competition had. Sooner than the blink of an eye, Hoseok was waving to his teammates while they saw him off backstage, new outfits on and encouraging smiles adorning their faces. Then it was a mess of the two of them pacing all over the place as they listened to their hyung's songs play; bopping about in time, playfully having tiny dance-offs, doing the parts of the choreography that they knew. Each time the next song was played, they silently yelped for joy (their hyung was moving on, past the first round, and second!) and finally Hoseok came back with sweat glistening on his forehead, a big smile, and the applause of the audience behind him.

"Hyung, you were great-"
"You did amazing-"
"You didn't even see me." Their hyung laughed. There was a sparkle in his eye and a bounce in his step. He knew he'd done well. And hell, even if it meant Jungkook lost to him, the maknae hoped to God that Hoseok won the solo part. He'd earned it ten times over.

"But it's something we just know." Jimin stressed with a grin. "Call it a performers intuition or whatever the fuck, we sensed it."

Hoseok laughed once more while he grabbed the platinum-haired man and poked him silly. "You're ridiculous, Jiminie. God." He turned to Jungkook, whom did his best to smile just as bright, to not repeatedly fiddle with his jacket, to not let his stomach twist in a weird mixture of anxiousness and excitement. "You ready for this, Jungkookie? Oh, your panties are showing."

The brunette cussed as quietly as possible and yanked up his pants (yeah, next year, he won't go for anything leather or tight. The fabric looked like it was spray painted on his thighs). When he saw both his hyung chuckling, he said, "Yah, they're for confidence."

"You do you, boo." Jimin's pupils turned into crescent moons at the ruffled look on his best friend's face. "Maybe I should wear panties next time too instead of a thong if it's that effective."

Realizing what he just uttered aloud, Jimin slapped a hand over his mouth. The damage was done: Jungkook and Hoseok were throwing themselves at each other to stifle the howls of laughter threatening to break free from their lungs. Jungkook choked out, "A thong?"

"It helps me move better! There's less fabric restricting-oh, forget it." The mochi groused after a half-hearted attempt to defend his clothing preferences.

Soon enough, the following two performances went (another solo dancer, then a group) and then it was Jungkook's turn. Hoseok gave him a slap on the ass before he headed onstage and Jimin a wink. He prayed he'd make them proud.

Ten judges sat in front of him at one well-lit long table. The stage lights were so bright and focused that they were all he could make out for a moment. Gradually, more of the audience came into view, rows upon rows upon rows. He needn't tell them his name, only bow and wait for the music to begin. He sank into the most precise ninety-degree bow he could manage and straightened with
his insides doing cartwheels. The seconds preceding the start of the music were oxymoronic, if the
brunette was being completely honest: nervousness fluttered about here and there, strengthened by
the competitive urge that followed him always, the drive to win. Yet Jungkook sensed the
eagerness to show off how his body could move, felt the lace at his hip, knew in his mind that a
special pair of eyes was trained upon him. Namjoon. Subconsciously, he sought his soulmate with
his eyes.

Before he could find him the music began.

The first song was full of things that Jungkook knew he was good at. Motion moved easily
between his joints, and they popped and flexed at his will. His black tie flew around quite a bit,
even hit him in the face twice, but he ignored it and continued with the piece. After two and a half
minutes, he was finished and breathing hard and it seemed as though the stage lights had gotten a
bit hotter. He resisted the urge to wipe the sweat from his brow using the sleeve of the jacket of his
suit in favor of keeping his gaze on the judges. The audience remained respectfully silent while the
judges conversed amongst each other. It took long, long enough to cause Jungkook to think that he
might not make it to the second round and oh God he'd struggle to dance again if he couldn't even
pass the first round, but the judge in the center sent a thumbs-up and the audience clapped loudly.
He smiled. Thank you. Thank you thank you thank you thank you.

He had several seconds until his next song began. Jungkook used those seconds to close his eyes,
breathe in and out, and remind himself of the moves. His songs were all stark contrasts from one
another, having themes in their own rights yet twining together to reveal three aspects of the human
personality. When picking the music, Jungkook thought it was important to portray feelings he had
as well, since he was human like everybody else, and chose songs he could both dance well to and
also convey an act to. The first song was easier with a simple message: power, skill, strength,
which got him here.

Jungkook heard the thumping beat of the song commence. Letting a smile lift the corners of his
mouth, he dramatically swept the back of his jacket to the side and flew into the beginning
motions. It was all ooze, languid yet restrained, sharp, simple. Hoseok warned him about using
choreography that repeated a pattern twice, but the brunette was counting on the complexity of the
rest of it on top of the spellbinding feeling he wanted to coax out of the audience. The goal was to
get them enraptured with him; if he could do that, seduce them, then that would more than make
up for the repetition.

I'm gonna be a bad boy
I gotta be a bad boy
I'm gonna be a bad, bad boy
I gotta be a bad boy

His hands wove images into the air while he traced half circles into the floor. Jungkook let his
eyelids flutter, tongue moisten his lower lip, and fell further into the performance.

I make it rainism

The rainism

Now you completely fell in

I'm gonna be crazy now
Yes, crazy now

Now you cannot get out of it

A particularly slow roll of his pelvis elicited gasps from several of the audience members. Jungkook swiftly performed the flurry of challenging combinations that would propel him into the final verses of the song, lifted a hand to mime pushing his hair back, and just then felt a particular fire light in his veins. It created a gooey, hot sensation in his stomach, turned his thoughts a darker, dirtier, a delicious kind of dangerous that he didn't want to let go of, that made him want to roll his hips one more time for the sole sake of making someone's jaw drop.

Whatever it was, it was exactly what he needed to finish the song. With a decisive click, he was done.

The maknae breathed heavily (both because of the intensity of the dance and because of that strange hot feeling), staring out into the audience to see if he'd been able to entrance them. Cloudy eyes and stares and flushed cheeks looked back at him. For the hell of it, he bit his bottom lip and dragged it out nice and slow. There were a few audible intakes of breath. Oh yeah, he'd done his job alright.

Jungkook came out of the act to focus on the judges. They too seemed to be shaking themselves out of something (a fact that the brunette wanted to giggle at; seriously, had he managed to do that well?) and the verdict arrived faster than it had previously.

A thumbs-up. Jungkook exchanged the smirk for a smile, the audience applauding once more. Round three. I'm in the final round. I did it.

Contrary to the sultry mood the previous song emitted the final piece was filled with emotion nearly to the brim. It was soulful, painful, tugged at the heartstrings. It was called Begin, a song that Jungkook related to closely. It was about wishing to take the pain of others, for you to cry instead of them, to wrap up the emotions in a soft blanket that everyone was underneath and become as tightly knit as family. Jungkook's smiled faded into something calmer as soon as the first notes greeted his ears. He shut his eyes tight ad shut his head off in the same manner.

The pleasant fire in him stirred up difficulty, since yes, the song had passion, but not such lustful passion. Thankfully the power of it dummed down into something steady and warm; he twirled, spun, leaped, reverted, repeated, sequence after sequence, listening to the words and trying to act out the last feelings.


Love.

And then everything stopped. Silence ruled the huge building. Not a single soul whispered. The ten judges clapped, one by one by one, and then Jungkook looked up and it was a torrent, a flood, a hurricane of noise exploding around him, like a chain reaction that grew the longer it progress. The brunette bowed low. He smiled wide, waved a last time, then turned to trot backstage.

Jimin and Hoseok were on him the second he was in their sights, hugging him fiercely and murmuring their pride. Jungkook's heart swelled. He finally let out the laughter that wished to escape so badly; it came out slightly teary. He choked out his gratitude to them and they hushed him, wiped at his eyes, hugged tighter. Jimin had to let go right away, for he was next. His teammates adamantly whispered their will that he have luck. Jimin sent a stunning grin, then stepped out into the light and was gone.
Despite wanting to stay here, forever in the moment, there were tasks that required attention.
Jungkook got the breath squeezed out of him via Hoseok crushing his body with his arms, and then
they were tugging one another into the hall, the short way into their performance room, and they
started to pack everything up. The maknae scrubbed at his pupils that watered every so often. In
the bag his makeup supplies went, in his purple outfit and regular clothes, in went his hair brush.
He busied himself with packing Jimin's things too while Hoseok helped. They laughed when they
reached for the same thing, Hoseok mussing the younger man's brown locks, soon enough
finishing everything up.

They had their belongings slung over their shoulders as they listened to Jimin's final song. It was a
lovely, sad thing, gorgeous and the very embodiment of the mochi. The volume of the applause
that the audience offered up once he finished was great in volume, their way of voicing their high
approval. Jimin appeared from the other side almost glowing. His friends giddily thumped him at
the space in-between his shoulder blades, smooshed his cheeks, handed over his things. Chattering
quietly amongst themselves, the group meandered to the refreshments table that was set up full of
water, fruits, and veggies.

"Did you make it to the third round?"

"I did! I made it! God, I couldn't believe it when it was happening, Hobi hyung. It felt so amazing
to dance for those few minutes up there. But even though I kinda wanna win, I hope you do,
hyung."

"Aish-"

"Hey, what about me? Didn't you want me to win?"

"Jungkookie, you could get an award in just about anything, do you honestly need another?"

"Well damn, I didn't know it was like that-"

"Hush, you two, people are looking this way." Hoseok put a finger to his lips to shush them, fingers
curled around a stick of celery. Jimin's fingers were occupied picking apart a piece of broccoli,
while Jungkook clutched a quarter of an apple in his hand. He brought it to his lips and reveled in
the crisp crunch that sounded when he bit into it.

They munched on the food for a few minutes without talking. Jungkook nudged Jimin to ask,
"Hey, hyung, did you feel anything weird on the stage?"

The mochi's eyebrows furrowed. "Weird like how? Like a draft or something? That was probably
the air conditioning-"

"No, no." Jungkook shook his head. He reached for another quarter of an apple, having finished
his. "It was kind of...hot. Sort of like someone injecting fire into you, but the fire felt good. Really
good."

Jimin peered at him. Suddenly, he seemed to realize something, and his expression turned sly. Oh
God have mercy. "Now that you mention it, I do remember feeling something like that while I was
dancing. I remember thinking that it was kind of familiar, too."

"What was it? Is it a soulmate thing again?" Jungkook questioned, wondering if Namjoon had
anything to do with it out of habit.

"Oh yeah." Jimin chuckled. "Remember how soulmates can feel each others emotions when they're
really strong?"
"Yeah."

"The kind of feeling you're describing is desire."

The brunette froze. "What?"

Jimin winked at him. "Namjoon was lusting after you while you were up there. That's what the fiery feeling means. Lust."

Jungkook didn't know how his mind wanted to handle that knowledge (should he be surprised or flattered or...or...something else). He swallowed the mouthful of fruit, about to say he didn't even know what, until his brain processed what his best friend said and his features screwed up in disgust. "Ew, you said that you felt that while you were up there? That means Yoongi hyung was lusting after...after you, eurgh, that's so gross to think about-"

"Am I not allowed to be attractive to anybody?" The platinum-haired man threw his hands up in the air in exasperation.

"You are, it's just that it's Yoongi hyung, and he's nasty-"

Jimin hit him on his shoulder. His words were biting, though the harshness of them was taken away due to the teasing smile Jimin wore as he said them. "Talk about my soulmate like that again and you'll be crying for days, Kook-ah."

Jungkook muffled his laughter behind his hand and took the hit since he deserved it. The three had a while to wait until the results would be announced, so they whittled at the time with the refreshments, playful banter, and conversations with other dancers. There was one man there named Taemin who was apparently a friend of Jimin; meeting him provided an excellent distraction from the impending scores. Hoseok kept checking his phone, smiling, which Jungkook assumed was Taehyung and Seokjin's fault. He caught him chuckling softly at the screen once or twice and randomly wondered if soon the whole group could get together on one big triple date, Jimin with Yoongi, Taehyung and Seokjin with Hoseok, Jungkook with his quirky Namjoon. It sounded pleasant. The brunette couldn't wait for it to be a reality.

Taemin eventually parted ways with them to speak with his other friends. Hoseok clicked his phone into sleep mode. Jungkook's fantasy melted until reality was left in its place. The dancers backstage halted in moving about to pay attention. Murmuring could be heard from the other side of the curtain. The group shot each other glances. The maknae exhaled once, twice, steeled his nerves. Warmth met each of his open palms: it was Jimin and Hoseok grasping either, holding tight.

Win or lose, they'd given everything tonight on that stage. That was what mattered the most.

"Attention, ladies and gentlemen!" Came the voice of the announcer. The audience immediately became silent. Jungkook listened hard. "Thank you for taking the time out of your nights to come here and witness the performances of over one hundred of South Korea's best dancers. As you know, there are two categories to try to win in, group and solo. There's only one winner for the group category, and there are three winners in the solo category. For those who do not come in first place, your scores will be sent to you via email tomorrow morning so you can view your standing. Now, the judges have deliberated for a long while now, and it's time to announce the winners."

_Breathe. Breathe. Breathe._

"As per tradition, the winning group will be announced first." A pause. It was dead silent save for
the ruffling of papers. The announcer cleared their throat. "The winning group of the 2018 Seoul Dance Competition, who will be receiving five million won as a grand prize, is..."

*Thump* went his heart, *ache* went his bones, *please* said his mind.

"...the Bangtan boys!"

...what.

Jungkook wasn't sure who started screaming first. It was probably Hoseok because that was the kind of personality he had, but then it didn't matter, it didn't matter because all three of them were clutching each other and screaming their heads off and showing the worst sportsmanship ever but they couldn't help it because this was the first time that they'd ever won and they did it they did it they did it.

*We did it.*

The entire audience was screaming with them if the noise was any indicator. People cheered so loudly that Jungkook swore he could feel it in the ground. Jimin's eyes were glistening and his hand was pressed to his mouth and Hoseok looked much the same. The brunette tugged them into a tight embrace, pressed their heads together, and they reached around and squeezed and Jungkook couldn't breathe right and figured he'd never have to breathe again, not really, he could live off of this feeling alone and he'd be just fine.

"Congratulations to Jung Hoseok, Park Jimin, and Jeon Jungkook, the dancers that make up this fabulous ensemble!" The audience roared. At the mention of each of their names, the respective member smiled broadly. Jungkook let out an airy laugh at the euphoric expressions his teammates wore. "Your prize will be delivered to you within seven business days. Thank you for working hard and showing your skill. Congratulations once again!"

Jimin really was crying now, crying and laughing, and then they all were while they clutched at each other listening to the sound of cheers and shouts of ecstasy and clapping from their fellow dancers backstage. Jungkook almost pinched himself to assure that everything was actually happening; he didn't have to, the pain in his cheeks from smiling so hard was proof enough, and he hoarsely croaked "W-We did it. We actually d-did it."

"Yes we did." Hoseok warbled. His thin lips trembled, torn between tilting up with happiness or tilting down with the onslaught of tears. "We won. We won, you two. We won."

"I know, I know, I can't believe it-" Jimin wiped at his face hurriedly. Babble exited his mouth at a rate that staccatoed due to his emotions. "Oh my god, we g-got this far and we crossed the f-finish line, God, what the h-hell are we going to d-do with all of that money? W-We didn't even think about that, did w-we?"

Truthfully, money really *had* been the last thing on any of their minds, making the question posed a fair one. Hoseok shrugged and grinned while he did so. "We could give some away to charity."

"Buy Yoongi hyung better recording equipment-"

"Or we could take a trip together." Jungkook suggested. His eyes started to water again, breathing speeding up with growing hysteria. "Oh my God, hyung, hyung, I can go to America now, my portion of the win is enough for a plane ticket for me and Joonie, oh my God I'm gonna see *America-*"

They collapsed on one another, leaning on arms, whispering in ears about plans that were to
corrode their future. The announcer moved on and the audience calmed some, while the three solo winners were announced. Not daring to hope (since they were satisfied with their unexpected win), they quieted to hear the rest of the winners.

Taemin was the first of the three winners. He ran to Jimin and the two of them hugged, the tiny mochi lifted up in the air and swung around in his friend's excitement. They chattered their congrats to each other, complimented flow, types of combinations, determination. The second winner was a slender, pale woman who went by Irene, her pretty face breaking out into a sunny smile at the announcement of her victory.

"Our last and final winner of the night whom will be receiving two hundred and fifty thousand won in prizes, is...Jung Hoseok!"

Hoseok's expression went from content to absolutely flabbergasted within a millisecond. Jungkook and Jimin screeched at the top of their lungs in joy, shaking their hyung with such fervor that he'd most likely have a headache the next day. Not only had they won for the first time as a group, but Hoseok was the first of them to ever win in the solo category. It was a night of never before's, of miracles, and the maknae never wanted it to end.

"That's all for tonight, ladies and gentlemen, dancers and judges. Thank you for joining us, and we hope to see you in a year's time! Good night!"

With that, the entirety of the dancers that resided backstage (Jungkook, Jimin, and Hoseok included) surged towards the exit doors. They couldn't break from the crowd fast enough, leave fast enough, search for their friends with their alight eyes fast enough. The air of the hallways felt ice cold on the brunette's flushed skin as he and his teammates politely pushed through the thickening swarm of people, audience and dancers alike, heads swiveling wildly as they attempted to find the four people whom meant the most to them here. Thirty seconds scarcely passed before the three grew impatient, hollering over the noise. The crowd got denser, dense enough to force short Jimin to ride piggy-back style on Jungkook to prevent him from getting trampled (it sounded highly improbable, though the sheer amount of people and the speed they moved at suggested otherwise). Now the platinum-haired man had a higher vantage point and because of this he called to his fellow members once he spotted a head of rose petal pink hair in a sea of black.

The sight that met them when they broke through the throngs of people was one that Jungkook would struggle to forget. Seokjin stood tall and proud in the very same powder blue suit showcased in the selca the brunette had seen not an hour and a half ago with his makeup flawless. Taehyung was dressed in a suit of forest green with a bright neon yellow bow tie settled in the center of his neck, a strange combination yet it worked for him. Yoongi had on a plain black number (no surprise there), his obsidian eyes smoked out with shadow. Then there was Namjoon, his posture shy but expression radiant, pulling off a dark crimson ensemble with white ruffles gently complimenting the cuffs. He parted his hair differently for the occasion, and his own near-black eyes were edged with liner. He looked utterly delectable and the sight of him made Jungkook's mouth go dry.

He was so focused on Namjoon that he failed to notice that Yoongi and Taehyung carried bouquets of flowers in their grasps and upon seeing the trio tightened their grips on the things which caused a bit of pollen to be released into the air. Jimin barely had the time to cough once; then the three were bombarded with arms reaching for them and shouts of congratulations and oh, it was overwhelming in the best possible way.

Yoongi, after carefully hugging Jimin and giving him the flowers, grabbed Jungkook to pull him in for a rare moment of affection. The brunette clutched his hyung tight, mumbling into the shorter
man's hair, "Thank you for coming today, hyung. How did you like the performance?"

"It was great, kid." The producer said gruffly in return, patting the younger man's back. "I'm proud of you."

Nothing could stop his heart from soaring at the words. Yoongi. His least emotional, stoic hyung. Was proud of him.

They separated from each other. Jungkook spun around to see his soulmate not two feet away, dimples on display, handsome and timid and shit, his heart was skipping beats again. The brunette stepped closer; Namjoon stepped back only slightly, smile apparent yet paired with a warning in his eyes, but Jungkook didn't care and promptly launched himself at his boyfriend.

The taller man stumbled two steps until he could properly catch him. Jungkook buried his face in the blonde's shoulder, breathed in the mouthwatering cologne he'd decided to wear tonight, embracing him tightly. Namjoon held on just as tightly while he said speedily, "Jungkookie you were stunning, your dancing was fantastic, it was fucking entrancing how you moved, Jesus, you nearly gave me a heart attack up there, and your last song was artful beyond words, I can't fathom how you expressed the meaning so well-"

A blush rose to fan across the maknae's face at the praise. His soul shuddered and melted into a pile of goo with delight the more Namjoon's deep voice went on, satisfied that its other half noticed and appreciated it. When they detangled themselves, the older man's pupils trailed down Jungkook's figure slowly. Abruptly, the pile of goo turned hot, dark, and fiery. The brunette remembered that that meant his soulmate wanted him the same time Namjoon breathed, "And my God, you look beautiful. The choker and the...the everything, that's really...wow."

Jungkook preened. He coyly fingered the fabric around his neck. Cheeks still hot, he asked, "So you liked what you saw?"

Namjoon's gaze locked on where he smoothly twined the choker. It took a second for him to glance away and respond with, "I saw you, and I like you, so I liked what I saw a fucking lot."

"Yah, if we let you two keep on like that, you'll end up naked and on the floor." Taehyung playfully jeered at the pair. The youngest of the group sent him the finger. He laughed at that which jostled Hoseok (since when had his arm been slung across the older's shoulder?) and said brightly, "Congratulations on winning you three! You were daebak! Right Seokjin hyung?"

"All of your individual pieces were works of art, and your group piece told a magnificent story about yourselves." Seokjin chuckled. "God knows that I could ever move like that. We should take a dancing class and catch up with the younger ones, eh, Namjoon-ah?"

Namjoon balked. "Please no. I embarrass myself with my two left feet enough in daily life."

"Like he did earlier." Yoongi snickered. His arm was curled around Jimin's waist, the latter snuggled up to his side. "It was hilariously tragic."

"Huh?" Jungkook glanced at his rapidly flushing boyfriend who suddenly became interested in the floor.

Taehyung saw this and grinned his signature boxy grin. "Well, you see here, our dear Namjoon hyung thought it would be a great idea to get you all flowers, which we did-

"-and not twenty minutes after we left the floral shop, as we were walking in these doors, he tripped over a dust mote and crushed the bouquet." Seokjin finished. His windshield wiper laugh
gradually squeaked out as he slapped his knee to contain his mirth. "Oh, he looked so destroyed. It was hysterical."

"It was horrible." Namjoon said mournfully to the floor.

Jungkook reached out to touch the blonde's clothed arm. He glanced up. Jungkook said softly, "Thank you for thinking of me, Joonie. It's very sweet. Hey." He called Namjoon when the other tried to glance back down. "They're just flowers, silly. It's the thought that counts."

"Aww, Jungkookie's so sweet to his soulmate!" Hoseok cooed at the pair. "The day that you finally get together is fast approaching. I can smell it."

Namjoon's eyebrows furrowed at the same time Jimin made a weird choking noise. Yoongi glanced at him in concern but was waved off as the blonde questioned, "What do you mean? Kookie and I have been together for weeks now."

Hoseok's eyes practically popped out of his skull. "What? For weeks?" He gaped like a fish, appalled, and rounded on the maknae. "Why am I only just finding out? How could you withhold such vital information from your favorite hyung."

"Jimin made me do it!" Jungkook protested over a now cackling Jimin.

Everybody turned to the culprit, whom, after finishing his fit of evil laughter, shrugged shamelessly. "I thought it would be funny if you were not only the last to know, but found out you were the last to know." He giggled. "I was right."

"Jiminnie, where do you get these despicable ideas from?" Huffed Hoseok with his arms crossed over his chest, tone salty.

The obvious answer was the man standing next to him. When everybody turned to him, Yoongi rolled his eyes. "I have better things to do with my time than plan ways to vex you, Hoseok. I have a life. Jimin's just evil."

While Hoseok sputtered at the pair at the response, Taehyung spotted the way Jungkook had an arm looped around Namjoon's and was cuddling into him (aka trying to leech off of his warmth and be discrete about it. His boyfriend didn't seem to mind), tutted, then drawled, "Yah, you two, what did I say earlier? This'll lead to you two on the floor. Get a room-

The brunette didn't even think before he returned sassily, "You three get a room! I can see the drool dripping from Seokjin hyung's jaw onto the floor!"

Seokjin's mouth snapped shut. Taehyung flipped Jungkook off this time.

"Come on, you guys, we should get going." Yoongi said. He was eying the crowd that continued to build. "If we don't leave now we'll be stuck in traffic for hours. Let's go."

Everybody verbalized their agreement. Namjoon gently took a hold of Jungkook's covered wrist to help guide him out (a gesture that had that damn heart of his fluttering and the fire kicking up a small notch). Seokjin and Taehyung escorted Hoseok (still salty but carrying his flowers with no tiny amount of satisfaction). Jimin voiced out a forewarning to his soulmate before he picked him up and Yoongi's legs wound around the mochi's front as he carried him outside. They laughed and talked amongst each other, lights of the street flashing in their vision, carbon dioxide filtering into their lungs. Jungkook was getting that nagging feeling again, that this was priceless and magical, then grinned broadly at an awful dad joke Seokjin told that had Taehyung and Jimin giggling crazily.
Never let the night end.

Just as dances and reigns do, however, nights end too. Sooner than the brunette would've liked they reached their cars. There was lots more hugging, particularly suffocating squeezes from his fellow teammates, more quiet whispers of "We won, Jungkook-ah, we won." Seokjin blew him a kiss as he climbed into the front seat of his car, followed by Tae and Hobi. Yoongi and Namjoon hugged shortly (they were subjectively forced into it by their boyfriends who claimed that all best friends hugged on nights like this. They even demonstrated) and the former bade Jungkook a warm goodbye. The latter joined the maknae in the car a minute later, all soft smiles. He started up the car and they headed off.

At the halfway point during the drive, Jungkook's knee began to bounce. He was still full of energy despite the lateness of the hour, still fiery, still a bit hot. He subconsciously tugged at his choker, eyes turning to stare at his soulmate. He really did look handsome tonight. Namjoon was always handsome, it was just that his natural good looks were enhanced and brought to life when he put effort into his appearance, making him almost ethereal in the glow of the car lights. The brunette found himself pausing to examine the shadows the blonde's eyelashes cast, the fine curve of his neck, the fullness of his lips. Jungkook gazed at his pretty mouth a bit longer than he meant to. Those lips had felt heavenly on his neck that time that seemed long ago. Soft and...and...

Warmth bloomed in the maknae's lower stomach. It was different from the fire in his veins, different in the way that the desire was his own, not a side affect of sensing Namjoon's. He swallowed and tore his eyes from the producer's lean figure. *Nope, nope, not gonna let myself get aroused, not gonna do it.*

...*but his mouth is so pretty.* Jungkook whined at himself. *He's so pretty and he's made for me, would he really refuse if I asked for just one little kiss to commemorate tonight? Or...or two kisses? Or maybe three...*

Without his permission his mind plunged into the gutter he'd been keeping it from entering for the past month or so. His brain conjured up images of just *where* Namjoon could place those three kisses, of the huskiness of his voice when they'd been flirting earlier. He swallowed thickly.

A hand was placed on his jittering knee. Jungkook glanced up at his soulmate, whose expression remained unreadable in the dark, and nearly jumped out of his skin at the sudden thought of Namjoon somehow *knowing* that he was thinking about him like that. Not that it was *wrong* necessarily...thinking about his boyfriend wasn't a crime. Even if it maybe felt like one for some odd reason, it wasn't against the law, didn't break any rules, not the ones they'd created for themselves or the laws of the world- "What are you thinking about, Jungkookie?"

After a moment of internal deliberation (*it is not wrong to think about Namjoon like that, it's not*) Jungkook admitted honestly, "*You.*" The taller man raised an eyebrow in prompt, and he continued, "I'm thinking about how you wanted to get me flowers. About how much it means to me that you came tonight to support me and Jiminie and Hoseok hyung." It could be seen that his soulmate's soft smile was back. Biting his lip, the brunette said, "I'm thinking about...about your jaw, too. And your eyelashes. And...and your mouth."

Namjoon blinked. "*Oh.*" He said quietly.

Perhaps it was due to the fact that the response that he got wasn't entirely negative; nevertheless, Jungkook pressed on, a bit bolder now. "*Were you thinking about me earlier, hyung? During my second dance?*

"Of course I was thinking about you, you were up there on the stage." Something about his answer
was off-kilter, strange, forced. The blonde shook his head at himself, yet didn't carry on.

"But you were thinking about me like how?"

Namjoon's gaze stayed locked on the road. "I don't know what you mean."

"You know exactly what I mean, hyung." Jungkook refuted softly. His hyung was becoming skittish as the conversation went on, tightening and untightening his grip on the steering wheel, swallowing too many times in a row for the gesture to be subconscious. So he might have the maknae's own odd nervousness, then. The worry that want was illegal when it wasn't. When it became apparent that the producer wouldn't elaborate, he said, "I felt your desire. In the middle of the dance. My stomach got hot and it was like someone injected fire in me. It didn't hurt, though, it felt good. That was you, wasn't it?"

Namjoon's head thumped against the headrest in his blooming self-frustration. "Dammit. I'm sorry, I thought I had it under control-

"Why does it need to be under control?" Want was natural, it was human, and damn it all Jungkook was so sick, so tired of fighting down the ache in him whenever he so much as glanced at the older man. Tired of distracting himself with other things when all he wanted to do was lose himself in the other. Tired of it. With these thoughts swirling in his head and the fire in his veins and his lower lip moistened from a nervous lick, he said, "You don't have to keep it under wraps. I want you too."

"Please don't say things like that, Jungkookie." Namjoon whispered.

"Why? It's true. I'm not ashamed." The brunette's voice trembled. He ignored it.

"I'm not ashamed either, baby, it's just-" The blonde removed the hand that rested on his soulmate's knee to rub at his face. "It makes it too hard for me when you say things like that."

"Too hard to what?"

"To control myself." Jungkook's heart skipped a beat at the admittance. Two beats. If it skipped any more he'd have a heart attack on the spot, right there in his goofy, intelligent, worrywart boyfriend's car. "To resist you."

Without thinking the younger man voiced the first thing that popped into his mind. "So stop resisting."

Almost like the universe wished to help punctuate his point, the car abruptly came to a halt. The blonde turned the engine off, and Jungkook noticed the familiar shrubs leading up to an even more familiar building. He'd shut the car off because they were home. The brunette barely had a second to process that and ash himself just how they'd gotten here this fast; Namjoon unbuckled his seatbelt and exited the vehicle. Jungkook hurried to follow him, getting out of the car and shutting the door firmly, trotting until he was met with the back of his soulmate's head as he opened the door to their apartment. Spacious lobby? Dead quiet at this time of night. Their shoes clicked upon making contact with the spotless tile, the clear repetitive sound adding to the tension that stretched thin between the two like a wire ready to snap.

And belatedly, Jungkook wondered if it snapping would be such a bad thing.

Not another word was uttered on the elevator ride up nor in the short time it took for Namjoon to fumble with the keys on his keyring and open the apartment door. They shrugged out of their jackets, left them on the couch while the door swung shut behind them. Without looking at him,
the taller man murmured, "We should go to bed."

"I'm not tired."

"You should rest anyway, you've had a long day with the competition and everything, and with the excitement of winning, and you...you've got work tomorrow."

"Namjoon." His soulmate finally turned to him. Now very aware that his voice shook (and unable to help that), Jungkook stared at him. His eyes stung slight yet his words rang with truth. "I'm not tired. Even though I should be, I should be so damn exhausted it's not even funny. But you're here with me, not even three feet away, and I can...I can feel it, that you still want me, and hyung, hyung I want you too and it's making me feel so aware, so fucking awake." Jungkook saw a fire light behind his soulmates pupils and finished with a determination in him he hadn't known he'd possessed. "If I'm going to bed tonight, I'm going to bed with you."

Namjoon stared at him in stunned silence. Jungkook stared back, refusing to waver. The gravity of what he'd just said and the implication it brought hung heavy in the room, thickened the air, stilled time. If one didn't know any better they'd think it was an angry silence, Namjoon's response to something said in defiance against him. But that was the thing, the niche, the click is that they were fighting the same battle, on the same side, going against whatever was stopping them but what was stopping them was themselves and Jungkook finally stopped stopping himself because you know what fuck it, fuck this bruising thing, fuck whatever twisted fated made soulmates possible, he was tired and his soul ached and this is what he wanted regardless of the cost.

Forget cost. Some things were priceless. And the feeling of Namjoon's bare skin, not covered up, not hidden, close close ever so close, was one of those things.

"I...we...we can't do that, Jungkook." His words spoken in a deep voice were already crumbling under the maknae's stare, and he knew it, they both knew it and Jungkook knew Namjoon was desperately attempting to piece himself together with that beautiful mind of his and control. "We can't, we can't, w-we-

"I'm not afraid of your touch." Jungkook stepped closer. His soulmate didn't step back. Taking this as a sign of encouragement, he took another step forward. "I've been frightened of so many things in my life, Joonie. Being alone, my ex boyfriend, losing Jimin, never finding my soulmate. But I've never been afraid of you because I trust you and care about you and, and, God, Namjoon, what fate says you can do doesn't change who you are. It doesn't change the fact that you're gentle and kind and way too fucking smart." Pleasant fire and a hungry ache gnawed at him. With the definite knowledge that what he was to say was the truth, Jungkook ended, "It doesn't change the fact that you want me too. I'm not afraid of your touch, Namjoon, I am not afraid."

"I am." Namjoon returned without a millisecond of hesitation. Still he did not step away; his body sway forward, and the fire in the brunette kicked up to a notch that had his gut almost cramping with need. Jungkook shook with the effort it took to stay in place. "You were right, I wanted you while you were dancing on stage. I wanted you yesterday, last week, a month ago and before that. I wanted you then. Just like I want you now." Jungkook's breath hitched and oh, it was getting increasingly difficult to remain unmoving. The blonde let out a shuddering sigh, expression pained. "Even though you're not scared, Kookie, I am. I'm terrified."

"There's nothing to be scared of." The maknae's foundation was cracking alongside his counterparts. The ache got stronger, the fire hotter, and was he really capable of staying still for another minute, was he really? "It's just me, Joonie. Your soulmate. Your boyfriend. I trust you. I won't be mad in the morning, God, I could never get upset with you over something like this the morning after." Jungkook couldn't help it anymore. He let his vocal chords draw out a high whine.
Please please please. "You can i-invade my space. You have my permission t-ten times over. I wanna go to bed with you hyung. Please let me come to bed with you."

Namjoon suddenly couldn't look at him. He shut his eyes, buried his head in his hands to hide the sound of his increasingly labored breathing. "Fuck, Kookie, I can't, I can't."

"I don't care how much it hurts." Jungkook's frame trembled. "Touch me. Please."

The older man let out a low groan. His face remained covered by his palms. "I want you, I need you."

"Take me. I'm yours."

Maybe it was the way the last two words were said. Maybe it was because the producer wished to stop fighting himself too. Maybe it was the same kind of thing that happened with bonding pains that were there to drive soulmates together more so than they already were. Maybe, even though physical contact brought purple bruises, maybe soulmates weren't meant to go so long without touch.

Whatever the reason was, it caused Namjoon to drop his hands from his face, reach for Jungkook, pull him in and oh, oh, oh they were kissing, they were kissing and it felt like heaven and hell combined with it's sweet slickness and virgin sin. The brunette whimpered into his soulmate's mouth, fingers moving up his arms to the side of his neck to meet with his wheat-colored locks to give them small tugs. There was pain surrounding his mouth, spreading on his hand, and Jungkook couldn't have cared less about anything in his life as Namjoon took his bottom lip between his teeth and bit down. He dragged his lip out, let go, and then their mouths were connected again and Jungkook was one hundred percent sure he wouldn't be able to go on in life after this without the bruising kisses of his everything.

Namjoon playfully growled when the maknae tried to dominate the kiss, fought with the blonde's tongue as his head spun round and round. The younger man almost won; he was forced to pull away to give a surprised yip when Namjoon hooked his hands underneath his thighs and lifted him up. Automatically Jungkook wound his legs around the other's waist. Giggling breathily as they moved down the hall, Jungkook tilted his head to nuzzle at Namjoon, eagerly pressing their lips together since he already missed the feeling.

Soon enough they reached the older man's bedroom. He'd been in there plenty of times to shake his hyung out of sleep and put him to bed properly, but he had yet to go inside with intent similar to the kind he had now. He didn't want to straighten the sheets, fluff the pillows, tuck in the blankets, he wanted to mess up that bed to the extent that they'd be scratching their heads the next morning looking for everything that had been on it the previous night.

The taller man set him down just as they reached the edge of the bed, freeing his hands. They wandered all over, curious, molding to the lines of his hip and curving around his jaw. Jungkook nearly keened into Namjoon, ears and neck and cheeks flushing hot and fast at the sensation of a finger pad accidentally brushing the hem of his undergarments. It was warm in that room, too warm, and both of their clothing had to come off else he'd combust.

Grateful for his multitasking skills, the brunette kicked off his shoes, removed his tie, and began to unbutton his shirt while keeping their lips locked. They disconnected for a second so he could shrug it off and throw it aside. When he turned to his soulmate, his eyes were dark, pupils blown wide, raking across his figure greedily. Jungkook shivered and whined again. "God, Jungkook, you're so pretty..."
Jungkook swiftly became dissatisfied that his hyung was merely looking and not touching, and said, "You can touch this pretty thing, 's all yours to do w-whatever you want with, Joonie." The stutter was not because anxious over giving his body to someone else, no, he was still choking on his own desire, still trying to not throw himself at the man he craved.

Namjoon bit his swollen lip (I did that, I did that, I did that he repeated gleefully). His hands stayed attached to the younger man's form and also stayed still. He slowly removed the hand curled along Jungkook's jaw and gazed at him. "Your face, baby..."

What did his face look like? Probably like he'd gone a few rounds with an MMA fighter. Purple most likely lined his sore, tingling mouth, and up across his face. Jungkook barely felt it. "I feel fine, Namjoonie hyung, I'm okay-"

"What if I do what I did to your face to the rest of your body?"

"Then I'll know you gave me what I asked for and more." Jungkook took hold of his boyfriend's hand and set it on his chest, sighing at the warmth and the skin-on-skin contact, and did not flinch. "I don't feel it. I just feel you. I wanna feel all of you, Joonie, please."

Jeon Jungkook seldom begged for anything, but if it was Kim Namjoon he was begging for, he'd get on his hands and knees for days. It was he final crack in Namjoon's resolve it seemed, and the younger man was backed up until he fell onto the mattress, his soulmate soon following. Weight on top of him tended to be a cause for alarm; this time it spoke of safety, security, made him feel tiny beneath Namjoon and he loved it.

He loved it even more when Namjoon trailed his lips southward, biting marks onto his neck and soothing the pain away with his tongue, laved down the center of his chest, blew a raspberry once he reached the area directly above Jungkook's belt. The younger man gasped a half laugh at the vibration. He swatted at his head, an action Namjoon neatly dodged despite his clumsiness, saying, "Are you loving me with your mouth or initiating a play fight?"

Namjoon smiled innocently. "Well. Now I know that that's something you'd be interested in trying..."

Jungkook prepared a sassy remark to respond with; then his belt was being undone, thrown in the same direction his shirt had been, and his soulmate had a hand placed tentatively on the edge of the fabric as a means of asking a silent question. The brunette nodded.

An audible intake of breath greeted his ears. Sounding choked, Namjoon said, "You're...you're wearing panties. Black panties."

Shyly, with burning cheeks, Jungkook mumbled, "I, um, I wear them to c-competitions because they m-make me feel more confident. And I kinda just...l-like them. I'm sorry if you t-think it's gross-"

"It's the hottest thing I've ever seen in my life." Namjoon breathed, delicately palming him through the lace. Jungkook threw his head against the pillows, fisted the sheets, shuddering as the motion was repeated once, twice, thrice. "What else are you into, baby?"

"Um." Was all he managed to get out, entranced by the steady pressure on his manhood. He struggled to put together a coherent sentence. "I like, mmph, f-fuck...I like r-rope, being tied up or tying someone else up-" The blonde's hand moved particularly deliciously, and Jungkook moaned. "I like g-gags and d-dressing up sometimes, oh fuck Joonie do th-that again, and I d-don't mind a bit of p-pain, shit."
"My God." Namjoon said with starry eyes. His palm slowed until it stilled, rested on top of his heat, causing the maknae to buck his hips up in search of friction. "Who would've thought you'd be hiding all that behind such a cute exterior?"

Jungkook had enough mind to pout, still rubbing himself on his boyfriend's unmoving hand. "I don't wanna be cute-" Just then the taller man granted his silent wish and squeezed him. The pleasure felt so powerful and spiked his arousal to a degree so high he was almost nauseous off of the intensity. "W-Wanna be tough 'n s-shit."

"I'd say you letting me touch you is pretty fucking tough."

The younger man grinned wide, huffing a pant at another hard grind. "Nah, 's not tough. 's trust. Cause I trust you. With everything I have, Joonie."

Namjoon stopped completely. Jungkook paused swiveling his hips, bent his head down, and listened knowing that whatever his soulmate was going to say next, it would be important. "Jungkook-ah. We don't...have to go all the way tonight. We can go a little further and then stop, or I can suck you off if you wear a condom, and that can be it. We can go slower."

And really, Jungkook loved how thoughtful Namjoon was, he really really did. He beckoned him upwards. Their lips met in a languid, slow kiss (that hurt slightly, truthfully, but he could bear it). At its conclusion the brunette said seriously, "It's sweet of you to suggest that. I appreciate it, really, I do." He gripped his soulmate's silky hair and tugged. Namjoon's eyes widened. Clearly, the message was partway to being received. "But I meant it when I said I'm going to bed with you tonight." He hesitated, leaned up, kissed Namjoon again. "Don't be scared. I know that you'll take good care of me."

It was as though his touch melted the fear from his counterparts shoulders. Namjoon stroked his cheek with a lightness comparable to a feather, then got up to grab what they would need from his dresser on the other side of the room.

Jungkook thought it would be rough, passionate like how their conversation leading up to it had been. It wasn't though: the atmosphere was calm, slow, intoxicating in the way the desire continued to burn and burn and drove him crazy. He got to put on a show for his soulmate, prepare himself in front of him since Namjoon couldn't, wouldn't stick his bare fingers inside a sensitive area like that. The maknae made it a show that was damn well worth watching, gripping the headboard with one hand and scissoring himself with his other, eyelids fluttering and tongue busy mewling out "Wanted you for so l-long, Namjoon, can't wait to feel you, have you fill me u-up, have you inside of m-me..." while Namjoon's neck blushed red as he watched him. It gave him a thrill like no other, because for the first time in a long time, Jungkook didn't mind being looked at.

The brunette wasn't nervous, wasn't anxious eying his Namjoon roll the condom on knowing that he'd be above him and around him and in him. He was hot, needy, wanted him more than he could ever remember wanting another person, mindless yet still very much in his mind, starkly aware of the heat of Namjoon's skin, the bead of sweat that formed at the nape of his neck, his heavy gaze. God, he was maddeningly careful, maddeningly slow pushing in, and though it was testing his lusty patience Jungkook loved every dragging second of it.

The first thrust was controlled, steady. Namjoon was moaning at the tightness and Jungkook was moaning at the sheer feeling. Then the next one came, and the next one, and the maknae lacked the control that his soulmate had and twined his legs around him, hooked his ankles together and pushed him closer, deeper. Following this change Jungkook cried out at the place that was now reachable.
"A little to the left, a little more-" The blonde's hips snapped forward and Jungkook seized, saw stars. "Fucking fuck, Joonie, right there, right there, please-"

"Please what, pretty baby?" Namjoon asked, his velvet voice strained. He hit his prostate dead-on once more. Tears edged at the younger man's eyes. It was so good, it felt so good, it had never felt this good before please never let it stop please never let him leave me.

"Puh-Please fuck me harder." Jungkook was losing his mouth, losing his sanity, losing his soul to the man above him. "Harder, harder hyung, you feel s-so good-

Namjoon obliged him and went harder. It was a matter of moments before the brunette was clawing at his back, high-pitched moans and yes, yes, please please please leaving his mouth, a few of the tears spilling over. The taller man kissed them away, each brush of his lips a dull pain and a blossoming bruise among the pleasure, compliments flowing from his mouth like a river flows along the ground. "God Jungkookie, you're so perfect, so, fuck, so t-talented, beautiful inside and outside and brave a-and you m-make me feel like the happiest man on e-earth-"

It was like the world was opening up around him. It was like his thudding heart of stone suddenly wasn't made of stone any more, it was flesh and pumping blood and muscle. It was like he wouldn't be afraid of anything ever again. It was like something that danced along the edge of his dreams that knew it was part of them but he wasn't conscious of it yet. It was his soulmate. It was Namjoon.

Jungkook sensed it with the coiling of red-hot heat in his stomach, of the arousal reaching its peak and getting ready to throw itself off of the cliff. He pushed to meet Namjoon's hips, his breathing sporadic, thoughts everywhere at once.

"L-Love you." Jungkook stuttered, his rhythm stuttering along with him. "I love you, hyung."

The heat shot from his stomach to his head and his toes and one more thrust was all it would take. He got it.

His orgasm tore through him forcefully, fingers curling, spine arching, eyes rolling into the back of his head. Namjoon was soon to follow him, rocking slower for both of their sakes to help them ride it out. Sightlessly Jungkook reached for his soulmate and connected their mouths to try and convey what he was feeling. The blonde kissed him in the same way in return and the maknae was alive and it was the best thing he'd experienced, this close, this bare, this raw.

Once they came down from their high, Namjoon pulled out carefully. The brunette quietly whined at the feeling of being empty. In boneless displeasure he saw his soulmate shakily get up, peel the condom off, and make his way into the bathroom. Jungkook snuggled tiredly into the blankets as he heard water run. Something wet was swiped along his stomach, cleaning him up, along his hips and legs. It was replaced with something dry and soon whatever was happening was done.

"Mmm...Joonie?" Jungkook called, unaware of how wreaked his voice sounded. "Where are you?"

"I'm right here, baby." A warm presence settled beside him. He tried to curl up into it but was nudged away. "I know you want to cuddle Jungkookie, I promise you I do too. But you're bruised enough and I don't...want to add to your collection."

"Bruises is a harsh word. It's mean." Jungkook yawned. "I'll started calling them your...your...purple love marks. 'Cause I love you and...and they're your marks so I love them too."

There was the sound of someone's breath catching. The brunette opened his eyes to see Namjoon
gazing at him with adoration adorning his features. Jungkook giggled, thoroughly sated, and made kissy lips. Namjoon kissed him softly, disconnected their mouths to murmur, "Jungkookie."

"Yeah, Joonie?"

"I love you too."

In his sleepy state, a question arose in the maknae's mind, so he asked it aloud. "More than you love your books? Your music?"

"Ten times more." Namjoon chuckled. "More than words, rap, flowers, more than the sky at night, more than the sun in the daytime..."

And so, with a heart no longer made of stone, with his soul humming in happiness, with poetic phrases conjured up by a voice of velvet, Jungkook fell asleep.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Think of this as the end, or the beginning, or whatever you wish. Just know that they are happy.

Chapter Notes

This is it, my fellow ARMY. This is the end. DUN DUN DUNNNN!!!!!

Ah, I'm kidding! :) This isn't really the end; though it's the end for this story, I'll be writing more BTS fanfic soon (definitely more Namkook, since they're my favorite ship and so underrepresented, like dude, they're so unique and great together! But I'll be writing some Yoonseok and possibly some Yoonmin and Taemin as well). But for now...a break :')

Some quick notes about this chapter, super fast: the wedding talked about is a mixture of Korean style and American style. I know that many elements of traditional Korean weddings aren't mentioned, but I tried to keep it as close as I could with a Western twist, and in this fic everybody is okay with two men getting married because this world needs love not hate

Thank you all so much for reading this story (almost 3000 hits? I'm actually screaming?????) and leaving such nice comments! And a huge thank you to those who have stuck around since the beginning, because waiting two weeks for a single chapter for nearly six months requires PATIENCE. All the love to you!

Once again, thank you for reading, my fellow ARMY! Please enjoy this final chapter!

It was astounding just how many different types of fabrics there were. Cotton, linen, wool, silk, cashmere...the list went on and on. So did the color selection, apparently, it was as though every color on the spectrum was on display: there was a violent orange jacket hanging off of the arm of another customers chair, slacks of deep forest green neatly placed on an end table, sapphire undershirts lacking any wrinkles whatsoever and lined up neatly beside shirts of a similar style that were a soft teal. Jeon Jungkook picked up one of the undershirts out of curiosity. After glancing at the price tag, he hastily put it back onto the hanger and moved a good five feet away.

One hundred thousand won for something that everyone can barely tell is there? He shook his head, ambling to where he could see a head of silver hair peeking out from behind a shelf full of ties. My God. I'm going to go broke buying my suit from here.

Eventually he ended up to the direct left of the person he'd been searching for. Pointing to a cranberry red bow tie, he said, "That one looks nice."

"It also looks more expensive than Seokjin's oven." The person responded. Plucking it from its
place anyway, Kim Taehyung read the price tag. "Hmm. Not exactly as expensive, but still pricey. Two hundred and fifty thousand won."

"Seriously?" Jungkook's eyes bugged out of their sockets as he leaned over to read it for himself. No, his friend was right. "Jesus Christ, how does this place stay in business when everything costs so much?"

"Well, you have rich people like me and Seokjinie buying shit from places like this, and then you have crazy people like Jiminie who figure, ah, the wedding already costs a fortune, what's a few more thousand won?" Taehyung hummed, returned the tie to the display, then resumed browsing. As an afterthought he commented mournfully, "I can't get it anyway, it wouldn't go with the theme."

"Oh, yeah, it's monochrome, isn't it?" When the older man nodded his affirmation, he snorted. "I wonder who decided that."

"I don't know if that choice makes Yoongi hyung original or boring." Taehyung chuckled, bemusedly reaching for a plain black tie. "I'm gonna call it boring."

"My future husband isn't boring!" A new voice huffed. Both men turned to see Park Jimin standing atop a wooden circle that was surrounded by mirrors with his arms crossed. He wore an obsidian suit with pearl-colored buttons that hugged his waist yet had sleeves that surpassed the edges of his fingers. Still, what with his sharp jaw, glittering eyes, and hair newly bleached until it was honey blonde, he managed to pull it off spectacularly. Which wasn't shocking at all, really. "He just likes to keep things simple."

"You just remember to tell yourself that in thirty years when you're surrounded by four cats on a ratty living room couch with static coming from the television and a mug of caffeine-free coffee sitting next to you in a chipped mug and you wonder what happened to your life." The silver-haired man said cheerily.

Jungkook and Jimin stared at him. Blinked.

"I'm now terrified." The blonde announced, significantly paler than he had been before the lengthy (and strangely specific) example.

"I mean, I would be too if I was marrying Yoongi hyung." Jungkook stated. Taehyung started to laugh and slapped his arm playfully, causing a few chuckles to break from his own chest. Jimin threw his arms in the air in exasperation as they sort of fell on themselves trying to hold the other up.

"I should've just gone suit shopping alone. You two are supposed to be helping me, not hating on my fiancée." The mochi's tone was a mixture of splenetic and fondness while he turned away from the giggling pair to see what he looked like in the mirrors. He twisted, examined, sighed in thought. Taehyung detached himself from the maknae to saunter over to Jimin's side.

"You know we're not actually hating, Jiminie." When the blonde raised a skeptical (but teasing) eyebrow, his friend giggled and ruffled his hair. "Kook and I love Yoongi hyung. We're just slightly worried that your future's gonna include a million cats and cold coffee and a grouchy husband. Right Jungkookie?"

"I'm not sure about the cat thing. Cold coffee and grouchy husbands are something I can get behind." Jungkook made his way to Jimin's opposing side. After his best friend posed differently a few times, he said, "And hyung, you look great in everything, really, but those sleeves are way too
long."

Jimin squinted. "The rest of the outfit is kinda nice. Maybe I could get it hemmed-"

Something in the brunette's pocket buzzed. He stepped to the side and pulled out his cell phone as Taehyung suggested that perhaps, since they'd been there for forty minutes already and hadn't found anything suitable for him yet, maybe they could get his exact measurements for a custom suit. Jungkook swiftly unlocked his phone to read the message there with two voices low and high-pitched conversing beside him.

**From: Joonie (my love)**

Hey baby, are we still all set for tonight? Do you think you'll be done shopping in time?

**To: Joonie (my love)**

i think so

jiminie hasn't found anything he likes yet and Tae and I still need to find something so we might not be done for hours

**From: Joonie (my love)**

It's okay, there's no rush

We can always reschedule for tomorrow

**To: Joonie (my love)**

no no noooo

we can't tomorrow bc we're going with Yoongi hyung to help him pick a wedding cake

**From: Joonie (my love)**

Shit, you're right, I forgot about that

The day after then

**To: Joonie (my love)**

can't then either, I'm going with Seokjin hyung and Hoseok hyung that night to help them revise the menu that Jiminie's wedding planner sent them

and you have to pick up Jiminie and make sure he doesn't get too drunk testing out the alcohol

its ok tho, tonight can still happen

we'll hurry up as much as we can, I know Tae and Jiminie have places they have to be later as well

I gotta go now, I love you

**From: Joonie (my love)**

Dammit I forgot about all of that too, thank you for reminding me
"Jungkook, back me up here." Taehyung's deep voice cut through the haze that Jungkook had fallen into while texting his soulmate. The maknae whipped his head up, returned his phone to his pocket, and made an innocent expression. The silver-haired man carried on, gesturing to an undecided Jimin. "Wouldn't it be better for him to just get measured for a custom suit?"

Jungkook thought about it. "No, it wouldn't be better...it'd cost twice as much to get a custom suit from here, and it would have to be delivered and that shit can take weeks. We should try to find a suit instead."

So the three men spent the following hour going through outfits, judging, critiquing them like this was the South Korean version of Say Yes To The Dress. First they rooted around for clothing that would actually fit sort of properly. Once that was done, outfits that weren't black or white or ash grey were set aside. The resulting pile was rather pathetic in size to the amount of outfits the shop had to offer, but Jimin did not give up and insisted they carry on with a determined We're not leaving here today until I get a wedding suit because we've been doing this for three days now at three different stores and I wanna find something today dammit. Jungkook was in charge of the suit pieces, Taehyung the accessories, and one by one each ensemble came together.

Until the number of ensembles available ran out.

Sufficiently burnt out, they flopped onto the nearest couches to rest, panting with exertion. Jimin appeared to be the most exhausted of them (understandable, since he was the one who had to not only try everything on but pay for it as well) and slumped against the wall in defeat. "This is going horribly."

"Nah, this..." Taehyung waved a listless hand from his spot draped over an arm of the couch. "This is...good for us. Like a bonding exercise."

"This whole fucking wedding has been one giant bonding exercise." Jungkook added, to which his companions managed to choke out laughs to because that was true beyond words. If the seven (meaning Namjoon, Seokjin, Yoongi, Hoseok, Jimin, Taehyung, and Jungkook) weren't stuck in one place for a long period of time attending to wedding duties, they were running around all over the place meeting time demands like ordering black and white roses before the went out of season, hiring a wedding planner, firing the wedding planner when they proved they were terrible at wedding planning, hiring a new wedding planner, finding a venue, composing the guest list in time to send out the invitations and get the responses back so they'd know how much food to make. It was endless and scraped at every person's patience. The stress had even gotten to Namjoon, whom was the most level-headed of all of them, made him lose his temper with Hoseok for a moment as the older tried to teach him a few basic steps of several of the dances they might have to participate in at the wedding. He'd quickly apologized of course, and of course Hoseok brushed him off and told him that it was fine because they were all stressed and it was only a matter of time before the stress caused one to snap.

Yet, with all the hell, they'd grown a lot closer as a group. Sure it was hard and yeah they wanted to go at Jimin and Yoongi's throats sometimes, but it was out of love. They loved that their friends were finally getting married and honestly, Jungkook would go through this hell seven times over if it meant that their wedding would be perfect.

Jimin sighed. He brought his palms up to his face to rub his eyes. "What am I gonna do? I can't find anything that makes me feel pretty."

"You look fantastic in everything, Jiminie-"
"No. Just, no." The mochi let his hands fall. A heavy exhale exited him again. "I need to find something that's...special. None of those-" He pointed to the suits they'd gone through within the hour. "-feel special." His gaze turned to his friends. "Is that bad? Should I not want to stand out or anything? Is it wrong that I don't want to look so plain?"

"Absolutely fucking not." Taehyung said. His choice of words and the harsh tone he used was in response to Jimin's dejected, guilty facial expression, the way his pupils were starting to sheen from tiredness and stress and the want to be finished already. "Park Jimin, you have the right to be the most stunning person in that room and that's who you're going to be. We'll stay here all night until we find you something, right, Kook-ah?"

"Guess I might have to cancel on Joonie." Jungkook thought as he nodded in agreement. Biting his lip to chase the thought away, he mused to the two, "I think that we need to find out what makes you feel special, Jimin hyung. What would make you feel special? What do you want that the suits that we've gone through don't have?"

"Well..." The mochi twisted his hands in nervousness. His friends waited patiently. "I'd really like it if...if my suit had color."

"Wow, such a sin to be going against the theme your future husband so carefully selected, Park Jimin how could you?" Jungkook gasped and acted as though he was taken aback. The blonde could barely manage to stick his tongue out at him, he was so drained. The brunette's voice softened. "Hey, hyung, look at me. Instead of Tae and I bringing you stuff, go pick out whatever the hell you want. Don't look at the price tag. Don't check to see if it's black or white or grey. Just go pick anything and try it on."

"That's a good idea." Taehyung agreed. He heaved himself from the couch armrest to assist his friend from his spot on the floor. Gently, he pushed him in the opposite direction of the fitting rooms. "Go crazy. Kookie and I will put all of this away, okay? If we're not here and you're done just call for us."

Jimin reluctantly headed off. Jungkook and Taehyung gathered together each piece that had been tossed aside and proceeded to return everything to where they had gotten it from. They got lost a few times (read: Jungkook got lost a few times because he'd never been inside an establishment so lavish. Taehyung walked around with such ease one would've thought he'd worked there for years), had to ask the employees where things went, almost knocked over a stack of precariously balanced hats (that was Taehyung, whose clumsiness wasn't exactly at the level of destruction that Namjoon's was, but was pretty damn chaotic in its own way) until each item they'd pulled was in place. Coming together from a moment of separation, the maknae said to his friend, "See, this is why I like being a middle class citizen. We have department stores where everything is cheaper than the down payment on a house and you don't need a map to find the restroom."

The silver-haired man grinned just as the two stepped into the area they'd abandoned to return all the items. There was a scuffling noise emitting from behind a curtain, a notion that suggested Jimin found something and was trying it on. Patiently the pair waited outside, the brunette absentmindedly reaching for his phone to check the time.

Not a second later, their friend stepped out. They remained quiet as the blonde slowly walked and stood atop the circle where the mirrors were, carefully twisting, turning, staring at himself. It seemed as though he was in a trance. Not wanting to break whatever spell he was under, Jungkook and Taehyung didn't utter a peep and held their breaths.

A bright smile broke out on Jimin's face. He tilted his head to his friends and breathed, "I love it."
Taehyung immediately started screeching with excitement, rushing towards their friend with Jungkook on his tail. Jimin was dressed in a pale lilac number that had a pink hydrangea peeking out from the breast pocket. The undershirt was as white as snow, the soft purple tie shiny and a perfect accent, and the size was impossibly perfect. He looked radiant in it. Special, ethereal, like how he'd wanted to appear.

"This is the one, Jiminie, this is the one!" The silver-haired man said ecstatically. The mochi blushed at him. Taehyung fretted with the tie, smoothed his shoulders out, pinched the fabric. "Yoongi hyung's going to think you look amazing!"

At the mention of the older man's name, Jimin's face lost some of its glee. Nervous suddenly, he asked, "Do you really think he'll like it? You don't think he'll be mad I want a suit with color?"

"Let's send him a picture and see what he thinks of it." The brunette was already pulling out his phone. Jimin barely had a millisecond to pose, then the shutter went off, then the image was being texted to Yoongi with the caption, hyung jiminie hyung wants this suit but he thinks you'll get mad since it's not compliant with the theme you picked. what are your thoughts? Without glancing up, he said, "I know for certain he'll say you look gorgeous in it. That's his nickname for you after all, for a good reason."

Jimin was nodding in understanding. "You know what, that makes a lot of sense. Our soulmate's nicknames for us say a lot about what they think. Yoongi calls me that because he thinks of me that way. Seokjin hyung calls Taehyung his boy because Tae Tae is literally his, because they're soulmates." The blonde sent Jungkook a wide grin. "And Namjoon hyung calls you baby because you're a child!"

"Fuck you." The youngest of the group deadpanned. His two friends promptly began laughing their asses off. His phone beeped, signaling that Yoongi had replied. Jungkook rolled his eyes at them and read the message. Tell Jimin that he looks fucking beautiful and that I don't care if him getting that breaks the theme. I approve. One million times, I approve. "Yoongi hyung just texted me back. He's on board with your choice and thinks, and I quote, 'he looks fucking beautiful'. So yeah. That suit is yours."

The three clapped in giddiness. Finally, the hardest part was over!

"Now it's our turn, Kook!" Taehyung grabbed the person in question by his arm to drag him from the beaming mochi. The brunette yelped as he was tugged along, passing by the colorful suits swiftly. He sighed with want once his pupils landed on a rich chocolate-colored jacket that would've matched his hair and eyes to the tee. Alas, though their friend was breaking the theme, they sure as hell couldn't, so that meant something black, white, or grey for them.

It didn't take too much time since neither man was super picky. The man with silver hair settled on an outfit that was identical to his hair color minus the luster, with steel grey cufflinks and a white undershirt with a basic pattern. Jungkook took a bit longer: should he go with black or white, what was in his price range, could he get accessories too? He texted Namjoon a picture of each, to which his soulmate claimed he looked stunning in either, to which Jungkook playfully told him he was no help at all and eventually decided to go with the white suit. He liked how the darkness of the tie and the earrings in his lobes (and helix) contrasted with it.

The three sidled up to the cash register with their selections. It was nearly their turn in line when the brunette suddenly remembered something and cussed quietly. His friends sent him odd glances as he hurried off in a seemingly random direction. Jungkook's head whipped around as he glanced about trying to recall where exactly he'd spotted the display earlier. At last he found what he was searching for, swiftly picked up what he needed and then some off of the counter, and made his
way back to his companions. Thankfully, they hadn't moved in line, and were right where he left them. Taehyung pulled a curious face once he caught sight of what was in his hands.

"You need three pairs of gloves?" He questioned. Jungkook shook his head, then peeled two pairs apart, handing them to his hyungs.

"We need three pairs of gloves." Jimin and Taehyung still appeared confused. Must be the tiredness getting to them. "You know. So we can touch our soulmates? I don't know about you Tae, but while I'm crying at this wedding and attempting to act like I'm not crying, I kind of want to hold Joonie's hand."

The silver-haired man shook his head. "It's during times like these where you truly surprise me, Jungkook-ah. I think that you're a fetus, and then at times like this I take a step back and go, wow, I raised my dongsaeng so damn well it's unbelievable."

"You'd think I had no other influences in my life, you really would."

"Excuse me." Three heads snapped up to meet with a carefully put together, politely smiling woman. Oh. The cashier. They like. Had to be adults and pay for stuff. Right. She batted her eyelashes twice. "Are you gentlemen ready to make a purchase?"

"Ah, yes, sorry." Jimin half bowed to her the best he could without crushing the suit in his arms. He gestured for Jungkook to go first; the younger man's transaction went smoothly. Swipe his debit card, remind himself that the cost was worth it, sign his name where he was directed to do so. Taehyung went next, barely glancing at the amount owed on the screen before he was swiping his card and signing too. Jimin went last, his items rung up as the two younger men bantered back and forth about exactly how much time Taehyung had spent in the maknae's journey to adulthood.

Their bagged suits were slung over their shoulders, bagged gloves in their hands, when they heard a choking sound. Glancing up, they were met with Jimin's rapidly paling face.

"Is everything okay, Jiminie?" The silver-haired man asked with concern.

He wordlessly pointed to the amount due. Jungkook didn't understand what the fuss was about until he finally took in the price. In the next second, he was choking too. "That's...that's how much the suit costs by itself? Three and a half million won?"

"Of course." Jimin wheezed. His two companions gave him looks like he was out of his mind. He shrugged his shoulders and sheepishly said, "You told me not to look at the price tag...so I didn't."

The three men just stood there not knowing what to do. The line was gradually growing behind them and the cashier in front of them was clearly getting impatient. "Will you be purchasing this suit? If not, I'd like to send it back to the sales floor."

Jimin appeared close to panicked tears because this was his special suit that he'd spent days seeking and now he couldn't buy the damn thing because it cost an arm and a leg and then some. He gazed at Jungkook, whom met his eyes sadly. They were going to have to leave it. It was simply too pricey. However, just as they made to turn away, a shiny black card was slapped on the counter, halting them in their tracks. It was Taehyung with a glint in his pupil, saying, "We'll take it. Please use my card."

"Tae-"

Taehyung waved off the mochi protesting at his side. With a soft smile, he said, "Think of this as your wedding gift from me and Seokjin hyung, yeah? I never know what to get people as a present,
In the blink of an eye the suit was wrapped, handed to Jimin, and the three were out of the store at last. Jimin handed the item to Jungkook for him to hold so he could throw himself at his friend, murmuring "Thank you, thank you, thank you Taehyungie, I love you thank you so much-"

"Aish, Jimin, it was the least I could do." The silver-haired man uttered fondly once the blonde let him go. "It's your wedding and it should be the best day of your life. You deserve this."


Their friend yanked them close in one big group hug, squeezing them tight. They stayed there in front of the store hugging it out for God knew how long. It wasn't until their phones began to beep in unison, a choir of ringing and notifications and reminders that they had to return to preparing, that the three went their separate ways to their cars, clutching their suits to their chests and waving all the while.

Usually, he was home preceding the setting of the sun. A normal day guaranteed it, really: wake up early from the bed he and Namjoon shared (that had been quite a fucking argument that included his partner heatedly saying that he wasn't going to intentionally put him in unnecessary danger, Jungkook returning with a question about the problem being the danger or the fact that Namjoon didn't trust himself. It had gotten ugly. However, after weeks of bickering, frustrated nights that were sleepless, and the ache making an appearance again, Jungkook finally won the verbal fight with We've made love in your bed and I've slept in it after, so how is just sleeping any different if we build a wall of pillows between us like a divider? There was reluctant agreement and no more sleepless nights), make them breakfast, head off to work until about midafternoon, meet up with Yoongi at his studio, then head home at about six or seven. His soulmate was typically home by then too, which meant that they had the night free, theirs to spend however they wished.

They'd done a lot in the night. Driven out into the city to their favorite bookstore to read for hours, stayed up late binge watching k-dramas that made them both cry, gone walking around the streets of Seoul talking about everything and nothing in particular. It had sort of become a ritual, a thing they did every three days or so when they both weren't exhausted out of their minds.

So long as they were both home before the sun set.

8:31 read the digital clock on the microwave when Jungkook stepped inside the silent apartment (confirmation that the sun had already dipped below the horizon). Peering around, he saw that there were no new dishes inside of the sink, and noted that there was a faint light coming from Namjoon's room. Noiselessly he toed off his shoes to pad his way into his own room (now more barren than it had been, as he kept most of his things in his soulmate's room) with the suit still in his hands. The brunette carefully hung it up in his closet and laid out the gloves in his dresser. The drawer shut with an audible bump loud enough to carry throughout the quiet apartment. Sure enough, a deep voice softly called, "Jungkook? Is that you?"

The maknae crossed the hall into Namjoon's bedroom. His boyfriend was sitting at his desk, as per usual, the wooden surface litter with sheets of paper lined and smudged with ink and graphite. A book on the inner mechanics of flashlights sat unopened beside a thick book with shiny golden pages that said, in English, Charles Dickens: His Five Best Tales. There was a bookmark about three quarters of the way in the thing. Shaking his head, he answered teasingly, "No, it's a burglar who's come to steal all of your precious jewels."

"Hey." Namjoon pouted, completely turning from whatever he'd been working on to face the
younger man. "This neighborhood isn't exactly the safest, I was asking for confirmation."

"Aish, you know I'm kidding, Joonie." Jungkook grinned good-naturedly. "You know that if it was a burglar, I'm strong enough to protect you."

"How horrible, a dongsaeng being the one to protect his hyung." The older man bemoaned, rising from his seat, scooting his chair in, straightening his back that was probably stiff from sitting so long. "Shouldn't it be the other way around, baby?"

"Nah. I'm pretty adamant about the whole fuck the system thing." The brunette hummed. Smile growing, he reached for Namjoon's covered wrist and pressed a kiss to the clothed skin. "Plus if you wanted to protect me you'd have to build some muscle, and that means going to the gym, which is apparently worse than getting mugged, says you."

"That it is. It's torture on the body to a degree the average mugger wouldn't put me through. That's my logic." Namjoon's dimples peeked out at the kiss. Voice losing its undertone of stoic reason, he gazed at his partner from behind the lens of his glasses and hummed, "Did the shopping go well? Everyone got everything they needed?"

Jungkook nodded. Lowering the volume of his words, he said, "Jiminnie almost couldn't get his suit once we finally found it, it was three and a half million won...but Tae Tae hyung ended up getting it for him as his wedding gift so it all worked out fine. And I managed to get my own suit, of course."

"Ah, yes, the one you look absolutely breathtaking in?"

He refused to allow his cheeks to flush. Nope. Not gonna happen. "I think 'absolutely breathtaking' is a bit much-"

"It's not enough." Namjoon disagreed. The brunette playfully smacked his chest; the older man retaliated by poking his stomach. This continued for a couple seconds until they were each reaching around the other person's abdomen in an attempt to tickle mercilessly. It was bound to end in disaster if they were standing up (they were) and proved to be so once Jungkook finally found his soulmate's weak spot and fluttered his fingers over the bottom of his ribcage. Wheezing laughter met his ears, then he was giggling too, then abruptly everything around him was moving in a blur and he was very suddenly sitting in Namjoon's lap.

He blinked at his boyfriend, a slight gasp rattling in his lungs when he felt two large hands cup right below his bottom to coax him closer. His hyung chuckled, stared back at him for a moment, disconnected their shared gaze to dip his head downwards and rest his forehead on the maknae's clothed shoulder. Jungkook nearly purred at the pleasant pressure.

"I'll never get over how beautiful you are, Jungkook." Namjoon murmured after a minute of comfortable silence, hands sliding across the younger man's thighs. The brunette's ears burned at the praise. He loosely draped his arms around his partner's waist, loving both the compliment and the fact that even two years into their relationship his boyfriend could still make him blush like crazy.

They merely sat there for a while enjoying the other's company. Jungkook listened to the steady rise and fall of Namjoon's breaths, petted his hair, closed his eyes to revel in the moment. At some point, the older man slowly ran his fingers down the slope of his spine, causing a full-body shiver to wrack through him. Eyes still shut, the maknae gave in to the instinct to arch forward into Namjoon when his hyung repeated the action, let his head tip to bare his neck. "Joonie."
Namjoon halted his ministrations (something that Jungkook knew was in an effort to get him to focus, but he couldn't help but hate it a little because. I mean. The ministrations were nice). "Are you sure, baby?"

"Triple sure." Jungkook breathed, because he was the tiniest bit drunk off of the languidness of the mood, because he wanted, because he truly was sure.

Lips met with the skin of his neck after a short pause. Familiar, dull pain bloomed there (bruises, he knew, purple bruises, purple love marks) as did the sensation of a fire being stoked. Namjoon took his time, kissing mouthing biting licking, like the two wouldn't need to anywhere important ever again it was just the two of them there, locked in a frame of time, bruising kisses pressed to bare skin, blood vessels bursting underneath the touch, Jungkook's eyes fluttering and grip tightening on his soulmate's shirt at the intense feeling such a simple action brought.

Too soon he was pulling that sinful mouth of his away, too soon in Jungkook's opinion. He made a tugging motion, come back, mark me up, mark me up to show everyone that I'm your baby, only yours, but Namjoon's pupils (though dilated) were firm.

"Your neck has enough discoloration-"

"It's not enough." The brunette echoed his boyfriend's words from earlier. The older man gave a half smile and shook his head.

"Cheeky."

"Only for you, hyung." Jungkook winked. They both chuckled at that knowing it was a lie if there ever was one (the maknae was cheeky with everybody, really), their grips on the other person lessening in their tightness. Jungkook knew this as a signal that they were to get up and move on with the night; to combat the inevitable, he resolutely remained in his hyung's lap, puckered his mouth. "Can I have a real kiss, Joonie?"

"Aish, baby, there's no need to beg." Namjoon's expression became more solemn as he reached up to gently tuck a stray piece of hair behind Jungkook's ear. Quieter, he continued, "You know I'd kiss you the instant you gave me permission without all of that."

Ever since they'd laid out underneath the stars one evening and Jungkook told Namjoon the complete history of his time with Yejun, the older man had been adamant on making sure that their relationship was nothing like that, or so he'd claimed to the night air. At the time, the brunette had just thought it was sweet, not realizing that his soulmate was dead serious: Namjoon waited until Jungkook gave him permission to do anything with him, made sure he had everything he needed at all times, never got jealous or possessive or any of that. The producer hadn't been the kind of person to do any of the opposite of those things beforehand, it was just as though he was being super extra careful. The maknae noticed it one day, a hot sticky good kind of fire in his veins, knew what it meant. He figured that his partner would do something about it. Hell, he eagerly awaited the day, he wanted him equally as much. The day didn't come, not after four whole ass days of the
fire burning in him on and off, and that's when Jungkook confronted him and Namjoon sheepishly explained himself. Then he brought that with him into their intimate life, no begging, no restraints that were forced upon the younger man, and the brunette's comfort was at the top of his list. After going through it all, reflecting on his past trauma...he had to admit. It was amazing beyond words that Namjoon wished to help him forget, help him be comfortable, just help him.

And Jungkook loved him for it.

The maknae said nothing in response, pouting his lips once more to convey what he wanted. He saw the way that his soulmate's eyes flickered from his own to his mouth, a silent fight in his own mind, a quarrel. Jungkook wriggled his hips the slightest bit, and there, there was that fire, and Namjoon pulled him ever closer and connected their mouths.

Pain again, meaningless, what had meaning was the softness of the mouth against his own, the tongue that frequently spat rap and complicated metaphors at lightning speed twining with his, words exchanged with shared breath, conveying care and lust and happiness and everything else there was to say without saying.

They separated after several moments, both men breathing with difficulty. Jungkook smiled a half smile and whispered, "That was a real kiss."

"You're...I don't even know what you are."

"Your favorite."

"Can't argue with that."

Jungkook giggled. With a raised eyebrow, he asked, "Have you eaten dinner yet?"

"Not yet, I was waiting for you to come home and cook."

*That explains the bareness of the sink.* The brunette huffed at him. "How is it possible that a man as driven as you can't find it in himself to cook dinner?"

"It's not that I couldn't find it in myself-" Jungkook rolled his eyes at the untruth, earning him a pinch in the side. "-it was just that your cooking is the best and I couldn't bear going another night without it."

"It's been a grand total of two days since I've cooked dinner." Slowly, he unwound his legs from where they were hooked around his soulmate's chair, secretly enjoying the way Namjoon's fingers drug along his covered legs as though to coax him into sitting back down. Jungkook made his way from the room with an ear tuned to the rhythm of his boyfriend's steps that trailed behind him. Humming a tune underneath his breath, he busied himself in the kitchen while Namjoon leaned over the counter to watch him. Tonight he decided to keep it basic, pulling the ingredients needed to whip up steamed pork and vegetable, the humming increasing in volume until he was quietly singing without realizing it. A brief glance at Namjoon showed that his eyes were shut. Clearly, he was nodding off as he listened.

Jungkook tapped his arm with his spoon. The older man started. "I'm awake, I'm awake."

"Better be. If I'm putting in the tremendous amount of effort it takes to make this food, you're obligated to eat it, hyung."

Within ten minutes their meal was complete. Too lazy to bring their food to the table, they ate while perched on top of the counter, chopsticks held in loose fingers. His hyung almost spilt
everything on his plate when he tried to save a stray piece of pork that had slipped from his chopstick's hold in vain. Jungkook managed to right him without pouring his own food all over the place (a feat he felt he should earn an award for accomplishing).

By the end of it the two were slightly more awake. Namjoon gathered up their dishes to set in the sink, saying, "I know it's kind of late, but do you still wanna do the thing we planned for tonight?"

What they'd planned for tonight was to drive out in the middle of nowhere and gaze at the stars, maybe fall asleep there and drive home in the morning, go on their own little adventure before their friends needed their assistance with the wedding again. However, it was far too late to even fathom the commencement of such a journey, so Jungkook replied, "I do still want to do it...we're both kind of pooped though. Let's save it for another day after all of this craziness is over."

"Would you like to go outside and go stargazing there for a little while instead?"

So the two found themselves standing side by side on the front step that led to the entrance of their apartment building with the night sky spread out in front of them, galaxies bare and grand, planets tiny dots of color billions of miles from them. Jungkook leaned his head on Namjoon's shoulder, wound his arm around his. Namjoon pointed out constellations to him, Orion, Andromeda, Hydra, low voice explaining the origin and backstory of each with vivid detail. The brunette didn't remember closing his eyes, didn't remember the moment he stopped focusing on his soulmate's words of astronomy and focused instead on the velvet hum of his tone, focused on the warmth he could feel emitting from his skin that was blocked by two layers of clothing, sensed the stars above him and fell into a contented haze.

"Kookie?"

Namjoon's eyebrows were delicately pulled together, full lips pursed in question. Jungkook could do nothing save lean upwards and kiss him. His mouth was warm, felt like home on his own. Though he knew he would have more purple love marks when they pulled away, he did not care.

"Promise I'm listening. You were saying something about...mmm..." Jungkook snuggled deeper into the taller man's side. Pressed their lips together once, twice more, thrice more. "Something about...I don't know."

He felt the resulting chuckle more than he heard it. Everything was becoming hazier as the seconds ticked onward. Drowsily, the maknae burrowed his face into Namjoon's shoulder while his ears stuffed with cotton continued to listen to the words he spoke, albeit softer now. All of Namjoon was soft. His voice. His eyes. His lips. His hair. His skin. His personality.

He couldn't tell when his arm was held tighter, feet made to walk along the ground to the elevator, down the hall towards their apartment, then down the hall within the small place. He sensed warmth being removed from him, and weight soon after, then gravity no longer existed as he laid horizontally and the warmth returned. Fingers lightly swept through his hair, travelling past his bangs to barely graze his cheek. Jungkook caught the fingers with his own that were hidden beneath the blanket. Bringing them to his lips, he nuzzled at them, mumbling "Goodnight, Joonie..."

"Night, Jungkookie. Sleep well."

Lights were turned off, the warmth cocooned him, and he submitted to the call of the haze.

Of course he was running late.
Jungkook pounded down the sidewalk towards the wedding hall, suit tucked underneath one arm, phone vibrating in his left hand. Without having to look at it he knew that it was Jimin calling him (probably to ask where in God's name he was) and cussed as loudly as he could while he ran on. Of course he'd forgotten to grab the wedding gift on the way out of the apartment, of course the streets had been clogged with traffic, of course he was nearly twenty minutes tardy to one of the most important days of his best friend's life. The actual ceremony wouldn't start for another two hours, but Jungkook promised his hyung he'd be there to assist him in getting ready, promised that he'd assist the staff if they needed any more hands setting everything up.

Of fucking course this was the one day he wasn't on time.

Cursing again, the brunette whipped his head around in search of the entrance to the venue. Not that one, no, not there, or there, shit how difficult could this place be to find? Jungkook slowed for a second. He could've sworn he was in the right place, the bus had only dropped him off a street away, it must be around here somewhere-

There. Spotting the beige entrance door a couple buildings from where he stood, the maknae bolted at it. Once he reached it Jungkook hurriedly twisted the handle and went inside. Unsurprisingly, the change in atmosphere from outside to inside was dramatic. Beeping automobiles were replaced with the faint sound of classical music coming from speakers overhead. It smelled of flowers (what kind, he didn't know) and of clean things. Glass doors lay ahead of him, each numbered, each carrying a different theme in its interior. Jungkook glanced at a small slip of paper he'd folded under his arm along with his suit; carefully extracting it, he read the number he'd scribbled on it the previous night. 9223.

Jungkook made his way through the hall looking for the room. Luckily it was a mere three doors away from the entrance, and he promptly tossed the paper in a nearby trash can and headed inside. He knew enough about wedding halls to know that there was a 'dressing room', per say, close by upon going in. Sure enough he saw a door to his left that was shut with a sign that read Reserved for the wedding of Park Jimin and Min Yoongi. Jungkook bowed politely to the staff whom were in the midst of getting everything together, ducking his head at their curious expressions as he passed them. Within fifteen seconds he stood on the outside of the door. He lifted a hand and knocked.

"Fucking finally!" Came the voice of Park Jimin. His hyung's tone was half exasperated, half relieved as the maknae closed the door behind him, shoulders hunched with sheepishness. Jimin's hair was already styled, body wrapped in a white robe, face bare of makeup and twitching with anxiousness or excitement. He glowed in the soft golden-white light that emitted from the bulbs of the vanity he sat at. As always he looked stunning. "Where were you, I thought you said you were going to be here twenty minutes ago."

"I'm sorry, hyung." Jungkook said honestly, bowing to him before hanging up his own suit and shrugging off his jacket. "For some dumbass reason I forgot I wasn't going to have my car today, because I'm letting Hoseok hyung borrow it, and Namjoon hyung left way earlier than me and took his car to go get Yoongi hyung at five a.m. so they would have enough time to pick up Yoongi hyung's parents from their house in Daegu and bring them here on time, then the traffic was awful, then I forgot to grab my gift for you two, which I'm putting on this table right here so I don't forget that-"

"Hey." Jimin interrupted, a small smile breaking across his face. Jungkook's mouth snapped shut. "It's okay, Kook-ah. I just got worried when you didn't answer your phone." He watched as the
young man set aside his wedding present and began to removed the plastic protecting his suit from damage. "I asked the staff if they would need any help with anything, but they said no, so the only thing I need you for is your makeup skills."

"Nice to know I'm considered an important asset to the team." Jungkook grinned, glancing back at his smirking friend.

Jimin sighed. "I mean, you're here for moral support too, I guess." He perked up. "Speaking of which. When are the others going to get here?"

"Our soulmates won't be here for another hour and a half. Hoseok hyung will be here with Tae Tae hyung in fifteen minutes or so, hyung said he wanted to return my car ASAP. Seokjin should be here a little after them...and eomma and appa are coming a couple minutes after him...and yeah. That's all of the immediate friends and family." The brunette rubbed his hands together. "I'll do your makeup and mine, you brought shit right? Taehyung will probably be helping you get your suit on and fussing with you over the accents and technical stuff. Where is everything so I can get started on you?"

"Behold my collection of trinkets." Jimin made a grand gesture at the admittedly large assortment of cosmetics splayed on top of the counter of the vanity. Brushes, combs, blush, eyeliner, shadow, colored contacts, everything that a person could want. Jungkook did a victory dance inside of his head. "Go crazy. Except not too crazy. Because I still have to look good."

"Oh my God, hyung, be quiet, you already look fantastic." The maknae walked over to the makeup supplies, pupils running over their lids in search of primer. He found it and plucked it from its place. Settling himself in front of Jimin, he instructed, "Eyes closed, chin tilted up. You know the drill."

With that Jungkook got to work. Most people wanted to appear as pretty as possible on their wedding day (like Jimin did) and ventured from their typical makeup regime to achieve their desired look for the special occasion: darkening their blush, their lips, lightening their face to give it that coveted white luster. Jungkook didn't want to do any of that to his hyung's face. The blonde man truly was gorgeous without the help of the makeup, so the brunette decided to highlight his features instead of buffering them out, let his natural good looks speak for themselves. Light gloss was swept over his lips, the lines of his nose and jaw deepened, his brows thickened and his lids patted with shimmering shadow. As he worked, Jungkook slowly sensed his body relax bit by bit as he fell into the familiar motions. It was kind of funny to think of applying makeup as something comforting now; when he had first started out two and a half years ago, he frequently made mistakes, stumbled through things like the order to apply products. Now he performed his craft like it was easier than breathing.

I suppose I've come a long way.

"You look a lot less stressed now than you did ten minutes ago." Jimin voiced while Jungkook was concentrating on drawing his eyeliner. "What's on your mind, hmm?"

"Just thinking about how much I've learned." He replied, keeping his hands steady despite the mochi's fluttering lids. "It's crazy to think that I couldn't do any of this at one point. It's crazy to think that I've learned so much from Taehyung, all the lessons he taught me, all the makeup pamphlets he forced me to read...God, I was so anxious doing makeup back then." The maknae leaned to the side to check the sharpness of the wing. Satisfied, he nodded. "Now it's almost relaxing."

"That's good. I think you need some relaxing."
"I think we all need some relaxing." Jungkook chuckled. "Hyung, I know this is your wedding, but God, I've stressed over it so much it feels like my own."

The mochi laughed at that. "Remember that you get to put me through the same hell when it actually is your wedding we're prepping for."

"Ah, hyung, I won't be getting married for a while." Though the idea of being able to call Namjoon his husband sounded very nice (very, very nice, indeed), caused his heart to beat a little faster, his bones to hum, he knew that it would come in due time, just as their agreement to be boyfriends had. He and Namjoon functioned well the way they were together right now, and when they were ready to take it to the next level...they would. No need to rush. His thoughts unbeknownst to Jimin, he teased, "But we won't wait five whole ass years before tying the knot, Jesus Christ, I thought Yoongi hyung would be eighty when he proposed."

"Yah!" The blonde promptly chucked a hairbrush at him. Jungkook neatly dodged. It hit the wall behind him.

The two glanced at the place the hairbrush had landed. The brunette slowly walked over to it, picked it up, and returned it to the counter of the vanity. That left he and Jimin not two feet apart from one another. Their eyes met. Jungkook thought Jimin's orbs were the warmest he'd ever seen them.

"Hyung."

"Yeah?"

"Congratulations. Really."

"Thank you, Jungkookie."

"No, no, like...really. Congratulations for finding it in you to ask for Yoongi when your bonding pains left you sick on the couch. Congratulations for sticking with him when you two fought and I wasn't there to help you through it. Congratulations for being patient, waiting, letting it draw out until it became this." Jungkook waved a hand about the place, eyes still on Jimin's. He smiled softly. "Congratulations on marrying your soulmate and the love of your life, hyung. I'm so glad that you're going to be happy, I'm glad that he's the one giving you that happiness. I hope you..." Oh, dammit dammit dammit, he wasn't supposed to be crying now, he was supposed to be saving that for the ceremony.

Jimin sniffled. Jungkook swallowed thickly, trying to croak out something, anything. In the next moment, he was surrounded by a pair of warm arms hugging him tight, and he squeezed back with equal tightness. Setting his chin atop the blonde's head, he gurgled through blurred vision, "You've been through so much with me, always caring and supporting, always pushing me to be the best I can be. You're my best friend and...and..." He gave a wet sniff. "I just hope you're happy forever, hyung."

"Sweetheart..." The blonde warbled, holding him with more force. He tried to bury his face in the taller man's shoulder but Jungkook shook his head.

"Can't, you're gonna mess up your makeup-"

"Screw the makeup, we're having a fucking moment here, Jeon."

The brunette grinned wide. Feeling the tears start to fall down his cheeks, he mustered up every ounce of will he had in his body and carefully removed Jimin's arms from his waist. He set them at
the shorter man's side, saying, "W-We can't keep standing here and crying like this, h-hyung, you gotta get married and stuff."

Abruptly the door to the room they were in flew open. In the doorway was none other than Jung Hoseok, dressed to the nines in a pearl-colored suit with knee-length coattails, heart shaped buttons decorating the jacket. His makeup was flawless, most likely done by Taehyung, and his expression was jubilant. "Hey, Kookie, here are your keys back, where's the husband-to-be at-" His string of niceties paused it its path as he took in he scene before him (which was two tear-streaked men half clutching on to one another). "...is this a bad time?"

"No, it's fine hyung, we just got emotional-"

"Hello!" A head of silver hair popped up in the doorway beside Hoseok. Taehyung was wearing his grey suit, shoes shined to perfection, looking like he stepped out of the cover of a magazine. His trademark boxy grin was on his face, remaining partially there even as he leaned over to give Hoseok a peck on the cheek. "Jiminnie, do you...oh. What happened?" He quirked an eyebrow. "Are you having a mental breakdown? You look like you're having a mental breakdown."

"I mean, that's cool, we don't blame you." Hoseok said indifferently. "If I was marrying Yoongi hyung I'd be having a mental breakdown too, to be honest."

"Same here."

"Same here."

"I hate all of you." Jimin announced with finality. The maknae reached up to wipe at his tears with the sleeve of his shirt. Taehyung trotted inside the room to him as Jungkook swapped places with him to stand in front of Hoseok and accept his car keys from him. There was a neon green treble clef charm that hung off of his key ring that hadn't been there previous to the loan. His hyung just shrugged with a sunny smile. Jungkook didn't press.

"Alright, so, since you're not having a mental breakdown and reconsidering your life choices, and therefore the wedding is still on..." Taehyung trilled, tugging at Jimin's cheek to have his hand swatted at. "We need to get you ready. I see Jungkookie did your makeup, nice job, Kook."

"Thanks." Jungkook watched the silver-haired man and the blonde commence the process of getting the latter into his wedding suit. The ordeal reminded him that he still had yet to put on his own outfit. Setting his keys aside, he began to strip himself of his casual clothing, tossing each article onto the floor while Hoseok joined in to help Jimin get dressed. He'd probably have to leave for a moment to throw his clothes in his car since the staff would trash them if they discovered the items here after the wedding was over-

A knocked sounded on the door. In stepped Kim Seokjin without a single flaw on his face or in his outfit, an ash grey thing several shades darker than Taehyung's ensemble. His eyes scoured everybody in the room. "Hello, Jimin-ah, Jungkook-ah. Hello, my two boys."

"Hi babe!" Hoseok and Taehyung said nearly in unison. They spared him a second to shoot quick smiles, then returned to working on their friend. Seokjin blew them kisses and fully stepped in the room as the door clicked shut behind him. Gracefully he meandered up to Jungkook (who was just finishing up the application of the concealer), making air kisses at him.

"Need any help, Kook-ah?"

"I'm good, hyung." The brunette declined. Seokjin pouted at him when he walked to what remained
of his outfit to put the rest of it on. Jungkook sent him a teasing grin. "What could you help me with, anyway? I've seen you try to do someone's makeup. That shit was terrifying."

"Yah." The eldest man in the room mock-scowled at him as he buttoned his undershirt. "It was my first time doing it and Tae didn't give me any pointers beforehand. It was bound to go wrong...and he knew it."

"I did." Taehyung nodded. "I knew it and the end result was hysterical."

Jimin giggled. Seokjin faced him with his pout, no doubt about to force him to take pity, but the moment his eyes landed on him his annoyance was forgotten and he clapped his hands together with delight. His words were giddy. "Oh, wow, Jiminie, you look fantastic! Absolutely ethereal, lord, Yoongi's going to faint at the sight of you-"

"I hope he doesn't, that would be mortifying." The blonde replied through a wide grin and blushing cheeks.

"And equally as hysterical as Seokjin hyung's makeup fail."

"Shut up, Jeon." Both men said at the same time. Jungkook merely laughed at them.

From then on the pace picked up. Jungkook and Jimin were fully clothed within two minutes, their hair touched up, the maknae's makeup done by Taehyung (though he insisted he do it himself). Seokjin received word from outside that guests were beginning to filter in, so per Korean custom, Jimin was ushered out of the room to greet them. Weddings in South Korea were rather short and sweet compared to weddings elsewhere, very brief and non-private. The future husbands had tried their best to add a modern touch to their wedding; picking a theme like monochrome, taking control over the menu, buying their suits rather than renting them. Despite this, custom was custom, so Jimin was expected to greet each guest that was present for the ceremony as well as the entire three and a half hours the entire ordeal would most likely last. As he watched his best friend straighten his shoulders to brace himself for the onslaught of people, Jungkook steeled himself with the determined thought that this was going to be the best three and a half hours Park Jimin had ever experienced ever.

Not ten minutes after their friend stepped out did his entourage follow. The brunette bowed along with his hyungs at guest after guest, eyes peeled for two special pairs of people he wanted to see tonight. His wish was granted when the first of the pairs stepped inside, arms linked together, the man with Jimin's smile and the woman with Jimin's eyes. The groom practically threw himself at them in excitement. The man caught him, holding him close while the woman asked, "Where is he, where is my other son?"

Jungkook raced across the floor without thought, vision full of comforting smiles and tear-streaked face and sorrow and pain and loss and he threw himself into the arms of the woman who he'd come to think of as his second mother, breathed in the strong smell of the sea that clung to her dress. Homesickness slammed into him. He missed Busan, missed the sea and its gulls, missed the beach and freedom and damn it all he'd missed his- "Eomma, eomma, I've missed you so much-"

Her hand stroked his hair, touch motherly. "Dear Jungkook, look at you, you're so tall now, how many centimeters have you grown? How is everything with you, how has your life been going, sweetie?"

"It's great eomma, it's really really great." Jungkook pulled away from her ignoring the sheen in his eyes. He refused to cry anymore until the ceremony. "I-I found my soulmate, I got a really nice job at a makeup store, my v-voice is on an album that Yoongi hyung produced-"
"You found your soulmate?" His second eomma gasped. He nodded at her, and she lightly slapped his arm. "When on earth were you planning on telling me? Park Jimin! How long have you two been keeping this from me?"

"Jungkookie's been with his soulmate for two years now, eomma-"

"Two years-!?"

"Honey, you know the boys are always going to have their secrets." A new voice piped up. Jungkook launched himself in the direction of it. "Whoa, there, Jungkook-ah, have you been putting on some muscle? So heavy now-"

"Appa, these muscles took work!" The brunette protested, separating himself from his second dad once they'd shared a brief hug. "Why aren't you scolding Jimin hyung for not having muscle?"

"You brat!" Jimin shot at him lacking a moment of hesitation. He too tore himself from his father to swat at his best friend. "I have muscle, I just don't go around shirtless twenty four seven showing them off like some muscle pigs I know feel like they need to do."

"If you got it, flaunt it, Jiminie-"

"Enough, you two!" Jimin's mother playfully swatted at the two of them. She grasped her husband's arm and began to lead them away. "We'll talk to you both more later. Jimin-ah still has guests to greet. I can't wait to see you get married, honey, you're going to look great up there!"

"Thank you, eomma." The blonde called to her as he waved. Nudging Jungkook with his elbow, he said under his breath, "She looks like she knows where she's going but I promise you she has no idea where they sit. Could you lead them to their table, Kook?"

"Got it." Hurrying after them, the brunette guided them to their table, smiling wide at his second mother's jokes, his second father's questions about his life. He truly had missed them a lot; he seldom came across an opportunity to visit Busan due to his busy schedule...perhaps, when this was over, he would talk to Namjoon and the others about going on one big group field trip around the country. Yeah...that sounded nice.

Once they were seated and he'd parted from them with a quick farewell, Jungkook busied himself with assisting the staff as well as his hyung every chance he was able. He seated guests (making polite and pleasant conversation on top of that), set tables as more people arrived, swiftly stopped Hoseok before the other could accidentally tear his coattails (they'd gotten caught underneath a chair), teasingly bumped into Seokjin merely to vex the older man, the list went on. It was amazing to him how time seemed to pass at the rate it did; in their dressing room, it went by at the pace of a snail, but out here with bustling people, staff, greetings, work, it sped up to match the speed of a sprinter. Because of that, it only felt like twenty minutes went by before the second of the two pairs he sought tonight showed up, their presence brought to his attention partly due to a particular lurch in his soul, partly due to the happy noise Jimin made at the main entrance.

The maknae glanced up from where he stood. Almost immediately his soulmate's eyes met his own, dark and sparkling with intellect. Namjoon wore an obsidian suit with a deep silver tie, a lovely contrast to his purple hair (a few months ago, previous to Yoongi and Jimin's engagement, the mochi had convinced Namjoon to dye his hair differently, so the older man had picked purple. Jungkook liked it because it suited his boyfriend, and because he got to call him Grapemon), locks styled to perfection. Black formal gloves hugged his long fingers, opposite to the white gloves that adorned Jungkook's slightly smaller hands. If the brunette was forced to pick two words to describe him, he'd say he was utterly magnificent.
Next to Namjoon was Min Yoongi, dressed similarly in an all-black piece that brought out the paleness of his skin, the seriousness of his pupils. The much shorter man bowed to Jimin once he'd entered and deftly stepped to stand at his side so they could finish greeting the guests together. Jungkook excused himself from the table of guests he was speaking to, maneuvering his way around people chattering about to get to the entrance.

"...be here in a minute, gorgeous, they've never been to a wedding hall so they're trying to soak in every detail. You have nothing to worry about, they'll love you just like I do." Yoongi was saying to his husband-to-be, a reassuring arm curling around his waist to pull him closer. Jimin was nervous meeting Yoongi's parents for the first time, Jungkook could tell, but Yoongi was right. Jimin exuded charm so natural and so potent that Yoongi's parents would be gushing about him for the rest of the night after he made his impression on them.

To make his presence known to Yoongi, Jungkook said, "Your parents are gonna love Jimin hyung just like you do? Exactly like you do? That's gross, hyung, and I...sorry-" The brunette hid his smile behind his hand, barely able to say the joke with a straight face. Chuckles bubbled up in him at the irritated but fond look Yoongi sent his way. "You look great, hyung, and everything is almost ready. How was Daegu?"

"For the brief thirty minutes I was there?" His hyung drawled at him. "It was nice, you brat. Jiminie, please tell me why we invited a kid to our wedding again?"

"This kid's voice helped you and Namjoonie hyung sell thousands of albums, that's why." Jungkook returned winningly without missing a beat.

Yoongi considered this. "Shit, you're right. Ah, well, as long as you don't touch anything you should be fine." His words, in context, sounded mean, but his eyes were fond and a small smile dared to show itself on his face. The smile grew. "Thanks for helping us with this whole thing, Jungkookie. Seriously kid. You and the others...it means a lot."

"Anything for my favorite hyungs."

"I thought I was your favorite hyung." A deep voice beside him said. Warm fingers grasped his palm, laced through his own. Jungkook tried and failed to catch his breath at the small yet intimate action. "Have I been demoted without my knowledge?"

Just then, a final pair of people stepped inside. They were nobody other than Yoongi's mother and father, short, nearly exact replicas of the producer. Jimin instantly straightened his spine, then snapped into a perfect 90 degree bow. Jungkook bowed less lowly while Namjoon gave them a nod (seeing as he'd been in a car with them for the past two and a half hours). The taller of the two tugged at the brunette by their joined hands from the group so the four could have a minute of privacy. Jungkook was quick to take the lead since his boyfriend in all reality didn't know where he was going, and searched around for his other friends. He spotted Taehyung's silver hair glinting in the light and walked towards him.

Suddenly he was pulled backwards. He yipped in surprise to be shushed by one fabric-covered finger pressing against his lips. Namjoon smiled down at him. "Am I really not your favorite hyung?"

"Is that seriously bothering you?" Jungkook asked, voice slightly muffled. "You know you're my favorite. But they don't need to know that. If they still think they're my favorites, then I get free shit like ice cream. And I get asked for fewer crazy favors."

"You devious little thing." His soulmate said. Their gazes were locking, his soul beginning to purr,
they were getting to intimate for the current time and setting- "You look beautiful."

Jungkook rolled his eyes at him but softly smiled nonetheless. About two months after the Bangtan Boys had won the dance completion, the maknae used his portion of the win to fly to the United States with Namjoon for a week. They'd stayed in Los Angeles, absorbing the American culture, the hip hop, soaked in the sun and went to the beach, did everything they could possibly do in seven days. Namjoon was already fluent in English and during their visit there taught Jungkook some parts of the language. Hell, the brunette had even managed to order food for them all by himself once, and though his words were broken and his accent thick, he was proud of himself. Since their return, the purple-haired man continued to teach him bits and pieces of the language at Jungkook's insistence; he'd improved much, and so, during public moments like this (when the two of them were surrounded by bedlam but got caught in their own little bubble) Namjoon whipped it out if he wanted to convey something without others knowing.

"Thank you." The brunette returned. His words were quieter, but remained clear. "You are very handsome too. But we must watch the...wed...wedding now."

"You've gotten so much better." Namjoon nodded approvingly as Jungkook resumed their journey to their friend's table, pulling them out of their bubble before the floated to the ceiling. "Really though, Kookie. You look beautiful tonight. I mean. You look beautiful every night, without the makeup and the suit and, shit, sorry baby-"

The maknae laughed. The producer tripped over his words as often as he tripped over air. "I'd kiss you right now if I could get away with it."

Seokjin, whom stood at the edge of their table talking with his partners, raised an eyebrow delicately at the pair as they approached. "Jungkookie, did you finally manage to break Namjoon-ah? His neck is this tomato red color and he's sputtering everywhere."

"He didn't break me, hyung-"

"Oh, hey, Namjoonie hyung!" Taehyung waved from his spot on Hoseok's lap. "I didn't see you come in, how was the journey with Yoongi hyung's parents, are they as serious as he is?"

"Well, uh, kind of, they're rather...reclusive people, if nothing else."

"How could you tell?"

"They've got this air about them, kind of like Yoongi hyung, except Yoongi's air is cockier and their air is primer. Stuffy-like. Did I just accidentally insult them?"

"Kind of."

"I think you did."

"At least they're out of earshot."

There came a low humming sound that reverberated around the room. Everybody glanced about, seeking the source of the noise, but it was merely the way that the wedding hall announced that the actual ceremony was going to commence. Jungkook dragged his soulmate into the seat beside him, keeping their hands connected, watched out of the corner of his eye as Seokjin took a seat and Taehyung slid into his assigned chair. Hoseok clapped giddily, his expression excited. "This is going to be amazing, you guys."

Jungkook smiled at him. "Yeah. Yeah, it is, hyung."
Another thirty seconds passed as everyone settled; then the music started up, slow and steady, and just as steadily Jimin took his first step down the aisle. Yoongi appeared by his side for his second, third, fourth, every step after, linking their arms together by the elbow like an escort. The mochi positively glowed while he walked, giggling once he caught sight of his table of friends beaming at him, sending him thumbs-up. Their walk wasn't long, but it was humble, and Jungkook liked to imagine that as they went the entire five years of their relationship was whispered with every step taken. Of the time they met, of the time they agreed to be boyfriends, of the times Jimin brought food to Yoongi's studio late at night for him to eat, of the time Yoongi planned their first anniversary entirely in secret and Jimin talked about how sweet it was for weeks afterward, of their effortless sync, connection, balance of yin and yang, weight of their bond a burden on their shoulders they shared equally with each other.

In the blink of an eye, the next chapter in the story of their relationship began, and the two men reached the alter.

The officiator started his spiel. "We have gathered here today to witness the union of two souls in this universe..."

Wetness gathered in Jungkook's pupils as he listened on. This was it. This was really happening. His best friend was getting married right in front of him. Oh, where had all the time gone? And further still, how had they all managed to get so lucky and end up so happy? They were friends who grew up together in a house with too many people crammed inside its walls, went to college together, cried about loss and stolen opportunities and good fortune together. Now they were still as close as brothers, now they had soulmates, now they were grown up and this was really happening, god-

Namjoon's gloved hand that wasn't joined with his own lifted to brush at the tears cascading down his face. The brunette weakly waved him off, batting his hand away and wiping at his tears himself. He glanced across the table to see both Taehyung and Hoseok quietly crying as well. Seokjin was delicately massaging his soulmate's shoulder, eyes dry yet full of feeling. Jungkook was so caught up in his own mind as the ceremony went on he barely heard the exchanging of vows. Worriedly, he whispered to Namjoon, "Can you tell me what they said to each other later? I can't focus, I'm so stupidly emotional over everything."

His boyfriend chuckled at him. Soothingly rubbed the area in-between his shoulder blades. "The ceremony is recorded, Kookie. We can ask Yoongi hyung for a copy of the CD if you want."

"Thank God." The maknae sniffled.

Close family and friends surrounding them were also dabbing their cheeks with handkerchiefs. Namjoon must've seen this, for he extracted a pretty black embroidered cloth to hand to his boyfriend. Before anyone knew it, the officiator turned to Yoongi and said, "You may now kiss the groom."

Yoongi stared at Jimin, gaze fond, affectionate. The blonde was leaning forward, obviously expecting a peck on the lips though there would be a ring of purple around his mouth after such a deed, but...Yoongi...was getting down on his knee? Jungkook sat up, wide-eyed. Dead silence held the room in its grip as Yoongi asked, "May I?"

Jimin followed his partner's line of sight until he appeared to realize what he wanted. The mochi held out his gloved hand, saying softly, "You may."

Yoongi slowly removed the glove from Jimin's hand, his skin blooming purple as their bare fingers touched, and pressed a formal kiss to his knuckles.
A beat.

Two beats.

Three.

Abruptly everyone erupted into applause. It was tame cheer, for Korean people were polite even in celebration, but loud and approving nevertheless. Yoongi stood, smiling at their relatives and friends, Jimin doing the same. It was as though a switch had been flipped: instead of sitting in quiet, everybody rose from their seats to either greet the new husbands or converse with their neighbors as the waiters came out and food was distributed. Hoseok looked like he wanted to jump from his seat and rush at the two, but Seokjin held him back. "Their seats are here at our table, Hoseokie, they'll make their way over."

"Oh." Hoseok mumbled, shoulders shaking, eyes wet. "Oops. I forgot about that."

Jungkook, Taehyung, and Namjoon laughed. After that, it was a waiting game, the group of five eagerly awaiting the arrival of the newlyweds. The brunette could hardly think about eating with the excitement around him, but Namjoon convinced him (and the others) to eat when the food was set in front of them. They were halfway through their ojingohoe when the couple finally managed to reach them. Taehyung and Hoseok were squealing before the two had the chance to properly sit down.

"Hyung, was that hand kiss thing planned?" The silver-haired man asked around a mouthful of squid. "It was so romantic!"

"It wasn't planned, Tae-ah." Yoongi responded as he pushed in Jimin's chair for him. With a gummy smile, he said, "Thank you. Romantic was what I was going for."

"You were really great, hyung. You too, Jimin-ah." Namjoon's dimples showed themselves. "Your vows were well put together. Very poetic, Yoongi hyung, did you write them originally as a song?"

"Dammit, Joon, that was supposed to be a secret."

"A secret?" Jungkook dove to his soulmate's defense, holding his hand tighter, raising a teasing eyebrow at his hyung. "Yoongi hyung, I barely heard half of it and even I could tell that there was a pattern within the words. Come on, now, if you didn't do it that way it wouldn't have been your style, anyhow."

"True, Kook...wait. You didn't hear half of it?"

The maknae sunk into his seat, determined not to look at anyone. "I was kind of...crying?" The producer started to laugh (something rare to hear from him) and Jungkook pouted at him. "Hey, my hyungs were getting married, it was touching!"

"It was touching." Seokjin agreed. "I'm extremely happy for you both and wish you nothing but the best."

"Thank you, hyung." They replied in unison. They glanced at one another and blushed slightly.

Their table filled with the buzz of conversation, clinking of chopsticks, tinkling of giggles. Namjoon and Yoongi conversed about the success of their previous album, a conversation that Jungkook joined for a while, praising him for his vocals and musicality and how he helped push the record to be the best it could be. The brunette was yanked from the discussion by Hoseok and eavesdropped on the two murmuring about the possible production of a second album soon. Jimin
eventually got around to telling the story of how Yoongi proposed, to which the group cooed and laughed and went *aww* when the time called. They poked fun at the fact that in the past they always joked about the two being married, highlighted the irony that it truly happened.

"But I mean that's no surprise." Seokjin stated to the table. "We all knew deep down that you'd eventually become Min Jimin."

Jungkook saw Taehyung mouthing out *Min Jimin* to get a feel for the new surname. The brunette tested it out in his own mind. He dared to think the name *Kim Jungkook* before he tore himself from that particular train of thought to return to the conversation at hand.

"And it actually happened." Jimin shrugged, grinning widely. "We're really married now."

"And how does it feel to finally be Min Jimin?" Taehyung asked with his trademark boxy smile.

The mochi hummed at him. "Damn good."

Right then, a voice came on from overhead. "Hello, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for joining us in the celebration of this union. At this moment we'd like to turn on the music and bring out the alcoholic beverages. Please note that this session in this wedding hall ends in approximately one hour. Thank you again."

"How has it already been two and a half hours?" Hoseok asked nobody, expression genuinely confused. "Seriously. How. It feels like we got here ten minutes ago."

"It does." Jungkook agreed. The waiters came out once more to clear the tables, polite and prim, and a bottle of alcohol was brought out to be placed in the center of each table. Nobody reached for it; instead, they kept their ears open for the beginning notes of the music.

Something upbeat played from overhead. Jungkook, Jimin, and Hoseok looked at one another. Grinned.

"If you'll excuse us." Hoseok piped cheerily. He grasped the blonde's hand, tugged him from his seat, waved at the astounded rest of the group. "Kook-ah and I are going to dance with your husband."

Jungkook got up from his chair after wiping his hands with a napkin. Kissing Namjoon's hair, he headed off with his dance teammates and the three of them hit the dance floor.

Though they were careful in the beginning due to their full stomachs (and knew better than anybody else that dancing on a full stomach would lead to nothing save soreness and possible nausea) it took a scarce ten minutes until the three of them really started going for it. Songs from IU and Girls Generation played, Rainism made a special appearance (Hoseok and Jimin danced at his sides, familiar with the choreography), Super Junior's *Sorry, Sorry* song popped up and they flew through the moves of the pop piece. There was clapping and laughing at their impromptu performances. As time progressed, their dancing got sillier, less perfect coordination and more flailing limbs, coaxing Taehyung to join the three. Once he joined them, it was like a dam broke loose, and soon enough other guests were on the dance floor too.

At one point Jimin giggled and gestured towards the table they'd left. Jungkook glanced up. Their partners had their hands over their eyes, cheeks blushing red or pink, making a point to not look in their direction. Clearly they were embarrassed by them. The brunette grinned, lacking any sympathy.

Eventually the music slowed to become gentler. Most people took that for the cue that it was;
single guests made room for older couples whom swayed each other round, and the atmosphere became calm once more. Hoseok took a seat while Taehyung did not, grasping his soulmate by their gloved hands so that they could dance together. When he received a puzzled look from the rest of his friends he merely said, "I know that I'm their boyfriend...but they're the one's actually made for each other. I like to give them some private time once in a while, y'know?"

Jimin and Yoongi got up to dance too. Namjoon looked to Jungkook to see if he wished to as well, and when he declined he asked, "How come? Did your dancing earlier tire you out?"

"No." The maknae shook his head. His soulmate continued to give him a questioning look. In lieu of response, Jungkook scooted their chairs closer together, settled their hands that were re-joined on his thigh, rested his head on the taller man's shoulder. Quietly he admitted, "I like dancing in the living room at night better. Dancing with these people around, in the daytime...seems weird, doesn't it?"

Namjoon nuzzled his nose into his boyfriend's brown locks. Jungkook felt warm. "Yeah. It does seem a bit strange."

Much too soon a humming sound vibrated through the air. The music paused, and everyone paid attention. "Hello, everyone, and thank you for joining us this afternoon. This wedding hall is reserved for another party in one hour, and so, the staff is expected to begin cleaning up in ten minutes. Please be sure to remember to grab your belongings during your departure. Thank you again."

"Aw, no." Hoseok whined. Their four friends slowly made their way back to the table. Within their vicinity, he groaned, "I want to stay longer. Why can't weddings last all day?"

"In other countries they do." Namjoon supplied as he assisted Jungkook in standing up (not that he needed it but...it was cute). "Some places party for days, and elsewhere, like in America, weddings are a day-long kind of thing."

"Though I'd love to stay longer, I don't think I could sit through a wedding for a whole day. What do you even do for that long?" Seokjin brushed his hair from his eyes, took Hoseok's palm in his own, kissed his cheek so he would not feel left out.

"I have no idea. Three and a half hours is long enough for me." Yoongi commented. Jimin's face twisted up to create a mock-offended look, to which his husband grasped his waist and brought him in close. "Only because I'd like to spend the rest of the day with you, gorgeous."

Jungkook covered his eyes. "Ew, PDA! My virgin eyes! It burns!"

Yoongi obviously was about to quip something back. Namjoon leaned in close to his ear to do the damage for him, words dripping and low, "You're not a virgin, baby, we both know that. You're just as responsive as one, though...so loud in bed, always begging though you don't need to, always hungry for more."

His neck burned and he swallowed thickly and yes, yes, Kim Namjoon was definitely going to be the end of him for sure, he could see the light.

Jimin did a victory fist-punch in the air. "The best part of Namjoon hyung being your soulmate is his ability to shut down your sass, Kook. The absolute best part."

"Joonie, they're bullying me." The maknae huffed, still blushing profusely.

"Only because we love you." Taehyung grinned.
"Speaking of love..." Jimin's gaze was travelling past his friends, searching, seeking. He seemed to have found what he was looking for. Turning to the brunette, he said, "Jungkookie, eomma and appa look like they're about to head out. We should see them off, c'mon."

Jungkook nodded to him. Hoseok caught his arm before he could head off, smile sunny, saying, "We're going to leave soon as well, Kook, so we probably won't see you since you're staying after to help with cleanup. Remember that me you and Jiminie have a meeting in three days about what we wanna tackle next, and-"

"Don't stress, hyung, I'll remember." The youngest of the group reassured him. The corners of his mouth tilted upwards and he jutted his chin towards Taehyung and Seokjin. "Go home with your lovers. I'll see you in three days."

They hugged. His other two friends pulled him in for strong hugs too, paired with well wishes. He watched them walk towards the door, waving all the way, moving only when Jimin grabbed his wrist and started to tug at him. Jungkook glanced to Yoongi, whom had his arms crossed and eyes sparkling with fondness, and Namjoon, whose hands were in his pockets, eyebrows relaxed and patient. He blinked at them, then turned on his heel and went with Jimin to say goodbye.

What never ceased to amaze Jungkook was just how alive Namjoon made him feel.

He'd heard from countless others that their partner made them feel as though they were drowning: a cliff that gave way to an ocean, one that they were willing to throw themselves off of to become one with the warmth, the security, the *everything*. Their breath was forced from their lungs and they wished to forever remain breathless. It was intoxicating, he heard, addictive, the urge to lose yourself in another. To succumb, let yourself be pulled under, *let go*.

Namjoon didn't make him feel this way.

Namjoon was the cliff, the sturdy piece of rock one stood upon as they stared down at the waves, who made adrenaline rush through veins and granted a sense of strength, of boldness. He was the air that there was to breathe, filling him with relief when he inhaled. Namjoon did not ask him to bow to him, to heed his person, his ways: he asked in the voice of velvet he wielded for Jungkook to be his equal. He didn't let go, he held on tight, his grip not faltering, not once.

Namjoon was everything that made him feel aware, everything that made him feel awake, everything that made him feel alive.

The very man himself was currently pressed against Jungkook's back as tightly as he could be, his hands tracing patterns down the younger man's sides, lips brushing the nape of his neck. The brunette leaned on the railing of their balcony, eyelids fluttering at the sensations that were intensified by the vastness of the night sky above them. Electricity pulsed wherever Namjoon touched him. As always, it was a combination of good and bad, the pain of bruises mixed with the pleasure of soft skin coming into contact with his own, but he didn't mind and simply breathed the evening air.

Lazily, Jungkook lifted his arm to reach behind him, weaving his fingers in his boyfriend's hair while urging his face closer. Namjoon received the silent message and mouthed at him with increased earnest. Teeth barely grazed his skin, and more, more electricity sizzling through him.

"Hmm..." The maknae sighed. His breath caught in his throat when his soulmate bit down gently. At the same time, he stopped drawing shapes into his side, choosing to keep his hands at his hips. "Joonie hyung."
"Yes, Kookie?"

"Have I ever told you that I love you?"

Namjoon lightly spun him around so they faced each other. The taller man tilted his head to the side, smiling slightly. "You might've said it in passing. Why?" His palms slid upward. One stopped at his ribcage to caress the bone there. The other continued its journey until it stopped, hovering just above the bare skin of Jungkook's cheek. The brunette saw the question in his eyes and nodded his permission. Heat met the side of his face, and the younger man's soul purred. "What were you thinking about that made you ask that?"

"I'm just thinking about..." Jungkook kept the movement slow, languid as he lifted his own arm, fingers skidding up Namjoon's arm and pressing over the hand held to his cheek. He let his eyes drift shut. "You. Always thinking about you. How you make me feel alive. Like a person, strong, like..." He breathed in. "You make me feel like I can take on the world, Joonie."

There was silence as his words lifted in the air, up and up and up, wove through Namjoon's eardrums then faded into the stars. On occasion, this was how the two spent their time together, whispering about everything meaningful or nothing at all, when they asked questions, gave answers, poised their tongues in the shape of words that paused their flow only when their minds grew more tired than their souls, and slumber called their names.

"Hyung."

"Yeah?"

"Hyung, why did you fight so hard in the beginning, when I was pushing you away because I was scared?" Jungkook opened his eyes to see Namjoon's own darkened in thought. A frown was forming on his face, ruling over his features, so the brunette leaned forwards and tilted his head and kissed him. Perhaps he was wrong before, describing the will to succumb as though he wasn't familiar with it: if there was something in this world he'd submit to, it was the feeling of his soulmate's lips, the deep voice that emitted from that same mouth, the fire that his hyung exhaled on the regular. Yes, he supposed that he would succumb to that.

Pulling away but remaining close enough that their noses almost brushed, Namjoon murmured, "What if you don't like me after I tell you?"

Jungkook grinned. Kissed him again. "I'm always going to like you, hyung, no matter what."

"Cheesy."

"I'm trying to be romantic." He drew out the last word like a violinist drew the bow along the final string at the end of a song.

"Trying is the key word there." Namjoon continued to tease. His boyfriend presented his slightest yet most compelling pout, and that did the trick. The purple-haired man regained some seriousness while his pupils were downcast as he explained, "Ever since I was old enough to understand what a soulmate was, I wanted to find mine. They were prefect for me, whoever they were, made to be by my side." His fingers clumsily fiddled with the hem of Jungkook's shirt. "And I wanted that. I wanted to find that somebody to love. I knew about the consequences I would have to face if I found them...I just prayed that I would be the one on the receiving end." His last words were quieter than the rest. "But fate didn't care."

The maknae shook his head. "Fate did care. It heard your wishes, led you to me. And I told you..."
He pushed his soulmate's chin up with his finger. "Your purple love marks, remember? Not bruises." He smiled. "You're gentle and I'm not afraid and I love you."

"I love you too. More than anything in this world."

There was another silence as they basked in the sentences spoken aloud. Namjoon broke the quiet with a low chuckle. "I didn't fully answer your question. I finally found you, the person made for me, and I didn't want to let you go. That's why I fought so hard."

"Why would you think I wouldn't like you after hearing you say that?"

"Ah, I don't know..." The taller man bit his bottom lip. Jungkook waited, knowing the cogs in his soulmate's brain were twirling at the speed of light, one thought leading to one thousand more and knowing that it was difficult, sometimes, to pick up what he wanted from those thoughts. It was even harder to pick up what he needed. "It was...you were so adamant about staying away from me at the start, because I would give you bruises, and...I guess I thought you wouldn't like to hear about me actively seeking love if the price was pain."

"Poetic." Jungkook deadpanned. Namjoon pinched the skin right underneath his bottom, causing him to squeak. He grinned at his boyfriend. "You're silly, hyung, thinking I'd stop liking you because of that. Please. I thought we were going into dark territory like bodies and stuff."

"Bodies means blood. I can't do blood."

"'Cause you're a marshmallow...Marshmallowmon."

"I'm disowning you."

Jungkook laughed at the look on his soulmate's face. Namjoon pinched him again. He grasped his hand and moved it north out of the danger zone, to which his partner responded with swiftly moving it back down, curling his hand underneath the younger man's thigh, and hooking Jungkook's leg around his waist so they were pressed closer together. The brunette wiggled his hips as payback, delighting in the small gasping noise that exited Namjoon's lips.

"Thank you for fighting so hard, hyung." Jungkook whispered to him when he'd stilled. Their gazes met. Something hot and charged with energy travelled between them. He shuddered. "Thank you for not giving up on me."

"How could I have possibly given up on you?" Namjoon replied, and oh, oh, the energy kicked up a notch, his gut was growing hotter, and he knew that meant. "You're irresistible."

They stayed out on the balcony for a few minutes longer with the sky bearing witness to their words. Jungkook took to rolling his pelvis whenever Namjoon teased him, using the heat he was certain grew in the other's stomach to playfully swing the conversation in his favor. Soon, though, vowels hitched and lost place, consonants skipped over, tongues lost the smartness of complete phrases to trip, stutter, balk. Hands were pulling him from the rail of the balcony, a mouth was on his own, there was warmth and pleasantness and Namjoon and then, then they broke from one another to open the door that led to the living room. Without missing a beat, his Namjoon gathered him up in his arms, kissed him so hard he felt it in his very soul, felt it in each of the marks painted on his skin, and carried him inside.

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End Notes
I'm still debating over whether or not this fic will be two or three chapters, but the next update will be somewhere within the next two weeks. Until then...BANGTAN FIGHTING!!! >0<

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