The Most Beautiful Moment in Life
by Amaranthine_x

Summary

Kim Seokjin does not like change. But when he finds himself in a complicated world of alternate universes with no exit, he realizes that maybe change is exactly what he needed to begin with.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Some moments become more vivid with the passage of time. Yesterday’s many encounters and
goodbyes existed for this very moment. Every alley and crossroad that I walked through were all
meant to lead me to this very place. That kind of moment is what I mean. The kind of moment in
which everything changes but nothing changes. The kind of moment that will forever determine
who you were, who you are, and who you would become. For some, those kinds of moments are
the best moments in life, the burst of youth as caterpillar becomes butterfly and soars to new
heights. For others, those kinds of moments are the most damning and haunt them, latching on like
a leech and sucking all of the positivity, energy, and light from them.

When one door opens, another door closes. But what if the door was never opened in the first
place? What if we could stay stagnant like still water and never change? What law of nature states
that things have to change in order for them to become better- when those same things are already
fine as they are?

For us… I wished that we had never opened those doors. I wished that we could remain as we were
forever, and therefore never welcomed any change. We were naïve to think that we could remain
young and youthful forever; to think that the harsh realities of life could be blocked out as long as
we had each other. We were naïve to not realize that with every plastered on smile, every bit of
forced enthusiasm, and every time we lied saying that we were “okay”, that we were only hurting
each other.

Humans are prideful creatures. We want to keep our wounds hidden until someone shows us their
own first. We don’t want to appear weak so we do not ask for help. We don’t want to appear
cowardly so we do not admit our fear. But that doesn’t mean that we do not have wounds, it
doesn’t mean that we do not have fear.

We all had wounds. We all had fear.
Looking back, I had known all along that underneath the glittering world before my eyes lay my deception. I had known that everything was to collapse with a breath of wind. I had turned away, sidestepped, simply closed my eyes. I was afraid. Afraid to be loved for who I am, who I was, and who I would become.

How ironic it was, to be afraid of love because I felt that I, myself, was not deserving of it.

I had been surrounded by friends who loved me and cared for me but I had never felt more alone. I had convinced myself that I was not deserving of their love nor their friendship and so I had thought that I had neither. When in truth, I had everything I had ever dreamed of. There had always been something about that kind of happiness that had me shrinking back in fear, running away from the paradise in front of me for what I had known, what was comfortable, what I was used to. My pain, my hurt, and my doubts.

Why is it that the happiest of moments usher in sudden fear?

It is because we know deep down in our hearts that we are not deserving of those moments. We are so used to the pain and sadness in our hearts that the concept of happiness is foreign and the fear of the unknown makes us act in reckless ways. We often end up ruining that happiness out of fear. We ruin it for ourselves so that others cannot ruin it for us. So that we hold the strings of fate and we could decide what happens. The fear of the unknown makes us do such foolish things.

Like a precious plant blooming into a beautiful flower, our happiness is something that we would give anything to protect. However, when we hold on to that blooming flower so fiercely that we deprive it of the light and nurture it needs that flower can die and turn to dust.

You can grasp tightly onto things in the hope that they will stay, but too strong of a grasp will crush them and bring you nothing but more pain. I learned that. Unfortunately, I only learned it after the petals in my hands dried and crumbled into nothingness.

When the heart suffers a wound, it does not heal right away. It grows a protective barrier to shield it from further injury. It hardens over time, every time it suffers a new wound, growing more and more obsessive over protection until it cannot even focus on healing anymore. Just protection. And so the wound festers and mutates. The heart is as much afraid as we are afraid. However, in that state we cannot open our hearts to anything from fear of further injury. We cannot heal, and we cannot move on, and eventually, the heart becomes bitter and broken.
Every trial and every tribulation added up inside all of us until we had nothing in common but the bitterness of our hearts. Our hate and our resentment, our pain and our wounds, our pride and our fear. That is what we had in common. At that time I did not want things to change. I believed that things were fine as they were and that any change would be a bad one and bring us more hurt and more pain. However, I now realize that we needed to change. I now realize that change allows us to grow and that we cannot save ourselves when we are alone. I know now that we were stagnant like still water, harboring bacteria, and parasitic insects. Things were growing inside of us and taking hold, leaving us as shells of our former selves. I know now that the process from caterpillar to butterfly is a painful, but necessary pain. We cannot soar if we do not have wings and growing those wings is a difficult task.

I learned that even planets, as large as they are, come from conflict. Atoms meeting in the solar system and colliding violently, bursting into light and creating a fragment of a world beyond our greatest imaginations. Just because we cannot see the end result does not mean that it should be feared. The greatest things in life come from meeting, parting, and creating something in that serendipitous moment.

I wish that I had known that then.

I think that at that time we were content in our loneliness even as we sat by each other and laughed. We were content with lying, both to one other and to ourselves, and convincing the world that we were fine when we were, in fact, not. At some point, we had turned so inwardly on ourselves that we did not even notice the falter in the smiles we gave to each other, the heaviness of the sighs we heaved, and the tiredness beneath our joy. We were too caught up in ourselves to help each other. We were too busy being alone to realize that we were together. And that is where our biggest mistakes began.

But this is not a good place to start this story. Without context and without a cast. Truly, I am not sure myself where the story began and I have no knowledge of where it ended or if it ever will. I must start somewhere, though, and I suppose that night is as good of a place as any. Things had gone horribly wrong before that, but that night was the culmination of all of our mistakes. All of our hurt and all of our anger boiled over to the surface and came rushing out with no warning. Burning all of those caught in the path indiscriminately. We hurt each other, but more importantly, we hurt ourselves. We ripped tears in the strong but thin threads that connected us.

Doors were opened that were better off remaining closed and everything would be forever changed after the events of that night, whether we wanted them to or not.

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact
Big Hit removed a scene from the Prologue MV. It was the ending scene in which Jin sat in a truck wet with water droplets and stared a photograph that he had taken earlier in the prologue video but while he had taken it with Yoongi, it was only him in the photo. It now ends with a strange sound like something rewinding.
“We need to be in despair, for all of our hardships”

From Namjoon:

*Hangout tmrw?*

To Namjoon:

*Sure*

*Where?*

From Namjoon:

*Same place as usual*

*Where else?*

To Namjoon:

*Just checking*

*Thought we were all gonna hang out on the weekend?*

From Namjoon:

*Tae insists*
Jin’s eyes passed over the messages again, a weird feeling nagging at him. The only time any of them ever insisted on hanging out together before they normally would on the weekend was if one of them desperately needed cheering up. Such a request coming from Taehyung was strange. The man three years his junior had been in all of their lives for years, but even Namjoon, who was undeniably the closest to the rogue figure, had no idea what was going through the younger’s head at any given time. Kim Taehyung was a wildcard, and Jin knew better than to question it, but he still couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong.

Though, they hadn’t gotten the chance to hang out as a group all month due to how busy their schedules had gotten. Maybe the sudden request was because of that.

Sighing, Jin checked his reflection in his floor length mirror, hating the bags forming under his eyes. He hadn’t been getting much sleep lately.

He was in the middle of his masters for acting in film and though he loved what he did, he couldn’t help but be wrecked with the weight of his thoughts late in the night. He wondered if he had truly made the right choice in dropping out of medical school and pursuing acting against his father’s wishes.

He hadn’t even heard the man’s voice in over two years.

His mother and older brother called every now and then, but there was always an unavoidable tension that came along with conversations with them, as if they missed him but still couldn’t approve of his decision.

After his father practically disowned him, Jin knew that all of that pressure to succeed fell onto his brother and he knew that his hyung would take all of it in stride. But he also knew that there was a tension between the two of them that had never been there before.

His phone vibrated angrily from his nightstand, drawing his attention away from his sorry reflection and over to the device. He picked it up, a smile naturally forming on his face as he read the contact name.
From Hye-Su:

Good afternoon! I hope that you have a great day, fighting! <3

To Hye-su:

Good afternoon. :)

Hoping that you don’t fall asleep in the middle of class and get in trouble again.

Fighting!

From Hye-Su:

That was ONE time!

I totally regret telling you about that!

To Hye-su:

I’ll never let you forget it. >:)

From Hye-Su:

REGRET!

Jin laughed to himself and slipped his phone into his back pocket, smiling warmly. Hye-Su. He wasn’t sure if he could say they were dating or not but they were definitely interested in each other. He had met her serendipitously at a train crossing. They had been at opposite sides of the track, waiting for the train to pass and had met eyes. She had run across, accidentally dropping a sketchbook as she passed him. Jin had picked it up with the intent to return it to her but she had already disappeared from his sight.

An entire week later he had seen her walking on campus and approached her. They had hit it off immediately and Jin was finally able to return her sketchbook. Coincidentally, she had been an art student at the very school Jin attended. That had been nearly three months ago and since exchanging numbers they had met up for coffee whenever their schedules allowed.

Hye-su was sweet, funny, and though she’d come off shy initially, she had a sense of humor rivaling his and appreciated his jokes more than anyone else he’d ever met.
But Jin hadn’t dated anyone in years and he was hesitant to start anything more serious with her even if he really, really liked her. So, it had been a shock when she had brought up the matter herself. It had been such a simple statement delivered with such a sweet smile that Jin had nearly choked on his coffee.

“We should go on a date sometime.”

And completely stunned, Jin had been left with no choice but to stutter out an,

“O-okay.”

“How about Friday? We can go for dinner and a walk near the river.”

And despite Jin’s reluctance with relationships he had simply responded with,

“Sure.”

And that was it. Now he was going on the first date he’d had in nearly 7 years.

Just another thing to add to the long list of things that were keeping him up in the middle of the night.

He grabbed his wallet, sticking it into the pocket of his pants, and grabbed his keys from his kitchen counter before exiting his apartment. He would probably be the first one there if he left this early but he wanted to clear his thoughts a bit.

Besides, he was looking forward to having a little time to himself so he could work on his photography. It was something he had previously been into when he was younger and something that he’d taken up again to combat his stress. His friends teased him for always having a camera lens pressed up to his face when they were together recently, but he’d been filled with a need to document their time together a few months ago. It was an indescribable feeling of urgency that came about after one of those nights staring up at the ceiling and realizing that they wouldn’t always be able to be together like this. Good things only lasted for so long after all. It was probably why he was feeling so strange about Taehyung’s sudden and out of the blue request.
Change.

It was like the feeling of the earth moving under your feet before you realized the scenery was suddenly different.

It was Jin’s least favorite word.

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As expected, when Jin pulled up to the fading parking lot, which was becoming more and more overgrown with weeds as the days passed, he found that he was the first one to arrive. Usually, if his friends didn’t see Jin’s truck in the parking lot they would wait for him before disappearing into the wall of shrubbery concealing what once was a public pool that had been reclaimed as their designated hangout spot.

But there was no one there.

They’d been meeting up here so long that Jin couldn’t even remember who had found it first nor the day when they had all pushed back the overgrown greenery and claimed this place that was all their own. A place that was just for them where they could forget about the outside world for a while.

Jin grabbed his camera bag from underneath the passenger seat, unzipping the fabric case and pulling out his ancient polaroid camera. Truly, the camera itself might have been what his friends were teasing him the most over. When he was younger his parents had been hesitant to indulge in his hobby and had eventually bought him a polaroid camera when he had begged for one long enough but, rather than a brand new one, it was a hand-me-down, and on top of that- pink. A faded, baby pink that Jin loved. His favorite color was pink, anyways.

Normally, he would spend some time taking pictures of the sky but it was overcast today and the sky was a passive grey color rather than the vibrant blue with light, puffy clouds that Jin preferred. He hoped it wouldn’t start raining.

He stepped out of his truck, closing the door behind him and walked towards the wall of greenery that acted as a door for their secret hangout. On the other side of the wall, there was a winding trail that led to the pool. Jin took his time walking the path, eyes focused and carefully looking through
the foliage lining the path for any interesting shots. Usually, he would catch a flower in the perfect state of bloom or a fat bee perched on a leaf and snag a picture immediately.

However, as he scanned the trail for any photogenic wildlife, he wasn’t seeing anything in particular. There weren’t many flowers in sight, which was understandable since technically it was still winter, even though it was well into March. The last time they had all gotten together was to celebrate Yoongi’s birthday at the beginning of the month and the whole thing had involved way too much drinking. Jin had struggled to make sure everyone got home okay by driving them himself. Though, driving around six grown men who had all had too much to drink was a bit much, even for him.

Still, Jin couldn’t even spot an ant crawling along the overgrown path. Which was… strange. It wasn’t even that cold out. It was concerning but more of an annoyance than anything else. Jin looked contemplatively at the leaves hanging down from the trees as he walked. He could probably get a good picture out of it but the thought of wasting precious film on leaves made him cringe distastefully. Definitely not worth it.

Nevertheless, Jin took his time walking down the path, appreciating the silence and the calmness of the nature around him.

Eventually, he reached the clearing where the path spilled out into the area which used to house what probably used to be a lively community swimming pool. Now it was deserted, drained of water and housed some of the various crap that they had dragged there. A ratty couch, a few chairs and a table, a mattress-

Wait a second, who was that lying down on it?

Jin squinted, walking along the perimeter of the pool to better see the person’s face.

*Taehyung.*

Jin frowned in confusion at that, wondering how long the younger had been here. He watched as Taehyung turned to lay on his back on the mattress, holding out something in front of him. It looked like a photo from where Jin was standing, but of what?

Before he could get an answer, Taehyung crushed the photo in his hand and slung an arm over his eyes.
Something was definitely wrong. But Jin didn’t really think that it was his business to get involved with it. Taehyung and him had a rocky relationship from the start and the only reason they were even remotely friends was because of their shared friendship with Namjoon. But to be honest, Jin barely talked to him and he really didn’t want to start a conversation with just the two of them if he could avoid it.

With a last glance at the younger to make sure he hadn’t noticed him, Jin made his way around the perimeter of the pool until he got to the small pond that had developed from the constant rains over the last few months. If he was lucky he would get a great shot of the water reflecting the leaves and sky above it. If he wasn’t lucky, he’d be scared half to death by a frog.

A long while passed before Jin heard the tell-tale racket of the rest of his friends approaching. They must have caught up to each other on the path for all of them to be arriving together like that.

He watched as they climbed up the steps and then jumped into the empty pool, yelling greetings at Taehyung who had been completely spaced out. Jin smiled and held his camera up to his face, snapping a shot before any of them could notice him on the far end of the pool. He had just been sitting there, spacing out similarly to Taehyung, wishing that he had at least brought his photo album so he could flick through the pages to keep him occupied.

Jin pulled the developing photo out of the camera, blowing on it gently so that the process would go by faster and he wouldn’t accidentally ruin it by touching the film.

Swinging his legs over the side of the pool, he watched warmly as Namjoon pulled Taehyung up to his feet and the rest of the boys jostled him around asking what he was doing just laying on the floor.

Jin held up his camera again and snapped a picture of all them smiling. Though they were smiling, Jin couldn’t help but notice that everyone seemed tired. It was customary between them to drop everything they were doing to hangout if one of them requested it, but doing something like that was stressful, especially since most of the group had jobs or were in school. But they were all here despite that.

Distantly Jin heard one of the boys question his whereabouts and as he looked up he locked eyes with Jeongguk. They boy’s face lit up in surprise and recognition.

“Oh, Jin-hyung!” He called out, drawing the attention of the rest of their friends.
Jin waved, standing up so that he could jump down into the main area of the pool. His friends greeted him as he approached and to his complete surprise, Taehyung wrapped his arms around him in a tight hug and Jin had no choice but to awkwardly hug him back. As soon as the moment passed, Taehyung was letting go and leaning into Namjoon.

“Oh you brought your camera! Take a picture of us.” Taehyung asked, throwing his hands up in peace signs and pouting his lips. Namjoon laughed behind him and pulled him closer, tucking his arms under Taehyung’s armpits and throwing his hands up in peace signs as well.

“Oh… uh, sure.” Jin responded, struggling to keep up with the pace of everything. He brought his camera up to his face and suddenly Hoseok jumped in, throwing his arm around the two of them.

“Me too!”

Jin felt a hand snake around his waist as Jimin moved closer to him, peering over his shoulder as if he could somehow see through the lense as well. He snapped the picture and waited for it to develop.

“Oh, that came out nice!” Jimin complimented, still looking over Jin’s shoulder.

The boys crowded him as they looked at the photo and Taehyung reached out a hand for it.

“Do you mind if I keep that one, hyung?”

“Uh… yeah, go ahead.” Jin responded, handing the now fully developed picture over. Taehyung smiled, looking down at the picture fondly for a moment before sliding it into his pocket.

Jin once again found himself wondering what Taehyung had been looking at earlier and what he had done with the picture he had crushed in his hand. But he still couldn’t bring himself to ask.
The rest of the day went on strangely. Things were too happy, too upbeat, too bright like the way a lightbulb got right before it burned out. Jin didn’t question it, thinking that it was just due to the fact that they were all trying their best to cheer Taehyung up. But there was a strange, forced feeling in the air that Jin didn’t remember ever feeling between the seven of them.

They played around as usual, climbing into the shopping carts they had smuggled there and holding mini races with them as one of the boys pushed another down the length of the pool at top speed laughing and shouting.

Taehyung brought out one of the many cans of spray paint from his secret stash and proceeded to outline Namjoon’s figure on one of the walls but it ended up with cat ears and a tail. Once Namjoon stood up to look at it he kicked Taehyung in the leg and the two ran around as Taehyung attempted to avoid further violence and Namjoon was determined to tackle him.

Jimin and Hoseok were out of the pool and play-fighting with sticks by the pond, acting as if they were in a historical drama and spouting lines of a script that only they knew. That apparently came to an end when Jimin’s stick went flying out of his hand and the two collapsed into laughter.

Jeongguk was perilously trying to walk the perimeter of the pool by standing on the very edge and putting one foot in front of the other, attempting to balance by spreading his arms out. Yoongi was standing below him in the pool, watching his friend and prepared to catch him if he were to fall. He didn’t seem all that happy about it, judging by the insults he was hurling at Jeongguk, but the younger just smiled and continued.

Jin watched all of this from where he sat on the couch in the middle of the pool. A bystander may have thought him lonely, sitting there all by his himself as his friends ran around having fun. But this was the way it had always been. They were all friends but they had the tendency to break off into pairs as some were closer friends than others. It just so happened that Jin was often left out of that division, but he wasn’t upset about it. Being the eldest, he felt a sort of responsibility for them. They jokingly called him “mother” sometimes and it wasn’t far off from the truth. He wanted them to all be safe and he wanted to be the first to run over if one of them got hurt. He wanted to already be calling for an ambulance if Jeongguk were to fall and Yoongi wasn’t there to catch him. He wanted them to stay as they were. Being with them here, like this, were some of the best moments of his life. He felt like he belonged, he had a place to go home to within his friends, they were like a family to him.

So, it was fine to just watch them like this. He had no wish for more.

They were fine like this.
Late into the afternoon they all regrouped after most of their boisterous energy was used up.

They were all squished onto both the couch and the mattress, watching and listening as Hoseok and Yoongi performed their own rendition of BigBang’s “bang bang bang”. Namjoon joined in after a while only when his favorite part of the chorus came on shouting out G-Dragon’s line as he jumped to his feet. Jimin jumped up too, unable to control himself when Jeongguk started playing the chorus from his phone and Yoongi sat back down, never really one for dancing. Taehyung jumped up in his place and he and Jimin started dancing aggressively, making the entire group laugh. Even Yoongi jumped in again, attempting to twerk to the song and only succeeding in making Jeongguk fall over from his position on the couch, crying out in laughter with tears in his ears.

Jin attempted to take a few pictures through the laughter, not able to forgive himself if he didn’t capture this moment somehow.

Then they were “golfing” over the mass of water that was overtaking almost half of the pool. It really had been raining a lot.

Jeongguk and Jin were perched right above the border on the rim of the pool, watching as Namjoon stepped forward, a long stick in his hands, swinging it back and forth in practice. Then he swung for real, hitting the toy yellow car that had been teed up on a water bottle into the mass of water and only narrowly avoided hitting Jeongguk and Jin.

“Hey!” Jeongguk shouted, laughing. Somehow Namjoon had managed to hit both the water bottle and the toy car into the water, splashing the two of them as the objects fell in.

“Sorry, I hit it too hard.” Namjoon apologized, running a hand through his hair in embarrassment.

“The god of destruction strikes again!” Jeongguk teased through his laughter.
A while later, after Namjoon and Taehyung teamed up to chase after Jeongguk and disappeared down the path, Jin caught sight of Hoseok leaning up against the wall of what used to be the restroom building outside of the pool, fast asleep.

Yoongi, who was quietly seated next to Jin seemed to realize that as well. He motioned for Jin to follow him as he crept up and posed next to the sleeping man. Jin smiled in amusement and held his camera up to his face before another body suddenly appeared- Jeongguk- and in his rush to get in on the picture he bumped into Yoongi and the commotion woke Hoseok up.

He looked confusedly between his two friends, who were leaning on him enough to knock him over, and Jin, smiling with his pink camera aimed at the three. He sighed at being woken up but, being the good sport that he was, threw out his own peace sign and smiled sleepily.

Jin snapped the picture before Hoseok’s eyes could close again. And then a few more as Jeongguk and Yoongi battled to do better aegyo than the other but they were inevitably both beaten by Hoseok.

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Eventually night fell, bringing with it the chilly undertones of the fading winter. Everyone gathered above the pool, around their makeshift fire pit made out of beaten up and weathered cinder blocks. They pulled all of the couches and loveseats together, squishing onto them both to stay warm and because it was either squish or freeze on the floor. Jin loved when they stayed this late, sitting here like this with a fire and a ratty old projector that desperately needed a new set of batteries given by how much the screen was flickering on the wall of the restroom structure.

It felt cozy, as if they were sitting in a living room rather than outside of an abandoned restroom beside an empty pool overgrown with weeds and murky rainwater.

They had all brought a variety of snacks and beers, Hoseok had brought harder alcohol for Jimin and Namjoon since they hated the taste of beer but like Jin, Hoseok didn’t drink. Instead, the two shared a chair and hoarded most of the snacks, stuffing pretzels and honey butter chips into their mouths.

The projector screen flickered again and made a loud whirring noise before the picture completely disappeared.
“Ah, damn it.” Namjoon cursed.

“I’ve been telling you, for like a month, that the batteries needed to be replaced, Namjoon.” Yoongi sighed, leaning back in his seat.

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll make a note so I’ll remember.” Namjoon said, getting up and walking over to the mirror hanging outside the building. He blew hot air onto the surface and wrote out a reminder for himself with his finger in the foggy remnants of his breath.

Yoongi watched him disinterestedly and though he didn’t say anything, Jin could tell that Yoongi had resigned himself to having to get the batteries himself. How was Namjoon even supposed to remember to bring them if the reminder was here?

Evidently not realizing that fact, Namjoon turned around with a satisfied smile on his face. He walked over to Jimin, leaning over him to grab the remains of whatever pink mixed drink he was sipping. He perched on the arm of the chair Jimin was sitting in and finished it off, letting out a loud burp afterward which caused Jimin to slap his arm as he laughed.

Jin wasn’t sure if it was just because everyone was tired but the almost hysterical energy that they all had earlier in the day had slipped away like it had never been there to begin with. As he looked around there was a certain heaviness in the way everyone was sitting that didn’t seem to be due to tiredness.

Hoseok, who had smiled just seconds before as Jin handed him a pretzel only to see that Hoseok already had one in his hand, though it was disfigured, was now forlornly staring off to the side as if completely lost in thought. It was strange for Jin to see him like that, happy, sunshine Hoseok looking so down. But he had been sleeping earlier so maybe he was just tired.

Yoongi was pinching the bridge of his nose as he absentmindedly ignited his lighter repeatedly, sending up a tall flame only for it to disappear a few seconds later. He looked disturbed by something but Jin had no idea what. He’d always been hard to read, only bringing up subjects hard for him to talk about when he blew up in anger.

Jeongguk had changed positions a few minutes ago so now he was stretched across the length of the couch with his head resting on Yoongi’s lap. As the oldest of the group, Jin always felt particularly responsible for the youngest, Jeongguk’s, wellbeing. He hadn’t said so in as many words but ever since his mother remarried, Jin knew that Jeongguk had been having a rough time. He wouldn’t part with any details but the way he avoided being at home said enough.
Even Namjoon, who never seemed bothered by anything in particular, seemed restless. Probably more due to his lack of cigarettes than anything else. He had been trying to quit as of late, trying that method of switching nicotine out for sugar and keeping a lollipop in his mouth, but as far as Jin could tell it only served to make the man more restless and agitated than he had ever seen him.

Jimin sat beside Namjoon, expression blank of emotion and sipping from his drink quickly, barely having taken a sip before he brought the bottle back up to his lips again. Jin knew that Hoseok and Jimin were, without a doubt, the closest pair of the group- having been glued to the hip since he had met them. But Jin also knew that Jimin’s personal life was something that was purposefully not spoken about. The most he had gotten was that Jimin had suffered from health problems when he was in school and he brushed it off as no big deal anytime it was questioned. Jin couldn’t help but feel that that wasn’t the truth but Hoseok wouldn’t tell him about it either.

And Taehyung. Well, it was obvious that something was going on with him, though Jin wondered if he was the only one who had noticed anything out of the ordinary. After all, Taehyung had perked up as soon as the boys arrived and Jin was the only one who saw him crumple that photo in his hands. Looking at him now, resting his head on the palm of his hand and staring at the fire sleepily, there wasn’t anything standing out to Jin as being odd. Usually Taehyung and Hoseok would still be laughing and goofing around, trying to pull the rest of the group up and laugh along with them. Jin would even tell some of his legendary jokes just to add to the fun and they’d be laughing until day break.

But they weren’t laughing.

They weren’t having fun.

They weren’t goofing around just for the hell of it.

No, there was a heaviness in the air, blanketing all of them like a thick fog, smothering the joy from their expressions and quieting their laughter. Jin couldn’t tell why that was but couldn’t deny the feeling. He’d yet to tell them about his upcoming date and doing so with this kind of atmosphere was… strange. He didn’t know how that kind of thing would be received by his friends, considering they all knew what happened with his last girlfriend. Him and Taehyung were finally okay and he wanted it to stay like that.

He’d tell them later, he decided. When this weird atmosphere had cleared.
Jin reached into his back pocket for his phone to check the time but was surprised to feel something else in the pocket. He brought it out in front of him to look at it and was pleasantly surprised to see the photo of their sea. He must not have taken it out of his pants since the last time they’d gone there.

The sea, their home away from home that they’d visited many, but not nearly enough, times. More so than this hideaway of theirs, the sea with its salted air and broad horizons stretching out further than the eye could see, it was a place that was like freedom to them. It was a four to five hour drive and since Jin was the only one with a car they didn’t go very often, but each time they felt refreshed when coming back from there as if they’d cleansed their souls and returned with less weight on their backs. It was their getaway. And it seemed like they could use one of those right now.

Jin looked up from the photo to see that Hoseok’s eyes were on it, having snapped out of whatever trance he had been in.

“We…” He began, holding the photo up higher. “Should we go here?”

Jin looked at Hoseok then, whose face had brightened. He smiled briefly and nodded.

Having gotten the other’s attention by speaking everyone looked over at him questioningly. Jin turned the photo around and showed it to them. It had been a long time since they had last went, the harshness of the winter making it not only difficult to be at the beach but difficult to drive there in the first place.

Excitement bloomed amongst them, temporarily dissipating the fog that had settled in the air.

Jeongguk raised his head so he could turn to look, and was shocked to see the high flame of Yoongi’s lighter right in front of his face. He blew it out and sat up.

“Are you trying to set my hair on fire?” He asked sleepily.

Yoongi rolled his eyes, tucking the lighter into his jacket pocket with a huff. “I didn’t put your head in my lap. And it was nowhere near your head until you started moving suddenly.”

Jeongguk ignored that and his eyes focused on the photo in Jin’s hand.
“The sea? We haven’t been there since, what, September? Count me in.”

“Me too.” Hoseok chimed in, that small smile still playing on his lips.
“Me three!” Jimin added, raising his bottle.

“Wait, when are we going? Tomorrow?” Namjoon asked in confusion.

“Sure, tomorrow.” Jin responded, then realized why Namjoon was asking. “Oh, you have work tomorrow, don’t you?”

Namjoon avoided his gaze, kicking his foot around in the dirt.

“Uh… no. I-um… I quit.”

“What?” Taehyung asked, suddenly tuning into the conversation.

“I quit.” Namjoon repeated, this time a bit more confidently.

“When?!” Taehyung demanded.

“Uh… earlier today? A customer just threw money at me after I finished filling them up and instead of getting here late I just left.”

“You just left?!” Jimin echoed incredulously.

Namjoon shrugged. “Yeah.”

“But you’ve worked there forever! I’m pretty sure that when I met you, you were working at that gas station.” Taehyung cried in clear shock.
“Yeah, well, I didn’t plan on working there for the rest of my life. Anyways, what’s the point of waiting until tomorrow? Why don’t we just head there now?”

Taehyung looked at Namjoon for a very long moment, clearly not thinking the conversation was over, but realized that Namjoon didn’t want to talk about it any more.

Jin was surprised too. Namjoon might have been labeled a delinquent but he was always very diligent when it came to others depending on him. He wasn’t the type to just up and quit without even giving a resignation letter. It was very unlike him.

“Head there now? It’s almost three in the morning.” Yoongi grunted, seemingly taking extreme effort to pull himself from the depths of the couch to rest on the edge, leaning his elbows onto his knees.

“Wait, don’t you have a tutoring session tomorrow, Yoongi?” Jeongguk asked in concern.

Yoongi made a noncommittal noise in the back of his throat.

“Don’t get yourself fired, again.” Jeongguk warned.

“There are plenty of rich parents who want their kids to learn how to play piano.” Yoongi replied brusquely.

Jin could physically feel the air getting heavy once again and rushed to push it away.

“I don’t mind if we leave now.” He announced. “With the lack of traffic this time of night we’ll probably get there in four hours.”

“And I can drive if you get tired.” Hoseok offered from beside him.

Jin nodded with a smile and stood. “Let’s get going then.”
Ironically, they had to stop for gas before setting off on the trip, and the closest gas station happened to be the one that Namjoon had quit from earlier that day. Namjoon seemed to find that fact hilarious, and was laughing as he opened the passenger side door and began filling up the car without even being asked. There were no attendants working this early in the morning anyways.

Also ironically, Hoseok, who had offered to drive if Jin got sleepy, was currently sleeping in the trunk bed with Jimin since Jin’s truck only fit five comfortably. But Namjoon swore he would keep Jin awake and if they ended up crashed on the side of the road well… it would be Namjoon’s fault.

But with how horrible Jin’s sleep schedule had been lately, he was only slightly starting to feel sleepy and driving didn’t seem all that different from staring up at his ceiling for hours on end.

He looked out the open window, watching as Namjoon fit the nozzle into the gas tank. He leaned back against the truck as the tank was filled, and as he glanced to the side he saw Jin leaning out of the window. Namjoon smiled and walked over.

He made a gesture with his hands that Jin understood as camera and though he didn’t understand what Namjoon wanted it for, Jin handed him the pink monstrosity.

Namjoon looked mildly embarrassed as he held the camera up.

“You look kind of photogenic in this light.” He whispered as to not wake the rest of the members who were in various states of sleep.

Jin breathed out a laugh and put up his fingers in a peace sign along with a tired smile. Suddenly, one of the passengers Jin assumed to be sleeping sprung forward to the front seat with a gummy smile and a peace sign. Yoongi. Jin laughed out loud this time. Most would think that someone with Yoongi’s personality would be vehemently against posing for pictures or doing aegyo but the man found a perverse pleasure in suddenly doing it just to surprise people. He may have had the personality of an alley cat but he also had a cute side.

Namjoon snapped the picture, then went back to monitoring the gas.

Apparently, Jin’s outburst of laughter woke up Hoseok and he watched in the rearview mirror as
Hoseok stretched and climbed out of the truck. He walked sleepily up to the passenger side of the car and leaned down into it.

“I’m going in to use the restroom and get some snacks. Do you want anything?”

Jin thought for a second. Coffee or something equally caffeinated would be great but he didn’t want to keep having to stop to use the restroom. Maybe something to eat would be better since they hadn’t really eaten dinner.

“Maybe a pizza steamed bun and pork gimbap for Namjoon.”

Hoseok rolled his eyes with a laugh. “I said snacks, not a whole meal. But since I can’t manage to keep my eyes open for longer than five minutes I guess I owe you for making you drive the whole way.” He tapped his hand against the metal of the car and headed inside the building.

Namjoon returned to the passenger seat after a few minutes, declaring the gas tank full. He held up the now developed photo of Jin and Yoongi, the dark lighting took away from the quality of the photo but that just made it feel more authentic. Jin gave the okay and Namjoon happily put the picture into the glove compartment and held on to the camera.

Hoseok came out of the convenience store a while after with a large bag of snacks. He stopped beside the passenger side to drop off the requested goodies then hopped into the trunk bed.

Jin started the engine and pulled out onto the street.

---

Jin didn’t know how many hours had passed when he woke up to Yoongi and Jeongguk knocking at the windows of the truck, waking everyone inside up.

They had arrived half past seven and Jin had parked near the pier before promptly falling asleep. Namjoon had kept his promise not to fall asleep but even he struggled to keep his eyes open during the last hour of the ride.
With a groan Jin lifted his head from its resting place on the steering wheel and winced as his back whined in protest.

“Did they even sleep?” Namjoon groaned, stretching his arms and rubbing harshly at his face.

“No.” Taehyung muttered from the backseat. “They got out of the car a while after we got here and woke me up, I haven’t been able to properly go back to sleep since.”

Well that was odd, what had they been doing for the last few hours?

Jin shrugged, opening the car door and stepping out. Namjoon and Taehyung followed him after a few minutes passed and Jin stepped around the truck to see that Hoseok and Jimin had been given an even worse wake up call.

Hoseok was scowling, which was never a good sign and as he jumped out of the trunk bed Jeongguk rushed over to Yoongi who was walking towards the edge of the pier. Jimin laughed and slung an arm around Hoseok’s shoulders, leading the grumbling man over to the edge of the pier. Jin, Namjoon, and Taehyung shuffled over slowly as well and the seven of them stood, looking fondly out at the calm water.

Eventually, Hoseok complained of being sleepy and nearly sent Jimin crashing into the water as he sat. The rest of them slowly followed suit, serenely staring into the water as that, now familiar, fog descended upon them again.

They were sitting shoulder to shoulder but Jin felt as though they were in completely different worlds of their own.

Sometime later, Namjoon had stood up to go get the bag of snacks Hoseok had bought and brought it back with him for them all to share. Maybe it was because they had arrived so early in the morning, but the area was completely devoid of people. About two kilometers down there were a few construction workers working on fixing a separate pier and the occasional hum of a car passing on the road but other than that it was quiet.

The boys, themselves, were quiet. And while there had never been a need for talking between them, this silence was almost overwhelming. Perhaps because it didn’t feel like they had driven over four hours to visit a sea and were now looking into it because they were carefree. No, instead, it felt like they were all running from something. Something that refused to let them go. Jin could feel it pressing down on his shoulders and in the air they were breathing. The heaviness was inhaled and sat like bricks in their lungs, causing them all to slump their postures and breathe out
It was frustrating. It was so frustrating that Jin wanted to scream more and more with every second that passed. Why were they all being like this? Why did they have to be in their own worlds and not let each other in? Why couldn’t they just speak - actually talk about what was troubling them? Weren’t they friends? Why were they so content to pretend everything was okay? Why could they not ask for help and lean on each other?

All of those questions were burning in the depth of Jin’s throat, bubbling up higher as he became angrier with the situation. What were they even running from?

The words were bubbling up higher and higher in his throat and his mouth opened almost involuntarily to spit them out, but all of a sudden Taehyung stood up. The sudden movement drew everyone’s attention, and everyone stared at him as he turned around without even looking at them and began walking away.

“Tae?” Namjoon called after him, eyebrows furrowed in confusion as his eyes followed his friend. “What are you doing?”

Taehyung didn’t answer, nor did he turn around, or do anything at all to indicate that he had actually heard Namjoon. Instead, he pulled his hood up over his head and walked right past Jin’s truck and towards the large construction structure.

Nobody said a word until Taehyung reached out a hand and began climbing it.

“What the hell is he doing?” Yoongi snapped, holding up a hand to block the morning sun from his eyes as he watched Taehyung climb higher.

He wasn’t provided an answer as everyone continued to watch Taehyung in stunned silence. Eventually Taehyung reached the top of the structure and stood on the large wooden plank for a long minute, simply staring out at the sea.

An unease filled everyone as he took a few steps forward.

“Tae!” Jimin shouted, a sense of panic coating his voice. “Get down from there!”
Namjoon stood up then and cupped his hands around his mouth to make sure his voice could be heard.

“Tae! Taehyung!”

A thick feeling of dread filled Jin as Taehyung finally turned his head towards their voices and smiled. Then his head turned back to the sea.

*He wouldn’t*, Jin thought frantically, standing up as well. *He’s not that stupid*.

The same sense of panic seemed to fill Namjoon as well.

“*Taehyung!*” He shouted. “*What are you doing*?”

At this point everyone was standing and watching Taehyung with fearful eyes. They were crowding around each other and Jin could feel the panic rolling off of everyone in waves.

“He’s just messing around right?” Hoseok asked to nobody in particular.

And then to everyone’s absolute horror, Taehyung changed his stance and began running.

*He’s going to jump*, Jin thought frantically, *that idiot is going to jump*.

All of it happened in slow motion and none of the boys were breathing as Taehyung reached the end of the platform and jumped. His limbs swung wildly through the air as he fell over nine meters down.

Vaguely, Jin heard Jimin scream Taehyung’s name and rush past him followed by Jeongguk who was already throwing off his jacket and preparing to dive into the water.

The splash as Taehyung hit the surface of the water was like booming thunder around them and the
dread that had been filling Jin ignited like gasoline.

*Taehyung couldn't swim.*

---

Jin didn’t like change. He hated it. He hated that good things always had to end and he hated that as time passed change was inevitable. But above all else in that moment, he hated Taehyung.

*Taehyung*, who stole all the happiness from his life five years ago.

*Taehyung*, who always had a way of selfishly doing whatever he wanted and getting away with it.

*Taehyung*, who always changed everything just because he felt like it.

*Taehyung*, who had just tried to kill himself in front of them.

Jimin and Jeongguk had jumped in a few seconds after Taehyung hit the surface of the water, and Jin watched with a strange detachment and burning anger as they dragged him out of the water and up onto the rocky beach. The two of them were supporting him on their shoulders and his feet dragged along the sand, getting caught by a jutting rock every few seconds.

He was coughing and spitting out water but other than that he seemed fine.

Jin found himself wishing that he *had* drowned.

“What were you thinking?” Namjoon yelled, voice hoarse with emotion. He shoved Jimin and Jeongguk away and shook Taehyung fiercely, causing his head to bobble back and forth like a limp doll.

“You’re a complete fucking idiot! What did you think you were doing!?” Namjoon screamed, spittle flying from his mouth and landing on Taehyung’s face.
“Namjoon…” Hoseok pleaded quietly, pulling on Namjoon’s shoulder in a feeble attempt to get him to stop.

Namjoon harshly pushed him away, nearly causing Hoseok to fall but Jimin quickly caught him before he totally lost his balance.

Taehyung didn’t respond and kept his eyes on the ground. Namjoon huffed and roughly let him go, walking away from them and lacing his fingers behind his head in an effort to calm down.

Contrary to Namjoon, Jin was only getting angrier with Taehyung’s silence. He didn’t even have the decency to explain himself? From the looks of it, not even Namjoon knew what was going on with him, which meant that Taehyung had been holding onto whatever was bothering him all by himself.

Jin didn’t even realize he had moved until Taehyung was lying on the ground and his face was a few inches away from Jin’s. His fist automatically came up and it throbbed with pain as he repeatedly punched Taehyung. The yelling of their friends was like static noise in Jin’s ears and he only vaguely registered the hands trying to pull him away.

Taehyung was only barely attempting to defend himself with wide eyes like a deer’s in headlights. He looked like he wanted to cry and as the first tear slipped from his eye Jin hesitated before his fist came down again, looking into Taehyung’s face with new light, snapping out of the rage filled haze that had overtaken him.

Jin blinked rapidly as he tried to understand what had just happened and his friends took the opportunity to pull him off of Taehyung.

They were still staring at each other as Jin was pulled away and he watched as Taehyung slowly turned his head to the side and followed his gaze, seeing Namjoon still standing off to the side watching the two of them with a hardened but blank gaze.

Another tear fell from Taehyung’s eyes and he scrambled to get up, blood dripping from both his nose and his lower lip. Jeongguk tried to reach for him but before his hand could even make contact, Taehyung was sprinting away as if the devil was chasing him.

As Jin looked at the bruising and bleeding of his knuckles and the retreating figure of Taehyung,
he realized that so much had just changed in the last five minutes that nothing could ever be the same again.

Immediate chaos ensued as the group tried to determine whether or not to go looking for Taehyung, ignoring the very large elephant in the room that was: *what the hell had Jin just done?*

Jin wasn’t a violent person by nature and even when Taehyung had horribly wronged him all those years ago he had simply felt betrayed and distraught. He had never gotten into a fistfight in his life, and he and his brother hadn’t ever really horsed around when they were younger.

So, he was in a catatonic state of shock as his friends talked around him, raising voices and trying to come to a decision.

Finally, Namjoon huffed and reached out for Jin.

“Fine. The two of us will look for him. He couldn’t have gone that far. You four just take a train back.” Namjoon manhandled Jin since he wasn’t making any attempt to move and began leading him away.

“Wait, you can’t just expect us to go home!” Jeongguk protested.

“I agree, wouldn’t it be better if all six of us were looking for him?” Hoseok piped up, holding a hysterical Jimin in his arms. Jin wasn’t exactly sure when Jimin had started crying but he seemed on the verge of having a very serious meltdown.

“No, you should take Jimin home.” Namjoon snapped.

Hoseok deflated immediately, attention turning to Jimin once again and attempting to calm him down.

“And what about us? We can help.” Yoongi spoke, his face was stony but Jin couldn’t really read anything else in his expression.
“You go home, too. You’ll just be in the way.”

Jin could feel the regret rolling off of Namjoon as soon as the words left his mouth. It was clear that the two were incredibly offended just by the change of expression on their faces. Jeongguk narrowed his eyes and his mouth dropped in disbelief, while Yoongi set his jaw even firmer and flared his nostrils.

“Wait-” Namjoon sighed. “That’s not what I meant. I just mean that Tae doesn’t seem to be in a good headspace right now, and there’s a lot that you don’t-”

“Whatever, Namjoon.” Yoongi icily cut him off. He grabbed Jeongguk’s shoulder and pushed him to turn around roughly. “We’re going.”

Hoseok was conflicted as he looked between Namjoon and the pair’s retreating backs. Jimin heaved out a sob and Hoseok looked down at him in concern. With a sigh and a sad attempt at a smile, he squeezed Jimin tighter against him and followed Yoongi and Jeongguk.

Namjoon sighed again, running a hand over his face and staring down at the sand. There were spots of dark blood on the ground, coloring the grey of the sand a morbid burgundy.

Namjoon turned around and began walking and Jin hesitantly followed after him. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to find Taehyung, but if he did what was he supposed to say? He knew that he should apologize but he didn’t really want to.

He followed Namjoon without a word, too many thoughts running through his head to speak, and the two of them were silent as they walked.

---

An hour and a half later they were still silent.

The sun was high in the sky now and Jin had no doubt that it was well into the afternoon now. As they walked, Namjoon had attempted to call Taehyung but unsurprisingly his phone had gone straight to voicemail.
Jin thought it was strange that they were just casually walking around the city rather than calling Taehyung’s name, or asking if anyone had seen a boy with dripping wet clothes and a bloody nose. But he didn’t say anything.

Instead, he was more curious about the fact that Namjoon hadn’t asked him why he had done something so terrible to Taehyung.

And he found that he couldn’t stop himself from asking.

“What?” Namjoon asked, tersely, as if Jin had interrupted his train of thought.

“I said, why aren’t you asking me why I hit Taehyung.” Jin repeated.

Namjoon faltered in his steps a bit, coming to a complete stop and looking at Jin with a deep frown.

“For the same reason that you aren’t asking me why I just watched and let you do it.” He let that sink in for a second and then immediately turned around and continued walking.

Jin, after a moment of stunned silence, followed after him.

“Why are we just walking around? Shouldn’t we be asking if anyone has seen him if we want to find him?” He asked.

“We’re not going to.” Namjoon responded quietly.

“What?” Jin asked, thinking that he had heard him wrong.

“We’re not going to find him.” Namjoon repeated.

Namjoon stopped suddenly, sighing and turning his eyes to the ground before begrudgingly lifting them up to meet Jin’s.

“We aren’t going to find him. I know him. If he doesn’t want to be found, then he won’t be. It doesn’t matter if we ask if anyone’s seen him and it doesn’t matter if someone has. He might have even hopped onto a train and is back in Seoul by now. That’s why I had the others leave. He’ll show up again when he’s ready.”

“So…” Jin began in confusion. “Why are we walking around then?”

“Well, my conscience wouldn’t let me just leave without looking for him even a little.” Namjoon admitted, stuffing his hands into his pockets.

“Why do you think he jumped?” Jin found himself asking.

Namjoon sighed, looking up into the sky as if it would give him all the answers.

“I don’t know. He’s been really off the last couple of days. I know his home life isn’t good with his drunk bastard of a father beating either him or his sister daily but I didn’t think it was bad enough for him to do something like this.”

Well, at least Jin wasn’t the only one who thought something was off. But Taehyung’s father was abusive? That was shocking, considering he always felt that Taehyung was the most carefree out of the seven of them. His knuckles throbbed pointedly and Jin found himself regretting his actions for the first time that day. No matter his feelings towards Taehyung or his actions he didn’t deserve to be beaten. Not by his father and not by someone who was supposed to be his friend.

---

Jin and Namjoon ducked into a restaurant to get some actual food for the first time in nearly twenty four hours before deciding to head back.

They had somehow walked in a complete circle and so as they approached the pier they passed the beach that was still splattered with blood. Jin faltered upon seeing it again. It was a harsh truth to
know that he had spilled that blood. Namjoon said nothing as the two of them stood staring at it, each lost in their own thoughts.

A fresh batch of waves crashed against the sand a few feet away and something in them caught Jin’s eyes. Some… paper or something was floating in the water.

Jin frowned and stepped closer. It couldn’t have been paper. Paper would have been soaked and falling apart. No, it looked like a photograph.

Plucking the wet thing from the water, Jin uncrumpled the photo and was met with the blank stare of a man holding a baby swaddled with white blankets. Namjoon had walked up behind him quietly, wondering what he was looking at and he promptly snatched the photo from Jin’s hands, holding it up to his face to see it better.

Jin opened his mouth, prepared to scold Namjoon for being so rude but the words stuck in his throat at the look on the younger man’s face.

“Do you recognize that or something?” Jin asked, standing up straight.

“Y-yeah…” Namjoon breathed out. “It’s Tae’s. It’s a photo of him and his father. It’s the only picture of the two of them that he has. He wouldn’t dare admit it but I’m pretty sure it’s one of his most valuable possessions.”

Jin frowned at that, a sudden memory resurfacing in his mind.

“Yesterday, I saw Taehyung staring at a photo for a long time and then he crumbled it up and stuck in his pocket.”

Namjoon looked deeply troubled by that information and looked back at the crumpled, wrinkled, and wet photo in his hands before shoving it into his pocket.

“Let’s go.”

Jin suddenly felt as if Namjoon knew something that he wasn’t sharing but had no idea how to ask
him about it. It was probably yet another thing that he wasn’t allowed to know.

---

That night not even Hye-su’s light hearted messages could cheer Jin up. He had a long list of things he was supposed to be doing to make up for the entire two days of slacking off but he couldn’t bring himself to do any of it.

Things had changed for sure.

And the fact that Jin didn’t know what to expect next was maddening. So, he was in his familiar position, laying on his bed and staring up at the ceiling as if the cobwebs and discoloration could answer all of the questions he wanted to ask.

There were so many questions that Jin wanted to ask. So many things that he didn’t know. And he couldn’t tell if he didn’t know these things because they were kept from him or he just wasn’t seeing them.

The news that Taehyung lived in an abusive household was shocking, to say the least. How could something like that have been kept from him for almost a decade? It made him wonder what else was being kept from him. He thought that he knew his friends, but he suddenly felt as if he didn’t know them at all. And maybe that was because they didn’t want him to.

Nobody ever told Jin secrets, nobody ever confided in him. He was just there. Was he even wanted there, though? It had never bothered him before, but wasn’t it too unfair that all of his friends had closer friends within their group and that Jin was a close friend to no one? Jimin had Hoseok, Jeongguk had Yoongi, and Taehyung had Namjoon. Where did that leave Jin?

A pang of loneliness hit him like a freight train, the kind that had always been there but was only just now brought into the light. All of his friends had each other and Jin had no one. If he asked everyone to hang out just to cheer him up he didn’t doubt that they would, but at that point wouldn’t he just be a nuisance?

Before he could even think to stop it, a tear was dripping from his eye and running down the side of his face. It wet the sheets near his ear and Jin couldn’t find the strength to stop the next few from slipping out as well.
Suddenly, a loud ringtone rang out in the room and Jin was shocked out of his self-loathing. He slapped the tears from his face hastily, embarrassed and ashamed that he had been crying over something so ridiculous.

He grabbed for his phone on the nightstand, squinting at the light in the darkness of the room.

_Call from Hoseok_

Jin frowned in confusion. What was Hoseok calling him for so late at night?

He answered and held the phone up to his ear.

“Hello?”

“Jin?” The voice on the other end asked, a hoarseness to it that Jin assumed was grogginess.

“Yeah, it’s me. What are you calling so late for? Aren’t you usually asleep by-”

“It’s Jeongguk.”

Jin’s blood ran cold. Dread was running through his veins rather than blood. While he had been in a hazy state of half awareness, he was fully awake now and his heart was beating so loudly he wondered if Hoseok could hear it through the phone.

“What? What about him?” Jin demanded. Now that he was actually paying complete attention he could hear the sound of many different voices in the background and he wondered where Hoseok even was.

“He’s been in a car accident. He’s in the hospital right now.”

Jin’s mouth fell open in shock and his phone slipped out of his hand, bouncing once on the fabric of his bed and then landing with a clatter on his floor.
Why did things have to change?

Chapter End Notes

You have no idea how many times I had to watch the prologue video to write this chapter.

Fun Fact:

The phone box RM is in in the Run JP video is similar to the one he was in for the Wings Short Film- Reflection.
House of Cards

Chapter Summary

[CHAPTER RECAP]

The events of “that night” transpire, leaving Jin to reflect on the current state of his relationships with his friends and makes a mistake that he won’t be able to take back. Then, he gets a phone call in the middle of the night, confirming his worst fears—change has come and it’s sweeping all of them up in it’s waves.

Chapter Notes

I’m not planning to give individual chapters warnings because that could potentially spoil so this will be the only one. Please MIND THE TAGS this story is not for everyone. Please be careful x

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“A house made of cards, and us, inside”

After Jin had picked the phone back up from the ground and spoke with Hoseok just long enough to get the address of the hospital and prodded for any details on how Jeongguk was doing, he was left with what felt like too long of a drive and the knowledge that the doctors weren’t saying anything other than Jeongguk was alive.

That would have to be enough for the moment.

Jin dashed around his apartment, throwing on the first things that he saw in his closet, making a frantic grab for his keys and taking the steps two at a time as he made his way to his car.

His mind was going a mile per minute with all the possibilities but he just couldn’t understand how Jeongguk had been hit by a car. How did things like that even happen? How did Hoseok find out about it?
The streetlights passed him by in a blur as he drove, brain shifting into autopilot as he knew exactly where the hospital was. He supposed that one saying was true.

*When it rains, it pours.*

Because Jin felt like he was in the middle of a monsoon.

---

Jin arrived at the hospital twenty minutes later, after what should have been a thirty minute drive. His mind had come up with all sorts of possibilities as he drove and the fact that Hoseok hadn’t even been able to tell him the extent of the damage was only driving him crazier. Sure, Jeongguk was alive but was he hanging onto the strings of consciousness while on life support? Was he unconscious due to excruciating pain? Was he bleeding to death and in desperate need of a blood transfusion?

And the worst thought of all- what if Jin was too late and Jeongguk was already gone?

That was the thought that had him careening into a parking space and turning the engine off before he had even properly come to a stop, jumping out of the car and sprinting inside.

He threw open the doors and though a few curious looks were thrown his way, all of the people in the reception area almost immediately went back to what they had been doing and Jin felt a sort of frustration in the fact that he was the only one completely panicked and flustered. Jeongguk, handsome, capable, and much too young, Jeongguk could be dying right now- how dare these people act so unaffected.

“Excuse me,” Jin rushed, as he approached the counter. The receptionist looked up at him warily. She was an older woman who looked tired and worn out and Jin realized that he had no idea what time it even was. Some hour of the early morning, he guessed, given that it was still pitch black outside.

“I- my friend, Jeon Jeongguk was admitted here a little while ago. He’s… He was in a car accident. I need to see him.”
The woman pensively looked up at him and then glanced down at the screen of the computer in front of her.

“What’s your name?” She asked, typing into the computer slowly. Much too slowly for Jin’s sanity at that moment.

“Kim Seokjin.” He rushed, staring at the computer nervously as she continued to type.

“Please sign in on the clipboard in front of you.” She instructed as she slipped on her glasses and began reading the screen silently.

Jin huffed and scribbled his name in, his hand was shaking slightly causing his writing to barely be legible but *whatever*. He tapped his foot impatiently when he finished signing in and noticed that the woman was still reading her screen slowly.

“Jeon Jeongguk…” She murmured. “He’s currently in the emergency room. Since you are not of direct relation to him, I’m not permitted to send you up.”

Jin frowned, wanting to reach over the counter and look at the computer screen himself.

“That’s fine.” He snapped, though it clearly *wasn’t*. “I just want to know how he’s doing.”

The woman looked as if she’d rather call security than continue talking with him and instead of doing her *job* and responding it seemed like she wanted him to just give up and walk away.

“*Sir,* I ask that you please take a seat and wait for a doctor to inform you of any news. There are plenty of you waiting already.” Jin frowned at that, having no idea what she meant but then he heard his name being called.

“Jin-hyung!” Jin turned his head towards the sound and saw Hoseok waving him over with Jimin and Namjoon behind him.

Was Jin the last to get here, then?
No, not even that, was he the last person Hoseok called?

He shook his head, pushing away the cancerous thoughts and walked away from the counter, to the woman’s immediate relief, rushing towards his group of friends.

“What happened?” He whisper yelled as he approached them, hoping that maybe one of them could explain why the youngest of their group was lying in a hospital bed in the middle of the night.

It was heartbreaking for Jin to see the looks on his friend’s faces. Hoseok’s eyes were red and watery as if he’d been crying; Namjoon’s face looked gaunt and tired as if he hadn’t slept for a week; and Jimin who had been a mess earlier in the day only looked worse now, chewing on his lip nervously, the amazing hair that Jin was often envious of was dull and flat and a complete mess from running his hand through it so often. Jin supposed he probably didn’t look much better, considering he’d already looked terrible the day before from his lack of sleep.

“We don’t know.” Namjoon snapped. Jin’s eyes widened at his friend’s brusqueness. Namjoon was slightly pacing back on forth, with a deep set scowl on his face and even Jin could tell that the man would probably kill for a cigarette right now.

“Yoongi was the first one to know about it,” Hoseok explained quietly, gesturing to the aforementioned man who was sitting in a chair a few feet away from them.

Jin hadn’t even noticed him until then, though Yoongi was absolutely radiating hostility even though he was simply slouched down in the chair, arms crossed over each other, and staring blankly at the floor.

“But he won’t say anything.” Hoseok continued. “He called me first, but all he said was that Jeongguk was hit by a car and that he was being taken to this hospital. So, I called you guys while I ran here but he’s been like that this entire time.”

“I think he must have seen it happen.” Jimin added quietly, sniffling gently.

Jin looked at Yoongi again, wondering not only what the hell had happened, but feeling an intense pity towards him for having to see something like that happen in front of his eyes. Jin couldn’t even imagine what that feeling would be like.
“Has anyone called his parents?” He asked.

Hoseok shook his head. “None of us have any number to contact them with.”

Jin sighed. His parents at least deserved to know that their son was in the hospital. But at the same time, it’s not like they were actually being told anything.

“It’s been about an hour since they admitted him, shouldn’t they tell us something soon?” Hoseok wondered out loud.

“They should,” Jin agreed.

Now that he had arrived at the hospital and had nothing left to do with all the nervous energy that had welled up in him he suddenly felt very drained. With a heavy sigh, Jin resigned himself to a seat next to Yoongi, curling in on himself so that he could rest his head on his lap.

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An hour and a half later, judging by the clock hanging on the wall, they were finally given some news.


Jin slowly looked up to see that a doctor had stepped into the waiting room, holding a clipboard, and was pensively looking over the waiting room. It wasn’t the first time that Hoseok had called their attention because of a doctor walking into the waiting room but when the doctor walked over to the receptionist and were pointed in the direction of the boys, Jin stood immediately.

“Yoongi,” He called, tapping the younger on the shoulder to get his attention. He was met with a glare at first but Jin gestured to the approaching doctor and the glare quickly dissolved as he stood.

Jin’s heart thundered in his chest as he took in the sight of Yoongi’s clothes. He was wearing black
pants and a black jacket that was zipped most of the way up but Jin could see the ruddy color of dried blood staining the white t-shirt he was wearing underneath. The sight only solidified his earlier fears of Jeongguk’s wellbeing and he was suddenly terrified to hear what the doctor was going to say.

“Are you gentlemen here for Jeon Jeongguk?” The doctor asked with a calm smile, she seemed to enjoy her job more than the receptionist and was at the very least making an effort to be comforting.

“We are.” Hoseok answered helpfully at the same time that Jin and Namjoon asked,

“Is he okay?”

“How is he?”

The doctor smiled patiently and looked over the clipboard in front of her.

“I’m Doctor Kang. And he’s doing fine. We’ve moved him out of the emergency room and into the patient care block so he can recover from his injuries.” She explained.

Jin felt like his stomach had dropped out of his gut and landed on the floor.

“W-what… What injuries?” He stuttered, a wave of panic washing over him like ice water.

The doctor’s expression fell slightly and she seemed to be struggling to find words which only made Jin panic further.

“Well, yes. Jeongguk was hit by a car going at least fifty miles an hour. It’s natural that he has some injuries. It’s a miracle that none of them appear to be life-threatening. He has some deep wounds that have required stitches and other scrapes but he also has some more serious injuries.”

She flipped through her clipboard rattling off what she saw. “His right shoulder is dislocated badly enough that it may cause permanent damage to the rotator cuff, along with a fracture in his right radius bone. Two of his ribs are badly bruised which we will have to monitor closely for internal
bleeding. He’s also suffering from a compound fracture in the left leg and a simple fracture in the right leg, which to put into simpler terms means that major bones in both legs are broken. And on top of that, he has a mild concussion from head contact with the pavement.”

The five of them stood in complete silence at hearing all of that. Jin wanted to cry. If that was her definition of being “fine” Jin might have fainted if Jeongguk wasn’t “fine”.

“C-can we go see him now?” Jimin asked quietly, and as Jin looked at him, he noticed that younger had begun crying again.

The doctor opened her mouth but closed it with an apologetic expression.

“I’m sorry. Because visiting hours are currently over and none of you are direct family I’m not permitted to let you into his room. But as soon as visiting hours begin at eight a.m, you’re more than welcome to see him.”

“His parents…” Jin began and Doctor Kang turned to him with rapt attention. “They don’t know, we have no way to reach them.”

“Ah, I see.” She glanced down at her clipboard. “Well, because he’s twenty years old, we won’t need any parental input so their presence isn’t required. But I’ll make sure that the receptionist informs them of his condition. There should be a way to contact them in his emergency information.”

Jin had no idea what she meant by that comment and frowned in confusion. Why wouldn’t his parents want to be here?

The doctor seemed to realize his confusion and frowned for the first time since she had begun talking to them.

“You all are friends of his, correct?” She asked.

They all nodded.
“Do you mind telling me about his home life? Does he live with his parents?”

Jin couldn’t understand why she was asking them that all of a sudden and though he was expecting Yoongi to answer, since he seemed to be the closest to Jeongguk, he remained silent. And now that Jin was actually looking at him, he seemed like he was barely even managing to remain standing. His gaze was turned to the floor and Jin wondered if he had fallen asleep standing up.

“He lives with his parents, yes.” Jin supplied when the silence stretched on for too long. “His mother recently got remarried and I don’t think that him and his stepfather get along well.”

The doctor seemed disturbed by that and glanced between the clipboard and Jin a few times before she tucked the thing under her arm and her face suddenly turned very serious.

“I’m asking you this because Jeongguk has strange injuries that I feel are unrelated to the car accident.”

That got everyone’s attention immediately, from the corner of his eye Jin even saw Yoongi raise his head at those words.

“I’m not sure what the situation with his home life is,” Doctor Kang continued. “But I think that some of the injuries Jeongguk has are from physical violence. Particularly his rib bruising.”

“The damage is mostly on his left side which couldn’t be because of the car accident since there’s no reason for any part of the car to have hit him that high. There are other minor things such as the bruising on his cheeks and the bridge of his nose. You all are friends of his so I thought that I would ask you first before we ask him when he regains consciousness. You all would know whether he was facing violence at home or getting into trouble on the streets, right?”

“He’s… not…” Hoseok began quietly unable to finish his sentence due to the shock.

Jin felt a rush of guilt well up in him at the mere suggestion that not one but two of his friends were dealing with domestic violence and he hadn’t known about either of them.

The very idea of it made him sick to his stomach.

Doctor Kang bit her lip and Jin knew that what she was going to say next would not be pleasant.
“As I said, I'm not sure of the situation but from the reports that I've heard, it…” She sighed. “It seems that Jeongguk walked into the street purposefully. I don't know what his intentions were or if he was in the right state of mind, but the driver was not at fault in this incident.” She let her words settle over them and Jin felt like he had been physically hit.

“What are you suggesting right now?” Namjoon suddenly snapped, looking and sounding more livid than Jin had ever seen him.

The doctor smiled sympathetically. “Well, I do hope that I’m wrong about this, but depending on his answer when he wakes up, this may need to be handed over to the police.”

She looked over all of them meaningfully. “Right. Well, I have to be going now. Remember eight a.m and you're welcome to see him.” She waved as she walked away, heading towards the receptionist.

“Th-there’s no way that's true… right?” Jimin pleaded, sounding borderline hysterical. “Jeongguk would have told us if something like that was happening to him, right?”

“Of course, it's not true.” Namjoon bit harshly. “That woman doesn’t even know him. How dare she even suggest something so stupid?”

Jimin had tears rolling down his face again and Jin could tell that the rest of the group wasn’t too far behind. Hoseok’s face was becoming splotchy and Namjoon’s foot was tapping insistently. Yoongi looked slightly more awake now but his face had gone ashen and pale. Jin himself, felt tears burning at his eyes. After the events earlier in the day, what the doctor had suggested didn’t seem that far fetched.

“B-But…” Jimin swallowed, “Tae…”

Jin stilled, shocked to know that Jimin was thinking similarly to him. But his attention was immediately caught by Namjoon who had whipped his head towards Jimin faster than what should have been humanly possible.

He took a step forward, invading Jimin’s personal space and jabbed a finger into his chest.
“Taehyung is nothing like Jeongguk,” He hissed. “You don’t even have the slightest clue what’s going on with him.” Jin quickly grabbed a hold of Namjoon’s shoulder and pulled him away from Jimin, not understanding why he was being so cruel all of a sudden but knowing that Jimin didn’t deserve it.

“Do you know what’s going on with him, Namjoon?” Jin demanded as Namjoon brushed him off roughly.

He got his answer as Namjoon immediately avoided his gaze. Jin should have been surprised but couldn’t bring himself to be. After all, what was so surprising about them keeping secrets from each other? They were all doing that anyways, weren’t they? Even about serious, important things, like the reasons why his friends were jumping into the ocean when they couldn't swim or stepping out into traffic without warning.

“I’m going for a cigarette.” Namjoon muttered, knocking into Jin roughly as he headed for the door.

“You quit!” Jin reminded him, suddenly filled with irritation.

“Yeah, well, I’m going for one anyways.” Namjoon snapped, and the hospital entrance slammed as he swung the door shut.

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The wait until they were permitted to go in and see Jeongguk was long and uncomfortable, to say the least.

They had opted to sit down after Namjoon stormed out for a smoke break and the air around them was ripe with awkwardness and tension. Everyone was naturally shocked by what the doctor had told them but beyond that Hoseok seemed angry and upset given by the sour look on his face, Jimin seemed hurt and confused by Namjoon’s anger, Namjoon seemed on edge even after he sat down near them reeking of cigarette smoke, Yoongi was still mute though his expression had hardened again, and Jin… well, Jin didn’t know what to feel. There was too much going on and with his complete lack of sleep, he just didn’t have the energy to even attempt to sort out his thoughts.

Jeongguk’s mother had arrived alone around six a.m., introducing herself to them and blushing in
embarrassment as she explained that her husband couldn’t be there because of work. Her face was tear stained, and Jin had offered to get her a coffee, which she had gratefully accepted.

She had also attempted to ask them what happened to her son, but since Yoongi was still intent on remaining mute, there wasn’t much they could tell her other than relaying the doctor’s news. She seemed distraught over the insinuation that her husband could have been physically abusing Jeongguk and had denied the accusation so vehemently that Jin was inclined to believe that she either had no idea about it or that it wasn’t the case at all.

Which only slightly calmed his fears about it.

Eventually, because she was Jeongguk’s mother, one of the nurses came down to lead her up to his room. Jin tried not to be too envious of that privilege.

Jimin and Hoseok had fallen asleep, leaning on each other cutely enough to make Jin want to take a picture of them. Namjoon was trying and failing to stay awake, sitting up straight in his chair. Jin watched as his head lulled forward as he fell asleep only for him to jolt awake when the bobbing of his head woke him up. Yoongi, to Jin’s surprise, had his eyes open and was staring blankly at the tiles of the floor. Jin’s own eyes were growing heavier with each minute that passed but he felt more physically exhausted than sleepy. How could he even sleep with the overdrive that his mind had worked itself into?

Not to mention there were only two minutes left until eight a.m. finally rolled around.

Jin stood, stretching his arms above his head and twisting his back in a futile attempt to get it to stop aching but the waiting room chairs were only so comfortable.

Namjoon’s head fell onto his chest again and he startled awake, looking around in surprise. He noticed Jin standing and glanced at the clock.

“Oh, it’s time already.” He commented, sounding genuinely surprised. Jin felt like it had taken an exceptionally long time to wait but maybe that was because he hadn’t gone to sleep.

He nodded grimly and began gently waking up Hoseok and Jimin. The two opened their eyes sleepily but after each took a glance at the clock they were wide awake.
Namjoon was trying to get Yoongi’s attention but the man wasn’t paying him any attention. Concerned, Jin walked over, crouching in front of him so that he could look into his eyes.

They were glazed over and generally unfocused and Jin’s heart skipped a beat as an adjective popped into his mind as to how he looked. *Dead*.

In a slight panic, Jin waved his hands back and forth in front of Yoongi’s eyes. There was no response.

“What’s wrong with him?” Jin found himself asking and Jimin and Hoseok crowded behind him.

Namjoon frowned, sliding out of his seat so he could kneel in front of Yoongi. Jin watched as he ducked down to look at Yoongi’s face. He scoffed suddenly and Jin was exceptionally confused.

“He is *literally* sleeping with his eyes open.” Namjoon explained.

“Really?” Hoseok asked, surprised amazement in his voice. He ducked down so he could see Yoongi’s face as well.

“Leave it to Yoongi-hyung to do something as creepy as that.” Jimin jested from behind them.


Jin watched as Yoongi blinked and the glazed over look to his eyes faded away as they regained their focus. The three of them stood up and watched as Yoongi blinked a few more times, confusion covering his features as he took in the four of them staring at him.

“What?” He croaked out, rubbing his eyes. The first thing that Jin had heard him say all night… or day…?

“It’s time to go see Jeongguk and you’re over here sleeping with your eyes open.” Namjoon answered, clapping him on the shoulder. “Let’s go.”
Yoongi grunted but wordlessly stood up and the group checked in with the receptionist; a different person now, which Jin was glad for, and headed towards the elevators that would take them up to the patient quarters.

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Jin didn’t know what he was expecting when he walked into Jeongguk’s room but nothing could have prepared him for what he saw.

Jeongguk was lying in the bed, face at peace, which contrasted starkly to the condition he was in.

There were a multitude of different bandages and plasters over his face and arms. His right shoulder, which had been dislocated was in a sling, and the lower part of the arm was wrapped in a splint that stretched onto his hand. But that wasn’t even the worst of it. Both of his legs were in giant casts and suspended in the air from a device hanging from the ceiling. In that same horrific way that they showed in movies and television shows.

Jeongguk’s mother looked up as the five of them entered. She was sitting by his bedside, holding onto the hand that wasn’t in a splint and dabbing at her wet eyes with a tissue.

She stood after heaving out a heavy sigh and faced them.

“I’ll let you boys have your time with him. I’m going to try to get something to eat. I just didn’t want to leave him alone in case he wakes up.” Jin thought that Namjoon responded to her, because she nodded in his direction before squeezing past them into the hallway, but he wasn’t sure because his ears were ringing too loudly to hear anything clearly.

Yoongi was the first of them to approach the bed and he stood staring at Jeongguk for a very long moment, before he collapsed into the chair and Jin was sure that the man was sobbing as he took Jeongguk’s hand into his.

Jimin stumbled over towards Jeongguk and his hands barely grasped the bed before his legs seemingly gave out from under him. Hoseok took hesitant steps towards the bed as well and Jin saw rather than heard the sigh Hoseok breathed as his hand gently traced the raised sling Jeongguk’s broken leg was hanging from.
Namjoon stepped out from behind Jin and sat down in one of the chairs at the far side of the room, immediately burying his head in his lap.

Jin was frozen to the spot.

He should have been breaking down at the sight of one of his most lively friends laying in a hospital bed covered in bandages and splints but he was just so overwhelmingly glad.

He was so, so incredibly glad that he could see the rise and fall of breath from Jeongguk’s chest and that the boy was alive.

Jeongguk’s mother may have been in the room a few minutes ago but Jin felt a parental responsibility to Jeongguk. He felt more responsible for him than he did for himself and he knew that he would never be able to forgive himself if someone so young was taken from the world on his watch. It was why he could understand why Yoongi, who he’d never seen cry before- not even when his dog died of cancer, was sobbing hysterically into Jeongguk’s hand.

The ringing in his ears only quieted when he’d watched Jeongguk breathe for a full minute and was sure that he had seen his eyes move under his eyelids in whatever dream the younger was having.

When the ringing stopped, he realized that Yoongi was speaking.

“-heard you. I swore I did. I was drinking and being an idiot and accidentally stepping off the curb into traffic and I heard you.” Even though Jin could make out what he was saying through his sobbing, it wasn’t making any sense. And from the strange glance he shared with Namjoon, it was obvious he wasn’t the only one who didn’t understand what Yoongi was talking about.

“I heard you whistling the song. Our song. The one we made together. And though I didn’t see you anywhere near me, I started remembering the old times. When we were still in school and how we spent so much time working on that song that I don’t think I’ll ever forget the notes for the rest of my life. I even passed by the store, you know the one. And then I heard the horn and I turned and you were just… standing there. Then you were on the ground and you were bleeding and there was so much blood and your… your leg. The bone was just sticking out in the air and I thought you were dead.”

Yoongi gasped through his sobbing, reaching up another hand to clasp Jeongguk’s own hand closer to him.
“I thought you were dying. The driver… the driver tried to avoid you and they crashed into the store and I was just holding you in my arms as I saw that piano burst into flames. And it felt like I was dying.”

Jin overwhelmingly felt as if he were hearing and witnessing something he wasn’t supposed to.

He turned away from them, staring down at the floor instead. He had no idea that Yoongi cared so deeply for Jeongguk and wondered if responsibility was the only thing he felt for the youngest of their group.

Someone cleared their throat from the doorway behind Jin and he jumped, completely startled.

A nurse was standing at the entrance to the room, smiling apologetically for scaring Jin.

“Excuse me, I just need to check his vitals and refill his IV.” She explained, bowing her head.

Jin stepped aside so she could enter and ended up sitting next to Namjoon in one of the chairs across from the bed.

The room was silent now except for the steady beep of Jeongguk’s heart monitor, the now softened crying of Yoongi, and the sporadic sniffling from Jimin.

Jin watched as the nurse observed Jeongguk's heart monitor, jotting down something on a clipboard and then twisting the tube connected to the IV drip until it came apart. Then, she took the nearly empty bag off the hook and replaced it with a new one, securely hooking the tube into it.

She tucked the clipboard under her arm, holding onto the nearly empty bag as she left, closing the door behind her softly.

Jin sighed, the worst was over, now it was just a matter of waiting.
Jeongguk had woken up in the early afternoon—confused, disoriented, and in pain. His mother had returned a few hours before that and had kindly brought them all something to eat. She had noticed Yoongi holding onto her son for dear life, and instead of asking him to move or even assuming that he would, she had asked one of the nurses to bring in another chair and seated herself on the other side of her son, content with stroking his hair lovingly as he slept.

After she had returned, a nurse had come into the room, and explained that because they had temporarily put Jeongguk on heavy pain medication he may not be fully cognisant and may suffer from slight memory loss.

So, when he woke up in the afternoon it was no surprise to anyone that he didn’t know where he was or how he had gotten there.

The emotional vulnerability that Yoongi had shown earlier that morning while sobbing into Jeongguk’s hand and muttering nonsense completely disappeared when the younger woke up and Yoongi uttered some excuse about having to use the restroom when he nearly ran out the door. Namjoon and Jin had shared a look, and silently, Namjoon had gotten up to go after him.

Jeongguk stared after Yoongi in confusion and Jin had hesitantly stepped up to his bedside, sitting in the vacant chair.

Hoseok busied himself with getting Jimin off of the floor and into one of the chairs on the far side of the room.

It had felt like an intervention of sorts when not only a nurse but also Doctor Kang had stepped into the room, both with clipboards, and began asking Jeongguk about what happened.

Jeongguk explained that his memory was kind of hazy but that he did remember the car coming towards him and the impact of being hit but everything after that was fuzzy.

It was when Doctor Kang asked him what happened before the accident that the atmosphere in the room became tense.

Jeongguk looked towards Jin curiously, seemingly wondering if she was talking about the events of that morning. Doctor Kang noticed his confusion and her voice was calculatedly soft when she explained what she meant.
“I’m asking you if you remember what happened before you were hit by the car. It seemed to me that you had injuries predating that incident.”

The sound of the door opening interrupted Jeongguk’s reply, and Namjoon slipped inside quietly. He picked up on the tense atmosphere immediately and apologized under his breath as he shuffled in, going over to stand next to Hoseok and Jimin. Everyone in the room seemed to notice that he had not returned with Yoongi but no one commented on that fact.

“Do we really need to ask him about this now?” Jeongguk's mother argued with a displeased tilt to her lips. “He just woke up. Don't you think that he needs to rest?”

The doctor sighed patiently but seemed firm about her decision.

“Ma’am, it is very important that he answers now rather than later. With the number of injuries he has and with the shock of the situation, the more time that passes the more likely it is that the fidelity of his memory related to the incident will decrease.”

“Are you going to keep talking about me as if I'm not here?” Jeongguk huffed. “I remember what happened.”

The attention of the room had turned to him in an instant.

“I was walking around and bumped into some guys. Wrong time, wrong place sort of thing. They beat the shit out of me and then mugged me.” Jeongguk explained. “That's it. I don't really know why you're making such a big deal out of it.”

The entire room seemed to breathe a sigh of relief at the news. But then Doctor Kang asked a follow-up question with a frown.

“If that's so, then what was the reason for you walking out into the middle of the street as you did?”

“What?” Jeongguk countered, and it seemed more like he was dodging the question than actually questioning what she had said.
“The police reports that I was given state that you stepped off of the sidewalk and into oncoming traffic. Do you mind telling me the reason for that?”

Jeongguk had nervously glanced over at Jin and then at his mother and finally back to Doctor Kang. The expression on his face reminded Jin of a caged animal, trapped and afraid with nowhere to go, and he found himself suddenly terrified of Jeongguk’s answer.

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Two weeks had passed since then, and Jin still couldn't get the utter look of terror in Jeongguk's eyes as he had looked at him out of his mind.

The younger had managed to utter out a weak response to the question but Doctor Kang had narrowed her eyes and promptly ordered everyone to leave the room. Including his mother.

Jin had been glad for it. He didn’t think he would have ever been able to sleep soundly if he had heard Jeongguk’s true answer as to why he stepped off that curb. He had a few ideas about it, but none that he actually wanted to entertain.

Since then, they had all visited him multiple times but after the first few days, Jin began realizing that they had stopped coming to see him at the same time.

He knew that they were visiting Jeongguk though because Jeongguk had told him as much. But it felt as if his friends were avoiding facing each other.

The only person who wasn't going to see him at all... was Yoongi. Though, Jin had no idea why he hadn’t. Yoongi had seemed so distraught about Jeongguk getting hurt but now that he was recovering well and was in pain but *alive*, Yoongi was acting like he wanted nothing to do with him. Jin was pretty sure that no one had seen him since he’d stormed out of the hospital room.

Jin couldn't understand it. But it's not like he understood anything about their friend group these days.

Taehyung still hadn't shown up.
At least, not as far as Jin knew.

And whatever Namjoon knew, he wasn't sharing, having become a complete recluse overnight. Though he visited Jeongguk, it didn’t seem like he was talking to anyone else and when Jin had tried to call him, his phone went straight to voicemail.

So, as it was, Jin had no idea what was going on since none of his friends deemed him important enough to actually tell him anything. And if that was the way it was going to be- then fine. He didn't need to tell them about his life either. Especially not about the date he was going on.

He had told Hye-su about the incident with Jeongguk, and she had immediately been filled with nothing but support for both him and his friend and suggested that Jin reschedule to whenever he felt up for it, since he obviously had a lot going on. Jin had been overwhelmingly thankful but had been worried that with the date left up to him, he would keep pushing it further and further back due to his fear of getting involved. But over the two weeks that had passed, the time he spent talking with her had doubled, likely because of the sudden and complete absence of his friends.

Hye-su had seemingly taken it upon herself to be his pillar of support and cheer him up as much as she could. Which was taking less work than Jin thought it would. They just worked well together. Jin would tell her a joke that anyone else would have cringed at and she would fire back with one that was even worse. They had a lot in common, from their eclectic taste in both music and tv shows, to their love of the arts and cooking, to their easily startled personalities and fear of scary movies. Both of their parents even disapproved of their life choices and passions.

Often times they would begin a conversation in the morning and text until the early hours of the next morning, only to restart the cycle again. Jin found himself staring at the screen of his phone for hours on end rather than his ceiling, and while he was still wasn’t getting as much sleep as he should have been getting, he felt better than he had in months.

He couldn’t really remember how he had felt with his girlfriend five years ago but somehow he knew that it wasn’t anything like this. He knew that he would regret it forever if he let someone as amazing as Hye-su go.

So, he had rescheduled the date to today, a Friday two weeks after the original date. And although Hye-su had assured him that she would be fine waiting longer, Jeongguk was fine and in recovery and Jin felt ready to start something fresh, new, and exciting.
Although, by the looks of things he was about to miss the date entirely because he couldn’t for the life of him settle on something to wear. His apartment was a mess with half of his closet strewn all over it and he should have left half an hour ago if he was planning to get there early. But finally as he looked in the mirror, he felt good about his appearance.

He had woken up early in the morning in order to go and get his hair done, something he hadn’t done since college acceptance interviews, and it was still parted and curled slightly in the front perfectly even though he had endangered it by pulling so many different shirts on and off. He had finally decided to wear a suit hidden in the back of his closet, having been bought for him by his mother ages ago. He had never worn it, thinking it too flashy, but it was the only thing that felt right to him now. It was a grey textured suit with a pointed lapel, and he had paired it with his favorite pair of dark slacks and his best white button-up.

Appreciating the reflection staring back at him, Jin smoothed his hair down and smiled, a good but nervous energy setting a permanent smile on his face.

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The date was planned for that night, so it was already dark when Jin left his apartment. He had planned for them to take a stroll through the park and then get some dinner, or dessert if they weren’t feeling hungry, before sitting and talking by the Han river. It was simple, but Jin felt like they were both opposed to more extravagant ideas.

But first, he had to pick up his special order of a Smeraldo bouquet before meeting with her. Back when she had dropped her sketchbook in front of him, Jin had opened it to a page, just to see what it was and had discovered Hye-Su’s love for drawing and painting the flower. It wasn’t a real and natural growing flower, rather it had been introduced to her in her favorite book as a flower with a warm atmosphere but cold history and though the story itself was simple she had been immediately smitten by it. So, Jin had visited over half the florists in the area until one of them agreed to make a replica of the Smeraldo. It had been an expensive quest and Jin’s savings were already screaming at him but it would be worth it to see the look on her face when she accepted them.

The streets were quiet at this time of night, far away from the hustle and bustle of downtown, and only a stray car every now and then passed Jin as he made his way to their rendezvous location.

The florist truck was waiting for him as he pulled up to the area and parked on the side of the road. Quickly checking his watch, he saw that he was only a few minutes away from the time Hye-su was supposed to be here to meet him.
Jin quickly stepped out of his car, closing the door behind him and walking over to the window of the truck. He provided his identity and, because he had paid for the flowers beforehand, he was simply handed them and wished a good night before the truck drove away.

He smiled at the sight of the soft blue and purple flowers, glad that they looked even better than he had hoped. His phone buzzed with a notification and he checked it to see a message from Hye-Su.

*From Hye-Su:*

*Turning the corner now! Almost there! ^_^*

Jin smiled even wider at that and assumed a stance near the light pole, hoping he looked attractive standing there and waiting for her to show up.

A few minutes later he saw movement out of the corner of his eye and looked up to see Hye-su checking her phone and looking around as she walked. She looked up and they met eyes, a wide smile appearing on her face as she waved excitedly at him. She grabbed tightly onto her bag as she stepped out onto the street, running across.

One thing that Jin had learned in his life was that like a riptide, good luck came suddenly and with little warning, but it could also be snatched away as if it were never there in the first place. What went up, would always come back down, and the fragile house of cards that Jin had built for himself collapsed in an instant.

He saw it before she did but couldn’t even open his mouth to yell out a warning to her as the driver slammed down on their brakes, tires screeching and horn blaring. Hye-su turned just as the car made contact with her body, throwing her onto the windshield and shattering the glass from the impact.

The radiant and positive energy that had been surging towards Jin and filling him with happiness was quickly put out like a fire doused in water and the tide was pulling him out to sea.

Her body flopped lifelessly onto the pavement and the driver was in hysterics as they jumped out of their car, checking to see if she was okay. Jin was again frozen to the spot and while his whole world was crashing down around him all he could manage to do was stand there, wondering if this was what Yoongi felt when he saw Jeongguk get hit. Helpless, hopeless, and useless.
Standing there, glued to the spot like a marble statue, just staring at Hye-su’s body lying lifelessly on the ground, Jin experienced an odd sensation.

Bright lights flashed in his vision and he had the sudden and unsteady airy feeling as if he was no longer properly in his own body. Mysteriously, as this sensation occurred, he found himself taking small steps towards Hye-su. The driver was standing a few feet away yelling frantically into his phone but Jin couldn’t hear him. No, he couldn’t take his eyes of off Hye-su and his heart was beating too loudly in his ears to hear anything but the rushing sound of blood.

She had rolled off of the car’s windshield and landed on the ground at an odd angle. Her long hair was matted with blood and it hung wildly, obscuring her face. For that, Jin could be thankful. He wasn’t sure if he could mentally handle looking into the face that had been smiling at him so brightly just a few minutes ago in the state it was in now.

*It was his fault.*

How could it not be? He was the one who decided to plan this date. He was the one who had stood waiting for her with flowers. He was the one who had waved to her from the other side of the street. He was the reason she had been in the situation at all.

He was staring at her contorted body on the ground but his eyes weren’t seeing anything. They were watery with unshed tears and Jin wasn’t even sure that he breathing thanks to the odd airy sensation he was feeling. Distantly, he wondered if he was going to faint. It certainly seemed like it.

But no. Someone was shaking his shoulder and when he wasn’t responding in any particular way, they took to pulling him, practically dragging him back onto the sidewalk. Jin didn’t know who it was. He didn’t care.

Lights danced across his vision again but this time they were colored. Red and blue flashing as emergency vehicles arrived on the scene. The ambulance doors bursted open in the edges of Jin’s vision and paramedics came rushing out, crowding around Hye-su and blocking Jin’s view of her. He watched as they talked amongst themselves and then two of them were jumping back into the ambulance to bring out a stretcher. Four of them worked to pick up Hye-su and place her onto the stretcher, while another one of them held a quickly reddening towel to her head.
The group of them maneuvered with some struggle into the ambulance and officially out of Jin’s sight.

Once again someone beside him was bothering him. They had at some point draped something over Jin’s shoulders judging the sudden appearance of color in the corners of his sight. But that wasn’t enough for whoever it was bothering him, they forced his shoulders down, applying an unrelenting amount of pressure until Jin’s knees were nearly buckling under the pressure. He sat down violently, only in an attempt to not be forced flat on his face, and this seemed to satisfy whoever it was that was bothering him.

Jin finally decided to give in and stop staring at the blood splattered across the car’s windshield and the small puddle of the liquid that had gathered on the pavement. He turned to the person who had been bothering him, mildly surprised to see a female paramedic looking at him in concern. He hadn’t seen any other paramedics than the ones that were currently in the back of the ambulance.

She lifted up a corner of her mouth in a slight attempt at a smile and pushed something warm into his hands.

“It’s coffee.” She explained when Jin did nothing but stare at the can. “I was planning to drink it but you seem like you need it more than me.”

Jin wasn’t sure that was true considering he still felt oddly airy and light, as if his mind were doing one thing and his body doing another. But then a drop of wetness landed on his hand, splashing on the back of his palm and rolling off. He looked curiously up into the sky, wondering if things could get any worse than they were already by raining. But the sky was perfectly clear.

Confused, Jin experimentally touched a hand to his face, surprised when it came away cold and wet. When had he started crying? He sniffled instinctively and was even more shocked to find his nose totally congested.

With a sigh, he brought the coffee up to his mouth, the female paramedic had opened it before giving it to him so he didn’t have to fiddle with the tab and he was wordlessly thankful for such a small kindness.

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Jin didn’t know how long he sat there on the curb of the sidewalk, sipping on the lukewarm coffee
and staring blankly at the side of the ambulance.

Time went by slowly now and Jin felt as if he could have been sitting in that spot for a year though it couldn’t have been longer than ten minutes. Someone had hopped off the back of the ambulance and walked over to the paramedic sitting with Jin and the two of them spoke in hushed whispers a few feet away from him. Whatever the man had said to her seemed to be upsetting and she sighed heavily before waving him off.

The woman slowly walked back over to Jin, crouching in front of him so that he was forced to look at her.

“Are you her boyfriend?” She asked softly.

Behind her the ambulance whirred with life and began driving away. Jin stood up in a sudden panic, instinctively taking a step forward as if he meant to chase after the vehicle but the woman in front of him grabbed his shoulders to stop him.

“They’re taking her to the hospital. You’ll need to follow them by car.” She explained and Jin looked at her with wide eyes.

“Do you think that you can drive?”

Jin’s eyes strayed behind her, where the driver of that car that had hit Hye-su was walking around the car with a police officer seemingly describing what happened. His eyes fell upon the shattered glass of the windshield once again and almost immediately he was shaking his head. The very idea of getting behind a wheel, let alone in a car at all, was terrifying.

The woman nodded, releasing him from her grip and holding out her hand.

“Give me your keys then. I’ll drive you.”

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Getting to the hospital was a complete blur.
Jin could barely stand being in the car so he had tightly shut his eyes as they drove, though all he could see on the insides of his eyelids was Hye-su getting hit with the car over and over again so he had decided to stare down at his hands instead, wincing everytime they came to a stop.

He noticed after a while that he was no longer holding onto the bouquet of Smeraldo flowers, though he couldn’t seem to remember dropping them. He wondered if Hye-su had at least seen them in his hands. He wondered if she’d ever be able to see them.

The paramedic who had driven him to the hospital walked him to the waiting room and Jin realized with a start that he was in the same hospital that Jeongguk was being kept in. He was once again left to wait in the same waiting room.

He realized then, just how much he hated hospitals. This one in particular.

The woman apologized for having to leave him there with no information on Hye-su’s condition but helped him by getting him signed in after asking for his name.

It didn’t matter though. He could tell by the look on her face as she left him that it wasn’t looking good.

Not long after he had arrived, a couple rushed into the waiting room, speaking frantically with the receptionist. There were only a few other people in the waiting room; an elderly man, and a middle aged woman with her family. Maybe that was why the woman noticed Jin sitting alone.

She adjusted her purse on her arm and walked towards him, and as she did Jin was stricken by how familiar she looked. Her hair was pulled messily into a bun but she looked young and fresh. It was obvious that she was Hye-su’s mother even through her splotchy face and tear streaked cheeks.

“Excuse me, are you… by any chance Kim Seokjin?” She asked, and even her voice resembled her daughter’s.

Jin stood up on weak legs, still shocked by how much Hye-su resembled her mother.

“I-I am…” He responded.
Hye-su’s mother lifted her lips in a weak smile.

“My daughter and I don’t get along that well these days because of our disagreements but we still talk often.” She choked out a laugh, wiping a falling tear before it dripped down her face.

“And every time that we’ve talked over these last three weeks she’s mentioned this man that she met. A Kim Seokjin who was incredibly handsome, charming, and even worse at jokes than she was. She was more excited about the date the two of you were supposed to have tonight than I’ve ever seen her about be about anything.”

The woman’s smile was kind but Jin felt as if every word was a calculated stab, the words should have made him happy but all it did was violently remind him that he was the reason that this woman’s daughter was currently in the hospital.

He didn’t know how to respond. Fresh tears were falling down his face now and Hye-su’s mother wiped them with her thumb before throwing her arm around his shoulders and pulling her along with him.

“Come on. We aren’t allowed in the emergency room with her but they have a family waiting section on that floor. If anyone asks who you are, we’ll just say that you’re my nephew.”

Jin was surprised by her kindness but didn’t object as he was pulled along. Hye-su’s father had been waiting by the door that led to the elevators for his wife to return and though he looked a little confused by Jin’s sudden appearance, he said nothing and instead held the door open for both of them as they passed through.

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The family waiting area was… unpleasant. The sight of doctors and nurses rushing in and out of the halls, made for a very tense atmosphere and it felt as if the sounds of people crying were echoing through the halls. It was making Jin feel sick to his stomach.

And from the looks of it Dongyeop, Hye-su’s father, wasn’t feeling much better as he had taken to pacing the floor ten minutes after they had arrived up here.
Misun, Hye-su’s mother, was bent over in her chair, trying and failing to stay composed given by her constant quiet sobbing and sniffling.

Jin was just trying his best to not let his nausea get any worse. The airy feeling he had earlier had dissipated and now he was shaking like a leaf and a cold sweat had broke out all over his body. The weight of the guilt he felt was pressing down on his shoulders relentlessly and he felt like he was being crushed under the sheer weight of it.

Finally, one of the staff members walked over towards them rather than rushing off in another direction. Dongyeop stopped his pacing to look at the approaching doctor and Misun looked up from her lap, quickly wiping away the traces of her tears as she stood.

“Are the two of you Yu Hye-su’s parents?” He asked as he approached.

“We are.” Dongyeop answered immediately.

“I-Is she okay? How is she?” Misun asked, desperation coating her voice and fear causing it to shake.

The doctor sighed and Jin knew. He just knew what would come out of his mouth next.

“I’m sorry to inform you that Hye-su was not able to withstand the injuries from the accident. Her head suffered extensive trauma which resulted in serious brain damage and though paramedics were able to keep her breathing on the scene of the accident we were unable to stop the internal bleeding of her brain and she was pronounced dead at 9:48pm.”

And even though Jin knew what was coming, he had no way of preparing himself for the news and the room spun violently before he doubled over, emptying the contents of his stomach onto the floor at the same time he heard Misun sob violently.

If the news of Hye-su’s death hadn’t solidified the idea in Jin’s mind, seeing the nurses wheel her body out of the E.R, covered with a white sheet was more than enough. He almost retched again at the sight.
Hours had passed now and Jin thought that there wouldn’t be a day in his life that he could forget
the sounds that came out of Misun’s mouth as she mourned the death of her only child. Just hearing
the anguish in her voice felt like Jin’s heart was being ripped out and shredded to pieces.

He had caused that.

If it wasn’t for him Misun and Dongyeop’s daughter would be perfectly fine and they could still
call each other on the phone and argue about Hye-su’s life choices and even if she grew to hate
them, at least she would have been alive.

Jin had taken that from them. He felt nothing but overwhelming guilt as he watched Dongyeop
attempt to comfort and calm Misun through his own tears but she was completely inconsolable. He
had managed to pick her up off the floor and set her down onto a chair but that was it. She was still
sobbing violently into her hands and Dongyeop seemed to be at a complete loss as to what to do.

Dongyeop had also watched as they wheeled his daughter into an elevator and headed down to the
morgue. Then the man’s eyes landed on Jin.

“Seokjin… was it?” He asked, and Jin’s attention was on him in an instant.

“Yes, sir.”

“Son, you should probably go home and get some rest. There’s not much left here to do. We’re
going to stay here until they…” Dongyeop seemed to get choked up in his words and Jin
respectfully looked away from him when more tears fell from his face.

“… Until we decide on our options.” He finally finished. “We’ll be in contact with you when we
finish planning for the… for the funeral.”

Jin felt like he was being dismissed. And maybe he was. It wasn’t as if he had known their
daughter for any large amount of time. He wasn’t even her boyfriend. Just a friend that had
snatched her life away.

Maybe Dongyeop realized that.
In any event, Jin stood up on shaky legs. He was given water after vomiting all over the floor a few hours ago but his throat still felt raw and the inside of his mouth tasted of bile.

He hesitated a while, waiting for Misun to acknowledge his departure in some way, but she seemed to not even hear the conversation between Jin and her husband as she was still crying in that horribly broken way.

Jin didn’t necessarily want to leave but he was at least glad to be away from the heartbreaking noise of Misun’s crying.

He walked away, heading down the stairs rather than the elevator, not wanting to be in the same elevator that Hye-su’s dead body was just in. And then he was walking out of the building and to the parking lot.

The sight of his truck staring back at him was intimidating and Jin stood staring at it for nearly ten minutes before convincing himself that it would be okay to at least get in it and deal with everything from inside.

Like: how the hell he was going to get home if he couldn’t bring himself to drive?

If things weren’t so strained between him and his friends he wouldn’t have hesitated to call one of them to pick him up but things being as they were, he’d rather not deal with the awkwardness of his friendships. He hadn’t even told them about Hye-su anyways. And now she was just… gone. And the happiness that she had brought with her was gone as well.

Jin sat in the driver’s seat for a long time, trembling as his hands clutched the steering wheel. He knew that it would be easier to just get a cab or wait for a bus or catch a train but at some point he would have to come back to this hospital and get his car and while he wasn’t too keen on driving at the moment, he never wanted to see this fucking hospital again. He wasn’t even sure if he could force himself to come here just to see Jeongguk.

But more than just driving, he didn’t know where to go.

He didn’t know if he could stand going back to his apartment and pretend that everything was okay and that someone hadn’t just died because of him. As much as he felt the urge to call for an impromptu hangout with his friends, being with them right now would only make him feel worse.
He would be a nuisance to them right now, because even though they didn’t deem him important enough to tell him, he knew that everyone was dealing with their own troubles. If they could deal with it themselves, then Jin would just have to the same.

Except, he had never been good at keeping things to himself. He wanted to be comforted and cheered up. Did that make him weak?

It must have.

At the end of the day, wasn’t he just a parasite leeching off of the happiness of others with no real happiness to call his own? Wasn’t he just a nuisance to everyone he knew? No. Not even a nuisance. Now he was a killer.

Jin let his head fall forward, crashing against the steering wheel as he attempted and failed to stave off an oncoming wave of depression. It was the first time he had truly cried that night. It was all just too much. Everything was closing in on him and he felt a panic attack creeping up on him as he sobbed too hard to even breathe.

He wanted to escape, he wanted to get away and go somewhere that he could breathe.

With a start, he lifted his head from the steering wheel, a place suddenly coming to his mind.

With shaking fingers, he struggled to place the key into the ignition and started the engine. He sped backwards out of the parking space nearly crashing into the car behind him but he had to get there. He had to get there now.

He had to go to that sea.

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Deep down Jin knew that it was a very bad idea for him to be driving in that moment but he couldn’t bring himself to care. It was nearly a five hour drive to the ocean and Jin was in no condition to be behind the wheel. He had stopped crying not long into the trip, his mind going too wild with all of his thoughts to even consistently produce tears.
He felt wild, *reckless*, as if he had been drinking alcohol but at the same time jittery as if he’d had several cups of coffee.

He was driving way over the speed limit and was weaving in and out of the little traffic there was dangerously. He didn’t want to be driving but it was the fastest way to get to the ocean and all he wanted was to get there as soon as possible.

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It’s in the early hours of the morning when Jin sees the pier coming into view in front of him.

He expected to be relieved but looking at the sea just reminds him of Taehyung now. He remembered the blood he spilled on the beach and the tears in Taehyung’s eyes as he ran away, he remembered the fear in Jeongguk’s expression that day in the hospital, and he remembered the puddle of blood under Hye-su’s head as she laid lifelessly on the pavement.

Jin clutched the steering wheel harder as he turned and tried to will the images away but he was just hit by wave after wave of guilt.

Out of the corner of his eye he noticed something swaying from his rearview mirror.

It was the picture he took of all of them at the sea from when they visited back in September. Jin had been on the other side of the camera so there were only the six of his friends in the picture.

He couldn’t help but feel like that was the way it *should* be. If he was nothing but a bother to everyone he was around, wouldn’t everyone be happier if he weren’t there to bother them anymore? They wouldn’t have to work so hard to keep secrets from him and they wouldn’t have to worry about him either. He should just be gone and disappear from their lives.

They probably wouldn’t miss him that much anyways. They had each other after all and Jin was just the odd one out who interfered with everything.

Jin turned away from the picture and back to the road in front of him only to realize that there was no longer any road. Somehow he’d driven off of it and was hurtling down the pier. If he had tried, he probably would have been able to stop in time to keep himself from flying off the edge.
But he didn’t want to stop.

He pushed the gas pedal down harder, happy to be offered such an easy solution to his problem.

He could be gone from his friends without a trace. He could stop struggling against the tide that was so determined to swallow him in darkness and just let it happen. If he was lucky they wouldn’t be able to find his body and they could just assume he went missing like Taehyung.

He didn’t want to bother them anymore anyways, so like this, it would be fine.

The pier ended in front of him and he felt the absence of gravity as the truck flew through the air for a few feet before crashing violently into the water. Jin’s head smacked against the steering wheel before the airbag could deploy and his vision flickered to blackness.

He could finally be free.

Chapter End Notes

I’m amazed that I somehow managed to make this more sad than the actual highlight reel. Also cameos everywhere whoops.

Fun Fact:

There were blue and white flowers similar to smeraldo flowers that were officially introduced in the Highlight Reel in the Bts Run MV.
Seokjin

Chapter Notes

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It’s my fate, still I want to struggle and fight”

Seokjin was born into a practical family. They weren’t strict, necessarily, but his mother was a lawyer and his father was a doctor. They didn’t believe in liberal arts and they especially didn’t believe that a career could be made out of it.

However, Seokjin was different. His older brother Seokjung was the smarter one, the more popular one, the more capable one, and most importantly the son that their father favored. While Seokjung often went fishing and golfing with the man, Seokjin often sat on the couch in the living room with his mother and watched reruns of their favorite dramas. Seokjin had always been closest to her, as they shared many of the same things in common such as their love for cooking, reading, and romantic comedies.

He and his mother had a lot in common and they always got along well, but at the end of the day, his parents were creatures of business and science. They were set in their own ways of thinking and thought that other things should stay as hobbies. Seokjin was expected from birth to share in his parent’s wishes for a respectable career in business. It was never something said out loud and announced, rather it stifled the air that Jin breathed and pushed it’s weight down upon his shoulders until he felt that he would be crushed underneath it.

Seokjung, being the closest to their father, had been groomed since birth to become a doctor and take over the family clinic. He had his path chosen for him and he happily walked it. Seokjin could, at least, be glad that he was given a little more freedom in that regard. While his parents didn’t particularly mind what he chose to do, he was still limited to a set amount of options to choose from and none of them were things that he wanted to do.

While his mother may have watched dramas for the fun, laughing at how cheesy some of the scenes were, it was Jin’s dream to be on the other side of the screen. He wanted to be the one that delivered those perfectly cheesy lines, he wanted to be the one who made his audience cry by sheer
performance alone, he wanted to the one that received the award for best leading actor. That was what he wanted.

But by the age of sixteen he was old enough to know that wanting something wasn’t enough to make it happen.

He was well aware of that fact.

Though, he was still surprised when his older brother made a decision that would nearly ruin his life forever.

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It happened suddenly and without warning one night as the four of them were eating dinner.

Their parents had been casually chatting about how their day had gone while dealing with difficult patients and equally difficult clients before they had begun to discuss plans to go grocery shopping the next day when Seokjung had politely interrupted them.

“I have something to announce.” He had said, catching their parents rapt attention as well as Jin’s.

“What is it, dear?” His mother had asked in confusion.

Seokjung had grinned then, seemingly having waited a long time to deliver this news and was visibly brimming with excitement.

“Rather than going into medical school, I think that I’d like to start my own tech business. Several of my classmates are interested in it and I think that we could really have something. So, I think that I’d like to study entrepreneurship and business instead.”

The table had gone silent then and Seokjin was counting down the moments in his head until when their father exploded at him. Jin had no idea what his brother was thinking, suddenly deciding to change paths like that. Seokjung was preparing to graduate from one of the best medical vocational schools in two months with the some of top scores in the nation and Jin knew that he had worked
tirelessly to get to that point.

Did he really do all of that just to throw it all away?

No, Seokjin had thought, *their father would never allow such a thing*.

Which is why he was completely shocked when their father had slowly nodded as Jin finished his countdown, having needed time to think about what his son was suggesting.

“As long as you’re sure, son. I’ll have to get some more information for you but I’m sure that China has some wonderful entrepreneurship programs. They’ve always been great leaders in business.”

Seokjung had smiled brightly, shaking his head, and Jin struggled to keep up with the strange conversation. His mother looked equally as shocked by how easily her husband had taken the news and she looked between the two of them curiously.

“I’ve already done a lot of research into it and while China does have great entrepreneurship programs, *Japan* is one of the leading tech countries and the U.S has some of the best business programs—”

Jin tuned out after that, shuffling his food around on his plate as his brother and father eagerly talked about options for further schooling. He was completely taken aback by how quickly his father had gone along with the idea. It was ridiculously out of character for the man and for some reason Jin had a very bad feeling about it.

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His bad feeling had nothing on the reality of the situation when, two weeks after that dinner conversation, his father had come up to him and delivered news that he’d never wanted to hear.

His father had signed him up for the last minute vocational school entrance exams. *For the very same school that his brother was graduating from.*
Jin had tried to argue against it, stating that he had barely any time to prepare for the exam since he had been planning on just completing the last few years of school traditionally but his father had simply given him a look that left no room for any more conversation on the topic and said,

“Since you have so little time to prepare you’d better use the time that you do have left to the fullest. I wouldn’t have done this if I didn’t that you could do it. Don’t prove me wrong.”

Then he had walked away.

Jin had been left staring at the place where his father had been standing for a long time, wondering what in the hell had just happened.

Just like that, the free will that he had been taking for granted all this time was snatched away and he was left to walk the path his brother had abandoned, something he had absolutely not wanted.

——

The weeks that had followed, leading up to the entrance exams, were the truest definitions of hell that Jin had ever experienced. He had been lucky if he got any sleep at all, as he was already having a hard enough time managing the stress from his regular classes. And now, with the looming presence of the entrance exams, Seokjin felt as if he were wasting precious time if he were doing anything other than studying.

He was more stressed than he had ever been in his life and it was apparently starting to show.

“Are you okay?” Namjoon asked one day as they were sitting in the school library after class, studying together as they often did.

Namjoon was two years younger than Jin but they had been friends since sixth grade. Jin’s father didn’t necessarily approve of his friendship with Namjoon, but he also didn’t have enough of an interest in Jin’s life to stop them from being friends. They were an odd match. Namjoon had a bad reputation of being a delinquent and everyone knew Jin’s father, one of the main practitioners in the city, and by association his son. But, despite his bad reputation, Namjoon was the only person Jin knew who was smart enough to have skipped a grade in South Korea and they had become friends over time. Their strengths balanced each other well so they often studied together after class.
Jin sighed, rubbing at his eyes violently. He hadn't been lucky enough the night before to get in a few hours of sleep before he had to get up and he was exhausted. The words in the textbook were blurring as he looked at them and if he had to do one more difficult math problem his brain might implode.

“I’m just tired.” He muttered, blinking rapidly as he tried to get the words on the page to clear up enough for him to read them.

“You’ve been tired a lot lately.” Namjoon commented, and Jin could feel the younger’s eyes on him. “Are you really that stressed about that entrance exam?”

Jin huffed, closing his textbook and tossing his pencil down onto the desk. The words weren’t getting any clearer and looking at them was only causing a nasty headache to form.

“It’s a month from now and I have a whole year’s worth of content to study. Of course, I’m stressed.” He sighed, looking up at Namjoon.

“I don’t get why you’re doing it anyways. If your father is fine with your brother not becoming a doctor then why do you have to do it?”

It wasn’t like that thought hadn’t crossed Jin’s mind a thousand times since his life had suddenly been decided for him. He thought about it with increasing anger every time he was awake studying at four in the morning and he just couldn’t find an answer for it.

His father was treating him like a replacement son that had been on standby for Seokjung since the moment he had been born. Jin didn’t know how to feel about that. Well, he did, he was furious but more than that, he felt the full brunt of his father’s coldness to him.

The reason he was taking this entrance exam so seriously was because, even if he was being treated like a replacement, his father’s eyes were on him for the first time in his entire life. He was being watched carefully and given a task that he was expected to fulfill and he didn’t want to know what happened to replacements that failed. Would he be tossed away like a used battery? Or would his father’s attention on him turn angry and resentful? He didn’t want to find out. So, he was trying his best to impress. It was the least he could do.

Though, he didn’t think that Namjoon would understand even if he explained all of that so he simply shrugged.
“I don’t know. But it doesn’t change the fact that it’s something I have to do.”

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That summer Seokjung moved to the U.S to study business and Seokjin was accepted into the vocational school that he’d left behind.

Jin wasn’t sure what he’d expected when he excitedly showed his father the acceptance letter but he was completely stunned when his father had only nodded and muttered,

“Good. I knew you could do it.”

Then he’d returned his attention to the plate of food in front of him.

His mother knew how hard he worked and gave him some money as a congratulatory gift, hugged him close, and kissed the top of his head. It wasn’t much, but he felt slightly better that at least one of his parents were acknowledging his efforts.

It was also the summer that he met Taehyung for the first time.

Jin hung out with Namjoon more often during the summers, at least when the younger wasn’t working. They would sit and chat at a park or walk around the city if it wasn’t too hot. And if it was too hot to get outside, they often opted to hang out at Jin’s house.

Early in the summer Namjoon had brought a younger boy with him when the two met up to hang out in the park and introduced his younger friend as Taehyung.

Jin had been hesitant about the new edition to their friendship, at first. Taehyung was energetic and charismatic and far too informal with someone he’d just met that was three years older than him. But as they continued to hang out over the summer, even without Namjoon sometimes, Jin learned that he had more in common with Taehyung than he thought. They both loved movies, tv shows, and acting, and often had long conversations about their favorite actors.
They became fast friends and seeing as Jin didn’t have many friends to begin with, he was grateful for Taehyung’s infectiously energetic personality.

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The summer passed by in a flash and Jin was quickly faced with the crushing weight of his future.

The fast track to medical school was insanely difficult. And while Jin was trying his best, he was still having to study three times as much as all of his classmates who had been studying likely since the moment of birth, just to keep his grades high enough to stay in the school. It was made worse by the fact that he didn’t even want to do this. He had never given medical school much thought, since he’d never anticipated having to pursue it, but the more he learned, the more he hated it.

Biology, chemistry, anatomy, and general health studies- he hated all of it. It was boring and confusing and he was expected to already know so much about it. But he didn’t. The stress was likely giving him grey hairs before he even turned twenty and taking years off of his life span.

But there was a light in the darkness. A saving grace to all of the madness.

Kim Sohyun.

Sohyun was a girl that Jin had known since he’d first moved to Seoul from Gwacheon when his father had decided to buy a larger practitioner’s office in the city. She had been welcoming to him since his seat had been next to hers. They’d always been friends and waved when they saw each other in the hallways but they’d never been close. Sohyun had been charming when she was younger and was often surrounded by people. She was smart, pretty, and charismatic. Jin knew he hadn’t been the only one that had practically fallen in love with her at first sight.

He hadn’t seen her often when they got older. They just hadn’t been able to cross paths as much as before, but in this vocational school with hundreds of unfamiliar students they had found each other again. Sohyun had been overjoyed to see a familiar face in the crowd and had latched on to Jin from the moment she’d laid eyes on him there. She’d been shocked to see that it was him since she’d always had the passion for medical school and Jin had always had interests elsewhere.

Jin had been just as happy to see her. He was nowhere near as social as she was and he’d worried about getting to know all of these people before they befriended each other and he was left alone. Not to mention that he almost felt guilty for being there surrounded by people who were honestly
passionate about the medical industry. Jin was only there because he’d been forced to. He’d probably even crushed someone’s dreams by being there as well. Because he had been accepted, someone else had been rejected. The school only accepted so many applicants. He’d worked hard but that didn’t necessarily mean that he was deserving of going to the school.

Beyond that, though, his childhood crush on Sohyun hadn’t dimmed in the slightest. Though Sohyun had already made a few acquaintances, she spent most of her time with Jin and he was able to get to actually know her.

Rather than his childhood crush dimming, it had never been so bright.

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In the February of his first year at the school, he finally gathered up the courage to ask Sohyun to be his girlfriend.

They’d gotten a lot closer since they began attending the school together and when they weren’t talking and laughing together at lunch, they were walking home together, eating baked goods from the bakery down the street, and texting each other nonstop. Jin had been testing the waters with her for months, wondering if his feelings would be reciprocated and terrified that he’d ruin one of the first truly good things that he’d ever experienced in his life. He’d be a little more flirty in his jokes, walk a bit closer to her on their way to school, put his arm around her casually if they were sitting together, he’d gone as far as he could before crossing the line into being romantic.

He’d been talking to Namjoon and Taehyung about her since he found out they were going to the same school until the two were sick of hearing their name.

They’d barely been able to hang out since Jin had started going to the vocational school since it was further than the school the two of them went to and most of his free time was spent almost obsessively studying the material so that he wouldn’t fall any further behind than he already was. And on top of Namjoon’s job and Taehyung’s extracurricular activities, which was basically petty vandalism, they had little time to all hang out.

Jin would talk about Sohyun just about every one of those few times they were all together and eventually Namjoon had enough.

“Hyung.” The younger had snapped and Jin had immediately stopped in the middle of his retelling
of the day before when Sohyun had cutely fallen asleep on him while they were watching a movie. The three of them were in Jin’s room, having deemed it too cold outside to do anything else. Jin was sitting at his desk, going over some of his notes as he talked, Namjoon was sitting on his bed and Taehyung was sitting on the floor, right beneath the heater vent.

“Enough. If you like her that much then just ask her out already and stop swooning over every single thing she does with us. We barely ever get to talk as it is, I don’t even know her and yet I could probably tell you what she had for breakfast this morning based on how much you’ve told us about her.”

Jin had been shocked by the rare instance of informal speech and had simply sat, staring slack jawed at Namjoon.

The younger had sighed. “Sorry to snap at you, but seriously just ask her out already.”

“I-I can’t just do that!” Seokjin argued, a blush creeping up his neck.

“It sounds like she likes you too, so why not?” Namjoon shrugged. “Just ask. The worst that can happen is she says no.”

“But-” He frowned, determined to argue more, but he was cut off by Taehyung, who had been uncharacteristically quiet this entire time.

“It’s not that hard, hyung. Just ask.”

Jin turned to look at him and they held eye contact for a moment before Taehyung turned his attention back to the rubber ball in his hand that he was throwing against Jin’s wall with a roll of his eyes.

Seokjin sighed, heart already about to burst out of his chest in nervousness and nodded his head. He had to trust that his friends, who had dated plenty of girls in the past, couldn’t both be wrong about this.

“Fine. I’ll ask her.”
And so, that Valentine’s day after class Jin surprised Sohyun with a confession as they sat in their favorite bakery and she surprised him with a confession of her own and some homemade chocolates. They’d laughed at themselves, and the amazing timing the two had and by the time Jin went home it was well after dark and he had his first girlfriend ever at the tender age of eighteen.

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Dating wasn’t nearly as glamorous as Jin was led to believe.

He and Sohyun were together, sure. Though, the only thing that had changed was that they would hold hands as they walked home together and sometimes she would lean over and kiss him. Other than that, and the occasional date they went on, it was pretty much the same as it was before.

They both studied like crazy, Jin so that he could at least attempt to keep up with the fast pace of the classes, and Sohyun so that she could distinguish herself as being one of the top students. Sometimes they studied together but it was more just being in the same room as each other, rather than being together. They had to focus on their schoolwork. There wasn’t much time for anything else.

Even still, he was happy, really happy. Dating may not have been everything that Jin was hoping for, but Sohyun was. All these years had passed and Jin was finally able to say that she was his and Sohyun seemed just as excited to say that he was hers. She was cheerful and bright, affectionate and warm, and knew much more than Jin did about relationships. Which was fine, one of them should probably know what they were doing. Because even if he’d only gotten a nap rather than sleep for three days in a row and could barely keep his eyes open, just seeing Sohyun smile in his direction brightened up his day.

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The only downside to dating Sohyun, was that Jin barely had any time to spend with Namjoon and Taehyung. He’d been able to spend a little time with them over the few months before summer break started and had told them that he now had a girlfriend. They’d been happy for him and he’d been grateful for that, but he also knew that they were probably sick of hearing about her so he tried to talk about other things instead.
However, as summer break began and he had a bit more free time on his hands, he realized that Namjoon and Taehyung had gotten used to him not being around. Jin hadn’t really noticed it before, since he’d they rarely all hung out together because he was so busy, but his friends were almost always out doing something together.

Of course, Jin was no idiot, he knew from the start that Taehyung was a troublemaker and that had only been confirmed when Namjoon told him the story of how he met the younger months after introducing him. Taehyung had been roaming the streets at night, being loudmouthed and getting himself into trouble with some of the older kids out on the streets at that time of night, he was about to get his ass handed to him but Namjoon had seen him and stepped in before things got out of hand.

Taehyung had seemed like he’d calmed down in his antics after meeting Jin and spending more time with the elder but it seemed that, in his absence, Taehyung had gone back to his old ways and had taken Namjoon with him.

When Jin wanted to hang out in the day, Namjoon told him that the two of them had been out the night before and needed to catch up on some sleep. When Jin wanted to hang out at night, Namjoon rarely responded and when he did he always said that they were out already and busy. Jin was obviously annoyed by that, he finally had the time to hang out and it felt like his friends couldn’t care less.

On top of that, Jin could barely manage to find time to hang out with Sohyun since she was apparently busy too. With what exactly, he had no idea. She’d become much more vague with her messages to him and oddly distant when they were together.

He was frustrated, both with his friends and with his girlfriend and ended up spending most of the summer in his room or out with other people from his class that he was acquaintances with.

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Jin was expecting things to go back to normal after summer ended and he entered the last year of vocational school. After all, it had been summer and people were often busy in the summer. He assumed that now that school was back, everything would go back to the way that it was.

He was wrong.
Namjoon made more time for him, and they usually hung out on the weekends, when the younger wasn’t working. However, Taehyung rarely appeared and when he did, it was never with Jin alone. He always came along with Namjoon and Jin missed the times when he and Taehyung would sit in his room watching old movies and recite the scenes line by line. Instead, when Taehyung came along with Namjoon, he was quiet and only spoke when directly spoken to.

Jin was confused by his behavior and asked Namjoon about it but he didn’t seem to have any idea about it either.

“I don’t know. He gets moody sometimes. I have no idea why he’s taking it out on you, though. He hasn’t really been talking to me either after he nearly got the two of us thrown in jail.”

Jin had widened his eyes and asked for the whole story. Apparently, the two had gone out tagging and they hadn’t been as successful in outrunning the cops as they had in the past. They had gotten arrested but Namjoon managed to convince the police to not throw them in jail. He’d been laying low since but he had no idea what Taehyung was doing.

In the end, Jin still had no idea why Taehyung was acting so strange around him.

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Taehyung wasn’t the only one acting strange, though.

Sohyun had also been acting strange ever since the summer. She barely had time to spend with Jin outside of school, and often went running off after class when they would usually walk home together, saying that she had somewhere to go. When they were together during class or the rare times that they walked home, she was strangely distant. He would say something to her and expect a response and look over when she gave none only to find her staring off into space or looking at her phone. She would always smile and laugh when he got her attention in those moments, claiming that classes were stressing her out and that she’d been getting less sleep.

Those smiles had always seemed forced though. Jin had always been looking at her over the years and he knew what her smile looked like. It left an odd feeling in his stomach to know that she was forcing them and he decided to give her a little space since it seemed like she was dealing with something that she wasn’t ready to tell him about.
After a month had passed of the same treatment, Jin had lost his patience.

He tried approaching Sohyun about it cautiously at first, worried that it could possibly be a sensitive topic but she’d brushed him off each time. Then, he attempted to ask her more directly and she’d made up some excuse. After that, she began to noticeably avoid him.

It was enough that they barely walked home together anymore, but then she began avoiding him at school as well. They would usually sit and eat lunch together but she often claimed that one her friends was going through a rough time and sat in a packed table of people, leaving Jin to fend for himself.

He tried to be understanding at first but when he tried to kiss her once and she had blatantly avoided it before running off, excuses falling from her lips, he realized that she was actually avoiding him.

The idea had crossed his mind before but she’d almost always been the one to initiate affection between the two and she’d never dodged a kiss from him. Something was going on, he decided. And he intended to find out what it was.

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He cornered her one day at lunch, walking over to the table she was sitting at with her friends and standing behind her.

“Sohyun. Can I talk to you for a minute?” He’d asked, forcing his expression to be pleasant despite the turmoil in his stomach. She’d been shocked to see him and he knew that he’d interrupted her in the middle of whatever she was saying but he didn’t care in the slightest.

“Um… Jin, I was talking to-” She attempted to make another excuse, eyes wide, and Jin was having none of it even if half the table had turned to stare at him curiously.

“It’s really important, sorry. Can you come right now?” He forced a smile on his face that he hoped looked apologetic but judging by the way she blinked at him, he assumed it was more of a grimace.
Sohyun turned to her friends in a last-ditch effort to decline speaking to him but the girl sitting closest to her smiled and smacked her on the shoulder.

“Go talk to your boyfriend, Sohyun. He said it’s important! You can finish telling us later.”

Sohyun looked downright scandalized for a second as she stared at her friend but she forced a smile and excused herself as she stood up. Jin turned and walked out of the cafeteria, hearing the hesitance in her footsteps before she began following him. He led her through the hallway to the back of the school where they could be alone.

He sighed, steeling his nerves and letting his anger take over so he wouldn’t be so nervous. He turned to face her and noticed how uncomfortable she looked. Her arms were crossed and she was looking off to the side rather than at him.

“Sohyun.” He called, sounding much angrier than he intended.

She turned to him and looked him over for a moment before averting her eyes again. “What? Did you really need to call me all the way out here? I was talking to my friends.”

“Why are you avoiding me? Did I something?” He asked, getting directly to the point. He feared she would turn around and go back inside if he stalled for too long.

Her eyes were wide as she glanced at him and she frowned. “What? I’m not.”

Jin narrowed his eyes.

“Did I do something?” He repeated.

Sohyun sighed. “No.”

“Then why are you avoiding me? I really don’t understand what’s going on. We’ve barely talked in weeks. I miss you. If I did something wrong just tell me so that I can fix it.” Jin pleaded, anger gone now and fear taking its place. He didn’t want to lose her and he felt like if he didn’t have this conversation now then he would lose her for good, if he hadn’t already.
Sohyun looked at him and there were tears in her eyes.

“It’s not you. It’s me.” She whispered.

Jin frowned. “What? What do you mean?”

She seemed to be having trouble looking at him and kept glancing away when she met his gaze. The tears in her eyes spilled over and she wiped them away as she sniffled.

“I… I’m sorry. I-I like someone else. I should have just told you, but I didn’t know how because you’re so nice and I didn’t want to hurt you any more than I already have…”

Jin stilled in shock. A cold feeling washed over him, he could his heartbeat in his ears but it felt like he was out of his body. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“W-what? Who… who is it?”

Sohyun inhaled a deep breath before letting it out, closing her eyes tightly. “I can’t tell you. You would be so upset. He’s your friend and I knew that but I just… I wanted more. You’re so nice, Jin. And such a gentleman but he’s interesting and mysterious and you’re…”

She trailed off but Jin glared, knowing what she was going to say.

“I’m boring.” He finished, icily. His mind was working a mile a minute trying to figure out who she was talking about. He had an idea but he didn’t want to believe it. He couldn’t believe someone who he thought of as a friend would do something so cruel to him.

“I’m sorry.” Sohyun cried, biting her lip.

“It’s fine. We’re over. I get it.” Jin muttered and walked past her, back into the building. The door slammed shut behind him emphasizing the tone of finality.
He was done.

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Jin didn’t know what to do with the newfound information. He was angry, hurt, upset. But he’d never been a confrontational person. He knew that it was Taehyung. He had no evidence whatsoever but something in his gut was telling him that it was the younger. As the days passed and he locked himself up in his room ignoring the ringing of his phone from various text messages and calls, he truly didn’t know what to do.

He couldn’t believe that Sohyun had been cheating on him of all things. He would never have guessed that she would do something like that to him but she had. He also couldn’t believe that Taehyung would do something like that to him but he had.

Irritated, Jin grabbed his phone and opened the gallery, swiping to the last picture he’d taken of the three of them—Namjoon, Taehyung, and himself. Their faces smiled up at him, Namjoon grinning, Jin laughing as he struggled to get the shot, and Taehyung looking up into the camera with a silly expression. It hurt. It hurt Jin to the core as if he’d been physically wounded. And it stung every time he thought of Taehyung sitting in his room, knowing that he was stealing Jin’s girlfriend away from him, every time he thought about Sohyun kissing him with the same lips she may have kissed Taehyung with. It stung like acid and left a bad taste in his mouth.

His phone made a noise as several new notifications popped up on his screen as he glared daggers into Taehyung’s face.

*From Namjoon:*

*Hey*

*stop ignoring me. I know you’re home*

*I’m outside and i see your light on*

*Let me in*

Jin sighed tiredly. He hadn’t gotten out of bed at all day, grateful that it was a weekend and he
could sulk in self-pity away from the school hallways where he would take extra precaution not to run into Sohyun. He’d been avoiding her like the plague, just seeing her made his blood boil but it also made him want to cry and the last thing he wanted to do was start crying in the middle of the school hallway. He’d liked her a lot and he felt almost lost now that she was no longer a part of his life or even daily routine. They’d barely talked at all over the last few weeks but it still hurt just as bad.

He forced himself out of bed and shuffled down the stairs. He could ignore a lot of people but he couldn’t ignore Namjoon. Besides, even if he didn’t let the younger in, his parents were home and they would let him in without question. Maybe Namjoon would see Jin’s awful appearance and be persuaded to leave.

He opened the front door and revealed Namjoon standing on his doorstep, leaning against one of the walls smoking a cigarette.

Jin rolled his eyes. “Are you seriously smoking right outside my house where my parents could literally open the door and see you?”

Namjoon grinned, throwing the cigarette to the ground and smothering it. He picked it up and threw it towards the sidewalk afterwards.

“I like to live dangerously. Besides, only you knew I was here. It wasn’t like I was going to knock with a cigarette hanging out of my mouth. By the way, you look like shit, what’s wrong?”

Jin sighed and stepped aside so he could let Namjoon in and the two walked up to his bedroom after the younger called out a friendly greeting to Jin’s mother, who was in the kitchen.

Once they were in his room, Jin closed the door behind him and turned on light. It was early evening and the sun had started to set. Jin hadn’t opened his blinds all day so he’d just been sitting in darkness but he guessed Namjoon actually wanted to see him as he spoke.

The younger sat down at Jin’s desk, whirling the chair around until it faced the bed which Jin had laid down in.

“So, what’s going on? I’ve been texting you all week and you haven’t responded once.” Namjoon questioned.
“Sohyun and I broke up.” Jin announced. “I haven’t really felt like talking.”

Namjoon widened his eyes. “You did? Why? Did she break up with you?”

Jin stared up at the ceiling, wishing he could disappear rather than have this conversation. He didn’t want to lie to Namjoon, though, the two had been friends for too long to even manage that and he’d had enough of lying anyways.

“I broke up with her, I guess.”

Namjoon looked confused then and leaned forward in his chair. “You guess?”

“Yeah. I guess.” Jin repeated irritatedly. “That’s what people do when their girlfriend admits to cheating on them and liking someone else, right?”

Namjoon whistled lowly and leaned back in the chair. He was quiet for a moment before he spoke again.

“That’s… wow. I’m really sorry, Jin. I know how much you liked her.”

“I think it was Taehyung.” Jin snapped, suddenly. He debated whether or not he should tell Namjoon about it but he couldn’t keep it to himself any longer.

“What?”

“I think she likes Taehyung.” Jin repeated, turning to Namjoon. “She didn’t say it was him but she said it was a friend of mine and that she likes him because he’s interesting and mysterious and I’m boring.”

Namjoon was quiet for a moment, frowning as he thought about something. He squeezed his eyes closed after a second and cursed under his breath. He sighed and looked at Jin once again.

“I told you that I haven’t been talking to Taehyung much, right? So, I happened to see him after I
got off work two weeks ago and he was with this really pretty girl. I was pissed, because he was supposed to meet up with me when I finished with work and he didn’t show up, but I saw that they were really close and he had his arm around her so I let it go. I thought I couldn’t really be pissed about since I’d probably ditch Taehyung too if a girl that beautiful was interested in me but,” He sighed in frustration.

“I’m thinking about it now and after all the talking you did about Sohyun, I definitely think that it was her. And Taehyung can’t even say that he didn’t know because I’m sure he realized who she was the second she told him her name.”

Jin turned back to the ceiling, anger burning at him once again now that Namjoon had confirmed what he’d already been thinking. Taehyung had done all this on purpose for some reason. He’d knowingly stolen Jin’s girlfriend from him and for what? Was it worth it?

Namjoon pulled his phone out of his back pocket and huffed, swiping around on it. “I’m gonna call him and tell him to come over here. This is ridiculous. You need to tell him that you know what he did.”

“Don’t.” Jin warned and Namjoon looked at him incredulously.

“Don’t? Taehyung has done some really stupid shit but this going too far. You’re his friend. I can’t believe he would do something like this to you!”

“I don’t want to talk to him.” Jin explained. “I don’t even want to see him. If he did all this then he obviously doesn’t consider us friends at all and if that’s the case, I have absolutely nothing to say to him. He can do what he wants.”

Namjoon scoffed, standing up from the chair.

“No, he can’t. He lives his whole life thinking that he can do whatever he wants and never thinks of the consequences. I understand if you don’t want to talk to him, Jin. But I’m not just going to let him get away with this and not realize what he’s done. If you aren’t going to yell at him, then I will.”

Jin sighed and let the younger leave. They had all made their decisions.
Now they would have to live with them.

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Jin had no idea what Namjoon had said to Taehyung but a few weeks after everything had happened the younger made some attempts to talk to him. Jin still didn’t want to see his face, worried about what he would do if he did, so he skillfully avoided him to the best of his ability. Namjoon had been spending more time with him and understood Jin’s position, assisting the older in avoiding Taehyung. At school, Sohyun had made a few attempts to apologize to Jin as well but he avoided her too. She seemed distraught by that and he often saw her sitting alone rather than with her friends. He didn’t know what that was about and, frankly, he didn’t really care. She’d made her choice.

It wasn’t that Jin wasn’t furious with the two of them. He was. But he was also incredibly hurt almost to the point of being numb. He still cared about both Sohyun and Taehyung but because he was angry, he didn’t want to give in and let them apologize to him. Jin knew himself. He’d probably forgive them on the spot if they were given the opportunity and he didn’t think that they deserved that. They deserved to live with their choices and he was going to make sure that they did. They’d chosen each other, not him.

Namjoon told him eventually that the two had dated briefly but broken up just as quickly, according to Taehyung. Jin felt a little better after hearing that. They didn’t deserve to be happy together after what they’d done to him and if Sohyun ended up alone because of that, then that was her own fault.

The problem was that as time passed, it became harder to avoid Taehyung. Namjoon was still friends with him after all and Jin wasn’t so selfish that he’d demand Namjoon to stop talking to the younger. But it became hard for Namjoon to not bring him up and harder for Jin to ignore it when he did.

They never fought about it, but it was obvious that it was taking a toll on Namjoon.

Eventually, months after the whole ordeal, close to when Jin would finish vocational school and go on to med school, Namjoon met up with him outside a movie theater. Jin had been confused by the younger’s troubled expression but he’d quickly learned that Namjoon had not come alone. He’d brought Taehyung with him. Jin’s immediate reaction was to get up and leave but before he could, Namjoon had rushed out an explanation.

“I’m sorry, he followed me here. I didn’t realize it until a few minutes ago and I didn’t want to
randomly cancel on you, so…”

Jin had stopped in his tracks, rolled his eyes and glanced at Taehyung who looked like he wanted to say something. He opened his mouth but Jin panicked, not wanting to hear what he had to say and blurted out the first thing he could think of.

“Fine. Whatever.” Then he’d turned around and walked into the theater, not giving either of them a chance to respond.

It had been awkward, sitting there watching the movie with Namjoon and Taehyung and it had been worse after when they had talked about the movie for a bit and Taehyung and Jin had spoken at the same time. The air had been charged with an uncomfortable tension as the two looked at each other but Jin had simply looked away and repeated what he’d been about to say.

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Their encounters continued like that, sometimes Taehyung would just show up while Namjoon and Jin were supposed to be hanging out. He was quiet, for the most part, only saying something to Namjoon every now and then.

Eventually, Taehyung spoke to Jin when they were all together and, after a beat of awkward silence, Jin had responded curtly to him. It happened more often after that and it seemed that neither of them had any intention of bringing up what Taehyung had done, which was just fine. Jin had nothing to say to him about it and it seemed that Taehyung had nothing to say to him either.

It was awkward being around the younger at first. Namjoon always acted like the two would blow up at each other at any given moment and needlessly played referee between them. He’d keep talking so Taehyung couldn’t fill the silences sometimes and cast what Jin suspected was a sorry attempt at a **discreet** glance between the two of them when they spoke to each other.

Jin wasn’t the type to remain angry for long. So while he wasn’t exactly ecstatic that Taehyung was hanging out with again or too keen on speaking to him, he wasn’t **angry**.

Instead, his anger had simmered down and intense feelings of hurt and loneliness had filled that space in his heart. He’d lost two of his closest friends in the drama and that hurt more than anything else. He had only been angry because he didn’t understand it. He knew that Taehyung often did things just because he felt like it, but he’d have never had guessed that the younger would
have recklessly hurt him so badly. Taehyung had never even attempted to apologize.

It could be said that Jin wouldn’t let him, since he didn’t want to speak with the younger at all at the time, but Taehyung wasn’t the apologizing type and Jin had been expecting excuses that he didn’t want to hear.

He just wished that Taehyung would have talked to him before all of this. Admitted to liking Sohyun so they could have talked it over rather than Jin having to find out after the fact that the younger was sneaking around with his girlfriend at night. It almost felt like Taehyung had done it purposefully.

It was those thoughts that hurt him the most.

The idea of Taehyung purposefully going out of his way to do something so cruel to him felt like a knife in Jin’s heart. He didn’t understand it. The worst part that was no matter how much he thought about it, he couldn’t understand what he could have done to deserve such ire from someone he considered a friend.

It just didn’t make sense.

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Somehow Jin managed to graduate from the vocational school. His second year was rough. It was difficult material even for those who had been top of the class, so for Jin it was the equivalent of rocket science. He’d barely gotten any sleep for months, he had to study so hard that he barely had time to eat, let alone sleep and even then he’d only barely made it with a passing grade.

His father seemed disappointed that he hadn’t done better. That he hadn’t made valedictorian like Seokjung had done, hadn’t had time to volunteer at the local hospital and make a name for himself. Jin was so tired he couldn’t even bring himself to care. He had graduated and that was the best that he could do.

Still, he was emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausted and knowing that he would do over a decade more of studying stirred his heart with fear. He didn’t think that he could do it. And not because he didn’t think that he couldn’t learn the material. No, he didn’t think that he could dedicate so much of his time doing something that he hated so much.
He’d had to study through flus, colds, migraines, and for what? A dream that was forced upon him. One that he didn’t want, didn’t ask for, and didn’t have any passion for. His father hadn’t even congratulated him on his graduation. His mother was busy with a difficult case and his father had spent the last three days holed up in the clinic as a virus spread throughout the population in the seasonal way that those things always do.

Only Namjoon had come to his graduation.

He’d studied so hard that there were times he seriously worried he would die as he attempted to solve biology questions with a high fever and chills running down his back even as he sweat profusely.

He’d done the best that he could physically do and it still didn’t seem to be enough for his father. It was like the man didn’t even care. Seokjin wasn’t Seokjung, and he never would be, so he was irrelevant.

For the first time since being given this second-hand dream, Jin allowed himself to cry.

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He entered medical school in the summer and though he thought he’d experienced true hell before, nothing compared to the hell that was medical school. Jin fell behind constantly, and though he was trying his best, it just didn’t seem to be enough. His lack of sleep caused him to make careless mistakes and he struggled to make friends. He couldn’t bring himself to want to talk to the people around him, people that were doing so much better than him.

All he could think was that his father would probably have been more proud of them than he ever would with his own son.

His friend group had expanded in other ways though. Taehyung had met Jung Hoseok, a man with a personality that matched the sun’s brightness. He was the same age as Namjoon, a dancer, and he and Jin became fast friends. He needed that sort of brightness in his life and Hoseok was just friendly enough to fit easily into their group.

Hoseok was also friends with Park Jimin, who was coincidentally the same age as Taehyung. Jimin was more aloof than Hoseok was and kept to himself a bit more than his older friend but him and Taehyung got along fine and Jin appreciated the new additions. It was straining to only really be
able to hang out with Taehyung and Namjoon since things were still fairly awkward between the three of them.

Soon after Jimin, Jeongguk, a friend of Namjoon’s was introduced as well. Namjoon had told them that he was a rather shy kid that he’d met around town one night and Jin fully expected the kid five years younger than him to be as much of a troublemaker as Taehyung but he was pleasantly surprised. Jeongguk was fairly quiet, though Jin suspected that it was probably because he was surrounded by males that were older than him but once he got used to everyone he had moments where he was as lively as Hoseok. He was also passionate about the music and often spoke to Hoseok about new artists.

Strangely, along with the appearance of Jeongguk was the appearance of a short, grumpy man that fit into their group rather expected. Jeongguk and Min Yoongi were very close and though the older was a year younger than Jin he often acted like he was twice his age. He wasn’t necessarily quiet even though he didn’t speak much because there was a certain weight to his presence that almost demanded attention. He was quick with his tongue and often said particularly rude things that in anyone else probably would have offended but for him it inspired laughter and his insight inspired thought in strange places. He was strange, for sure, and although he pretty much stuck like glue to Jeongguk, Jin respected him and appreciated his friendship.

Jin’s friend group had expanded suddenly and unexpectedly. He was incredibly grateful for the new additions though and he felt that they balanced each other fairly well considering how different they all were.

His house got to be inadequate in occupying all of them and eventually they had to find an alternate place.

That was when they all went to the abandoned pool for the first time. Jin wasn’t sure who suggested it, but as soon as they saw it the place became theirs, and though Jin couldn’t go there often it quickly began to feel like a second home.

They dragged old furniture out there, stained mattresses and ratty couches, and even though it was dingy and gross it was theirs.

Jin was happy for something to finally feel right, like he belonged and could escape from the stress of university and the watchful eyes of his father.
However, Jin had learned that good things could only last for so long. He failed his first class in his second year of university and finally decided that he’d had enough.

He couldn’t waste another minute of his life pursuing something he hated just for someone that didn’t even care that much. Even though Seokjung had moved to the United States years ago, their father still found more time to talk to him than he spoke to Seokjin.

Jin had always known that he couldn’t live up to his father’s expectations but he had to draw a line at some point and realize that he couldn’t keep hopelessly trying. His father would never be proud of him and even though it hurt to finally admit it, he absolutely could not waste another year of his life preparing for a future that he didn’t want. His father wouldn’t be alive forever and Jin feared that if he continued down this path and became a doctor, after his father passed away he’d regret everything and it’d be far too late to go back.

It was his life. He didn’t want to waste half of it trying to impress someone that would never be impressed by him.

He wanted to study acting. That was his goal and that was what he truly wanted to do. He would have to break the news to his parents but he dropped out of medical school before he told them.

No matter what they said, it would be too late to go back and Jin wouldn’t give himself a chance to back out. He had to go through with this if he wanted to be happy.

Still, he didn’t know what he'd been expecting when he finally worked up the nerve to bring it up to his father, but it was much worse than what he’d been thinking.

“You did what?” His father roared, dropping his fork with a loud clang as he looked across the table to Jin.

His mother had stopped eating as well and turned to him in surprise. Jin was positively shaking, but he had to do this. He had to. He clenched his fists and tried his best to keep his heart from beating out of his chest.

“I dropped out.” Jin repeated, forcing himself to keep his head down. He wanted to look his father in the face as he said it but he didn’t want the action to be viewed as rude. He wasn’t trying to be disrespectful, he was just trying to be honest.
“Why would you do something like that?” His father demanded.

“Because I don’t want to be a doctor.” Jin explained. “I’ve never wanted to be a doctor!”

“Sweetheart, what do you mean? If you didn’t want to go to medical school then why didn’t you say so?” His mother asked, sounding genuinely confused.

Jin glanced at her in shock before quickly lowering his head again. He breathed out a laugh of disbelief. Of all people, he thought that his mother at least knew him the best. How could she look at him and not tell that he was miserable?

“It didn’t… it didn’t really seem like I had a choice. Someone has to run the clinic and I thought it would have to be me after Seokjung left.”

His father shifted and crossed his arms over his chest. A bad sign. He only did that when he was upset.

“Yes, well, I assumed you would be up for the task of taking over. If I had known that you could be so irresponsible and if you had told me that you didn’t want to do it, I never would have asked you to do so and I could have been spared this disappointment.”

Jin flinched. The word disappointment had haunted him his whole life, had practically been branded on his head the minute he was born. He was insurance, that’s all. Insurance that if Seokjung ever failed, his parents would have another son to take his place.

Jin was tired of living his life as a replacement.

His father sighed in obvious frustration. “So, what will you do now then? Go work at a gas station like your friend and live at home for the next ten years?”

Jin bristled at the obvious jab at Namjoon, annoyed that he’d been brought into the conversation at all. He steeled himself for what he was going to say next.
“I want to go to an art school. I want to become an actor. That’s my dream.”

The room was so quiet that you could hear a pin drop. Then his father scoffed and it turned into a laugh of utter disbelief as he stood.

“I can’t believe this.” He muttered.

“An actor, Jin?” His mother questioned sounding just as surprised as his father did. “You don’t want to do something of worth? Are you going to become an idol, as well? If you don’t want to continue with medical school maybe you could study business or hospitality at another college? I doubt you’ll get into any good universities since you’ve dropped out but we can explore some other options. There must be something that you want to do.”

Jin looked up at her, unable to hide the glare on his face. He was being ridiculed by his own family. His own mother was treating him like a joke and his own father had laughed in his face.

“I just told you what I wanted to do.” He stated, seething with anger.

“No.” His father stated, sounding furious now that the shock had worn off. “No son of mine is going to go around parading themselves on television and acting a fool. Our entire family name will be tarnished. I don’t know what’s going on with you, lately. Maybe it’s that group of delinquents that you’ve been hanging out with. I let you do what you wanted because you’ve always been very focused on your studies, but maybe that was a mistake because they’ve obviously influenced you with their lackadaisical behavior.”

Jin looked up at him, embarrassment and fury tangling together in a dangerous mix, and opened his mouth to speak but his father sent him a fierce glare and spoke before he could get a word in.

“This conversation is over. I don’t want to hear another word from your mouth about this art school business. This is the problem with television nowadays, they show so many of these hallyu stars and dramas that it fills children’s heads with nonsense. Nobody wants to do anything respectful anymore, all they want to do is make a name for themselves and forget about the community that raised them. I can’t believe my own son is saying such ridiculous things to me.”

His father shook his head again. “Why can’t you just be more like your brother, Seokjung? He didn’t want to do medical school either but he took matters into his own hands and wants to start his own business. He’s always been very responsible, always does things by himself without my
Seokjin had been compared to Seokjung his whole life but actually hearing the words from his father’s mouth hurt him far deeper than he’d anticipated. The hurt turned to anger and before he knew it the chair behind him toppled over as he stood, meeting his father’s gaze for the first time that night.

“Because I’m not Seokjung!” He yelled. “And I won’t ever be!”

His father opened his mouth in surprise at his outburst and his mother stood as well, looking offended.

“Seokjin! You will not speak to your father like that!” She snapped and Jin felt truly alone in that kitchen. He’d assumed all this time that his mother would be on his side but it was obvious now that she wasn’t and likely never had been.

“If you’ve fallen so far down that you would even speak like that to your own parents …” His father seethed, eyes alight with fury. “Then, perhaps you need to go learn some respect and responsibility in the military before it’s too late.”

“That’s not necessary.” Jin stated calmly, having made his decision already. “I’m leaving.”

He pushed away from the table and headed upstairs, tears burning at his eyes, but he refused to let them fall.

“Seokjin, get back here! Where are you going!” His mother yelled after him.

“Let him go. He’s apparently the type that has to learn things the hard way. Let him go and try to become an actor. He’ll learn and then he’ll come crawling back.” He heard his father say and Jin paused on the steps, wondering if his mother would actually try to stop him but she sighed and moments later he heard the clink of silverware again.

A tear slipped down his cheek before he could stop it and then he hurried up the rest of the stairs.
After the fallout with his family, Jin had been lost.

He was committed to his statement and he planned to put his best into becoming an actor but the suddenness of everything was scary.

He’d left as he said he would. Packed all of his important things into a suitcase and a backpack and walked out the front door. He’d walked right past the kitchen where his mother was cleaning after dinner and right past where his father was watching the news in the living room and neither had said a word to him.

He’d walked all the way to a bus stop before he sat and sobbed for a good while. He couldn’t believe that they hadn’t tried to stop him at all and for the first time he fully realized how little his father cared about him. It hurt. Stung worse than anything in his life ever had but he figured that he would eventually stop caring about the man too. His mother was a different story but he didn’t want to think about her. Betrayal was something that he’d experienced before but he never thought that he would experience it at the hands of his own mother.

Now he had to figure out where to go from here.

He wiped his eyes and pulled his phone from his pocket wondering who he should call. It was early in the evening, just short of seven, which meant it wouldn’t be outlandish to call any of his friends but the question was who. He thought he should call Namjoon but he needed to stay with someone for a while, at least until he found a job and an apartment to stay in. He couldn’t impose on Namjoon when he knew the younger’s financial situation wasn’t great.

Jin had some money saved up, as if he’d unconsciously been preparing for this situation. It was a good amount, enough to get an apartment, but he needed to find a job and save up a little more so he could be financially stable. It was scary being out on his own suddenly but he’d have to deal with it to chase his dreams.

This is what he’d wanted for years and now that he’d finally given himself the opportunity, he’d have to fight for it. The best option was probably Yoongi, Jimin, or Hoseok. He knew that Yoongi and Hoseok lived alone but he wasn’t too sure about Jimin. They weren’t really close enough, Jin thought, to impose himself on the younger’s life and not know what kind of situation he was in. Yoongi was an option, but to be honest Jin wasn’t sure he wanted to try living with him. He didn’t think that Yoongi would say no if he asked but he, like Jimin, he seemed like a very private person and Jin wasn’t sure he wanted to walk on eggshells around him when he didn’t know how to avoid
angering him. He’d seen Yoongi angry before, once, when Taehyung had gotten on his nerves one too many times and Jin never wanted that anger to be directed at him.

So, that left Hoseok. Jin sighed and called him.

He answered on the second ring, sounding breathless as if he’d been doing something. Probably dancing, knowing him. Jin explained the situation to him and Hoseok had been exactly what he needed at that moment. Calm, friendly, and understanding. He’d told Jin he could stay with him as long as he needed, along with his address and Jin had nearly cried in relief.

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Jin and Hoseok lived together for just over a half a year.

Despite the younger’s assurances, Jin couldn’t help but feel like a nuisance living on Hoseok’s couch. He was older after all and sleeping on his younger friend’s couch made him feel like a complete failure.

Though he felt horrible, he was immensely grateful for his friend's hospitality. He was grateful for all of his friends. He’d truly embraced them as his new family, the family that he had chosen and they were all the support that he needed. They didn’t call his dreams dumb or laugh in his face when they heard that he’d basically run away from home in order to pursue them. Instead, they encouraged him, congratulated him on his decision, and helped him look for a new apartment.

Jin applied for art school in the city and after successfully passing the audition to get in, he was accepted. He got a job at the school working in administration and managed to practically plead for a second job in the library. He saved up enough money to buy an older truck and then saved up even more money until he was able to move into his own apartment early in the semester.

His mother had called him a few times. Once when a week had passed after he’d basically run away. She’d tried to persuade him to come home and wondered where he had gone and if he was eating properly. Then, she’d called a few weeks after he’d been accepted into the art school and when he’d told her the news she had gotten very quiet for a few minutes before questioning his decision once again and he’d hung up on her, snarkily telling her to say hello to his father for him. The third time she’d called was well into his first year of school and nearly a year after he’d left home. She’d been crying, and apologized for driving him out of the house though she didn’t ask him to come back again, which he was thankful for. She hadn’t been supportive of his decision but she told him that she respected that it was a choice he had made.
They spoke more often after that, calling each other once a month or so. It still hurt talking to her and knowing that her opinion hadn’t changed much. They weren’t nearly as close as they had once been and Jin often had to quickly make up an excuse to hang up when she would hesitantly ask about his classes. She didn’t actually want to know and it was obvious in her voice that she still hated that he was on the path to becoming an actor.

His father hadn’t called once. Which Jin was expecting. What he wasn’t expecting were the numerous calls from his brother.

He wasn’t sure how Seokjung had found out what happened or which one of his parents had told him but his hyung knew what Jin had done. The strange thing was that they had never been very close before and had only briefly talked to one another since Seokjung had moved to the states when their mother was talking to him on the phone and handed it off to Jin.

Seokjung also attempted to convince Jin to let go of the dream to become an actor. He told him that it was impractical and totally up to chance since hard work often didn’t mean much in the entertainment industry. Jin had nearly cussed at him in anger but settled for hanging up the phone. It wasn’t until months later when Seokjung called to wish Jin a happy birthday that they spoke again and Seokjung didn’t bring up acting at all, instead he told Jin of what he had accomplished in the U.S and asked how the younger was doing. Jin was suspicious of the sudden change and suspected that their mother had put his hyung up to this, probably more worried about Jin than she let on in their phone calls. It was as though she thought he’d made such a stupid decision and was so heinously irresponsible that he wasn’t able to take care of himself. She pretended to care but the reality was that she had no faith in him at all and didn’t think that he could do this alone. He was motivated to prove her wrong.

So, he told Seokjung of his own accomplishments, talked about his two jobs and how much school work he had to do and made sure that he made it seem as though he was casually managing everything. Really, he was struggling more than he ever had in his life and knew that he couldn’t keep two jobs and do school at the same time when the next school year rolled around. His mother sent him money from time to time and though Jin kept it, not so full of himself that he would refuse the help, he knew it was only because she didn’t believe he could take care of himself. He put the money he gave her into his savings, to use only if he absolutely needed to and kept on working hard.

He could do this, even if his family didn’t think that he could. He would have to, after all, it was far too late to go back.
Next chapter we return to your regularly scheduled programming.

**Fun Fact**

In the Boy in Luv music video, Jin is actually the first to talk with the girl and while she resists Yoongi’s advances, she agrees to Jin.

Although it is a different girl, at the end of the War of Hormone video Taehyung ends up winning the girl’s favor.
Lost

Chapter Summary

[Chapter Recap]

When it rains, it pours, and Jin faces a storm like no other as Jungkook is hospitalized and Taehyung goes missing. Tensions run higher than ever, and just when Jin finds the light at the end of the tunnel in the form of his soon-to-be girlfriend Hye-su, she's taken away from him as if she never existed in the first place. Jin makes the decision to leave.

Chapter Notes

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Lost my way in a complicated world with no exit.”

His eyes opened to pitch blackness.

There was a disorienting feeling in his body and his head throbbed dully in pain. He couldn’t understand what was happening to him, where he was, or why it was so dark.

Memories fluttered in and out of his brain like drops of rain on a windshield. A vague suggestion of color and shape before disappearing completely. A car, a white room, a black sheet, and the blue sea. A nonsensical order of images that seemingly had no correlation. He didn’t know what they meant.

All he knew was that something was very wrong.

He couldn’t see, hear, taste, smell or feel anything and the realization of that ignited panic deep inside of him. This wasn’t right. This shouldn’t be happening.
All at once, and probably much too late, he realized that he wasn’t breathing.

That realization sent another wave of panic through him as he attempted to breathe in air and was shocked to only inhale water. Cold, nearly freezing water that burned his throat like fire and caused him to sputter in an attempt to expel the sudden rush of water from his lungs.

But more water just continued to pour in through his open mouth and nostrils.

He couldn’t breathe.

*He was drowning.*

His body was reacting on its own accord, thrashing wildly in a feeble attempt to escape his confines. But his hands simply met the interior of his truck.

*It was so dark.*

He felt like he was blinking rapidly as he spasmed, body desperate for air, but the pitch black darkness in his vision didn’t change.

It *hurt.*

The coldness was a heavy ache that stung like thousands of needles. His lungs were *screaming* at him and every cell in his body begged to be saved. But he didn’t want to be saved.

It *hurt,* but he wanted more pain.

It *burned,* but he wanted the fire.

It was *dark,* but he wanted it to be dark forever.
Slowly, as body gave in to the pull of the water, no oxygen to be found, he felt his limbs stop spasming. He was still and an enormous weight seemed to pull on his consciousness. Tugging him into the depths.

*Was he dying?*

He hoped so.

His mind was struggling against the weight but he, himself, was not putting up much of a fight. His memory was hazy and while he couldn’t remember exactly how he got into this situation he knew that he just wanted *out*. He wanted to leave and the physical hurt now was nothing compared to the mental hurt he had felt before.

Eventually, his mind too, finally gave in to the pull and a different kind of darkness enveloped his sight.

He felt like he was floating, all previous sensations gone, and it was just him and the nothingness.

And then there was nothing at all.

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Jin’s eyes opened.

He was sitting. Legs were crossed. Black shorts were on, and his shirt was white.

He was confused.

His head felt strange, light and airy as if he was on the verge of fainting. And as he tried to think he found himself unable to come up with anything intelligent.
He looked up, surveying the area that he was sitting in.

Four walls. It’s a room. A small one.

The walls were tiled, small white squares in every direction he looked.

He was surrounded by water, shallow enough for him to stand in, and clear enough for him to see the white floor underneath. The water reflected on the shiny white tiles and made him feel even more disoriented.

He was sitting on some sort of platform that emitted a reddish light from underneath it, and for some reason that scared him.

The entire situation seemed strange to him, and the fact that he saw no exit was concerning, but he couldn’t understand why it was strange. He tried to think again, to remember, but his mind is blank like the walls of white tiles surrounding him.

His attention turned to the one thing in the small space that he hadn’t looked at yet. Six photographs were spread out in front of him. The fact that they were photos seems significant to him for some reason and he blindly reached out for the first one, bringing it up to his face so that he can look at it closer.

But as soon as the glossy image was held up to his face he felt a sudden pull towards it. Colors flashed behind his eyelids before he even realizes that they had closed.

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When he opened his eyes again, he had the strange feeling that he was no longer in his body. His height felt changed somehow and his body just felt different.

He was lying in a bed, looking up at a ceiling that didn’t seem like his. Jin had spent enough time in the same position in his own apartment that he’s sure his own bed didn’t smell like this, didn’t feel like this, and that his ceiling definitely shouldn’t look like that.
He felt sleepy, groggy, the kind of lethargic you feel when you take a nap that’s just slightly too long.

And as he sits up, he was met immediately with the fact that this isn’t his bed, his room, and that definitely had not been his ceiling. The bedroom was slightly bigger than his own, the mattress felt softer, and a flat screen tv stared at him, propped up on a dresser. There were seemingly random clothes strewn about the room but other than that it looked weirdly unlived in. It was nice, spacious, and besides the few other personal items that were laying around it had the cold, sterile feeling of a hotel room.

Jin rubbed his eyes, already struggling to not just close them again and go back to sleep. He felt so tired, exhausted even, more so than when he occasionally only got an hour or two of sleep.

Hair flicked across his vision as he rubbed at his eyes and he stopped immediately, heart skipping a beat thunderously. He grabbed for the lock of hair, squinting to look at it properly even in the darkness of the room. The lights were off but the moon was shining brightly enough through the window.

And as he thought- the lock of hair was at least two shades darker than he remembered his hair being.

Something… something was not right.

He stood up from the bed, nearly lurching forward onto the floor from the sudden difference in balance. The soft sound of a television could be heard beyond the bedroom door and Jin had no idea where it was coming from but thought it would be best if he found out.

Maybe then he’d get some clues to whatever was happening.

He opened the door, surprised to see that the hallway in front of him was only slightly brighter than it had been inside the room and even that was only because of the many windows. As Jin walked he felt a sense of familiarity in this place even though he was sure that he’d never seen it before. His feet seemed to be moving without any input from him, leading him directly to the stairs and down them in the direction of the noise.

It was coming from the living room, he realized, but had no idea how he actually knew that.
Eventually, he found himself standing in the walkway into the living room. Blue light was filling the space ominously and though Jin couldn’t put any names to the faces he was seeing he felt as though he knew them.

There were four people spread out across the couches, all with attention focused on the screen of the tv and even as he continued to stand in the walkway, in plain sight of the four, none of them even glanced in his direction.

A younger looking woman, giggled at something on the screen and the young man sitting next to her smiled and pulled her closer to him. The older woman stretched across a sofa all on her own, turned towards the younger girl saying something that Jin couldn’t hear and the man sitting at the far corner of the room in a comfortable looking chair shushed the both of them.

The scene painfully dug at Jin’s chest, prickling his eyes with tears immediately even as an unexplainable anger boiled up to the surface. The sudden rush of emotions elicited a strange sensation because Jin felt that somehow they weren’t his own feelings.

As he continued to stare at the four who still hadn’t noticed him, he didn’t know whether to shout in fury or to cry in devastation. It was wrong, a voice in Jin’s head suddenly thought. It wasn’t his own but it seemed strangely familiar.

They aren’t even concerned that I’ve been gone for two days, the voice seethed, and Jin felt his fists clench involuntarily. He suddenly wanted to leave, wanted to just go and leave them behind. They probably wouldn’t even notice, the voice reasoned furiously.

Jin felt that this must be his house even if it wasn’t his house, because Jin lived in an apartment and he lived alone.

If it was his house, whoever he was, then he must live with these people which probably meant that they were his family. So, why wouldn’t they be concerned if he had been missing for two days?

He thought of going upstairs to collect his things before he left, but the voice in his head scoffed and Jin was turning away before he could actually decide.

There’s nothing in this house that belongs to me. None of it means anything at all.
And then Jin was walking to the front door and opening it to the cold, biting wind of the night. He felt a sudden sense of urgency. Not only to get away but to find someone. He had no idea who he was thinking of but the blurry figure that was appearing in his mind was distinctly familiar.

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Jin still didn’t really know what was going on as he walked through the dark streets, feeling horribly empty and discarded, but somehow finding out what was happening had little importance now. His body, although Jin was convinced that it wasn’t his, was moving on its own, making turns and walking with purpose to an unknown destination.

His chest hurt so much that he wondered if he was having some sort of strange heart attack. Every now and then as he walked a few flashes of a scene played out in his mind.

Jin wasn’t able to discern what was happening at first but he eventually was able to clearly see Taehyung jumping off of the construction structure. And after that he saw Namjoon saying something to him and his heart ached even harder. His eyes were burning with unshed tears and for some reason Jin was trying as hard as he possibly could to keep those tears from falling.

_I thought that I finally had a home with them, a real family that cared for each other;_ the voice in his head anguished. _But I guess I was the only one who felt that way._

He whistled a tune to distract him as he walked. It was unfamiliar to Jin but his mouth blew out the notes as if it was a second nature. It was pretty and Jin found himself wanting to hear the full song rather than just the whistling of the tune but he was still sure that he’d never heard it before.

He was so focused on the flashes of scenes playing out in his brain and the sound of the tune that he didn’t see the group of men until he’d already bumped into them. He wanted to apologize but his body was so focused on not crying that he couldn’t manage to open his mouth and get the words out.

He just continued walking.

Which was clearly a mistake.

The three men quickly catch up to him, and shove him into an alley. They’re offended by his
behavior and he can tell that they’re looking for trouble but he just feels so empty that he couldn’t bring himself to care.

His lack of response angered them even further.

One of them grabbed him by his jacket and shoved him against a wall, spitting into his face as he shouted. Then the man's hand was wrapped around his throat and squeezing and instinctively he threw the hand off of him, stepping forward threateningly.

Another mistake.

As he looked the three men in the face, they seem oddly familiar as if the other voice in his head knew them but doesn’t understand why he's seeing them all of a sudden.

However, they don’t give him much time to think. They were clearly just trying to get a reaction out of him and they laughed at his sudden bravado. The one he shoved punches him and the pain disoriented him as he suddenly doubled over and faced the ground. Another one of the men grabbed him roughly by his shoulders and then his head was bouncing off of a knee and the world was spinning. The third man took his opportunity and kicked at his torso, shoving him into the wall again.

They’re shouting things at him again but his ears were ringing too much to properly hear them. Jin’s never been in a fight in his entire life so experiencing this, even though he still didn’t properly feel that he was in his own body, was horrifying. He didn’t know what to do, or how to get them to stop and the other voice in his head seemed to be in the driver’s seat but there was a sick thought that Jin hears which instantly worries him.

Why can these fuckers notice me when my own family can’t even manage to?

Somehow this strikes the other voice in his head as being ridiculously funny and he started laughed out loud.

The men that are intent on beating the shit out of him hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to handle the situation, but then the punches started flying even more rapidly and he was forced to stop laughing or risk biting his own tongue off.
Once they'd gotten him to the ground, kicking savagely into his ribs, and stamping their feet down on him as if trying to put out a fire, they finally seemed to be content with their work.

One of them dug around in both his jacket and his pants pockets until he produced both the wallet tucked inside as well as his phone. The one that kneed him in the face earlier leered over him saying something like,

“Be a little more respectful to your elders next time, you fucking queer.” Before the group of them walk out of the alley, leaving him there bruised and bloodied on the ground.

And though he could barely hear it over the ringing in his ears, the voice in Jin’s head immediately knew where he’d the seen the men before. *Those self-entitled homophobic assholes that used to go to my school*. *What were the odds of running into them? Am I that fucking unlucky?*

The voice inside Jin’s head felt defeated. Jin, himself, was completely overwhelmed by how much violence he just had to suffer through and how much pain this body, that was certainly not his, was being put through.

When he finally stood, spitting out the blood that had accumulated in his mouth, it wasn’t because Jin wished it. In fact, it felt like he had little control over the body he was in now.

He stumbled out of the alleyway, the pain making his vision spotty, and shoved his hood back over his head. He was only walking in a straight line so why… why was he stepping off the curb and onto the street?

Jin tried in a panic to step backwards, to stop himself from taking another step onto the road, but he was merely an observer now and could do nothing but watch as the sleek black car approached him at a speed too quick to dodge.

All he could feel was the fear and resolution from the owner of the body he was in and the decisiveness to stand there and face the car head on rather than moving.

Jin realized a little too late whose body he was in and what he was somehow witnessing.

*That night*. The events that had somehow happened two weeks ago.
The car swerved in an attempt to avoid him but not fast enough. The right side of the car crashed into Jeongguk’s body, sending him flying backwards onto the pavement and right before he felt the ground against his body, in that singular second where he was airborne and still conscious, Jin swore that he saw Yoongi from a distance. His eyes were wide in shock and Jeongguk seemed to see him as well in that second because regret radiated throughout his entire body before the pavement advanced out of the corner of his eye and then everything went dark.

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When Jin opened his eyes, he felt different again.

His surroundings have changed dramatically, but the sight of the white tiles in every direction he looked made him think that he’d somehow returned to that strange room from before.

But no, it’s not the same place.

Rather than the ceramic floor he was sitting rather far down in an overly full ceramic bathtub with a tank top and shorts on and he was freezing.

The water was cold as if it had been filled with ice, and though it should hurt or cause him some discomfort his limbs feel numb and swollen. To his surprise, a few minutes after the initial shock he hardly felt anything but the subtle shake of his body as it tried futilely to maintain warmth.

Jin was still reeling over the shock of what had just happened with him being in Jeongguk’s body, and the feeling of being hit with an actual physical car, so he didn’t hear the constant muttering from the other voice in his head at first. It was a quiet hum that gradually increased in volume until it was nearly screaming in his head.

Worthless.

Useless.

Helpless.
Jin didn’t understand what the hell was happening to him but he knew that he hadn’t yet returned to his own body and if that was true then... was he in another one of his friend’s bodies?

Who was it this time?

And were those the thoughts of one of his friends being shouted in his head?

Why?

As Jin adjusted to the sudden change, he felt an overwhelming sadness, like a tsunami wave crashing over his body and dragging him under. A sob ripped from his throat violently, and though his entire head was wet and dripping with water he felt hot tears rushing down his face.

It hurt.

It was an ache deep in his chest that felt like it was reaching up into his throat and trying to strangle him. He could barely breathe and each breath came out ragged and thick with emotion. He was shaking violently but he didn’t know if it was due to the freezing coldness of the water he was sitting in or it was due to the sobs that continued to rip out of his throat.

The pain reminded Jin of something, a remnant similar to a memory but he couldn’t remember exactly what it was. He couldn’t think of anything really due to the other voice in his head nearly screaming at itself internally. His own thoughts were being drowned out as if they weren’t even there to begin with.

He tried to kill himself in front of you!

You’re so selfish that you can’t even see when a friend is in enough to pain to jump into the ocean even though he can’t swim!
You failed him.

Just like you fail at everything else.

What’s the point of you existing if you can’t even do a single thing right?

All you do is make people worry about you and bother them.

You’re such a nuisance.

Your own mother can’t even stand you.

You should stop wasting air that others could be breathing and just go away.

The sobs intensified, ripping out from his chest like blades and his voice was raw with despair as he yelled out into the empty bathroom.

The sound reminded Jin of someone. The brutal rawness that would make even those that hear it feel sorry. A woman, Hye-su’s mother, cried similarly when the doctor told her that her daughter had died. And as soon as the memory occurred to him, the guilt returned.

His fault.

Jin wasn’t sure if that thought was his or the other voice in his head but it felt like the truth either way.

In fear of getting hypothermia from sitting in the ice cold bath, Jin forced the body he was in to get out, sloshing water over the side and onto the tile.

There was a towel nearby and he hurried to wrap it around himself, shaking violently as he struggled to find warmth.
The voice in his head was still muttering horrible things over and over and over as if he wasn’t fully conscious and as Jin coughed, hacking until water came out of his throat, he wondered if he had woken up at the bottom of the bathtub.

Hadn’t he woken up under water before as well? He wondered. Confused by how vague the memory seemed, he shook away the thought.

The other voice in his head seemed to have gone quiet now that he was out of the bathtub and Jin was able to look around the relatively large bathroom freely. There was a mirror against the far side of the wall and he curiously wondered if he could find out whose body he was in if he got up to look into it.

Though as soon as the thought occurred to him the other voice in his head was panicked as it begged,

No. No, please. I don’t want to look at myself right now. I can’t.

And it sounded so desperate that Jin immediately shot down the idea.

Distantly, as if coming from another room, he heard the faint jingle of a ringtone. A phone was ringing.

It stops before he can get to it but Jin is already trying to stand, which was a very difficult task due to how shaky and numb his legs still are and the amount of water that splashed onto the tiles, making them especially slippery.

But eventually he stood, though he almost toppled over instantly from the extreme change in balance. There was no doubt that he’s not in his own body at that moment. Because there was no way that he was suddenly at least five centimeters shorter.

On wobbly legs, he headed towards the door of the bathroom, opening it and revealing the rather small bedroom attached to it.

Jin felt like he’s been in this room before but the vague memory is gone before he can properly try to figure out where he is. The ringtone begins playing again, a bit louder this time and Jin hurried to find it before he missed it once again.
The room he was in was very neat and tidy but he found the phone haphazardly on the floor as if it were carelessly thrown there.

He picked it up and looks at the caller ID which almost makes him send the phone flying to the floor.

_Incoming call from Hobi_

_Hobi?_ Jin thought wildly. _As in Hoseok? So, he really was in the body of one of his friends?_

_What was going on?_

The voice in his head seemed to share the same confusion. It was late from the time that the phone read and a bit _too_ late for Hoseok to be calling him out of nowhere.

The stray tears that were still spilling down his cheeks were hastily wiped away, his throat was cleared and the snot threatening to drip out of his nose was sucked back into the recesses.

The other person in Jin’s head had taken over again and he could feel the panic in his body and how quickly his heart had started to beat.

Somewhere in the shared space of his mind he strongly felt that Hoseok absolutely could _not_ know that he wasn’t feeling well.

It was only when the other person in Jin’s head felt that he had successfully covered up any audible signs of his previous crying that he could answer the phone, nearly missing the call entirely in the process.

“Hello?” Hoseok’s familiar voice asked over the phone. “Jimin?”

_That_ sent Jin’s mind reeling.
He was in Jimin’s body? Jimin was the one sitting in a bathtub filled with freezing cold water and sobbing like a mother who’d just lost her only child? How did that make any sense?

*How did any of this many any sense?*

Jin didn’t know much about Jimin’s past or what kind of struggles he dealt with since they were always something that he wasn’t allowed to know, though he doubted that anyone other than Hoseok knew, but whatever it was seemed far too serious to be kept secret.

“Jimin? Are you there?” Hoseok asked, sounding concerned and Jin realized that neither him or… Jimin had said anything.

“Uh… yeah. Yeah, I’m here.” Jimin cringed at how horrible his voice still sounded and hoped Hoseok wouldn’t notice it.

Although judging by the long silence on the other end of the line, it didn’t seem like he’d been very successful.

“… Jimin are you okay? What’s going on?”

Jin felt his eyes burn… well Jimin’s eyes burn as the sudden urge to cry returned but he pushed the feeling down. He felt panicked again, annoyed that Hoseok could read him so well, and sad that he had no choice but to lie.

“Nothing. I was just sleeping and you woke me up. What is it?” Jimin deflected and the excuse seemed weak even to Jin.

Hoseok hesitated for a moment, seemingly having trouble deciding whether or not to push the issue but after a deep sigh he decided to drop it.

“You need to get here, now. It’s Jeongguk.” At the words Jimin caught the emotion in Hoseok’s voice and he felt the warning signs of an impending panic attack take over.

“W-what?” Jimin struggled to get out through his sudden lack of oxygen. “What do you mean it’s
Jeongguk? Where do I need to go? What’s going on?”

Jin knew what Hoseok was going to say before the words even came out. He had not only gotten a similar call himself, but also experienced the event personally when he was temporarily in Jeongguk’s body not that too long ago.

“Jimin breathe.” Hoseok instructed firmly, although it seemed like he was struggling to stay calm himself. “He was hit by a car not that long ago. It’s going to be okay, though. Alright? Trust me. It’s going to be okay.”

Jin felt the panic take over and then it seemed that not even Jimin was in control of his body any longer. He dropped to his knees, only barely managing to keep the phone near his ear as his other hand dropped to the ground to steady himself as he began hyperventilating.

It was too much.

Both Jeongguk and Taehyung in the same day?

Why was everything horrible happening at the same time?

What if Jeongguk died tonight?

What if they never saw Taehyung again?

“Jimin!” Hoseok was yelling through the phone and it sounded like he had begun to cry as well. “Don’t do this. Breathe. I’m heading to the hospital right now, don’t make me have to stop by your place first.”

Jimin struggled to move the phone closer to his ear so he could hear Hoseok better. Tears were falling freely now and Jin was worried that Jimin might collapse from the intense stress.

“Don’t make me do that, Jimin.” Hoseok was saying, his voice thick with tears. ‘You can do this. Just breathe okay? You need to breathe. You don’t want to have another one of those and make your mother worry again, right? Gukkie needs you, okay? So, you need to breathe and you need to
Jimin didn’t know if he could; Jin hoped that he could.

As Jimin was still struggling to regulate his breathing, Jin wondered if he could help. He tried to take over control of his body and slowly forced a deep intake and release of breath. He could distantly hear Hoseok encouraging him to breathe but Jin was too focused on overcoming the near paralysis that the panic had forced Jimin’s body into.

With an intense amount of effort, he managed to get Jimin breathing at a regular rate once again and slowly got him to stand up once again.

Jin still wasn’t sure what was happening but he definitely remembered Jimin being at the hospital when he was in his own body and while he had no idea if this was actual reality or not, he was going to make sure that Jimin got there.

After the initial shock passed, Jimin took control of his own body once again and moved over to his closet, pulling out a jacket and pants. Which was a good idea considering the clothes that he was wearing were soaking wet.

“Jimin? I’m going to have to hang up. I have to call the others. You can get here by yourself, right?” Hoseok asked nervously.

“Yes, I can get there.” Jimin responded, a false cheer suddenly in his voice and Jin was shocked not only by how fake it felt but also by how similar it sounded to the way Jimin usually spoke.

Hoseok gave him an uneasy goodbye and then hung up the phone.

Jimin placed it down on his bed as he changed into the clothes he picked out. They helped to stop his constant shivering but he was still incredibly cold.

_He was fine now_, and Jin could feel how convincing the thought was to Jimin as he put his phone into his back pocket and headed to the front door. He would have to be, it would be too much if something happened to him as well today.

He opened the door, stepping out into the brisk night and as he stepped forward the world spun and

*get to the hospital that’s right down the street from me. You can do that, can’t you?*”

*"Jimin? I’m going to have to hang up. I have to call the others. You can get here by yourself, right?"* Hoseok asked nervously.
rather than the night he was walking into he was faced with the blaring sun.

Had Jin switched bodies again?

Was he just going to keep switching between his friend’s bodies? Why? What for? What would happen when he spent a while in all of their bodies? Would he switch back into his own?

Hopefully.

Whose body was he in now?

He was sitting now, and both his back and his neck ached in pain. The sun was glaring through tinted glass into his eyes so he squeezed them shut though he could still see the light even with his eyelids closed.

A sudden bang behind him startled him, making him cry out in surprise.

He vaguely recognized voices all around him, namely laughter as the banging continued. He held a hand out in front of his face to shield his eyes from the sunlight and takes some time to look around. He was tired for some reason, his eyes were aching with the lack of rest and he felt lethargic enough to go back to sleep.

He was sitting in what appeared to be the back of a car, the black leather interior and shape of the windows making that apparent.

He turned to look at where the banging sound had come from and was shocked to see Jeongguk grinning right in front of his face. The younger pointed at him and laughed and then ran around to the back of the car with Yoongi following behind him.

“Did they even sleep?” A groggy but incredibly familiar voice asked. It was coming from in front of him, in the passenger seat. Long limbs stretched out above the head of the seat.
“No.” Jin found himself saying, the low baritone voice surprising him. It was heavy with annoyance and he distinctly remembered the words that come next. “They got out of the car a while after we got here and woke me up, I haven’t been able to properly go back to sleep since.”

_Not that I’ve actually been able to sleep in the past three days_, the same voice says in Jin’s head.

Neither of the people in the two front seats answer him and the person in the driver’s seat opened his door to get out.

_Was that… Jin wondered in horror… him?_

_Was he actually seeing himself from the eyes of one of his friends? Then, was that Namjoon in the passenger seat?_

He wondered if he was progressing backwards in time. He had started in Jeongguk’s body after all, right at the time that he was hit with a car and then he was in Jimin’s body when Hoseok called to tell him about it. _How far would he have to go back if that was true?_

But more importantly… if this was the time that Jin thought it was then wasn’t he in-

_“Taehyung,”_ that familiar groggy voice called, snapping his attention up to the front seat once again where Namjoon was looking at him strangely. “What are you doing just staring off into space? Come on.”

_Well, Jin thought, that answered that question._

So he was in Taehyung’s body now. On the day that they all went to the sea.

Jin couldn’t really remember all of what happened since his memories were so foggy now but judging by the thoughts of the others later on in the same day Taehyung did something crazy that upset both Jimin and Jeongguk.
While Jin was thinking, Taehyung was moving on his own and getting out of the car.

Namjoon threw an arm around him when he did, and they walked together towards the pier where their other friends were already much further ahead of them.

Jin could see his own body in front of him, walking slowly and wondered in horror what that meant. Was there someone else in his body now or was he purely observing all of these events and not actually influencing them? Would he be talking to himself as himself or as Taehyung? His head was beginning to hurt just by thinking about it, or maybe that was Taehyung getting a headache… he couldn’t tell anymore.

Anyways, the seven of them stood at the edge of the pier looking over the calm waters and while the other voice in Jin’s head reasoned that these waters usually calmed him, today they made him antsy and nervous.

He doubted that he would ever be able to look at these waters calmly like this ever again.

Jin wondered what that meant. He remembered feeling trepidation towards the events to come but was Taehyung sharing in that foreboding or was it something else?

After a while, Hoseok loudly complained that he was sleepy and as he sat down with his arms still around Jimin he nearly sent the younger tumbling into the water.

Jimin laughed good-naturedly as he regained his balance and sat down but all Jin could think about was how fake it sounded now. Had Jimin’s cheer always sounded so false? Or was it just Jin’s brief time being in Jimin’s body that was making it sound like that?

All of them followed after the two, sitting with their legs dangling over the edge.

Jin could feel how restless Taehyung was, as he kicked his feet back and forth forcefully, mind nearly being overloaded by how much he was thinking about.

Although Jin couldn’t keep up with the thoughts, there was one constant that kept appearing over and over again.
Taehyung’s little sister.

Jin had never met her but Taehyung often talked about her with all the pride that a parent would have as if he raised her himself. The most Jin knew about her was that she was smart and wanted to be a teacher, and the most he could get from Taehyung’s constant rush of thoughts was that he was incredibly worried about leaving her alone.

And that didn’t make much sense. She was in her final years of school, it shouldn’t be making a brother that worried to leave her at home alone.

But then Jin remembered.

He remembered Namjoon that had told him that Taehyung had an abusive father.

And his worry made a bit more sense.

He watched as Namjoon stood up to return to the car for snacks, nearly dropping the bag of them as he returned.

Taehyung ate absentmindedly as his mind continued to run wildly. He was thinking so seriously of his sister that Jin was starting to believe that he wasn’t just worried that his father would hit her but that something else was going on.

Every few minutes Jin caught a flash of blood in his mind like a memory but it didn’t belong to him which meant that Taehyung was thinking of it. So much fear filled him when those flashes of memories appeared that Jin felt like he could cry but each time Taehyung merely thought even harder about other things, blocking the memory out but it didn’t seem to be working.

It wasn’t just fear every time, though. While it was the strongest emotion he felt sometimes it was anger, other times guilt, but most often it was doom. The feeling of an inescapable impending sense of doom as if being sent by the devil himself and that was the feeling that Taehyung had whether that image of blood was replaying in his mind or not.

Jin couldn’t understand what Taehyung was so afraid of happening but he did understand that he wanted to run. That he wanted to outrun the looming shadow over him, he wanted to stay in the light just a bit longer before the darkness could swallow him.
Jin didn’t know what the “darkness” was but even he wanted to run away from it from how much fear Taehyung had towards it.

*I can’t outrun it*, the other voice in Jin’s voice whispered, as if afraid to voice the words out loud. *It’ll catch up to me eventually.*

And then Taehyung was standing. Jin could feel his uncertainty and his resolve as one and the same.

It made no sense to him how someone could be so sure of their uncertainty but the feeling seemed familiar to Taehyung who invited it in with welcoming arms.

Taehyung didn’t believe in fate but he believed in luck- the good and the bad.

And as he looked up at the construction structure he wasn’t sure of the results but he knew he had to do it. He had to do something. And he couldn’t decide but he also had no time to sit there indecisively because the looming darkness was coming for him.

He heard his friends calling after him but he ignored their voices. This was something that he had to do and he couldn’t let himself be stopped.

When his hand met the cold metal rod of the many making up the construction structure, Jin seriously doubted Taehyung’s sanity.

Jin had never been sure of anything in his life and the absolute sureness in Taehyung’s mind as he did quite possibly the most dangerous thing ever was downright insane.

*He had been gambling*, Jin realized in wonder. While most would flip a coin to decide their fate, Taehyung was deciding his fate with his own life. He couldn’t swim and there was an entire sea in front of him, he could smell it on the air that blew his hood back as he looked at the unending horizon in front of him.

If he jumped into the water and drowned then he wouldn’t have to waste time running when the darkness inevitably caught up to him.
But if he jumped into the water and lived then he would run as much as he could, for as long as he could and hopefully it would never take him.

Jin had never heard such an insane thing in his entire life.

Seeing Taehyung jump off the structure from down below out of nowhere was crazy but actually being on top of it and witnessing Taehyung’s thoughts first hand was a completely different level of crazy.

Taehyung looked down to his friends one last time just in case, smiling at them and hoping that they knew how much they all meant to him, though they probably had no idea.

Jin saw his own blurry face looking up at Taehyung and felt a deep sense of regret somewhere inside of him though he wasn’t sure if it was coming from himself or the body that he was in.

Taehyung steeled himself for the jump, pushing down both his fear of heights and his fear of death and ran towards the end of the platform, jumping at the very end.

For a moment he felt as if he flew, as if the wind were carrying him gently and the sensation reminded Jin of something he, himself, had experienced here at this sea but before he could remember fully he was dropping out of the sky and the water below was rushing towards him much too quickly.

Taehyung barely managed to close his eyes, too tempted to locate the desperate call of his name as he neared the surface of the water, and then there was a loud crashing sound in his ears and he was enveloped completely in cold.

Much like Jin, Taehyung couldn’t swim.

There was darkness all around him, to the point where neither Jin nor Taehyung could tell if his eyes were closed or open and after a few seconds of mindlessly sinking towards the bottom of the sea floor his lungs began to crave air, though there was none to be had.

Taehyung to his credit, attempted to swim upwards, not entirely suicidal, but his movements were quick and sloppy and he wasn’t making much progress towards the surface.
And then his lungs were demanding air. Bubbles floated up in front of his face as he was forced to release the little air that he’d been holding and almost immediately his body attempted to breathe but only got water in return.

And then he was choking.

His chest was burning and his lungs were begging for oxygen but Taehyung wasn’t making much progress with his attempt at swimming and it seemed as though gambling hadn’t worked in his favor.

And Jin was getting tired of constantly being in water.

Although, to Taehyung’s incredible surprise, hands wrapped around his body from both sides, pulling him and dragging him up. He could do little but become pliant to their tugging and eventually he breached the surface, his lungs finally able to take in the oxygen that they needed so badly.

He was coughing and sputtering as his body worked to get rid of the water in his body that wasn’t meant to be there.

Taehyung was too out of it to fully realize that Jeongguk and Jimin were the ones that had gone in to get him but Jin knew that it was them. After his experience in being in both of their bodies and being able to hear their thoughts and emotions he felt bad that two of the youngest in their group had to be the ones to go in and save Taehyung. Their fear was evident in the way that Jimin was shaking against him and Jeongguk’s grip was hard enough to leave bruises.

“What were you thinking?” Namjoon yelled, although his voice sounded odd as if Taehyung was hearing it from underwater.

He was in shock, and not just because he had nearly died, but because he hadn’t taken into account his friends saving him. He had just wanted to surrender himself to luck, he wasn’t expecting them to intervene and he definitely wasn’t expecting Namjoon to be so angry.

His closest friend was shaking him roughly as if he were a ragdoll and the two grips that had been on his arms had left him, leaving his limp body subject to gravity. His head was shaking back and forth loosely and Jin could feel Taehyung struggling to get a grip so he could actually stand on his
own two feet.

“You’re a complete fucking idiot! What did you think you were doing!?” Namjoon screamed and Jin cringed internally as the man’s spittle landed on Taehyung’s face from how hard he was yelling.

“Namjoon…” Hoseok pleaded, approaching the two and pulling on Namjoon’s shoulder to get him to stop.

Namjoon harshly pushed Hoseok away, nearly causing him to fall but Jimin was quick to catch him before he could.

Taehyung was quiet, and Jin could feel regret seeping into every part of his bones as the weight of what he had just done settled in his mind.

_I shouldn’t have done that_, Taehyung was thinking bitterly, _why do I have be like this? Why can’t I ever think anything through before I do it?

_I’ve never seen Namjoon so angry, not even when I got us arrested for tagging a few years ago_.

Jin knew what was going to happen next even though Taehyung didn’t so he wasn’t entirely surprised when the world suddenly changed perspective and he was looking up at the sky with a piercing pain in his cheek.

He blinked in surprise and it was an extremely strange feeling for Jin to be looking into his own face.

The face he was making as he looked down at Taehyung was… _ugly_.

Full of hatred and anger and despair.

Taehyung was completely shocked staring up into that face, ugly with hatred, and only barely able to get his arms up to cover his face as he was repeatedly punched.
He had never seen such an expression on Jin’s face before. Not even when he had fucked up royally all those years ago and ruined any chance of ever being friends with one of the few people that Taehyung actually looked up to.

He was always ruining everything.

Jin didn’t know if that thought was his own or Taehyung’s but he was filled with Taehyung’s heart breaking despair.

Taehyung was in pain and not just because he was being punched. No, it felt like his heart was breaking. Splitting open and cracking into hundreds of pieces.

Had he really ruined things so horribly to cause Jin to hate him this much?

Jin who didn’t have a violent bone in his body, was looking at him as if he wished Taehyung was dead, and the Jin who was sharing these thoughts with him was startled by how true that was.

He had been wishing Taehyung was dead at this moment. Whether it was really happening again or not, he had been wishing for nothing more than for Taehyung to disappear and stop acting so selfish.

But he regretted this moment more than anything now.

Taehyung turned his head to better evade the fists launching at his face and made eye contact with Namjoon who was standing a few feet away, looking at him blankly as he was beaten by Jin.

Did Namjoon hate him too?

Taehyung found that he couldn’t even blame him if he did. All he did was cause Namjoon trouble anyways.

The Jin that was punching him stopped suddenly, his eyes clearing of their rage like the sky after a
storm and he blinked rapidly, pausing with his fist in the air as if he was just realizing what he was doing. His gaze turned to Namjoon as well briefly, before it turned back to Taehyung.

Their friends took the opportunity to drag Jin off of Taehyung but the two just remained staring at each other even though Taehyung’s vision was getting blurry with tears.

_He was truly alone now._

_He should have just said goodbye to them earlier._

_Left them with good memories of him._

_But at least they wouldn’t look for him now._

They weren’t his thoughts but Jin felt as if they were as his vision swam, scenery moving past his eyes quickly as if he were in a car and then darkness. Jin didn’t know what it meant but he was struck with the sudden feeling as if he were in his own body and his heart was aching with the pang of being abandoned as if he were feeling Taehyung’s pain.

As soon as the strange feeling came it was gone and Taehyung was scrambling to get up, tears mixing with the blood dripping from both his nose and his lip and falling onto the sand.

_He had to leave now._

From the corner of his eye he saw Jeongguk reaching for him but panic gripped him so tight in that split second he immediately forced his body to start running.

He wanted to hug them all so badly and tell them how much he wished he’d made different decisions and how much he hated having to leave them but he couldn’t now.

_It was better if they hated him._

If he stayed there for another second he wasn’t sure if he would ever have the determination to
They were his family and he had already lost so much in the last couple of days it was hard to lose them as well. He wasn’t even sure if he could live without them, he couldn’t even remember not having them in his life. They had become such a permanent place in his heart.

Jin still couldn’t understand what Taehyung was running from, or why he had to leave them all, but the fear had only tripled now and it was what propelled Taehyung’s feet through the sand and far away.

Jin had also been running away from something. But his memories were so jumbled now that he couldn’t quite understand what it was. Though he was beginning to feel like the impending doom, that darkness that was haunting Taehyung like a ghost had gotten to him instead.

He felt for the first time that he actually understood Taehyung.

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Taehyung stumbled as he walked along a sidewalk far away from the sea and just like that Jin switched bodies again and as he blinked an incredibly bright light was in his eyes and then he registered the sound of a honk and quickly stepped back onto the sidewalk as a car sped by.

It was dark now and he felt short again. Jin still had not even the slightest clue about what was happening to him and if he actually was in the bodies of his friends and watching actual events play out but even if he was dreaming or something equally strange everything seemed too real. The pain felt too intense and he doubted that his imagination was able to come up with such extreme fantasies.

Besides, he had no idea about a lot of the things that were happening, so how could he be dreaming about events he wasn’t even there to witness?

But regardless of whether or not he was in reality, he was definitely cycling through the bodies of all of his friends and if that was true the only member that could have possibly been this short besides Jimin was Yoongi.

Jin looked around, completely disoriented and not just because of the sudden transition from broad
daylight to darkness and neon signs. No, he was disoriented for a completely different reason.

A reason that became extremely apparent to him as he attempted to take a step forward and almost went flying into the street again.

He was drunk.

Jin didn’t drink, but he had gotten drunk once and it felt exactly like this but this was worse.

The biggest problem was that his own mind was completely sober but he could still feel the slow movement of the other mind in his head and his sober input with a drunk body was a horrible combination.

If he was truly in Yoongi’s body, then that was very strange because Jin doesn’t remember ever seeing Yoongi drunk. The man was small but he always held his liquor well and more often than not would just end up sleeping if he drank too much which wasn’t too different from how he acted normally.

So, he must have drank way too much to be in this state.

Jin let the other mind take over the task of walking. He was still stumbling all over the place but at least he was standing up straight. Mostly.

The thoughts of the other mind in Jin’s head were just as unsteady and barely coherent as the body but Jin could feel the simmering anger at the surface and the lesser, barely there, sorrow beneath it that felt like it’d been watered down by the alcohol.

Jin wasn’t really sure where he was walking to and it seemed as if the other mind in his head wasn’t exactly sure either but it felt like he needed to go somewhere familiar.

The thoughts of the other mind were muddied with the alcohol but he saw a face repeated in his thoughts that was slowly morphing into someone else.

I can’t believe that fucking brat would do something so motherfucking stupid.
So, was it Taehyung’s face that he was seeing? Then who was it turning into?

*I knew that brat was having trouble at home but I never expected it to be that bad.*

The face finished changing and suddenly Jin realized who it was. *Jeongguk*.

*It could have been Jeongguk. His home life isn’t good either and they’re only a year apart.*

*It could have been Jeongguk*.

The other voice in Jin’s head seemed to be terrified of that reality. The thought of losing Jeongguk just like that was so deeply horrifying that Jin almost wanted a drink to calm the feeling.

No wonder Yoongi was so drunk.

Jin felt just as terrified of that reality. He still didn’t fully know what Jeongguk’s home situation was like but he had no idea how bad Taehyung’s was.

It could have been Jeongguk doing something stupid.

But Jeongguk *did* do something stupid, Jin remembered. He walked off the curb into oncoming traffic and was hit by a car. And if Jin’s experience in Jeongguk’s body was real then it wasn’t entirely accidental.

He suddenly remembered the five of them waiting in the waiting room to hear about Jeongguk’s condition. *Wasn’t Yoongi the one who witnessed it?*

So, had that already happened or was he back to that night again?

It was one thing to experience it first hand but actually *seeing* it happen would be too much for Jin to handle. He didn’t want to experience that *at all*. 
But if he was in Yoongi’s body and Yoongi was this upset about what happened with Taehyung then it wasn’t looking good.

A noise occurred to him then, it was faint as if it was coming from a distance away but it was definitely a whistle. What was strange was that the other mind in Jin’s head perked up at this sound as if sobering immediately. His heart was racing and he was filled with a longing to see someone.

*That melody*....

His steps were quick and much steadier all of a sudden. He had to go to that shop, *their* shop.

The whistling did sound like a song of some sort and though it was only slightly familiar Jin had no idea what song it was.

But he was sure that he’d heard it before.

After a few minutes of walking, he approached what looked to be a music store judging by the instruments in front and the albums on shelves that could be seen through the glass entrance.

The whistling stopped a while ago but that didn’t deter the other mind in Jin’s head at all. In fact, the stopping of the whistling only made him walk faster, worried that whatever he was going to the music shop for would no longer be there when he got there.

But as he glanced around inside, seeing the interior lights off and the small brown piano at the back of the shop devoid of life and completely empty he realized somehow that he was already too late.

Even though he was drunk, Jin could feel the same sense of foreboding that he had felt the entire time he hung out with his friends that day. As if every being was holding their breath and waiting for that single moment of change.

It seemed like that feeling was coming from both Jin’s own mind and the one sharing it and as he slowly turned, preparing to go back the way he came, go home and maybe call Jeongguk even though he was drunk and would definitely end up saying someone that he would regret- he saw
Unfortunately, it was at that same moment that he saw the car heading towards him and watched in horror as Jeongguk stepped off the curb.

He was moving before he could even think, completely sober due to the panic rising like lava in his chest. He was running faster than he thought he had the ability to but even he knew that there was no chance of making it to Jeongguk before the car did.

He could hear nothing but the beating of his own heart in his ears as he yelled out his name futilely.

Jeongguk’s stunned gaze moved from the car to Yoongi for only a split second before the collision.

Jin felt like vomiting. He didn’t know if it was his own feeling or Yoongi’s but he was getting flashbacks to witnessing the car accident with Hye-su and the actual feeling of seeing Jeongguk be hit with the car was only multiplying the nausea.

Jeongguk was on the ground now, having been hit at an angle by the car which went screeching past in an attempt to stop suddenly.

The younger seemed to be unconscious which was good because Jin couldn’t imagine how much pain he was in. He remembered what the doctor had said about Jeongguk’s condition and how horrible it sounded but he had no idea that it would look this bad.

Jeongguk’s face was pressed to the gravel and Yoongi hurried to crouch next to him and pull him into his lap, a shaking hand pressed to his bleeding head and unable to pull his eyes away from his leg.

The bone was jutting out from his calf horribly, dark red blood spilling out from the wound like a punctured hose.

An incredibly loud sound registered in his ears and he looked up to see the car that had only barely managed to avoid hitting Jeongguk full on, in the music shop he had been previously looking into. A fire had started somehow, engulfing not only the car in flames but also the store and even from his position down on the ground with Jeongguk, Yoongi could see the small brown piano in the
back licked with flames as well.

Jin wasn’t aware that Yoongi was sobbing until he could no longer breathe and tried, through his own distress, to force the body he was in to take deep gulps of air which only resulted in him choking and he was crying so hard that he was still only able to suck in breaths of air through the guttural sobs erupting from his throat.

A horrible thought engulfed Yoongi’s mind that only made him cry harder and caused the ache in his chest to feel like a hole ripped out of it leaving only bloody tendrils of flesh and muscle.

*Jeongguk could be dead.*

The fear that he had been feeling earlier had come to fruition and he was terrified, so badly that he was shaking.

He was gasping for air like a fish out of water as his eyes stayed trained on that brown piano slowly being swallowed by flames, and Jin was shocked by the pure anguish that Yoongi was feeling in that moment.

It felt as if he was dying.

Dying of wounds that didn’t physically exist but hurt just the same.

Jin wished that he could escape Yoongi’s thoughts and get away from the phantom pain that reminded him too much of his own.

He had felt similarly when he watched Hye-su be hit with the car and he had felt as if the light was snatched cruelly from his life as if he had never been deserving of it in the first place. He had felt worthless. Useless. And hopeless.

But most of all- pathetic.

Just thinking about it hurt and the actual sight of Jeongguk being hit by the car paired with Yoongi’s own distraught was too much.
It was too much.

A vision of the sea took over his sight again and he remembered wanting to leave, he remembered wanting to get away but then all he saw was darkness and it just didn’t make any sense.

Jin couldn’t remember. He had a feeling that he did something that he shouldn’t have but what did the sea have to do with it? All he could remember was the darkness.

Yoongi looked up at the approaching ambulance, the red and blue lights flashing in his vision and for once Jin was glad to feel his vision swim and welcomed the feeling of being in a different body for the first time.

---

Yes, Jin was in a different body. Which was incredibly disorienting because he was still looking at the flashing of red and blue lights although they were in the distance now.

He was standing, and definitely taller than Yoongi had been, more around the height of his own body. With a quick glance down, he nearly laughed out loud at how obvious it was that he was in Namjoon’s body.

If Jin was truly rotating in and out of all of his friend’s bodies than that meant he only had Namjoon and Hoseok left. And Hoseok would definitely not be caught dead in the ratty orange converse that Namjoon had a particular affection for.

He had known Namjoon for years and though he knew about Namjoon’s uneasy financial situation he also knew that Namjoon owned other shoes in much better condition but wore the ratty orange converse with the holes in the bottom of the soles anyways.

The lingering ache in his chest from being in Yoongi’s body remained and Jin vaguely wondered if he could cry in Namjoon’s body because he still felt incredibly overwhelmed by sadness. But as he adjusted to the change he felt an equally overwhelming sense of dread that definitely wasn’t his own.

Jin focused his vision, confused because he was sure that Namjoon hadn’t been at the scene of the accident with Jeongguk yet he was still seeing flashing police lights.
Actually, they were mostly police cars Jin realized as he continued to look at the scene.

He was standing a bit down the road from an apartment complex, and not the nice kind like the one that Jin lived in. No, these were the kinds of apartment complexes that were often shown on the news with reports of gang violence, stabbings, or robberies.

It was a place those not fortunate enough to have an abundance of money stayed.

But… Namjoon lived in a house, so who lived here?

And why was he feeling so much dread as he looked at the building?

Jin got his answer as Namjoon reached into the pocket of his jeans, taking out his phone and swiping through his contacts as he searched for a particular name.

Taehyung.

Was this where Taehyung lived then?

He was chewing nervously on his lip as he pressed call, holding the phone up to his ear and listening to the dial tone.

“The number you have dialed has been disconnected or is no longer in service. If you feel that you are getting this message in error, please check the number and try your call again.”

His hands were shaking in fear as his mind rushed with thoughts.

He didn’t do anything stupid. Namjoon attempted to convince himself.

He’s just being an asshole like usual whenever things get to be too much and he’ll show up again acting like nothing happened.
Namjoon gulped, fingers wrapping around the phone tighter in fear and teeth digging into his lip hard enough to draw blood.

*Call again and if he doesn’t answer…*

He was too scared to finish that thought.

Namjoon pressed the button to call Taehyung again and was unsurprisingly met with the same message. He called twice more shakily, and still was met with no response.

Jin didn’t quite know what Namjoon was so afraid of and was shocked when a rush of frustration ran through his veins, making him angry enough to consider throwing his phone to the ground.

He paced with his hands laced behind his head, trying in vain to calm himself down.

*You shouldn’t have been so passive with him the other day, you idiot!* Namjoon berated himself.

Jin was met with a foggy mental replay in his head of Namjoon answering his phone during his lunch break, exhaustion weighing down his limbs and an acute sense of irritation as he heard Taehyung’s voice on the other end of the line.

*“Hyung, I don’t know what to do anymore.”*

Namjoon had sighed, rubbing his eyes aggressively and had wanted nothing more than for the conversation to be over.

Taehyung was like a little brother to him and he had always felt obliged to help him, even when he turned out to be a professional at getting Namjoon into trouble. So, therefore, Namjoon had become somewhat of a professional in cleaning up Taehyung’s messes.

But Taehyung was always making messes. He was impulsive and brash and never thought about his actions before he did them. And Namjoon was, quite frankly, tired of it.
He couldn’t help the exasperated tone of his voice as he answered.

“Taehyung. I’m at work.”

“I know, sorry, but I can’t stand him. He’s so full of hatred and anger and it hurts to even look at him now because all he wants to do is get drunk and hit the two of us. I can’t keep living like this, it’s already been over a decade. Haven’t I suffered enough?”

Namjoon couldn’t help but roll his eyes. He knew that Taehyung’s father was a drunk who got angry and aggressive whenever he drank but Taehyung complained about it so much that it didn’t even have any effect on him anymore.

He had other things to worry about. Like how he was going to tell his parents that he wanted to go to college in Ilsan and finally accept that offer for a full-ride scholarship.

But he had regretted what he had said to his younger friend seconds after he said it because he would never be able to take those words back even if was just his exhaustion talking.

“You need to grow up, Tae. You’re only one year younger than me. Life isn’t fair and it sucks and we all just have to deal with it. If you want to get you and your sister away from him then get a job and save up enough money to do it. You think I sit around complaining about how broke my family is? No, I do something about it and so should you.”

He knew the younger was too god damn irresponsible to keep a job but he said it anyways. Because he was tired.

Taehyung was quiet for a long moment and Namjoon had to check his phone to see if the younger had actually hung up on him.

“But… Hyung… can’t you just-”

Namjoon cut him off immediately. “No, I don’t care. It’s not something I can even take care of anyways. It’s your problem, Taehyung. Deal with it. I gotta go, lunch is ending.”
Jin could see the scene so clearly as if Namjoon had been thinking about it over and over since the day it had happened.

It was a cruel thing to say but Jin still didn’t understand why Namjoon was so terrified.

What could Taehyung have done that was making him so scared?

Namjoon reflected back to what had happened at the beach and cursed his own anger at Taehyung for letting the younger be beaten by Jin.

*That was wrong. Namjoon lamented. That was so wrong of me. Taehyung sees me as one of the few people to actually protect him and yet I let something like that happen to him.*

Jin remembered the brief conversation the two had about the incident and was glad to know that Namjoon regretted it as much as he did but Namjoon had also seemed so calm about everything then.

But as Jin thought about it he remembered the panic in Namjoon’s eyes when they returned to the beach and Jin found the crumpled photo that Taehyung had been keeping in his pocket.

“It’s Tae’s. It’s a photo of him and his father. It’s the only picture of the two of them that he has. He wouldn’t dare admit it but I’m pretty sure it’s one of his most valuable possessions.”

Was what Namjoon had said.

And then Jin remembered his experience being in Taehyung’s body and the darkness that was chasing after him and the recurring memory of blood stained hands.

Namjoon’s thoughts reflected the ones that Jin was too scared to actually put words to.

*He didn’t kill him. Taehyung didn’t kill his father, he’s not that fucking stupid.*
But Jin remembered all too well the way that Taehyung had run away from them all, a final goodbye swallowed by shame, sprinting away like the devil had been chasing him.

And maybe it had been.

Namjoon’s phone began ringing in his hand and his attention quickly turned to it, hope alighting in his chest that it might have been Taehyung only to dissipate quickly when he saw Hoseok’s name sprawled across the screen.

“What? Why? What happened?” He could hear the sound of cars zooming by in the background and Hoseok’s labored breathing through the phone.

“Jeongguk,” Hoseok paused for a moment, breathing deeply into the phone. “Jeongguk was in an accident. He was hit by a car. He’s in the hospital now or being taken there, I don’t know. I’m heading there now. I called Jimin already so I’ll call Jin next. I don’t know what the hell is going on, Joon. I mean, Tae this morning and now this? Have you heard from him by the way?”

Bitterly, Jin realized that he was the last one Hoseok called and the knowledge of that both angered and saddened him.

Namjoon swallows down the guilt on his tongue as he lies, still watching the police from a distance as they start rolling out the yellow tape to mark a crime scene.

“No, I haven’t. I don’t know what happened earlier but he’s going through some stuff, don’t worry about it.” His heart is beating erratically as he thinks about Jeongguk being in the hospital and Jin can’t understand why Namjoon was keeping what he knew about Taehyung such a secret from everyone.
Hoseok huffed in a way that makes it clear he’s annoyed. “How can anyone not worry when someone who can’t swim jumps into the ocean out of nowhere? Whatever, Namjoon, just… get here, okay?”

“I’m on my way.” Namjoon responds and hangs up the phone, the sudden light of the phone screen flashes in Jin’s eyes and suddenly he’s not outside anymore.

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He’s in a small bathroom from the looks of it, the white tiles dark with shadows since the only light is coming from a small bulb under the mirror.

His hands are braced on either edge of the sink and he’s staring into Hoseok’s eyes.

Which would be strange in the first place, because why was Hoseok staring at himself so intently in a dark bathroom- but he’s shaking.

He’s shaking like he’s freezing which is extremely disconcerting because Jin is fairly certain that he’s warm and actually sweating slightly.

Don’t.

Is the single thought that he keeps hearing the other mind in his head repeats over and over.


But it’s then that he gets fully adjusted to the change in bodies and he feels the need. He felt it digging like claws into his skin, heard it whispering into his ears like a lover, and he felt it wrapping around his mind like a snake.

He was scared.

He was so, so scared.
But he was also anxious and nervous and angry and confused.

Because he didn’t understand why Taehyung jumped off that structure and threatened all of them with change. He didn’t understand why it felt like all of his friends felt like they were trying so hard to be happy rather than just being happy. He was nervous and anxious about what change meant. He was angry that Jin seemed so tired, that Jimin’s smile looked so fake, that Jeongguk and Yoongi didn’t sleep all night, and angry that he doesn’t enjoy alcohol so he couldn’t even have the luxury of being away from his own thoughts.

He was angry that he was in this position again, the one he swore to both himself and Jimin to never be in again.

He was angry that he hates change and that the only family he’d ever truly had is at risk of falling apart and he was powerless to stop it.

He was angry that the only way he knows how to live is with the help of medication.

And well, Jin was a little overwhelmed by all of that information. If there was anything that this bizarre experience has taught Jin it’s that all of his friends were hurting in unimaginable ways and that he wasn’t imagining the distance between all of them that day.

And he had no idea about any of it.

And that hurt.

It hurt him enough that he suddenly knew what he had done that morning after Hye-su died. He clearly remembered getting in his truck and driving to the sea in search of a place to be calm but he had hated himself so much that he just wanted it to end. So why hadn’t it? Why was he still being hurt?

Hoseok was breathing heavily with the force of his restraint and Jin wished he could stop him as the man opened the medicine cabinet, grabbing a bottle of pills from the many stored there.

Don’t.
Shaking fingers unscrewed the child protected cap, wishing that it was enough to prevent him from opening it as well.

But Hoseok wasn’t that lucky. He had lived an entire life filled with nothing but bad luck up till now anyways.

He poured the contents of the bottle out into his hand and Jin was horrified that Hoseok was preparing to throw all of \textit{whatever they were} down his throat. He didn’t even know that Hoseok \textit{took} medication let alone \textit{abused} it.

His hand was shaking terribly and he was nearly screaming at himself not to take them. His other hand came off the edge of the sink only long enough to turn the tap on and Jin was worried about the possibility of him falling over since he was shaking so much.

Two of the small blue pills fell out of his hand and into the sink, slipping down the drain.

In the back of his mind Hoseok was annoyed that he’d wasted them like that and it’s the part of his mind that Jin fears the most since it’s the voice whispering for Hoseok to take them, promising that he’ll feel better after he does.

But then his hand is flipping over all of a sudden and the multitude of blue pills that he’d been holding swirl around the drain of the sink before disappearing altogether.

Hoseok bent over the sink, forcing the ceramic material to hold all of his weight as he nearly collapses with relief.

\textit{He could do this}.

He doesn’t need pills to calm him down. He doesn’t even have anxiety issues for fuck’s sake. All he has is his Munchausen's and he prays for the day where his past can stop coming to haunt him and he can look at a snickers bar without crying.

Jin didn’t know what the hell that meant but he was glad that the little voice in the back of Hoseok’s head has shut up for the moment. He was also glad that unlike him, Hoseok didn’t give
into that voice whispering evil things to him. Jin had no idea what Hoseok had been through but he admired that even through his struggles his sunshine smile had never once seemed forced.

But then he heard the familiar jingle of Hoseok’s ringtone. The cheery voices of a girl group cutting through the almost overbearing silence and Jin knew what was coming next.

Hoseok hurried to throw the empty pill bottle in the garbage, as if leaving it lying around would get him into trouble or something and he quickly turned off the light to the bathroom in search of his phone but Jin’s vision wavered and he wasn’t not in Hoseok’s body anymore.

---

Jin’ stared at the white tiles in front of him, startled by how relieved he was to see them again and be back in his own body.

Whatever had just happened to him was weird, worse than weird- crazy. And he still had no idea how it was possible, if it was truly real life, and why he couldn’t just be done with everything like he wanted.

But if what he saw was the truth, then his friends were hiding much more than just a bad day from him and that’s what hurt the most. The fact that many of them were battling things like mental illnesses and serious family issues and they couldn’t even confide in Jin about it.

The fact that it could have been any of them doing something stupid one day and ending their own life was… scary.

Jimin’s mind was scary, and the implications of what Taehyung might have done to his father were even scarier.

But even through Jin’s bitterness he hoped that they were at least confiding in each other and not suffering all by themselves. He had suffered alone and look where that got him.

In some messed up and confusing purgatory or something with no way out.
He had ended up trapped here when all he had wanted to do was get away.

Chapter End Notes

I don’t ship Sugakookie/Yoonkook irl but I found it kind of hard to deny them in the HYYH storyline. Whoops

Fun Fact

The main concept of the Wings era was the transition of BTS from school kids to adults which is why they used the story “Demian” by Herman Hesse as a main focus of the concept as it tells the story of a young boy transitioning from youth to adulthood and the struggles that he faced.
ChapterNotes

Surprise! I’m upping the update schedule to twice a week, twice a month. (Basically every three weeks I’ll be updating twice.) Thank you guys for the support! <3

MusicRecommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I was scentless and completely empty”

Jeongguk’s parents divorced when he was eight.

Before that he had been in a loving family with parents that doted on him endlessly. He was an only child and was treated like he was the best thing that had ever happened to either of his parents. And perhaps he was.

They both worked good jobs that paid well and they lived comfortably. There was little that they wanted. If Jeongguk wanted something, he was almost always given it. He was a happy child in a happy family. His parents were happily married and loved each other endlessly. Things were good, great even.

Even though he can barely remember those times now, he remembered the happiness.

He guessed that he was too young to understand what happened when he was seven. They were happy and comfortable but his father was a gambler. He was great at it and more often than not he came away with plenty of winnings. The problem began when he started to lose. He lost and then lost and then lost again.

Jeongguk remembered when his parents began to yell at each other. First, it was only late at night
after they’d put him to sleep. Then it happened at the dinner table. And eventually any time they were in the same room together they were yelling. He didn’t understand it all at that time and it scared him.

His mother told him that his father was acting recklessly and had an addiction to gambling. Where they had been comfortable before, now they were struggling to pay bills and the worse their financial situation became, the more his father gambled, desperate to win back what he’d lost and unable to accept defeat.

And so, eventually, Jeongguk’s mother had enough of his father’s irresponsibility and filed for divorce.

The process was a blur in Jeongguk’s mind. He remembered crying in his bed terrified of what was happening to his family, and not understanding anything.

Then, one day, his father was kissing the top of his head with tears in his eyes, telling him goodbye and then pulling his suitcase behind him as he left.

Jeongguk remembered sobbing endlessly that day. One moment his father was there and then the next, he was just gone. He was too young to understand anything and his mother was too angry to properly explain it to him.

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Jeongguk and his mother moved to Seoul shortly after that.

After his father had left, Jeongguk at least expected his mother to be there for him. It was a childlike expectation that, since one of his parents had suddenly disappeared from his life, the other parent would dote on him twice as much as before and fill the empty space.

Instead, it was like he’d lost both of them. Because his father had left their financial situation so terrible, his mother had picked up a second job to not only build their funds up again but also support them as a single parent. He barely ever saw her.

She went to work early in the morning and dropped him off at school hours before class started, having to rely on early morning care at the school to take care of him. He stayed until late in the
evening, spending time in the library or in the after school care program and was often one of the last kids to go home. He supposed the school understood his family’s situation and were kind enough to accommodate him.

In those evening hours, his mother would pick him up and bring him home. She would cook dinner and make sure that he ate and then sternly tell him to make sure all his homework was done before turning on the television and to be in bed by nine. Then, she cleaned up at went to bed.

In those few hours that he saw her she was stressed and irritable and in no mood to talk. He only meekly asked her about her day and tried to do everything that she asked, even taking over doing the dishes when she started falling asleep at the table. It was like she had become a completely different person.

She would snap at him over the smallest things like leaving a toy on the floor or having the tv up too loud. Jeongguk quickly learned to be quiet, neat, and attentive to her in order to avoid her anger.

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As soon as Jeongguk was old enough, he stopped going to morning and evening care. He took the bus home and walked the rest of the way.

When he was younger, he’d always been surrounded by friends but after moving he had to start all over. It was intimidating not knowing anyone when he had, at one point, nearly known everyone that he went to school with. He withdrew into himself and became meek and shy. He had a few acquaintances but they could never truly become friends because Jeongguk couldn’t go over to their houses and play. His mother was strict with him when she wasn’t at home, she wanted to make sure he was eating and doing everything that he was supposed to. Not to mention she would never have time to come and pick him up from a friend’s house and asking a stranger to drop off her kid was unacceptable.

On top of that, he felt strange now that he had no father. Everyone always mentioned their own and he didn’t know how to explain that his father had left. He’d explained it to his friends in Busan before he left, and because just about everyone knew the situation, not just his classmates but the faculty members and teachers treated him differently and looked at him differently. They had this look in their eyes as they spoke to him kindly that he hated. It was like they felt bad for him and he couldn’t stand that.

His father had kept in touch with him at first, but Jeongguk’s mother wouldn’t let him visit and
because the man had no phone due to barely having the money to support himself in the first place, they quickly lost contact. Jeongguk wrote him letters and every now and then he would get one back. But one day he wrote a letter and sent it and it came back to him with the words “wrong address” written across it. He stopped getting letters after that.

The one thing that Jeongguk realized he truly hated as he got older was being alone.

He lived with his mother but because he rarely ever saw her, it felt like he lived alone in the house. He fixed his own meals, ate by himself, did his homework alone, and nobody told him goodnight when he went to sleep.

He grew up an only child so he had grown accustomed to being alone sometimes, though he still hadn’t liked it then, but his parents made up for it by doting on him and showered him with love. If he needed company, he would shuffle down to his parents room and crawl into bed with them. He couldn’t do that now. If he longed for company he was acutely reminded of how alone he was. It often caused him to fall asleep with tear streaks down his face and a wet pillow under his cheek.

He even thought of the idea of getting a pet. A dog or cat, something that would always be there when he needed companionship but when he brought it up with his mother, she shot it down immediately, saying that a pet would be too much extra work for her. When Jeongguk tried to argue that he would take care of it, she asked him if he would get a job to pay for it’s food as well and that had been the end of that conversation.

School went by in a blur for Jeongguk. He just did what he was told and went through the motions. He didn’t have a favorite subject, worst subject, or even a favorite teacher. To be completely honest, he didn’t have strong feelings about anything.

At thirteen, Jeongguk felt like an empty shell. He had no passions, no interests, no aspirations. Life was boring, monotonous, and he was beyond tired of being alone. He wanted more. He wanted to find something that inspired him and he wanted to feel something new. He’d long grown used to the situation with his family, though thinking of his father still hurt him, his mother finally trusted him to take care of himself and wasn’t so strict with him. Though, the problem with her being less strict was that she spoke to him even less and since she was rarely home she often just left him a list of chores to do. He always did them without complaint, since he’d grown used to that too.
One day, though, Jeongguk stumbled upon something interesting.

The high school in the district was right next to the middle school that Jeongguk went to and behind the middle school was the old, abandoned primary school that hadn’t been used in over five years. It had fallen victim to a terrible earthquake and most of the structure collapsed since it was so old. Rather than repairing the building, the school district just finished building the high school they were working on and the primary school students moved to another building in the city.

The old building was completely off limits to students, though it was visible from outside where the high school and middle school students shared an outdoor patio space for lunch.

Which was why it was strange when Jeongguk saw a dark haired male student, obviously from the high school based on his uniform, sneak into the building. There weren’t any teachers or staff out on the patio, though they would occasionally come out to make sure nobody was doing anything that they shouldn’t have been. The patio was generally was where the older kids sat and some of the more delinquent students would even sneak a cigarette. Therefore, no one was batting an eyelash over the fact that someone had just snuck into the abandoned building. He might have even been the only one to have seen it.

Jeongguk was curious. Incredibly curious.

He glanced around him. He usually sat alone at lunch but he wanted to make sure no one that he knew was out here. The last thing he wanted was someone asking him where he was going or following him to the building when he snuck over there.

Jeongguk was beyond thrilled over the potential for an interesting situation. He wondered what was in the abandoned building but he also wondered why that dark haired person had gone in there at all. It would probably get him in trouble but if it did then maybe his mother would get angry enough to yell at him and he’d be able to see her for the first time all week. He wasn’t purposefully trying to get in trouble to get her attention, he doubted stressing her out any more than she already was would make for any good conversation, but if it happened then it happened.

After confirming that no one from his class was out on the patio, Jeongguk slowly got up and threw his tray in the trash. His heart was pounding nervously but he forced himself to act casual as he approached the old building and tried to find the same opening that the other kid had. Eventually, he found it and with a deep breath he stepped in through the broken glass of a sliding door, ducking under the yellow “condemned” tape. He wasn’t exactly sure what the door was for when the building was whole but he was inside and that was all that mattered.
He regretted his decision to enter the building as soon as he was in it. It was musty from rainwater getting in and above all else, dark. He had to reach into his back pocket to get his phone so that he could light the path in front of him since he couldn’t see much from the little light the broken door was offering. He walked forward slowly, feeling like he was walking into a haunted house. There were still posters on the walls and on the doors, fun, happy cartoon animals with equally happy phrases written near them but the rainwater had dirtied some of them making the cartoon figures look horrific.

What Jeongguk had not thought about was figuring out where exactly the older kid had gone. This place was much bigger than it looked from the outside and he could barely see even with the cell phone light.

He ended up in a corridor that split in two ways and sighed as he glanced down both of them. It was pitch black in either direction and he was beginning to wonder if he had followed a ghost out here because the boy was nowhere to be found. Just as he had that thought, a voice spoke right behind him causing him to shriek and send his phone flying to the ground.

He turned, wide eyed and gasping for breath as he held his hand to his pounding heart and saw the very same dark haired boy that he’d followed out here behind him, holding up a lighter.

The kid looked beyond annoyed to see Jeongguk. “Are you just going to stand there staring at me? I asked you what you were doing in here.”

Jeongguk forced his open mouth closed and reached down to grab his phone, stuttering in fear. “I-I was just… I s-saw you a-and I wanted to k-know what you were doing in… in here.”

He wrapped his fingers around his phone and stood up to face the older boy again. His irritated expression hadn’t changed.

“That’s none of your business. Get out of here and go back to your friends before you get yourself in trouble.”

Like an idiot, Jeongguk’s first reaction was to correct him. “I-I don’t… I don’t really have friends. I was just sitting by myself.”

The older kid rolled his eyes, irises glinting in the low light.
“Move.” He snapped, and before Jeongguk could coordinate his limbs enough to follow the order, the older kid pushed past him and turned left as he continued down the hallway. Jeongguk watched him for a second as he climbed over some rubble and then, not knowing what else to do, followed him.

After a few minutes of following a few steps behind him, the older kid stopped dead in his tracks and turned around.

“I thought I told you to go back outside?” He hissed.

Jeongguk was startled by the sudden movement and responded with wide eyes. “What are you doing in here, though?”

The kid turned back around and started walking again. “I said it was none of your business.”

Jeongguk knew he was playing a dangerous game, following this hostile high schooler, but he thought he was being more of an annoyance rather than outright angering the kid so he continued to follow him. He hadn’t been yelled at so that was a good enough sign for him.

The older boy sighed when he heard Jeongguk’s footsteps behind him but didn’t turn around again.

Jeongguk followed him through the hallways, making a few more turns before he stopped in front of a door. It was surprisingly more intact than most of the building even though the hinges were barely hanging to the doorframe. The older kid opened the door carefully and though Jeongguk expected the door to be slammed in his face, it was held open for him.

He was too surprised to say anything other than a muttered “thank you” and the older kid just grunted in response. Jeongguk stood near the entrance watching him as he walked over to a large window and pulled the dusty blinds open. It barely let in any light, but it was more than enough to see properly. The room seemed like it had been a music room for the elementary school kids. All the small chairs were stacked up in a corner and there were blankets piled on top of the old puzzle patterned rug as if someone had slept on it. Jeongguk looked at the older curiously but was more surprised to see that he had sat down at the brown grand piano in the room.

It was as if the older completely forgot that Jeongguk was in the room as well until he stepped forward and the floor creaked under his weight. The older kid turned to him, glare on his face as if
telling him to *be quiet* without saying it out loud. Jeongguk walked over to the rug and sat down, curious as to what the older was actually intending to do here.

Though it became apparent when he turned back to the piano and began softly playing it. Jeongguk was shocked that the older had just started to play without any sheet music on the stand. He remembered being interested in music when he was younger and in elementary school himself. Then all that drama had happened with his family and he’d forgotten about that interest somehow.

Now, sitting in the old abandoned school and listening to this older kid whose name he didn’t even know play the piano like he was breathing the music into the instrument, Jeongguk felt that interest again.

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Unexpectedly, Jeongguk developed a routine.

After that first day in the music room, the older kid had played the piano until they heard the bell announcing that lunch was over. Then he’d gotten up, affectionately wiped the dust off the piano, closed the blinds, and barely sent a glance in Jeongguk’s direction before leaving the room. Jeongguk had scrambled after him and they hadn’t said a word to each other even after they exited the building together and went their separate ways to their respective classes.

Then, the next day Jeongguk had seen the boy go into the abandoned building again. He’d followed him inside and the older almost seemed surprised to run into him again inside, though he had only sighed with that grumpy look on his face and led Jeongguk to the music room again.

He played the piano again, a different song this time. One that was so sad it drew a tear from Jeongguk’s eye.

The day after that, Jeongguk went to the building as soon as lunch started, wrapping his food up and putting it in his backpack. He was waiting in the room, biting into a pork-filled steamed bun when the older kid walked in and took one look at Jeongguk before he shook his head and continued with his routine of opening the blinds and sitting at the piano. Jeongguk had almost thought he saw a hint of a smile on the elder’s face before he’d turned away from him.

There were a few times when Jeongguk went to the music room and the older kid didn’t show up. It may have crossed his mind that the older was avoiding seeing him and he almost felt bad for
being there if he was ruining the older kid’s personal time in the room. He still had no idea what the kid was even doing out here other than playing the piano, especially when he was sure there were music rooms in both the middle and the high school. But it was obvious even without asking that it was important and meant a lot to him.

His fear that he’d driven the older away after days of not seeing him was proven incorrect when an entire week after entering the abandoned building for the first time, the older finally came into the music room again. Jeongguk wasn’t expecting to see him and was sat in a corner of the room, food in one hand and phone in the other, nearly dropping both when the door opened.

The older kid walked in, looking at Jeongguk for a long moment before he laid his bag down near the piano. He moved to open the blinds as well but was obviously shocked to see that Jeongguk had already opened them. Even though the older hadn’t been coming in, Jeongguk wasn’t going to just sit there in the dark, so he had taken to opening them himself. He even dusted the piano off after a few days as well.

The older kid seemed to notice that as well and, after looking at both the blinds and the piano for a long moment, he picked his bag up again and rather than leaving like Jeongguk assumed would happen, he sat on the puzzle rug with Jeongguk.

Jeongguk watched as he pulled a water and a bag of chips out of his bag and began to eat. The older looked up at after a moment, eyebrow raised as if challenging Jeongguk to say something to him but Jeongguk just averted his gaze and went back to eating his own food.

They ate in silence like that for a while and Jeongguk nearly choked when the older spoke to him for the first since the day that had met.

“What’s your name?”

Jeongguk looked at him in surprise and was surprised to see the older’s gaze on him. He wasn’t eating anymore and heat rushed to Jeongguk’s face when he realized that the older had probably been staring at him for a while.


“W-what’s yours?” Jeongguk asked, tripping over his words as he rushed to speak again.
The older looked away finally, as if he were waiting for Jeongguk to ask. “...Min Yoongi.”

Yoongi. Jeongguk repeated in his head, overjoyed that the mysterious figure that he’d grown strangely attached to finally had a name.

They’re both quiet again and just when Jeongguk worked up his nerve to ask Yoongi another question the older beat him to it.

“So, Jeon Jeongguk is the name of my stalker that has no friends of his own.”

Jeongguk was shocked by the sudden accusation and his mouth fell open as he struggled to come up with an argument. Before he could though, Yoongi shoved his backpack behind him and laid his head down on it, closing his eyes.

“That’s okay. I don’t have any friends either.”

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After speaking to each other after all of the time that passed, Jeongguk felt less like a nuisance and was suspicious that Yoongi enjoyed his company more than he let on. He was still quiet in the music room, only speaking if Yoongi spoke first or if Jeongguk wanted to ask him something. He complimented the older after he played pieces on the piano and gave him his honest opinion, which Yoongi seemed to appreciate.

However, Yoongi didn’t always go to the room to play the piano. Sometimes he ate some snacks, which Jeongguk couldn’t imagine being enough to sustain him as lunch, sometimes he did homework, and lately, he’d been actually writing a song.

The process was incredibly interesting to Jeongguk and he sat at an angle from Yoongi so he could see his fingers on the ivory keys as well as what he wrote down on the paper in front of him.

His interest, apparently, wasn’t nearly as discreet as he thought it was and after a while, Yoongi turned to him one day.
“Hey. Get up here.” The older said and nodded towards the piano bench. Jeongguk nearly tripped over himself in his rush to sit on the bench. He had no idea why Yoongi was asking him to do this all of a sudden, but at the very least, it was an opportunity to watch the process from up close.

“You know how to play?” Yoongi asked him brusquely, glancing over at him.

Jeongguk shook his head negatively.

“You want to learn?” The elder asked and Jeongguk nodded excitedly.

“Yeah.”

Yoongi carefully explained how the keys on the piano worked, going over the different octaves and what chords were. After he explained everything he slowly taught Jeongguk a simple melody, he was calm as he taught and didn’t get frustrated even when Jeongguk repeatedly messed up.

The younger was overjoyed when he finally caught the rhythm of the notes and executed it just as he was taught. Yoongi had a hint of a smile on his face when he asked Jeongguk to play it again and the younger did though he was shocked when Yoongi joined in on the lower register with notes of his own.

The older used both of his hands to play and Jeongguk was grinning ear to ear as they played a beautiful and happy melody together. When they stopped and the air went silent, Jeongguk turned to look at Yoongi, only mildly surprised when he saw that the elder was already looking at him. The hint of a smile on Yoongi’s face was revealed to be a full grin, lips stretching just under his gums and quite possibly the most unexpectedly adorable thing that Jeongguk had ever seen.

Yoongi chuckled a little under his breath and opened his mouth to speak.

“Let me show you another one.”
After that, playing piano with Yoongi became a regular thing. Jeongguk was giddy with happiness over the new discovery that he absolutely loved playing the piano. He had a natural affinity to it and though he’d forgotten, he’d always been moved by music. When his family was still together they often listened to music and watched award shows together. Yoongi taught him more songs and once he’d learned the basics, Jeongguk eventually moved on to the more difficult pieces and melodies. Yoongi was such an excellent pianist that sometimes Jeongguk couldn’t tell if the piece he was learning was something Yoongi had created or something classical.

Once, to test the elder, Jeongguk had asked to be taught how to play the melody to a popular song. It was an I.U song and the older had never heard it before, apparently, he only listened to rap which was surprising considering his piano skill. Yoongi had agreed and after listening to the song in question twice, he played around on the piano, testing out combinations of chords until he found the right notes. Jeongguk watched, impressed, as Yoongi flawlessly played the melody of the chorus. He turned to Jeongguk with raised eyebrows as if fully realizing that the younger had been trying to challenge him.

Yoongi was probably the best pianist that Jeongguk had ever met. And while it was true that he hadn’t met that many pianists he didn’t think he’d ever meet anyone that had half the raw talent and passion for playing that Yoongi did. The older only broke out sheet music when he working on new songs.

The best part of playing piano with Yoongi to Jeongguk was when he worked on new songs, the elder would occasionally ask Jeongguk’s opinion on a melody or chord progression, usually wondering if it gave the feeling that he was going for with the song overall. Jeongguk loved that part, he felt like his input was valued even though he knew little of the various technical aspects that Yoongi would mention. He just knew when something sounded good and when something didn’t.

In particular, there was one song that Yoongi struggled with for weeks that Jeongguk absolutely loved. It was catchy and beautiful and haunting in some places while it was uplifting in other places. Yoongi overheard him humming it one day while they were both sitting down doing homework and the older had moved faster than Jeongguk had ever seen him move as he rushed over to the piano.

“Sing that melody again.” Yoongi instructed, firm, focused, breaking out his songwriting voice as Jeongguk liked to call it.

The younger was confused but obediently sung the melody again, now that he was actually listening to himself he realized that he’d changed it slightly since he still had trouble remembering what notes were what. Yoongi pressed down on the keys in an almost exact mock of Jeongguk’s voice then frantically dug into his backpack for his notebook before rushing back to the piano and scribbling down the new melody. Jeongguk watched, transfixed, as Yoongi added the changed
melody to what he had already and the smile the older had as he turned to face him knocked his breath away for no reason at all.

“You didn’t tell me you could sing, kid.” Yoongi accused, looking at Jeongguk strangely, like he was thinking of a thousand different things at once.

Jeongguk shifted uncomfortably, his heart had leaped up into his throat and he was struggling to push the strange feeling down but the pure excitement in Yoongi’s expression wasn’t helping.

“I mean, I guess I can…” He trailed off.

“You *can*.” Yoongi stated as if it was ridiculous for Jeongguk to be doubting that fact at all.

“You haven’t even *heard* me sing. I was only humming” The younger argued, crossing his arms.

Yoongi lifted an eyebrow and Jeongguk knew he’d made a mistake.

“If you can *hum* a tune, you can carry it. Get over here.” The older instructed, flipping through his notebook to a page with words scribbled all over it.

Jeongguk sighed, but obediently got up and sat down on the piano bench.

“Sing this,” Yoongi instructed.

Jeongguk looked over the page, shocked that Yoongi had written lyrics as well and wondered how many songs the elder had written. “I don’t even know the melody.”

Yoongi scoffed and rolled his eyes. “*Make the melody*. Just sing it.”

Jeongguk was unsure of what exactly he was expected to do but he was interested in the lyrics Yoongi had written and if the elder thought that he could sing, then maybe he could.
He read over the lyrics quickly, noting where each line stopped and started singing the words. Yoongi began playing after a moment, a soft melody that helped guide him. When the pitch of the notes got higher so did Jeongguk’s voice and since it was such a simple melody it was easy to keep up with the pace and after a few minutes, Jeongguk had sung through two pages of lyrics. Yoongi kept playing the melody for a little bit as if he’d had a vision for how the song should sound and needed to hear the entire thing from start to finish.

When Yoongi took his finger off the last note, he turned to look at Jeongguk and his expression was fond as he looked at the younger and smiled.

“See? I told you, you could sing.”

Jeongguk smiled. “What was that? It sounded nice. The lyrics were pretty too.”

“Ah,” Yoongi sighed, flipping through the pages of his notebook as if the sudden attention to that side of his songwriting was embarrassing. “It’s just something I was working on. I have better ones. I just thought that one would suit your voice.”

Jeongguk was intrigued, not willing to let Yoongi just shrug the subject off. “Do you sing?”

He’d never heard the elder do such a thing and the very idea was hard to wrap his mind around but he had heard Yoongi humming some of the melodies to himself from time to time. It hadn’t sounded horrible and by Yoongi’s logic that probably meant that he could sing.

“No.” Yoongi snapped, and Jeongguk swore he saw the elder’s ears burn red before he turned and his hair fell in front of them again. “I… I rap. I’m pretty good at it. That’s mostly what these lyrics are. I write entire songs, melody, verses, and rap verses but since I don’t sing it’s a little hard to hear what the melodies should sound like.”

“I want to hear it,” Jeongguk stated suddenly.

Yoongi turned to him, eyes wide but expression betraying nothing. “What?”

“I want to hear it,” Jeongguk repeated. “Your rapping. You heard me singing so… I want to hear what your rapping sounds like.”
Yoongi looked at him for a long moment and then turned his head towards the piano. He was quiet and Jeongguk thought that he’d maybe overstepped and irritated him but then Yoongi grunted as if clearing his throat awkwardly and began playing the piano again.

Jeongguk didn’t understand what the older was doing until a few seconds into the melody Yoongi opened his mouth and started rapping.

Jeongguk wasn’t expecting it at all, not to a soft melody that sounded like it should have been under a woman’s sweet voice. However, the roughness of Yoongi’s voice, rapping so rhythmically it was almost as if he were singing but the strong inflection on the words as he said them reiterated that he was rapping fit perfectly. Jeongguk listened to a lot of different music- rap, pop, rock, and whatever else you could think of and though he hadn’t been listening to music nearly as much as when he was younger, he’d never heard a song like this. He never knew that rap could be used to deliver such a positive and heartfelt message or that Yoongi was even capable of doing so.

“Dream, your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous your future will be. Dream.”

By the time that Yoongi had rapped the last line of the song and had taken his hands off of the piano, Jeongguk was completely in awe.

“It still needs a bit of work but that’s one of my favorites,” Yoongi explained, tenderly running his finger down the piano keys as if reminiscing.

“Can we make something like that?” Jeongguk asked, excitement making him nearly trip over his words.

“What do you mean?” Yoongi asked, glancing over to him.

“The other song that I’m helping you with. Can we make an actual song out of it? With verses and singing and rapping in it?”

Yoongi shrugged. “Sure. I was planning to write a few rap verses for it anyways. I could just add on some verses for you. Or you could try writing yourself if you want. It’s not that hard.”
Jeongguk was beaming, he had no idea that he would ever get an opportunity to make music let alone find something that he enjoyed doing so much. He’d been nothing but an empty shell going through the motions before but now he looked forward to these lunch meetings and even the few times they’d come here after school. He felt excited, passionate, fulfilled as though he had been waiting for this moment all his life.

“I want to try.” Jeongguk nodded.

“Alright,” Yoongi said, a hint of a smile on his face as he turned to the piano once again. “Let’s make a song together.”

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At some point in time, Jeongguk and Yoongi become friends. And at some point in time, they became even better friends, close friends.

Jeongguk learned that although Yoongi had a grumpy, antisocial exterior, he was actually much nicer that Jeongguk expected him to be, even with the occasional insulting jab or sly comment.

Meanwhile, Yoongi learned that although Jeongguk acted shy and timid, he was really anything but. Jeongguk was rambunctious when excited and almost overly touchy with his friendship.

The abandoned school’s music room became their hangout. They would sneak into it during lunch breaks mostly although Jeongguk suspected that Yoongi often used it as a refuge when skipping class. Yoongi also smoked. Jeongguk rarely saw him do so, the smell of cigarette smoke often lingered on his clothing, but the few times that he had seen the elder smoke he’d always done so in the hallway of the abandoned building. Never in the music room.

Jeongguk often wondered why Yoongi had called taken refuge in such a strange place but upon asking he’d only gotten an answer along the lines of “I like the quiet here”, but that didn’t seem like the truth and the swift way that Yoongi had changed the subject afterward hadn’t sat well with him.

The only thing that bothered Jeongguk about their friendship was that it didn’t seem to extend past the music room. Yoongi made it very clear that he didn’t want Jeongguk talking to him outside the classroom. And while Jeongguk had been hesitant to accept that, he’d at least thought that it would be okay if he were to wait outside the building or near the patio and walk to the building together
with Yoongi. Though, the one time he’d tried that, Yoongi had yelled in his face about not following him and Jeongguk had been so shocked that he had stayed outside and ate in the patio area.

The day after, Jeongguk had purposefully rushed to the music room as soon as lunch began. He waited for Yoongi to appear, wary of the response he’d get from the elder after the day before. To his surprise, though, Yoongi had greeted him normally and set his things down without pause.

Jeongguk needed to understand what had happened so he wasn’t going to sit and pretend that his feelings hadn’t been hurt. He couldn’t even understand why Yoongi had reacted like that out of nowhere.

“Why did you yell at me yesterday?” He asked, careful but firm. He wasn’t going to let Yoongi just shrug it off as it was nothing.

The elder merely glanced at him, an expression on his face like he was confused as to why Jeongguk was asking. “I told you that I didn’t want people to see us together. We can’t walk here together, it would draw attention. Just make sure you come here either before or after me.”

Jeongguk was still confused and frowned. “Why?”

Yoongi glanced at him again and his expression had hardened slightly. “Because I don’t want people seeing us together.”

Jeongguk blinked at what felt like an insult. How exactly was he supposed to feel when one of the few people he actually considered a friend was telling him that they didn’t want to be seen with him? His tongue poked into his cheek as a wave of irritation washed over him.

“Why?” He insisted. He felt angry enough to leave but he wanted to at least know the reason why Yoongi was being such a dick all of a sudden. Was it just because he didn’t want to be seen with an underclassmen? Jeongguk didn’t think that Yoongi was that kind of person and yet he couldn’t think of a single other reason.

Yoongi turned towards him now, expression escalating from the usual grimace on his face to a scowl.
“Kid, don’t take it the wrong way. It has nothing to do with you.” Jeongguk felt himself glaring and it seemed that Yoongi noticed it as well because he sighed and elaborated.

“Fine. You want to know? I’m not liked in my class and while I normally wouldn’t give a fuck, it’s like certain people won’t rest until they find some way to ruin my goddamn day. They got to my friends too, which is why I don’t have any. You don’t deserve any of that, because like I said, it’s none of your business. So, I’d prefer if you were left out of it. And being seen with me practically puts a target on your forehead. So, don’t do that and make me have to yell at you again, okay?”

Jeongguk was shocked into silence at the sudden outburst. It was probably the most he’d ever heard Yoongi speak since they’d met and after Jeongguk nodded it seemed like Yoongi had even more to say.

“You asked why I come here so often? It’s because I like the quiet. I wasn’t lying about that. I love this place even if it reeks of mildew and looks like it could collapse any second. Because this classroom… was where my mother used to teach at this school. This was her class, she taught music. The summer after the earthquake, right before they switched to the other building, there was a freak accident with a gas line and our house caught on fire. My father managed to save me but he couldn’t get to her in time. And by the time firefighters arrived all they could find was a charred corpse.”

Jeongguk stared at Yoongi, mouth hung wide open in surprise. He was speechless. He wanted to say so many things but nothing sounded right and before he could come up with a coherent sentence, Yoongi beat him to it.

“Any other questions? No? Good.” Then he’d turned back around and that had been the end of that.

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Things had been better after that. While they had been fine friends before, now there was less of a boundary between them. Yoongi had felt like a secret to Jeongguk but now that at least some of the secret had been revealed, he felt closer to the elder. Close enough to spill his own secrets, telling Yoongi about his own family. He told him about his father and how he hadn’t seen or heard from him in years and how, even though he lived with his mother, it felt like he lived alone. Jeongguk had never felt comfortable enough to tell someone about his family out of fear that someone would judge him but he wasn’t afraid to tell Yoongi.

In return, Yoongi told Jeongguk more about his mother and how she’d been a huge inspiration in
his life. She’d been the one who had taught him piano and the memories he had of sitting with her at that big brown piano were some of his most cherished things. He told Jeongguk about his father and the strained relationship that they had after his mother had passed. His father was scared of losing him as well and tried to hold tightly onto him but Yoongi felt like he was suffocating. He’d already made plans to move out as soon as he finished high school. He didn’t have much money but he’d scrape by and Jeongguk respected that.

The two had known each other for about a year. Over summer break they had texted each other and though they mostly still met up in the old music room, there were a few times that Yoongi had invited Jeongguk to go to a record shop with him and discover new music. They still didn’t talk outside of the classroom at school which Jeongguk understood but was still sad about. This was the last year that he and Yoongi would be able to consistently meet up during lunch. Yoongi would graduate soon and move out and Jeongguk worried that he’d never see the elder again once that happened.

At least, if it did happen, he would at least be able to keep the song that they had made together. They’d nearly finished it, the melody sounded amazing, the rap lines that Yoongi had written fit it perfectly and Jeongguk had even discovered his knack for song writing and written some nice verses for himself as well. They were still working out some of the kinks, like the problem Yoongi was having with the speed of the song and the speed that he thought it should be rapped at but they had moved on to making a song that Jeongguk had written all by himself.

The younger had wanted to do something to show his gratitude to Yoongi not just for being a friend to him in a time where he needed one, but for reminding him what music had once meant to him. Jeongguk had told Yoongi how lost he had felt before meeting him and how he had no passion for anything at all, and that now that he had found music, he’d found endless passion for the subject. Jeongguk had just wanted to thank him for that so he’d stayed up countless night working on lyrics that could express his gratitude and when he finally thought it good enough to show Yoongi, the elder had been pleasantly surprised that he’d written a song. Though, when Jeongguk had told him that it was a song for him, Yoongi had reread the lyrics and then looked at Jeongguk with an expression so intense that Jeongguk had thought that he’d done something wrong.

Something happened in that moment of silence between them as Yoongi stared at him intensely and Jeongguk’s heart kicked into overdrive. The younger had been compelled to lean towards the elder for some reason but as soon as he’d moved, the spell over them had been broken and Yoongi had cleared his throat and turned towards the piano again. It had been strangely awkward for a moment as Jeongguk realized what he had done, though he had no explanation for why he had leaned forward. He’d been expecting something to happen but he was curious as to what.

Yoongi had avoided eye contact with him the rest of the lunch break but he’d asked Jeongguk a lot of questions about the rhythm of the song and eventually came up with a melody that would match on the piano.
“What do you think about this?” Yoongi asked, one afternoon as he worked on the melody of the song Jeongguk had written. It was nearing winter and the weather was getting colder. There was a hole forming in the ceiling from the heavy rains over the summer and it was letting in a frigid breeze.

They’d been having trouble with the intro to the song and it just wasn’t sounding right no matter what they tried. Jeongguk was doing some homework in the corner of the room but he sighed and put it down as he walked over to the piano bench.

“That sounds okay. What about adding something. Play it again and I’ll show you.”

Yoongi began playing the melody again but this time Jeongguk chimed in on the higher register playing a few notes and then ending with a chord.

“That sounds really good, actually.” Yoongi stated, sounding impressed.

“I learned from the best.” Jeongguk laughed and stood up, preparing to go back to his homework.

Suddenly, the door to the classroom swung open and Jeongguk froze in place, completely startled. A man had entered the classroom, a teacher from the looks of it, and Jeongguk knew before the man had even opened his mouth that this was going to end badly.

“What are you doing in here?” The man demanded, furious eyes passing over Jeongguk and settling somewhere behind him, Yoongi probably.

The man didn’t give them a chance to answer once he laid eyes on Yoongi and started yelling. Jeongguk still hadn’t moved an inch, in far too much shock to even register what the man was saying even as his furious eyes landed on Jeongguk once again and he began to approach him. Jeongguk’s blood was rushing loudly in his ears, mind reeling with all the different ways that he would get in trouble.

This place was strictly prohibited for students, he knew for a fact that Yoongi had smoked a
cigarette barely even ten minutes ago which meant the smell was probably still lingering, all of his things were laid out on the floor in the corner of the room which insinuated that this wasn’t his first time in here, and he was too terrified of what would happen after this to even attempt to defend himself. He’d probably be suspended. His mother might even be called in to speak with someone about his behavior and she’d probably yell at him when they got home. Most importantly, he was too startled to even realize that he was rudely staring the teacher in the face rather than lowering his gaze respectfully.

He realized it only when the man seemed to go into a rage from the lack of response and deliberate rudeness on Jeongguk’s end and smacked him across the face, sending him flying to the ground.

From the corner of his eye as Jeongguk clutched his face, he saw Yoongi get up from the piano bench and rush over to stand in front of him. He wanted to tell the older to stop, knowing that any act of defiance would probably get them into more trouble but as he stood up and the shock began to wear off, he heard that Yoongi was yelling as well.

He’d never really seen Yoongi angry except for the one time when Jeongguk had tried to wait for Yoongi so they could walk to the classroom together, but this was entirely different. The elder’s hands were balled up into fists and he was having an all out shouting match with the teacher. It was to the point where Jeongguk wasn’t sure if Yoongi was defending him or just angry at the teacher in general since, from the little he could understand, it seemed like the two knew each other.

Just as Jeongguk was about to try and get Yoongi’s attention in the hopes that he could convince the older to calm down, Yoongi suddenly lunged forward and pushed the teacher so hard that the man went toppling backward, hitting his head against the open door.

Jeongguk stood, staring at the man in shock, as he saw a trickle of blood run down the man’s head. Yoongi rushed to gather Jeongguk’s things, shoving them into his hands and then grabbed his own.

Jeongguk couldn’t tear his eyes away from the blood trickling down the man’s face but as the teacher began to stir, groaning in pain, Yoongi grasped Jeongguk tightly around his arm and pulled him out of the room.

“Come on. We have to go.” The older muttered and Jeongguk let himself be pulled down the dark hallways. When they reached the entrance, Yoongi tugged him outside and then let go of his arm suddenly and pushed him in the direction of the patio.

“Go back to class. Act like nothing happened, alright?” Yoongi instructed and then turned in the opposite direction.
“What? What about you? Where are you going?” Jeongguk questioned, completely at a loss. What just happened was crazy and the repercussions what Yoongi had done would be harsh.

Yoongi had a look in his eyes that was full of hatred and contempt and Jeongguk found himself a little scared by it. “That fucker has it out for me. I got tired of his shit. Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine. Just go to class and act normal. If you get asked about what happened just tell them the truth. I’m going home.”

And then, without waiting for Jeongguk to say anything, he took off, and Jeongguk was left alone.

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Weeks passed without seeing Min Yoongi. Jeongguk’s life had been steeped with the man and now that he was just gone, the familiar loneliness that Jeongguk had managed to evade for all this time came back with a vengeance.

After the whole situation that had happened in the music room, Jeongguk was called up to the main office since he was identified as being involved in the incident and he’d given a truthful recount of what happened, adding in that he and Yoongi had only been playing the piano when that teacher had barged in and gone off on them.

He was given a stern lecture about the dangers of not only trespassing but being in a condemned building and was sent back to class. He didn’t hear anything else about the incident. He went back to the abandoned school to see if he could go to the music room and find out something but the entrance that was there before had been sealed. Then, he had attempted to text Yoongi and when that didn’t work he tried calling but the number had apparently been disconnected and Jeongguk was at a complete loss.

Around school, he often noticed people glancing at him and heard snippets of conversation involving the teacher and what had happened in the music room. He didn’t really know why people were looking at him the way that they were, as if they knew something that he didn’t, but after a few days he grew tired of it and decided to ask around to see if he could learn anything.

After talking to several different people he learned a variety of different things and though they were in a variety of ways, since so many absurd rumors were going around, it was fundamentally the same thing.
Yoongi had apparently been expelled. Jeongguk was saddened by that but not surprised. He knew as soon as he saw the blood trickle down that man’s face that the consequences would be harsh. He’d also heard a lot about the teacher involved in the accident. The man had apparently been fired, which Jeongguk thought was justified. But he also heard many students saying that the man had always had it out for Yoongi, that he was a complete asshole, and more than a few times he’d heard that the man was homophobic.

Jeongguk was confused by that, not understanding what the man being homophobic had to do with Yoongi or even why the man had it out with Yoongi to begin with but he chalked it up to- the guy was just an asshole. And that was that.

Not many people knew that Jeongguk was actually the one that had been in the music room with Yoongi and he preferred to keep it that way. The rumors were mostly about the teacher that had been fired anyways and Jeongguk only occasionally heard some nasty comment about Yoongi.

Though, he was shocked when one day at lunch, as he was sitting by himself someone sat down at his table. The kid’s hair was fiery red, to the point where it was hard to look at, and he looked like he couldn’t have been much older than Jeongguk. Since he’d never seen him around, Jeongguk guessed that he was an upperclassman but it couldn’t have been by much.

“Hey.” The boy had said, leaning forward on the table as he spoke as if about to tell Jeongguk a secret.

“Uh… hi?” Jeongguk greeted in confusion.

“Oh,” The boy gasped as if suddenly realizing something. “I’m Taehyung.”

Jeongguk had no idea what this Taehyung wanted from him but he would at least try to entertain him for a little while.

“... I’m Jeongguk.”

“Do you know Min Yoongi?” The boy asked suddenly and Jeongguk frowned at him.
“No.” He lied. “Why? Isn’t he that guy that was expelled?”

Taehyung rolled his eyes and grinned. “Don’t lie to me. I’ve watched you sneak off to that abandoned building a bunch of times before. I only saw the back of your head though, so it was hard to find you.”

Jeongguk sighed. He was sure he would have noticed someone with hair this bright looking at him. But Taehyung seemed to be convinced and Jeongguk doubted he could convince him otherwise. “What do you want?”

Taehyung giggled in delight. “I want the gossip! Spill! What were you and Min Yoongi doing in that abandoned building? What happened to get him expelled?”

Jeongguk stared at the upperclassman for a long moment, shocked that someone would be so straightforward and annoyed that he was even being asked about the situation to begin with. He didn’t know the person sitting across from him and though he didn’t seem to have any malicious intent, the music room had been something sacred to both Jeongguk and Yoongi and though it had already been tainted he still wanted to keep it secret.

“What have you heard?” Jeongguk asked instead, abandoning his food- he wasn’t really eating it anyway, and turned his full attention to Taehyung.

“I’ve heard a lot. I mean everyone is talking about it and everything but I don’t like rumors. It just gives people a chance to say whatever they want and see how much they can get away with. I’d rather hear it from the source.”

And maybe it was because it was Jeongguk was lonely again, or the friendly sound of Taehyung’s voice, but Jeongguk told him. It wasn’t like he and Yoongi were doing anything illegal. Jeongguk had gotten used to having company and the thought of being miserable again made him dizzy with fear. Maybe he and Taehyung could become friends.

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Thankfully, after Jeongguk told Taehyung about all the things that happened in the music room the older stuck around. They didn’t necessarily have much in common but every now and then Taehyung came out and joined Jeongguk on the patio and though he usually talked about himself and some of the crazy things he’d gotten up to, and Jeongguk appreciated his presence.
However, just as he got used to the sudden loss of Yoongi in his life something else he never expected happened.

It happened suddenly and without warning, or perhaps Jeongguk just wasn’t paying attention. His mother was home one day when he returned from school and she said that she had to tell him something.

Apparently, his mother had been dating again and she’d met this man that she’d fallen in love with and he had asked her to marry him. Jeongguk was shocked and had mixed feelings at first but when his mother told him that the man had a son of his own, someone who would become Jeongguk’s brother when they got married, he was interested in the idea. His home with his mother had truly felt like he was living in it alone but with the addition of not just a new father figure but also a brother the idea sounded better and better by the minute.

Shortly after Jeongguk met the man for the first time. They had all gone out bowling. He’d been surprised to see how close his mother was to a man he was just meeting and couldn’t help but wonder how long they had been seeing each other. His mother barely had time to see her own son but had somehow met this man and known him well enough that he wanted to marry her. Jeongguk pushed thoughts like that down, though, not liking the implications of them and instead did his best to get to know the man who would become his step-dad and the boy three years older than him who would become his step-brother.

He’d had fun at the bowling alley with everyone but he’d felt strange. It was obvious that his mother was close to the man she was dating but she was also fairly close to his son. Meanwhile, Jeongguk didn’t know either of them well and it sort of felt like he was tagging along. He shook away thoughts like that though. He was happy for his mother and excited that he could be a part of a family again. He would just have to get used to the new additions and they would have to get used to him. Things like that took time after all.

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However, as time passed and his mother remarried bringing that man and his son into their family and they moved into the same house together, the feeling of being left out had only gotten worse.

Jeongguk had been excited about finally getting a brother and he attempted to talk to his new brother but the older was strangely apathetic towards him. He was often given one-word answers to his questions and to be completely honest, it seemed like his brother was avoiding talking to him.
Jeongguk brought that up with his mother but she had simply told him that it was new for his brother too and it would just take time.

That’s what Jeongguk wanted to believe too.

But as he entered high school and time continued to pass, he didn’t seem to be getting any closer to his new father nor his brother. And he felt that even his mother had become estranged from him somehow. At the dinner table, the three often engaged in conversation and ignored his input. The few times that they responded it was in brief words and often had a condescending tone as if he were stupid to be speaking up at all. So, Jeongguk stopped trying to talk to them.

However, the less he tried to talk to them the less they noticed him. Now that his mother had remarried, she stopped working so much and often did the housework. She would make breakfast for everyone but she’d completely forgotten to make enough for Jeongguk once.

He brought up the issue to her, after noticing that there was only enough for three people to eat and she’d looked shocked as if she’d completely forgotten that her own son needed to eat too. Jeongguk’s stepfather had made some joke and his mother had laughed and told him to grab something on the way since he was running late anyways.

It had been a polarizing moment for Jeongguk.

He had felt like he lived alone before and he was looking forward to the addition of new members to the family but for the first time ever he felt like a stranger in his own home. He didn’t know the people surrounding him and they didn’t seem to want to know him. His own mother, the same one that had once doted on him endlessly before, was acting like he didn’t exist. He had blinked at them, watching as they continued to laugh about something else and sat down to breakfast without another word to him.

His stepbrother had come down from upstairs and knocked into him as he passed. Jeongguk had watched them, the family that he wasn’t a part of, sit down and eat. He listened to his stepbrother talk about his longtime girlfriend and heard his mother sound more interested in her step son’s girlfriend than she was interested in her own son.

He realized that he hadn’t actually minded how things had been before. At least he had actually been alone and in a home all by himself. Now, he was surrounded by people and he’d never felt so alone in his life.
Jeongguk absolutely hated being at home. He took any excuse that he could to avoid being around his family. He doubted they even noticed his absence. His mother didn’t even bother to text and ask him where he was when he should have been home. It hurt to his core to know that his mother truly cared so little about him. Thankfully, although Yoongi was no longer a constant in his life, Taehyung had taken up that space. Jeongguk often hung out with the older which gave him all the excuse he needed to stay away from home.

Taehyung was trouble and Jeongguk had known that the second he’d seen his fiery red hair, which was now thankfully back to a dark brown. The boy lived life by direction of impulse. He did what he wanted when he wanted and he didn’t need a reason.

In school, Taehyung was charismatic, friendly, loud, and obnoxious. He had many friends and was constantly surrounded by people. He somehow got away with joking around in the middle of class as all the teachers loved him and all the students thought pretty highly of him. He was popular.

Outside of school, Taehyung was a complete delinquent. Though Jeongguk doubted that many knew that.

The boy spoke roughly and rudely to people and often got himself into trouble, both with the less than savory nightlife and with the police. Taehyung tagged and destroyed and got drunk off the high that acting so recklessly gave him. Jeongguk didn’t understand it at first but over the time that he got to know the boy, it became evident that Taehyung was compensating for something, doing all the reckless stuff because he had to in order to shut everything else out.

At least that’s what Jeongguk thought. Taehyung was… strange. Jeongguk didn’t think that he would ever truly know Kim Taehyung and to be completely honest he didn’t that think that Taehyung would either.

Jeongguk wasn’t always with Taehyung though. Sometimes the older would get into things that he wanted no part of or sometimes Taehyung would check the time and run off muttering something about needing to get home. That’s when Jeongguk would hang out with some of Taehyung’s friends that he’d been introduced to- Kim Namjoon and Kim Seokjin. Both had already graduated high school though Jeongguk hung out with Namjoon more often than Seokjin since he was in medical school and often busy. There were two others in Taehyung’s rather large group of friends, Hoseok and Jimin. Jeongguk often spoke to Hoseok about music since the older was a dancer and every now and then he’d speak to Jimin as well. Jeongguk only spoke to them when they were in a group with others though. He didn’t feel confident enough to speak to anyone alone except for
It was times when Jeongguk found himself alone that he wandered around on the streets listening to music in his headphones and thought of Yoongi. He missed the older’s gummy smile and the serious way that he would talk about music. He missed the songs that they used to write and he missed the times where he felt completely whole and fulfilled in that rundown music room. The old school had finally been destroyed by the city. Jeongguk thought it was probably because of the incident that the school pressed the city to hurry up with the deconstruction. Jeongguk had watched the bulldozers during lunch and a few tears slipped down his cheek as he watched the piano be dragged out along with whatever other salvageable items there were in the school.

Where the abandoned school was there was now a large plot of land filled with fresh soil.

Looking at it made Jeongguk feel hollow inside and he’d long since stopped eating lunch out on the patio. Still, he wondered where that piano had been taken. Jeongguk had been stopping in music shops and second-hand shops in search of it. It wasn’t for himself, the actual piano itself mattered less to him than the music that he had made, it was for Yoongi. That piano was Yoongi’s mother’s. Somehow Jeongguk felt that Yoongi was somehow tied to the thing. He couldn’t help but think that wherever that piano was, was where he would find Yoongi.

He hadn’t seen the older in over two years. He had no idea where Yoongi lived to begin with or if he had gone to finish his last year of high school somewhere else. Even if he had, he would have graduated a long time ago. He might have gone somewhere, traveled overseas or back to Daegu, where he was born.

Maybe Jeongguk would never see him again.

The thought made a tear slip down Jeongguk’s cheek and he roughly wiped it away as he continued to walk. It was another one of those days where Taehyung had rushed home and left Jeongguk alone. He planned to walk around until his legs began to scream at him and he got too tired to continue. He knew that his step brother’s girlfriend was at his house and he also knew that when she was around, his mother acted like the girl was her own daughter and doted on her the way she’d once doted on Jeongguk. He didn’t want to see that.

He sighed and looked up. He didn’t even know where he was. He’d just been mindlessly walking for hours. He usually walked in a circle around a few blocks but it seemed that he had passed the point where he usually would have turned. He looked around and saw a flashing light from a store. He frowned and took one of his earbuds out of his ear. It was late in the middle of the week. There was practically nobody on the streets and he doubted that there was some nightclub with lights like that on this kind of street.
True enough, he could hear the ringing of an alarm. He wondered if there was some robbery taking place and couldn’t help his curiosity. Something was drawing him towards the shop and he intended to find out what. Besides, even if it was a robbery, it wasn’t like he had stolen anything. Not to mention that even with the alarm going off there was no sign of any cops.

Jeongguk approached the shop slowly, looking up at the sign on the building. It was a music shop. Strange. He wondered who would be robbing a small shop like this. As he approached he mostly saw cd’s and album covers. Not much that someone would steal.

It wasn’t until he stood in the doorway of the music store that he heard it. He was staring at the red neon lights outlining the store window, eyes drawn to the hole in the glass front door that had probably set off the alarm and then his eyes fell upon the brown piano in the middle of the small room. There was someone sat at it and the moment that Jeongguk saw it, he heard the notes being played from it over the sound of the blaring alarm. His heart beat in double time and he didn’t even think about what he was doing until he had opened the door and stepped inside in a rush, the name falling from his lips before he could think better of it.

“Yoongi!”

The notes stopped abruptly and Jeongguk stood, panting like he’d just run a mile but instead his head was being flooded with all sorts of thoughts- so many that he couldn’t even keep up with them and it was as if his head was spinning. Then the person sitting at the piano turned around, as if in slow motion, and the thoughts in Jeongguk’s mind stopped immediately.

He had hoped and he had wished and he had been so sure that the person sitting there at that brown piano was the person he’d wanted it to be, but even though he knew it was Yoongi, seeing the man in front of him for the first time in years took his breath away.

There were so many things that Jeongguk wanted to say, so many things that he wanted to ask but he couldn’t get his brain to work properly. He was looking at Yoongi and Yoongi was looking at him, likely mirroring his own expression of surprise.

“Jeongguk?” The man asked, the familiar rasp spreading warmth all throughout Jeongguk’s body.

Yoongi looked older, different. Held himself differently. He had small earrings in ears that hadn’t been pierced before, rings on his fingers and metal bracelets hanging from his wrists. He was wearing a dark hoodie that the strands of black hair practically disappeared into. His face had
matured in a way Jeongguk couldn’t describe but he still looked exactly the same somehow.

Yoongi was practically gaping up at him and Jeongguk couldn’t fight the smile overtaking his face. He knew that he had changed a lot in the past few years. He had been scrawny and timid and everything about his body language screamed in the awkwardness of prepubescence before. Now, he’d grown much taller and his frame had filled out in addition to his time working out in the gym—it was just another excuse to not be in his house but he’d actually gained some muscle from it. He’d let his hair grow out a bit too, and lately he’d been parting it out of his face.

Honestly, he’d known that his appearance had improved pretty greatly. He’d chalked it up to just being friends with Taehyung but he’d also gotten pretty popular at school. Girls had certainly been showing interest, but Jeongguk had never really been interested in dating.

Of course, there were also those that knew that he was involved in what had happened with Yoongi. He hadn’t really understood what Yoongi had been talking about before when he had said that there were people tormenting him but there were three upperclassmen that constantly spat insults at Jeongguk and called him all types of things. He didn’t really know what he’d done to deserve such treatment from random people that he’d never even met but he supposed they were some that had also given Yoongi a hard time.

“Yoongi.” Jeongguk repeated, grinning. He still couldn’t believe that after all this time he was able to meet Yoongi again. He was elated, ecstatic, every word for happiness that he could think of.

Yoongi smiled too, brown eyes glittering with mirth under the dim lighting of the store. “It’s hyung, you brat.”

Jeongguk laughed and Yoongi laughed too. He stood up from the piano and approached Jeongguk, looking slightly up at the younger now since he’d grown taller, the expression on his face made it obvious that he couldn’t believe that Jeongguk was standing there in front of him either.

Jeongguk was first to move forward and wrapped his arms around Yoongi in a hug. Yoongi hugged him back until the two were squeezing the life out of each other.

They let go after a few moments, breathless and giddy with happiness.

“What are you doing here?” Yoongi asked, looking pleasantly confused.
“I just happened to be walking by.” Jeongguk answered, face hurting from how much he was smiling. “What are you doing here?”

Yoongi laughed and gestured to the piano. “I’ve been tracking this piano down. It’s the same one, you know? My mother’s. The was kind of closed though, so I had to break in.”

Jeongguk laughed. “You couldn’t have waited until they opened in the morning?”

“No.” Yoongi answered, voice suddenly serious. “I couldn’t wait another second to play on this piano again.”

They were quiet for a while, each staring at the old brown piano. They had bonded over the instrument, they had created beautiful memories, and here it was- connecting them once again.

“I missed you.” Jeongguk said, lifting his gaze from the ivory keys of the piano to Yoongi’s face.

The older smiled, looking deeply into Jeongguk’s eyes. “I missed you, too.”

They stared at each other for a long moment and Jeongguk realized just how much he had actually missed Yoongi. It felt like a part of him had been missing and he stepped forward, wanting to hug the older again and make him promise to never leave him again.

As soon as he did, the sound of sirens finally sounded. Jeongguk had wondered where the police had been with the alarm of the music shop going off for so long but it seemed that they had finally arrived.

“Shit.” Yoongi swore and grabbed Jeongguk’s arm. The younger barely had any time to react before Yoongi began running and pulling him along.

As they exited the store, Jeongguk saw the police cars turn the corner down the street.

“They’re coming!” He shouted and began properly running as well, Yoongi still hadn’t let go of his hand though and Jeongguk was glad for that. He would hate for this to turn out just like the last time they had been running from something but, thankfully, it didn’t seem like Yoongi had any
intention of letting Jeongguk go this time.

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They ran for a while, long after they had lost the police. Yoongi seemed to know the area well and Jeongguk was surprised when they ran up the stairs of an apartment complex. They were out of breath and Jeongguk doubled over as he waited for Yoongi to dig out his keys and open the door. He pulled Jeongguk inside once he got the door open and before Jeongguk knew it, his back was against it.

He laughed breathlessly against the cool surface of the door as the air conditioning hit him and dried the sweat on his skin.

“Why do we keep ending up like this?” He asked, overjoyed and drunk off the adrenaline in his veins. He felt like he was floating, he was happy and the space in his heart had finally been filled once again, he felt like he could do anything as long as he had Yoongi by his side.

Yoongi laughed and suddenly he was close. He was standing right in front of Jeongguk and he was everything Jeongguk could see, everything he could smell. His heart was pounding in his ears and though it had been pounding because of all the running, it felt different now. Jeongguk felt nervous as if he wanted to do something. There had always been this energy between him and Yoongi and it was something Jeongguk could never explain. Yoongi was close but Jeongguk wanted him to be even closer, he wanted to touch him, feel his skin and be wrapped in Yoongi’s body heat once again.

Jeongguk didn’t know what those thoughts meant or why he was suddenly overwhelmed by them and the intensity that he wanted. He wanted Yoongi.

“I missed you.” Yoongi muttered once again but it sounded different now. His tone was deeper, it echoed in the empty space of the apartment and rang loudly in Jeongguk’s ears. Yoongi’s eyes were burning into his and it suddenly felt like the older could read all of Jeongguk’s thoughts as if they were written all over his face.

Jeongguk could feel the older’s breath fanning over his skin, raising goosebumps where ever it touched. Yoongi’s eyes left his, settling lower on his face making Jeongguk swallow audibly and the sound seemed too loud in the minimal space between them. He thought he should say something, respond to Yoongi somehow but he couldn’t find any words. It was like his breath had been stolen from him and he waited for something, anything to happen.
“Jeongguk.” Yoongi whispered, breath raspy. It sent a shiver down Jeongguk’s spine. “I-I missed you.”

Jeongguk’s eyes were wide when Yoongi suddenly stepped closer and there was a warmth on his lips. Yoongi was… kissing him. They were kissing.

Jeongguk could feel Yoongi’s chapped lips over his own and he tasted the alcohol on his mouth. He hadn’t even realized that Yoongi had been drinking. Jeongguk had long forgotten how to breathe but this was nice, it was somehow exactly what he’d been wanting though he hadn’t been able to put words to it until now. He’d never really kissed anyone except for this girl in elementary school in the middle of recess. This was entirely different though.

Jeongguk hadn’t felt anything back then and it hadn’t even really been an enjoyable experience but as he hesitantly parted his lips and pressed against Yoongi’s mouth, he felt so much at once that it was hard to for his brain to keep up. Somehow his arms had worked their way around Yoongi and he felt the older under him; he was small, slender, a little shorter than Jeongguk. Everything about him was hard and angled, girls were softer, rounder, but Yoongi was completely different. Jeongguk wasn’t even thinking about him in terms of male or female, he was just Yoongi, and Jeongguk realized just how long he’d been wanting to do this.

Yoongi’s hand crept up Jeongguk’s nape and grasped the shorter hairs there, then he was pushing against Jeongguk harder, pressing him into the door. He was everywhere and though they were both wearing jackets, Jeongguk could feel Yoongi’s warmth all over him. He wondered what it would be like if their skin could touch like this. If Yoongi was all over him and pressing kisses to his chest.

As if sensing that Jeongguk wanted more, Yoongi’s other hand crept under his jacket and onto his hip bone, rubbing circles on his bare skin. Jeongguk was finally allowed to breathe as Yoongi broke their kiss, pressing light kisses down his jawline and down his neck. Jeongguk couldn’t help but let his head fall back against the door as Yoongi began nipping and sucking at his skin.

The situation was completely overwhelming and Jeongguk was well and truly overwhelmed. It felt like he was having an out of body experience. Yoongi was all over him and the hand on his hip was warring for attention over the tongue on his neck. Jeongguk was gasping as he tried to catch his breath but he couldn’t manage to do so. Yoongi sucked particularly hard right at his collarbone and Jeongguk’s mouth fell open as a moan spilled out.

He shocked himself at the sudden sound. He didn’t even realize he could make such a noise and Yoongi seemed shocked by it as well. The hand on his hip rushed away as if burned and Yoongi
took a few steps backwards, putting distance between them. He looked with wide eyes at Jeongguk as if he couldn’t believe what had just happened.

Jeongguk was confused by Yoongi. In more ways than one, but at that exact moment, he didn’t understand why the older had stopped. It had felt good, too good and Jeongguk had wanted to keep going, he didn’t even know what they were doing but he wanted more of it. He wanted Yoongi. And it had seemed that Yoongi wanted him too but he could see the older closing off.

“Yoongi-” Jeongguk began, panic suddenly setting in but Yoongi cut him off immediately.

“You should probably go.” He snapped and the way that he suddenly avoided Jeongguk’s eyes hurt like a knife.

“Yoongi don’t-” Jeongguk tried again but he knew that it was too late.

“Youngmomisprobablywonderingwhereyouare.Youshouldgohome.”Yoongiinstructedandhisvoicewassuddenlycold.

Jeongguk wanted to argue that she probably hadn’t even noticed that he wasn’t home to begin with, but he swallowed down the words. He felt strange now. The adrenaline rush had disappeared and now he was left with too many questions. He had just basically made out with Yoongi and that gave him a lot to think about. And he couldn’t exactly think clearly with the older in front of him, especially not after knowing how good those lips could feel slotted between his own. It was probably best if he did leave.

He bit his lip and nodded. Yoongi walked away, further into the apartment, and Jeongguk took that as his sign to leave. He opened the door and stepped back out into the night.

Those strange rumors about Yoongi suddenly made much more sense now. Yoongi was gay. And at some point, it must have gotten out at school. That was probably why Jeongguk had so many eyes on him after the incident and why those three upperclassmen were so hellbent on giving him a hard time. But if Yoongi was gay… and Jeongguk had just made out with him and liked it…

What did that make him?

Chapter End Notes
I had to stop myself from making this chapter 20k. I seriously get carried away with these two, smh.

**Fun Fact**

In recent concepts and music videos, it seems like Jeongguk is taking on the position of the main character rather than Jin, this can be seen in Spring Day as well as Fake Love, especially the extended version.
Jin drowns, which is why he finds it extremely strange to be waking up in his body as if nothing happened. He finds six photographs and, after touching one of them, he goes through the minds of all of his friends, showing him not only the events of that night, but the secrets that they’ve all been hiding. When he returns to his own body he is relieved but also very confused.

It’s scary to Jin how something so confusing and scary could become so comforting in such a short amount of time, but there’s nothing but relief on his mind now that’s he’s back where he started.

He’s also glad that his mind is only his own, with no guests coming along for the ride.

Most importantly, he’s grateful to know what happened to him before he ended up here.

Although, Jin didn’t know why he was being forced to keep going when all he wanted to do was stop. Being in his friend’s minds, whether it was real or not, had hurt and it had been painful in a way that he had never imagined. Everyone was harboring so many secrets that it was a miracle the group had functioned for so long without falling apart.

But Jin supposed he had somehow seen it coming. If that overwhelming feeling of dread he had felt that day was any indication.
That was the thing about change. It always came suddenly and without warning, but you could always feel it right before it struck. A nagging feeling that you continuously shoved down and called “ridiculous” even as every fiber of your being knew it was the truth. But even if you did believe in that feeling it wouldn’t matter at all. There was no way to stop change once it was set in motion. All you could do was sit back and watch.

Jin had always hated feeling powerless.

With a tired sigh, he looked around his small surroundings once again and was shocked to see that the wall behind him was suddenly marked with black paint.

It looked like it had been hastily and sloppily painted in the vague outline of a butterfly and though there were a bunch of other markings and words on the wall, the only thing that Jin could decipher was the word *nevermind*.

He didn’t know what the significance of the word was but his attention was captured by movement from the corner of his eye before he could think about it any further.

Three black butterflies fluttered just above his head for a brief moment before they ascended upwards into the dark recesses of the ceiling.

*How did they even get in here?* Jin wondered in absolute confusion. He looked around, searching for a hole or crevice that the insects could have come through, but there was nothing that stood out. He was still locked in on all four sides without even a hint of an exit, as well as still being surrounded by water on the small platform that he was sitting on.

Curiously, he reached out a hand, sticking it into the water and creating small waves in it. It was freezing cold, cold enough to sting his hand but what horrified him was the sudden appearance of color in the water that seemed to be coming *off of his hand*, saturating the water more and more with vibrant swirls until Jin suddenly realized that it looked like his hand was *melting* and he quickly snatched his hand out.

He looked over his hand with a pounding heart, but other than the redness from the piercing cold, it seemed perfectly intact.

Though as he looked into the water again, the colors were still diffusing, branching out from where his hand was initially and spreading quickly although the colors weren’t fading at all as they mixed
with the water. If anything it looked like oil paint had been dumped in.

Strange.

Jin’s attention refocused to where the photographs were still spread out before him as they’d been before he touched the first one. But as he looked at them he realized that there were now only five photographs and in the place of the sixth was a single white flower petal that looked like it might have come from a lily.

Bracing himself for whatever would happen next, Jin hesitantly reached out for the next photograph, but even as he squeezed his eyes tightly shut and felt the smooth plastic between his fingers nothing happened.

He opened his eyes slowly and was surprised to see the same white tiles surrounding him. He shut them again, gripping onto the photograph and focusing his attention on the feeling of it.

But nothing happened.

With a relieved sigh, Jin opened his eyes again, looking down at the photo. He supposed it was silly of him to assume that anything would be a constant in this strange place he’d found himself in. But it had at least been worth a try.

The photo in his hands was grey with strange dark lines and shapes that made no sense to his eyes. Jin didn’t know much about photographs themselves, since he had always used instant polaroid cameras, but unless this was somehow purposefully made to look so strange he guessed that the picture had yet to be developed or was developed incorrectly.

In the photography class he’d taken in school he once had to handle developing his own photographs and he distinctly remembered how creepy the dark room had been with the red lights and hanging photos. There had been containers of developer that contained his classmate’s photographs and Jin had tirelessly worked to perfect his own. Though, the process wasn’t as easy as it had seemed and it had taken many tries to get the photo to develop properly.

But it seemed like the other four photographs were in a similar state.

Jin sighed, glancing between the water that was still spreading color in front of him and the
photograph in his hand.

*It wouldn’t work.*

But wasn’t there a red light under the platform that he was sitting on?

Jin bit his lip, watching the colors continue to swirl vibrantly.

*It was worth a try.*

Already shaking his head at the idiotic plan, Jin shifted until he was kneeling and shuffled closer to the edge of the platform. Logically this idea didn’t make any sense but Jin wasn’t sure that anything logical applied to this strange place that he was in. A few moments ago his hand had started to melt into rainbows when he put it in water.

Surely things couldn’t get any weirder than that?

With the picture in hand, he slowly lowered his hand into the colored water. The tip of the photo touched the water and Jin watched as it slowly slipped beneath the surface.

He waited a moment, making sure to keep a good grip on the photo even as color spilled out from where his fingertips touched the water. He would have to fish around to get the photo back if he dropped it and he didn’t want to know what would happen if he left his hand in the water for too long.

But as the moment passed with nothing happening, Jin began to really believe that it was a stupid idea. With his luck, the photo would be completely ruined now and he would have no way out of this room.

Irritatedly, he began pulling the photo out of the water but was surprised to hear a sudden bubbling noise. He looked at the water more closely now and his eyes widened in surprise as he saw large bubbles of a paint-like substance pop in the water, splattering the color everywhere.

He quickly pulled his hand out of the water, sacrificing the photograph in the process and just as
suddenly the bubbling suddenly increased and the room was filled with an explosion of color.

By now Jin should be used to opening his eyes to completely different scenery but it was still incredibly disorienting when he opened them to bright sunlight and loud noises around him.

He didn’t know what those photographs were doing to him or even what they meant but there was some reason for all of this that he just wasn’t getting. Was he being punished in some way or was this somehow a good thing? He didn’t know and he didn’t know if he ever would.

What he did know was that it was hot with the sun beating down on him relentlessly and he was breaking into a sweat. But at least he could be grateful that he still felt as though he was in his own body.

Eventually, the loud noises around him started to take shape into voices and music and as he lifted his head from his seat on the ground he saw the source of the noise but he only became more confused.

There were familiar faces above him but for some reason Jin felt as if he’d never seen them before.

Because although the faces were the same, nothing else matched the image of the close friends that he had in his mind.

To his left, Yoongi was leaning up against the white brick of the wall behind him, his usual jet black hair replaced with a slate grey which was already strange enough on it’s own because Yoongi wasn’t the type to bleach his hair in any way but he also wasn’t the type to wear such flashy clothes. But there he was, wearing a black button up with some lime green image that repeated all over the shirt, tight jeans with huge rips on the knees and a pair of bright red round sunglasses perched on the bridge of his nose. As Jin looked closer he saw that Yoongi was even wearing numerous bracelets on each of his arms as well as earrings. In short, the Yoongi that Jin knew wouldn’t be caught dead walking around looking like that.

Even worse was Taehyung, who was standing across from Yoongi. In their teenage years, Taehyung had decided on a whim to dye his hair a scarlet red and though it had blinded Jin every time he looked at the younger, that red color had nothing on Taehyung’s hair right now. It wasn’t so much bright as it was hard to look at. It was a peachy orange that looked like the color you
would get after a hot pink faded, but it wasn’t the hair that was the problem. Taehyung was wearing big, round, blue sunglasses that took up most of his face with a tan suit jacket, a minty green button up under that and black slacks. He looked like he’d gotten dressed in the dark. And somehow put on clothes that weren’t his.

Next to Taehyung was Jimin, and Jin was shocked to see that his hair was black. Jimin made a point of keeping his hair anything but his natural color, constantly bleaching it so much that Jin was surprised it still looked as healthy as it did. Once, when it had come up in conversation, Jimin had offhandedly mentioned that his father had black hair with a stormy look on his face. Jin assumed his constant bleaching had something to do with that and hadn’t wanted to push the issue. Maybe he should have. But Jimin was also wearing bizarre clothing, a black pair of those sunglasses with dark red lenses, and a pale yellow shirt with a bright orange jacket tied around his neck just like Jin had seen golfers do from time to time and shorts that looked like they had once been pants judging by the strings hanging from where the hem should have been.

Behind the two of them was Hoseok, who had the least dramatic change of hair, although the now honey brown strands were styled strangely down in his face. He was wearing a weird shirt with colorful maracas, palm trees, and music notes all over it along with dark blue shorts that were cuffed at the bottom. And of course, a yellow pair of those sunglasses that everyone was wearing sat comfortably on the bridge of his nose.

On Jin’s left side the other members of his friend group were standing and it seemed like all of them were animatedly talking about something, speaking loudly to be heard over the music. It was a song that Jin had never heard before and the sharp loudness of the brass in the song was hurting his ears. He wished he could turn it down but even after looking around he couldn’t locate the source of it.

Jeongguk’s hair hadn’t been changed in any drastic way and other than his odd clothes he looked mostly the same as usual. His dark brown strands had been curled in some strange way, reminding Jin of a poodle with how fluffy it looked. He was wearing a beige button-up with weird black ovals all over it along with pressed black slacks and Jin knew for a fact that the Jeongguk he knew wouldn’t own anything like that.

But as Jin turned to look at the man closest to him, his jaw dropped automatically and he stared bug-eyed at what should have been his childhood friend but so obviously wasn’t. Because although Namjoon wasn’t the most fashionable of the group, having a penchant for worn-out clothes because they were “comfortable” even though he had plenty of newer things to wear, this was a bit much even for him. His hair was mint green and cut in a style similar to G-Dragon’s a few years back. Except the undercut was also dyed that same mint green. He had on a white pair of those strange sunglasses with an open red button-down with motorcycles printed all over it and under that a black and white striped shirt, black skinny jeans, and dress shoes.
Jin didn’t think that Namjoon was even capable of putting together an outfit that was *that* flashy. Did he ever even wear anything that *wasn’t* a worn pair of jeans?

So, yes, his friends going around wearing such ridiculous outfits and sporting equally ridiculous hair was strange. No, more than strange, it was *disturbing*.

Jin wondered if he had somehow been placed into a world where he and his friends were international superstars or something equally ridiculous and were therefore entitled to look so incredibly flashy.

The sun was still shining in his eyes so he reasoned that he wasn’t wearing a pair of the weird sunglasses like everyone else and after a quick look downwards to see if he was wearing some ridiculous outfit as well he was even more shocked to be wearing something familiar.

*The uniform that he wore when he went to vocational school.* The uniform that he had worn when he fell in love, got his heart broken, and lost a friend all in the same year.

Just the sight of it sent old wounds rushing back up to surface and he shook his head to clear his mind but then his hair fell into his eyes.

*Blonde* hair.

And instantly all judgment he had for Namjoon’s outlandish appearance faded away. His hair was *blonde*. Kim Seokjin had *platinum blonde hair*. The world really must have been coming to an end.

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After a while, the initial shock of the situation wore off and Jin managed to calm down enough to start paying attention to what was actually going on around him.

The six of his friends were having a loud conversation that Jin could barely hear over how loud the music was, not that he could keep up with the pace of the conversation either way.
Taehyung seemed like he was going off about something and Jeongguk was insistent on arguing with him even though both of them were laughing. The rest were adding in their own two cents every now and then which only made Taehyung start speaking even more animatedly.

Behind them was a fence that had what looked to be toilet tissue or some kind of cloth in the shape of letters. It was hard to tell what it said since Jin was on the opposite side but it might have spelled out something like... youth.

And as he continued to look at the letters, a black shape in the distance drew his attention. He watched as the figure clothed in all black steadily approached them and it seemed as though he wasn’t the only one to notice the mysterious appearance.

Taehyung and Jeongguk’s conversation stilled and the music finally quieted as all of the boys turned their attention to the visitor. The mysterious figure stopped walking forward a few feet away from them, silent and staring.

Yoongi walked closer to the fence that was separating them, leaning against it to get a better look at the visitor. And then he turned around, sharing a quick glance with Namjoon, before quickly jumping over the fence. The silver-haired man approached their silent audience with cocky steps and the rest of them watched with rapt attention.

Jin watched curiously as Yoongi stopped just in front of the stranger and held out his hand. The stranger also held out their hand as if to shake it in greeting, but the second the black gloved hand met Yoongi’s the stranger burst into flames. The rest of the group began hooting and hollering, cheering Yoongi on and laughing merrily but Jin was horrified. He could do little but look on with wide eyes and a mouth dropped open in shock.

What had just happened?

How did Yoongi do that?

Yoongi began walking back towards their group with a smirk, turning his back to the figure that had started to dissolve into ashes that were carried away with the wind until there was nothing left.

Yoongi jumped the fence once again and Jeongguk seemed oddly fired up. He stepped up to the fence in front of them.
“Watch this.” He instructed, and the group watched, silent for a moment as Jeongguk just stood there. Then, out of nowhere, a bicycle went rolling past them and that would have been crazy enough on its own but it was also on fire.

Jeongguk turned back around to face them all with a proud smile on his face and Yoongi laughed, slinging an arm around the younger’s shoulders.

“Not bad, kid.”

Jin was staring bug-eyed at them, completely and totally confused by what just happened and more specifically how it happened, and for the first time, he opened his mouth to speak.

“Wh-” But he couldn’t even get a word out before Jimin interrupted him.

“You act as if we haven’t seen that trick before, Jeongguk.” He scoffed, rolling his eyes.

Jeongguk frowned and the moment of pride was over as quickly as it began, though Yoongi kept his arm slung around the younger’s shoulders.

“I’ve been working on it,” Jeongguk argued. “Before I couldn’t even get the bike to move.”

Then Hoseok stepped forward, arms crossed over his chest. “Well, while you were working on your cute little project there, Jimin and I have been working on something much larger.”

Yoongi scoffs. “Yeah? Is that what you were doing when that building exploded the other day when I was inside of it?”

“What?” Jin couldn’t help but gasp out loud. They were exploding buildings now? Were they all some sort of pyromaniac criminals?

Hoseok’s head whipped towards him, and the younger shushed him harshly.

Why was he being shushed?!
“It’s not like it’s our fault that you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Besides, it’s not like you died, stop complaining.” Jimin defended with a frustrated pout.

Yoongi grunted in disbelief and moved closer to Jeongguk until he could rest his head on the younger’s shoulder.

Jimin and Hoseok moved to stand across from each other and the two of them stared up at the sky. Yoongi was still grumbling under his breath and Namjoon shushed him with a laugh as they continued to watch Jimin and Hoseok and Jin was tempted to try to figure out what in the hell was going again but before he could get the words out a whistling sound began, low at first but gradually growing louder and more high pitched.

Jin turned his own gaze towards the sky in confusion and although he was sitting he nearly fell over at the sight of the full-size commercial airplane passing overhead completely engulfed in flames.

Jimin and Hoseok both watched it for a moment longer, only looking away when the airplane exploded in the air, sending parts flying in every direction, and a ball of fire that went flying to the ground.

“Yes!” Jimin cheered.

“Exactly like we practiced, nice!” Hoseok grinned and the two high fived with bright smiles.

Jin wasn’t smiling. In fact, he felt a rolling sensation in his gut as fear started to take over. He had no idea what the hell was going on but there could have been people on that plane, and all of his friends were gushing over the spectacle and congratulating Jimin and Hoseok as if something like that was praiseworthy. But all they had done was look up into the sky for a long moment, so how were they able to just do that?

Yoongi rolled his eyes but a smile was creeping onto his face. “Yeah whatever, it was sort of cool.”

They all laughed and poked fun at him as if nothing was out of the ordinary.
“Tae and I have been working on something too,” Namjoon announced shyly and Taehyung’s face lit up like a christmas tree.

“I thought you wanted to wait a bit until we showed them?” He asked, excitedly draping his body over Namjoon.

The elder all but shoved him off with a grin. “Yeah, well, I think it’s ready enough. We should be able to do it.”

“What is it?” Jeongguk asked, obviously intrigued.

“Is it what you guys have been sneaking around to work on?” Hoseok wondered, excitement evident in his voice.

Namjoon grinned even wider at all of the attention and gestured behind him. “Yeah, we have to do it at the back of the warehouse though, come on.”

He began walking away and the rest of the group eagerly followed him. Jin hesitantly stood as well and reached out for Taehyung, who was the closest to him, determined to get some answers as to what in the hell was going on.

The younger shrugged off his touch as if burned and whirled around, fixing him with a nasty glare given by how furrowed his eyebrows suddenly were above the rim of his sunglasses.

“Taehyung, what the hell-”

“Shut up.” The younger hissed. Jin had never in his life seen Taehyung actually angry and he so taken aback that he immediately snapped his mouth shut at the pure hostility in the younger’s words.

“Ugh, I don’t know why the fuck everyone is so insistent on dragging this out longer than necessary. Just looking at you is giving me a headache. Don’t fucking touch me and shut your mouth before I decide to stop waiting.” Taehyung snapped, and with a huff, turned away from Jin to quickly catch up to the rest of their friends.
Jin stood there, completely stunned. Never in all of his life had he been spoken to so rudely and aggressively and by Taehyung of all people? Taehyung who never got mad at anything and went through life without a care in the world, doing whatever he wanted just because he could?

It was unsettling, to say the least.

Not to mention he didn’t recall doing anything to Taehyung to warrant that kind of resentment.

With a sigh, Jin shook his head and followed after the boys. He turned the corner just in time to see a familiar black truck fall out of the sky. It was filled with water and as it met the ground, the window shattered and all of the water came spilling out.

His friends gasped in awed surprise and Jin stepped closer, not believing what his eyes were seeing. It was his truck. The same truck that he had driven them to the sea in, the same truck that his life had ended in, and the fact that it was filled with water only made his heart beat even louder in his ears. It was still black although the paint had lost its shine and become a dark and dull grey but as Jin looked closer he saw white letters spelling out a singular word all over it over and over again.

*Nevermind.*

The same word that had been written on the white tiles of the room he had been trapped in just before this.

The truck then exploded out of nowhere, sending glass spraying everywhere and even from the distance Jin was standing he felt the rush of heat against his face.

The boys lost it at that yelling and cheering and laughing as they exchanged high fives with Namjoon and Taehyung. They laughed even harder as the explosion triggered a secondary one and the truck was completely in enveloped in red flames.

Taehyung jumped onto Namjoon’s back in celebration and the elder nearly fell forward, and his sunglasses went flying to the ground in the process. He stood up straight, spinning around to make Taehyung get off and made accidental eye contact with Jin who had previously been standing a bit behind them.
Jin gasped out loud at the sight and his heart nearly stopped in his chest before it kicked into overdrive. He knew that these weren’t the people he’d come to call friends but if that was true then who were they, and what were they?

Namjoon’s eyes were pure black, and not just the iris, his entire eye was a shiny black—no white to be seen at all.

_They weren’t human_. Jin didn’t know what they were, but no human eye looked like that. He’d seen creepy pictures on the internet and in movies of people wearing pure black contacts like that but he didn’t think that they were contacts. That would be way too convenient for all the weird shit that was happening with them somehow lighting things on fire and causing explosions without even touching anything.

The air was deadly silent as Namjoon raised an eyebrow at Jin.

“Why are you looking at me like—” He stopped mid-sentence as he caught sight of his white sunglasses laying on the ground a few inches from his foot. “Oh.”

A laugh cut through the silence and Jin glanced over towards the sound, Hoseok, before his eyes returned to Namjoon’s—terrified of looking away.

“Oh man, Namjoon, he found out already. Why are you so clumsy?” Jin glanced at Hoseok again and watched him as he took off his own sunglasses, and his fear skyrocketed as he saw that Hoseok also had bottomless black eyes.

Taehyung stepped closer to Namjoon with a grin, and Jin watched as he also took off his sunglasses, throwing them to the ground carelessly. And Jin shouldn’t have been so surprised that his eyes were also black but he _was_ and his eyes darted frightfully between his group of friends as each of them removed their sunglasses and stared at him.

All of those eyes on him and all of them were black, black, black, black, black, and black.

Jin was terrified, more scared than he’d ever been in his life because there was something predatory about those eyes on him, and if he had any common sense he’d have started running, but as soon as the thought occurred to him Taehyung grinned like the Cheshire cat and said,
“Can we kill him now?”

And Jin knew that he wouldn’t be able to escape even if he tried.

There was an unspoken agreement to that question and as soon as Jin turned to run, they advanced. Freezing cold hands latched onto his shoulders with stone grips and he was dragged towards the building they referred to as the warehouse against his will.

“H- Help!” He managed to scream, kicking and squirming against their brutally hard grips. “Help me!”

There was a sudden snap and Jin’s vision went white with agony before he even had time to comprehend that the sound was that of his leg being kicked so hard that the bone snapped in half.

“I told you to shut the fuck up. Nobody is coming to save you, so stop giving me a fucking headache, you piece of shit.” A voice that he knew whispered venomously in his ear, but Jin was too busy wailing from the pain of his leg to even bother listening. The pain was intense and overwhelming to the point that he worried he would pass out as they continued to drag his dead weight, every bump jostled his leg and had him screaming in pure agony.

Eventually, he was forced onto a surface of some kind and the constant jostling of his leg stopped. He was thankful for the brief respite but as soon as he regained his senses enough to be aware of his surroundings again the terror returned. He looked around fearfully and saw nothing but concrete walls with writing all over them that he couldn’t read and the six monsters leering as they circled above him, saying things that he couldn’t hear over the rush of blood in his ears.

But when the sound dissipated and Jin was able to hear them again he immediately wished that he couldn’t.

“Ah, why didn’t we just do this as soon as we found him?”

“Because waiting makes it better. He had no idea what was going on anyways.”

“Jeongguk, go get the knife.”
“Isn’t it better to watch him look like a lost lamb at the butchers or a child about to soil their pants in fear?”

“No, it’s pissing me off. How fucking dare he act like he doesn’t know what he did to us. He should be overwhelmed with guilt! Not innocent and confused.”

“Jeongguk! Hurry up with the goddamn knife!”

“I call going first.”

“Tae, we’re doing it by our ages.”

“That’s bullshit! You know what he did to me, how can any of you go first?”

“Kid, back the fuck off before I decide to kill you first.”

Taehyung scoffed, kicking something over in the far corner of the room angrily and the sound echoed in the small room loudly.

Jin’s vision was blurry and he thought that he might have been crying but he saw the long, pitch black blade in Yoongi’s hand and suddenly he was hyperventilating.

He’d seen Yoongi angry before, the man was practically a walking bomb ready to explode at any moment, but never had he seen the small man look so incredibly disgusted.

“Kim Seokjin,” The man sneered, circling the table like a wild cat about to strike its prey. “I’m sure you’re confused to be in this position. After all, you were always so put together and naïve. But it all starts with you, and so it’ll all end with you. I would explain to you why this is happening because it seems like you don’t know. But I’d rather explain what we’re going to do to you.”

Yoongi stopped circling him, standing at the far end of the table Jin was laying on, and distantly Jin realized that he was being held down but he wasn’t even coherent enough to struggle.
“This blade is made of obsidian. It’s a sacrificial blade and it took us years to find it. We’re going to take turns with it and we won’t stop even if you scream and beg at the top of your lungs for mercy. You deserve this for what you’ve done to us and by using you we’re going to reverse your mistakes. Understand?”

And before Jin could even catch his breath enough to speak, Yoongi swung forward and a searing pain ignited in Jin’s stomach, taking his breath away so that all he could do was gasp on air that wouldn’t fill his lungs and convulse weakly. The blade was removed at an angle that caused a second round of the searing agony and Jin could feel hot rivulets of his blood seep out of the wound and stain his white shirt crimson.

He didn’t know why they were doing this to him or what he supposedly did but he was sorry for whatever it was and so, so scared. His leg was a long forgotten pain and he was shaking in fear as he weakly struggled against the restraining hands on his limbs.

“I hate you.” A low rumble of a familiar voice announced and then mint green hair was in Jin’s vision and he was once again looking into the black pools that were Namjoon’s eyes.

“Weren’t you just feeling pity for the poor boy who had to work after school instead of studying? Or maybe it was some fucked up sense of charity. Every time you invited me over and flaunted your wealth and then had the nerve to complain. Your father would have paid for your entire college tuition without batting an eye and you just threw his money away like it was nothing. Like I wouldn’t kill to have an opportunity like that.” More than the pain radiating from his stomach it hurt to hear such cruel words from his childhood friend’s mouth. That wasn’t what Jin thought of him at all, he admired and respected Namjoon and his intelligence. And being able to be friends with him was something Jin had always been extremely thankful for.

“The thing with you, Jin, is that you’re never grateful for what you have and you always take it for granted.” Namjoon hissed, and Jin felt the cold grip on his left arm release him if for only a moment before his hand was being held with a crushing grip and he turned his head to look at it, only to see the blade suddenly being thrust through it, appearing on the other side of his palm.

“Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.” Namjoon spat.

Jin wailed in agony, attempting futilely to reach over with his other hand and take the blade out, but he was being held down too tightly and he could do little more than shake his head back in forth as tears spilled down his cheeks uncontrollably and scream until his voice went hoarse.

Namjoon pulled the blade out after a moment and let go of him but before Jin could curl the
injured hand into his chest protectively someone else was grabbing it, pressing fingers into the hole in the flesh and Jin could do nothing but buck against the table, begging through snot and tears for them to stop.

Eventually, they did, but the cold fingers were threateningly gripping onto his wrist and a thumb brushed against the wound in warning. Jin knew that they would press into it again mercilessly if he struggled even a little bit, so he forced his body to stay still, choking on the sobs building up in his throat as he struggled to breathe.

His leg was jostled roughly and he lifted his head up slightly to see Hoseok standing next to it, looking down at Jin’s pant leg rather than his face but as his gaze flickered upwards Jin could see nothing but contempt in his expression.

“The reason that we’re like this is you. Damned and trapped like animals. I was happy before I met you, I was safe and learning to trust that not everyone would leave me. And then you came around and fucked everything up. The only family I ever had disappeared without a trace and it’s all your fucking fault.”

Hoseok; happy, bright, and energetic Hoseok plunged the blade right into the space where his bone had snapped earlier, twisting the blade around as he held eye contact and Jin was hyperventilating. The room was spinning and he was sure that he had blacked out for a moment because Jimin was suddenly holding the blade and standing at his other leg.

“You ruined everything!” He barked, sending the blade plunging into his thigh and the pain in Jin’s body was so acute at times and then radiating everywhere at other times. He was sure he was in the midst of a panic attack because he couldn’t breathe and there was so much blood that he could hear it dripping onto the concrete below and he was going die.

Oh god, he was going to die.

He was going to be brutally murdered by his best friends who hated him as much as Jin always suspected they had, because it had always been too good to be true for him to be surrounded by such amazing people. And he did deserve it didn’t he? Because he should have known about all of their problems. He should have insisted instead of always letting go of things. He should have tried harder to be a friend to them. His heart felt like it was breaking over and over again. He repeatedly muttered “I’m sorry”, delusionally and between bouts of unconsciousness. It was useless and he knew that because as Yoongi had said- they weren’t going to give any mercy.

Because he deserved it.
Someone slapped him across the face, barking a “shut the fuck up”.

*Taehyung.*

It must have been his turn then.

“You keep muttering sorry over and over again but you don’t even know what the fuck you should be sorry for!” Taehyung roared, eyes blazing with fury. “Jeongguk was hit by the car and you had the nerve to go and drown yourself in the sea when we all needed each other! You are so god damn *selfish,* do you ever think about anyone other than yourself?!” Jin was stabbed in the gut again, so quickly and viciously that his own hot blood splattered across his face.

“Did you ever stop to think about how your death would affect everyone? How much hurt you could cause all of us? Or did you just have your head so far up your own ass that you thought that you were the only one suffering?! It was a never-ending spiral that you created! Even if I wanted to come back to everyone there was nobody to come back to! You sent the rocks tumbling down the mountain and the rest of us got buried in the avalanche but you don’t even have the decency to feel bad about it!” Taehyung stabbed at the same spot in Jin’s abdomen twice, ignoring the warnings from the others.

“You think you’re *so* good Kim Seokjin, you think you’re *so* much better than me. But the truth is you aren’t any different. You killed your family too.” Taehyung stared at him for a long moment before his lip curled up in distaste. His arms were covered in Jin’s blood and it was splattered all over his clothing as well.

Jeongguk barely managed to keep a hold on the dagger as Taehyung shoved it into his hands and stormed away.

Jin looked up into his youngest friends’ face, breathing ragged and entire body shaking, and he was shocked to see how heartbroken Jeongguk appeared looking down at him. Jin wanted to reach out to him, to wrap his hand around Jeongguk’s wrist and force him to listen, force him to just *stop* for a second and let Jin apologize.

“You were supposed to protect us.” Jeongguk whispered, avoiding Jin’s pleading gaze as he plunged the dagger into Jin’s chest with both hands.
Jin felt new tears form at the corners of his eyes. It wasn’t at the pain of the blade piercing his heart but at the pain of feeling his heart break for a final, irreversible time. He had failed Jeongguk. He knew that. He felt it when he saw the younger covered in plaster in his hospital bed. But he hadn’t realized that he had failed them all until he took in all of their hateful gazes and had it spelled out for him.

Jeongguk pulled the blade out almost immediately, tossing it to the ground and leaving the room with a heavy sigh.

Jin was cold. Cold even as he was covered from head to toe in his own hot blood. Cold even as he felt the vice-like grips around his body release him. Cold as his head lolled to the side lifelessly and he teetered on the edge of consciousness.

His eyes focused on the broken mirror in the corner of the room. He was unresponsive to the movement and noise in the room around him. All he was able to focus on were the shards littered around on the ground and, when his vision focused, he caught his own reflection in one of them. His face was pale and ashen, blood was speckled in his bright blonde hair, and there so much red on him and around him and falling off the edge of the concrete slab he was rested on in rivulets.

He was dying again, surely. In a different way this time, a way that hurt on more than just the physical level.

His eyes fluttered peacefully shut.

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When Jin came to again, he saw a rush of color behind his closed eyelids similar to what he saw in that small enclosed room he had been in. He felt the vague sensation of falling, the distance that someone would fall off of a couch, and then he felt gravel poking into his legs.

Wait… gravel?

With his eyes still closed, he reached out with his hand, feeling around on the ground and it didn’t seem like he was on the concrete slab anymore.

All of a sudden, his heart jolted in his chest and he sat up clutching a shaking hand to where the
final stab wound had been. The wound that would have ended his life. And maybe had for all he knew. His eyes flew open to look at the spot but the panic that had flared up settled down when he realized that he was no longer covered in blood.

He wasn’t even bleeding anymore. But if he did actually die again … what did that mean? Was he going to repeatedly die over and over again? Was he in hell rather than purgatory and was this the punishment for the sins he committed?

He at least didn't feel any different than before the colors had exploded in the room he’d previously been in. Had he returned once again to that room?

Jin looked around, expecting to see white tiles walls and a dark ceiling but drew in a gasp when he saw something entirely different. He definitely wasn’t in the same room as before. In fact, he wasn’t even in a room at all anymore.

He was somewhere else entirely, outside and surrounded by fences.

Chapter End Notes

I kind of roasted the boys in this chapter oops

**Fun Fact:**

In the Fire MV Jungkook completely changes his outfit between 0:12 and 0:18.

Also-

In the Fake Love MV the phrase “I’m Fine” behind him spells out “Save Me” when flipped upside down. This is a repeated theme wherever the phrase is seen even going back to the HYYH era. In Love Yourself: Answer BTS finally addressed the flipped phrase with the upbeat song “I’m Fine” even sampling a bit of the original “Save Me” song at the beginning.
Kim Namjoon spent his whole entire life being told that he never amount to anything. That he’d never become anything worthwhile or mean anything to anyone. That he’d live as a particle of dust, irrelevant to the rest of the world and die just as irrelevant.

He’s heard so many different variations of the insult that he’d even started to believe it.

The problem is that it wasn’t for lack of trying. Ever since he was born he’d had to try two or three times as hard as the people around him. His family was poor and so he grew up in poverty and constantly moved. Being his parents only child, and a son at that, he inherited the weight of the world on his shoulders. As soon as he was able, he was doing chores around the house and cleaning so that his parents didn’t have to. They worked as much as they could and brought in as much money as they could, but it just wasn’t enough.

They were a couple who had already been struggling on their own and were in no position to have a kid, but sometimes life had its own plan.

Growing up was hard. Namjoon’s parents needed him to grow up and take care of himself and take responsibilities that other kids still in primary school wouldn’t have to deal with until they were in high school. Thankfully, though they didn’t have much, his parents weren’t the absentee type and they often had family nights when they could. Sometimes, in the winters when they didn’t have money to pay for heating, they’d all cuddle up under blankets and play card games or if they didn’t have enough food to put on the table, they’d made a game of going out and selling some of the handmade crafts Namjoon’s mother made. They didn’t have much, but they had each other and though they were all stressed, they were happy.

In school, Namjoon had always been smarter than other kids. It wasn’t that he studied harder or
even that he specifically tried to be better. He just understood concepts and instructions well and was a fast learner. He’d had to be at home. There were times where his parents had needed to solve complicated math in order to figure out how to pay their bills and Namjoon had looked at the numbers for himself and solved the issue much faster than his parents had been able to.

He may not have purposely trying to do so well in school but he wanted to do as well as he could so his parents didn’t have to worry. He’d experienced so many things by the time he finished elementary school that he knew he would do anything for his parents who were constantly sacrificing so much for him. He wanted to do his best in school and get a good paying job so his parents could be taken care of for the rest of their lives. He wanted to at least do that for them.

However, the problem with school was that kids were ruthless. Namjoon learned early on, just from watching his parents, that the world wasn’t that nice of a place but he experienced just how bad it was first-hand at school.

His family didn’t live in the best neighborhood and the schools in the district were terrible excuses for education. So, his parents had forged a few documents just so he would be allowed to go to school in the next district over. The issue with that was that the next district was full of upper-middle-class families. Namjoon could have fit in with his high mental ability but what gave him away was the ratty shoes that he wore and his own mouth, admittedly. He let something slip about where he lived and the students at his primary school had turned on him like piranhas that smelled blood in the water.

They bullied him for something he couldn’t even control. Harshly.

It was as though the very fact that he and his family had to try harder than them who were simply given all that they could ever want in life offended them. He was teased, called names, and discriminated against in every situation. He couldn’t understand it as a child. He didn’t understand why he lived in a world where people were fortunate just by being born into a certain family and others had to struggle for their livelihood every day.

Somehow, Namjoon’s proficiency in school was so high above his grade level that he was permitted to skip a grade in primary school.

It was a blessing in disguise.

Being separated from his class meant that fewer people actually knew him and he tried harder to blend in and not stand out so his new class wouldn’t have so much opportunity to bully him. He was still bullied, of course, but not nearly as bad. A few people hating him was much better than an
entire room that went to extra lengths to ostracize him.

Rather than his poverty being the forefront of his “popularity”, more students were actually curious about him due to his skipping a grade. In South Korea such a thing was unheard of and even though it drew more attention to him than he wanted, it was hard to complain.

Especially when his parents were so incredibly proud of him.

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As soon as Namjoon entered middle school he started working. He wasn’t hired for any jobs since he was still so young but he sought out odd jobs. He searched for anybody that was looking to pay someone for some menial task that they didn’t want to do. He did deliveries, stocking, cleaning, anything he could get paid for.

The stress of managing a multitude of jobs as well as the increase of work and difficulty in that work as a middle schooler was rough. It consisted of a lot of sleepless nights and struggling to stay awake. He’d originally thought that he could do anything as long as his parents got to relax about their bills and expenses but when his grades began to take a toll, it was his mother who told him to stop working so hard. She’d been crying when she talked to him about the situation. She felt horrible that her son was trying so hard to work at a time when he still should have been a kid.

Namjoon had thought that he was doing a good thing and hadn’t seen how much his parents were struggling with the idea of him supporting them.

He understood after that conversation.

He dropped a few of his jobs and learned to manage his schedule so that he could take on more jobs when he had an abundance of time but didn’t work himself so hard that he didn’t have time for school. His parents tried to encourage him to drop all of his jobs and focus on being a student but he never missed the way their shoulders relaxed whenever he gave them the money he’d earned. He wouldn’t overwork himself, but he wouldn’t let his parents carry the entire weight of the world on their shoulders alone either.

However, though Namjoon had good intentions at first, it was inevitable that he would succumb to the reputation of being a delinquent. Good students hung out while it was still light outside and when it was dark they were inside doing their homework. Namjoon was the exact opposite. He went home right after school, got changed, and then went back out to work. He was lucky if he finished before midnight. His homework usually got done in the early hours of the morning before
class. All it took was one person seeing him out at night talking to a relatively shady owner of a business he did deliveries for and the rumors spread like wildfire.

He heard everything from being a member of a gang, being a drug runner, and that his good grades were only because his family was threatening the school. That one had hurt the most.

As much as Namjoon hated the rumors, there was nothing he could do to stop them. Even if he tried to explain that he was just working, it would only stir up the whole situation with his family and he was tired of being called the poor pity student of their school.

He even embraced the new rumors a bit.

He started wearing his uniform just messy enough so that it barely passed the dress code, he hung out with a lot of older students that were admittedly delinquents since he was always out at night so he also picked up smoking cigarettes, and he started parting his hair instead of wearing it neatly forward. If he couldn’t escape the rumors, the least he could do was make himself seem dangerous to talk to. People were more likely to talk shit about him but at least it wasn’t to his face.

Unfortunately, what started as an act quickly turned into reality. There was only so long Namjoon could act like a delinquent without falling too deep into the role. Where he had only gone out at night before to work, he often hung out with the lowlifes of the city. Drop-outs, high schoolers, and other middle schoolers who were in much worse places than him. He saw people get beaten by his group of friends often, especially boys around his age that thought they could act tough and nobody would question them. They were all bark and Namjoon’s friends were all bite. Honestly, Namjoon had been wary of them and skeptical of what they would do to him, but luckily, they liked him because of his smarts.

They respected him, which was a fortunate thing. Namjoon had seen all too often what happened to the people his friends didn’t respect.

He went out tagging and vandalizing with them, counted money that he knew had been from either drugs or muggings, and smoked cigarettes with them- which quickly became an addiction.

He stayed away from violence and drugs though.

He didn’t have to see firsthand that it was a road it wasn’t easy to come back from. Some of his friends got arrested from time to time and others overdosed on drugs or were killed in back alleys.
None of them were people that Namjoon considered to be close to him. In general, he didn’t consider his “friends” to be that close to him all. He knew that if it came down to it they would make him take the fall for something they did if he wasn’t careful.

In fact, the only person Namjoon actually considered a friend was Kim Seokjin.

Jin was two years older than him but since Namjoon had skipped a year they were only a year apart. They had met in the library one day. Namjoon was pulling out a chair to sit at a table and as he went to sit in it, he was so absorbed in the book he was reading that he misjudged the distance of the chair from the table and missed it completely, landing on the floor with an ungraceful shout. Jin had already been sat at the table and had witnessed his mistake first hand. The older had laughed so hard that his chuckles sounded more like the squeak of wiper blades on a windshield. He laughed so hard that tears came out of his eyes and even when the librarian told him repeatedly to quiet down, he couldn’t stop. Namjoon had started to laugh as well over the sheer ridiculousness of the situation and that ended up getting them both kicked out of the library.

Once they had each caught their breath, they introduced themselves and easily became close friends.

Jin didn’t pay much attention to the rumors surrounding Namjoon. He was sure that Jin knew about them but rather than blindly believing them, Jin asked him questions instead. He asked Namjoon what his family was like, where he lived, and why he always smelled like cigarette smoke. Namjoon was hesitant to answer those sorts of questions at first but eventually, he realized that Jin wasn’t going to run for the hills when he heard the truth.

Rather than proving the rumors true or not, it seemed like Seokjin was more interested in getting to know Namjoon as a person and it had been a long while since someone had shown genuine interest in doing so.

So, Namjoon told Seokjin about himself and in return, Namjoon asked questions about Seokjin and got to know more about him.

Honestly, they were an odd match and even stranger friends. Rather than judge Namjoon for the rumors surrounding him and the very real reality of his delinquent behavior, Jin seemed like he just respected Namjoon for his intelligence and the hard work he always put in. A lot of the time they spent together was to study. They balanced each other’s strengths well. Seokjin was better at subjects like language, literature, and history while Namjoon was better at subjects like science, math, and English. They helped each other with things that the other didn’t understand and, admittedly, sometimes they just talked.
Even stranger were their backgrounds. Seokjin was another one of those extremely well-off families, but unlike those other students, he never treated Namjoon differently. Not even when Jin came over to his house to hang out a few times over the weekends. Usually, they hung out at Jin’s house if they were outside of school but they’d gone out to get ice cream from this popular place and it just so happened that it was closest to Namjoon’s house.

He had been hesitant at first, worried about what Jin would think of his humble surroundings, but the older had called his place comfy like it’d been really lived in. Namjoon had almost been offended until he thought about Jin’s house- the organization of everything, the absence of dust anywhere, real leather furniture that was still shiny, freshly polished floors, and rooms that still smelled of cleaner- and immediately knew what Jin meant.

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Usually, Namjoon made a point of staying out of trouble. He’d occasionally get lectured by teachers for reeking of cigarette smoke and he’d run from the police when his friends got a little too wild at night.

It really wasn’t until he met Kim Taehyung that he was ever in any big trouble.

Namjoon should have known to stay away from him the night that he met the boy just one year younger than him.

He had been out late at night, alone for once. He’d recently turned fifteen so businesses were actually open to hiring him for legit work. He had just finished stocking shelves at a corner store and was walking around town, toying with the idea of finding some people to hang out with or heading back home.

He turned a corner just as he saw what seemed to be a few familiar faces disappear into an alley. Normally he wouldn’t have concerned himself with what his friends were doing but the boy that they’d dragged into the alley looked strangely familiar. Against his better judgment he approached the alley and peered down it.

He could barely see the boy since he was completely surrounded by men that were clearly older than him. Namjoon didn’t know what the boy had done to earn the wrath of the five guys that were cornering him like a feral animal but he knew that if he didn’t do anything then the boy would be lucky if he was able to get up and stumble home after they were done with him.
He could hear a few of his friends antagonizing the boy with cocky threats and condescending voices. He only knew two of them, the other three were strangers which was not a good sign. Namjoon knew most of the people out on the streets in this neighborhood. He knew who was chill and he knew who he should stay away from. If some of his friends were hanging with people that he didn’t know, then it was probably because they were not chill and Namjoon had avoided them.

Usually, he did his best to stay out of stuff like this but his conscience wouldn’t let him just walk away from it now. The boy looked like someone who he’d seen around at school a few times. The problem was that he distinctly remembered that the boy was in a lower grade than him for whatever reason. His conscience definitely would not let him leave someone who was younger than him to fend for himself.

He sighed and started down the alley. He only knew two of the guys here and he wasn’t exactly sure what they thought of him which was yet another problem. This was going to go one of two ways. He was either going to convince them to leave the boy alone for today or he was going to get his ass kicked along with the boy.

He’d only been beaten up a few times, once for not realizing that it wasn’t a great idea to correct someone with a tattoo on their neck and the other was back when he’d first gotten on the streets at night and some guys gave him a hard time.

Each time his mother had nearly cried in worry when he went back home covered in bruises and bleeding wounds. He’d promised her the second time that it wouldn’t happen again and he didn’t exactly want to break his word and make her worry again, she’d only just started to come to terms with the idea of him embracing the nightlife of the city more than he should have. Even his father had finally stopped lecturing him every time he came home smelling of cigarettes and weed.

But sometimes things just had to be done.

“Hey, what’s going on guys?” He called, in order to announce himself. He’d stuffed his hands into his pockets to look as non-threatening as he could. He knew his height and young appearance was already threatening enough, as if he wasn’t a complete clutz due to it.

Everyone turned to look at him and Namjoon was actually glad that they were completely surrounding the kid because otherwise, it would have been the perfect time for him to flee and if he managed to get away, Namjoon was going to be in deep shit.

The two guys that he knew raised their eyebrows as they realized that they recognized him but the other three looked a mix of uninterested and pissed at being interrupted. One of the guys in the
group immediately started toward him but he was stopped by another one of them throwing his arms out.

“Namjoon? That you?” One of the guys he knew, Minjae, asked.

“Yeah. What are you guys doing?” Namjoon took a few steps forward, but not too close in case one of the guys he didn’t know got pissed and made a grab for him.

“I thought you didn’t fuck with this kind of shit.” One of the others muttered with a heavy dialect. Namjoon recognized him as Jeongwoo. “You want in or somethin’ all of a sudden?”

Namjoon swallowed and tried to ignore the rather aggressive way that they were all looking at him. He was beginning to get worried that if he didn’t say he wanted to join in they were gonna jump him, no other questions asked.

“That depends.” He smirked, adding in an unattractive snort to keep up the pretense of appearing tough. “The fuck did he do?”

One of the guys that he didn’t recognize smiled cruelly, glancing at the boy they’d cornered.

“This piece of shit apparently doesn’t like us tagging over his work. As if he’s in any position to be making complaints.”

“Hey, fuck you!” The boy spat suddenly, rushing forward as if he meant to punch the guy but one of the other men in the alley grabbed onto his arms, effectively holding him still. The boy struggled against the sudden restraint.

“My tagging is way better than that lame shit you guys put everywhere!”

The group of guys laughed with a tinge of annoyance at the boy’s bold claims and Namjoon wanted to slap him. He was still antagonizing them even when being surrounded by a bunch of older kids who clearly wanted to beat the snot out of him. Did he not realize the position that he was in?! Jeongwoo shrugged animatedly and looked thoroughly amused. “I guess that answers your
question, doesn’t it?”

Minjae’s expression showed his impatience. “You in or not, Namjoon? If not, then hurry up and get the fuck out of here.”

Namjoon wracked his brain for some plan that would get him and the idiotic boy with a death wish out of the alley. The boy seemed intent in digging his own grave and laying it and Namjoon wasn’t about to lay in it with him.

“You’re really just gonna beat him up over that? I mean there’s five of you and only one of him.”

One of the guys he didn’t know raised an eyebrow and fixed him with a glare. “What are you trying to do? Make it two against five? You gonna fight with this kid? Do you even know him?”

“Chill, dude,” Minjae spoke up. “I’m not laying a hand on him, he’s cool with Jackson.”

“He is?” One of the guys asked, disbelief evident in his voice.

“Yeah, he is.” Minjae snapped and turned his attention back to Namjoon. “Do you know this guy, Namjoon?”

Namjoon looked over Minjae’s shoulder and made eye contact with the boy who was still weakly struggling against the arms restraining him. He hoped the look in his eyes was pleading. He’d definitely be in trouble if the kid didn’t play along.

“Yeah, I know him.” Namjoon nodded.

Jeongwoo narrowed his eyes and crossed his arms. “What’s his name then?”

Namjoon hoped the widening of his eyes at the sudden question wasn’t as noticeable as it felt and desperately searched his mind for a name.

“T-Taeyong.”
Minjun stared at Namjoon for a long moment before turning to the boy. “That your name, kid?”

The boy looked between Namjoon and the guy talking to him and for a second Namjoon worried that the idiot was actually going to say no but then he smiled brightly and Namjoon regretted ever getting into this mess.

“Yeah! Namjoon and I go way back!”

Nobody really seemed to be buying the act but to Namjoon’s relief, Jeongwoo sighed exaggeratedly.

“Fuck it, whatever. Let’s go. I’m hungry and I don’t feel like kicking this kid’s ass anymore. This is stupid as shit.” He walked out of the alley, knocking into Namjoon’s shoulder roughly as he passed.

Minjae motioned for the rest of the guys to come with as he followed Jeongwoo and sent a knowing look to Namjoon. Namjoon nodded. Minjae was acknowledging that he had helped him out this time but it was a one-time thing and would absolutely not happen again. Namjoon already knew that though.

The rest of the guys lingered for a minute but the one restraining the kid, roughly pushed him forward so he could do little other than catch himself with his hands before his face made contact with the ground. They sneered at Namjoon as they passed and Namjoon stood still until they were well out of sight.

Once he confirmed that all of them had left, he breathed out a shaky sigh and squeezed his eyes shut.

“You didn’t have to do that, you know.” A voice full of annoyance snapped.

Namjoon opened his eyes. The kid was standing in front of him now, arms crossed and glare on his face.

“The correct thing to say would be- thank you. I just put my ass on the line for you and I don’t
even *know* you, but you’re already making me regret that decision.” Namjoon seethed.

“You didn’t have to.” The kid argued. “But at least you were sort of close with my name. It’s Taehyung.”

“Was I really?” Namjoon asked, surprised. He had just made a wild guess but it seemed it hadn’t been so wild after all. Maybe he’d heard the kid’s name somewhere.

“Yeah. I’ve seen you around school before too.” Taehyung admitted. “I think you’re a grade higher than me.”

“Two actually.” Namjoon corrected. “I’m a year older I think, but I skipped a grade.”

Taehyung’s eyes widened. “Seriously? That’s impressive.”

Namjoon shrugged.

“Uh… anyways,” Taehyung muttered, looking down at the ground. “I guess thanks for… stepping in.”

“You’re welcome. You’re just lucky I knew some of those guys or I never would have.” Namjoon explained.

“I would have gotten my ass handed to me, for sure.” Taehyung agreed and Namjoon was glad that the younger realized it. “It’s not like it hasn’t happened before but… yeah, thanks. I just… I don’t like feeling like I owe people anything so can we call it even if I buy you some ramyeon or something?”

Namjoon scoffed. “Sure, I’ll call it even if you buy me five bowls. I saved you from five guys so that’s even.”

Taehyung’s eyes went wide again. “*Five*!? Dude, I’m broke as hell, come on.”
“Fine.” Namjoon settled. “Three, since I knew two of them.”


“I’m broke too.” Namjoon laughed. “Why else do you think I’m bullying an underclassman into buying me ramen?”

Taehyung laughed loudly at that and Namjoon followed him out of the alley.

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Surprisingly, after that incident, Taehyung became a regular addition to Namjoon’s life.

He hadn’t been expecting to get along with Taehyung as much as he did. He was easy to talk to, fun to be around, and shared a similar living situation with Namjoon. Taehyung hadn’t been joking about being poor any more than Namjoon had been joking, but even Namjoon knew that Taehyung lived in extremely meager conditions.

Taehyung was the only poor kid that Namjoon knew that didn’t look or act like it. He was popular in school and got decent grades, he was funny and charismatic and Namjoon had been completely shocked when Taehyung had taken him by his house once to grab something from inside.

The younger lived in a large apartment building of various multi-family homes. It was in the sort of neighborhood that cops were always patrolling and sirens could be heard all throughout the day. It was the kind of neighborhood that was in the background of news broadcasts as news reporters spoke of muggings, stabbings, and robberies. It was the kind of place that made Namjoon grateful for what little he had.

Taehyung told him that his mother had passed away a few years ago due to an illness and his father had become a drunk that was completely incapable of keeping a stable job. His family barely got by and Taehyung often worried about his younger sister when he was out. Namjoon didn’t realize why at first but after a few times of seeing Taehyung with numerous bruises, he finally asked the younger why he kept getting into so many fights.

He had not been expecting Taehyung to smile sadly and say that the only fights he was getting into
were with his father.

It suddenly made sense why Taehyung was so hell-bent on causing trouble wherever he went. It was just the way that he coped with things.

It sounded strange but that rebellious trait was one that Namjoon was actually envious of. Taehyung acted without thinking first and often did whatever he felt in the moment, just because he could. Namjoon wished that he could be more like that, though not as bad as Taehyung. The boy was getting into trouble nearly every other day.

He was popular in school and Namjoon also realized that that was why he had recognized Taehyung at all. All the girls were constantly going on and on about him and though Namjoon had seen Taehyung around before, it wasn’t until they were friends that he could put a face to the name.

If Jin was Namjoon’s calm and collected friend then Taehyung was the wild and unfiltered friend. He was completely unpredictable and impulsive and more than once he had almost gotten the two of them caught by the police for tagging. And then, of course, there was the time that Taehyung actually had gotten them arrested.

—

Namjoon and Taehyung were fast friends. Taehyung had kept up his promise to repay Namjoon with three bowls of ramyeon and the two had hit it off. They started hanging out together at night regularly. Partly because Namjoon preferred Taehyung’s company over the volatile personalities of his other friends and the potentially dangerous company that they hung out with but also because, for some reason, Namjoon felt responsible for Taehyung. He’d saved the younger from getting his ass handed to him but what would happen if Namjoon wasn’t there the next time? Taehyung was volatile and stubborn, an especially dangerous combination, and the fact that the younger didn’t visibly get angry only made it harder to read him.

Taehyung was always one of two things- excited or apathetic.

The difference between them was like polar opposites. At times Taehyung would run around like the energizer bunny getting into all sorts of mischief and other times he’d be so downtrodden and moody that Namjoon didn’t know what he was supposed to say around him.

That night was one of Taehyung’s excited nights. He was in a ridiculously good mood and was
acting more like a rambunctious elementary school student than a thirteen year old.

Namjoon humored him when Taehyung said he wanted to go out tagging, and had even been a bit excited himself when Taehyung had unzipped his backpack and shown him the various colored cans of spray paint stuffed inside.

They went on somewhat of a rampage through the city, tagging and having a good time.

Of course, they were having too much fun to keep a low profile and in the upper-class neighborhood they were in, it wasn’t a surprise that the police were called rather quickly.

Namjoon had been leaning against a wall, cigarette perched precariously on his lip as Taehyung worked on some yellow thing. Namjoon had no idea what it was supposed to be but he didn’t feel like pointing that out. Since he was facing the street, he was the first one to see the flash of the police lights. At first, it was just the headlights as the car turned onto the streets and as the police inside caught sight of the two, the red and blue lights started flashing along with the whirring of the siren.

Namjoon’s cigarette dropped out of his mouth as he hurried to get Taehyung’s attention. The younger looked at him in confusion and then he glanced behind them at the police car that had pulled up next to the curb. The door began to open and Taehyung swore under his breath as he dropped his can of spray paint. Namjoon reached down to grab the backpack with the rest of the spray paint and began running, nearly tripping over himself in his rush. Taehyung scrambled to start running behind him.

Namjoon could hear the pounding of steps from the pursuing cops and their shouts for the two of them to stop. They kept running for a while and Namjoon glanced back to see how close the cops were to them but was surprised to see that Taehyung was already turning around and moving backward as he taunted the cops with a wide grin.

Namjoon couldn’t help but laugh at his antics and taunt the cops too but there was a voice in the back of his head telling him that this wouldn’t end well.

Looking back on it, he should have listened to that voice.

The two turned a few corners in an attempt to lose the two officers but they weren’t expecting a second squad car to cut them off as they came out through an alley.
Namjoon swore as his stomach dropped in nervousness and he froze. Taehyung turned around in an attempt to run back the way that they’d come but the police officers were cornering them on either side.

The officers in the squad car got out of the car and waited for the other officers to make their way down the alley. When they did, Namjoon and Taehyung were aggressively pushed against the side of the car and handcuffed.

One of the officers took the backpack off of Namjoon’s shoulders and dumped the contents onto the ground.

It took a minute for Namjoon to hear it over the rapid pounding of his heart but Taehyung was laughing. He looked towards the younger in confusion, wondering if he had somehow missed something but Taehyung looked like he found the entire situation hilarious.

It was at that moment that Namjoon realized Taehyung was trouble but it was far too late to back out of anything now. He’d dug his grave and now, thanks to Taehyung, he’d have to lay in it.

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Luckily, Namjoon was able to use his knowledge of the law and the loopholes to get them off with a stern warning. Namjoon had never been arrested before and since the officers had claimed that he was the one in possession of the spray paint, there wasn’t much legal action they could take for a first misdemeanor. Taehyung had many more misdemeanors on his record and Namjoon doubted that the younger would have gotten off so easily if he’d been the one with the backpack.

Namjoon wished that he could have cut Taehyung off and never spoken to the younger again but he couldn’t bring himself to. He knew the younger’s home life and the sort of things he had to deal with. Taehyung seemed like he was on a mission to destroy himself and anyone else caught in his self-destructive path. Namjoon didn’t want to watch it happen, nor did he want to be the cause of it happening. He wanted to help Taehyung. He wanted to watch out for the younger and make sure that he wouldn’t ruin his life forever.

Taehyung needed somebody in his life that was on his side and looking out for him. Namjoon didn’t know who would do it if it wasn’t him.
Still, Namjoon hadn’t thought that introducing Taehyung to Seokjin would be such a disaster. He knew that the two had a lot in common and even though they were like polar opposites he thought that it’d be good if they somehow got along. Taehyung and Seokjin were in the same boat, after all, neither of them really had anyone else besides Namjoon.

In Namjoon’s eyes, they were two sides of the same coin. Similar but also totally different.

So, he was glad when they did hit it off and got along well with each other. He liked to hear that the two had been hanging out while he was at work. He’d gotten annoyed with managing so many different jobs at once and finally settled for a well-paying job pumping gas at a gas station. He honestly hated the job but it paid well and he needed a steady income. Having the job also meant that he didn’t have nearly as much free time as he’d had before so he was glad that Jin and Tae could hang out with each other.

Then the year passed. Jin started going to vocational school to study medicine, Namjoon became a senior and Taehyung entered high school.

That’s when things began to change. Taehyung began acting even more volatile than before and it was probably around then when his father started hitting his sister as well. Jin kept talking about this girl that he knew named Sohyun and then she became his girlfriend. Namjoon started to feel like he’d be working at the gas station for the rest of his life.

His father became ill and wasn’t able to work so Namjoon had to take over as head of his house and take care of his father as well. There wasn’t a minute that passed where he wasn’t stressed. He even found it hard to spend time with Jin and Tae without feeling guilty that he wasn’t making money or making sure that his father was okay. He was irritable and where it normally wouldn’t have bothered him, Jin constantly worrying about Sohyun liking him in return and Taehyung constantly getting into trouble and complaining about his father got on his nerves the most.

It wasn’t something he intended on doing but Namjoon started spending less time with both Taehyung and Seokjin. Though, since Seokjin was so busy with his girlfriend and school, Namjoon ended up spending the least amount of time with the older. Most of his free time was spent with Taehyung, and even then it was mostly because he didn’t trust the younger to be left to his own devices for an extended amount of time.

He spent a lot of time with Taehyung, both in school and out of school, and he saw how popular the younger became over the years. The problem was that the Taehyung Namjoon knew in school
was not the same Taehyung that Namjoon knew out of school. In school, Taehyung was charismatic, funny, and friendly to everyone he met. He still got in trouble often but the teachers loved him too much to really do anything. At night, Taehyung was volatile, rambunctious and almost bipolar in his mood swings. Namjoon was just lucky to not get arrested with the younger again.

Namjoon knew from the start that Taehyung was trouble but he still never expected that he would do something so cruel to his own friend.

He’d known that something was up when Seokjin stopped answering his text messages for days. The older usually responded pretty promptly to his messages and though Namjoon knew that they hadn’t been talking that much recently, he liked to think that he knew his friend well enough to know when something was up.

So, one day when he had a little time, he dropped by Seokjin’s house to see what was going on.

He’d never seen Seokjin look so down.

The older looked lost and tired, like he didn’t know how he could continue to carry the load on his shoulders without succumbing to the weight. Namjoon didn’t know what he’d been expecting when Jin led him up to his room but being told that he had broken up with his girlfriend was not on that list. Namjoon hadn’t really spoken to Jin about Sohyun much but he’d assumed that the two were still doing well, but apparently, that was not the case.

When Jin had continued though, muttering under his breath like just saying the name was more than he could handle and said that he thought his girlfriend had cheated on him with Taehyung, Namjoon was shocked.

He’d thought it was a ridiculous claim at first but as he thought about it, he remembered seeing Taehyung about a week before with a particularly pretty girl. Namjoon had thought it strange since Taehyung was supposed to hang out with him and hadn’t shown up, but after seeing that the younger was with a girl, he’d decided to just leave it at that. He should have known better though. Taehyung usually told him everything but he’d never mentioned that he was seeing anybody.

He knew that after Jin had talked about Sohyun so much that there was no doubt the girl Taehyung was with was the very same girl. Taehyung was no idiot either and he would have known that Sohyun was the girl that Jin liked so much after hearing her name.
As he thought about that, he became angry.

Namjoon knew Taehyung and he knew that the younger often did things without thinking about it but to go as far as to make moves on Jin’s girlfriend was too much. That only meant that Taehyung had made a conscious effort to hurt Jin and that was completely unacceptable.

What angered him, even more, was Jin’s attitude of indifference towards the situation. The older was simply accepting the situation and didn’t even want to talk about it with Taehyung. That was a huge problem for two reasons. One, if Taehyung wasn’t yelled at for his actions and reprimanded for them, he’d never realize that what he did was wrong. And two, if Jin was done with the situation to the point of not even wanting to hear what Taehyung had to say about it, then apologies and forgiveness would never happen and Namjoon would be awkwardly caught in the middle.

It wasn’t that he expected Jin to just forgive Taehyung for what he had done, after all, there were no excuses that could actually make it okay. But if they didn’t resolve the issue then there would always be tension and awkwardness and Namjoon didn’t want to have to deal with that. He was friends with both of them and he didn’t want to have to choose between the two. If he was made to choose, the logical choice would be Jin but Namjoon got stressed at the mere idea of leaving Taehyung to his own devices for even a few minutes.

Taehyung was destructive. A ticking time bomb that would blow both himself and everyone around him up if given the choice. Namjoon didn’t want to see it happen. Nor did he want to be the cause. But Taehyung doing things like this tested every last ounce of patience that Namjoon had.

If Jin wasn’t going to yell at Taehyung, then Namjoon would do it for him. Someone had to.

—

After leaving Jin’s house, Namjoon checked the time and headed to where Taehyung could usually be found around then.

It was late Friday evening which meant that Taehyung would be at home. His father drank the most on the weekends, which meant that if Taehyung wasn’t at home, the man would probably turn his aggression onto Taehyung’s little sister.

Namjoon made his way to that part of town and only grew more angry with the situation as time passed. He kept thinking of a reason as to why Taehyung would do something so deliberately mean
and couldn’t come up with a single answer. There was no reason for it at all and that was seriously pissing him off. Taehyung often did things without a reason and without thinking but to carelessly hurt someone that they both considered a close friend was just too ridiculous.

By the time he’d made his way up to Taehyung’s front door, he was livid.

He texted Taehyung to come outside rather than knocking on the door. He was angry and the last thing he wanted to come face to face with Taehyung’s asshole of a father or irritate the man with an unwanted visitor.

Taehyung didn’t answer his text message but a few minutes after sending it the door opened and the younger stepped out, carefully closing the door behind him.

“What do you want, Namjoon?” He asked, tersely. “I told you not to come here by yourself.”

Namjoon scoffed and crossed his arms. “Jin’s girlfriend cheated on him so he broke up with her.”

He was in no mood to beat around the bush and studied Taehyung’s expression for any trace of guilt. The younger just frowned slightly in confusion.

“Okay… why did you come here to tell me that?”

Namjoon breathed in and out deeply to steady himself, fighting against the sudden urge to strangle Taehyung in his frustration.

“Because Jin is too fucking upset to even see your face, let alone yell at you.” He snapped and felt satisfaction in the way that Taehyung’s facade melted and he visibly flinched. “He knows that Sohyun cheated on him with you.”

Taehyung bit his lip nervously. “He does?”

Namjoon ground his teeth together at the simple answer.
“Yes, he does. You can feel guilty, you know!” He yelled. “Why the fuck would do that to him!? I’ve been trying to figure it out since I heard about it. I saw you with her last week that one night that we were supposed to hang out, so don’t even try to play innocent right now. He’s your friend, Taehyung! Why would you do that to him!?”

Taehyung’s gaze turned downward and he scuffed his shoe on the ground. “I don’t know,” He muttered.

Namjoon was nearly seeing red. “You don’t know!? Do you want everyone to hate you, Taehyung? Is that what you want!? You do shit like this and you can’t even feel bad about it-”

“I do feel bad!” Taehyung interjected, lifting his gaze from the ground and Namjoon was surprised to see that younger’s face was red and his eyes were watering with unshed tears.

“I feel awful!” The younger continued and tears dripped from his eyes. “I just get angry and I do things! Stupid things! Things that I can’t take back! Everyone should hate me! What is there about me that anyone could even like!?”

Namjoon frowned, swallowed, and tried to think of a response. Honestly, he was sort of lost for words. He’d never seen Taehyung so emotional in all the years that he’d known him. As much as Namjoon wanted to stay angry, it was hard to, looking at the distraught expression on Taehyung’s face as tears rolled down his cheeks.

He was still just as confused, though. If Taehyung felt bad enough to cry about the situation then why did he do it in the first place? It still didn’t make any sense.

A crash echoed through the door followed by a loud voice and Taehyung flinched and glanced at the door behind him.

“Tae…” Namjoon started, desperate to say something but Taehyung cut him off.

“I don’t know why I did it either, alright?” He snapped, sniffling. “I’m an idiot and Jin deserves a better friend than me, anyway.”

And then Taehyung opened the door and quickly slipped back inside and Namjoon could hear the click of the lock after it closed.
He sighed. Somehow things had become complicated despite his best efforts.

—

Though Namjoon was still mad at Taehyung for what he’d done, he continued to hang out with the younger. Just as much as he hung out with Jin. He was glad that Jin was trying to get over the situation rather than spitting out hateful words about Taehyung to him. Namjoon would understand if Jin never wanted to hear the name “Taehyung” again, but he didn’t how he would feel if he was forced to play this strange middle role that happened whenever you were friends with people that had a falling out.

Honestly, Namjoon had the harder time not mentioning Taehyung. He had grown used to casually bringing the younger up in conversations with Jin but he saw how the older flinched when he heard the name and tried to make more of a conscious effort to not mention him. He had to tell Jin when Taehyung informed him a few weeks after the whole ordeal that he’d broken up with Sohyun, though.

He thought it might set the older’s mind at ease to hear it and Jin’s mood did seem to lift afterward.

Things might have been awkward between the three of them, especially when Taehyung hesitantly began hanging out with them again, but the addition of new friends to their group made it a bit more bearable.

Taehyung was friends with Hoseok, who happened to be the same age as Namjoon, and his bright disposition meshed well with everyone’s personalities. Plus, he was a dancer and listened to a lot of the same music that Namjoon listened to, which made the two quick friends. Hoseok’s best friend was Park Jimin and though the boy was a year younger than him and fairly quiet, Jimin made for an easy conversationalist and from time to time he and Jin would be casually sitting in a corner talking for hours about anything and everything.

Then, Taehyung introduced everyone to Jeon Jeongguk. Namjoon had seen the kid around and got along well with him, as did everyone else, even if he was a bit shy at first. Jeongguk brought along Yoongi to their friend group and though the boy one year Namjoon’s senior kept mostly to himself, the second Namjoon brought up music he tuned in and a had lot more to say about the subject than most would think.

In no time, their friend group of three had expanded to seven and it was much easier to talk with
both Taehyung and Seokjin without the lingering awkwardness. The two were still very distant from each other but it was more of a subtle thing as time went on.

They didn’t go out of their way to avoid each other but Jin tended to make sure that he was never alone with Taehyung at any point. Taehyung seemed fine with that and spent a lot of his time with either Jeongguk or Namjoon. Things were okay but even Namjoon knew that sooner or later old tensions would build up and would have to be addressed at some point.

He just hoped that it wouldn’t upset the gentle balance that they had created with their new group of friends.

Namjoon didn’t know how everyone else felt but he was immensely glad for the people suddenly surrounding him. They were a form of support that he had never experienced before. Sure, he had Seokjin and Taehyung but Tae wasn’t someone he could go to with his issues and Jin often seemed to being his best to stay put together. Namjoon wasn’t exactly good at voicing his concerns and things of that nature but just knowing that if something went terribly wrong he would have six people there willing to support him comforted him a lot.

That many people who would could lift his spirits without trying too hard and make him feel valuable was more than he could ever ask for. Namjoon had a lot of uncertainties about so many things, like if his father would get over his sickness and be able to support their family again or if Namjoon would be doomed to working whatever jobs he could find. It had always been his dream to go to university and prove all those people that told him he’d never amount to anything wrong, but like wasn’t exactly fair and he worried that all he’d end up proving those people right.

He’d gotten an offer to go to a University back near the town that he was born in but he had to decline it since it would mean not only moving away from his family that needed him, it would mean that he couldn’t work as much and couldn’t support his parents in the way that he needed to. Plus, it would mean leaving the fragile but incredibly powerful friend group that he now had. It had been a hard choice but Namjoon was certain that it was the right one. It was just hard convincing himself to say no to his dreams and still push back those voices in his head that told him that he would never amount to anything.

He hadn’t told anyone about it, not his friends and not his parents. He worried that they would probably convince him to go and he knew that if he explained his reasoning for not going, everyone would probably feel guilty for being the thing that prevented him from his dreams.

Not that he saw it that way at all. It was his own decision to make and his own choices that were to blame.
But, even without knowing, his friends calmed him and encouraged him and though he hoped that they would always be there for him like that, he knew that nothing lasted forever.

He just hoped that the fragile foundations that they were all standing on would be enough to support them for a while.

Chapter End Notes

The music recommendations that I give are all mashups of BTS songs relevant to the chapter! I highly suggest you listen to the one for this chapter! It's a mashup of Namjoon's solo song "Reflection" and a song from his mixtape "Always"! Here it is again: Music Recommendation

Fun Fact

Namjoon’s character has the least canon narrative out of all the members in the BTS Universe. [in other words: I struggled with this chapter lol]
Chapter Summary

[Chapter Recap]

*Jin experiences odd occurrences in the purgatory-like dream world and is sent into a manifestation of his biggest nightmare after an explosion of colors. He interacts with his strange looking friends as they perform tricks that shouldn’t be humanly possible and he quickly comes to realize that they aren’t human at all. These creatures with the faces of his friends blame him for their condition and take turns brutally stabbing him with a sacrificial blade.*

Chapter Notes

**Music Recommendation**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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“I scream out of frustration but the empty air echoes.”

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There was concrete below him, blue sky above him, and chain link fences spread out in all directions in front of him.

It was strange but no matter where he was, he was glad to be out of that claustrophobic room with no exit. He thought he might have gone crazy if he had to stare at those white tiles for any longer. If he hadn’t already gone crazy.

As he stared at the ground, a sudden drop of water splashed down onto the concrete, darkening it as the wetness spread. Jin was surprised by this at first before two more drops fell and he belatedly realized that he was crying.

Now that the shock of the sudden environment change had worn off, the shock of what had just happened to Jin was overwhelming. His hand fisted in the white cotton of his shirt once again as sobs ripped from his throat. The fear, the pain, and the sorrow formed like lead in his heart, weighing it down and spreading poison to all parts of his body.
It had always been a nagging feeling in the back of Jin’s mind that his friends hated him. It was the same voice that told him it was unfair that he was the odd one out of their friend group, the same voice that told him that he was unneeded and unwanted by them, and the same voice that told him that he was a bother to everyone around him. The voice that Jin had always tried to very hard to ignore. But even with those kind of thoughts in the back of his mind it had been horrifying to face the truth of it so brutally. His own friends had stabbed and murdered him and at this point it didn’t matter if it was real or not, he felt the pain as if it were real, and he felt their hatred as if it were real.

Even if his mind was fabricating the entire thing and it had just been some nightmare that he couldn’t wake up from, he had always worried that Namjoon resented him for what he had. He had always taken care to not shove his family’s wealth into his younger friend’s face and had always been careful of what he said so he wouldn’t offend him.

Had he failed at that too?

When Jin felt the tears begin to cease and the panic began to finally leave his limbs and stop them from shaking, he took a deep breath and pulled himself to his feet.

Whether or not this was some kind of punishment for him, he had to find out what was happening and what the purpose of those photographs were. Every time he touched one of them he was taken to some… strange form of reality. It couldn’t be real but it felt too real to be fake. He had to find out what would happen when he touched all six of them.

Jin looked around, still seeing nothing but fences. Beyond them he was surrounded by concrete in every direction so he had no idea where this place was. With a sigh, he turned back around but a figure in the distance caught his attention.

He ran towards it without thinking, following the path in the fences towards the figure but he quickly came to realize two things that immediately made him stop in his tracks.

One- this wasn’t a path that he was following. These fences were forming some sort of cruel maze. He could see different paths and the walking figure through the chain links but had no idea how to actually get to that path.

And two- the figure he was running after looked an awful lot like Namjoon.
Jin still had no idea how any of this worked and if he had actually gone back to a purgatory-like space or if he was still in the world where his friends were demons that wanted to sacrifice him. So, no, he wasn’t entirely sure that it was a good idea to be chasing after the figure. Not to mention that there were a bunch of strips of fabric tied on the links of the fences and it looked like the same material “youth” had been spelled out with on the fence that he saw before this. It would probably be a better idea to focus on finding a way out.

He looked around, trying to find a path that looked like it would lead to the end and when he turned to where the figure he was following had been, it was nowhere to be found.

Which was probably for the best.

Jin began walking, attempting to traverse through the maze.

It was harder than he thought it would be, and the figure that looked like Namjoon wasn’t the only one that he saw as he walked. He saw several other phantom-like figures that resembled his friends and he often turned around, walking the other way when he saw them which probably doubled the time he spent trying to find the exit.

He also found strange things in the maze as he walked. Some of them were familiar to him, a lollipop of the brand Namjoon was always eating, the white lighter that Yoongi always held in his hand when he was upset, and a spilled bottle of pills that looked exactly like the ones Hoseok had thrown down the sink when Jin was in his body. But the rest of the things that he passed by made no sense to him.

A pile of feathers that had scattered with the wind, a broken beer bottle, and a puddle of water with wet footprints leading away from it even though Jin was sure he hadn’t walked through it before. None of the things he saw, familiar or otherwise, seemed like things he should be seeing in the maze.

Eventually after what seemed like endless walking, Jin came across a photograph stuffed into the links of the fence. Without thinking, he reached out for it, and as soon as the corner of the plastic touched his fingertips he felt a pulling sensation and saw a blindingly white light.

—
When Jin opened his eyes again he was sat at a small table in a brightly lit room with a steaming hot tray of food in front of him. There was chatter around him over the sound of gentle music playing and, as he looked around, he saw several people both standing and sitting in nurse and doctor uniforms.

Confused, Jin glanced down at his own attire and his heart pounded in his chest as he saw that he was wearing a white lab coat with a white button down shirt and black tie.

“Doctor Kim?” A woman in a nurse’s uniform called, leaning into his field of vision. His eyes snapped over to her and he saw the worried and mildly amused expression on her face. “Are you alright? You’ve been staring at your food for the last five minutes without even touching it.”

Jin’s mouth opened and shut as his brain struggled to form his thoughts into words.

“D-doc… doctor?” He echoed stupidly.

The woman giggled, holding her hand up to her face politely. “Oh, sorry. I keep forgetting that you want us to call you Doctor Seokjin. You’d think I would have remembered by now, I’ve been working here for half a year already. Doctor Yu keeps telling me that if my memory gets any worse-”

The woman continued talking cheerfully to him but Jin was long past hearing her.

He was a doctor? As in the one thing in his life that he absolutely did not want to be? The thing that he fought so vehemently against that his own father hadn’t wished him a happy birthday in over two years?

A doctor?

But if he was actually a doctor… then how many years in the future was he? He would have had to do upwards of seven years of schooling even after completing the fast track vocational school. And if this was somehow the real world, even if it was unlikely, then what were his friends doing? Where were they?

Jin pat his pockets down in a rush, feeling around for the solid form of his phone and after a few seconds of searching, he found the device in the interior pocket of his lab coat.
He stood hurriedly, nearly knocking the chair back in his haste and the woman speaking to him stopped mid sentence at his sudden movement.

“Doctor Seokjin? Is everything okay? Where are you going?”

The majority of attention in the room turned to him as he looked at her with wide eyes and he forced himself to calm down before he caused a scene.

“Ah… I forgot that I needed to make a call. I’ll be back in a few minutes.” He lied, hoping that he didn’t sound as freaked out as he felt. The woman frowned but shrugged after a long moment.

“Well, don’t take too long, you’re leaving this untouched food all alone in this break room. Who knows if it’ll be here when you get back!” Her and another nurse laughed at that and the two began talking, giving Jin a perfect opportunity to leave without having to come up with something to say in return.

He opened the door into the hallway and began walking, following signs that led to outdoor areas. After a few minutes he ended up on a staff balcony and after having checked that no one else was around, he breathed out a heavy sigh in a futile attempt to calm his racing heart.

He was a doctor. It would seem that he was being punished with all of his worst nightmares. If he weren’t freaking out so badly he might have even laughed at how completely absurd that turn of events would be given all that he did to avoid this very fate and yet- here he was.

With shaking hands, he brought his phone up to his face, opening his contacts and scrolling through them for any familiar names. He thought that it might be best to call Namjoon since, hatred and potential demonic nature aside, Namjoon was his closest friend and would be the most likely to understand the situation if Jin explained it to him. Namjoon would think he was crazy, and maybe he was, but he would at least listen.

But as Jin scrolled through the contacts of his phone, seeing no ‘Namjoon’ in the N’s nor ‘Kim Namjoon’ in the K’s or even ‘Joonie’ in the J’s, he came to the realization that he didn’t have Namjoon’s number. And as he meticulously looked over all of the names in his contact list, he saw that he didn’t have any of his friend’s numbers. He even looked over his call history to see if he had overlooked something or saw any familiar numbers but the only thing that stood out to him was the multitude of incoming and outgoing calls to the same number, one that Jin didn’t recognize.
He looked at the name of the contact again and his phone nearly went careening to the ground.

He had been in constant contact with someone named Sohyun. And even if it was pure coincidence or chance that it was the same name… Kim Sohyun was Jin’s first love and heartbreak.

He had a very, very bad feeling about this.

It was his best lead so far, though, since he didn’t recognize any other numbers in his phone except for his family and he doubted that talking to them would do him any good. Especially since it didn’t look like he had spoken to them recently.

So, bracing himself, he pushed the call button and held the phone up to his ear.

The dial tone rang for so long that Jin was sure he wouldn’t be getting an answer and was a few seconds from hanging up when the dial tone finally stopped.

The woman’s voice on the other end of the phone sounded winded as she breathed out a,

“Hello?”

Jin didn’t want to believe it but the voice sounded too familiar to him for it not to be true.

“Uh, hello.” He responded awkwardly. “Is this Kim Sohyun?”

The woman laughed over the phone and Jin hated how nostalgic the sound was.

“Of course, it’s me. You called me didn’t you?” She paused for a second. “Wait- you are Jin, right? I didn’t read the contact incorrectly, did I?”

“N-no it’s me.” Jin said, rushing to get his words out before she hung up or something. Kim Sohyun, the Kim Sohyun. He hadn’t talked to her at all after what happened with Taehyung so why
did it seem like he was close with her now?

“Why are you acting so strange? I practically ran over here to answer my phone since I thought it might be an emergency. Is everything okay? I know you’ve been stressed since you took over surgery from Soogeun. Did anything happen?” Jin was shocked at how genuinely concerned she sounded. But had he really become a surgeon?

“No. Everything’s fine.” He answered in a daze. “I just wanted to talk to you about something.”

“You’re on your lunch break aren’t you? If you wanted to talk, you could have come up here to pediatric care.” Sohyun giggled. “You shouldn’t. But it’s not like that’s ever stopped you before. I swear ever since you officially became a doctor, it’s gone straight to your head.”

They even worked in the same hospital!?

Jin’s head was going crazy with the volume of thoughts and questions that he had, but as much as he wanted to ask Sohyun to explain what was going on, he still didn’t know the relationship between them. Sohyun had always been nice and understanding in Jin’s memories of her but he seriously doubted that he could tell her everything without being thought of as completely insane.

He didn’t really want to meet up with her if she was working, or… at all for that matter, but it wasn’t like he had an abundance of choices. Besides, even if he didn’t meet up with her now then he would have to leave the building because he wasn’t a trained surgeon and it would not be a smart idea to pretend to be. Though, that also meant that he would have to find his own way home and he didn’t know where he was, let alone where he lived. He didn’t even know if he was living in the same apartment or not.

So, yes, his options were extremely limited.

“Actually, what I wanted to talk to you about is pretty important. Not an emergency but it… can’t really wait.”

The silence on the line was deafening and Jin bit his lip as he waited for some kind of response. He really didn’t know what he was going to do if she said no.

“… It’s really important?” She questioned, and Jin could hear the hesitance in her voice.
“It’s really important.” He confirmed.

Sohyun was quiet again for a long moment before she breathed out a deep sigh.

“You’re gonna get the both of us fired. But fine. I’ll tell everyone you had a family emergency and that we need to go. Wait for me down in the lobby.”

Before Jin could even respond, Sohyun hung up and the beeping of the lost call rang dully in his ears.

Well… that went better than he’d expected.

Jin took a deep breath before turning and returning to the interior of the building. He got Sohyun to agree to talk with him, but he still needed to figure out what he was even going to say to her. And find out how to get to the lobby from where he was without being stopped by anyone.

He walked fast and kept his head low as he made his way to where he thought he had seen elevators previously. But as soon as he reached out a hand to press the button that would call the elevator, he heard someone call his name from behind him. He turned, seeing a man in a similar looking white lab coat approaching him. The man didn’t look familiar so Jin had no idea who he was.

Which was bad.

There was no way he’d be able to get into the elevator and safely evade the man in time. Jin had seen way too many dramas to ever believe that would work. And being stuck in an elevator with the man sounded much worse than being stuck in a hallway. Jin turned back around in a hurry and quickly scanned the hallways to his right and to his left.


Without a second thought, Jin rushed towards the staircase, doing his best to not run and seem even more suspicious than he was already acting. He heard the man call out his name again just before the steel doors clicked shut. Jin started hurriedly down the stairs in case the man decided to chase
him down. He didn’t know what the man wanted from him but he figured that it would be for the best if he avoided talking to people as much as possible.

He jogged down the stairs quickly, only slowing down once a few moments passed and he didn’t hear any door opening above him.

Luckily, there were signs outside the doors on the landings so Jin couldn’t get himself totally lost.

After a few minutes and five flights of stairs, Jin’s legs were burning and he was breaking into a sweat but he had finally found the door into the lobby. He pushed it open with a sigh and walked down a narrow hallway, following the sound of voices and a baby crying until he eventually saw a large room with multiple chairs lining the walls and people sitting in almost every one of the seats.

He didn’t see her at first, since her back was turned to him, but when she turned her head to laugh at something the receptionist said, Jin was shocked to his first love standing a few feet away from him.

She had matured with age, the fat in her cheeks that he had found so adorably cute when she smiled had disappeared, taking with it her immaturity. She caught sight of him from the corner of her eye and turned to face him with an easy smile. Her chestnut brown hair had been dyed black and the bangs that had once settled just above her eyebrows had grown out. She parted her hair down the middle and the black waves fell softly down her shoulders.

She still looked like the Kim Sohyun that Jin had once known but now she looked like a put together grown woman. Jin had worried that old resentment would return upon seeing her again, but he was surprised that he felt nothing but a familiar comfort in seeing her.

He took a step towards her but as soon as he did, a sudden hand pulled at his shoulder.

He whirled around, letting out a gasp of surprise when he saw the same man from before standing in front of him. The man was frowning now and crossed his arms over his chest as he looked at Jin.

“Seokjin, didn’t you hear me calling you?” He asked, lifting an eyebrow.

Jin fumbled for an answer with wide eyes.
“N-no… I was in a rush.” He stuttered. “Did… you need something?”

The man sighed and let his arms drop, a calm smile spreading across his face. Jin couldn’t figure out who he was. He was wearing a nametag with his name and doctor title but besides that there was nothing telling. He didn’t look that much older than Jin himself so he couldn’t even tell if he was a superior or coworker.

“Do I need something? Yeah, I need you to get back up to surgery and remove some kidney stones from a young man’s urinary tract.” The man laughed and Jin felt some of the tension leave his body.

“Did you forget or something?”

Well in a way, yes, he had forgotten. If he had ever known about it to begin with. But it wasn’t like he could actually say that.

Jin opened his mouth to come up with a viable excuse but a woman’s voice spoke before he could get a word out.

“You aren’t working him too hard up there in surgery are you, Siwon?” Jin turned to see Sohyun standing next to him with a teasing smile on her face. “I swear his eyebags have only gotten worse since April.”

Siwon laughed. “Do any of us actually get any sleep? If anyone is sleeping they should take over some of my workload.”

Sohyun laughed along with him. “If you have time to sleep, you aren’t doing your job right. But anyways, Jin has a family emergency so we’re gonna have to leave for the day.”

Siwon’s expression fell into shock and he turned his attention to Jin in concern.

“Really? What happened? Is it serious? Well, obviously it is since you’re leaving in the middle of the day, but is everything okay?”
Jin balked at the sudden return of attention to him and said the first thing that came to his mind.

“My father collapsed. They don’t know why yet but I still think I should be there so…” He trailed off awkwardly but Siwon nodded reaching out a hand to squeeze Jin’s shoulder reassuringly.

“That’s rough. I’ll let the higher-ups know for you. Go ahead, and get some sleep while you can!” Siwon smiled warmly at both Jin and Sohyun and walked away from them with a wave.

“He’s nice.” Jin commented without thinking. At first the man had seemed somewhat intimidating, but he was friendly and warm when he smiled. He gave Jin a feeling of comfort and familiarity that was strange seeing as he’d never even met the man before now.

Sohyun scoffed, wrapping an arm around Jin and leading him in the direction of the exit.

“Yes, well, he’s kind of your closest friend so I’d imagine he is.”

Jin frowned, turning his head to look at the retreating figure of Siwon. How had he managed to become friends with someone so charismatic?

As he continued to question his relationship with Siwon, Sohyun led him to the parking lot. They approached a silver sedan and Jin thoughtlessly walked towards the driver’s side door.

“Uh, Jin?” Sohyun called, confusion evident in her voice. Jin turned towards her with raised eyebrows.

“What?”

Sohyun gave him a strange look. “You must be really out of it to be getting in the driver’s seat.”

Jin didn’t really know what she meant by that, but after thinking about it, he realized he had simply assumed that it was his car because he had always been the designated driver of his friend group. He figured this must have been her car, then.
“Oh… sorry.” He muttered, walking around and getting in on the passenger side.

Sohyun sat down in the driver’s seat and as soon as the two of them closed their doors Jin felt the cool pads of her fingertips pull his chin towards her and he was too shocked to even react when she leaned in and kissed him.

She retracted after a moment and her eyes fluttered open in confusion. Jin couldn’t do anything but blink in surprise.

If it was even possible Jin was more confused than he was a few seconds ago.

*Why had Sohyun kissed him out of nowhere?*

*What was their relationship?*

*Why was he a doctor!?*

Sohyun sat back in her seat after studying him for a long moment. She licked her lip before pulling it in to chew on it with her teeth and fixed Jin with a strange look.

“Is something wrong, Jin?” She asked after a long moment of terse silence had passed between them.

*Something was very wrong*, he wanted to scream. *Everything* was wrong, and messed up and he had no idea why any of it was happening to him.

Instead he sighed, leaning his head back on the headrest. “Can we go to a cafe or something so I can tell you about it?”

He felt her eyes on him for another long moment before she started the engine and began pulling out of the space.
Fifteen minutes later, Jin was sat in a cozy coffee shop with an iced coffee sat in front of him while Sohyun sat across from him with an expectant look on her face.

He’d been wracking his brain since Sohyun had started the car for some reasonable way to explain why he didn’t even know what year it was. But with the intensity of Sohyun’s gaze on him he was having trouble thinking of anything that didn’t make him sound insane.

“Jin, what is going on with you today?” Sohyun asked impatiently. It felt strange now that she had kissed him. Looking at her before hadn’t resurfaced any old feelings but that kiss had caught him off guard. It was unreal that he could be sitting across from her like this after what she did to him and have her expect him to act like there was nothing wrong with that. It reminded him of how she had done the same when they were dating before he’d found about her cheating. She had probably sat across from him just like this, with an innocent smile on her face while she knowingly broke his heart-

But that wasn’t what he should be thinking about right now. No, now he needed to work on getting answers for the many questions he had.

He stared down at his iced coffee. The ice was beginning to melt and condensation was rolling down the sides of the plastic cup. He didn’t really drink coffee and he could tell just by looking at it that it wouldn’t be nearly sweet enough for him to enjoy it. He had ordered it just to have something to drink but he was regretting his choice already.

The ice shifted as more of it melted, and just like that it hit him. He looked up from the cup to Sohyun who had still been waiting for an answer.

“I... “ He began. “I think that I’m suffering from transient global amnesia.”

Sohyun raised an eyebrow. “What?”

Apparently, all the studying he had done in vocational school hadn’t been for nothing. He sat a bit straighter as the details of the condition returned to him and responded more confidently.

“Transient global amnesia.” He repeated. “I can’t remember anything. I still know who you are and I know who I am. But I have no idea why I’m a doctor or why we work in the same hospital.”
Sohyun frowned but said nothing.

“Earlier,” Jin continued. “When we were talking to Siwon- I don’t know who he is. You said that we were close friends but I would definitely remember having a friend like that. And… the surgeon you said I took over surgery from. I don’t know him either. I don’t even know what year it is.”

Sohyun still wasn’t saying anything and Jin was getting nervous. It wasn’t as if he was lying- he didn’t remember anything that happened to get him to this point. But that may have been because it never happened to him in the first place. No matter how crazy that sounded. He didn’t know where the photographs were taking him but the fact that he still remembered touching one of them to get to where he was now said enough. Something strange was happening and whether this was reality or not had yet to be determined.

“If… if,” Sohyun began with a firm voice. “You are suffering from transient amnesia, then why didn’t you say so while we were still in the hospital where they could have properly diagnosed whatever it is that you’re going through?”

Jin hadn’t even thought of that. He’d been too busy worrying about anyone finding out that he couldn’t remember anything and ruining something. But he couldn’t waste time with that now, because he wasn’t suffering from memory loss. Something else strange was happening and he needed to find his friends.

“Because…” He desperately grasped for a reason that would make sense. “Some things aren’t making sense to me with the memory that I do have. So, I wanted to talk to you first since we seem close now.”

Sohyun seemed to bristle at that and the frown dropped from her face as her mouth opened slightly and her expression looked genuinely confused.

Jin moved so that his hand could rest on his knee rather than resting his elbow on the table and he was surprised to hear a metallic clank and a strange feeling on his finger as he accidentally hit the edge of the table.

Curiously, he held his hand out in front of him and a strange feeling of dread began in his gut when he noticed the silver band on his ring finger. He stared at it for a long moment, wondering how he hadn’t noticed it before, then his eyes drifted to where Sohyun’s hands were wrapped around her
“Y-your... ring...” Was all he could manage to say as his gaze drifted between his own ring and the ring on Sohyun’s finger.

She slowly raised her hand, and her expression had hardened as tears gathered in her eyes. She reached across the table until she laced her hand in his own and Jin could only stare at the two rings in complete shock.

“11 months ago,” Sohyun began unsteadily. “On August 15th of last year you took me on the best date of my life and proposed to me at the end of it. It was awkward and romantic and we were both crying. But I had never been happier in my life than at that moment, because I don’t deserve you and I know that I don’t, but I am so grateful to have you in my life.”

Her grip on Jin’s hand tightened. “We started dating during our residency at the hospital six years ago. We’ve been engaged for almost a year. Do you... really not remember that, Jin? Because this is not funny enough to be a joke.”

Jin frowned as he tried to do the math in his head.

“What year is it?” He asked, squeezing Sohyun’s hand urgently.

“It’s 2024, Jin.” She responded tiredly.

2024?! Jin had realized that he was obviously fairly far in the future but for him to be thirty-two years old suddenly was making his head spin.

He shook his head in shock. “Sohyun, I’m not joking. I don’t remember anything that happened over the last nine years.”

Sohyun retracted her hand with a barely muffled sob, and Jin watched as her shoulders shook with her crying.

“Why? Why is this happening? I don’t understand!” She wailed under her breath and Jin wished
that he knew the answer.

“If I’m correct and it is transient global amnesia, my memories should return within a few days.” He offered in an attempt to cheer her up.

It seemed to work as she slowly stopped sobbing and wiped her tears away with a shaking hand.

“Sohyun, how did I become a doctor?” Jin tried once she had calmed down. “I never wanted to. I thought I dropped out of med school and started going to art school?”

She coughed out a laugh and shook her head. “What are you talking about? You always wanted to be a doctor. That’s what you and your father always fought about. He wanted you to take over the family clinic and you wanted to become a big shot at a fancy hospital. So you did.”

Jin frowned, what she was saying didn’t make any sense. There was no point in time that Jin remembered in which he ever wanted to be a doctor or do anything in the medical field.

“What about my brother?”

“What about him? He’s still in America, I think. You told me that your family basically abandoned him when he wanted to become an entrepreneur and you haven’t heard from him since he left.”

Jin was beginning to get a headache. Everything Sohyun was telling him was the opposite of what actually happened and he had no idea why that was.

“Then… how did we start dating?” He asked.

“What do you mean? We started dating in our residency at the hospital, like I said. We weren’t supposed to, but Siwon is the only one who knows about it.”

“No,” Jin shook his head. “I thought we started dating in vocational school.”

Sohyun’s face became blank of expression as she looked at him, seemingly startled by what he had
said.

“That… was a long time ago.”

Jin narrowed his eyes. “So, you did cheat on me with Taehyung?”

Sohyun closed her eyes as if hearing the words physically hurt and sighed.

“I made a mistake. An awful, terrible mistake that I never should have made, but I was young and stupid and I thought that being with a bad boy would somehow make me cooler. It was stupid, Jin. I regret it every day and there’s no amount of times that I can say sorry that will ever make up for it.”

“We broke up after and I realized my mistake too late. You wouldn’t even let me apologize, so I didn’t even get to say a word to you for four years. And by chance, we ended up serving our residency at the same hospital. I thank god for that everyday. Because I was able to finally apologize to you, and we took our relationship incredibly slow until you could learn to trust me again. We stopped talking about the past and just focused on the future. Just you and me.”

She smiled softly as she lovingly twisted her engagement ring and Jin almost felt guilty that he had been harboring so much resentment for her all of these years. Maybe he had also made a mistake in not hearing her side and at least letting her apologize. Maybe he had been young and brash and rushed into things. Maybe things would have been different if he had made different choices.

A weird feeling overcame him in that moment, one that almost had tears slipping from his eyes. He felt… at peace with the woman in front of him. It was as if a huge weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He hadn’t realized how badly he had wanted an explanation from someone who had once been a close friend. But now that he had gotten at least some kind of reasoning and heartfelt apology he felt… lighter.

“What about my friends?” He asked after a long moment of silence between them.

Sohyun snapped out of the reverie she had been in. “Who? Siwon? He-”

“No, not him.” Jin corrected. “I mean Namjoon and the others.”
Sohyun’s eyebrows furrowed and she seemed puzzled. “Namjoon and the others? You haven’t mentioned them in years. I don’t think you talk to any of them anymore. I never really met all of them either…”

So, that was the reason for the absence of their contacts in his phone? It caused a dull pang in Jin’s chest.

“Do you know where any of them are? I need to talk to them. It might help my memories come back faster.”

Sohyun thought for a moment, taking a sip of her tea.

“I… only know about Namjoon. My younger brother is doing his mandatory military service and he’s mentioned that Kim Namjoon is one of the lieutenants that he really respects. And… I only spoke with Taehyung once after what happened. I wanted to make amends with my mistakes so I tracked him down, which was strangely difficult by the way, and we mostly just talked about you. I don’t know what happened between all of you after you graduated but… Taehyung seemed haunted by something. He’s a few years younger than us but he seemed twenty years older when I spoke with him. It was weird. I haven’t kept in contact with him or anything, though, so I really have no idea where he is.”

It wasn’t much but at least it was a start.

“Can you get your brother on the phone?”

—

And that was how Jin found himself on a train out of Seoul and headed towards the Incheon coastal military base that Namjoon was stationed at.

Sohyun had insisted on going with him but he had somehow managed to convince her to stay in Seoul. This was something that he had to do by himself and he still felt kind of strange coming to terms with the fact that they were engaged and lived together.
After Sohyun had called her younger brother they had spent a bit longer in the cafe going over all of the things that Jin had “forgotten”. Most notably was the reasoning why Sohyun had reacted so strangely to Jin attempting to drive. He apparently had a paralyzing fear of driving, but as he had never explicitly told Sohyun the reasoning she couldn’t tell him why. She was only able to tell him that it had started when he was twenty-two, in between the time they had known each other, and that he had never gotten behind the wheel since.

He couldn’t think of any reason for that either. In the world he was used to, he had only fallen into despair after Jeongguk had been hospitalized from his car accident and Hye-su had died. In this world he doubted that he had ever even met Hye-su, given that he had never gone to the same art school as her. Though, that train of thought caused him a sadness he didn’t know what to do with, so he pushed the feeling down and tried to figure out what he should do.

The way Jin saw it, he had to get back into contact with his friends. Once he did that there were three things that could happen. One: He would return the strange limbo world that he kept finding himself in. Two: He regained the memories that he was missing from this world and would continue to stay here. Or three: absolutely nothing would happen.

The third option was what he was dreading.

The most Jin could understand about what was happening was that he was either in some sort of limbo or purgatory but, either way, he was trapped. Things only changed and progressed when he touched the photographs but each time he returned from the... world that the photographs took him to, he still ended up in the same place. The surroundings may have changed but he was still trapped with no exit in sight. He doubted that even if he had made it out of the maze that he would have found a proper way out. But the point was that he distinctly remembered touching the photograph in the chain link fence before he opened his eyes in the hospital break room. So, although it wasn’t completely impossible, he doubted that this was the real world.

What he couldn’t understand was why he was being forced into this mess, and even more importantly, what he was supposed to do to get out of it. The only lead he had so far were the photographs. Something was happening to him when he touched one of them and he had to figure out what would happen once he touched all of them. That had to be the key to all of this- he hoped.

The air was warm with the beginning of spring, carrying the scent of both the briny sea and budding flowers to Jin’s nose as he approached the base. As a civilian, he wasn’t allowed to enter but Sohyun’s brother had been nice enough to set up a time for Namjoon to meet with Jin.

He just hoped that Namjoon would actually want to meet with him.
The horror of his friends brutally stabbing him still sat heavily on Jin’s mind and he didn’t think that he would ever be able to completely forget about it. He wasn’t worried that Namjoon would suddenly stab him or punch him in the face or something equally horrible, but there was a reason that the seven of them had stopped talking and Jin had no idea what that reason was.

The military base was buzzing with life and Jin passed several uniformed young men talking animatedly to each other as he approached it. It was apparently Friday and the younger recruits were excited for the fun the weekend would bring. Beyond them, guards stood at attention at the entrance of the base but Jin could see a lone figure standing just in front of the entrance, standing with his arms firmly locked behind his back and staring up at the sky.

It may have been a decade in the future but Jin felt as though he’d never forget the figure of his closest friend. Namjoon.

The name was leaving his lips before he could think better of it and the lone figure slowly turned his head in Jin’s direction as the older continued to approach. Namjoon smiled in that way that always made his dimples overly pronounced and turned to face Jin completely.

“Jin-hyung!”

Jin gained confidence at the sight of his friend’s smile rather than the sneer he had been wearing the last time they saw each other. He opened his arms, spreading them out for a hug and couldn’t help the relieved smile that appeared on his face as Namjoon hugged him back.

“It’s been a long time, hyung.” Namjoon stated warmly, squeezing Jin’s shoulder.

When they stepped away from each other, the first thing that Jin noticed was that Namjoon hadn’t changed very much from the friend he was used to seeing. He looked older, sure, and his usually messy dark brown hair was shortly cut and parted neatly. But other than his strict posture and muscular physique, he still looked the same.

“Too long.” Jin agreed. It truly did feel like he was seeing his friend for the first time in a long while.

“There’s a great barbecue place around here, I was thinking we could get dinner and catch up.” Namjoon grinned again. “My treat.”
Jin raised an eyebrow. “Your treat? You sure that you’re still the Kim Namjoon that I used to know?”

Namjoon laughed and threw an arm around Jin, turning them and leading him in the direction of the restaurant.

—

The barbeque was good even though the ruckus from the abundance of young men in the restaurant gave Jin a headache. Namjoon just smiled at their antics, he may have been their lieutenant but he was in civilian clothing so he doubted they even noticed his presence.

The two had made cordial talk throughout their meal, each asking the other how’d they’d been, how their careers were going, and reminiscing about old times.

It was nice, but Jin was itching to ask Namjoon some real questions. The other had just finished his third beer while Jin was still nursing his first since he didn’t want to seem drunk when he started talking about things that would seem crazy coming from a sober person’s mouth.

But Namjoon beat him to the punch. “So, Mr. Handsome, are you finally tied down? That ring on your finger looks like it’s just screaming commitment.”

Jin startled as he looked down to his hand, seeing the silver band glint under the low light of the restaurant. It made him uncomfortable to see it. The love that he had was for someone else, someone who was gone from the world now, and it hadn’t been his choice to give it to anyone else.

But at the same time, he couldn’t bring himself to take the ring off.

“… Yeah.” He muttered, lost in thought.

“You don’t have to be embarrassed if you didn’t invite me to the wedding.” Namjoon chuckled, leaning back in his chair. “We haven’t talked since… well, you know.”

Jin looked up at his friend in confusion. “Since when?”
Namjoon expression changed then, a shadow crossing over it briefly before his easy smile returned making Jin wonder if he had imagined the change.

“Let’s not talk about stuff like that. I’m only just now seeing you again after so long and you’re married! What’s she like? Do you have any kids?”

Jin frowned, growing irritated. “I’m not married, I’m engaged. To Kim Sohyun. But since when have we not spoken? Did something happen?”

Namjoon’s eyes widened in surprise. “Sohyun? As in the same Sohyun that cheated on you with Taehyung and completely broke your heart? Wow, I guess what they say about first loves are true. You were so heartbroken. I’m shocked that you started dating again. Let alone got back together with her.”

“Namjoon.” Jin hissed, fists clenched in exasperation.

His friend’s smile slipped from his face as he took in how irritated Jin had gotten.

“You know what happened, Jin. I’d rather we not talk about it. Let the past stay in the past.” Namjoon sighed, the jovial tone of his voice long gone. Instead, he sounded tired; haggard and worn down.

Jin shook his head vehemently. “No, I don’t. I woke up today in the break room of the hospital I work at, not knowing where I was and not remembering the last nine years of my life.” He glared down at the ring on his finger.

“I don’t remember asking Sohyun to marry me and I don’t remember deleting all of my friend’s contact numbers from my phone. I don’t remember this life, Namjoon. I don’t remember it at all, and the things that I do remember are not adding up.”

Namjoon’s face twisted into a mixture of both shock and concern and he regarded Jin silently for a few moments, seemingly looking for the traces of a lie in Jin’s expression.

“... You’re terrible at lying.” He said after a few minutes had passed.
Jin glared at him and shook his head, begging his friend with his eyes to believe him.

“I’m **not** lying.”

“I know.” Namjoon admitted, nodding his head. “You can’t ever look into someone’s eyes and tell a lie. I’ve always been able to tell in the past but right now… you look completely earnest.”

They were quiet again for a long moment before Namjoon suddenly swore.

“**Shit,** we’re gonna need more alcohol.”

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They left the restaurant, stopping at a corner store for some soju before making their way to Namjoon’s apartment. Jin was glad for the change of scenery. Talking about serious topics over the hooting and hollering of drunk twenty year olds desperate for fun wasn’t ideal and Namjoon seemed to agree.

His friend’s apartment was a few minutes away from the military base and they had walked in relative silence on the way over. They climbed the stairs up to the second floor and Namjoon held the door open for Jin to enter before following after him.

The apartment was small but cozy and it seemed as though Namjoon had been living here for quite a few years. His friend disappeared into the kitchen, returning a few minutes later with two glasses that he sat on the coffee table before sinking into the plush couch. Jin had busied himself with taking off his shoes but he joined Namjoon on the couch once he was done.

The air was tense and Jin wasn’t sure if he should break the silence or wait for Namjoon, who was obviously contemplating something, to speak first.

He watched as Namjoon poured them both a glass of soju, bringing his full glass up to his lips and sipping slowly as he thought.
“You said the things that you do remember aren’t adding up?” Namjoon asked finally. “What did you mean by that?”

Jin shifted on the couch, leaning forward until his elbows were able to rest on his knees.

“What I do remember from nine years ago doesn’t make sense with what’s happening now.” His eyes shifted from Namjoon’s pensive gaze, down to the deep wood of the floor underneath his socked feet. His eyes caught the glint of metal around his ring finger again and he sighed.

“Like this,” Jin explained, holding his left hand up to show the engagement ring. “I remember that Sohyun cheated on me, but I wanted nothing to do with her after that. Nine years ago I met someone completely different and things were going well between us but…”

Jin squeezed his eyes shut in a desperate attempt to keep the sudden rush of tears from spilling out. He hadn’t actually told anyone of Hye-su’s death yet and the task of actually voicing it out loud hurt like a knife in his chest. And he had first-hand experience of that sensation.

“She…” He heaved in a deep breath to calm himself. His lip was wobbling with the effort to keep from crying and Jin didn’t have to look up to feel the worried gaze of his friend on him. “She died… in… in a car accident. She was running across the street to meet with me for our first date and the car came out nowhere and she just-” He shook his head as a few tears escaped from his closed eyelids.

He took a minute to compose himself, swiping the escaped tears from the tops of his cheeks and lifting his head up to meet Namjoon’s gaze again. His friend’s eyebrows had furrowed as he looked at Jin, nothing but concern and sympathy on his face.

“And… I’m a doctor. A god damn surgeon.” Jin spat. “I never wanted that. We’ve been friends since middle school, you know me. You know that I always wanted to be an actor. So, I can’t understand why Sohyun told me that my father and I fought because I wanted to be a world-renowned doctor and he wanted me to take over the clinic. I can’t understand why my brother was the one outcasted from the family rather than me. It doesn’t make any sense.”

Namjoon was shaking his head by the time Jin finished explaining. He had a strange expression on his face, similar to the one Sohyun had worn when Jin had said that they were close. He was beginning to think it was the expression that people wore when they were completely baffled.

“Jin, you never told me that you wanted to be an actor. Honestly, from what I remember, you were always trying so hard to please your father that it pissed me off. I felt like I knew you in middle
school but you changed so much after that to conform to his expectations that I was shocked when you went against him and refused to run the clinic. I think that you just wanted to be better than him, prove that you could surpass his accomplishments. And… I guess you did.”

Jin didn’t know how to respond to that. He couldn’t even argue that it wasn’t true because he doubted Namjoon would make something like that up. Things were different now and it felt like his entire past had been rewritten. But if that was the case, then what was it that had caused it to change so drastically?

Suddenly, Namjoon’s expression turned deadly serious, all traces of his easy smile completely gone and Jin didn’t know why that scared him so much.

“Do you… really not remember what happened that night? Why we all stopped talking to each other?” He asked, and there was a tone in his voice that was like a barely suppressed frustration.

Namjoon sounded… angry. But Jin had no idea what he could have done to make his long time friend have such an emotion towards him. His mind flashed back to jet black eyes and mint colored hair and he shuddered involuntarily.

But… that night? Was that also different? What horrible thing had happened that was bad enough to cause the seven of them to stop talking to each other for the last ten years?

“That night… are you talking about the night after we went to the sea?” Jin asked.

Namjoon shook his head. “No, I’m talking about the night we threw that party in our secret hideout in the abandoned train yard.”

What?

Jin’s face contorted into one of complete confusion. “The… train yard? Wasn’t our secret hideout that abandoned community pool?”

Namjoon’s frown deepened. “No, we stopped hanging out there after Jeongguk graduated from school.”
“I… don’t remember that at all.” Jin whispered, his throat constricting so much that it was hard to breathe let alone speak. Why was everything so different?

He was getting a horrible feeling of dread in the depths of his stomach that was so strong he was beginning to feel nauseated. If everything was so different than anything could have happened to separate the friends from each other and Namjoon’s reaction to Jin not remembering was worrying him the most.

His friend rubbed at his eyes aggressively, before suddenly downing the entire glass of soju that he had poured for himself. Jin distantly thought that Namjoon was definitely drinking too much as he remembered the four beers the younger had finished earlier in the evening.

“The train yard was where we spent most of our time. While we sat around doing nothing at the community pool, the train yard was where we threw stupid parties with just the seven of us and drank until we passed out.” Namjoon began explaining. “It was stupid but I think at that time we were all struggling with personal issues and rather than talking about them maturely, we turned into glorified delinquents. Taehyung always dragged us into doing stupid stuff but that night was the worst of it. We had been drinking the whole night, fooling around and destroying things as usual. But Taehyung had suggested we take the party out on the town and we all stupidly agreed. So, you drove us around, and even though you were more sober than the rest of us, you were still drunk. It was a bad idea to begin with but it just got progressively worse.”

Namjoon shook his head as he let out a troubled sigh.

“Looking back on it now, I think we were all so desperate to get away from our own problems that we were sprinting away while we looked back over our shoulders and had no idea where we actually running. That night… we vandalized the whole town. We stopped traffic in the middle of a tunnel and spat on people’s cars, tagged them with spray paint, threw drinks and food at people. It was… a mess.”

Jin was shocked to say the least. His jaw had fallen open somewhere in the middle of Namjoon’s recount of the story and he struggled to pull himself together.

“We… really did that?” He asked. It wasn’t that he didn’t believe Namjoon. After all, he remembered that Namjoon and Taehyung had been the delinquents of their group and both had been arrested for tagging before but… he couldn’t see the others doing something as crazy as that.

“You stayed in the truck in case we needed to make a fast escape. But… yes. We did. Then the cops showed up and that was when everything went to hell.” Namjoon looked up from his hands,
regarding Jin seriously once again. “Do you really not remember any of this?”

“I-I don’t.” Jin answered, and his tongue felt heavy with the weight of swallowing down his words. He wanted to tell Namjoon the night that he remembered but something was stopping him from doing so. It just didn’t feel like a good idea. He was lucky for his to friend to be this understanding of his situation, he didn’t want to ruin that by telling him that he remembered something completely and utterly different.

Namjoon sighed then, and he truly looked tired to Jin. “Well, the police came and so we just started running. You had cut the engine while you were sitting there, so we ran past you in the hopes that you could turn the truck around and catch up to us so we could jump in later. But… look I don’t know what happened. We were all freaking out and drunk and Jeongguk was behind me when we were running. There was a loud sound, a deep thud, and the sound of tires screeching. When I turned around Jeongguk was lying on the ground right in front of your truck and the next second I was being forced onto the ground by a police officer.”

What Namjoon was implying with his vague words didn’t occur to Jin until he looked at his younger friend for a few seconds, taking in the hard set of his jaw and the wetness of his eyes that what he was insinuating suddenly hit him.

He was standing before he even knew it, body shaking with a sick sense of fear as the dread that pooled into the depths of his stomach spread throughout his body.

“ I did not.” He hissed. His throat was constricting with fear and he almost wished that he was back on that concrete slab, being brutally murdered by his friends than here listening to Namjoon suggest that he ran over Jeongguk. He wanted to swear, he wanted to throw something, he wanted to punch Namjoon but he could do nothing but stand there trembling with dread and fear, unable to believe what he was being told.

But then he remembered what Sohyun had told him. His paralyzing fear of driving. That he hadn’t driven in years. And it was suddenly much harder for him to believe that Namjoon was lying.

His friend fixed him with a look like he had expected this kind of response and continued as if Jin hadn’t said anything.

“We were all arrested and Jeongguk was taken to the hospital. Jimin, Hoseok, and Yoongi were let off with a severe warning but because Taehyung and I had been arrested before, we were charged with vandalism and were in jail for a month with a year of community service. You were charged with driving under the influence and you… you had gone into shock basically and couldn’t argue
your case. I think it was just an accident Jin, but you never talked about it after, and even after
Jeongguk recovered in the hospital, he never told us what happened either. You didn’t serve any
jail time since your family bailed you out and I assume that Jeongguk told the cops that it was just
an accident as well but neither of you ever explained what happened to us.”

Namjoon leaned down to pick up Jin’s neglected glass of soju, and began drinking it as if it were
water.

“Things just weren’t the same after that. You got busy working on your bachelor’s degree and the
few times that you did hang out with us you were always cold and absent as if you were being
haunted. You didn’t visit Jeongguk once. After I did my time in jail, I started thinking that I needed
to clean up my act so I voluntarily enlisted for military service and our friend group just… fell
apart after that.”

Jin didn’t know what to say. He was completely and thoroughly lost for words. But he doubted that
he could even force the words out even if did have anything to say.

He suddenly understood why Namjoon had been drinking so much and sat down silently, taking
Namjoon’s now empty glass, pouring it full of alcohol. He took a drink, cringing at the strong
taste, and he was still lost for words. He wondered what he was even supposed to say. He didn’t
live this life. That much was for sure. He didn’t lose his memories because they weren’t his to
lose. He was completely sure of that now. This was a weird version of reality and he didn’t like it.
He didn’t want to live with the guilt of nearly killing one of his best friends. He couldn’t.

The two were silent, both drinking soju if only to chase away the overwhelming emotions.

Eventually, Jin found it within him to speak. He was sure now that this was not reality, or at least
not one that he wanted and he was more determined than ever to find a way out of it. He had gotten
out of the other versions of reality after all so he could get out of this one as well.

“Where is everyone else?”

Namjoon seemed surprised by the question but he had relaxed a bit more now and that expression
of simmering anger had disappeared.

“Everyone else? Uh… I think that Jeongguk became a police officer in the main city. And…
Hoseok is a pretty famous racecar driver now. I see him on tv sometimes. Taehyung is…” Taehyung
so he’s probably doing something less than respectable somewhere. I really don’t know about everyone else.”

“Is there a way that we can get in contact with them?”

Namjoon frowned in confusion. “Why?”

Jin smiled bitterly and leaned back into his seat.

“We haven’t seen each other in a decade, Namjoon. Don’t you think it’s time for a reunion?”

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Sohyun had managed to get Jin a week away from his responsibilities as a surgeon with the downside that he wouldn’t have any more vacation time for the rest of the year. Which was fine because Jin wasn’t planning to prolong his stay here.

He had tried looking at his reflection as soon as he could in the hopes that would trigger the flash of colors and bring him back to the world with fences but all he was saw was his matured face that was overdue for a shave.

Over the course of the week, Jin had crashed on Namjoon’s couch as the two attempted to track down their friends. Hoseok was strangely the easiest to track down since he was in the eye of media these days. He had grown out his facial hair a bit making him look suave and fashionable. Through Hoseok, they had tracked down Jimin who was an ordinary office worker now. He hadn’t been nearly as enthusiastic about their reunion as Hoseok was, but he had still agreed without much convincing. Though it had taken the four’s collective effort to track down Taehyung, who didn’t own a phone for some unknown reason. He had taken some time to convince since he kept coming up with more and more excuses as to why he couldn’t come even going so far as to hang up the borrowed phone when he heard Jin’s voice. Which had hurt, but they eventually convinced him to come. Yoongi had been relatively easy to find since he was working as a commercial pilot but it had taken all of their effort to get him to come. And even then it was with the condition that Jeongguk also agreed.

Jin couldn’t muster the courage to contact the youngest in the group, faced with an overwhelming sense of guilt and shame even when, logically, he hadn’t been the one to actually run over Jeongguk. He just couldn’t stop remembering how Jeongguk had looked in the hospital after
stepping out onto the street and getting hit and the thought that Jin, himself, might have caused that was completely overwhelming. But he’d listened in when Namjoon called him and shared in the younger’s relief when Jeongguk agreed.

Everyone had agreed to come.

It was time to have a reunion at the abandoned pool. The place where they used to call home.

Even if Jin hadn’t actually experienced being away from them all for an entire decade, it still felt as though he hadn’t seen them properly for a long time. And the last time that he had, they were all trying to kill him. So, saying that he was nervous would have been an understatement.

Namjoon naturally had weekends off from duty, but from what he told Seokjin he hadn’t actually used up any of his meager vacation time over the decade that he’d been serving. He visited his parents once a month but other than that, there was no reason to take off from work and something in that statement had bothered Jin but he decided to not worry about it.

But even with Jin and Namjoon’s flexible schedules they still had to plan to meet in the early afternoon. Their friends were all working citizens and as strange as it was for Jin to hear, they couldn’t just take off time whenever they wanted. Not like before.

So, Jin felt like this would be his only chance. He still wasn’t entirely certain about what he was meant to do in these distorted versions of reality but he had a gut feeling that reuniting with all of his friends was a good first step. He had to find some way out of this after all. When this week ended, he was expected to go back to work at the hospital and he could not perform surgery on anyone. But he also felt that it wasn’t a good idea to let anyone know that. For some reason, he still didn’t think it would be a good idea to ruin or change anything drastically.

He and Namjoon arrived about an hour before their set time, and Jin felt the warm sense of nostalgia as he pushed back the overgrown weeds and foliage, revealing the hidden path behind it. He had luckily thought to ask Namjoon if he had a camera and even though it was just a simple digital one, he still brought it. He wanted to be sure that he captured a picture of all of them together. The two took their time walking down the path, each lost in their own train of thought.

Eventually they made it to the large expanse of the clearing where the abandoned pool was located. Although, as Jin looked around, he was surprised to see a figure already sat on the ratty and beaten up couch on the other side of the pool. He caught Namjoon’s attention and pointed at the figure.
Namjoon squinted at the figure as if that could make him see better somehow but his face lit up in recognition after a few seconds.

“Jimin?!” He shouted across the pool.

The figure jumped at the sudden sound and spun around to face them. His face broke out into a nervous smile but Jin would recognize him anywhere. He and Namjoon ran across to the other side of the pool.

“I got here a little early…” Jimin explained when the two were finally standing in front of him, reaching behind him to ruffle through his hair nervously. “I couldn’t just sit around this morning doing nothing so I… just… yeah.”

Jin rolled his eyes at his friends antics and pulled him in for a bone crushing hug. Jimin still in surprise but after a few seconds tentatively wrapped his arms around Jin as well. When he finally let go, Namjoon pulled Jimin in for an equally tight hug.

“So… is everyone coming?” Jimin asked as he bounced on the balls of his feet.

“Everyone said they were coming.” Namjoon answered, before slumping into the ratty couch. “I can’t believe this old thing is still here.”

“Yeah,” Jimin agreed, looking around. “I thought that after all this time someone else would have found this place and made it theirs or it would have been turned into an apartment block or something.”

“I’m glad that it hasn’t changed.” Jin added, a soft smile forming on his lips. Jimin glanced at him with a matching smile.

“Me too. I missed this place.” He agreed.

It was their home after all.
Jin took pictures as he waited for everyone else to arrive, though he was wary of the little space left on Namjoon’s camera. He took pictures of the three of them and only stopped once Jimin and Namjoon complained that there would only be pictures of the three of them after they left. So, he drifted around after catching up with Jimin for a little while. He missed taking pictures like this, peacefully and with no motive other than taking good shots. Not as a method of distraction but just for fun.

He spotted a butterfly fluttering just above a bush and crouched slowly as he approached it with the camera held up to his face. But as he observed the large winged insect, a strange thing happened. It looked like the butterfly was flying backwards and to the best of Jin’s knowledge things that flew didn’t have the ability to do that.

He narrowed his eyes and pulled the camera away from his face, thinking that maybe it was just the camera playing tricks on his eyes but he watched in amazement as the butterfly continued to flutter backwards.

“Oh!? I thought I was on time!” A voice suddenly rang out from across the clearing and Jin turned to see Hoseok on the other side, a bright smile on his face as he waved excitedly at everyone. Jin quickly turned back around to the butterfly, but he realized with a start that it had disappeared. He looked through the bushes around him to see if it had simply fluttered away but it was nowhere to be seen.

“Seokjin, is that you?” A bright voice asked from behind him. Jin turned around and stood up, fully aware of how strange he must have looked crouched down near the bushes, looking around like he was trying to find the hole Alice fell down.

“Shouldn’t I be the one asking if that’s you, Hoseok?” Jin asked in amusement.

Hoseok was standing in front of him, looking every bit like he should be on the cover of some sports magazine. He was wearing tight black jeans with a black t-shirt that had some colorful band logo printed on it and a black and white letterman style leather jacket. But the most striking thing was the combination of dark hair on his forehead and the neatly trimmed beard on his jaw.

“I look good, right?” Hoseok winked, striking a sudden pose. “Wish I had found out that facial hair really suits me earlier in life.”

“Did all that fame go straight to your head?” Jin teased, swatting him.
Hoseok laughed and Jin began walking him over to Namjoon and Jimin.

Namjoon also gushed over Hoseok’s appearance and Jin rolled his eyes, sure that the man’s ego would be over the moon by the time he left today, if it wasn’t already. The two hugged and Jin watched as Hoseok and Jimin regarded each other a bit awkwardly. It made him frown to see them acting like that since they had always been the closest in the group. Had they also not spoken to each other in the past decade?

They spent some time catching up with Hoseok, and the man went wild with joy when Jin told him that he had become a surgeon, joking that they would have to compete to be the most famous one in their group. Jin didn’t feel particularly joyful about that accomplishment so he had simply smiled and nodded before changing the subject.

Eventually, they heard some commotion from across the empty pool and Jin watched in shock as Yoongi practically dragged Taehyung with him around the length of the pool.

“Yoongi-hyung let go of me!” Taehyung whined. The elder did but only after he was stood right in front of the others.

Taehyung huffed and smoothed out his shirt. Yoongi took in the surprised expressions of the four men in front of him and rolled his eyes, though Jin could tell that he was suddenly feeling embarrassed.

“I caught him wandering around like an idiot and watched him for a good five minutes before I got tired of his shit. What the hell is the point of coming all the way out here if you’re not even going meet everyone?” Yoongi spat.

Taehyung seemed flustered by that and rushed to defend himself. “I was not just wandering around! I like the trail so I just taking my time! Why did you even bother watching me for five minutes instead of just going ahead of me?!”

“You were in the way, idiot.” Was all Yoongi said before he plopped down into a seat, looking tired already.

Taehyung sighed and forced a small smile onto his face, lifting up his hand in an awkward wave.
“Hi.”

The group laughed at their antics and exchanged quick hugs with the new arrivals.

“What the hell is that on your face, Hoseok?” Yoongi asked with disgust all over his features once all the pleasantries had finished and everyone had sat down.

Hoseok looked scandalized. “What!? It’s a beard and it completely suits me! Don’t be jealous that you’d look like a grandpa if you grew one!”

Yoongi simply grunted in response and looked away from him.

“Jin, are you wearing a ring?” Jimin asked suddenly and all attention was on him.

Jin flushed red with embarrassment and cursed himself for not thinking to take it off and stick it in his pocket just for today. He glanced quickly over to Taehyung who was looking at the aforementioned ring with interest.

“Ooh, looks like an engagement ring!” Hoseok squealed, holding Jin’s hand up. “Will you be the first one of us to be married?”

“I always thought Jeongguk would be the first of us to get married. Boy is dense, but he’s always been popular with women.” Jimin commented innocently.

But Jin wished that he could shove the words back into the younger’s mouth.

The atmosphere changed drastically, the simple mention of Jeongguk’s name- the only person who had yet to appear, enough to make everyone tense and flush the good mood in the air straight down the drain. Though it seemed like the one worst affected by Jimin’s comment was Yoongi, who glared silently into the back of younger’s head so intensely that Jin worried that a hole was being burned into it.
Between the two evils, bringing up his own rocky past or leaving the atmosphere tense and uncomfortable, Jin opted for the former.

“Yeah, I’m engaged. To… uh… Sohyun.”

That did the trick, and the tense atmosphere slipped away as if his friends were more than happy to ignore the elephant in the room.

“Wow, really?” Hoseok gasped before he could stop himself. Jin could see the regret in his eyes as soon as the words slipped from his mouth.

Jin smiled in a way he hoped would come across as reassuring.

“Really. I know it’s kind of surprising but I mean… it’s been a long time.” And though he didn’t specify what had been a long time his friends knew what he was talking about. “We were all kids back then, we’re adults now.”

Jin could feel that everyone’s curious gazes were straying from him to Taehyung, who had yet to comment. Honestly, even Jin sat with held breath waiting for Taehyung to respond to the news. He didn’t know how he would feel if Taehyung announced one day that he was marrying Sohyun even if the circumstances were a lot different, so he had no idea how Taehyung was feeling.

Taehyung noticed the sudden transfer of attention to him and shifted uncomfortably.

“How is everyone looking at me?” He huffed. “Sohyun and I were… we weren’t…” He struggled to find the words to explain what he wanted, but gave up after a moment, waving his hand in frustration.

“It doesn’t matter. I’m happy for you, Jin. Really. I can rest in peace knowing that my bullshit didn’t completely ruin a good thing.” Taehyung shrugged with a smile.

Seeing a smile from the younger man was enough to make tears prickle at Jin’s eyes and he hurried to look busy with the camera in his hands. The last time he had seen Taehyung’s face, the man had been in a hatred fueled rage and had stabbed him in the gut three times. It was an intense relief that he could smile at Jin now and be happy for him.
“Oh, I almost forgot!” Hoseok announced, fishing something from one of his large jacket pockets. Jin watched as the man procured the pastel pink camera that Jin treasured above all else with a flourish and bright smile.

“You left it somewhere back in the days where we used to hang out like this all the time, so I picked it up with the intention to give it back to you or something, but I guess I never got the chance because it was still sitting in a box in my closet all these years later. So… here.” He held the pink monstrosity out and Jin couldn’t help the grin that took over his face as he took it from his friend’s outstretched hand.

“I was thinking that you could take a commemorative photo of all us with that.” Hoseok offered.

“But Jeongguk isn’t here yet.” Namjoon reminded him as if everyone wasn’t already completely aware of that fact.

“That’s because he isn’t coming.” Taehyung commented bitterly, picking at a thread in the couch and revealing even more of the white stuffing inside.

“Well, he said he would but…” Namjoon trailed off with a disappointed sigh.

“He’ll come.” Yoongi argued. “I’m here, so he has to come. That was the deal.”

Jin didn’t think that Yoongi had actually made that deal with Jeongguk himself but knew better than to correct him.

“Oh-!” Jimin gasped suddenly, pointing a finger towards the entrance of the clearing.

A figure was there, in a white t-shirt and jeans as he walked with some difficulty, favoring his left leg just enough to make him limp a bit as he moved.

Yoongi was out of his seat in a flash, moving faster than Jin had ever seen him move to the other side of the pool.
“Kid just wants to make a dramatic entrance.” Hoseok teased and Jin couldn’t help but agree that Jeongguk had impeccable timing.

The group watched as Yoongi attempted to offer his shoulder as a support to help Jeongguk walk easier and they watched as Jeongguk shrugged the elder off, saying something that they couldn’t hear from here. Yoongi backed off but he walked pointedly behind Jeongguk to catch him if he fell, and Jin fondly remembered the way that Yoongi used to walk around the bottom of the pool just to be there in case Jeongguk fell as he tested his balance by walking around the rim.

It took a while but eventually the two arrived in front of the group and Yoongi looked a complicated mix between irritated and uncomfortable.

They all stood as the two approached so everyone was standing awkwardly as they waited for Jeongguk to say something.

“Sorry I’m late.” The youngest finally said once he caught his breath.

Jin was completely stunned by how much older he looked. He still looked just like the Jeongguk he remembered, but his frame had filled out a bit more and while he had been scrawny before, bulging muscles covered his bones now.

“I’m not usually this bad at walking in a straight line, I promise.” He laughed. “I just had physical therapy this morning and no matter how many times that woman tells me that she’s helping me, I swear it really doesn’t feel like it.”

The silence continued and Jeongguk forced out a laugh, visually frustrated that everyone was treating his arrival as some sort of spectacle.

“Don’t just stand there staring at me, I want some hugs. Come on!” Jimin sprung forward but Yoongi, who had just been standing silently beside Jeongguk, suddenly pulled the younger into a hug and Jimin stopped midstep.

“Oh come on, Yoongi.” Jimin whined and the eldest squeezed the absolute life out of Jeongguk.

“Can’t… breathe !” Jeongguk gasped, slapping Yoongi’s back desperately.
Eventually, the elder released him but he certainly didn’t look like he ever wanted to let go. Jimin took his chance then, pouncing on Jeongguk hard enough to nearly knock the younger over. He ruffled Jeongguk’s hair with a bright smile and then moved aside to let Namjoon hug him.

“My Jeonggukie is all grown up now!” Jimin fake cried.

“He really is, I’m actually scared of him punching me now.” Namjoon jested making Jeongguk pretend to lunge at him with a smile.

Hoseok moved up to take his turn, shaking Jeongguk all over the place as he hugged him enthusiastically.

Taehyung moved forward with a smirk playing on his lips. “I heard you’re a police officer now. Please don’t arrest me.”

Jeongguk raised an eyebrow. “Don’t give me a reason to arrest you.”

“Ooh, guess I better keep my mouth closed about my personal life then.” Taehyung said under his breath, making sure it was loud enough for Jeongguk to hear. The most Jin knew was that Taehyung worked doing “odd jobs” and he hoped Jeongguk had the common sense not to pry any further either.

Jeongguk rolled his eyes and pulled Taehyung in for a hug as well. And then his eyes were on Jin, who was still standing awkwardly behind everyone else.

His heart lurched in his chest and he suddenly didn’t know what to do or say. Jeongguk’s next words certainly didn’t help.

“You.” The youngest member of their group called out, pointing at Jin. “Are a dick.” And Jin could feel his throat clenching with panic.

“But I love you anyways- get over here. I missed you.” Contrary to Jeongguk’s words, the youngest was the one that walked over to Jin, wrapping the older into a warm hug.
Jin hesitated for a second but once the initial shock wore off he wrapped his arms around Jeongguk just as tightly.

“It’s okay, hyung.” Jeongguk whispered. “It was an accident and I forgave you before I even woke up in the hospital. You didn’t have to go off feeling guilty all by yourself. We could have had this talk much sooner.”

Jin was going to cry. He was going to cry and there was nothing he could do about it. He just felt so comforted. Comforted by the same people that had once been stabbing him and hissing their hatred into his ears as they did it. It was too much of a shocking transition and Jin clutched Jeongguk closer to him as a few hot tears slipped from his eyes.

“I’m sorry.” He admitted desperately. “I’m so sorry.” He was apologizing for running him over, for causing such a divide in their group of friends, for causing everyone so much hurt, he was apologizing for everything. He just hoped that his friends would actually listen to him this time. They didn’t have to accept it, but he just wanted them to know.

So, he said it a bit louder so that more than just Jeongguk could hear.

Almost immediately another body pressed against Jin’s back, then another on his left and then on his right. All of his friends were hugging him tight and even though it was the middle of summer and it was hot and uncomfortable and he could barely breathe, he didn’t want to be anywhere else.

“It’s okay, Jin.” It wasn’t.

“You don’t have to cry about it, come on.” He couldn’t stop the tears if he tried.

“We’re all here now.” They were and he felt true warmth for the first time in a long while.

They stayed like that for a while, until Jin managed to stop crying and Yoongi was tired of being sentimental.

“Let’s take that picture now.” Namjoon suggested and Jin nodded, wiping away his tears.
His friends huddled together as Jin struggled to find a good place to position the camera so he could put it on a timer and get into the picture with everyone else.

Eventually, he settled for placing it on the back of one of the couches at an angle. He set the timer and ran around the couch to pose for the picture with everyone else.

The flash went off with a loud click and Jin quickly went to check if the photograph came out well.

It took a while to develop but once it did, Jin flicked it impatiently to make it process faster and then he held it up to see it better. But what he saw sent his heart dropping into the pit of his stomach.

The picture had come out well, considering the lighting and the fact that he had to use a couch as a tripod but… he was sure he was standing on the left end right next to Hoseok. And yet... There a blatantly empty space where he should have been standing.

He felt an overwhelming sense of deja vu as he continued to look at the photo, and images of the interior of a car but it was gone as soon as it began. Jin looked up from the photo to voice his confusion to his friends but he was even more confused to see that the space that they had just been standing was no longer occupied.

He looked around him in a breathless rush, expecting to see them somewhere but he didn’t see a single sign of life after spinning around twice. He was… alone.

As quickly as he had been surrounded by warmth and comfort, it was taken away from him so abruptly that it was if it had never existed to begin with.

Jin looked down at the photo again as his mind kicked into overdrive, thoughts flying around his head so fast that he couldn’t focus on even a single one. The photo had fallen out of his hands though and fluttered down to the ground, landing in a rather large puddle.

He bent down to pick it up and caught sight of his reflection in the water. He was back to how he was used to looking, the twenty-two year old who was always freshly shaven. Colors exploded in his vision and he felt the familiar pulling sensation that usually accompanied it. He had been wanting to find a way to return to the limbo world all of this time but he hadn’t wanted it like this.
He was tired of ending up cold and alone on every path that he took.

Chapter End Notes

The timelines for this chapter have given me several migraines.

I just want to quickly clarify the timeline that Jin became a doctor. Vocational school exists in Korea but they don’t have a medical vocational school. For the purposes of this story- they do, and if you go to and complete the optional vocational school it’s worth 2 years of undergrad credit. So you would then go to a regular university for the remaining two years and earn an Associates degree. You would go to a medical school for 4 years to obtain a bachelor’s degree. Then, you would complete a residency of another 4 years to obtain a doctorate. Add another 4+ years of study onto that to obtain a Ph.D and a lot of experience to become a surgeon. That’s a total of 14 years. The vocational school is meant to put students on a fast track into their degree program. So, it would have been around 9-10 years from the original timeline in the first chapter (2015). Jin was 22 then, therefore he would be 32 in this future. Hopefully, that’s not confusing.

Probably is, oh well.

Fun Fact

Remember when ARMYs pranked BTS on April Fools by posting “beardtan” pics all over twitter? Yeah, that’s all I could think of while writing this.
Yoongi

Chapter Notes

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You were firmly by my side”

Yoongi’s mother planted the seed of music in his life at an early age. Hell, probably before he even left her womb. She had been a music teacher at an elementary school and she lived and breathed music. She was beautiful and kind, the brightest light that Yoongi had ever seen.

As a child he’d spent the most time with her. His father was a businessman and Yoongi had always gotten along with him well but he didn’t understand music the way his mother did. She understood that the same note played by thousands of different people would produce thousands of different sounds. She knew that music was more than math, more than notes and chord progressions. It was a way of speaking, intricate but simple, effective but complex.

She often took Yoongi to class with her and the two would sit at the school’s old brown piano and play for hours. Yoongi loved those times with her the best. They made music together in a way that was better than just talking. His mother was brightest when surrounded by music and Yoongi yearned to shine just as bright. Like a star.

But that had been a childish desire. And he was childish to not realize how easily lights could be devoured by shadows.

It had been a faulty gas pipe. Such a simple thing, an oversight, an easy mistake but it had taken her away from him so violently. One day she was there smiling brightly next to him as he practiced a song she’d been teaching him and the next he was wearing black and standing over a six foot hole in the dirt as her body was lowered into it.

The gas pipe had caused an explosion in their home. Yoongi had nightmares about it for years and would probably have nightmares about it for the rest of his life. His mother had been in the kitchen when it happened, the closest to the source of the explosion. His father had only barely managed to
get him out of the house. He had been twelve years old.

He changed after that. The bright, happy kid whose dream in life was to shine as bright as his mother was nowhere to be found. Right after the incident he found himself wishing that he would have died in that house too so that he wouldn’t have to live with the pain of losing his light, losing his mother. He often argued with his father and blamed him for what happened though he knew it wasn’t the man’s fault. Yoongi didn’t want to die, but he didn’t want to live without his mother either.

Both he and his father dealt with their grief in their own ways. Yoongi was volatile and moody and his father was subdued and controlling.

At the funeral, neither of them had cried. Yoongi had been angry, angry that the world would take something so good and pure away from him for no reason at all. Angry that he didn’t know what to do without her. Angry that his father didn’t either.

His father hadn’t cried. The man had never really been passionate about anything and now that his wife had died it seemed like he didn’t know what to do with himself. He was a shell of a person. Yoongi hated him for that too. He needed someone strong to pick their family back up and keep them going, but his father couldn’t do that.

It was like the man was afraid that if Yoongi wasn’t doing everything that he was supposed to be, he would die too. Yoongi found himself being lectured all the time about responsibility. He found himself given a curfew. It was like having a drill sergeant as a father, because controlling Yoongi was the only thing keeping the man sane.

Yoongi had already made up his mind about what he wanted to do and after the funeral he had snuck into their burned down house and retrieved the key his mother kept in her bedroom for the classroom she taught in. Earlier in the year the school she worked at had been destroyed by an earthquake and was condemned. Yoongi had looked at it a while ago and he knew that there was an entrance to it.

In the middle of the night, after his father had gone to sleep, he’d crept out of the house and down to the abandoned elementary school. He found the entrance he’d located before and snuck inside. The place was in bad shape but Yoongi knew that most of the damage was on the east wing of the school where the cafeteria was located. His mother’s classroom was on the west wing. He crept through the rundown hallways until he found the familiar door and unlocked it, stepping inside.

It was dusty and rubble had spilled onto it from the hole in the ceiling but it was there. The piano
that he had grown up with and the most important thing that he had of his mom’s. He couldn’t bring himself to play it but he ran his fingers over the ivory keys and allowed a few tears to fall from his eyes.

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A few years after his mother’s death, Yoongi discovered his sexuality. He’d never given it much thought before but when a male upperclassman had subtly hit on him, he found himself not totally opposed to it. He’d dated a few girls before that and whenever they had wanted to be more physical with him, he hadn’t been that into it, and eventually he broke up with them.

When he kissed a man for the first time, the same upperclassman that had been stealing glances at him for months, it was behind the school in the dark and dingy area where they kept the trash. It stunk, it was disgusting, and it was somehow one of the most amazing experiences that Yoongi ever had. That singular moment seemed to change his entire life from thereafter- it was as if he was given access into a world that he never knew existed.

Then he’d entered high school.

Looking back on it, Yoongi knew that he’d been asking for trouble by being so open about his sexuality. He hit on anyone that he was interested in without discretion and they were often just as interested in him. His sex life became quick hand jobs in bathroom stalls, frenzied makeouts behind buildings, and rushed grinding in foreign bedrooms.

The problem was that nobody wanted to date him. They wanted to kiss him in secret and keep the fact that they had grinded to completion on the smooth skin of his thigh hidden. He was a dirty secret. Though, he got used to that pretty quickly. He wasn’t exclusive to anyone and, because he was kept a secret by the people he was with, he made sure to make that fact known. By his second year of school he’d hooked up with far more people than he could count on his fingers. He’d long gotten used to subtle head movements and lingering gazes to communicate interest.

He wasn’t necessarily popular but he had a group of friends that he often hung out with. Some knew about the kind of things that he got up to after school and some didn’t. Yoongi wasn’t specifically keeping his sexual preference a secret, he was pretty open about it but he also didn’t think that it was something that had to be announced to everyone. Unless someone was interested in him, it wasn’t really any of their business.

It had taken him a while to realize that men having romantic interest in other men wasn’t exactly socially acceptable.
At first it had only been his father. Yoongi had made the bold decision to bring someone to his own room, since the guy he was seeing had a bunch of family at his own home. It wasn’t the first time that Yoongi had brought someone to his house but he usually tried to avoid it and this time he wasn’t entirely sure when his father would return home. So, he hadn’t been completely surprised when his father had opened his bedroom door and found Yoongi half dressed, obvious tent in his pants, with his tongue halfway down some poor underclassmen’s throat. The kid hadn’t needed to be told to leave, Yoongi’s father had simply stood in the doorway with his arms crossed and waited for the kid to rush past him with a flurry of apologies.

His father hadn’t seemed angry, but he had the familiar glean of disappointment in his voice as he lectured Yoongi about his unsavory activities. Yoongi had merely rolled his eyes and told his father to stop trying to control him, he would do whatever he wanted. The man had given up trying years ago and Yoongi was glad for it. They barely spoke anymore but Yoongi was still determined to move out as soon as he could so he wouldn’t have to owe his father anything. The man had just sighed and walked away while Yoongi wondered if the underclassmen would be too embarrassed to try hooking up again.

Then it had been one of his friends. Yoongi had been telling one of his closer friends about the incident at his house where his father had walked in on him. The friend that he’d been talking was well aware of Yoongi’s sexuality but not everyone at the lunch table was so when he said that he’d had his tongue down the underclassmen’s throat when his father walked in, it earned more attention than Yoongi’s casually gay comments usually earned. One of his friend’s noses had scrunched up in disgust as he asked for clarification that Yoongi had been with a guy. Yoongi had confirmed that he had, in fact, been making out with a guy in his bedroom and the person that he’d considered a friend sneered at him, spitting out harsh words of disgust and gotten up from their table.

After that, a group of rowdy underclassmen, friends of that poor kid that Yoongi had brought home had approached him at lunch. They leered over him and jested loudly about his interest in men, spouting lies that he’d lured their friend to his house and taken advantage of him. Yoongi naturally had a laid back personality and usually would have never taken the bait from but he glanced at his friends sitting at the table with them, and their expressions scared him. He turned towards the three nuisances intent on bothering him and asked them if they realized that their friend was the one who had come to him first.

He came to regret that moment more than anything.

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The three nuisances that had suddenly appeared in his life, set down roots in it and had no intention
of leaving him alone. They made a spectacle of him at lunch, constantly coming over to the table with his other friends and talking so loud that the whole cafeteria would hear them as they asked Yoongi just how many guys he’d been with and obscene things like how far he could take a cock down his throat.

He’d ignore them as best as he could but they knew that as soon as they started asking him obscene things that he would fight back. It wasn’t because he was embarrassed by the things that they were saying or even that their words were bothering him but he could see it in his friend’s eyes that they were bothered. He could see it in the way one of his closer friends shifted slightly away from him after the three nuisances asked him if he’d ever eaten ass before. He could see it in the few friends that hadn’t been so aware of his sexual life had begun to sit at other tables, letting the three underclassmen sit in their absence.

Eventually Yoongi had enough of their bullshit and started sitting somewhere else. He didn’t want to cause a scene and he was tired of being constantly put in the spotlight. He didn’t know what was worse- the fact that his friends were hesitant to talk to him now or that the variety of male students he had been seeing before were now actively avoiding him. He wasn’t a secret anymore and that made him dangerous to be associated with. He didn’t even know what the fuck he’d done to deserve such anger from those three underclassmen but he’d had about enough of it.

Rather than sitting in any open areas, Yoongi decided to seclude himself and often went into the abandoned school during lunch. He’d walk all the way to his mother’s old classroom and sit on the old puzzle mat, knees drawn into his chest, and stared at the piano until the bell that signaled that lunch was over rang. He didn’t touch the piano. He hadn’t in years. He was too scared to play it, too unsure of his fingers, too unsure of his memory of the notes. He’d only played piano with his mother and now that she was gone, he just… couldn’t bring himself to.

By his second year of high school, Yoongi had no friends left. They had all slowly faded away, turned their back, and left him. The three underclassmen still tormented him whenever they saw him, cornering him in hallways and crowding around him. If they weren’t so fucking annoying Yoongi might have even called their mindless obsession with him cute. They weren’t violent with him like he’d expected them to be, instead they were aggressive. Aggressive with the crude words they said to him, with the way they pushed him around and knocked the books out of his hands with sarcastic apologies. Aggressive with the way they teased him for being gay, flirting with him only to get a response, and doubling over in laughter when Yoongi threatened them with actually going through with it.

He was nothing but a means of entertainment for them and he hated it.

They, themselves, weren’t so much an issue as the rest of the trouble that they caused. Besides driving his friends away and announcing to the entire student body daily that he liked having cock in his mouth, they also invited some of the more violent student body to take offense with his
existence as well. He’d been jumped after school a few times. He wasn’t exactly happy with letting his fellow students beat the shit out of him but the first time, when he’d fought back, they’d nearly broken his arm and dislocated his jaw. He had to know when he was in a losing fight. Besides, he’d gotten used to showing just enough reaction to not make them bored enough to hit him hard but still not so much that they had too much fun.

He also hated the knowing looks his father gave him when he saw Yoongi wiping blood from his face and putting on band-aids.

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As time passed, Yoongi spent more of his free time in that abandoned music room. Rather than playing the piano, he’d begun to write lyrics in a small notebook. One thing that had never changed in his life and likely never would was his love for music. It was comforting in a time where he didn’t want to admit he needed it. He didn’t necessarily mind being alone, he personality was introverted to begin with, but it was always harder to be alone whether you wanted to be or not.

Days passed with him being in that room, writing lyrics with melodies in his head, desperately wanting to touch the old brown piano. He’d created somewhat of a routine. He would walk into the classroom, open the blinds, dust off the piano and sit either on the bench or on the puzzled mat and write lyrics. Sometimes he ate a little or worked on an assignment that he’d procrastinated far too much on.

One day, as he was sitting on the piano bench, knees pulled up to his chest, muttering a rap verse that he’d made as he wrote it, he’d shifted and his elbow had lightly pressed against the keys causing a soft but discordant sound to echo in the room. He startled, nearly falling off the piano bench, as he heard it.

His heart was beating heavily in his chest as he slowly put the notebook he had been writing in down and turned his full attention to the piano. Hesitantly, as if worried that he’d somehow break the thing, he lowered a finger down onto the keys to play a simple chord. The strong and stable sound echoed in the room and Yoongi quickly lowered his other hand to play a slow melody that he remembered. It was his mother’s favorite song to play with him and she had been overjoyed when he had gotten good enough at the piano that he could play the entire thing by himself.

Sitting there, a tear escaping from the corner of his eye and running down the slope of his nose, Yoongi didn’t know how he had managed to convince himself to stay away from the piano for so long. He had been worried that his sadness over his mother’s death would taint his experience playing, but as the cheerful memories of sitting at the bench with her flooded in from the carefully shut box he’d had in his head, he felt nothing but relieved happiness. It had been too long.
Just like his mother, he lived and breathed music, and he’d gone just a bit too long without breathing.

After a few minutes of playing some of the songs that he remembered, Yoongi picked the notebook up and with a deep breath got started actually creating the melodies that would go with the various lyrics that he’d written.

Even if everyone else in the world left him, he’d always have music to fall back onto, and he’d always hear his mother’s gentle voice telling him that he was doing a good job.

What Yoongi was not expecting was to be followed out to the abandoned school one day.

He had been minding his own business, double and triple checked to make sure that nobody was following him but he still heard footsteps that were not his own echoing down the dim hallways. He sighed, hoping that those nitwits hadn’t managed to find him and ducked into a doorway. He would to see whoever it was and it was anyone that he recognized he’d wait until they passed and then head to the exit himself.

Although, Yoongi was relieved to only hear one pair of footsteps down the hallway. They were light and unsure as if the person was both struggling to see and looking for something in particular. Yoongi hoped that he wasn’t what they were looking for.

The person finally got close enough that Yoongi could see them. It was nearly pitch black in the hallways but the light from the doors made it just light enough to see. The boy was thankfully not one that Yoongi recognized, and very obviously an underclassman, probably a middle schooler from the looks of the uniform.

Yoongi was grateful for that, at least, he might have come here in curiosity and all Yoongi needed to do was scare him bad enough to make him leave. The boy hadn’t seen him and Yoongi could probably sneak out without being spotted but if the boy wanted to start hanging out in here, they’d cross paths eventually and Yoongi preferred to be the only one in the building. Groups of students coming in and out would draw too much attention for sure.

Yoongi crept out of the doorway and followed the underclassman to where he came to a stop in the
hallway, sighing and looking back and forth. Yoongi noted that, the kid had probably come in after seeing him. He’d have to be even more careful from then on to not let anyone see him. He took out his lighter so he could actually see the kid and approached him.

“What are you doing in here?” Yoongi demanded, making sure to deepen his voice a bit to scare the kid even more.

The middle schooler visibly jumped, sending the phone in his hand soaring to the ground so that the flashlight on it was turned up to the ceiling, and turned around with wide eyes. His hand was over his heart and for a second Yoongi was worried he’d given the poor kid a heart attack. Then the boy shakily reached down for his phone and Yoongi decided that he was fine.

“Are you just going to stand there staring at me?” Yoongi insisted. “I asked you what you were doing in here.”

The kid forced his open mouth closed and swallowed audibly. “I-I was just… I s-saw you a-and I wanted to k-know what you were doing in… in here.”

Yoongi narrowed his eyes. “That’s none of your business. Get out of here and go back to your friends before you get yourself in trouble.”

“I-I don’t… I don’t really have friends. I was just sitting by myself.” The boy corrected and Yoongi blinked at him in surprise. He might have even laughed if the situation was different but instead he forcefully rolled his eyes.

“Move.” He instructed and moved forward before the kid could coordinate his gangly limbs to get out of the way. Yoongi walked past him, in the direction of the music room, feel satisfied that he had only run into an underclassman and one that seemed to be extremely shy as well.

However, as he walked down the hallway he realized that he was still hearing a pair of footsteps that were not his own. He stopped suddenly and spun around, both surprised and angry that the kid was still following him.

“I thought I told you to go back outside?” He hissed.

The kid’s eyes were wide again as he looked at Yoongi and he almost seemed to not know what to
do with himself.

“What are you doing in here, though?” He asked, and Yoongi was baffled by his insistence.

Yoongi turned around and started walking again, irritation setting in. “I said it was none of your business.”

He nearly turned around a second time when he heard the kid’s footsteps behind him again but the boy seemed harmless. If he decided to stay, maybe Yoongi playing the piano rather than doing something illegal like the kid probably thought he was coming here to do would bore him enough to make him leave.

They got to the music room door and Yoongi, not a completely terrible person, even held the door open as he entered to let the younger kid in behind him. He muttered a “thank you” under his breath and Yoongi decided that maybe the kid wasn’t completely terrible either. He still wasn’t welcome in the music room, though.

Yoongi felt self-conscious as he opened the blinds and dusted off the piano in his usual routine. He could feel the boys eyes on him, curious and wondering. As he sat down on the piano bench, though, he was immediately absorbed in the comfort it gave him and the piece that he was going to play. It was a soft song, somber, and possibly boring enough to dissuade the younger’s curiosity.

The floor creaked suddenly and Yoongi’s head whipped around. He’d somehow forgotten the other’s actual presence in the room that quickly. It was disconcerting and Yoongi reminded himself to pay more attention. He shot a glare at the younger for good measure and the boy shrank over to the corner of the room, where Yoongi usually took naps, and sat down.

Yoongi sighed and began playing. He had wanted to get some other things done during the lunch period but when the kid seemed intent on staying put, Yoongi decided to just play old songs that he remembered the entire time.

Eventually, the bell signifying that lunch was over rang and Yoongi finally stopped playing, letting the room be enveloped in silence once again. He picked up his backpack and stood. His eyes fell upon the underclassmen sitting in the corner of the room, the younger’s eyes were on him and Yoongi was surprised that he hadn’t just been on his phone the whole time. He had just assumed that the younger hadn’t been paying any attention to him but now Yoongi wondered if he had been watched the entire time.
He swallowed down the embarrassment that suddenly swelled within him and exited the classroom. The underclassman scurried to leave with him and neither said a word as they navigated down the hallways and out the broken sliding door.

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Yoongi had wrongfully assumed that would be the last time he saw the underclassman. They hadn’t spoken at all and Yoongi was sure that even if the younger had been watching him play, there was nothing interesting about it. He figured that the kid would try and find some other form of entertainment.

However, as he walked into the music room and saw the boy sitting in the same corner as the day before, he realized that maybe he hadn’t gotten rid of the kid so easily.

He was quiet though, Yoongi supposed as he crossed the room to open the blinds. But even if the underclassman did have wholesome intentions for being in the music room with him, Yoongi didn’t want the boy to suffer from being associated with him. If those three nuisances caught them together, or even of the less savory members of the student body, it wouldn’t pretty for the underclassman.

Yoongi doubted that the younger was one to listen to warnings though, given by the face that he was there again. Before Yoongi had even got there, to top it off, too.

Consecutive days of running into the younger ensued after that first day and Yoongi had almost gotten used to it. The kid was quiet and kept to himself in the room, he watched Yoongi play each day and when it was time to leave he did that quietly as well. Yoongi hated to admit that a quiet and non-invasive presence was nice.

The only thing worse than constantly being alone and ostracized by all his peers was one of his teachers.

The man had apparently caught wind of Yoongi’s sexuality, not that Yoongi doubted there was anyone in the high school who didn’t know, and had been going out of his way to insult and disrespect him. Loudly announcing his grades to the class, making a point of using him for examples as an excuse to insult him, writing him disciplinary notes if he even looked like he wasn’t paying attention during class. Yoongi couldn’t fucking stand him. He guessed the feeling was mutual, however he hadn’t done anything else than breathe to make the man hate him. He supposed he just had that effect on people.
There were, of course, other teachers that gave Yoongi a hard time but that man acted like it was his life mission to make Yoongi’s life an even worse hell than it was already was. Fortunately, it was Yoongi’s life mission to spite the old fuck, so he wasn’t going to let the man get to him.

Unfortunately, Yoongi had a horrible temper and there was only so much that he could take. So, when the man had gone on his daily tirade of insults and jabs hurled Yoongi’s way after he had given a presentation, Yoongi couldn’t stop himself from telling the man to go fuck himself and leave him alone in front of the entire class.

The three day suspension afterwards was not worth the trouble, but at least it was an excuse to not deal with the bullshit of school for a little while. His father got pissy whenever he skipped school so Yoongi had taken to skipping classes and sneaking off to the music room. It was nice to not be able to go to school at all, so Yoongi had enjoyed his time off.

After the suspension ended, Yoongi had gone to the music room after days of not seeing and he was shocked to see the underclassman in the room. Somehow he’d completely forgotten about the younger boy and had not expected him to have been waiting for Yoongi in the classroom over the past few days.

The younger apparently didn’t expect to see him either and nearly dropped both the food in his hand and his phone when Yoongi suddenly entered the room.

Yoongi looked at the boy for a long moment, curious as to why he was there, before turning and placing his bag down near the piano. He moved on autopilot to the window before realizing that the blinds were already open. He froze in surprise but then he realized that the boy sitting in the dark room for days would have been strange. He shook the strange feeling away and walked over to the piano, pulling his sleeve up to dust the piano but stilled when he realized that there was no dust to clean off. Which was strange since he hadn’t been in the room in days.

Yoongi looked between both the blinds and the piano and sighed, coming to a decision.

He leaned over to pick his bag back up from where it was resting against the piano and walked over to the puzzle mat, taking a seat on it. The boy was staring at him with wide eyes, a piece of rice was stuck to his face, his mouth was hanging open and he looked like a complete idiot. Yoongi wanted to tell him so but he had just made the decision to try being nice.

He ignored the gaze of the underclassman and unzipped his backpack, pulling out a water bottle
and chips. He usually ate after school, setting foot in the cafeteria was just asking for trouble these
days. He opened the package of chips and popped one into his mouth. He still felt the younger’s
eyes on him and looked at him, raising an eyebrow to challenge him to say something. Yoongi
was trying to be casual and the kid staring at him like a circus attraction was not helping.

The kid quickly averted his gaze and slowly went back to eating.

They ate in silence for a while until Yoongi convinced himself that talking to this kid wouldn’t be
the worst mistake he made in life and finally spoke up.

“What’s your name?” He asked brusquely. He’d meant for it to come out more casually but judging
by the way the kid nearly choked on his own saliva, he hadn’t been so successful. It had been a
while since he’d had to talk to someone new.

The boy seemed surprised that Yoongi was asking but once he caught his breath he responded.
“Uh… Jeongguk. Jeon Jeongguk.”

Yoongi nodded, he wasn’t sure what sort of name he’d been expecting but Jeongguk fit the
younger well. He waited to be asked his own name. It took a minute but the younger finally got
that Yoongi was waiting for him to say something.

“What’s yours?”

Yoongi looked away then, focusing on something else in the room as he answered. “...Min
Yoongi.”

It was quiet again and Yoongi guessed that Jeongguk was struggling to think of something else to
say to keep the conversation going. He cut in before the kid could say anything though.

“So, Jeon Jeongguk is the name of my stalker that has no friends of his own.” he teased.

Jeongguk seemed shocked by the sudden accusation and his mouth fell open as he struggled to
come up with an argument. Before he could though, Yoongi shoved his backpack behind him and
laid his head down on it, closing his eyes.
“That’s okay. I don’t have any either.”

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It was somehow inevitable that the two became friends.

Rather than being one of the worst decisions that Yoongi had ever made, speaking to Jeongguk had quickly become the best. Yoongi’s initial assumption that Jeongguk was quiet and shy was thrown out the window as soon as he talked to the younger. He was quiet around strangers but once he got to know you the boy was rambunctious and excitable.

He was adorable and awkward but Yoongi admired Jeongguk’s courage and curious nature. Even if he had been shy at first he had still made the decision to follow Yoongi into the music room and Yoongi thought that if he’d been in that position, he never would have even followed someone out here to begin with.

As much as Yoongi hated having company in a place he considered sacred, he also enjoyed it.

He didn’t have friends anymore and he’d long since gotten used to being alone but spending time with Jeongguk and his bunny smile and amazing singing voice had Yoongi addicted. He started looking forward to his lunch breaks again and felt a feeling similar to the joy he felt with his mother when he played piano with Jeongguk. He felt less angry and at peace.

It wasn’t even surprising when Yoongi realized that he had feelings for Jeongguk. He hadn’t realized it at first, though. It had been the one time that Jeongguk had waited at the patio to walk with him to the music room and Yoongi had been terrified. Truly and utterly terrified that someone would see them together and turn their ire onto Jeongguk. Jeongguk was a light, one of the few lights in Yoongi’s life besides the brown piano, he made Yoongi happy and Yoongi was terrified to see that light go out. Everyone always left him at some point or other and he didn’t want Jeongguk to get bullied and hate him too. So he’d yelled furiously at the younger, making the tremble in his voice sound like rage and he’d nearly apologized immediately when he saw the downturn of the younger’s mouth and the hurt confusion in his doe eyes.

After, when he was in the music room alone, Yoongi felt like trash and almost wished that someone would punch in him the face for causing such an expression to appear on Jeongguk’s face.
He hadn’t understood the feeling in his chest back then.

Then after that, over a year after they’d first met, when Jeongguk had come to him with a song he’d written all by himself- Yoongi finally understood it.

He’d read the song and was pleasantly surprised by how good it was. Jeongguk had a talent for writing and Yoongi was glad that he was able to discover it. As he read over it though, Jeongguk said something else. Something that he wasn’t expecting.

“I actually… uh… wrote it for you, hyung. As a… thank you, I guess.”

Yoongi’s heart palpitated dangerously and he swallowed audibly. He glanced up at Jeongguk who was looking at him nervously as if was worried that Yoongi wouldn’t like it. Yoongi turned back to the song in his hands, reading over them in a different light now that he knew it was referring to himself.

You make me begin. Yoongi felt like he didn’t deserve such praise. He hadn’t really done anything.

His chest tightened painfully with the weight of his emotions and he turned to Jeongguk, desperate to calm them but looking at the younger had the opposite effect. Yoongi realized his feelings in the moment and instinctively he wanted to act on them. That’s how he’d always done everything in the past, the second he felt anything for anyone he jumped on the chance to flirt with them, test the waters, see if they were interested in him as well.

But that hadn’t ended well for him.

It wasn’t that he thought Jeongguk would end up being just like the last underclassman Yoongi had been interested in, Jeongguk was much too sweet and caring for that. It was the result of the last underclassman that he was worried about.

Yoongi couldn’t just carelessly display his sexuality anymore. Anyone associated with him, gay or not, had a target on their head. Anyone that talked to Yoongi got the same treatment that he did and Jeongguk didn’t deserve that. He deserved nothing but the best that life had to offer. Even now, Yoongi still can’t believe that Jeongguk had been left alone too. He was charismatic, friendly, nice - much nicer than Yoongi would ever be.

The people at this school were relentless.
If they ever even found out about Jeongguk spending his time here *platonically* it wouldn’t go well. Yoongi would graduate soon and leave Jeongguk alone and he already hated that enough. He didn’t want to leave Jeongguk alone *and* in shark infested waters.

So, *no*, Yoongi couldn’t act on any of the various feelings he had. Not even when Jeongguk held his gaze curiously with wide eyes and especially not when, for some ungodly reason, Jeongguk started leaning in.

Yoongi regained his senses, horrified at what Jeongguk’s intentions had been when he’d started to lean in and quickly cleared his throat to break the tension, turning his attention back to the piano. He could do this. For Jeongguk’s sake he would push down those feelings and just be a friend. There was a limit to just how selfish he could be and remaining friends with Jeongguk even with the danger of being discovered was more than enough.

“It’s good. Really good.” Yoongi forced himself to say, propping the notebook up on the piano. “What kind of melody were you thinking about as you wrote it?”

It took Jeongguk a minute, since he seemed to be struggling to ignore whatever it was that had just happened between them, but eventually he came up with a response.

“Um… something that’s slower in the beginning and then picks up the tempo a lot in the choruses.”

Yoongi skillfully avoided meeting the younger’s eye for the rest of the day and desperately hoped that the sudden flush of his skin were the signs of an early onset illness and not a blush manifesting on his cheeks.

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Like all good things, however, each comes to an end eventually.

And as soon as his teacher from hell opened the door to the music room and stepped inside, Yoongi knew that the good thing he had was coming to an end.
Jeongguk had stood from the piano bench after giving Yoongi a suggestion for the song that they were working on together and so he was the closest to the door when it opened. The man was furious as he demanded an answer from Jeongguk.

It took a moment but then his attention turned to Yoongi and his eyes seemed to gleam with victory.

He finally had a real reason to take out all his anger on Yoongi and he looked like he intended to put it to full use. He didn’t even give Jeongguk a chance to respond to his previous questions as he began yelling at Yoongi specifically. Jeongguk still hadn’t moved an inch, from Yoongi’s angle it looked like he had frozen in shock. He wasn’t even sure that the younger was hearing what was being said to him as furious eyes landed on him once again and the man began to approach him.

He was just staring into the teacher’s face and Yoongi wanted to call him to get his attention but he was in his own state of shock from the horrendous things coming out of that man’s mouth. He’d been called all sorts of things, been beat up and kicked, but hearing those things aimed at Jeongguk was a completely different shock.

Yoongi knew that he was protective of Jeongguk, possibly overly so, and he was finding it hard to sit down and listen to the younger being called something worse than trash by the worst person he’d ever met on the face of the Earth.

He was still exercising some restraint though. The situation looked bad already and Yoongi knew it probably still smelled of the cigarettes he had smoked earlier in the hallway, he’d only make it worse by saying something. His hands were clenched though, squeezing so tight that his fingernails were digging into the palm of his hand painfully.

Restraint went out the window though when the man seemed to get fed up of Jeongguk’s disrespectful silence and slapped him across the face. The force of it sent Jeongguk falling to the ground and he clutched his cheek in obvious pain.

Yoongi saw red.

He was standing and before he knew what he was doing that sorry excuse for a man was in front of him. Words were coming out of his mouth like dripping poison. All the things that he’d been wanting to say to the man since the moment he’d met him spilled from his mouth uncontrollably. Yoongi always had a temper and he’d always been prone to explosive anger but he’d never been this angry before. A surge of rage sent his arms forward and he watched in satisfaction as the man lost his balance and fell, though the resounding thud as the man’s head hit the corner of the door
frame turned the satisfied smile on Yoongi’s face into a grimace.

The man fell to the ground and both Yoongi and Jeongguk watched as a thin trickle of blood dripped from the man’s head and onto the floor.

There was a split second of panic in Yoongi’s brain before he snapped into action. His mind was going a mile a minute as he moved shakily at first to grab Jeongguk’s things and press them into the younger’s hands and then more steadily as he grabbed his own bag and slung it over his shoulder.

Jeongguk was still standing in the same place and it looked like he was paralyzed with shock.

Yoongi grabbed for his arm and pulled him along. “Come on, we have to go.”

The younger resisted at first but after Yoongi tugged harder, Jeongguk began running after him down the hallways. Yoongi pulled him all the way to the makeshift entrance of the building. When the two emerged outside, Yoongi finally let go of Jeongguk and pushed him in the direction of the school.

“Go back to class. Act like nothing happened, alright?” Yoongi instructed and then turned in the opposite direction. There was no way he was going to get away with what he’d just done and he knew that he’d be lucky if he was expelled and not charged with assault. He didn’t want Jeongguk involved anymore than he already was.

“What? What about you? Where are you going?” Jeongguk questioned, eyes wide with fright and voice tight with desperation.

Yoongi scowled, angry that he wouldn’t be able to even finish the school year with Jeongguk. He wondered if the younger had actually heard any of the insults his teacher had hurled towards them. He hadn’t told Jeongguk that he was gay and though the man had assumed that they had romantic intentions with each other in that building, Jeongguk didn’t seem at all fazed by the accusations.

The younger hadn’t actually said a single word during the entire ordeal.

“That fucker has it out for me.” Yoongi spat. “I got tired of his shit. Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine. Just go to class and act normal. If you get asked about what happened just tell them the truth.
I’m going home.”

And then, without waiting for Jeongguk to say anything, Yoongi took off, and forced his steps away from him to seem more steady than he actually felt.

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As Yoongi thought, the consequences for what he had done to that teacher were harsh. Surprisingly, though, not nearly as harsh as he thought they would be. He was called into the police station the day after the incident and he knew he’d only make things worse by not going. When he got there the man had been livid to see him, even more so than usual, it was almost as if he was embarrassed that the thick bandage on his head had come from Yoongi.

Some officials from the school were there as well and after Yoongi was questioned and admitted to assaulting the teacher he was steeply admonished for his behavior. However, once the police had finished reprimanding him, the school officials had told him news that surprised him.

He wasn’t going to be charged for assault. At the news the teacher had gone into a frenzied rage and had to be escorted out of the room. Yoongi watched him and almost felt bad about how terribly the man was embarrassing himself. Once he’d left the school officials had told him that due to the man’s past record of student complaints, infractions, witness account and specific complaints about the way the man treated Yoongi, himself, they would hold the man responsible for his actions and he would be fired for his unprofessional actions. Still, there was no choice but expulsion for Yoongi, though he knew that already.

Yoongi had always thought that the one thing that would really infuriate his father was if he were to get arrested so he was glad that he didn’t have to deal with that.

Of course, his father was still particularly unhappy that his son had gotten expelled from school but Yoongi had grown used to the look of disappointment on his father’s face.

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Since he had no intention of going any further with school than he had to, Yoongi wasn’t nearly as bothered by his expulsion as he should have been. In fact, he was only regretful that he wouldn’t be able to spend anymore time with Jeongguk but he supposed that maybe that was for the best. It was better that they separated now before Yoongi’s feelings manifested into something he could no
longer control and he started acting just a little *too* selfish.

So, rather than finding some other high school to enroll in, Yoongi decided to bump up his plans to move out. He’d been saving up money by doing odd jobs here and there, mostly delivering things when he could. He had just enough to get his own place but he since he’d been paying his own phone bill since his father had stopped as a form of payment he’d have to forego having a phone to afford the place. Which was just as well. Yoongi rarely talked to anyone anyways.

In just under a month after being expelled, Yoongi had moved into his own apartment. He was just barely scraping by with the money that he had, but this was something that he really wanted so he wasn’t that bothered by struggling to pay bills and rent.

He found out rather quickly though, that just doing delivery jobs would be enough to sustain him so he started looking into alternatives. He didn’t have a phone but he did have an old computer that used to be his mother’s so he started searching for jobs online. He applied to pretty much everything he could find, including a post about someone wanting a piano tutor for their daughter. He hadn’t realized that he’d actually applied for that one at first until he was nibbling on a piece of stale toast early one morning, browsing through his emails and saw a response for it.

He’d been hesitant about it at first, something about the idea of playing piano and teaching it to others as a career seemed daunting but after the first few lessons with the rather adorable eight year old, Yoongi realized that it only seemed daunting because it was something he actually wanted to do. His mother had always told him that heights were only scary because you were thinking about the fall. So, Yoongi stopped thinking about the fall and immersed himself into his work, he took on more clients and loved the kids that he worked with. He went to their recitals and cheered for them, felt proud when they won competitions, and felt something warm soar in his chest when they learned a new piece.

They all reminded him of Jeongguk in some way or another.

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Yoongi had been horrified when he learned months later that the old abandoned elementary school where his mother had taught had been demolished. He didn’t want to believe that they would have demolished the entire building with everything still inside so he dedicated himself to checking every second hand music store, thrift shop, and auction to finding that old brown piano that meant so much to him.

He didn’t want to believe that his mother’s spirit could just be *gone* just like that so even as he ran
into dead end after dead end, he refused to give up hope. He had to find that piano. He took on more odd jobs to be able to save up the money that he would need to buy it if he came across it, knowing that it would be absolute hell to get the thing into his apartment when he did. He couldn’t live without that piano though and he wouldn’t rest until he found it.

He didn’t expect to actually stumble upon the thing on accident. His mother had always believed in serendipitous moments though, and Yoongi supposed that he could see why. He’d gone out to a bar earlier in the evening and drank a bit more than he should have. Drinking made him broody and being broody made him want to drink more. He still kept mostly to himself even though it had been over a year since he’d been expelled.

It was hard for him to trust people and to trust that they wouldn’t end up leaving him when he knew that such a thing happening was completely inevitable. Everyone always left him in the end, it was something Yoongi would just have to get used to.

He was drunk and walking down a street a few blocks away from his apartment with a lit cigarette hanging from his mouth. He was glad that the area he lived in was shitty but not shitty enough for it to be downtown. The night life was rough enough as it was, he didn’t want to be given a hard time just for walking down the street and minding his own business. Especially not when he was drunk.

It was a nice night out and Yoongi hadn’t felt like going home to his lonely apartment so he could feel gross and broody and lonely and probably end up drinking until he passed out so he wouldn’t end up crying. He’d just been walking when he saw the neon light of the storefront. It caught his attention strangely. It was the only neon lit building this time at night, toward the residential areas.

Yoongi stopped in front of it and saw that it was a music shop. It was tiny but his gaze fell from the old sign on top of the building down to the glass storefront. Then he gasped, inhaling a ragged breath as he saw it. The piano. While he’d been looking he’d seen many pianos that were similar but he knew just by looking at it that it was the one he was looking for. He knew it.

Without thinking, he moved forward and pulled on the door and the pushed when it didn’t open. Then he sighed in irritation. The shop was closed- of course.

He was drunk and probably not in a state to make the best decisions but he needed to get into that store. Now.

He looked around and spotted a stray concrete brick laying on the sidewalk a few feet away from him. Determined, he walked towards it and picked it up. Then, in a quick movement he threw
it at the glass door to the store.

The glass crashed loudly as it broke from the impact. Yoongi approached the door and stuck his hand through the hole, reaching around to unlock it. The alarm began to ring as he opened the door but he was too focused on his task to pay any attention to it. It wasn’t like he was planning on stealing anything. He’d probably have to come back after a while to see if he could buy the instrument but right now he was only focused on playing it once again.

He walked over to it, enamored by the overwhelming sense of nostalgia he felt looking at it. He sat down at the bench and ran delicate fingers over the keys before lightly adding pressure and pushing the keys down. The sound brought a smile to his face and he relaxed, letting his fingers play the song that he had made for Jeongguk.

They had spent months tirelessly working on the song and Yoongi held it surprisingly dear to him. It was like the soundtrack to not just the time he spent with Jeongguk but the soundtrack to Yoongi and Jeongguk. It was theirs and they had worked to make it as perfect as it would be. Playing it made Yoongi a strange mix of terribly sad and happily nostalgic. He hated playing the song by himself. It felt like it was missing something, the same feeling that he had felt about the song before Jeongguk had helped him fix it. It was missing Jeongguk. Yoongi was missing Jeongguk.

He wondered how the younger was doing. If he’d made any friends since Yoongi had left. If he was doing well in school and if the same people that bothered Yoongi were bothering him. He hoped that Jeongguk was happy. Though that was partially a lie. Selfishly, deep down in the darkest corner of Yoongi’s heart, he wished that Jeongguk was suffering without him. He hoped that he was missed and that Jeongguk felt the same longing loneliness that Yoongi felt while thinking of their song.

Yoongi heard the door behind him open followed by rushed steps and before he could turn around he heard a familiar voice and was frozen to the spot.

“Yoongi!”

The notes that had been ringing out softly in the music shop, just loud enough to hear over the ringing of the alarm, came to a sudden stop just like Yoongi’s heart.

He was scared to turn around, worried that the voice was just a phantom of his imagination. It was too good to be true but Yoongi wanted to believe just for a second that it could be true. He turned slowly and was somehow still surprised to see Jeongguk standing there.
“Jeongguk?” He gasped, and the name slipped from his mouth without him meaning to say it.

The younger looked different from how Yoongi remembered him. Perhaps it was because it had been so long since he’d last seen him. Jeongguk would have been well into his first year of high school now. He’d... really grown up Yoongi noticed. He’d become much taller than before and his previously lanky frame had filled out, his shoulders were obviously wide even under his hoodie. The younger had also let his hair grow out a bit and rather than messily combed into his face it was parted neatly now, making him look even more mature.

Jeongguk smiled knowingly and Yoongi knew that he’d been openly staring at him for too long.

“Yoongi.” Jeongguk repeated, grinning.

Yoongi smiled too, suddenly overwhelmingly happy that he hadn’t been imagining Jeongguk’s voice and coming to the realization that the younger was truly standing right in front of him.

“It’s hyung, you brat.” Yoongi corrected. He wasn’t sure if it was because he was drunk or just the presence of Jeongguk but he felt airy and light as if nothing could drag him down or ruin this moment.

Jeongguk laughed and he laughed too. Yoongi stood up from the piano and approached Jeongguk, looking slightly up at the younger now since he’d grown taller. Jeongguk was first to move forward and wrapped his arms around Yoongi in a hug. Yoongi hugged him back until the two were squeezing the life out of each other.

They let go after a few moments, breathless and giddy with happiness.

“What are you doing here?” Yoongi asked, now that he’d sort of come back to his senses, he realized how strange it was for Jeongguk to have just shown up out of nowhere.

“I just happened to be walking by.” Jeongguk answered, smiling brightly. “What are you doing here?”

Yoongi laughed and gestured to the piano. “I’ve been tracking this piano down. It’s the same one,
you know? My mother’s. The store was kind of closed though, so I had to break in.”

Jeongguk laughed. “You couldn’t have waited until they opened in the morning?”

“No.” Yoongi answered somberly, reminded of all the memories that the piano held. “I couldn’t wait another second to play on this piano again.”

They were quiet for a while, each staring at the old brown piano. They had bonded over the instrument, they had created beautiful memories, and here it was- connecting them once again. Yoongi wondered if this is what people meant when they spoke of fate. He’d never believed in it before but it was hard to deny now that he was faced with it.

“I missed you.” Jeongguk admitted suddenly and Yoongi felt the pull of the youngers gaze on his face.

He smiled as he turned to look at Jeongguk. There was the feeling again, the one that had gone dormant in his heart now beat again in earnest, and even through his drunken haze he knew that the feeling was dangerous somehow but he couldn’t stop himself from embracing it anyways. “I missed you, too.”

Jeongguk had an expression that seemed too intense for the moment and as he stepped forward, Yoongi’s heart leapt in expectation. However, at the same moment that Jeongguk stepped forward, police sirens finally sounded.

“Shit.” Yoongi swore and grabbed Jeongguk’s arm, he’d somehow forgotten that the two of them were standing in the middle of a store that he’d broken in to. He took of running, pulling Jeongguk along with him. The scenario was oddly similar to the last time that the two had been together when they’d run out of the abandoned school building.

“They’re coming!” Jeongguk shouted as they left the building and emerged on the sidewalk. Yoongi cursed under his breath and began running in earnest, glad that Jeongguk was running just as fast. The younger’s hand was warm in his grasp and unlike before, Yoongi had no intention of letting him go this time.
Yoongi hadn’t intended to kiss Jeongguk when they got to his apartment. He was still drunk and the rush of adrenaline after running away from the cops wasn’t letting him think straight.

He had just seen the younger in front of him, looking flushed and slightly sweaty from the run. He’d been overwhelmed by the feelings that he’d been pushing down for so long and how attractive Jeongguk had suddenly become.

Before he knew what he was doing, he had gotten so close to the younger that he could see the tiny beauty mark just under his bottom lip. Yoongi couldn’t take his eyes off of it and got closer, leaning forward. Then their lips were slotting together. There was a moment of panic in the back of Yoongi’s head but then Jeongguk was pressing against him and his mind completely blanked.

Jeongguk’s arms were around him and they were strong, much stronger than Yoongi expected them to be. His hands crept up into the hair at the nape of Jeongguk’s neck and pressed even closer against the younger until they were practically making out up against the door.

Jeongguk was hot and Yoongi was growing irritated that he couldn’t feel the younger’s skin against his own since they were both wearing hoodies. He broke the kiss, lowering his head to kiss against Jeongguk’s defined jawline and down his neck. Yoongi’s hand crept up Jeongguk’s hip, under the younger’s jacket and onto the skin just above the fabric of his jeans.

Jeongguk’s head thudded against the wood of the door as it fell back and the panting sound of the younger’s breath was encouraging him. He nipped and sucked at the younger’s neck, licking over the spot when blood rushed to it.

Yoongi froze when Jeongguk moaned out loud when he bit particularly hard. He’d gone too far. The drunk, lust filled haze that had taken over him dissipated in an instant, leaving him almost dizzy.

He took a few steps back from Jeongguk, horrified at what they had just done. The look on the younger’s face, low lidded eyes and lips swollen and glistening, made Yoongi duck his gaze immediately from how obscenely sexy and unguarded it was.

“Yoongi-” Jeongguk began, voice rough with desire. It shocked Yoongi and he rushed to close the door to his heart that he’d accidentally opened. He couldn’t do this. Not with Jeongguk. It didn’t matter how much he wanted it, it would be selfish of him since he knew the consequences. He’d experienced them before and he would rather suffer by himself than drag Jeongguk down with him.
Yoongi forced himself to speak, pushing down the traces of desire that he felt and purposefully making his voice sound angry. “You should probably go.”

“Yoongi, don’t-” Jeongguk tried again and Yoongi winced from how hurt and confused he sounded.

Yoongi’s eyes were watering dangerously and he absolutely didn’t want Jeongguk to see him cry.

“Your mom is probably wondering where you are. You should go home.” He snapped. Jeongguk didn’t say anything for a minute and Yoongi hurriedly retreated into his apartment in order to get away from him. After a few minutes from the safety of his bathroom he heard Jeongguk sigh and then the click of the door closing as he left.

Yoongi allowed a tear to fall from his eye as he breathed out a sigh of his own. He couldn’t stop thinking about the fact that Jeongguk hadn’t looked disgusted or confused. The younger had responded to his advances in earnest and when Yoongi had pulled away Jeongguk had looked… turned on .

Yoongi groaned and sat on his toilet, lowering his head into his hands. This was bad. This was very, very bad.

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Yoongi wanted to be friends with Jeongguk. Now that they had found each other he found it hard to come to terms with the possibility of never seeing Jeongguk again.

Yoongi didn’t want to date Jeongguk. The problem with that was that his head said one thing and his body said another.

Yoongi cared about Jeongguk. Which is why he wanted to try his best to protect the younger from those who would dim the bright light inside of him.

He didn’t want Jeongguk to leave him.
However, as days passed without seeing Jeongguk, Yoongi became more and more distraught. He missed the younger. Though, if it came down to it Yoongi would give Jeongguk up in order for the younger to be happy. It didn’t seem likely that the two could put that kiss behind them and Yoongi didn’t want to have to lie and tell Jeongguk that it was a mistake in order for the younger to forget about it. Not only would that probably hurt Jeongguk but Yoongi didn’t think he could say it.

Jeongguk’s lips had been haunting him ever since that night. The wrecked expression Jeongguk had after Yoongi pulled away kept appearing in his head, and the image appeared in the late hours of the night more times than he cared to admit. So, no, it did not seem likely that they could simply go back to the way they had been before that. It was driving him crazy and when Yoongi didn’t know how to fix things he solved them with alcohol and anger.

He didn’t like admitting it but in the time that he had been living alone, Yoongi was sure he now fit the bill for a barely functioning alcoholic. His thoughts were loud in his head and the only way he knew how to solve them were to drown them with alcohol. Unfortunately, his temper was impossible to control when he was drunk and even more unfortunately, Yoongi was an angry drunk.

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Ever since that night, Yoongi had been a complete mess. He couldn’t get Jeongguk out of his head so he drank and stayed drunk in order to keep the thoughts away.

He’d had a tutoring session in the evening and he was thankful that they were a family he was close to, so when he’d arrived bleary eyed and reeking of alcohol they’d smiled sympathetically at him and sent him back home.

Not in the mood to be around people, he’d walked all the way back to his apartment rather than taking the bus. He regretted that decision halfway home and, as he shuffled up the steps to his apartment, he wanted to sleep for a few days and not have to deal with the world. By the time he reached the top step he had come to terms with the idea of doing nothing but sleeping for a few days but then he saw a figure sitting by his door and groaned out loud.

The figure rushed to stand and Yoongi hurried to unlock his door.

“Yoongi!” Jeongguk snapped, sounding both frustrated and desperate.
Yoongi ignored him and went into his apartment hoping to lock the younger outside but he misjudged both Jeongguk’s speed and his own strength. Jeongguk stuck his foot in the door and forced his shoulder against it to keep it open.

“Hey! Yoongi!? What the fuck!?”

“Go away!” Yoongi shouted and just as he was about to get the door closed, Jeongguk forced it open with all his body weight nearly knocking Yoongi down in the process.

Jeongguk closed the door behind him and crossed his arms over his chest as he glared at the older.

“What is wrong with you!?” The younger demanded and Yoongi rolled his eyes, turning around and stomping into the kitchen.

“A lot.” He snapped. “I thought I told you to go away.”

Jeongguk followed him into the kitchen and just the mix of hurt and confusion on his face had Yoongi’s heart clenching painfully. He gritted his teeth together and opened his cabinet, pulling out a bottle of soju.

“I’m not going anywhere until you talk to me, Yoongi.” Jeongguk stated.

Yoongi was about to reach for a glass but with a scoff he brought the bottle up to his lips instead.

Jeongguk glared at him as he stayed silent and swallowed down the alcohol like water, the younger glanced around the sorry state of his apartment and scowled even further.

“Your apartment is a mess.” He observed.

Yoongi took the bottle away from his mouth to breathe and wiped the liquid off of his mouth.

“Yeah, well I wasn’t expecting visitors. If you don’t like it then you’re free to get the hell out.”

Jeongguk’s attention turned to him once again and Yoongi noted that he was even starting to look
angry. Good, maybe if he got Jeongguk mad enough the younger would hate him and he wouldn’t have to deal with this anymore. He forced a smile onto his face right before bringing the soju bottle up to his mouth as the thought made his eyes sting with tears.

“Yoongi, I want to talk to you, can you just stop drinking and doing this so we can talk for a minute, please?” Jeongguk asked, frowning.

“I don’t want to talk.” Yoongi slurred. “So, why don’t you fucking leave like I asked you to.”

“I’m not going anywhere!” Jeongguk insisted. “Especially when you’re acting like you’re trying to give yourself alcohol poisoning. There are empty bottles everywhere! What is going on Yoongi? Talk to me, please. Don’t shut me out like this.”

“I can do whatever the fuck I want.” Yoongi snapped. He went to lean against the counter since he suddenly felt dizzy, but he misjudged and Jeongguk rushed forward to catch him before he felt and split his head open on the counter.

Yoongi slapped his hands away once he regained his balance. “You aren’t my god damn mother, Jeongguk. You don’t get to tell me what to do. Fuck, I’m your hyung anyways, why are you talking to me like that? Show me some respect!”

“I’m not trying to be your mother!” Jeongguk shouted and Yoongi knew he had pushed the younger too far. “Stop fucking acting like a lunatic! Why do you always do this when things get hard for you!? Stop running away all the time!”

Yoongi scoffed but his heart was beating loudly in his chest.

“Fuck off.” He muttered and lifted the bottle up to his mouth again.

Jeongguk moved forward suddenly and the bottle was smacked from his hands. It landed and shattered on the tile of the kitchen and just like that a switch was flipped in Yoongi’s mind.

He grabbed Jeongguk by his shirt and got into his face as a wave of rage crashed over him.
“I said fuck off! I don’t want you here! Can’t you get that through your thick skull, you fucking dick!” He shouted.

Jeongguk pushed him off easily enough and due to Yoongi’s intoxicated state he nearly fell over again and made a desperate grab for his counters, swiping half of the trash and bottles on them to the floor.

“Fuck!” Yoongi roared and a liquid fell down his face but he was too angry to pay any attention to it.

Jeongguk’s face softened suddenly and he cautiously started toward Yoongi.

“Hey, wait a second :”

He made a move that seemed like he was trying to hug the older and without thinking Yoongi threw a punch at him. It landed and Jeongguk reeled backwards.

Yoongi stumbled out of the kitchen and into his living room but Jeongguk was behind him. Yoongi was spun around suddenly and Jeongguk’s eyes were livid as he returned the punch from before except Jeongguk was much stronger than Yoongi and it sent him falling to the floor.

Yoongi scrambled to get up again but Jeongguk was pulling him up much faster.

“Yoongi! Shit- stop! I didn’t mean to do that, stop it!”

Yoongi struggled to get free from Jeongguk’s grip but the younger refused to budge so he gathered Jeongguk’s shirt in his own grasp and used all of his body strength to throw him to the couch.

In a fit of rage, Yoongi grabbed the wooden chair he had next to the couch and threw it at the mirror across the room. The glass shattered loudly and the dizziness that Yoongi felt before multiplied and he felt the world spin before his vision pitched to the side and he heard the frantic call of his name before he fell unconscious.
When Yoongi opened his eyes again, he hissed at the light entering them and winced. After all this time drinking and getting drunk he still wasn’t used to how severe his hangovers were. He groaned at the intense pounding in his head and forced himself to sit up. There wasn’t a chance in hell he would be able to go back to sleep with a pounding migraine.

He turned and grabbed for the pain medicine he always kept by his bed for times like these but his hand came back empty. He looked at his nightstand and suddenly realized that he was on the wrong side of the bed. He always slept on the same side, drunk or not, so why was he on the wrong side?

His question was answered in the form of a voice.

“How are you feeling?”

Yoongi turned towards the side of the bed that he usually slept on and was surprised to see Jeongguk there. The younger was under the covers as well and as Yoongi moved his foot experimentally he came in contact with the warm skin of Jeongguk’s leg.

His gaze focused on a purple bruise just under Jeongguk’s left eye and Yoongi groaned, throwing an arm over his face. He could feel it reddening but he didn’t have the energy to deal with the strange way his heart leapt knowing Jeongguk was in his bed and how it clashed with the cold rush of shame he felt, knowing that he had caused the bruise on Jeongguk’s face. He’d hit him. Yoongi didn’t remember much about what happened but the blurry images of what he did remember told him enough.

“Like shit.” He muttered.

Jeongguk laughed a little under his breath and handed him the bottle of pain medicine that he had been looking for.

“What?”

Yoongi groaned again and got out of the bed hurriedly. “Hold on.”
He rushed to his bathroom as the sudden feeling of nausea increased and emptied the contents of his stomach into the toilet. He’d been drinking so much that he almost always threw up in the mornings now. When the nausea had passed, he shuffled over to the sink and rinsed out his mouth, brushing his teeth as well just to get the taste of bile and stale alcohol out of his mouth.

He sighed again and made his way back to the bedroom where Jeongguk was sitting in his bed casually. Yoongi said nothing but got back under the covers of his bed and opened the pill bottle. He poured one of them out and swallowed it down dry since he’d done this routine so many times now that it was starting to feel like it was how he would wake up every day.

Jeongguk didn’t say anything, likely waiting for Yoongi to talk. And, too tired to fight anymore, Yoongi did.

“I’m sorry.” He apologized. He wasn’t even sure what exactly he was apologizing for. There was too much to be sorry about and Yoongi just wanted Jeongguk to know that he was sorry about all of it.

They were both sitting up in his bed, looking at the ceiling rather than each other.

“It’s okay.” Jeongguk whispered and Yoongi wasn’t sure if the younger realized what he was apologizing for so he said it again.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Jeongguk repeated.

“It’s not okay.” Yoongi swallowed and forced himself to keep talking.

“I like you. A lot. I think you should know that. But I don’t think that we should be together. I’m gay and high school was terrible for me. I just don’t want you to experience any of the stuff that I did. You don’t deserve any of it.”

Jeongguk was quiet for a long moment before he responded. “I didn’t… I didn’t know how I felt about you until we kissed. That’s why I came here. I like you, too. I just wanted to understand. I don’t really know what you went through, Yoongi… but I don’t think you deserved it either.”
Yoongi sighed, trying hard to ignore the warm feeling that bloomed in his chest after hearing that his feelings were reciprocated. “I think that we should just stay friends.”

Jeongguk turned, rotating his whole body until he was completely facing Yoongi in the bed. Yoongi tried to resist looking at him but as he continuously felt the younger’s gaze on his face, he finally gave in and turned until he was facing Jeongguk too and then the two were close and staring at each other.

“Friends?” Jeongguk questioned and Yoongi couldn’t read his expression.

“Friends.” He agreed.

Jeongguk looked down and bit his lip. Yoongi’s eyes followed the movement but he didn’t dare say anything.

“Okay.” Jeongguk agreed after a moment. “Can we be friends with benefits, though?”

Yoongi snorted. Jeongguk really had grown up. “What kind of benefits?”

Jeongguk smiled and he almost looked embarrassed. “I don’t want you to date anyone else.”

Yoongi nodded. “Done.”

“What about me?” Jeongguk asked curiously.

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t you want me to not date anyone else?”

Yoongi looked at Jeongguk, not trusting himself to say anything for a moment. He shoved the prickling feeling of jealously over the thought of Jeongguk seeing someone else down hurriedly.
“Jeongguk, I just want you to be happy-”

“Okay, so I won’t date anyone else either.” Jeongguk quickly stated.

Yoongi fought back a smile. “What else?”

“Can I kiss you?” Jeongguk asked and Yoongi didn’t miss the way the younger’s gaze dropped to his lips for a moment. Yoongi struggled to breathe all of a sudden, this kid was really testing him.

“No.” And it took everything inside of him to say that. “That’s not something friends do, is it?”

Jeongguk pouted cutely, he reached out a hand to cradle Yoongi’s face. “But I want to kiss you again. And… touch you.”

Yoongi’s mind blanked completely at the implication of Jeongguk’s words and before he could say anything else, Jeongguk’s lips were against his.

He pulled away almost immediately, looking at Jeongguk strangely. “You realize I just threw up a few minutes ago, right?”

“I can literally taste the toothpaste on your lips, shut up.” Jeongguk rolled his eyes and pulled in Yoongi again.

Jeongguk had scooted closer so under the covers, Yoongi was burning up with Jeongguk’s body heat against him. He moved his lips against the younger’s and let out a faint noise of surprise when a tongue licked against his lower lip. In the slight moment that he’d opened his mouth, Jeongguk tongue darted out, licking across his lips. Yoongi responded by reaching up into the hairs on Jeongguk’s nape and bit teasingly at the younger’s lower lip.

Jeongguk made a strangled noise in the back of his throat and suddenly he was shifting his weight again, tossing a leg over Yoongi’s waist as he clambered on top of him. Yoongi groaned, completely turned on by Jeongguk’s assertiveness. He had no idea where the shy kid he had met before in the music room had gone but he was nowhere to be seen now.
Jeongguk grinded down against him and Yoongi groaned out loud without thinking. Jeongguk seemed to take that as a sign to continue and Yoongi felt a curious hand feel around his boxer clad hips before diving lower.

Just like that, Yoongi snapped back to reality and grabbed for Jeongguk’s hand.

“Jeongguk. Stop it.” Yoongi instructed sternly.

“But you’re—” Jeongguk started, eyes wide in confusion.

“Stop. If we go further than this, we’re not gonna be able to stay friends.”

Jeongguk bit his lip again but obediently slid off of Yoongi and back onto the bed.

“Sorry.”

Yoongi sighed, turning his gaze back to the ceiling, and willed his body to calm down. “It’s fine. I should have stopped you sooner.”

“Is it okay if we kiss a little?” Jeongguk asked from beside him.

“If it’s not in front of anybody, sure.” Yoongi acquiesced. He wasn’t sure he’d be able to discipline himself enough to resist kissing Jeongguk for the rest of his life anyways.

They were quiet for a while as Yoongi steadied his breathing and Jeongguk quietly held his hand.

“Oh! I forgot to tell you. I made some new friends. They’re all older than me though.”

“Oh?” Yoongi asked, intrigued. He was glad that Jeongguk hadn’t been alone in his absence.
“Yeah. I think only Jin is older than you though. They’re really cool even if everyone is kind of a mess. Namjoon and Hoseok really like music though, you’d probably get along with them well. You’d probably hate Taehyung though. And Jimin is probably the only person that’s quieter than me so you’d fit right in! I’ll have to take you to meet them sometime.”

“Sure. I wouldn’t mind meeting them.”

Yoongi was surprised by the honesty in his words.

He’d been making a point of staying to himself over the past few years but if they were people that Jeongguk considered friends it was probably worth it to meet them. Whatever Jeongguk and he had together would be hard for sure, but it would undoubtedly be easier than Yoongi trying to survive without him. He had no idea that some shy, overly curious middle schooler would have ever burrowed so deeply into his life.

But like a moth drawn to a flame, Yoongi had always wanted to be surrounded by light.

Chapter End Notes

Yoongi’s name basically means “to shine/to make shine” in Korean and I realized that after I wrote the first half of this chapter and I made myself cry. :) why am I like this?

Fun Fact
Out of all the BTS “characters” Yoongi seems to be most volatile and emotional.
When Jin opened his eyes, he was once again surrounded by fences and though it had been his wish to be there again, he couldn’t help but feel bitter at the sight of them.

It hadn’t been what he wanted. He didn’t want to feel warmth and love only to have it ripped away from him time and time again until he was used to feeling cold and empty. It felt just like it did when Hye-su was taken away from him. The happiness was snatched away like it was never there to begin with. As if he didn't deserve it. And maybe he didn't. But all he had wanted Was to stop feeling. He didn't want to have happiness, he knew better than to think that he deserved it. Why else would it keep being taken away from him just as he could feel it in his grasp? No, he was smarter than that. He just wanted it all to stop but he wasn't even allowed to have that. He wasn't allowed to have nothing, feel nothing, be nothing.

Was he doomed to this suffering for the rest of eternity? Was there a way out of this endless maze?
He didn’t know. He wasn’t sure if he wanted to know.

He felt the cool weight of something in his palm and looked down to see that it was a flower petal. A white lily just like the one he had seen before.

He wished that he knew what it meant.

He was still standing in front of the fence where he initially found the photograph, and though the scenery remained mostly the same, it seemed like the sky was at dawn judging by the coloration in the sky. Pinks and purples gave way to a soft shade of blue as the moon descended and the sun began to take its place.

Besides that, there seemed to be far more of those strips of fabric hanging from the links of the fence, making the area look like the beginnings of a haunted house.

The atmosphere had certainly gotten spookier. Jin shivered as a cool breeze blew past and returned to his mission of finding the exit.

This time, however, as he turned corners and kept what looked to be the exit in front of him as he walked, there were no phantom figures. The air was quiet, almost too quiet for it be dawn, no birds were calling, no honking of people late to work or the hum of city life. It was just Jin, the sky, and the fences.

He’d never felt so alone.

As he walked his mind wandered. As much as he didn’t want to think too deeply about what all of this could mean, he couldn’t help the thought that had passed through his mind, burrowed into the back of his head and made a home there.

The worlds that the photos seemed to be taking him to didn’t seem like they were real since they were so distorted from the world that Jin remembered the most but…

What if he didn’t actually exist at all?
While he had been in the last world, he had been cautious of messing anything up and ruining the timeline of his life or something equally crazy. But what happened in those worlds when he left them? Did another version of himself take over? Or did he just stop existing in that world altogether? Did he actually have an impact on his surroundings while he was in a world or did he also disappear without a trace when he left them?

If he left no trace and had no impact on his surroundings or the people he talked to… was that even considered existing? Or would it be as if Kim Seokjin never existed at all?

It was a thought process that he didn’t want to delve any deeper into and one that he couldn’t help wondering about. It stung, to think that his friends could all be moving on without him and not caring about his death.

But wasn’t that what his intention had been when he had driven off of the pier and into the sea?

He had wanted to disappear without a trace. He had wanted to stop being a bother to them. He had wanted them to move on without him.

*Right?*

So, why did the idea of disappearing without a trace, his friends not being bothered by his absence, and moving on without him hurt so much that he was short of breath?

Could they even be considered friends if they were so indifferent? Had he really meant nothing to them at all? Were they really better of without him?

*Did they really not miss him?*

Because he missed them. He wasn’t so indifferent. They meant *everything* to him. He would never be better off without them.

In the midst of all the confusion, terror, and anguish his friends hadn’t left his mind for a moment. He hadn’t even seen or thought of his actual family once since he drove off that pier. That had to mean something. People always said that the family you choose was often more important than the family you were given and Jin completely agreed. Where his real family had shunned and abandoned him for his choices, his friends had encouraged him and supported him without
They had always been there for him in a way that his family hadn’t.

And if there was any constant between all of the worlds Jin had experienced thus far, it was that he really fucking missed them.

Eventually, though it seemed like an impossible task, Jin reached the exit to the maze. He had no idea how long he had been walking around since the sky hadn’t changed at all from the time he was brought back. But there, a few meters away from him, the maze opened up into a singular pathway. Beyond that, a bright white helicopter pad was painted onto the dark brown of the gravel and even further away Jin realized with a start that there was a real plane on what looked to be a runway.

He watched in stupefied wonder as the plane continued down the runway and took off into the air. Wind blew through his hair from the gusts and he stared after the plane long after it had disappeared from his sight.

It strangely looked like the same plane that Jimin and Hoseok had set on fire while it was in the air when they were showing off their demonic skills.

Jin found himself wishing that the plane he just saw didn’t suffer the same fate.

In front of him, just at the exit of the maze sat two neatly placed white flower petals, similar to the one Jin held in his hands when he returned here. He wondered why they were white lily petals. When he had been picking out the perfect flowers for Hye-su, the florist had given him an impromptu floriography lesson. He had learned that purple hyacinth had meant forgiveness, ambrosia had meant that your love was reciprocated, and when Jin had asked about the pretty white lilies in the corner the florist had nearly laughed at him.

“Don’t ever give white lilies to anyone unless you want to make a lifelong enemy. It’s like telling someone to die. They can mean purity in most situations but they’re commonly used at funerals.” The florist had gotten a dark look in their eye at that moment. “Usually they symbolize that the soul of the departed has received restored innocence after death.”

But what did restored innocence have to do with the strange photographs and dream like world that he was trapped in?
Next to the flower petals lay the remaining three photographs. Their contents were still indiscernible, with grey, strange shapes and murky black backgrounds.

Jin found himself hesitating as he reached for the next photo.

It wasn’t as though he was afraid of moving forward, he wanted to do whatever he could to get out of this place he seemed to be stuck in. But he was afraid of going back to square one. He hoped he was making progress of some sort… but there was also a good possibility that he wasn’t.

With a deep sigh, he bent over and picked the next photo up from the ground. He glanced up at the sky again, in the direction the plane had flown off to and watched as the pinks and blues of the sky erupted into a mess of different colors coloring the sky like a nuclear explosion.

Strong wind blew against his face, forcing him to shut his eyes.

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He squinted against the bright sunlight that reflected off the glass in front of him for a brief second. The landscape in front of him was rushing past, so quickly that he could see little other than color and hints of shapes, yet slow enough for him to see that he was passing through a city covered in a light dusting of snow.

It was disorienting, as it often is closing your eyes and opening them to completely new and different scenery.

It was quiet, and Jin realized that he was facing a window and staring out of it. He moved his gaze away from it and looked around to find out where he was.

He hadn’t been on one very often, but the familiar interior of a train surrounded him. He was sat in a booth seat and across from him, similar scenery flies past the window in even less discernible shapes and colors. He continued looking around and was startled to see Jeongguk sitting a few rows behind him on the opposite side, staring absentely out of the window.

Jeongguk didn’t seem to notice or care that Jin was sitting a few seats up so Jin took the initiative
and stood up so that he could sit next to the younger. He squeezed into the same booth seat as Jeongguk but the younger didn’t do so much as flinch or even acknowledge Jin’s presence at all.

Jin tried calling out his name in case he was just spacing out, or sleeping with his eyes open like Yoongi had done once, but Jeongguk just continued staring out of the window. Which was strange, because even if Jeongguk was purposefully avoiding Jin, there was no reason for him to be pretending not to notice him this much.

Jin even tried waving a hand in front of the youngers face to capture his attention but nothing was working.

“Hey!” Jin called out as he began to become irritated, swatting Jeongguk on the shoulder. “Don’t just ignore your hyung when he’s… talking to… you…”

Jin faltered and the words spilled from his mouth without his input. He was much too busy looking at the way his hand had just gone through Jeongguk’s flesh like air, disappearing and reappearing on the other side without making contact at all.

He swatted at him again just to be sure. In one side and out the other.

And once more just to be absolutely certain that his eyes weren’t deceiving him. In one side, out the other.

Jin nearly screamed in terror as Jeongguk shuddered like he had felt a chill, tucking his jacket in tighter around himself.

What… was this, Jin wondered. He hadn’t watched many horror movies in his life, being much too scared to sit through one entirely but it felt like he was right in the middle of one. His hand had gone straight through Jeongguk as if… as if he were… a ghost.

Which would have been insane to him a while ago but now… now it was just yet another strange thing to happen to him.

Jin sighed, and not knowing what else to do, made himself comfortable in the seat. Jeongguk sighed as well, and shifted then, leaning down to pull something out of the open backpack on the floor in front of him.
Jin watched as he pulled out a black notebook and a pen before sitting back in the seat and opening the notebook to a blank page. Jeongguk nibbled on the tip of the pen for a few seconds before he pressed it to the page and began to write something.

“*Hyung. You were the glue that held us all together. Without you...*”

Jeongguk stared at the page for a long moment before he scoffed and aggressively crossed out the words.

He skipped a few lines and began writing again.

“*Hyung. It’s been over a year and I still think of you every day. And I still can’t understand why you...*”

Jeongguk hesitated with the pen to the page and Jin watched in confused concern as he huffed and viciously scribbled those words out as well.

Below the two scratched out lines, Jeongguk began writing a third time, this time more frantic and messy than the handwriting from before.

“*You shouldn’t have left us, hyung. We’re a mess and we need you to fix it. But you aren’t here.*”

This time Jeongguk didn’t even bother scratching out the words. As soon as he had written them he merely looked at the page for a second before ripping the piece of paper out of the notebook and crumpling it into a ball. He stuffed the crumpled ball, notebook, and pen into his backpack before zipping it up with a huff.

He threw a hand over his face as he leaned back into the seat with his face contorted in frustration.

“I told Jimin I couldn’t do this.” He hissed under his breath. “It’s fucking dumb.”

Jin frowned. He had a lot of questions about what was happening. Like- why was he on a train with
Jeongguk? Where were they going? Who was Jeongguk writing that letter to? Why was he writing it? And why was his hand passing through Jeongguk’s body like he wasn’t a physical being?

But he doubted that any of those questions were going to be answered soon.

Especially since it didn’t seem like he was able to interact with the environment in any way. He figured that his best bet would be to quietly observe what was happening and pay attention to as much as he could.

The muffled voice of the train conductor came through over the speakers and Jin realized that they were coming to a stop. He hadn’t seen any other passengers so it seemed as if Jeongguk was sitting in a private room.

The train finally came to a stop and Jin looked out at the station through the window, watching as the line of waiting patrons shortened. He heard voices pass in the hallway outside of the room and even Jeongguk straightened up as though he was waiting for someone.

Sure enough, after the noise and clamor quietened down the door slid open and a head peeked inside.

“Oh, Jeongguk.” Jimin gasped with surprise as he squeezed into the room tugging his luggage along. “Why didn’t you answer my texts? I was worried you didn’t make it to the train station on time.”

Jeongguk shrugged. “Phone died. Sorry.”

Jin didn’t think that he really sounded all that apologetic. Jimin seemed to agree and shot him a complex look as he stowed his luggage away underneath a seat, the same seat Jin had woken up in. After the luggage was safely tucked away, Jimin climbed on top of the table in the middle of the booth, scooting backwards until his back touched the wood siding of the cabin.

Jeongguk had turned away, looking out of the window as the train started up again but he turned back to Jimin when he spoke.

“Did you finish writing your part of the speech?”
Jeongguk didn’t answer, just bit his lip and turned towards the window again. Jin looked over at Jimin to see that his face displayed his disappointment. But beyond that, the man looked tired and worn down and the almost forced cheeriness of his expression fell as soon as Jeongguk stopped looking at him.

“Jeongguk, please.” Jimin pleaded, sounding every bit as tired as he looked. “I want everyone to say something at the memorial.”

Memorial? Jin questioned. He wondered what that meant. Judging by what Jeongguk had been writing before, it didn’t seem like it was a national memorial so was it a memorial service? And if so, who was it for?

“I have nothing to say.” Jeongguk stated, a bitterness in his voice that Jin had never heard before.

“Or you have too much to say.” Jimin sighed. “I know that his death has affected you a lot. It’s affected all of us, but he would want us to do this. To remember him. To let him know that we’re still thinking of him.”

Jeongguk turned away from the window and from where Jin was sitting he could see unshed tears shining in his eyes.

“Do you think that he thought of us, Jimin? Do you think that he thought of us at all that day?”

Jimin bristled, seemingly both surprised and angered by the question judging by the sudden set of his jaw and pursing of his lips.

“Of course he did.” He stated firmly and Jin could tell by the way he said it without making eye contact with Jeongguk that he was trying to convince himself of that fact more than anyone else.

He could tell that Jeongguk thought the same as his gaze fell back to the window as if drawn by gravity.

“Then, that hurts even more.” He whispered, window fogging with his breath.
Neither Jeongguk nor Jimin spoke after that.

Jeongguk stared out of the window and Jimin nestled his head into his knees.

The atmosphere was strangely heavy, had been ever since Jin had arrived here, but had only gotten heavier once Jimin had entered the cabin. The quiet wasn’t so strange, out of their friend group Jimin, Jeongguk, and Yoongi had always been the quietest. But it was an atmosphere similar to the one Jin had felt that day sitting on the pier. As if there were so many words unsaid that they hung in the air and brought a bad taste to his mouth.

He hated the feeling, to say the least.

And as the train continued on for a while without stopping, Jin began to realize that the surroundings rushing past the windows strangely did not look like Seoul. So, he could only guess that they were heading towards Seoul. But that, again, begged the question of why? He had gathered by now that his friends were all going to some sort of memorial service. But for who?

All of these questions and not a single way to get an answer.

Jin had even tried to gain Jimin’s attention by repeatedly tapping his shoulder and going so far as to attempt to push him but the man had done nothing but shiver and make a small comment about there being a draft before huddling even further into himself.

Eventually, the robotic sounding voice rang out from the train’s communication system and once again the only thing Jin could understand was that the train was going to be stopping soon.

Jin had taken to sitting in the booth diagonal to Jimin so he could see both of them at all times and he watched as Jimin sleepily raised his head, rubbing his eyes and running a hand through his hair. Jeongguk just continued staring out the window but something in his posture had changed as if he had gotten… stiffer. Jin wondered why that was but the door to the cabin slid open before he could think about it any further.

Taehyung walked into the cabin first. He was wearing a knit beanie with hanging ear flaps in defense from the cold wind that seemed to be blowing outside, given by the cold blast of air that
rushed in once the door was opened. He was biting his lip as he entered but he looked up with a brief smile when Jimin greeted him warmly.

He shuffled into the cabin and took the seat in front of Jeongguk, scooting in all the way until he could also see out of the window.

Yoongi shuffled in after him, wearing a colorful beanie. He seemed to be no different than usual until his eyes rose from the ground and immediately made eye contact with Jeongguk, who had been watching him enter the room.

Jin looked between them as a seemingly awkward moment transpired. Yoongi looked away first, clenching his jaw. Jeongguk narrowed his eyes, tongue poking briefly into his cheek as he turned his head back to the window.

Jin greeted Yoongi as well but the older of the two just grunted in response before slumping loudly into the seat directly across from Jeongguk. Jin frowned at that and Jimin looked equally concerned. Had something happened between the two of them?

Jin scoffed. Something had *obviously* happened between them. But what could have been big enough for the two of them to have so much animosity towards each other?

Jimin scrambled to ease the newfound tension in the small cabin.

“Did… did the two of you finish writing your parts of the speech?”

Yoongi sent a glare icy enough to freeze fire in Jimin’s direction. “I already told you, I’m not doing that.”

Jimin pouted. “But… everyone should say something! I’ve been planning this for the last year and a half, it wouldn’t kill you to say something at the memorial, hyung.”

“It might.” Yoongi snapped in response.

Jimin bit the inside of his lip and Jin thought that he might start crying at any moment if Yoongi
kept it up.

“Can’t you just do this? For me?” Jimin asked, the beginning of tears thickening his voice.

“I’m already sitting here, in this seat, for you.” Yoongi spat. “If I had it my way, I’d be sitting at home-”

“-Getting drunk.” Jeongguk finished testily.

Yoongi looked over the younger with an unreadable expression and Jin was shocked to see that Jeongguk was glaring at the elder.

“Since when was drinking a crime?” Yoongi fired back, but it was clear even to Jin that his tone didn’t have the same ice in it that it had a second ago. He sounded like he knew he was arguing a losing side.

“You’d find a way to make it one.” Jeongguk argued in return and, just like that, Jimin’s attempts at distilling the tension were for naught.

“I finished writing mine.” Taehyung spoke up from the corner, glancing between Yoongi and Jeongguk warily.

Jemin gave him a watery smile. “Thank you, Taehyung.”

Taehyung quirked his lips into another brief smile before turning his attention back to Yoongi and Jeongguk.

“I don’t really know what’s going on with the two of you…” He said carefully, as if scared that speaking too frankly would reignite the flames of the fire. Which sounded like a reasonable concern to Jin. “But can you at least try not to fight on this trip? Jimin went to a lot of work to plan this for all of us so…”

Jeongguk and Yoongi glanced at each other briefly but Jin watched as they quickly turned away from each other, finding great interest in the scenery outside.
So, that’s what this trip was going to be like, Jin thought with a sigh.

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Once the train had continued on, passing scenery once again flying past the windows of the train, things had calmed down.

Taehyung and Jimin were having a quiet conversation about how their morning’s had gone thus far, Taehyung telling a funny story about how he had gone to the bathroom at the train station and lost Yoongi when he came back out because the elder was so short.

The tension and generally unpleasant atmosphere was still there and Jin found it amazing that the four hadn’t started screaming from how stifling it felt. It was enough that Jin wondered if it was only him that was feeling it.

The announcement rang over the loudspeakers once again after what felt like the longest time between stops and Jin caught “Gwangju” in the sentence. And maybe he had heard it wrong because it was so absurd that they had traveled so far East rather than going North like they would need to do in order to get Seoul. Had he been wrong about their destination?

His friends had fallen into silence as voices once again passed by the hallway just outside of the door.

Though, Jin was surprised when the door slid open and Hoseok poked his head in, bright smile on his face as he saw everybody inside. Jin had long since given up trying to be noticed so it didn’t surprise him when Hoseok’s eyes passed over his seat without stopping, but it didn’t help the dull thud in his chest as it happened.

“Hi, everyone!” He greeted, completely ignoring the tense atmosphere. Whether or not Hoseok actually noticed it was questionable.

Namjoon appeared behind him, not looking nearly as cheerful but he at least seemed to be in a better mood than Yoongi.
Namjoon’s appearance confused Jin the most. But thankfully, he didn’t seem to be the only one.

“Namjoon-hyung? What are you doing in Gwangju?” Taehyung asked, eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

Hoseok sat down in front of Yoongi, despite the elder clearly broadcasting “leave me alone” with his body language, while Namjoon squeezed into the seat next to Taehyung.

“Well, I had family down here so I figured I might as well just catch the train with Hoseok back up. If I stayed in Ilsan, I would have had to meet you all at the motel. I know Jimin planned this trip for a while so I thought it would be best if we all made the journey together.”

Jimin grinned sleepily at that. “Thank you, hyung. I’m really glad that we’re all here. Doing this… together.”

Namjoon nodded with a smile. “I think that he would want us to do this.”

“I know he would,” Hoseok adds.

The train began to move again, and Jin turned his attention to the window as a strange shadow passed over. It seemed like they were entering a tunnel. A pitch black darkness bled into the train, and in the second it took for the brightness sensitive lights to come on, he saw something strange outside the train. There were separate paths in the tunnel that they were travelling through and it passed in a flash but in that singular second he saw something. He swore that he saw seven figures who strangely resembled both himself and his friends down one of the paths. But that wouldn’t be possible because they’re all here sitting on this train.

Jin turned to see if anyone else saw and reacted to what he just saw and felt some justification in the fact that Jeongguk was also turning his head as though he was trying to look at something that had passed now, confusion written all over his face.

Jeongguk turned around and suddenly it was as if he was looking directly at Jin. As if he was actually seeing him and Jin wanted to talk, wanted to open his mouth and speak because he was looking right into Jeongguk’s eyes and Jeongguk was looking right into Jin’s eyes. But then he heard something that had his head turning fast enough to give him whiplash.
“Seokjin loved all of us and more importantly he was our family.” Hoseok said, and Jin felt his heart pounding thunderously in his chest.

“He may have left us too early but he’ll always be in our hearts.”

Jin felt nauseated. Bile burned at the back of his throat, threatening to burst forth at any second. They were going to his memorial?

Was he… was he actually a ghost?

The thought scared him more than he anything else he’d seen so far had. Being here on the train with them suddenly felt wrong, all of it felt wrong. He wasn’t supposed to be seeing something like this. He didn’t want to. It felt like he was intruding on something he was never supposed to see. As if he was going to attend his own funeral.

He could at least be glad that it seemed as though a while had passed since his death so he wouldn’t have to witness something that awful. He hadn’t wanted to be found at all, he just wanted to disappear. To stop existing.

But why, why could he not even have that?

Though, as he thought more about it there was also something terribly different about this timeline as well. His friends had all gone to the same school in Seoul so why was everyone living back in their hometowns?

——

The cabin was quiet after that. Jin guessed that they had decided to go early in the morning which was why everyone seemed so tired even though Jimin was the only one actually sleeping. Everyone else was looking out of windows or chatting quietly amongst themselves.

Jeongguk talked with Namjoon and Taehyung, and even Hoseok had managed to get Yoongi talking to him. Yoongi and Jeongguk hadn’t so much as looked at each other since Taehyung had asked them not to fight, but with the weird vibe between the two of them, it was probably for the best.
The train had stopped a few more times but given by the fact that no one else came in or out of their private cabin, Jin figured that they were heading to their final destination.

And as the overhead speakers rattled with an announcement Jin actually understood most of the message.

“We have now arrived in Seoul. It is early afternoon. If you intend to disembark at this stop, please begin to gather your things now.”

Jin watched as his friends slowly began getting up and tugging their bags out from underneath the seats. So, they really were going to Seoul. Hoseok shook Jimin’s leg to wake him up from his sleeping position on the table and the younger lethargically lifted his head.

“We’re getting off.” Hoseok explained quietly and Jimin nodded before slowly making his way to his feet.

After a few minutes everyone had gathered their things and shuffled tiredly out of the cabin. Jin didn’t know what else to do other than follow them as they disembarked the train, walking out into the bright, sunlit streets of Seoul.

“Are we gonna have to walk the rest of the way?” Jeongguk questioned, hoisting his backpack up on his shoulders so it sat more comfortably on his back.

Jimin turned around and shot him an incredulous look. “Are you crazy? It’s ten miles away from here. We’d be walking for over three hours. We’re taking an hour bus ride.”

Jeongguk looked embarrassed as he ruffled the back of his hair and scuffed his shoe on the ground. “Oh.”

Though it seemed like they had a while to wait until the bus came, so everyone decided to get lunch first. Jin followed after them, feeling every bit like a ghost as he watched them eat and make small talk. As they laughed at the shocked expression on Namjoon’s face when they all turned to him to pay the bill. As they shuffled back out into the frosty winter air just in time to board the bus. As Jimin fell asleep once again with his face resting against the cool glass of the window. As Namjoon and Hoseok realized that Yoongi and Jeongguk were in the middle of some fight and tried way too hard to keep the two from arguing with each other.
He watched from his standing position in the bus as the scenery of the city flew by and gave way into the familiar landscape that led to the sea where all of their mistakes had once culminated into one giant mess. Where they had once found nothing but peace and comfort.

He could see it passing by on the right side of the bus, a light dusting of snow covering everything and the cold air making the sea water look like glass. Eventually the bus stopped in the small coastal town, the closest buildings to the sea unless you traveled back towards the city. Jin hadn’t known what place they had been talking about before, but he saw the neon sign of the motel in the distance now, glowing a bright green against the stark grey and beige scenery.

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The boys had gotten off the bus and walked the small distance to the quaint motel. They had been the only ones to get off here, the sea wasn’t somewhere often visited during winter. But the trouble had started when they checked in and room assignments had needed to be decided.

Surprisingly, Jeongguk had been the first to speak up, though what he suggested came as even more of a surprise.

“I’ll room with Yoongi.”

Yoongi looked at him incredulously, immediately shaking his head.

“No, I’m rooming with Hoseok.”

“Then I’ll room with Tae-” Jimin announced but Jeongguk interrupted him before he could finish his sentence.

His arms were crossed with a stern expression on his face as he regarded Yoongi. “You’re rooming with me, Yoongi.”

Yoongi bristled at the disrespectful use of his name, eyes narrowing in irritation. Jeongguk didn’t do so much as flinch.
“I’m not trying to cause a scene, but I know that you have two full bottles of soju in your luggage that you intend to drink on this trip and you’re impossible to handle when you’re drunk. I know how to deal with you, at least. Even if I don’t want to. So, you’re rooming with me.”

The others looked on, varying degrees of concern on each of their faces as they waited for Yoongi’s reaction. The air was charged with a tension even Jin could feel and he almost wanted to look away from how uncomfortable the two were making him. It was as if he were watching Jimin and Hoseok fight. Completely strange and foreign. But everyone knew about Yoongi’s temper so Jeongguk making him angry was the worst possible scenario.

To everyone’s surprise, though, Yoongi just clenched his jaw, as if holding himself back from saying something unpleasant, and muttered out a “fine”, before snatching the room key from Jeongguk’s hand and pushing past him roughly.

Everyone seemed to let out a collective breath as Yoongi left and Jeongguk slowly followed behind him. The rest of the room assignments were decided quickly—Jimin with Hoseok and Namjoon with Taehyung.

“Don’t forget that we’re doing the service first thing in the morning tomorrow!” Jimin called out as everyone began going in their separate directions. “Have your speech ready, please!”

And then, just like that, Jin was standing all alone.

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Jin stood outside the motel for a while, just watching the light snow fall gently to the ground. The frozen crystals formed a layer over the damp and cold earth, washing out the colors even further.

He wasn’t entirely sure what he should be doing. He couldn’t interact with his environment and as frustrating as it was, he was also glad that he could just stand outside like this in the snow without feeling the cold wind or curious eyes on him. He wanted to figure out how to leave this world since the insignificance of his presence was doing funny things to his mental state but he also couldn’t deny the strange desire to witness his own memorial service. It was almost like a masochistic urge to know what his friends truly thought of him when he wasn’t around.

Jeongguk’s earlier struggle with writing his speech hung heavily on his mind. The younger seemed
to hold some degree of anger over Jin’s actions and he was completely terrified that they’d all be holding a similar anger that the demon versions of them Jin encountered had held for him.

Eventually, once the sun had begun to dip behind the clouds and the breeze blew harder as the night winds began to roll in, Jin decided that he shouldn’t just stand outside staring blankly at the ground for the entire night. He had no intention of watching his friends sleep, since that would be a bit too strange, so he had plenty of time for standing around doing nothing later on in the night. Now, before everyone went to sleep, would be the time to do some exploring.

He looked up at the motel as he tried to remember what rooms the boys rented. It would be insanely awkward if he were to enter the wrong room. Whether the people inside could see him or not.

But he distinctly remembered the room that Jimin and Hoseok walked into so he decided that was as good a place as any to start. He approached the door and, after forgetting his predicament for a split second and reaching for the handle, he sighed and stepped through the closed door instead. The feeling of it was strange and disorienting and he almost fell over in the middle of passing through before quickly adjusting so he could regain his balance.

Inside the small room, Jimin was sitting at an equally small desk. His elbows were crossed over the surface and his head rested on them as he stared at a pair of shoes. Jin frowned when he recognized them as his own.

What was Jimin doing with a pair of his shoes?

Hoseok shifted from his position on the bed, lifting his head up and away from the light of his phone.

“How long are you going to stare at those, Jimin?” He asked, fatigue evident in his voice. He yawned and rolled over on the bed so he could face the younger better.

Jimin heaved a sigh and his eyelids drooped tiredly. “... Do you think... Jin thought of us that day?”

Hoseok frowned at the question but he seemed to think over his answer for a while before he answered.
“I do. But I think that he thought he was doing us a favor by leaving.”

Jimin lifted up his head then, fixing Hoseok with a perplexed expression. “A favor? How could doing that possibly benefit us in any way?”

“You should know better than anyone else that depression fucks with your brain in weird ways.” Hoseok explained before turning to face the ceiling. “Rational thoughts just stop existing.”

“You… You think he had depression?” Jimin asked, his voice shaking with his unease.

Hoseok breathed out a harsh laugh in the quiet of the room. “I think that people who are happy in life don’t commit suicide, Jimin.”

Jin felt himself backing up before he realized it. He was halfway through the door when Hoseok spoke again.

“Anyways, come with me to the laundromat so I can wash my clothes for tomorrow before I fall asleep.”

Jin turned so that his back was against the door, heart pounding in his chest and tears prickling at his eyes. He squeezed them shut, willing the tears to stay firmly in his eyes. But it hurt. Hurt in a way he didn’t know he could feel. A mixture of embarrassment and disappointment in himself. It felt like he had written all his most personal thoughts down in a journal and had to watch as someone read it out loud.

He didn’t have depression. He had been fine. Everything had gotten to be too much and he had just wanted to get away. To get away from the pain that had made its place in his ribcage, pressed its overwhelming weight right up against his heart and threatened to crush it. Was that so wrong?

On shaky limbs he made his way to the next room he remembered them calling out when they had paid for the night.

He slipped inside, feeling that same strange feeling, but he realized with a start that he entered the room that Yoongi and Jeongguk were sharing together. Which had not been his intention at all. He nearly turned around immediately to leave, not wanting to witness another potential fight between the two but then he noticed Yoongi sitting on the floor with his back to the bed, nursing the very
bottle of soju that Jeongguk had suspected him to have.

The younger was nowhere to be seen and for a while Jin just watched as Yoongi brought the bottle to his lips again and again, digging the palm of his hand into his left eye as he did. As as Jin continued to watch, he realized that it looked like Yoongi was... *crying*. Which was incredibly strange. The last time he had seen the ill-tempered man cry was when Jeongguk had woken up in the hospital after his accident.

Suddenly, the door off to the side of the room opened, and a puff of steam entered the bedroom as Jeongguk stepped out with a towel hung around his neck.

Yoongi smacked at his own face oddly and it took Jin a moment to realize that he was hastily wiping his tears away before Jeongguk could see.

The younger glanced at the man sitting on the floor, disdain clear on his face as he towelled off his wet hair, pulling on a thick black hoodie and matching sweatpants over his boxers.

“I can’t believe you *actually* brought two entire bottles of soju along for a two day trip.” Jeongguk commented, a tired frustration clear in his voice as he slipped on a pair of socks. “Can you really not go a single day without drinking?”

Yoongi didn’t respond. Didn’t even do so much as acknowledge Jeongguk at all.

The younger huffed out a sigh as he stood up from his seat on the bed and disappeared back into the bathroom to put the towels that he used away. He emerged once again from the bathroom and this time he stopped right in front of Yoongi with crossed arms.

Then with a sudden movement, he crouched down and snatched the bottle from Yoongi’s hands. The liquid sloshed out of the bottle with the commotion, splattering onto Yoongi’s striped shirt and a variety of darkening spots formed on the material. Yoongi lunged forward, making an attempt to swipe the bottle back from Jeongguk’s hands but the younger held it just out of his reach. Quickly growing from irritated to angry, Yoongi shoved Jeongguk back forcefully.

The younger leaned backwards from the impact, managing to stay upright somehow, though the bottle of soju in his hands wasn’t so lucky and fell with a clatter on the laminate wood floor. The two men watched as the liquid leaked from the bottle in streams.
Yoongi threw his head back against the bed with a frustrated groan.

“Fucking great.” He muttered viciously, and Jin wasn’t sure if it was because he was tired or drunk but it didn’t sound as biting as it could have.

“Stop drinking like this, hyung.” Jeongguk said softly. “I miss him, too. We all do.”

“... It hurts.” Yoongi mumbled after a long moment of silence had passed. “I hate it.”

Jeongguk snorted, sounding equally affectionate and sad. He shuffled forward on his knees until he was sitting next to Yoongi and faced the elder with his entire body. “Yeah, that’s what grief is supposed to feel like, hyung.”

Yoongi turned to face Jeongguk, lifting a hand to briefly caress the younger's jaw before dropping it into his lap. “I hate it.” He repeated.

Jin watched in amazement as Jeongguk leaned forward slowly, pressing a chaste kiss to Yoongi’s lips. The elder didn’t react until Jeongguk made a sound like a whine in his throat, pressing his lips to Yoongi’s again until he responded to the kiss and Jin found himself stilled by shock and unable to look away as the two shared a tender kiss, moving lips against each other’s softly.

When they finally broke away from each other, each leaning their head against the bed as if nothing had happened at all, Jin felt like he was burning up from embarrassment. He had had his suspicions about the dynamics of Jeongguk and Yoongi’s relationship but seeing them being romantic with each other in person was still incredibly surprising. And though Jin felt like a complete and total creep watching two of his friends kiss without knowing that he was able to see them, he couldn’t bring himself to leave. He was getting an insight to their relationship that he’d never seen before and likely wouldn’t have been able to see in any other scenario.

“... I’m drunk and tired so I’m going to pretend that you didn’t just do that.” Yoongi spoke and while there was the usual irritation in his voice there was also something there that Jin had only heard in rare situations before. Something… affectionate.

Jeongguk chuckled under his breath and a slight smirk graced his reddened lips.

“You don’t have to be so mean to Jimin.” He stated, effectively changing the subject. “He’s having
a hard time and doing his best for all of us.”

Yoongi cracked one eye open, looking over at Jeongguk with an amused expression.

“Oh? So, that means you wrote your speech too, then?”

Jeongguk bristled, breathing out a heavy sigh from his nose. “No. I’ve told him so many times that I just can’t write it. I tried on the train but everything I wrote just seemed so angry and bitter. Jin doesn’t deserve that, but I just can’t write something that actually reflects how I feel. How much I miss him, how much he meant to me, how much he meant to all of us. All the things I wish I had said when he was still with us so that maybe he wouldn’t… he wouldn’t have…”

Jeongguk became choked up then, squeezing his eyes shut and bringing a hand up to his face to hide his crying.

“Don’t blame yourself.” Yoongi muttered, turning so that he could pull Jeongguk into a hug.

“It’s weird,” Jeongguk began through his sudden onslaught of tears. “When we were on the train I was staring out of the window and I thought I saw something strange then when I turned, I swore Jin was sitting across from me. I could see him and I was too startled to say anything, but I saw him. He was there.”

Yoongi leaned back from their hug and looked at Jeongguk strangely. “You sure I’m the only one that’s been drinking?”

Jeongguk rolled his eyes. “Nevermind. It’s probably just all this memorial business that’s making me think I’m seeing him.”

Yoongi grunted in response.

Jin was stunned. Had Jeongguk really seen him in that moment? What would have happened if he hadn’t gotten distracted and had actually said something? Would he have been heard?

They two were quiet for a moment until Jeongguk pushed away from Yoongi with a grimace.
“You reek of soju, holy shit.” Jeongguk complained with a grimace. “Take the shirt off. Let’s get it washed before you stick it back in your suitcase and people mistake you for a fifty year old alcoholic.”

“You’re the one that poured it all over me!” Yoongi argued, struggling to his feet.

Jeongguk hurried to stabilize him before the elder went sailing back down to the floor.

“Yeah, because you’re acting like a fifty year old alcoholic.” Jeongguk retorts.

Yoongi started to pull the shirt over his head and Jin realized it was about time for him to leave. It was time for him to leave a while ago, but he just now felt as though he’d regained control of his legs again. Though they still remained somewhat shaky as he made his way out of the room.

He wandered around a while, before the bright lights of the laundromat next door caught his attention. The sun had fully set now and it was well into night given by the pitch black darkness of the sky. From where Jin stood he could see some of his friends inside, Jimin sitting on top of one of the washing machines and what looked like Hoseok, Yoongi, and Jeongguk squished together on one of the benches.

Jin decided to make himself comfortable on the bottom of the staircase of the motel, staring up into the sky and watching the stars twinkle and shine. It’s harder to see them in the city because of the smog but Jin remembered spending often a night staring up at them, waiting for some cosmic sign of the universe to help him with his problems.

It didn’t help then and it didn’t help now.

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Hours had passed since Jin had sat down. His friends had left the laundromat a while ago and they walked right past him, slow and drowsy from the lure of sleep and then all had been quiet. A few other patrons of the motel had been in and out but Jin hadn’t paid much attention to them. He had done little else but stare up at the sky, feeling both nervous and anxious about the memorial soon to happen.
It felt like he was getting an unfairly intimate view of his friends, as if he were spying on them and as much as he wanted to leave already, he couldn’t help his curiosity from taking over. He desperately wanted to know what his friends thought of him without fear of him overhearing them. And at the same time he was terrified of what he would hear.

Strangely, though, he heard voices behind him on the steps and turned to see Namjoon and Taehyung making their way down. Jin had heard Jimin warning everyone that they would have to be up bright and early in the morning but it seemed like Namjoon and Taehyung were the first to be up and out. Which was… strange given that the two were usually the hardest to wake up in the mornings. Even Yoongi, who didn’t exactly care to be woken up early, still woke up pretty easily even if he was grumpy afterwards.

They were quiet as they walked and Jin stood up to follow them as he saw that they were crossing the street and heading to the shore. He hadn’t visited their room yesterday, having been too overwhelmed with everything else to stomach hearing the two people closest to him talk about his death.

It was strange to think of Taehyung as a close friend and Jin thought that the younger probably would have given him a strange look if he were to say so out loud. But before Taehyung had ruined everything with his reckless actions, they had been friends. Good friends, with a lot in common. Even though they hadn’t talked often, mostly hanging out with Namjoon at the same time rather than hanging out together. Jin had been more open back then, talked about his problems a lot more.

Before his problems had started to be because of Taehyung and Jin felt too uncomfortable talking about it to their other friends, so he just… stopped talking about his problems altogether.

Once, he had thought it had been better that way.

Now, he realized that it was wrong of him to want his friends to open up to him when he couldn’t even open up himself.

Jin watched as Namjoon and Taehyung walked slower as they got closer to the coastline. Here the grass and rocks melted away into dark ugly sand, made mushy by the snow and made to look even uglier with the sun being tucked away behind the clouds. They made sure to stay in line of sight of the motel, and Jin wondered if they were just killing time until the others were ready.

Taehyung sighed suddenly, a heavy, labored thing that made him sound three times his age.
“This sucks.” He said, sounding tired and defeated.

“Yeah.” Is all that Namjoon said in response. His hands were stuffed deep into his pockets and his breath was clearly visible even as he tried to bury his nose into the scarf wrapped around his neck.

The two were quiet again until they approached the water and a figure came into view, sitting in the sand and resting their head on their knees.

“Is that Jimin?” Taehyung asked, voice quivering as he visibly shuddered. He wasn’t wearing much even though it was obviously below freezing out and Jin found himself hoping that he wouldn’t get a cold.

Namjoon looked up from the ground for the first time since they’d started walking and followed Taehyung’s gaze to the figure.

“... Looks like it.” He muttered as the two begin to approach him.

Jimin didn’t look up as the two came to a stop behind him and, curious, Jin walked around him wondering if he had somehow fallen asleep or something.

But no, he wasn’t sleeping. Though Jin immediately wished that he was.

Instead, Jimin was clutching those same shoes from before tightly in his hands which had gone pale from the cold, looking out into the water with icy tear stains down his face. His jaw was trembling and Jin couldn’t tell if it was from the cold or from his crying as another tear slipped down his cheek.

The three were quiet, and though Namjoon and Taehyung hadn’t seen Jimin’s face, the look they gave each other was full of concern.

“I wish we could have done this on the actual day.” Jimin said, voice quiet but loud enough so that the others can hear him.
Namjoon and Taehyung were also silently staring out at the sea, which was serenely calm due to the cold of the season, but Taehyung’s glanced down at Jimin with a hard expression.

“It’s not your fault that you were in the hospital, Jimin.”

Jin frowned in confusion at that, not understanding why Jimin would have been in the hospital. He didn’t seem injured in any way and he’d rarely ever seen the younger get sick with a cold. He wondered if Jimin was at the hospital for someone else but… it just didn’t sound right for some reason.

“I know.” Jimin sighed, and something in his voice made it sound like he had heard that one too many times. “It just would have been nice.”

They were quiet again, each seemingly lost in thought as they looked over the sea.

The crunch of shoes on the snowy mix of sand and rock rang out behind them and Namjoon and Taehyung turned to see Jeongguk and Hoseok approaching.

“Thought you guys left without us.” Hoseok greeted as the two came to a stop in front of the others. He had a cheery tone to his voice but his face betrayed him. He looked sullen, face tight and jaw clenched as if he was fighting the urge to cry. It didn’t seem to be working.

“Nope. Just got a little restless.” Namjoon responded with an attempt at a smile.

“Where’s Yoongi?” Taehyung asked, looking between the two new arrivals.

Jeongguk shrugged, yawning a second later and blinking sleepily. “Neither of us really slept last night so he was being crabby this morning when I woke him up. He’ll probably be here in a few minutes. He was pulling himself out of bed when I left.”

Taehyung nodded in understanding. Yoongi was not a morning person.

They fell into a comfortable silence once again. It seemed that it was still early in the morning and the sun had only recently begun it’s ascent into the sky behind the clouds. Each of Jin’s friends
simply stared out into the sea lost in their own thoughts and the silence was starting to drive him crazy. He desperately wanted to know what the five of them were thinking.

Sooner than anyone probably thought, Yoongi appeared in the distance, huddled up in a coat, a beanie, and a face mask, looking way warmer than all of them. Namjoon attempted to greet him with a forced looking smile but Yoongi just shot him a glare clearly saying that any attempt at being cordial was pointless and yanked his head to the left in a forceful gesture.

“Let’s go.” He snapped through the cloth fabric of his face mask.

Jeongguk scoffed but began walking after him, “Told you he’s crabby.”

Hoseok helped Jimin to his feet, exclaiming loudly about how cold Jimin felt and pulling the younger into his arms as they walked. Taehyung followed behind them and Namjoon did as well after casting once last wistful glance at the sea which just so happened to be exactly where Jin was standing.

Jin wondered if Namjoon had somehow felt his presence in that short moment like Jeongguk had on the train before picking up his feet to follow everyone.

They left a tread of footprints in the wet, snow infused sand but as Jin looked behind himself as he walked, he only saw six pairs of tracks.

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They walked for a while and it took Jin an embarrassingly long amount of time to realize where they were going. It was a spot that they hadn’t visited in years, so long that he had nearly forgotten about it.

There was somewhat of a clearing if you followed the sea further away from town, where the sand turned into rocks and the sea dwindled down to a stream that ran all the way out to the ocean. In the summer it was beautiful here, bright green grass grew along with tall fountain grass that swayed in the wind and reflected the light of the sun. A single tree stood in the middle of the field, and on those hot days it’s shining leaves, brimming with dew, looked like the tree of life.

Jin had stumbled upon the area after having taken a walk the second or third time they had started
coming here. He had sat under the tree, calmly watching the fountain grass sway in the breeze until it had put him into a gentle sleep. His friends had been beyond themselves with worry when they found him since he had left in the early morning before everyone had woken up from the car ride, unable to sleep. But after having calmed down they had also found the beauty of the place and they’d stayed, simply sitting and talking until their stomachs had rumbled with hunger.

He didn’t know why they stopped coming to this place. Maybe because they had stopped coming to the sea so much in general. When life had started to really hit for everyone and they had been too caught up in their schedules to go on a spontaneous four hour trip.

But what he did know was why Jimin had wished they had come here sooner in the year. It seemed like it was somewhere in the winter months now and Jin remembered that it had been in the late days of March when Hye-su had gotten into her car crash, though it felt like years ago now.

Now, rather than the bright grasses and liveliness of the clearing it looked desolate and decayed. Snow covered the dirt path only becoming more muddy as they walked through it, the tall feathered grass had turned an unhealthy beige color from the cold, and the usually brilliant lone tree’s leaves had died and fallen off leaving the branches bare and added to the decaying look of everything.

It really did feel like they were attending a funeral.

The six of them walked until they were right in front of the tree and that was when Jin saw the tiny memorial plaque nestled at the base near the roots. It had his name etched onto it along with his birth and death dates surrounded by flowers that were long dead.

He felt like he would fall over at the sight.

“The flowers are dead.” Jeongguk commented out of nowhere.

“It’s winter.” Taehyung responded, voice tight and quiet.

They were silent for an awkward, uncomfortable moment as they all looked at both the plaque and the dead tree with it’s barren branches.

Then Jimin stepped forward. “I’ll go first.”
He took a deep breath and Jin tentatively moved until he was standing in front of the plaque, it was intense this way, as if Jimin was actually talking to him rather than a piece of metal buried in the earth.

Jemin seemed to be taking a minute to compose his thoughts and Jin wished he knew how to mentally prepare for what he was about to hear but all he could do was stand there, shaking slightly though he couldn’t feel the cold, and wait.

“Jin-hyung. I miss you.” Jimin began softly. Jin could see the tears already making their return in his eyes and he wondered if they had ever stopped to begin with. “I’m sorry that we couldn’t do this on the actual day when it’s actually pretty the way you used to enjoy it. I bothered the others a lot to come up with something to say to you but… I think I’m actually struggling the most to find words to say. When you were with us and we were all together I felt the most whole I’ve ever felt in my whole life. And now that you’ve left us…”

Jemin choked down a sob, clutching the shoes to his chest like a lifeline. “I feel so broken I don’t what to do to put myself back together. But I think that you would be upset to see us so sad over you.”

He lowered his voice when he spoke again and Jin had to strain him even though they were less than two feet apart.

“I’ve been thinking a lot about why you left us without even saying anything and I know what it feels like to think you’d be doing someone a favor to remove yourself from their lives. Maybe that’s why you left us without any explanation. You thought you were doing us a favor.”

Jemin was silent for a long time after that, so long that Jin thought- hoped - that he was done talking. But then he saw that Jimin’s shoulders were shaking uncontrollably and his grip around the shoes was tight enough to make his knuckles show white through his skin.

“ You weren’t. ” Jemin whispered. He looked up at the tree, adjusted his stance and then the shoes go flying out of his hand until they caught one of the branches, swinging around the laces until they were secured. Then he turned around, openly sobbing now and Hoseok was quick to step forward and pull him into his arms. The words stung Jin more than he thought that they would and he felt tears burning at his own eyes as he looked at Jimin’s shaking form.

Taehyung stepped up hesitantly, gaze never leaving the ground as he did and Jimin’s barely
muffled wails echoed in the silence.

“I spent so much time writing down exactly what I was going to say and though I was sure I memorized it yesterday, I can’t remember a single word now.” Taehyung muttered angrily to himself. “Whatever.”

“All it really came down to was me being sorry. For everything. And sorry that I never actually got to say it to your face.” He scuffed his shoe through the snow and finally looked up, though his eyes only lingered on the plaque for a fleeting moment before he turned his gaze up to the sky.

“It’s not my fault, right? It’s dumb but I keep thinking that it is. I think of all the shit I’ve done to you and trouble that I’ve caused to everyone around me and I know it sounds ridiculously conceited to think that it’s my fault you… left. But none of us really noticed anything going on with you besides the fact that you were quieter than normal but… weren’t we all? And it’s not like you left any explanation at all so we really have no idea.”

“So I keep telling myself it’s not my fault. But what if it is?” Taehyung sighed again, that same weighted sound that Jin heard before. He wanted desperately to tell Taehyung that it was not his fault. That it more or less had nothing to do with him and that he appreciated his apology for all the things that happened, but he couldn’t so he just stood there in front of the plaque with his name engraved on it, clenching his fists hard enough to leave crescent shaped welts in his palm.

“I’ve been trying to be better. Actually thinking things through before I do them. Thinking about the consequences and not being as much of a dick as I was when I was a teenager. But now that I have, I regret so many things in our friendship. I just want to talk to you and talk through things. Be actual friends again because those days were some of the best of my terrible life. But I can’t. Because you’re gone and no matter how much apologizing I do, you're not coming back.”

Taehyung smiled then, a sad, bitter thing that looks strange on his face before he swallows audibly and turned around.

Jin bit his lip, gnawing on it as he felt like screaming. He called out to him, called Taehyung’s name but his voice fell upon dead ears. Or maybe his voice was dead and that’s why Taehyung couldn’t hear him but it was maddening to be this close, to be this emotional and not be able to do anything about it.

Jimin was still crying as Hoseok gently passed him off to Taehyung when the younger returned to the group so that he can say his own words to Jin. He looked nervous as he approached, scratching the back of his neck uncomfortably and pulling his jacket tighter around his body.
“I don’t… I don’t really know what to say.” He admitted. “I wrote a lot of things in the speech that I prepared but it just… feels wrong reading you out something rehearsed now.”

Hoseok paused for a moment, eyes rolling over the engraving on the plaque. “I don’t know if you ever realized this but you were… sort of the one that held us all together. I feel like we all have someone in our friend group that we’re the closest to but I think that we all were close to you. You were always there when we needed you and you always did your best to keep us out of trouble. In that way… you were sort of like a parent to us? And I… I needed a parent. So it… feels like we’ve lost more than just a brother. We’ve lost a parent and now that you’re gone I struggle every day to convince myself that everyone else won’t leave too. Without our glue. Without you. But they will leave. And that’s okay because everyone can’t stay forever. At least, that’s what my therapist keeps telling me. I just hope that I’m ready for it when it happens.”

He blinked rapidly, in a way that Jin thought was his way of holding back tears, but his smile is watery when he opened his mouth again. “I miss you, Seokjin.”

“I miss you, too.” Jin said immediately, wanting to hug his friend and promise to never leave him again. But he can’t do that and Hoseok can’t hear him so he just watched with hot tears rolling down his face as Yoongi approached.

Though, Jin watched in surprise as Yoongi knelt down over the plaque, viciously ripping the dead flowers from their position around it and threw them off to the side. He grumbled something under his breath about how tacky the plaque looked with those flowers around it, but doesn’t stand back up.

Instead, he stayed kneeling so Jin felt compelled to kneel himself so he could see Yoongi on his eye level. He was shocked to see that a few tears have slipped from Yoongi’s eyes which he discreetly wiped away.

“People don’t just go poof.” Yoongi was muttering, the anger in his voice sounding a lot like he was trying not to sound like he’s crying, which probably wasn’t as well as he thought. “People leave after saying goodbye, after explaining themselves, after they make peace with everything. You’re a dick for not doing any of that. You’re a dick for just leaving without a word, and in a way that makes me feel like you didn’t want to be found, and you’re an even bigger dick for not ever telling us about your problems. I hate you for that. I’ll probably always hate you for that.”

Jin’s heart dropped into his stomach and he felt nauseated again, like he could throw up if the wind blew against him the wrong way.
“But I miss you anyways, and I’d hate you a lot less if you were still with us, giving us a family and a home and a warmth I didn’t know still existed after my mother died. I would… I would hate you a lot less.” Yoongi finished and then he stood up, brushed the snow and dirt off his knees and walked away.

Jin smiled sadly, probably not unlike the strange expression that had graced Taehyung’s face a few minutes ago, and thought that Yoongi was cute for not being able to say what he meant in a nicer way. But he still understood, regardless.

Jeongguk was trying very hard to look interested in the bird flitting just above the grass, likely looking for food, as Yoongi returned to the group but the elder was in no mood to put up with his shit and shoved the younger forwards. Jeongguk stumbled in shock and he turned, seemingly ready to argue with Yoongi, but the words fizzled on his tongue instantly as he took in the older’s expression.

With a defeated sigh, he trod through the thin layer of snow until he was right underneath the tree and Jin bit his lip in anticipation as he stood to face him.

He couldn’t help but fear Jeongguk’s anger towards him, which was natural given what he had experienced so far, but he’d never actually seen the younger anything but cheerful. There were times when he was more quiet than usual or when that happiness took on a desperate edge as if he was making an attempt at being cheerful rather than actually being so. But Jin had never seen the younger visibly upset just as he had never seen Hoseok upset until he had the strange experience of being in his body. Jin didn’t know what this Jeongguk was like when he was emotional and grieving, and he didn’t know what it would be like for himself, knowing that it was all his fault.

“Hyung.” Jeongguk says, but it comes out as a barely there whisper and his eyes narrow as he tries it again.

“Hyung…” And this time his voice cracks a little and Jeongguk’s face crumbles along with it. His gaze had been steadily on the plaque but as tears form and subsequently falls down his cheeks he looked away and though his mouth was open it seemed like he couldn’t get out any words.

Jin watched him with a heavy heart, arms itching to wrap them around his youngest friend, wanting to comfort him and calm him down- assure him that it was okay and that he could take his time. Jin’s eyes wandered to his other friends behind them, wishing that one of them would step up and support Jeongguk but they seemed to be adamant about letting each person take their own time.

“I don’t…” Jeongguk tried, voice still coming out weak but he got the words out and Jin supposes
that’s the most important thing. “I don’t want to be angry with you… but I am.”

He turns back towards the plaque now, eyes raking over the engravings as if they were insulting just to look at.

“I was trying to write something nice that would honor your memory but I just… can’t. Because I’m pissed off. Pissed off with the way that you left us. Pissed off that none of us have any idea why you did it. Pissed off that you did it here in the place we used to go to forget about everything, and ruined it forever. Pissed off that we only heard about your girlfriend because her parents were at your funeral. Pissed off that you thought so little of us that you could just leave like that without a word.”

“No!” Jin cried, tears burning his cheeks as they fell rapidly from his eyes. He was shaking his head vigorously and Jeongguk wasn’t reacting because he couldn’t hear him, he couldn’t hear Jin explaining that that is not how things were. It’s not how they were at all, but Jeongguk just kept on talking as if Jin never said anything and, somehow, in this tortuous world that Jin has found himself in- he hadn’t.

“It’s been over a year now and I’m still pissed off because we won’t ever have the answers that we want. Because you didn’t leave us with any.” Jeongguk grimaces at the ground, clenching his teeth.

Jin is suddenly overwhelmed with guilt, so much fucking guilt that it felt like it’ll kill him, felt like it would swallow him whole and leave nothing but blood and bones, felt like it’s constricting his throat and strangling him no matter how much he breathed in. It felt so much worse than when Hye-su died, because even then there had been a little voice at the back of his head convincing him otherwise, telling him that he couldn’t have known about the car and that he shouldn’t feel guilty for wanting to be happy but this- he knows is his fault. Isn’t anyone else’s but his own, he did this to his friends, and he is the one that caused the background noise in this field to be filled with Jimin’s wails and sobs. He is the one who caused Jeongguk to be looking down at his memorial plaque nestled securely into the ground surrounded by dead leaves, dead flowers, and muddy snow like Jin ruined not only his entire life but like Jin ruined everything.

And maybe he did.

No.

He knows that he did, because his friends wouldn’t be here crying over the little memorial they made for him if everything hadn’t been ruined.
And as Jin stood there, looking at the tears rolling down Jeongguk’s face, watching his mouth move even though he’s not really listening anymore, too distracted by the loud thump of his heartbeat in his ears, he knew that he’d made a mistake.

Eventually, Jeongguk heaved a sigh and turned, beginning to walk away. Yoongi saw the tears in his eyes immediately and attempted to comfort him but Jeongguk seemed to mutter something and the two began walking back the way that they came.

Jin was sad that he couldn’t hear the rest of Jeongguk’s words to him but doubted that they would have made him feel any better, as if anything could with the realization that he’d come to. But what already had him feeling worse was the sight of Namjoon approaching the tree, paper in hand, with a scared look in his eyes that made Jin think that he’d rather be doing anything else but this.

Namjoon coughed once, twice, pulled his jacket in closer and tugged his facemask down so it rested on his chin. His eyes darted between the paper and the plaque and eventually they settled on the paper as he began to read.

“Jin, I-” His voice cracked and he nervously cleared his throat before trying again. “I’m sorry. I know that you didn’t leave us with a lot of explanation and a lot of us have been trying to come up with one. But the only explanation that I can come up with is that I failed you. That I failed you as a friend.” Namjoon swallowed, glancing down at the plaque and Jin frowned at him, shaking his head even though he knew that he couldn’t be seen.

“We’ve known each other the longest out of all of us, and I think that although we might not be the closest, I’m sure that I know you the best out of everyone. But just as you never told me about Hye-su, I never told you that I decided to go to university. It’s back in Ilsan so I would have had to leave everyone and I didn’t really know how to say it, so I didn’t. And I’m sure you probably thought the same. You always seemed so much more put together than I was, more mature, less emotional, and yeah you had your problems, but you always climbed over them like they were nothing so I guess I just trusted you to always be like that and thought you would always get over things easily. Even when Taehyung… when he hurt you with Sohyun, you were devastated and it took a little while but you still hung out with all of us, even when Taehyung was there. And I thought you were so strong for not punching that little shit in the face because he totally deserved that. You always got over things, Seokjin. So, I never really worried about you. Not even when I noticed that you had dark circles under your eyes more often than not, not when your smiles started seeming forced before they became a rarity, not when you looked so fucking lost that day when you suggested we go to the sea and not even when you finally gave Taehyung what he deserved the day after that and your eyes burned like you were about to kill him if he hadn’t started crying.”

Namjoon took a breath then, turning the page to the backside, and Jin wasn’t sure if he was more
shocked by the knowledge that Namjoon had chosen to further his education or by the fact that his murderous intent in that moment by the sea had been visible on his face.

“And just when I thought that I should worry, after that night in Jeongguk’s hospital room, you were suddenly happy again- brighter. And because we weren’t really talking then, I thought that I shouldn’t ask. But I should have asked, and I should have worried, Jin. Because it was so obvious that none of us were as okay as we were pretending to be and because I know you. I know that you deal with things differently and if you aren’t talking about something that it must be really serious. Just like when your parents practically disowned you and you avoided my questions about you moving out for an entire year. I should have known, and I should have done something. As your friend, I should have done something. But I didn’t. I trusted you to just get over it because I was too busy dealing with my own stuff on top of Tae’s problems and for that I’m sorry. That’s why I’m here talking to this plaque instead of saying this to your face.” Namjoon sighed again, and, though he had been seemingly fighting them the entire time he spoke, as soon as he stopped talking the tears came. He knelt to the ground, as if he had gotten exhausted from forcing his legs to support him for so long, and clenched his hands in the dirt and snow as he sobbed.

“I’m sorry, Jin.” He whispered through his sobs. “I hope that you’re happy wherever you are.”

And that’s what finally broke him.

Jin shouted in anguish as his legs gave out from under him, sobs bubbled from his throat uncontrollably and stung as he cried, and the hot tears ran down his temples without wetting the ground under him.

He wasn’t happy.

In fact, he had gone through what felt like three times as much trauma and hurt since he left them and all he had wanted to be was happy. And when he realized he couldn’t have that, he settled for nothing but apparently wanting those things was a crime and being here in this godforsaken hell of a reality, was his punishment.

It was his punishment to feel what his friends had felt that night as if he was experiencing it himself; to have demonic versions of his friends hate him and stab him to death; to live out his worst nightmare of being a doctor, getting engaged to Sohyun, not even remembering running Jeongguk over but still feeling the guilt of it, and finding his friends only to have them disappear right in front of his eyes; to attend his own memorial service and listen to his friends be in pain and struggling and all of it be because he made a stupid mistake.
Yes, he made a mistake.

He could acknowledge that. But did he deserve this much punishment for making it? Did he deserve to feel so much that he would gladly drive off that pier again, would do anything to just make it stop? He just wanted it to stop. But he didn't know how. Because he was trapped in a complicated world with no exit. Because he was surrounded by doors that looked like the way out but all they ever did was put him right back where he started.

He didn't deserve this.

But he didn't know how to escape it.

Though he did know how he can leave this place.

He pushed himself to his feet, stumbling through the snow, past Namjoon who was still sobbing over the plaque in the ground with Kim Seokjin written on it. Past Hoseok, Jimin, and Taehyung who were all wrapped up in some sort of group hug though it looked like more like an attempt to keep Jimin from collapsing onto the ground, past Yoongi and Jeongguk who had their arms around each other in silent comfort as they waited for the others, perched upon a rock. He made it to the stream that was nearly frozen over from how cold it was, and Jin certainly felt cold though it wasn’t from the weather that he couldn’t even feel. It’s because he felt dead inside and he wished that this could stop and he could feel just as dead on the outside.

He knelt until his knees were set down on jagged rocks and dirt, which should have been pushing into his skin painfully but they weren’t, and bent over until he could look directly into the stream. He saw the crisp reflection of the sky, with its dark clouds threatening more snow, and the stray bird from before flying overhead but he couldn’t see his own reflection. And that’s just as well, because he no longer existed in this universe.

He worried that his plan wouldn’t work because of that but just when he was about to give up and walk all the way back to the motel so he could look into a mirror or something, it finally did the trick and the world swayed making him feel like he was being sucked down into the river.

His eyes closed and everything was black before colors swayed similarly to how the water in the stream did but they looked grey and dull to Jin, and not nearly as bright as he remembered them being.
Chapter End Notes

Well... this was sad.

Fun Fact

The BTS Music Video Spring Day is based upon the movie titled “Snowpiercer” as well as the short story “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” written by Ursula K. Le Guin. Not so fun fact- The video is also in commemoration for the lives lost in the Sewol Ferry incident in the spring of 2014 that tragically killed 304 people. Most of them being high school students. The video is also a possible link to the HYYH storyline due to scenes like Jungkook seeing himself on the train. There’s a lot going on there.
Jimin

Chapter Notes

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Give me back my smile.”

From early on in life, Jimin’s life was plagued with misfortune.

He was born to a very well off family in Busan but even that wasn’t enough to guarantee him happiness.

His father cheated on his mother soon after he was born and perhaps that’s the reason why his life has been in shambles for as long as he can remember. He knows the story word by word from how many times his mother has told it to him. It’s her favorite story right after the story of how Jimin nearly killed her in childbirth.

His no-good, scumbag of a father cheated on his mother with her younger and prettier sister. She discovered them in her own bed after returning from a dinner with an old friend. They were supposed to be watching Jimin since he was an infant but he’d apparently gone to sleep early since he was almost always sleeping, so they’d taken the extra time they had to get in a quick fuck before she returned home. She’d found them in the act and made the decision to divorce her husband and estrange her sister in the same moment.

Jimin’s mother had never properly recovered from that horrible betrayal and often took out her residual frustrations on him.

At first, she turned to herself. She felt inferior to her sister, knowing that not only did her husband find her prettier but so did everyone else. So, with the divorce money that she won, she got various cosmetic surgeries. Everything from making her nose smaller, to lip injections, to breast implants, to liposuction, and botox injections.
After a while, she got tired of having to travel all the way to Seoul to get the procedures done and decided to move there without even bothering to talk to Jimin before making the situation.

One day they were comfortably living in their home and the next everything was packed and they were on their way to Seoul.

When his mother had gotten so many surgeries done that she barely even resembled the woman that had given birth to him, the woman turned to buying luxury clothing and accessories to go with her new look. She bought thousands of dollars worth of designer clothing and expensive jewelries every week and rarely ever wore the same outfit twice.

The problem was that after she had spent so much money that she could barely pay the bills anymore, she took out her frustration on Jimin.

Even though she was spending thousands of dollars on herself a week, she only bought Jimin what she felt was absolutely necessary. He was still in primary school back then so he was constantly growing out of his clothes and his mother only bought him new things when he begged her until she got irritated.

Jimin supposed it was the fact that he looked so much like his father that bothered his mother so much. He rarely saw photos of the man since he’d disappeared so early on in his life and his mother had full custody, but from the little that he had seen, he was the spitting image of his father.

His mother always complained of this fact. And after her surgeries, she began to claim that he was too ugly to even be her son. They looked nothing alike after all, especially not after all the changes she’d made to her appearance.

The way she acted was so confusing to him.

In public, she often made a show of bragging about his good looks and how he must have inherited them from her as she spoke with other women of the city that sported similar brands as she did and just as many silver, gold, pearl, and diamond accessories.

At home, though, she would berate him over his appearance and awful sense of fashion -the latter being her own fault. She would claim that he embarrassed her by looking like that and would often be so disgusted that she couldn’t stand to look at him.
As a child, he truly felt that it was his own fault and often cried so hard that he couldn’t breathe when she told him such things. Of course, if he cried in front of her she would tell him to stop showing her such an ugly expression, so he learned the skill of silently sobbing early and even mastered the art of getting rid of his puffy eyes and red face afterwards.

Though, her harsh words only got worse as he got older.

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It was after he entered middle school that his downfall began.

Jimin became so obsessed with his appearance that he took every comment and word about his looks to heart. If someone made a joke about him being fat, he felt fat; if someone told him that he was handsome, he thought that they were making fun of him. He took every insult to heart and took every compliment as sarcasm.

He went long periods of not eating so that he could lose the weight that puberty had left him with. The problem was that he didn’t realize extreme dieting could result in fluctuating weight. He gained weight easily and everytime he stopped dieting, he would gain all that he lost all over again. He was horrendously envious of those who were naturally skinny with fast metabolisms.

Due to the fact that he never ate lunch at school, he was able to save up his lunch money and buy better clothes. He bought whatever he could afford with the saved up money paired with the meager allowance that his mother gave him.

Honestly, at school Jimin was complimented a lot. He was relatively popular and girls were constantly confessing to him. He just could never bring himself to believe any of the comments. The moment he believed one of them he would go home and his mother would berate his appearance again and he knew that those classmates of his were just trying to make him feel better about himself. In the end, he preferred not to get compliments at all. They just made him feel like he was being pitied and he already felt pitiful enough.

He failed his first test in his last year of middle school. Up until that point he had made a point of getting the best grades that he could. It was the only thing he truly had control of.

He failed the test because he had been on a rather extreme diet. It was one that he heard had worked for female idols, and desperate to lose weight, he tried it out and as a result had been
unable to focus due to the gnawing hunger in his stomach.

His mother had shouted at him when she saw the test and told him that it was bad enough that he looked so much like his ugly father but ridiculous that he was stupid on top of that.

Jimin had cried so hard that his voice was hoarse the next morning.

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After that incident, he doubled the time that he spent studying and only ate as much as he absolutely had to.

When he entered high school and dealt with an even stricter schedule and classes that were much harder, he was overwhelmed with stress. No matter how hard he tried, it was never good enough, and he couldn’t recall a single time in his life that his mother had ever complimented him.

Eventually the stress became too much and Jimin collapsed in the middle of class at sixteen.

He had gotten only an hour of sleep the night before so he was incredibly tired and found it hard to keep his eyes open in class. He knew there was something wrong when in the middle of a lecture he was cold, sweating slightly, and shaking like a leaf. He raised his hand to ask to get permission to go to the bathroom, hoping to splash water on his face and wake himself up a bit. As soon as he stood, black spots speckled his vision and he lost balance, crashing to the floor amidst worried shouts of his name.

He woke to a brightly lit room with white everywhere. He recognized it as a hospital room, despite having never being inside one before, and noticed that he was hooked up to an IV and was wearing a hospital gown.

He frowned and tried to remember how he had gotten in this position but all he remembered was not feeling well in class and getting up to go to the bathroom. Everything after that was a blur.

He looked around and saw his mother in the room with him. She was tapping around on her phone but saw him move out of the corner of her eye and looked up at him.
“Oh, you’re awake.” She muttered and disappeared into the hallway.

Jimin frowned in confusion at her disappearance. He didn’t know where she had gone but his question was answered when she returned a few minutes later with a doctor trailing behind her.

The doctor introduced himself and studied his clipboard before regarding Jimin seriously. The man told him that he had critically low blood sugar, an extreme iron deficiency, and was moderately underweight for his height and age.

The doctor explained that the IV was directly nourishing him with the vitamins and substances that he was lacking.

Then the man asked to speak with Jimin’s mother outside and he was left to worry about what they were talking about.

They returned after a few minutes. His mother busied herself with collecting her things while the doctor took the IV out of Jimin’s arm, applying a bandage over the small wound. The man smiled at Jimin and reminded him to take care of himself before he left the room, closing the door behind him softly.

Jimin hesitantly glanced over at his mother who merely glanced over at him before practically throwing his clothes at him.

“Get dressed. We’re going home.”

She was angry. Jimin knew the woman well and she only spoke in that carefully pleasant tone when he’d done something to disappoint her but they were in public and she didn’t want to make a scene by yelling at him.

He sighed and got dressed quickly, though he still felt a bit dizzy. His mother only waited until he had pulled on his shoes before she roughly grabbed hold of his shoulders and led him out of the room. They dropped by the front desk of the hospital where his mother signed a few papers and took a prescription from them.

The two were silent as they walked to his mother’s car, silent when they got in, and silent when she made a stop at a pharmacy to pick up the medications that had been prescribed to him.
They didn’t say a word until they got home and Jimin’s mother dropped her purse on the dinner table with a loud thud.

“Are you trying to embarrass me?” She snapped, venom in her voice.

“No.” Jimin responded quietly, shaking his head.

“Are you sure? Because I feel absolutely mortified right now! What are you doing, not eating!? Are you insane!? Are you trying to kill yourself!? That doctor was so god damn full of himself, telling me that you were showing signs of anorexia and explaining it like I didn’t know what it was!”

Jimin stayed silent, knowing anything he said would only fuel her rage. She’d yell at him until she got all of her anger out and then she’d stop. He was used to it by now. He was used to it but he couldn’t help the tears that were beginning to form in his eyes despite his best efforts to keep them at bay.

She stomped into the kitchen and swung open the refrigerator door, reaching inside. She opened a container of leftover stew and threw it at him along with whatever else she could find. Some of it she opened and some of it was left closed, but all of it made a complete mess of both Jimin, his clothing, and the floor around the dining table. He was just glad that it was cold and not scalding hot.

“Eat!” She shouted. “Stop starving yourself like a complete idiot or I’ll kill you myself if you want to die so badly!”

Jimin swallowed thickly, hoping she wouldn’t see the tears slipping down his cheeks.

“I wasn’t trying to die.” He stated quietly.

His mother’s eyes widened indignantly at that. “No!? Then, you’re even more of an idiot than I thought! All you ever do is embarrass me! I can’t believe you had to be taken to the hospital over something so stupid. You’re making me look terrible. If you want to starve yourself at least do it smartly so it doesn’t end up involving me.”
She slammed the refrigerator door shut and collected her purse from the table, pulling out a cigarette from the secret compartment she kept them in. She smoked often but hid it well, she couldn’t have anyone finding out her nasty habits after all.

“Clean this up.” She instructed coldly, before retreating to her bedroom.

Once she was out of his sight, Jimin let his legs go weak and his knees squished into the cold stew that had been thrown at him as he sank to the floor. He couldn’t hold the tears back anymore and nearly hyperventilated from how hard he was crying. He’d never felt like such a failure in his entire life.

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Jimin tried to take better care of himself, he really did.

Unfortunately, he never learned any healthy ways to cope with stress and stress was all he felt every second of his life. Rather than starving himself, he took up a vigorous workout schedule instead. The problem was that it bit into the time he would normally spend studying or enjoying a few minutes of downtime.

It worked for a while.

The only downside was that where he’d once experienced dizziness, cold sweats, and shaking he was experiencing something different now. At seemingly random times, Jimin would get extremely overwhelmed to the point where he felt like the world was closing in on him and he could do little other than curl up into a ball and hyperventilate until it felt like he might die. Those moments eventually passed but as they were happening his heart would beat so fast in his chest that he was seriously worried about his health. It didn’t seem normal but he didn’t want to bother his mother with it so he kept it to himself.

He was lucky to usually anticipate when those moments were about to hit and managed to get himself in a bathroom or some other enclosed space away from others. Though, there was one time when they had first started that it taken him by surprise in the middle of the cafeteria when he was sitting down with some of his friends. The sense of panic had come on so strongly and suddenly that Jimin couldn’t even bring himself to stand and run to a bathroom.

He had resisted the urge to curl into a ball and had merely sat with his head down, nestled in his
arms, bouncing his foot rapidly up and down while forcing the rest of his body to stay still. He had put so much effort into not showing any visible signs of what he was going through that he had gotten so nauseated he had almost thrown up.

Thankfully, his friends had just assumed that he was napping during the lunch break even if he was acting a little strange. Jimin had been glad for that but he’d been so shaky for the rest of the day that he still hadn’t calmed down by the time he had gotten home.

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But as expected, the workouts only lasted for so long.

Jimin collapsed a second and third time. The second had been when he was out shopping with friends and the third time was in front of his mother during the summer. She had been fixing breakfast and the world had spun as he entered the kitchen to get something to eat. All he remembered was her turning to ask him if she should add another egg to what she was making and he knew she had seen him lose consciousness.

He’d woken up in a hospital room again, the surroundings having become morbidly familiar after strangely waking up in them so many times.

His mother had probably been the one to call for an ambulance and he was full prepared to face her wrath. But he heard a strange noise and turned to see the woman in the chair beside him. She usually sat at the other end of the room when he woke up. Never this close.

He stared at her for a moment, wondering what the sound was and his eyes widened as he realized she was crying.

He had only witnessed his mother crying a few times in his life. And every time in the past had been when he stumbled upon her at night as she looked at old pictures of her wedding. She had never cried over him.

She hadn’t shouted at him when they returned home. Instead, she’d quietly fixed him his favorite food and sat with him, watching him as he ate it.

She’d told him to get some rest after and washed the dishes herself.
Jimin had been confused by her behavior but was too tired to properly question it.

Looking back on it, Jimin had been rather naive about his condition.

Constantly collapsing like that in a single year was a serious concern and no matter how much he told himself to rest and eat and take his medications, that voice in the back of his head just wouldn’t let him be happy. He still struggled with how he looked, no matter how much he weighed, or what clothes he wore, or how he styled his hair.

He even bought cosmetics to cover up the bags under his eyes and make his eyes and lips pop a bit more against his gaunt appearance.

His natural hair was black and his mother had hated it, constantly saying that he looked too much like his father with that color, and so he had been bleaching it since middle school. It had been every shade of blonde and every shade of brown but he’d never let his black roots show too much. He didn’t like his black hair either. Though, not for the same reasons as his mother. With his gaunt appearance, black hair made him look sickly and ill. At least blonde or brown hair gave him the illusion of looking like the happy person that he wished he could be.

None of that changed how he really looked. He wanted to look happy and radiant but he could only look tired and depressed and the juxtaposition struck him viciously everytime he looked in a mirror. Eventually, he just stopped wanting to and actively avoided looking at himself. He hated his appearance.

He hated that the person he saw staring back at himself in the mirror was his own face. His own tired eyes and downturned lips. His own body and his bleach fried hair. His own reflection. He hated all of it.

He learned the hard way that you can only stress your body out so much until it began to break down.

It happened suddenly one day as he was riding the bus home. One moment he was fine and the next he was hit with those feelings of panic that he had learned was a panic attack after speaking with his doctor about them. There wasn’t really anywhere he could go since he was on the bus and
as soon as that thought hit him he worried about making a scene and embarrassing his mother. The feelings of stress overwhelmed the onset of panic and what happened after was hard to explain.

It was like a panic overtook him but he lost control of his body aggressively. He could feel his body moving of its own volition and, as if he were having an out of body experience, he could do nothing to stop it. His eyes fluttered open and shut and at times he was conscious of what was happening to him and at other times it felt like he was in an another place entirely. It was as if his brain completely short-circuited and as soon as it began, it was over and Jimin fell unconscious.

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There were many voices around him when he came to again. Though he wasn’t sure if they were coming from different people or just echoing around him. He felt groggy and incredibly disoriented, more so than when he usually woke up in hospital rooms. He could tell where he was immediately upon opening his eyes.

His vision was still blurry but he could make out three people standing around him in the room and out of the corner of his eye he saw his mother sitting beside him.

There was a strange warmth in his hand and he frowned, squeezing his hand in curiosity. His hand was squeezed tightly in response and his lips raised slightly at the comfort.

“Jimin, are you awake?” That was his mother. His head was still swimming like he was underwater but he could hear her so clearly.

“He just squeezed my hand, does that mean he’s waking up?” She asked and Jimin nodded slowly, he was waking up now.

“I think he heard you just now, so yes, I would say so.” Another voice, familiar. “Give him a few moments.”

Eventually, Jimin’s eyes were able to stay open for more than a few seconds and he looked around in confusion. He felt somehow that he’d been having a nice dream and had been woken up from it. But as he looked down to his hand he saw that it was clutched between someone else’s hands. He followed them to their owner and was surprised to see that his mother was looking at him with watery eyes.
He tried to remember what had happened this time but unlike usual he couldn’t remember anything. Also strange, was that he usually woke up with his mother in the room and maybe his doctor but there were two nurses there as well and he wasn’t in the standard hospital room. There was a lot of equipment around him and even the nurses had on different outfits.

“W-what’s going on?” He winced as he spoke, his tongue was numb and throbbing strangely.

“Jimin,” The doctor called. “Do you remember what happened before you fell unconscious?”

He frowned, struggling to remember but came up with nothing. He remembered that he’d gone to school and some of the things that had happened in his day but as he got closer to remembering what happened nearer to the end of the day everything got blurry and trying to remember past then made his head hurt.

“Not… really.” He admitted.

The doctor shared a glance with Jimin’s mother and he looked between the two in confusion.

“I’ve been eating!” He defended. He usually ended up in this position after not eating enough, not getting enough sleep, and stressing his body out too much. He had been eating, he just didn’t feel that well that morning to begin with.

“I don’t really know why it happened again,” He continued when the room remained silent. “I even took my medications this morning but-”

“Jimin, you didn’t collapse again. You had a non-epileptic seizure.” The doctor informed him gravely.

Jimin swallowed in surprise at the word. He stole a glance at his mother but she was looking at down at their connected hands. He turned back to the doctor with wide eyes.

“You had the seizure on the bus on your way home from school.” The man explained. “You bit your tongue pretty harshly and banged your head against the window during it.”

“Oh.” Jimin breathed as he gingerly felt the bandage on his head. It didn’t really hurt but maybe
that was because they put numbing cream over it before bandaging it. His tongue definitely felt pretty strange though.

“We think it’s probably due to an extremely high level of anxiety and stress but we aren’t sure so we’ll need to keep you in the hospital for a few days to make sure everything is okay. This is the first time you’ve had a seizure so we need to make sure of its origin and you need to be away from any potential stressors.”

The nurses and doctor talked to both Jimin and his mother for a while longer before leaving them alone. Jimin turned to her, prepared to apologize for causing her trouble again but she had lowered her face until it pressed against the fabric of the hospital cot and her shoulders shook as she cried. It was the second time that she had cried over him.

He didn’t know what to say, so he just squeezed her hand comfortingly even though her own grasp was so strong on his hand that he was worried she might break it. She was holding him like she was scared he would fly away and leave her all alone.

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Jmin stayed in the hospital for nearly a week and he was already stressing over all the missed work that he would have to make up despite his doctor’s insistence that he stay as stress-free as possible. Jimin didn’t know how to live like that but, besides the stress of school, he wasn’t letting anything else bother him.

He tried to ignore the fear over what had happened to him and the whole situation with the seizures and honestly, his mother made it easier. She was acting incredibly strange.

She had taken time off of work so that she could stay with him in the hospital and she constantly asked him what he needed and if he wanted anything. They didn’t actually talk much, mostly because they’d never really had anything to talk about before but also because she was creeping him out with how strange she was acting. He had no idea how he was supposed to act around her let alone what he was supposed to say.

She was actually treating him gently as if he would break if she was too rough with him.

He couldn’t adjust to the sudden change in her behavior.
Jimin was glad for a number of reasons when he was finally released from the hospital. They had done a few different brain scans and tests and were waiting to hear back from some of them but the general consensus was that his seizure wasn’t caused by latent epilepsy or brain cancer so he was allowed to leave. His doctor strongly suggested that he start receiving therapy for the mental illnesses that he was suffering from before they started to manifest in even more physical issues but Jimin told him that he would think about it.

His mother had been silent through the exchange and even though she was acting strangely, he doubted that she would appreciate having to take him to therapy sessions on top of everything else.

Jimin had expected her caring attitude to drop as soon as they got back home as it had done so many times before but he was surprised when she offered to cook him something after having to eat so much hospital food. He’d accepted the offer even if her behavior was freaking him out a little. She didn’t often cook for him, usually leaving him to fend for himself, and the few times that she did cook it was usually some recipe she found on a health food website. It was barely anything that tasted good.

But that night she pulled out the oil that had been collecting dust from the cabinet and fried him some meat and some more of his favorite things. If it wasn’t for the fact that he had seen the woman cry earlier in the day, Jimin would have thought she had completely lost her mind. And, honestly, maybe she had.

He wasn’t about to question her when she was suddenly acting so nice to him, though.

She kept glancing at him as they ate and Jimin swore that her eyes were watery each time, though she quickly looked away when he caught her gaze.

After he had finished he got up to help her start cleaning but she stopped him by speaking suddenly.

“Jimin.” He paused in his movements and turned to look at her. “I… know that I’m hard on you. Maybe… too hard but I do care about you even if it doesn’t seem like it sometimes.”

Her eye contact with him was fleeting as though she was nervous to be saying this out loud and he hurried to comfort her before she lost her nerve for whatever she was trying to say.

“I know, mom.” He said and managed to force a small smile.
It wasn’t that he hated the woman. He knew that in her own way she wanted the best for him but her own struggles often skewed that objective.

She bit her lip and seemed to grow even more uncomfortable. “I just… I know I’m not very easy to talk to, but I really don’t understand what’s going on with you. I mean, I’ve had to pick you up from the hospital four times in the past three months! That’s not- that’s not normal.”

Jimin fought down the bitterness rising in his throat like bile. “I’m sorry. I’m really not going out of my way to embarass you or get your attention. It’s not my intention at all to be like this, but I can’t help it!”

He was distinctly aware of the fact that he had basically just yelled at the woman and cringed, preparing for the backlash that was sure to happen.

He heard the scrape of her chair as she stood and he steeled himself to be hit or yelled at, maybe even both after the day he’d had.

Instead, he was more surprised to feel arms tight around him, encasing him in a hug.

“I’m not embarrassed, Jimin! I’m worried!” The woman hissed and her voice wobbled as she cried. “I treat you like shit, I’m well aware of that, but it’s just me and you in the world and I don’t know what I would do if you left me alone! I need you, okay?! I want you to get better and stay healthy!”

“But-” Jimin attempted to speak, completely confused by this turn of events, but his mother spoke right over him.

“I know I’m a shit parent and an even worse person! Why else do you think your father left me for my tramp of a sister!? But I love you, I do! I don’t want you to leave me too!”

His mother was practically sobbing by then and Jimin hesitantly hugged her back. He couldn’t remember the last time they had ever hugged each other like this, but it was sort of nice in an odd way.
He let her sob against him for a moment before he pulled back just enough to look her in the face and she looked completely distraught for a moment, eyeliner running down her face and streaking her cheeks like charcoal, until she realized that he wasn’t pushing her away.

“I’m not going anywhere, okay?” He promised. “And dad is an asshole.”

His mother laughed, an ugly, overly loud sound but it was the most authentic that he’d ever seen her. She sniffled and wrapped her arms around Jimin once again, squeezing him tightly against her body.

“He really is!”

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After that, things between Jimin and his mother weren’t great, but they had come to some understanding between each other and things were better. She only doted on him that one night and after she was back to being the way that she always was. Really, the only thing that had changed was that she stopped berating his appearance. She still yelled at him about other things, though.

Jimin supposed that couldn’t be helped.

He returned to school soon enough and though he was glad to, there were a few things that he hadn’t been expecting at all. First, was that apparently news of what had happened on the bus had spread like wildfire through the school until just about everyone knew about it. There were people that he had never even seen before, coming up to ask him if he was okay and even teachers were checking up on him and giving him fewer assignments than everyone else.

Then, he realized that people were treating him differently. He had always been rather popular even though he felt like he had few friends. He was just the sort of person that was always in groups and surrounded by others. When he returned from the hospital he was alone more often than not. It took him awhile to realize why. The usual friends that he hung out with were actively avoiding him.

Those that were around him often left him out of conversations and treated him like a ticking time bomb.
It also took him a while to see that the constant glances that he was getting from those around him weren’t curious, they were concerned. Everyone was acting like he was going to have another episode at any second and they wanted to make sure they were as far away from him as possible when it happened.

It hurt.

Jimin wanted to tell everyone that he was fine and that he wasn’t likely to have another seizure but he saw the fear in his friend’s eyes when he sat with them and lost his nerve.

He started to feel like something really was wrong with him.

Normal people didn’t constantly collapse and have seizures and have panic attacks, did they?

He’d never really thought about it before but he supposed that it was probably very strange. He’d had that panic attack in front of his friends in the cafeteria a while back and though he’d managed to hide it well enough, what if he hadn’t? They probably would have thought that he was crazy.

He had been hiding all of his problems so well up until then, that he hadn’t even realized how strange he must have seemed to everyone else.

Things got progressively worse from then.

Jimin had already been a bit paranoid about his appearance but now he was paranoid about everything he did. He was hyper-aware of the way his peers looked at him and the things they muttered about him when they thought he couldn’t hear.

A freak.

Like he’d been possessed.

It was so creepy.
He was so weird.

Didn’t he look too much like a girl?

He was so frail it’s like he would break if the wind blew against him.

Jimin heard all the things that the people whispered about him. Their voices haunted him at night, taunting him, insulting him, terrorizing him.

He certainly felt like a freak sitting up in his bed late at night, sobbing uncontrollably, because even when he was alone he heard those voices loudly as if they were being whispered into his ears.

He withdrew into himself, scared to show anyone what a mess he truly was.

Surprisingly, his mother noticed the change.

He was nearing the end of his second year of high school and though he hadn’t any more visits to the hospital, he was a shell of the person that he was before. He didn’t speak unless spoken to and his demeanor was carefully subdued. He’d developed insomnia, since the voices in his head kept him up at night and he only slept once he had cried all the energy out of his body. He had constant bags under his eyes but he often covered them with concealer and had mastered the art of seeming happier than he was. His forced smiles felt natural now and the cheerful inflection in his voice was carefully practiced.

His friends still didn’t talk to him very often but Jimin had gotten used to blending into the background. It bothered him less than the idea of attention constantly being on him.

His mother mentioned his change in demeanor lightly one day as they sat down to breakfast and wondered why Jimin hadn’t hung out with his friends in a while. He had smiled and told her that they were busy and he didn’t have much time to hang out with them either.

She had narrowed her eyes and her expression morphed into one of confusion.
“Why are you smiling like that?”

Jimin’s heart leapt up into his chest and he fought to keep the smile on his face, carefully adding an innocent look of curiosity to it.

“Like what?” He repeated, cocking his head.

His mother looked at him for a long moment before she shook her head. “Nothing. Anyways, what do you mean you don’t have time? All you do is lounge around here doing nothing.”

He looked at her blankly for a second, in stunned surprise, before quickly broadening his smile.

“I’m not sitting around doing nothing, mom. I’m doing homework.” He corrected, and cringed at the slight sharpness in his tone.

His mother nodded slowly and was quiet for a while. Jimin assumed that she would drop the conversation and went back to eating. However, he was surprised when she spoke up again a few minutes later.

“You haven’t had any episodes lately.” She commented calmly. “Are you feeling better?”

Jimin nodded, plastering on a grin. “Yup! I’m feeling much better now, thanks!”

His mother slammed down her spoon, making Jimin jump and widen his eyes.

“Okay, what is going on with you, right now?!” She demanded, glaring at him.

“W-what do you mean?” Jimin asked quietly, surprised by her sudden outburst.

“I’m your mother not an idiot and this whole—” She gestured wildly with her hands. “Cheery attitude you have is more fake than those free perfume samples they hand out in the mall. So, how
about you drop it and tell me what’s really going on?”

Jimin shifted uncomfortably in his seat and let the mask drop from his face. He felt close to tears for some reason but maybe it was because he had been called out so bluntly. He felt exposed suddenly and he hated it.

“Nothing.” He muttered, looking down at his neglected food. He no longer felt like eating it.

“Did something happen at school?”

Jimin glanced up at his mother and instantly regretted it. If there was anything his mother was good at, it was reading people. She was a people person and knew how to make people like her by molding herself into someone that they liked. It was why she was good in business and why she was always in such a bad mood at home. She never tried to make Jimin like her but that didn’t mean that wasn’t the best at reading him.

The two were still weird around each other and Jimin was still getting used to the random spikes of his mother’s concern with him where there had been none before. Right at that moment, the concern was wholly unappreciated.

“Something happened.” His mother concluded before he could say anything else. “Did somebody say something to you? Did someone do something?”

Jimin sighed, giving in.

“Nobody said or did anything.” He dismissed, knowing that it was a lie. “I guess… people are just afraid that I’ll have another episode so…”

He shrugged, hoping that his mother would let him just leave it at that but he knew the woman too well to actually believe that she would.

“So, they’re avoiding you.” His mother stated and Jimin shrugged again.

She sighed. “Kids have always been vicious. I doubt that they’re only avoiding you.”
Jimin kept his gaze on the table in front of him and didn’t respond.

“Well, what do you want to do about it?” She questioned and Jimin finally glanced up at her in confusion.

“What?”

“What do you want to do about it?” She repeated, raising her eyebrows. “You want me to talk to the principal? Do you want to sue for bullying? Do you want to change schools?”

Jimin quickly shook his head. “Please don’t come down to the school or sue or anything else. It’s not that big of a deal, really.”

“So, you want to change schools then?” His mother countered and Jimin was seriously having trouble keeping up with the conversation.

“W-what?” He sputtered in surprise. “I didn’t say that!”

“Well, you aren’t saying that you don’t want to. It’s fine, I’ll apply for a transfer and you’ll go to a different school next year.”

Jimin wanted to tell her that it wasn’t necessary but he couldn’t ignore the instantaneous feeling of relief just at the idea that he could change schools and not have everyone know that he was a freak.

In the end, he just ended up saying nothing and sitting in silence.

His mother finally picked her spoon again and nodded. “It’s settled then. I’ll apply for you to transfer and in return you’ll stop smiling like that around me. You can put on a mask for other people all you want but take it off when you’re at home.”
And so, just like that, as Jimin entered his final year of high school in a different school than the one he’d started in.

He didn’t know how to feel about it at first since it had happened so suddenly, but as he continued to wrap his mind around the fact that he could start fresh in a new school with new people, he grew a bit more used to the idea. He was nervous too, of course. But he’d always been good at making friends, perhaps he’d gotten that charisma from his mother, so he wasn’t too worried about that. Instead, he was worried that he would say or do the wrong thing and he would end up right back in the same place that he had just escaped from. He couldn’t afford to make any mistakes.

Though, he had little reason to worry.

The students at his new school greeted him warmly and praised him endlessly for his looks. He was invited to sit with several different groups of students and was almost overwhelmed by how interested everyone seemed to be in him.

Luckily, the fascination was short-lived and as his classmates became used to his presence they continued to treat him nicely and included him into conversations from time to time. The biggest problem that Jimin had at his old school persisted, though. He had no trouble talking with people and having pleasant conversation but he struggled to make those relationships stick. He’d never really had any good friends, at least not since he was a child living in Busan.

Boys hung out with him because he was popular with girls and somehow thought that including him and befriending him would also make them popular with girls. Jimin knew that. He also knew that most of the girls that he talked to were flirting with him or testing the waters before they handed him off to a friend of theirs that was interested. He knew that. He had no intention of dating, though. He’d grown up with the pain and misery that his mother’s marriage had caused her and the last thing he wanted to do was make a similar mistake.

Jimin knew that the people around him with their kind smiles and friendly gestures were just using him, and the ones that weren’t didn’t want anything more than a casual friendship with him.

He knew that and yet he couldn’t help but want to be selfish for more. He wanted a deeper friendship, one that went beyond the usual pleasantries of the day and disgruntled complaints about the amount of homework that was assigned.

So, when Jimin was approached one day by Jung Hoseok, he was immediately taken in by Hoseok’s almost overly friendly nature. There hadn’t really been anything that had caused them to meet, no bumping into each other or funny coincidence. Hoseok had just walked up to Jimin’s table
one day as he was eating lunch with a cheerful smile and introduced himself.

That was all that really needed to happen.

Hoseok was looking for a friend in Jimin and Jimin was looking for a friend in anyone that wasn’t trying to talk to him about the weather.

After the first day that they had met, Jimin convinced himself that Hoseok’s friendly nature was cordial at best and, though it was disappointing, came to terms with the idea of never talking to the older again. Jimin couldn’t fathom being all that interesting to talk to and though Hoseok had seemed engaged in their conversation earlier that day at lunch, it was obvious that it wouldn’t last.

Which is why Jimin was so surprised when, the next day at lunch, Hoseok sat down with him again and they resumed their conversation on how likely it was that the new movie coming out at the end of the week was to be terrible.

He was even more surprised when they actually made plans to go and see the terrible movie, which was actually far worse than the two had joked it would be.

Hoseok actually wanted to get to know Jimin and Jimin was overjoyed by that fact. He still had no idea what the older found interesting about him or why Hoseok wanted to be his friend in the first place when it looked like he had plenty of friends of his own, Jimin had never actually seen the older alone, but he was happy regardless.

He was himself around Hoseok, the older had enough vibrant energy for the both of them and Jimin found himself influenced by it, to the point where he no longer felt like the smiles he wore around Hoseok were fake or forced.

Although, he still kept a lot to himself. He didn’t want to risk seeing the wary glances shot at him when people didn’t think he was looking again and he was terrified of scaring the bright light that had suddenly appeared in his life away.

Jimin was doing better, that was certain. He’d started to see a therapist after he’d gotten his first seizure, albeit only after both his mother and doctor had practically forced him into his first session. He’d been dreading at first, the idea of speaking to a complete stranger about all the various ways he was messed up in the head seemed less than ideal. But, as he got to know the soft spoken woman, he found it to be an almost cathartic practice for him.
The first few months of therapy were rough. He couldn’t start healing until he told the woman about all his wounds, and actually stating about how damaging the way his mother treated him was turned out to far more intense and painful than he’d ever thought it could be.

His mother had also been invited to a few sessions so they could properly talk to each other and those sessions were the most draining. Jimin knew that his mother was not a perfect person and that she meant the best for him but seeing the woman’s face crumple as the therapist gently told her that a lot of Jimin’s issues were due to her verbal abuse gave him an odd sense of vindication. He didn’t hate his mother in any way, shape, or form but he had been blaming himself for the way that he was and hearing that it actually was not totally his own blame was nice.

He felt a little less apologetic for the way that he was.

His mother, on the other hand, had not really taken those sessions well. She vehemently defending her actions in any way that she could and was often incredibly quiet for days after going to therapy. She seemed repentful, but she also refused to take the blame. Every time it always ended up going back to Jimin’s father and how he was to blame for all of it.

Jimin didn’t need to be a therapist to know that his mother wasn’t nearly as mentally sound as she made herself appear to be.

Their relationship became strained once again, though she still cooked for him and made sure that he was eating well. She still snapped at him, though she apologized when she realized she had done it. She no longer called him fat, ugly, or stupid but she did continue to berate his fashion sense and the little makeup that he wore.

Jimin could only sigh.

People didn’t change overnight, and his mother wasn’t going to suddenly change her entire personality just because he had health problems that she had probably provoked.

Jimin didn’t tell Hoseok that he went to therapy on Saturday mornings, instead he told the older that he frequently slept in late on weekends. If he had it his way, Hoseok would never learn about his health problems and they could continue on being close friends.

Of course, nothing ever went Jimin’s way, though.
As he and Hoseok became closer friends, the older opened up to him about being an orphan. Hoseok’s mother had abandoned him at a theme park on his eighth birthday and though he had been taken to a foster home not long after, he’d never been adopted. And considering that Hoseok was in his last year of high school, it didn’t seem like he was going to be getting adopted any time soon.

Jimin had been surprised to hear that. Hoseok always acted like there wasn’t a single thing bothering him and that nothing could ruin his constantly cheerful mood. He had been somber when he told Jimin about it though and after he finished he had looked at Jimin expectantly as if he was expecting the younger to open up about himself as well.

Jimin wanted to, he really did. But in that moment he was so frightened that if he opened up about himself, Hoseok would think he was a freak just like everyone else did and the beautiful friendship that the two had made would disappear just like that. So, he had merely commented something sympathetic about what Hoseok had been through and prayed for the conversation to change direction.

Hoseok had smiled thinly at him and asked him more directly if he was hiding any skeletons in his closet and Jimin had worried that he would have a heart attack if his heart had pounded any harder in his chest. He had managed to force a nervous smile on his face and shook his head with a shaky “not really”.

Luckily, Hoseok had dropped it after that and launched back into the bright, bubbly personality that Jimin was comfortable with. It wasn’t that Hoseok being more serious was bad, it just scared Jimin. He knew that eventually he would have to open up to the older about his own issues but he knew that the minute he did, Hoseok would probably take off running for the hills. Hoseok’s serious voice meant that they weren’t talking about the latest episode of the cartoon that they both watched or the new song that had come out from their favorite artists. The serious voice meant serious topics and Jimin wanted to hold on to Hoseok for just a bit longer before he scared him away.

Though, after that conversation, it became a constant worry in Jimin’s mind.

Hoseok was his best friend, his only friend. Jimin felt better around the older, happier, more himself than he’d ever felt before. He was terrified of Hoseok leaving him. Now that he didn’t feel so alone, the thought of going back to that time in his life had become an all consuming fear that often kept him up at night.
It was a fear that began bleeding into every aspect of his life.

It begun to be so bad that his therapist noticed it. She asked him why he seemed to be stressing out so badly when he’d been doing so well before and he had explained the fear to her. He thought that it would help and that she would help to calm him down. Instead, she had decided to focus the session on convincing him that it was a completely natural thing for people to move in and out of his life. She apparently thought that telling him that there was a very real chance Hoseok could leave Jimin’s life, even if it wasn’t simply because of his mental instability, would help.

It did not.

Instead, it gave Jimin a sense of impending doom like a storm cloud was hovering over his head and waiting to strike him down with lightning. It was like his friendship with Hoseok had a countdown attached to it and Jimin could hear the ticking but couldn’t see how long was left on the timer.

He suddenly found it hard to smile in front of Hoseok. The older was blissfully unaware of just how much Jimin was struggling. Once, he had made a joke that was meant to be funny about how he might move to Los Angeles to study dance and Jimin had nearly cried. He hadn’t thought much about the fact that Hoseok would be graduating soon and they wouldn’t be able to see each other as often, but after that conversation it was all he could think about.

Hoseok was an amazing dancer and even though Jimin had only seen him dancing a few times, he knew that the older had true potential. Hoseok could probably join one of the bigger music companies if he wanted to. That would definitely mean that Jimin wouldn’t be seeing him nearly as much. If at all.

Jimin hadn’t been having nearly as many panic attacks after he started going to therapy but he knew that their violent reappearance could only mean worse things were to come.

In retrospect, he probably should have just stayed home that day. He’d had two panic attacks in the same day, one in the afternoon and one when he had been trying to sleep but his brain was completely overrun with poisonous thoughts. So, the day after, a Monday, he was totally exhausted.

He and Hoseok took the same bus to school, though it was right down the street for Jimin and nearly a twenty minute walk to the stop for Hoseok. He still lived at the orphanage, after all, and it
was located further away from the main city.

Jimin was aware that he probably looked like shit. He hadn’t slept more than an hour and he could already feel a headache starting. Though, he hadn’t slept, he had stayed in bed much longer than he probably should have and ended up running late which meant that he hadn’t had time to meticulously pick out anything to wear, cover up the very obvious bags under his eyes, or eat anything for breakfast. He had shrugged on his uniform and his tie was crooked but he didn’t have the energy to fix it.

_He should have stayed home._

Was all he could think as he sat at the bus stop, struggling to keep his eyes open, and waiting for Hoseok to show up.

The older did after a while, well before the bus arrived. Jimin probably could have left his own house later but he didn’t like the idea of Hoseok waiting at the stop by himself. There were other students that were early as well, of course, but they were either intensely studying or sleepily shoving food into their mouths. Hoseok probably would find some way to talk to them if he felt so inclined but Jimin needed Hoseok’s radiance more than ever that morning.

“Wow, you look terrible.” The older commented humorously as he approached. Jimin blinked sleepily at him and stumbled a little as he stood to greet him, he felt dizzy and drowsy like he would pass out if he had to stay standing for much longer. He was hoping to get in a nap on the way to school.

“Did you stay up all night studying or something?” Hoseok asked, and a certain concern was in his voice now as he reached out to steady Jimin.

“Something like that.” Jimin murmured. He kind of regretted standing up now. His head had begun to pound with dizziness and fatigue and he was aware that he distantly felt nauseated as well.

“Are you sure you’re okay? Maybe you should have just stayed home today.” Hoseok questioned, sounding even more concerned. Jimin hated that tone but he sort of felt incredibly terrible all of a sudden and now that Hoseok was next to him he was acutely aware of how obviously _not okay_ he was acting. He looked terrible, felt terrible, and Hoseok was seeing all of it.

He felt himself flush in a sudden rush of embarrassment and stretched away from Hoseok’s hands.
Jimin was falling before he even realized what was happening.

“Whoa! Jimin!” Hoseok’s worried voice called as Jimin lost his balance and fell to the ground.

Pain spread across his back, hip, and shoulder from the impact and though Jimin could hear Hoseok’s voice all he could think of was what a mess he was right at that moment. Everyone had seen him fall and he felt the strong tendrils of panic lace across his body. An ice-cold feeling enveloped him and he was shivering. No, he was shaking.

He distantly registered strong hands rolling him to the side and a warmth on his back but he could see nothing and hear nothing. Jimin didn’t realize what had actually happened until it passed and his consciousness lulled violently.

He’d just had another seizure. In front of Hoseok.

—

Jimin’s mother was not happy when he woke up in the hospital. His doctor wasn’t happy either. Jimin, however, wished more than anything that he could just disappear.

He had never hated himself so much as he did in that moment that he opened his eyes and registered the all-too-familiar white interior of the hospital room.

He had a seizure in front of Hoseok. The one thing that he absolutely did not want to happen, happened. And for some reason, it was around a bus again even though he hadn’t actually been on the bus. Which meant that more people than just Hoseok had seen him. Which meant that people were going to start looking at him like they were scared of him again.

Worst of all, it meant that he’d probably freaked Hoseok out so terribly that the older would probably never want to talk to him again.

Jimin’s mother had sourly told him that Hoseok was the one who had called for an ambulance and took Jimin’s phone to call her.
It was obvious that his mother was trying to blame the recent episode on Hoseok. He had been doing fine before he met Hoseok and now he’d had another seizure for the first time in nearly a year. It wasn’t a hard connection to make but Jimin insisted that it was own fault.

After all, it wasn’t Hoseok’s fault that Jimin was mentally unstable.

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Jimin was once again kept in the hospital for a few days. They had to do more elaborate tests now that he’d had a second seizure and if he had a third he would need to be prescribed a new medication. Anticonvulsant medicine for the seizures that also doubled as mood stabilizers. Jimin absolutely did not want to take them, but he was worried that if they were given to him and his mother found out he wasn’t taking them she would shove them down his throat.

He wished that thought was an exaggeration.

He had been hoping in the back of his mind that he had been wrong about Hoseok. He’d hoped that he’d misjudged the older completely and that at any moment his hospital room door would open and Hoseok would come in brimming with mirth and warmth and get well soon balloons. But as the days passed, Jimin wished that Hoseok would just text him and ask him if he was alright.

And by the time that Jimin was getting discharged without so much as a word from Hoseok, he realized that his worst fear had come to pass. Hoseok was freaked out by him and wanted nothing more to do with him.

Jemin thought of texting him, spent nearly an hour staring at his phone writing out a variety of different messages and eventually deleted them all without pressing the send button once. He didn’t know what to say and he would probably cry if he texted Hoseok and the older didn’t respond to him. He didn’t know how he would handle such a blatant dismissal.

He wasn’t insane. He knew doing the same thing more than once and expecting a different result was crazy.

So, instead of texting Hoseok, Jimin asked his mother if he could finish the rest of the year via a homeschool program.
She agreed with little convincing.

Chapter End Notes

I’m extremely sorry if you experience seizures or frequent panic attacks and found this chapter to not be an accurate depiction of what it’s like. I did so much research in order to write this chapter but I’m worried I still haven’t been as accurate with things as I could have been. I’m really sorry if that’s the case. I tried my best but as I haven’t experienced these things myself, I can only be so accurate.

Fun Fact

Most of the backstory of Jimin and Hoseok’s past and history as friends is revealed in “The Notes” that were released by BigHit during the Love Yourself era. They came with the albums as well as being posted on twitter (at least some of them) and were stylized as diary entries written by each of the member’s “characters”.

Butterfly

Chapter Summary

[Chapter Recap]

Jin finds his way out of the maze and into a world where he is a ghostlike figure. He can’t interact with anything and his friends can’t hear him when he speaks. They all meet on a train and Jin is curious about the memorial that they are going to until he realizes that it’s for himself. It fills him with an even more morbid sense of curiosity and so he attends, hearing for the first time what all of his friends truly think about him and what his death has done to them. Jin feels the full weight of his consequences and realizes that he’s made a terrible mistake.

Chapter Notes

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I don't know if this is reality or a dream."

Jin didn’t know why he even bothered to expect fences to be around him when he opened his eyes again. If there was anything that he’d learned in this nightmare, it was that just as he got used to something and felt secure, things changed and that sense of security was snatched away.

Rather than open space and the sky above him, he was sitting in an almost pitch black room that was only illuminated by the blindingly white light that fell into the space from the skylight in the ceiling. It was so dark that he couldn't even see how large the room actually was. In any direction he looked, all that he saw was depthless blackness.

His gaze dropped to his hands, where he was cradling four of those white flower petals that looked suspiciously like the ones used in funerals. He guessed that he should have been concerned about waking up like this, without even remembering at what point these flower petals got into his hands, but he couldn't bring himself to care. He didn't even flinch when the petals turned into small white butterflies before his eyes, and he watched without emotion as they fluttered out of his hand and up into the box of light in the ceiling before disappearing from his sight altogether.
The sight stirred a sense of panic in him that he couldn't quite understand and he turned his attention, instead, to his new surroundings.

He was sitting on a bed of soft white sheets, the only thing in the room he could actually see, and what looked to be real lilies with the full stems surrounded him. They looked too perfect, too pristinely white to actually be real, and after looking at them he understood why they were used at funerals.

He hoped that they had been used at his own.

On either side of his body, the two remaining photographs lay on the white sheets. Jin still couldn’t really make out what they were but one of them had started to take the shape of an apple. Which didn’t really make any sense to him but he was beyond questioning things.

*He was tired.*

So, so tired. And it was bordering on a crushing exhaustion. He was tired of doing all of this, and more than anything he just wanted to make it stop, but he had no other leads besides those photographs that just made him *more* tired every time he touched one.

*He was sick of this.*

The bed he was sitting on looked inviting and he was extremely tempted to just lay down and sleep in it for eternity. But as much as he wanted to just… *stop this* , he couldn’t rest not knowing what would happen when all of the photographs turned into flower petals. And he couldn’t deny the realization that he had come to.

*He had made a mistake.*

He could admit that. He remembered that day clearly now, and he remembered the overflow of dangerous emotions and thoughts that had taken over his mind in his overwhelming grief. He had been brash, hadn’t considered the severity of his actions, and while he *had* thought of his friends, he hadn’t been thinking of them positively. Because as much as he believed he would be doing them a favor by `leaving them, he also believed that they’d *wanted* him gone. And that had been wrong of him.
Whether or not the things he was experiencing were actually real, he didn’t think that his friends hated him enough to feel relief if he died. And if they cared even half as much as he had seen them care in the world from the last photograph, then he had made a mistake. The last thing he wanted to do was inconvenience them even further and if they were horribly grief-stricken from his death, that was even worse. So, the only thing he could do was try to fix it.

Even if he had no idea if he was even capable of actually doing anything.

He had to at least try. He owed them at least that much.

And so, gathering what little strength he had left, he turned to his left and picked up the photograph with the developing apple. He hoped that maybe it would do something a bit different since it was more developed than the rest.

A liquid dropped past his eyes so fast that he thought he imagined it. He looked down curiously at the floor but realized he couldn’t see that far even with the bright light illuminating it. And then he realized that the light had become much dimmer and the dripping sound continued, echoing in the space loudly.

He looked back up towards the skylight in the ceiling just in time to see a rush of multicolored liquid with the consistency of paint pour into the room. The light continued to filter through for a short while, until the pouring substance began to enter in earnest and the remaining light was blocked out, casting the room into an eternal darkness.

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Jin knew even before he opened his eyes that something was not right. That something didn’t feel quite right. He wasn’t able to exactly pinpoint what the feeling was, but he just knew somewhere deep down that something had changed. Even more so than the other times he had touched one of the photographs.

He understood the feeling a bit more after opening his eyes but that was mostly due to the instantaneous confusion he felt as he took in his surroundings.

He stood in a building, or a grand hall of some sort, judging by how monstrously tall the ceilings were, that looked like it was too expensive for him to even be breathing in. The floors were shiny
marble with a slightly darker shade of the material arranged to make a repeating pattern of squares on the floor. Several porcelain white marble statues in different states of wholeness were scattered around the room along with several different gold frames on the walls that held beautiful paintings intricate enough to look like the original work of Renaissance artists.

Jin doubted that things like this even existed in Korea, and with a start, he realized what was causing the strange unease in his chest.

It felt like a dream.

An elaborate, fever-induced dream with a crisp likeness to reality but with that lingering sheen of imagination that made everything look just good enough to be unrealistically perfect. The kind of dream that left you feeling like you were still in it when you woke up and completely forgetting about it a few minutes later.

In other words, what he was seeing was too good to be true, too good to be real, and the realization sent a shiver down his spine.

He looked down and was even more shocked to see what he was wearing. The dress shirt he had on looked like it had been made by a French designer, the collar was red with hundreds of delicately sewn shiny black beads on it, the seam where it would have buttoned was a strip of white silk with ruffles on either side and the majority of the shirt was covered in a layer of thin, white silk lace. The shirt was tucked neatly into expertly cropped black dress pants and the shiniest black loafers that he had ever seen were on his feet.

The outfit he was wearing probably cost more, if not double, his apartment rent. Even if he worked hard his entire life he doubted that he would ever make enough money to afford to wear such luxurious clothing, which is why he couldn’t understand why he was wearing it now. Had he been taken to some world where he was a billionaire?

He took a step forward, intending to get a better look of the place but as soon as his foot hit the marble floor with an echoing clack, noises erupted from behind him and he didn’t even have the time to turn around before figures rushed past him. They were laughing and making a ruckus as they entered suddenly, one of them slapping Jin on the back and calling out,

“What are you doing just standing there, Seokjin?” Before they also passed in front of him.
Jin watched in stunned confusion as they spread out into the room, slinging arms around each other, reading books, and fooling around.

His eyes were probably bulging out of his head as he realized just who he was looking at. His friends.

He had seen them looking totally strange before when they had been demons... but this was different. Before they had been dressed sloppily, wearing loud and obnoxious clothing with equally obnoxious hair colors and styles. But he had never seen his friends looking like this.

He probably should have expected something like this from looking at his own clothing, but his friends looked like each were young billionaires who lived frivolous lives of luxury. The hairstyles and colors were still wildly different, all of them styled nicely but Hoseok had orange hair, Namjoon’s hair was a wheat blonde that was actually styled for once rather than just sitting on his forehead, Taehyung’s was bright blonde cut in a chic style, and Jimin had silver hair that was parted neatly to the side. Yoongi and Jeongguk’s hair hadn’t changed much but all of them were wearing outfits that looked like they should be modeled at Seoul’s fashion week.

His friends wore ripped jeans and old t-shirts, not sequined blazers and silk chokers.

But here they were, looking like they walked right out of a cover page from a fashion magazine.

Hoseok spoke up after a few minutes had passed, with Jin still standing there slack-jawed and confused, announcing that it was about time that everyone got to their “training”.

Everyone agreed begrudgingly, as if they didn’t really want to do whatever it was they were supposed to be doing but couldn’t argue. Jin just wondered what Hoseok meant by “training” as he watched everyone split up into pairs and disappear down different hallways and doors.

Leaving him alone in the room.

He frowned at that, annoyed that no one had directly spoken to him other than to passively ask what he was doing. He had no idea what he was doing, or what he was supposed to be doing, or what training even meant. And he had no idea where to start in order to get the answers that he wanted.
He looked around again, noting all the different paths, hallways, and doors that led out of the room. His best bet would probably be to find out what everyone else was doing. And maybe find out where they were while he was at it. At least he didn’t feel so horrifically out of place with his expensive outfit on.

Hoseok was the only one who’d actually spoken to him, so he was the one Jin decided to visit first. He saw the door that Hoseok disappeared behind and approached it, opening it slowly and peeking his head in.

A gust of wind whipped against his face and a dull thud rang out in the room instantaneously and Jin stared wide-eyed at the arrow lodged in the wall a few centimeters away from his head.

An irritated sigh registered in his ears over the rapid beating of his heart and he slowly turned his gaze away from the wall and towards the noise.

The room was dark, probably would have been pitch black without the light filtering in through the open door. Jin could barely make out the shape of a large statue in the center of the room in the serene shape of a woman. Something about it felt familiar to him, as if he should have recognized the figure but he couldn't remember who she was. There was a shallow pool of water right in front of the statue, walled off by what looked like stone, which was strange to see surrounded by all the marble. It almost looked like the room had been built around the statue rather than the statue being built in it.

He could see a few plants behind the statue but overall Jin had no idea what the purpose of the room was. He wondered if there was something that he couldn’t see that would make more sense but really, he was too distracted by the sight of Hoseok standing in the middle of the shallow pool of water, a golden and glittering chair right behind him and an equally gold bow in his hands, second arrow already drawn and aimed at him.

“How many times have I told you all not to bother me when I’m meditating?” He asked with a frown, pointing the arrow at the ground but still keeping the bowstring held taut to Jin’s extreme displeasure.

“Y-you…” Jin gasped. “You almost shot me with that!”

Hoseok rolled his eyes in the darkness, irises glinting from the light.
“If I had been trying to shoot you, you would have an arrow sticking out of your forehead right now. I shot on reflex, because I was meditating and you interrupted me. Are you going to apologize or just keep whining? Because if you’re going to do the latter, save us both the time and leave now.”

Jin blanched at the disrespectful tone Hoseok had taken. He didn’t take himself that seriously and often let his friends disrespect him and call him without honorifics but Hoseok had never spoken to him so rudely.

“I’m… sorry?” He said, still fully aware of the bow in Hoseok’s hands. Now was not the time to be lecturing him on giving respect to elders.

To Jin’s immediate relief, Hoseok let the bowstring go, unloaded the arrow and held both in his hand.

“Did you need something from me?” He asked, sounding exasperated.

Jin had been intending to ask him a few questions but something told him that if anything else Hoseok considered stupid came out of his mouth, he wouldn’t hesitate to draw his bow again.

“Oh… No. I just didn’t realize that you were in here, sorry.”

Hoseok frowned, sitting down in the chair and holding the arrow in his hands contemplatively.

“You should be training as well. We must continue to be diligent, I’m worried about our integrity in the face of rising evil. These days darkness spreads faster than ever.”

Jin bit back the questions that formed in his head about what that even meant, and instead nodded as if he understood the cryptic words that just came out of Hoseok’s mouth and quietly closed the door behind him as he took his exit.

Well, that had gone well.

Clearly, Hoseok was not going to be much help, so Jin decided to change his strategy a little. If
everyone was as frigid and diligent as Hoseok seemed to be, then Jin came to the conclusion that maybe it wasn’t the greatest idea to try asking the mountain of questions stacking up in his head. He still wanted to find out, but considering that he was almost shot in the head with an arrow just for opening a door, for his own survival it was probably best to figure out the answers to his questions on his own.

With a deep sigh, he stepped away from the door and tried to remember where he had seen Namjoon heading off to. He headed down a corridor with tall and ornate arches, marveling at how expensive everything looked. It was crazy to think that they might have owned this building but with how comfortable everyone had seemed in it, it wasn’t entirely impossible.

At the end of the corridor was a single door, and windows lined the hallway, casting brilliant golden light into the area. But the strange thing was that when Jin tried to get a view of their surroundings outside of the building he couldn’t see anything. And it wasn’t as if there was nothing to be seen, or that his view was obscured with trees.

No. He couldn’t see anything besides the golden light. It was as if there were spotlights on the outside casting light into the windows. And though he figured that maybe it was just the sun glaring off the glass, he attempted to look outside the windows on the opposite side and experienced nothing but that same brilliant gold light.

So… unless the world was on fire, they were on the sun, or his theory about the spotlights outside was correct… that didn’t make any sense at all. The sun couldn’t glare like that on two opposite sides of the hallway unless he had misunderstood his science classes in school, but he highly doubted that was the case.

He shook his head, deciding to save that mystery for later because the possibilities his brain was coming up with was making him nothing but uneasy and nervous.

He knocked hesitantly on the door, wary of nearly being shot with an arrow again, and put his ear against the thick door to listen for a response. He strangely heard the scrambling sound of things being moved quickly and then a familiar voice.

“... Come in.” So, Namjoon had gone this way. That was good. Jin was worried about getting lost in the search for him. The building was probably much bigger than it let on, even with all the hallways and doors he had seen in the main area.

Jin pushed the door open and entered slowly, only stopping when Namjoon and Jeongguk let out equally loud sighs. Jin hadn’t even seen Jeongguk come this way.
“Ugh, we thought you were Yoongi. Thank goodness you weren’t.” Namjoon sighed in relief.

Jeongguk fixed Jin with a curious but mildly annoyed look. “Yeah, why did you knock, Seokjin? You usually just come in.”

Jin raised an eyebrow at Jeongguk actually calling him by his full name, he didn’t remember ever hearing the younger call him that before.

“Well, I just opened the door to the room Hoseok was in and nearly got an arrow in my head, so sorry if I’m feeling overly polite,” Jin stated sourly.

“Ah, yeah he’s been really serious these days,” Jeongguk stated empathetically, getting up from his seat on the bed in the room and picking up two glasses that had been hidden near the front of the bed under the hanging blankets. “Even more serious than Yoongi, which is an accomplishment in itself.”

Jin looked around the room, more surprised than he thought he would be to see the obviously French-inspired decor, old-fashioned decorative wallpaper, hand-woven rugs, and stacks of books littered all over the room in various colors and languages based on the engraved covers.

But a trail of smoke passed in front of his vision and he turned his attention back to the others in the room. Jeongguk now had a glass up to his lips, tipping the bright green contents down with a blissful sigh as he lay in the bed. Jin trailed the slightly green-tinted smoke to Namjoon, who was only breathing it out. Jin found himself initially assuming that he was smoking a cigarette or something less legal but there was nothing in hands except for a glass of that same bright green liquid which didn’t exactly make sense.

He thought not to question it but his confusion must have shown on his face.

“Yoongi keeps catching us slacking off like this,” Namjoon began explaining, though that only partly solved Jin’s confusion. “The two of them, Hoseok and Yoongi I mean, really need to calm down. They’re acting like we’re gonna shake hands with the devil himself if we don’t stay diligent with our training and studies.” He made exaggerated air quotes as he seemingly imitated Hoseok’s voice. Jin was surprised by how accurate the impression was.

Jeongguk swung his legs over the side of the bed, turning his full attention to the two of them now
that his glass was empty.

“Yeah, but I guess it’s because of what happened with Jimin.” He speculated, swinging his legs rapidly back and forth.

Namjoon grunted loudly in disgust. “Ugh, don’t even talk about that. What a mess. He’s fine now, anyways, Yoongi won’t even let him breathe alone.” He turned his attention to the glass Jeongguk had set in front of him, reaching underneath the table briefly to grab a glass decanter. Jin watched as Namjoon pulled some other things from his pocket before setting them on the table as well. He poured a generous amount of that mysterious green liquid into the glass, delicately balancing a spoon on the rim, before pulling out what looked like a sugar cube from a small plastic bag and placing it on the spoon.

Jin cocked his head in confusion as he watched Namjoon light the sugar cube on fire with a white lighter. The scene was ringing bells in his head as though he knew somewhere in his mind what Namjoon was drinking.

It took a moment but then suddenly he realized and he felt his mouth fall open. Absinthe, it looked like Namjoon was drinking absinthe. As in the historically banned alcoholic drink said to have hallucinogenic properties and extremely addictive substances. So, why was Namjoon drinking it? And not just Namjoon but Jeongguk as well?

Jin felt like he was back on that train, totally confused about what was going on around him and having no idea how to get answers. He desperately wanted to know what they were talking about, but whatever had happened with Jimin seemed like a fairly big deal and he wasn’t sure if he could get away with asking about it without seeming strange.

“Well, I’m just saying it makes sense for them to worry, even if it’s annoying. We almost lost him completely.” Jeongguk shrugged, standing up from his seat on the bed. He seemed oddly restless, as if his body was itching for a run or something.

“Anyways, even if it wasn’t Yoongi this time, he’s bound to come check up on us soon. I’m gonna go train for a bit.”

“Oh?” Namjoon began with great interest. “What’s your distance these days?”

Jeongguk grinned, pausing at the door, “About nine feet!”
Namjoon clapped, leaning back in his chair. “Nice! Keep it up and you’ll be ready in no time.”

Jeongguk grinned once more, catching Jin’s eye before he disappeared down the hallways, closing the door behind him.

For some reason, the thought of staying in the same room alone with Namjoon was making Jin uncomfortable. There was something strange going on, as there always was, but he still had no idea what it was and the fact that two of his best friends were casually drinking absinthe and smoking… *something*, was giving him a strange feeling in his gut.

“Hey, where is Yoongi anyways?” Jin asked, hoping he sounded more casual than he felt. If Yoongi was so focused on everyone doing what they were supposed to be doing, maybe he could ask him a few vague questions and get some better insight as to what was happening here.

Namjoon fixed him with a wary look, bringing the glass in his hands up to drink more of the bright green substance. There was something about his eyes, Jin realized, they were different, a shade or two lighter than they were usually and almost hazel in their color. That, paired with his unique hairstyle and color made the man in the chic blue jacket with the light blue and green floral print and chiffon collar look nothing at all like the friend he knew.

“You’re not gonna rat us out, right?”

Jin was shaking his head before he could even register what Namjoon was asking him. The last thing he wanted was to make anyone angry when he still couldn’t figure out what was going on.

“Of course not, I just want to…” He scrambled to think of a reasonable excuse. “ask him how Jimin is doing.”

Namjoon stared at him with a hard to read expression for a long moment before he lifted one shoulder carelessly.

“Yeah, well, like I said- Yoongi doesn’t let Jimin breathe without supervision. They’re probably training upstairs. Same room as always.”
Jin hesitated for a moment, not knowing whether or not he should ask what room that would be, and Namjoon raised an eyebrow at him.

“You alright, Seokjin? You’re acting sort of strange today. You’re not thinking of shaking hands with the devil, right?” Namjoon laughed at his own joke and Jin attempted to laugh along, though, for some reason, it hadn’t seemed funny at all.

“No, I’m just… tired is all.”

“Yeah, I imagine it’s tiring having to pretend to be perfect all the time,” Namjoon commented underhandedly.

Jin frowned. “What?”

Namjoon waved a hand flippantly, before picking up a stray book from off the floor. “Nothing. Get some rest, don’t work yourself too hard.”

Jin frowned even further, but he made his way to the door and closed it behind him as he entered the strange hallway from before.

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The problem that occurred to Jin as he made his way back to the main area of the building, was that he hadn’t seen a single set of stairs in the entire time that he’d been here and he, again, didn’t know how to ask without seeming strange. That same dream-like feeling hadn’t left him, but he was beginning to have a suspicion that his friends in this world weren’t human. He wasn’t exactly sure what it was, but after seeing Namjoon’s eyes and realizing how flawless his skin had looked, he remembered how everyone else had looked similarly odd. He hadn’t been able to pinpoint it at the time since he was so busy being overwhelmed by everything else, but Jeongguk’s eyes had been a blueish grey and it seemed like too much of a coincidence for them to just be contacts.

After all, the demons that had murdered him before had looked slightly odd as well and though he thought they all might have been wearing black sclera contacts, the inhuman feats they had accomplished suggested otherwise.

But they had already mentioned things like staying diligent and joked about shaking hands with the
devil, so it didn’t really seem like they were demons either. But if they weren’t human and they weren’t demons… then what were they?

Jin pondered that as he walked, trying to find some path that would lead him to the next floor. He assumed that he would get himself lost looking for it, but some sense of instinct kicked in and the hallways felt a lot more familiar than they should have with him seeing them for the first time. He took left turns and then right turns and another left and eventually he was walking towards a grand spiraling staircase in the middle of what looked to be a rather extensive library.

He took the glittering gold steps to the top and was surprised to see that the flooring was a modern dark wood rather than the vividly colored, patterned carpet that he was expecting. His shoes resounded down the hallway with a dull thud that ricocheted off the walls and echoed so loudly that it seemed as though the hallway stretched on forever. But, no, he could see ornate double doors at the end and even more branching hallways than the main room downstairs had.

It was dark up here, and after a few moments of walking, Jin realized it was because there were no windows at all. The only light source was the few small electrically powered lights on the ceiling that were so dim they might as well have been candles. They looked out of place in the French-inspired mansion-like building, since Jin hadn’t seen a single other device that was powered electrically, but they kept him from being in complete darkness so he was grateful for them anyways.

He heard muffled voices as he approached the double doors at the end of the hallway, and they got louder as he approached. He stopped outside of them and hesitantly pressed his ear to the door to hear who it was.

“... focus , Jimin. Focus on yourself and ignore what’s around you.” That was Yoongi talking. Jin pressed his ear to the door more firmly so that he could hear them better. Maybe he could find out something useful before he spoke with them.

He heard a pained grunt and shuffling like someone dragging their foot over carpet.

“Focus !” Yoongi snapped. “Focus on nothing but my voice talking to you and yourself. Deny everything else.”

It was silent for a moment besides the sound of shuffling and the rare footstep every few seconds.
And then a loud wail rang out in the room, echoing loudly through the hallway and the thud of something hitting the floor. The wail morphed into an agonizing scream and then labored breathing.

“You can do this, Jimin,” Yoongi whispered, and Jin had to strain his ears to actually hear him.

“You can do this. You can. Fight against it. You made a mistake but you can fix it. It’s not too late. But you can’t give up either. I won’t let you. *Fight it.*” Jin had no idea what Jimin was supposed to be fighting but it didn’t sound like it was going well. Another wail rang out in the room, sounding gruff and gritty like the sound was ripping Jimin’s throat open.

And then the sound suddenly stopped and the room was eerily quiet. Jin frowned and pressed his ear even closer to the door, wondering if there was something happening that he just couldn’t hear.

“... Good.” Was the only muttered sound Jin heard. Jimin didn’t make any noise of response and Jin frowned in worry. What was happening in there?

But before Jin could get an answer, the door opened suddenly and it was all he could do to not fall on the floor in surprise. He was so shocked that he could do nothing but gape at Yoongi and look just like he’d been caught eavesdropping- which he had.

He fully expected Yoongi to yell at him for being nosy, but the man seemed just as unsettled by Jin’s sudden presence. He looked uncomfortably away from him and softly closed the door behind himself.

Jin scrambled to find something to say to dispel the awkwardness of the situation but Yoongi beat him to it before he could even open his mouth.

“You don’t need to worry about him, I’m taking care of it.” He sounded mildly annoyed and Jin wasn’t sure if it was just because he was *there* or because he had been eavesdropping.

“Is… Is he okay?” Jin asked, incredibly concerned with the sudden silence that had descended in the room. “He was screaming...”

Yoongi tossed a look over his shoulder that was hard to read and Jin realized how *shaken* the younger looked at that moment. As if he hadn’t been expecting Jimin to start screaming like that
“He’s fine. He’s just fighting it.” Yoongi stated firmly. “I know that you think it was too late to get him back but he’s doing well. He’s denying it and he hasn’t had any relapses since I’ve been watching him.”

Jin frowned in confusion then, was *that* why Yoongi was acting so weird with his presence here? Was he… being protective of Jimin? Because of *Jin*? Because for some reason Jin, himself, had thought that Jimin was lost to them and he was against trying to get him back?

Why did that make him feel like the villain? He didn’t even know what Jimin *did*! He didn’t have enough information to even formulate any sort of opinion!

He was at a complete loss for words. He wanted to ask so many different questions but all he could think about was the guarded way Yoongi was looking at him as if they had argued about this before. But what had Jimin given into? Evil? That was what it was sounding like… but what did that even *mean*? Why had he been *screaming* like that?

Yoongi seemed to take his silence as disbelief in what he was saying and glared up at him. “I’m *confident* he can fight it off. He’ll be fine. I’m not just going to give up on him.”

And then he pushed past Jin, and walked off down the hallway, disappearing from sight as he took the stairs down.

Jin watched him as he left and then his attention fell upon the shut double doors.

Even if Yoongi had said that Jimin was fine, Jin found himself wanting to confirm it with his own eyes. He reached out a hand hesitantly, pulling down the handle to the door and pushing it open.

His eyes widened involuntarily at the sight before him. Strangely, there was a glass panel inlaid in the floor outlined in a golden frame, and though it was glass, it looked completely black from where Jin was standing. There were feathers strewn all over the place, like someone had thrown a slumber party and didn’t clean up after the pillow fight. Most of the dawny fibers were white but there were also quite a few black feathers. And when Jin looked at them further, he saw that there were red splotches on some of the white feathers but he quickly tore his gaze from them since it looked suspiciously like blood.
Jimin was kneeling on the ground, knees right on top of the black glass and though he was kneeling he looked disturbingly limp, as if he had fallen asleep in that position. His eyes were blindfolded with a silky black ribbon that wrapped around his head and was held taut between another set of double doors behind him, trapping him effectively so that he had a limited range of movement unless he pulled the blindfold off.

Yoongi’s hostility ran through Jin’s mind as he debated whether or not to enter the room, but eventually his concern for Jimin overtook his fear of Yoongi finding him in the room. Jin took a hesitant step forward, hoping to see if he could determine if Jimin was actually still breathing or not since the silence was deafening. But as soon as his foot crossed the threshold Jimin’s head shot up, looking directly at him through the blindfold Jin was sure he wasn’t able to actually see through.

Jin’s heart leaped up into his chest as he regarded Jimin carefully. He realized that he still had no idea what Jimin was fighting and he looked at the blindfold uneasily. It would probably take less than a second for Jimin to get it off of him if he wanted to and what would happen then? If he was fighting against… evil or whatever, then what exactly was wrong with him?

Jin watched in complete terror as Jimin visibly stiffened, sitting up straight on his knees.

“... Seokjin? Is that you?” He whispered, voice still raw from the screaming he had done.

Jin wanted to respond, he wanted to open his mouth and tell Jimin that yes, it was him. But something about the way Jimin had spoken was off, it sounded fearful and desperate and Jin couldn’t speak over the lump that had formed in his throat.

“It’s you, right, Seokjin?” Jimin asked again, and he sounded so desperate that Jin was seriously regretting opening the door.

“I’m better now. Yoongi is helping me. I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to disappoint everyone. I just… I messed up. But I can get better! Yoongi is helping me. I can fight it. Please don’t… don’t give up on me.” He was babbling, whispering so intently that Jin was standing a few feet away from him and could still barely understand what he was saying. He watched in horror as a liquid dropped from under the blindfold, it looked like it should have been a tear but it was green.

“Please, Seokjin. I can get better. Please. I don’t want to leave you all, please. Please, please, please.”
Jin stepped backward on impulse, wanting to run away from the room and barely restraining himself from doing so. He didn’t know what was happening to Jimin but the green liquid continued to leak out from underneath the blindfold and they saturated in color until they turned black and then Jimin was smiling.

No, it wasn’t even a smile. He was grinning, grinning like the Chesire cat and the liquid, tears, fell onto his lip and into his open mouth, coloring one of his teeth in a green tint.

Jimin made a sound that sounded like a laugh and it sent a shiver down Jin’s spine.

“Seokjin~. I know you’re there. Why won’t you talk to me? Can’t you see that I’m suffering? Aren’t you going to help me, Seokjin? Aren’t you going to put me out of my misery, Seokjin?”

Jimin began laughing in earnest then and Jin completely stepped out of the room, hands shaking as he pulled the doors closed once again, but he could still hear Jimin’s chaotic laughter through them.

He had seen enough to understand what Jimin was fighting. There was just a feeling as Jimin spoke to him that caused the hairs on the back of his neck to rise. It elicited a type of terror that Jin had never felt before, it just felt wrong. He supposed that was the evil everyone had spoken about. After experiencing that, he could understand why Hoseok had been so serious before. If becoming like that was a reasonable danger to everyone, it seemed like something that was definitely a concern.

Jin sighed and wrapped his arms around himself in an attempt to settle his nerves. He felt completely freaked out though, and he could still hear Jimin’s creepy laughter echoing in his head even though the room had returned to silence already.

He seemed completely insane to Jin, and the way he had shifted from sad and desperate to creepy and hostile made Jin’s head spin.

He stepped away from the door, already feeling himself calm down as he distanced himself from it. He looked around the hallway, taking in all the paths that branched off of it. He had yet to find where Taehyung had gone, so he supposed that was his next goal. He had definitely seen him disappear down a hallway in the main area though he hadn’t seen him since. Maybe he was up here somewhere?
It was worth a try anyway, and even if he didn’t find him, maybe he would find something else that would give him some sort of clue as to what exactly was going on here. Although, after seeing Jimin, Jin was starting to think that maybe he didn’t want to know.

He turned down one of the branching hallways and tried opening every door that he passed, but for some reason every single door was locked and even after checking his pockets for keys, just to be sure, he didn’t have any way to open them.

He tried another branching hallway and was irritated to see that every door there was locked as well. What was the point of all these doors if every single one was locked? Who had the keys to open them? He tried going down another hallway and that was when he realized that the doors didn’t even have keyholes. They were just handles and if they were really locked, they were locked from the inside. Which was strange. Very strange.

Frustrated, Jin tried opening the door at the end of the third hallway and cried out in surprise as the door swung open and he nearly went flying to the floor.

He steadied himself quickly and looked up into the room, shocked by how bright it was inside compared to the darkness of the hallway, but he was even more shocked to see Jeongguk inside the room.

And just seeing Jeongguk would have been a surprise, but Jin’s eyes were nearly bulging out of his head as he saw the younger suspended in the air. Jeongguk seemed to notice that someone had entered the room and he let out a cry of surprise as he suddenly fell nearly ten feet to the ground. Jin could do nothing but gape in shock, not believing what he just saw.

Jeongguk let out a groan and rubbed the back of his head tenderly.

“Ow,” He moaned, sitting up and looking incredulously at Jin. “Now of all times, you decide not to knock? No wonder Hoseok nearly shot you.”

He laughed good-naturedly, and stood up, straightening out his clothes. He took in Jin’s shocked expression, which hadn’t changed at all since Jeongguk had fallen.

“Impressed?” Jeongguk teased, wiggling his eyebrows. He began stretching like he hadn’t just been levitating ten feet in the air and Jin was completely stunned. “I’ve improved a lot, huh? You think I’ll be ready for the real deal soon?”
This time Jin couldn’t even try holding back his questions. “What…. What real deal?” He gasped, blinking as he tried to wrap his brain around what he had just seen.

Jeongguk continued stretching and breathed out a laugh. “The test? Do you think that I’m ready for it yet?”

Jin just stared at him, having absolutely no idea what test he was talking about and his mind was still moving slowly from what he had seen before so he couldn’t even play along and pretend to know.

Jeongguk stopped stretching for a second and his face seemed to mirror Jin’s own confusion before he seemed to come to a realization.

“Oh, I get it. You’re quizzing me, right?” He nodded to himself a few times and stood straight in front of Jin.

"The test is what every angel has to take in order to test their diligence and affinity for the light. The angel must come of age and be recommended by the head of their flock to be considered for testing. Which in this case, would be you. In the test, angels perform tasks that are graded as pass or fail by an archangel. If the angel passes this test they are allowed to remove the seal from their wings and will advance in rank to an official harbinger of light, peace, and harmony.” Jeongguk grinned proudly when he finished explaining and Jin felt the beginnings of a migraine forming as he attempted to wrap his head around what the younger had just said.

It didn’t feel as crazy as it should have, and Jin found himself having a harder time trying to convince himself that this wasn’t possible. But the words felt right, they felt correct, and he couldn’t come up with enough argument to prove it wrong.

“Are… are all of us angels?” Jin found himself asking, mind thinking back to all the feathers that had been in the room with Jimin, and the strange light from the windows. He hadn’t given much thought to any of it, but now things were beginning to make a bit more sense, as crazy as that sounded.

“You could ask me harder questions, Seokjin. I’ve been studying.” Jeongguk muttered, rolling his eyes. “But no. We’re celestials until we pass the test, and once we pass- we’re officially angels. That test is very strict and it’s to ensure that we have no deviation in our hearts away from the light and that we have the ability to use the light as we please. After that, we do more training and we
determine our affinity in a final, much less formal test. You and Yoongi are Principalities which means that you help celestials with the process of becoming angels. Hoseok is a Power which means that his responsibility is to keep order within the cosmos, but he just recently got that role so he’s freakishly diligent about it, and if any rank of celestial deviates into the darkness it will be his job to subdue them. Namjoon passed the test a while ago but he hasn’t decided on an affinity so he’s just an angel for now. Jimin is an angel and he passed the test with flying colors but he’s lost his way a bit so we’re hoping he can come back to the light. And… Taehyung keeps failing the test because he never takes anything seriously, so he’s still a celestial along with me. Did I get everything?”

Surprisingly, Jin asking the questions he had been wanting to ask had actually worked in this case and besides the hopeful, nervous look Jeongguk was giving him, he didn’t seem to think Jin was acting strangely at all.

But still… it was a little hard for Jin to take all of that information seriously. It explained things sure, but angels? He had thought the demons were a bit much for his imagination but this, this was taking it a step further. And the fact that they had a hierarchy in this… flock was even harder to swallow.

Jin licked his lips, struggling to come up with what to say next. He was doing a good job of pulling information from Jeongguk so far but he wondered how much he could ask without seeming suspicious.

“What did Jimin do to get into that state?” He asked and then realized he was curious about something else as well. “And what is Yoongi doing to help fix him?”

Jeongguk bounced on the balls of his feet, that same restless energy from before still commanding his body. “Well, we don’t know what happened exactly since it was so sudden. You know, he was completely fine one moment and then acting like a raving lunatic the next. Especially with the whole… trying to... kill me and everything. But I think he had a mental instability that was dormant and came to the forefront after his seal was removed. That happens sometimes. He’s always been really conscious of himself, always thinking that he could do better even when he’s already giving his best.” He shrugged as if it was no big deal, but a chill ran down Jin’s spine at the new information that made him physically tremble. He had felt that murderous intent when he had listened to Jimin speak to him but he hadn’t been able to put a word to it until now.

“But Yoongi was the one who recommended him for the test so he’s trying to take full responsibility. He’s trying to get Jimin into a sensory deprivation mode by blinding him and forcing him to fight off the darkness trying to overtake him but I think it’s just making it worse. The only reason angels turn to the darkness is because they want a way out, an escape. I don’t think he wants to confront whatever is going on in his head, so I’m really sad about it, but I think you’re right. It’s a lost cause. Yoongi’s efforts would be better spent with Taehyung.”
Jin attempted to process that, but he got stuck on the mention of Taehyung.

“Why does Taehyung keep failing the test?”

Jeongguk smirked, walking around in a quick circle as if the act of standing still was bothering him.

“Well, you should know that best as the person that keeps recommending him. He’s a mess. I’m not allowed to know why he’s failing but it doesn’t take a genius to figure it out. He’s not serious about anything. He’s frivolous, uninspired, and irresponsible. He says hasn’t been feeling that well, but I think it’s just an excuse to get out of training. He’s probably just messing around, as usual.”

Jeongguk raised an eyebrow, cocking his head. “Is that all? Did I pass? I know I’m not supposed to ask but can you please recommend me? Yoongi is too busy dealing with Jimin to do anything other than yell at us, so you’d have to be the one to do it.”

Jin had no idea how to respond to that, but the silence as he tried to think of a good response seemed to be much too long for Jeongguk who was starting to look like he’d seriously lose his mind if he stood still for another minute.

“Is it about Namjoon? I know you keep telling me he’s a bad influence and I can’t even pretend that he isn’t, but if it’s about the drinking I only do it every now and then. I wouldn’t have even started if Namjoon hadn’t practically shoved it down my throat. I can stop if it’s going to be a problem.”

Somehow, Jin thought that stopping the drinking wasn’t going to be as simple as Jeongguk was making it seem as he watched the younger jog lightly in place and let out a huff as if he wanted to go and run a marathon.

“Are you… restless like that because of the drinking?” He asked, with probably a bit too much suspicion in his voice.

Jeongguk stopped moving immediately, posture going as straight as a board.
“No!” He rushed to argue. “I’m just in the mood to train and you interrupted me so…”

Jin nodded, not believing him at all but now that most of his questions had been answered he wanted to go and find the one person he hadn’t spoken with yet.

“Do you know where Taehyung is? I want to see what he’s up to.”

Jeongguk still looked uncomfortably antsy but he calmed down at the mention of Taehyung.

“Like I said, he’s probably just goofing around so he might be in his room downstairs. I’m gonna go back to my training, now. So... yeah.”

Jin nodded and Jeongguk shot him a smile that looked oddly forced before lowering himself to the ground and closing his eyes, face taught with concentration.

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Well, now that Jin had most of the answers to the questions that he wanted, he was left to make sense of it all. Jeongguk went back to his training and Jin watched for a little while as the younger concentrated and once again levitated off the ground as if pulled by a string. He had only made it about a two feet off the floor before Jin decided to leave, he had just wanted to make sure he hadn’t made up the scene in his head.

But now that he was out of the room and left to himself as he walked back down the hallway and down the spiral staircase he couldn’t help but feel like he had made up all of this in his head. And it was so intricate and detailed that it was almost sickening to think that his brain could have fabricated all of this.

It was truly feeling like a fever dream now.

But it was a dream that felt very close to becoming a nightmare.

He had learned a lot from speaking to Jeongguk but there were still questions that had yet to be answered. And Jin felt as though they were questions that he wasn’t meant to know the answer to.
Like what exactly was going on with Jeongguk, Namjoon, and that green stuff that they had been drinking? The two had treated it so casually but the idea of *angels* drinking alcohol and *smoking* didn’t rest well with him- imagination or not. It just wasn’t adding up. And neither was the situation with Jimin. Jeongguk was making it sound like Jimin had just *snapped* and gone careening off into evil but Jin suspected that things weren’t that simple. In Jin’s eyes, their group seemed like a bit of a mess and he knew enough to know that that wasn’t a good thing.

He walked back down the path he had taken to get to the staircase like second nature, he hadn’t even needed to think about it and soon enough he was back in the main room.

Jin wondered if he could count on his sense of innate direction to lead him to wherever Taehyung’s room was, but as he stood in the main room surrounded by shiny marble floors and beautiful marble sculptures, he found his eyes drawn to the largest painting in the room. It wasn’t especially big but the colors and chaotic nature of the image drew him in and before he knew it, he was standing in front of it.

His eyes raked over the various shapes- people, animals, and insects. The chaotic scene depicted death, sex, and despair and it sent a shudder down Jin’s spine as he looked at it. It reminded him of the feeling he got when Jimin had spoken to him.

*Dread.*

And though Jin was *sure* that he was only just now seeing this painting for the first time, it seemed familiar. In fact, the entire scene filled him with a sense of deja vu that was nearly overwhelming. *He knew somehow that he had looked at this painting and experienced that same feeling before.*

Suddenly, Jin’s vision went black and he blinked a few times in confusion until he felt breathing on his neck, causing the hairs on his nape to stand.

*Someone was covering his eyes.* Which was strange, because the marble floors were incredibly loud when walked on and yet he didn’t hear a single thing.

“Seokjin.” A deep rumble of a voice called, and Jin knew immediately that it was Taehyung. And for some reason that realization made his heart leap up into his chest as that sense of dread intensified.

“Taehyung?” Jin asked, just to be sure.
“It’s me.” The voice responded, and while the warm feeling of hands over his eyes left, Jin still couldn't see anything but darkness even after blinking a few times. He turned around, and though he saw something that looked like movement it was gone before his eyes could make sense of it.

“Why is it so dark?” Jin asked, a tremble in his voice that was audible even to himself.

“I’ve been wanting to talk to you.” Jin continued to look around, hoping to see another flash of movement but he could see nothing but pitch black darkness and even Taehyung’s voice sounded echoey as if he were getting further away.

“About what?”

“Don’t you… feel out of place here? Haven’t you made a mistake that you want to fix?”

Jin frowned, turning around slowly as he tried in vain to locate Taehyung. He had an idea of what Taehyung might have been referring to but there was no way that he could have possibly known about what Jin had gone through after driving off of that pier.

“What are you talking about, Taehyung? What mistake?”

Jin flinched in surprise as Taehyung spoke again, this time right next to his ear even though he hadn’t heard any noise at all.

“The mistake that you made, Seokjin. The one you wish desperately to take back? I can help you fix it.”

Jin narrowed his eyes, there was something entirely untrustworthy about the situation but the truth of the matter was that Jin was willing to do anything that would stop this vicious cycle. And he would do anything that he could to fix the mistake that he made in order to be happy with his friends again.

“... How?”
The voice echoed from across the room once again. “We’re angels, Seokjin. We can do whatever we want. Although, we’re constantly told that we can’t. And they even go so far as to put a seal on who we really are until we pass the stupid test. Why do we need to prove ourselves to archangels just because they’ve lived longer than us? We can be just as powerful as them if not more powerful because of our youth. I can give you what you want. You just have to do me a favor in return, and everything will go back to the way that it was.”

Warning bells were going off in Jin’s head but he was having a hard time listening to them over how enticing the offer sounded. And Taehyung had a point didn’t he? They were angels! Beings out of this world, capable of so much more than he could ever imagine. Jin wasn’t even a religious person but even he could agree to believe something like that, he had seen Jeongguk levitate ten feet in the air right in front of him! There was no telling what the limits to their abilities were. And if it would get him out of here and back to where he actually belonged, then… what was stopping him?

“What do you need me to do?”

A flash of white appeared in his vision that reminded Jin of the Cheshire cat’s floating smile and then he realized that Taehyung was standing right in front of him. The room had lost the veil of darkness that had been covering it and Jin’s eyes struggled to adjust to the sudden influx of light.

“I knew that you’d agree with me. Everyone else is so used to the traditional ways of doing things that they can’t understand when a system is flawed. But you’re different. You think like I do.” Taehyung said and tapped a finger against his lips. “We need to touch here in order to break my seal.”

Jin frowned. “I… I need to kiss you? I’m not even an archangel, I don’t think it’ll work.”

A dark shadow of annoyance passed over Taehyung’s bright expression, and it happened so quickly Jin wasn’t sure if he actually saw the change or not.

“It’s not a kiss. We just need to touch mouths briefly. And like I said before, we’re capable of things that we didn’t even know was possible. It’ll work, trust me.”

Jin sighed, squeezing his eyes shut to block out thoughts of kissing Taehyung. It was an extremely unpleasant idea, to say the least.

“Fine.” He would just stay still and let Taehyung do it. It was a small price to pay for getting what he wanted.
He felt breath fan across his face as Taehyung moved closer and then the warm sensation of lips against his as he forced his body not to cringe away from the younger.

It was over quickly and though Jin hadn’t felt anything change, the feeling of dread had increased drastically and the temperature in the room felt like it had dropped several degrees.

He opened his eyes, mouth open and about to ask Taehyung whether or not it would work, but his words died on his tongue as he realized what was causing the seeping feeling of dread to pour through his veins.

Taehyung was smirking at him, lips curving upwards in a disturbing way. His eyes which had previously been a blue-ish green were now completely jet black, reminding Jin of the demonic version of Taehyung that had stabbed him multiple times.

He had a distinct feeling that he had just made another mistake.

“Wh…-” Jin gasped, finding it suddenly hard to breathe standing so close to the younger.
“Taehyung, what did you just do?”

The younger tipped his head back and laughed out loud and Jin felt the rumbling of the building under his feet as cracks formed fissures in the ground and up the walls, spitting out colors meters high up into the air from the crevices.

Jin saw something go flying past him from the corner of his eye, so close to his face that he felt a stinging line across his cheek. He blinked in shock and saw that Taehyung suddenly had a golden arrow sticking out from his shoulder a few inches away from his neck.

He looked behind him and saw Hoseok standing a few feet away from them, bow already drawn with a second arrow and an entire quiver full of golden arrows peeked out from behind his back. He was glaring fiercely at Taehyung and his eyes didn't even meet Jin’s for a second before they were back on his target.

Yoongi appeared from behind Hoseok, seemingly having rounded the corner a few seconds after the arrow had been lodged in Taehyung's shoulder. He looked furious as his eyes scanned over the room and took in the numerous gushing fissures in the marble, then he was stomping over to them and nearly wrenching Jin’s arm out of its socket as he dragged him away from Taehyung.
“What did you do?!” Yoongi roared at him, but Jin was in too much shock to actually hear him. His eyes didn’t leave Taehyung as he was dragged away and he watched as the younger pulled out the golden arrow with ease, throwing it to the ground with a clatter and grinning like a madman. Black blood seeped out of the open wound and Jin wondered if Taehyung could even feel it as it dripped down his shirt and puddled on the floor.

Footsteps echoed behind him and he saw Jeongguk and Namjoon appear out of the corner of his eye. Namjoon stepped further into his field of vision and Jin could see the devastatingly disappointed expression on his face.

“Oh, Taehyung.” He muttered, shaking his head sadly. “I had my suspicions about you, but I never thought you would be so far gone.”

Jeongguk gasped loudly all of a sudden and Jin found himself looking over at him. The youngest of the group was looking between Taehyung, Jin, and the spraying fissures in the room in horror.

“Y-you didn’t, Taehyung.” He begged softly. “Please tell me you didn’t do what I think you did.”

“He did,” Hoseok stated gruffly, tensing the arrow even further as Taehyung’s eyes raked over the group.

“Are you an idiot?” Yoongi yelled, shaking Jin until he felt dizzy enough to fall over, and all of the attention in the room fell onto the two of them. “Why would you make an illegal contract with him? Do you have any idea what you’ve just done?!”

“I- I don’t…” Jin stuttered, feeling winded, dizzy, and light headed all at once.

“Taehyung is completely lost to us, he’s swallowed by evil entirely and you’ve just sold your soul to a demon!” Yoongi explained fiercely, sounding every part horrified as he did angry.

The explanation was unnecessary. Jin knew that as soon as he had opened his eyes and saw those black eyes staring back at him. Now he was scared, overwhelmingly frightened to the point where he wasn’t sure if he was shaking from Yoongi’s grasp or out of terror. The feeling he had experienced with Jimin was nothing compared to this. It was probably what characters in movies felt when they were confronted by a merciless killer. The feeling of being confronted with pure evil.
It was why the room was suddenly feeling several degrees colder, why goosebumps had broken out on his arms, and why all of his friends had the sort of horrified look on their faces that people got when they saw a horrible accident play out in front of them.

His attention fell back onto Taehyung as he shifted and gigantic black wings spread out from behind his back, gently swishing back and forth and eclipsing him in their shadow.

“Don’t move another muscle,” Hoseok warned, training the arrow right where Taehyung’s heart should be.

The younger began laughing again and the sound was anything but comforting.

“You all are so simple.” He stated, passing his gaze to everyone in the room until they rested on Hoseok once again. “Don’t you realize that you’re limiting your potential by only choosing the light? The dark has so much more to offer.”

Jin watched in horror as Taehyung just barely moved, pushing off the floor with a slight movement, and went flying with the speed of a bullet at Hoseok.

The older of the two just barely had enough time to spread his own brilliantly white wings that looked like they had been dipped in gold and let an arrow fly, nestling into Taehyung’s thigh, before the younger crashed into him, causing him to smack into a wall with a loud bang.

Glass clattered loudly onto the floor as the chaotic painting from before broke with the impact, causing the entire frame to fall to the floor with a thud.

All hell broke loose after that and Namjoon rushed into action, spreading his own white wings in order to dart across the room and pull Taehyung off of Hoseok. The two squabbled in the far end of the room, until Taehyung pushed Namjoon off of him with amazing force, sending the older flying across the room and destroying several statues in the process. Dust from the broken marble rose up into the air and Yoongi disappeared from beside Jin into the haze after spreading his own wings, pure ivory with stripes of gold, followed by Jeongguk who simply ran into the fray.

Jin didn’t really think that it was a good idea for Jeongguk to be involving himself in the fight if he didn’t even have wings. But before he could even shout a warning, the dust cleared with a strong flap of wings and all Jin could see was Jeongguk’s body flying across the room, just as Hoseok
shot another arrow in tandem with Yoongi flying with full force into Taehyung.

They knocked into a glass case holding a smaller statue sending large shards of glass flying everywhere. Jin looked over at the commotion as Namjoon and Yoongi attempted to restrain Taehyung while Hoseok shot arrow after arrow at him. And even with the three of them trying to subdue him it didn’t seem to be going well, but he also didn’t think that any of them were even thinking of trying to check if Jeongguk was okay.

He had been thrown across the room and had crashed into an arch but Jin had yet to see him stand back up. He shot another careful look towards the chaos before making his way over to Jeongguk. The floor was slippery with whatever liquid had been gushing out from the fissures in the marble and Jin moved carefully so that he wouldn’t slip in it. Jeongguk was slumped over when he reached him, lifeless under the fallen pillar with a trail of bright red blood dripping down from his temple.

He heard a shout ring out behind him and turned in time to see Yoongi flying backward through the air, the younger went crashing into the nearby window once again sending glass flying everywhere. Jin jumped backward to avoid being hit with one of the shards as a large chunk came right toward him.

It was if time slowed then, with him looking forward in shock as the shard passed just where his head had been less than a second ago and he could see the blurry outline of his reflection in it. He saw the red of his shirt collar, the white sleeves of the shirt that had colorful liquid splattered all over it now, the subtle pink hue of his hair that looked like it might have been styled nicely before all of this, the slice in his cheek from the arrow that was oozing with unshed blood, and on his other cheek- right under his eye he saw a forked line in his skin that resembled a crack in marble.

And then the moment was over and the glass cracked into a million pieces on the floor and his vision quickly faded to black as the lightheadedness he had felt earlier overcame him and he felt the vague sensation of falling before his head hit the hard surface of the marble.

Chapter End Notes

Surprisingly- This chapter was one I was looking forward to writing the most but ended up being the hardest to write and I’m still kind of unhappy with it. It’s hard to translate all that visual art into words. :(
Fun Fact

I could give you all some great facts about the Blood, Sweat, & Tears MV and give you an impromptu art history lesson or talk about why BTS decided to use Demian by Herman Hesse as a theme for the Wings era. But instead, I'll just say that it was, in fact, not shot in Korea and that Blood Sweat and Tears is my favorite BTS song, choreo, and music video and it’s an aesthetic masterpiece.
“Because you were my support”

“Hoseok, cover your eyes.”

“Why?”

“Just close them for mommy, okay?”

He did as he was told and lifted his hands to cover his face and block his vision.

“Now countdown from ten for mommy, alright?”

“Why do I-”

“Just do this for mommy. Countdown from ten. You can do that for me, can’t you?”

“Okay…”

He was confused but obediently began to count down.

“Ten…”
“Nine…”

“Eight…”

“Seven…”

“Six…”

“Five…”

“Four…”

“Three…”

“Two…”

One.

He lowered his hands and blinked, squinting against the bright glare of the sun in his eyes. It was high in the sky, at the peak of noon, and warmed his skin with the strength of it’s light.

The amusement park was crowded and people passed by. Families adorned with merchandise from the park, colorful hats on their heads, and delicious looking food in their hands; couples with their arms linked together, laughing and smiling as they enjoyed their day and headed off to the next ride; and street vendors of the park reached out to them with friendly grins and offers of even more delicious food or the perfect toy that would suit any child’s tastes.

His mother was nowhere to be seen.

He looked left, right, and then left again and couldn’t catch even a glimpse of her face. He wanted to go and look for her but he’d gotten in trouble the last time she’d told him to wait somewhere and he’d gotten lost in his attempt to find her again.
She hadn’t told him to wait, though.

Still, he thought, she’d be angry if she returned to this spot and he wasn’t there. He would just wait for her to return. She’d probably gone to get him a surprise. It was his birthday after all. He thought that just being able to go to this park that he’d always wanted to go to would be enough, but maybe his mother had more than just this planned.

A smile crept onto his face at the thought and he straightened his back, looking expectantly out at the passing masses as he waited for his mother to reappear.

He was getting a cramp in both of his legs when he finally realized, as the sun began its downward descent back into the clouds, that something was wrong. He’d taken a seat now, right in front of the carousel that he’d been standing in front of this entire time. It had taken him a while until he saw it, but he grew only more confused when he took notice of the snickers bar sat next to him. It was his favorite type of chocolate bar and he always asked his mother for one whenever he was upset. He stared at it for a long while, wondering if it was his mother who had put it there.

It was when it started to get dark that Hoseok grew truly concerned. Surely, his mother should have been back by then. Where was she, he wondered. Why hadn’t she returned?

One of the amusement park staff members approached him as they got closer to closing time and asked him where his parents were.

Hoseok calmly explained to the woman that his mother had told him to wait there but had yet to return. The woman’s expression turned into one of confusion and she asked Hoseok to describe his mother and give her name so that they could find her. Hoseok did, happy that someone was looking for her.

Maybe she had just gotten lost.

His stomach was rumbling when the same woman approached him again, hours later, and told him that no woman was in the park that matched the description Hoseok had given. He insisted that she was still in the park, not knowing where else she would have gone, and the woman got a strange look in her eyes as she nibbled on her lip. Another coworker had joined her and they discussed something quietly, a few feet away from him, stealing glances in his direction every few seconds.
Hoseok reached out for the snickers bar that had been left beside him and grasped it as he tried to convince himself that everything was fine.

The two workers returned and asked him to come with them. The woman explained that they would probably need to go to the police department and ask officials to help look for his mother.

Hoseok refused vehemently. He insisted that his mother would be mad when she came back for him and didn’t see him there.

The two workers looked between each other and nodded solemnly. They spoke amongst themselves for a while before the man walked away and the woman sat beside him on the ledge he sat on. She asked him a few questions about himself and he told her that he had just turned eight. She was quiet for a moment before she wrapped an arm around him and showed him a brilliant smile as she wished him a happy birthday.

They didn’t really talk much after that, though.

Hoseok was surprised when the man from before returned with two police officers. They introduced themselves to him and asked him about his mother and what had happened earlier in the day.

When he finished explaining the officers also had that strange look in their eyes and shared a strange glance between each other. One of the officers knelt down in front of Hoseok and told him that he couldn’t stay at the park all night and would have to come with them to the station.

Panic gripped at him then and for the first time all day he started crying. He begged them to let him stay, desperately clinging to the idea that his mother would come back for him. He told them through snot filled nose and mouth wobbling with tears that if he moved from the spot his mother would get mad at him.

He was sobbing by the time they resorted to dragging him away from the spot. In the struggle he dropped the snickers bar and watched as, suspended from one of the officer’s backs, it grew further and further away from him.
It was a dream. A recurring dream that Hoseok was lucky to get at least a night away from. For some reason the dream always ending in him being overwhelmed with snickers bars and being suffocated by the sheer volume of them.

That part had never made any sense to him.

It did stop him from ever enjoying the treat again, though.

After the police had dragged him away from the spot at the amusement park and taken him to the station, they determined in hushed voices and whispers what exactly had happened to his mother.

One of them had knelt in front of him, that same strange look which Hoseok eventually came to recognize as pity in their eyes, and told him that it looked as though his mother had abandoned him.

Hoseok had truly sobbed then and didn’t stop sobbing when time passed by and eventually he was processed into an orphanage. At first he had hated the man that told him that devastating news. He thought that it couldn’t have been true, must have been some lie that they had made up.

But he grew to appreciate the man’s brutal honestly, even to an eight year-old that had just been abandoned at an amusement park by his single mother on his birthday. He probably would have just continued to delude himself if he hadn’t been hit with the blatant truth so early on.

His mother had abandoned him and practically left him for dead.

He had no idea why. It ate at him at night, plaguing his primary school mind with all sorts of unpleasant thoughts. He wanted to believe that maybe he had just gotten to be too much for her to take care of alone but... he couldn’t help but think that it was his fault.

He was too needy.

Too whiny.

Not smart enough.
Not good enough.

Wondering if his mother had ever wanted him was the worst of those thoughts.

He still remembered all of the good times that they’d had together. Sure, he was old enough to know that he and his mother were struggling financially but they had been so happy that he couldn’t help but look back on those memories and find it difficult to believe them. He found it hard to believe that the two had truly been so happy if his mother could just abandon him so easily. Smiles were nice but Hoseok couldn’t trust them now.

His mother had smiled at him when she asked him to close his eyes, after all.

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Growing up in the orphanage was rough.

Hoseok didn’t want to be there but he had tried running away once and it hadn’t worked out well for him, so he was stuck.

He hated the environment. He was surrounded by kids who were in similar situations but they were all just as miserable as him and twice as angry. He often fell asleep to the sound of screaming and crying and it only made him feel even more miserable. He hated everyone around him and the few that he didn’t hate weren’t liked enough to even try calling them friends.

He had no intention of making any more deep connections when they could be severed as easily as scissors to a string. What was the point?

He didn’t see the point in a lot of things anymore and getting close to anyone was at the top of that list. The second he made good friends with someone in the orphanage, they would just get adopted and he would never see them again.

He had tried, once, when he had first gotten there. His bunkmate was the same age as him, and shared a similar personality to Hoseok. His name was Baekhyun and the two spent a lot of time together and just when Hoseok started to think that maybe being in the orphanage wouldn’t be so bad, Baekhyun got adopted and didn’t even bother to say bye to Hoseok.
He didn’t try a second time.

Even if he made friends with someone else and they didn’t end up getting adopted there was no
promise that they would keep contact when they moved out of the orphanage.

Hoseok could only take being abandoned so many times.

Even years after he had first been brought there, he hadn’t adjusted at all.

He knew that his best bet on getting out of the orphanage was to be adopted by a nice family so
that he could live a comfortable and pleasant life.

But the very thought made him physically ill.

He hated the weekly adoption rotation, the time where prospective parents would look over the
orphaned children being kept there as if they were products on sale. They picked the kid that
looked the most well-kept, the most well-mannered, the ones with the brighter smiles and puppy-
dog eyes.

At first, Hoseok would cry during those meetings because the idea of being picked up like a stray
toy that was left on the street hurt him too deeply to put on the pretense of being perfectly okay. He
honestly couldn’t help but to cry and the matrons running the facility would always lecture him so
strongly afterward that it only made him cry harder.

As he got older, though, he eventually got over the idea. Though, that didn’t mean that he was any
more okay with it. He wasn’t a stray toy that someone could pick up, dust off, and make their own.

He didn’t want to be adopted and he made his stance on that loud and clear.

Rather than crying, he just avoided going to them at all, either specifically leaving the boarding
house for a while when he knew that those meetings were being held or hiding from the matrons
when they looked for him.
He didn’t want a “new family” or a new mother and father. He was fine on his own. He already had one father and one mother and both had ended up abandoning him in the end.

What was to stop a new family from doing the same?

---

All the orphanage children were given monthly sessions of therapy.

They were given in an attempt to make sure that all of the kids were able to have guidance in the process in getting over their various traumas. Hoseok knew that it was just a way of making sure that all of the kids were able to function properly and were able to be deemed “adoptable”. It was bullshit but, even though he had no intention of getting adopted, the sessions still helped him to some degree.

Hoseok wasn’t particularly talkative during the sessions but apparently the few things that he said paired with his frequent sobbing attacks, shaking attacks, random bursts of anger, and sometimes manic behavior was enough to warrant sending him to a specialist.

He no longer met the orphanage’s therapist at the boarding house, instead he was driven by one of the matrons to a psychiatrist specializing in children psychology. Hoseok thought it was an unnecessary hassle but he also sort of hated the man that he usually spoke to so the woman he spoke to in the office closer to the city, was a welcome change.

It was around the age of twelve when he began to hear all sorts of words passed around.

Depression.

Anxiety Disorder.

Bipolar Depression.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
Munchausen’s Syndrome.

The last was the only one that stuck and he only heard it after he was introduced to the third specialist. None of them could truly figure out what exactly was wrong with him, especially because his symptoms changed at the drop of a hat. Hoseok didn’t really understand it either but he just knew that he constantly felt terrible and none of the medicines that were prescribed to him helped in any way.

He didn’t understand what Munchausen’s Syndrome meant at first, and he was too uninterested to care. He had a slew of other things wrong with him. Why did that one matter?

But when the specialist sternly called for his attention and told him that he didn’t actually suffer from any of the other things that they had previously diagnosed him with, he had started to pay attention.

Apparently, he’d gotten so fucked up in the head that he was literally giving himself false mental illnesses.

He was prescribed medication but because his symptoms were so varied, there was no way to know what would actually help him treat the syndrome.

It was probably stupid, but he felt sort of justified in the fact that there was actually something very wrong with him. It was easier when his problems weren’t something that he could help. It helped ease his mind against the belligerent thoughts that all told him it was his fault that his mother had left him.

---

The most frustrating thing about the orphanage was how miserable the mood was even though the matrons tried desperately to force positivity.

Hoseok wasn’t a person who enjoyed feeling sad so he was thankful for the matron’s almost desperate struggle to keep up a lighthearted atmosphere. He often joined in and forced a smile to his mouth and cheer to his voice because it usually made him feel better than wallowing in all of his sadness.
The problem was that once he started to take the new medication that was prescribed to him, he found it ten times harder to muster a smile when he didn’t actually want to.

The medication was numbing and made Hoseok feel sluggish and lethargic. He felt like he had less energy than usual and it took much more energy than before to do even menial tasks like bathing and eating.

And though it made him feel like that, there was a plus to it that kept him taking the pills.

The numbness.

When he took those pills, all the voices in his head stopped shouting at him, his heart didn’t clench everytime something reminded him of his mother, and for a few hours of the day he didn’t feel like crying.

It was nice. Blissful even, to not be constantly assaulted by the weight of his emotions every second of every day.

Honestly, Hoseok liked the feeling even if it made him feel tired and lethargic all the time. He even slept better, that same recurring nightmare appeared less and less. So, who could blame him if he took one more than the recommended intake was?

It wasn’t like he was trying to shove five of them down his throat at the same time. He just wanted to keep the consistent blissful feeling going as long as he was awake.

As long as he could keep the smile on his face he didn’t really think it was that big of a deal.

---

Hoseok discovered dance by chance.

There were many people that he considered acquaintances in the orphanage. Though, they were all
around his age or older since he tried to stay away from the younger ones. Those were the kids that were adopted more often. There wasn’t any point in getting close to them.

However, there were a group of boys that he spent a lot of time with. They were all around his age and they often hung out together and watched music videos and other funny things on the internet. By chance, Hoseok happened to be paying more attention than usual to them and caught sight of a dance practice video for some popular song that the group of them were into.

They ooh-ed and awe-ed over the intricate and powerful dance moves and Hoseok couldn’t tear his eyes away from the dancers on the screen. He was entranced by the way that they moved their bodies in perfect sync and breathing a life into their movements that Hoseok didn’t know was even possible.

When the video ended, Hoseok’s heart was racing and he urgently asked the boys to replay it. He usually didn’t speak up like that as they were doing something, so they merely gave him a strange look and did as he asked. Hoseok payed even more attention to the dancer’s movements the second time, ingraining them into his brain.

He made a mental note of what song they were dancing to and continued to watch as the boys went through more dance videos by different groups of people and even a solo dancer who caught Hoseok’s attention even more aggressively. There was something about the single dancer going through the routine by himself that was powerful and commanding in a different way than the group dances had been. There was more creativity, more effortlessness, more freedom not being restricted to dancing with other people beside him.

Hoseok was thirteen when he discovered his love of dance.

From that day watching the dance practices, he snuck outside at night and played the songs on his mp3 player, recalling the dance moves that he’d seen and making the parts that he forgot up.

It wasn’t long until one until one of the matrons discovered him. She’d given him an earful about sneaking outside and not being in bed when he was supposed to be but the woman had smiled kindly as she complimented him and told him that he could take dance lessons if he really wanted to.

Of course, he had said yes.
He was a little annoyed at being taken in as a charity case, since he was receiving his lessons for free as a gracious offer from the closest studio, but he had little to complain about. He loved the practice room with it’s fingerprint laden mirrors and shiny wood floors with scuff marks across it. He didn’t even mind the odor that it started to get after they’d been practicing for a few hours.

It felt like home. It felt like somewhere that Hoseok belonged.

Something about dancing allowed him to completely dissociate from everything. There were no worries, no stress, only his body and the music having a beautiful conversation. The people at the studio encouraged him endlessly and marveled at his innate skill. He learned choreography faster than people that had been dancing longer than he’d been alive. Dancing was the one time that Hoseok allowed himself to feel hopeful for the future. As long as he could dance, he was confident that he would find a way to be happy.

The medicine for his syndrome made dancing hard, since no matter how much he slept or how much caffeine he ingested he still lacked energy. He just didn’t have the stamina that he needed to dance at his best so he stopped taking them.

He felt the things that the medication was suppressing in full force when he stopped but even still, it was nowhere as bad as it was before he started taking them, which he saw as a good sign. It meant that he was getting better.

He certainly felt better.

---

High school was far better than middle school. Hoseok was doing much better mentally and thanks to that he was able to form more friendships than he ever had before. None of them were particularly deep or meaningful relationships but Hoseok was scared to ask for any more so he held people at an arm’s length. It would probably bother most people, but to Hoseok it was more than he could ever hope for.

He’d been dancing for years now and even competed in a few competitions, some of which he was proud to say he won. He was involved in as many clubs, sports, and activities as he could handle at school. It wasn’t because he was particularly interested in any of them, but he enjoyed meeting new people and being nice. It may have been because of his upbringing in the boarding house, but he couldn’t help but to try and put a smile on the faces of everyone around him.
Plus, he liked to keep busy. Too much time with himself and his thoughts led to nothing good and he had a much better chance of keeping the recurring nightmare away if he was totally exhausted by the time his head hit the pillow.

He may not have been particularly close to anyone but people depended on him for a variety of things and he had proven himself to be dependable. His psychiatrist would probably come up with some complex reason for that desire but Hoseok didn’t need to be told. He knew that it was because he enjoyed feeling needed and appreciated. And if he happened to help someone and make them smile in the process, then that was even better.

So, it wasn’t really surprising that, as a result of Hoseok’s friendly disposition and helpful nature, he was almost always surrounded by people.

Various people from his class, clubs, groups, activities, and sports often spoke to him and he hadn’t realized how lonely he had made himself by rejecting relationships with others until then. It hadn’t really bothered him before, which is why he likely hadn’t noticed what the empty feeling in his chest really was. But now that he recognized it, he couldn’t bare the thought of being that lonely again.

Though, that wasn’t to say that his shallow friendships filled the emptiness in his heart. They didn’t.

They just made it a bit better.

It was obvious that Hoseok wasn’t going to adopted. He hadn’t wanted to, and even if he did, at this point the chances were incredibly slim. The percentage of orphaned teens that got adopted was dismal, at best.

And as Hoseok entered his final year of high school, the reality of his situation weighed heavily on him. He would be expected to get a job and move out of the boarding house after he graduated. Which meant that soon he would no longer have the now familiar comfort of the orphanage. He would be on his own.

The idea scared him. Not because he was afraid to support himself and take care of himself, but because he was scared of being truly alone. He had built nothing but shallow relationships around him. Even the matrons, who had been raising him for the past decade were not people that he considered to be close to him. Sure, he was closer to some of them than others but they were also
people that he held at arm’s length.

He was scared to make relationships, worried that as soon as he did, they would abandon him too. But he had never before considered the possibility of someone who wasn’t that close to him hurting him by abandoning him. If none of his relationships were meaningful then the second that they stopped being convenient for the people involved, wouldn’t that mean that they would still end up leaving him?

That was the thought that scared him the most.

So, while he had been opposed to it before, he went into his senior year of school with the intent to make some new meaningful friends. Sure, there was a possibility that they would leave him in the end but his psychiatrist had been preparing him for the feeling of separation for years. He’d constantly been told that the aversive type of separation anxiety Hoseok practiced would only make it so that he was always alone. Hoseok had scoffed at that when he first heard it, but he understood it more as he got older.

Constantly pushing people away in fear of being hurt by them wasn’t a healthy way of living, and Hoseok had to push past that fear to begin getting over his trauma.

That’s why he hadn’t thought much about approaching the lonely looking boy that he always saw at lunch. He was sure that the boy was in a lower grade than him since Hoseok had only recently begun to see him around often. There was no particular reason that Hoseok walked over to his empty table and sat down with him.

He had seen the boy talking and laughing with people before, but he was always alone at lunch and maybe it was the familiar look of loneliness in his eyes that pulled Hoseok in.

Park Jimin was a year younger than Hoseok and much less shy than he appeared.

Hoseok worried that their initial conversation would be awkward, even though he trusted his personality to dispel any potentially awkward social interactions, he was just randomly going up to some kid that he’d never even said a word to before. But his worries were unnecessary.

Jimin didn’t even seem that weirded out by Hoseok’s sudden appearance in front of him. The younger was the one who struck up conversation after Hoseok greeted him and introduced himself and then they were talking about all the different shows that they watched and their favorite
movies and Hoseok found himself disappointed when the bell rang and announced the end of lunch.

So, he visited Jimin’s table again the next day. The younger seemed almost more surprised to see him the second time as if he wasn’t expecting to ever see Hoseok again.

Hoseok would be stupid to not want to talk to Jimin again. Talking to the younger was so much better than the meaningless conversations that Hoseok held with others just to seem polite. He was actually interested in what the younger had to say and knew that Jimin was equally as curious to hear what Hoseok said. They were somehow the perfect match.

They liked the same genres of music, the same types of movies, and watched the same cartoons. Talking to Jimin was easy and Hoseok made sure to both ask for the younger’s number so they could stay in touch and invite him to actually go and see that movie that was definitely going to be as bad, if not worse, than they thought it was going to be.

Telling people that his mother abandoned him and that he was raised in an orphanage was not something that Hoseok openly told anybody. He hated the pity in people’s eyes when he told them and worried that they were going to treat him differently after but he didn’t worry about any of that with Jimin. There was a look in the younger’s eyes sometimes that Hoseok knew reflected his own. The look of an old hurt and the familiar tone of forced cheer.

Hoseok could tell that Jimin was nowhere as fine as the younger was pretending to be.

So, he told him.

After, he looked at Jimin hesitantly, wanting to know what was causing that faraway look in his eyes but not knowing if it was okay to actually ask out loud. Jimin had looked almost panicked for a moment before he calmed down and shot Hoseok a careful smile, quickly coming up with words of sympathy for Hoseok’s situation.

Hoseok pushed a little harder and asked Jimin a little more directly if he had any dark secrets of his own to spill. The younger had just laughed with practiced ease and denied that he did, even though they both knew it was a lie.

Hoseok wasn’t a dick though, and understood that Jimin wasn’t ready to talk about it, so he had changed the topic and shifted back into the happy-go-lucky attitude that Jimin was used to.
Hoseok knew that Jimin was nowhere as put together as he tried to appear to be but there was no way he could have ever expected anything that day at the bus stop to happen.

When he had seen Jimin, looking like actual death and visibly struggling to keep steady on his feet, he had known something was wrong.

Jimin always looked impeccable. His skin was kept smooth and moisturized, any blemish covered by what Hoseok could only guess was some sort of makeup, hair was perfectly brushed and not a strand was out of place and he always dressed tidily, shirt tucked in neatly and tie hung securely in place.

That day Jimin didn’t meet any of those usual appearances. He looked like he had simply pulled himself out of bed and struggled into some clothes.

Hoseok was immediately worried, but he was more worried about making Jimin uncomfortable so he forced his voice into something casual and made a joke about the younger studying.

Jimin had muttered something barely intelligible and Hoseok had to help him stand, seriously concerned that the younger would just fall back down if he continued to try alone.

He asked Jimin once again if he was okay, frowning at the younger’s strange behavior. He wondered whether or not he should force Jimin to walk back home, the strange way that the younger was acting was garnering attention and various pairs of curious eyes began to fall on theme.

Jimin nodded jerkily and Hoseok could see a flush creep up Jimin’s neck and then onto his face and ears and he hastily pulled out of the older’s grasp.

Then, as if in slow motion, Jimin fell to the ground and Hoseok’s heart dropped into his stomach as he desperately grabbed for the younger, shouting out his name in panic. He was too late though, and watched with wide eyes as Jimin collapsed.
It would have been worrisome enough if Jimin had just fallen, but he was also convulsing on the ground now and his eyes were rolling up into the back of his head.

To be honest, it looked like Jimin had been possessed by some sort of spirit but maybe that was just because Hoseok had seen so many movies. There was only so many things to do back at the orphanage. Fortunately, he didn’t only watch horror movies, in fact watching that genre was rare, and he remembered that if someone was convulsing the way that Jimin was people usually turned them onto their side so they wouldn’t choke on their own vomit or bite their tongue off.

Hoseok’s heart was beating erratically in his chest as he bent down over Jimin and forced him to roll over. There was attention on them now, shocked gasps and hushed whispers, Hoseok was trying to stay calm but he really had no idea what to do. Thinking quickly, he searched Jimin’s pockets and pulled out the younger’s phone.

He looked into the group observing the situation and beckoned one of them to come and help him keep Jimin from thrashing too much. A girl that Hoseok had spoken to a few times before stepped forward and stated that it looked as though Jimin was having a seizure and that they shouldn’t try to restrain him, they should only try to keep him from hurting himself.

Hoseok nodded jerkily and unlocked Jimin’s phone, thankful that the younger had given him the password a while ago. He typed in the number for emergency services and told the operator that answered what had happened and where they were. The woman told him that an emergency vehicle was on the way after asking a few questions about Jimin’s situation. She seemed very worried that he had just started to convulse randomly and kept questioning whether or not there was anything coming out of his mouth whether that be saliva, blood, or vomit. Hoseok had glanced at Jimin, equally concerned of this but the younger had gone still and appeared to be unconscious now. He hung up with the operator after being assured that emergency services were headed their way.

Soon, the bus arrived. The driver realized that something was wrong and got off of the bus to talk to Hoseok about the situation for a few minutes. Once the man understood what had happened he vowed to wait until emergency services arrived before leaving. Most of the students waiting at the bus stop boarded the bus though there were a couple of students, including the girl that had warned him to not restrain Jimin, that were waiting with him.

Hoseok wondered if they were just being nice or if they actually were Jimin’s friends, though he’d never seen the younger talking to any of them. Honestly, Jimin was often approached by people that attempted to initiate conversation with him but for whatever reason, the younger never seemed that open to having a long conversation with anyone other than Hoseok.

It wasn’t as if Jimin wasn’t liked, the entire student body practically adored him and that was something that Hoseok had known before meeting him. He had heard the name Jimin often but he
had no idea that the kid who was almost always alone was the owner of the name.

Hoseok had seen Jimin interact with others a few times since they had been friends and the younger was always cordial and friendly, smiling widely whenever someone approached him, but he never let the conversation go deeper than casual pleasantries. It was almost as though the younger was waiting for the other person to make the conversation deeper, unaware of how standoffish he appeared even as he smiled with a near rehearsed pleasantness.

Hoseok was purposely overly friendly to everyone he met. He knew that taking charge of conversation often made people more comfortable talking to him, and he had always tried especially hard to do that for Jimin. It had taken a while to get to actually know the younger, and as Hoseok slipped past the various walls that Jimin had up he had no idea what would lie behind the strongest fortification. He had stumbled upon it when he had indirectly asked Jimin to tell him about his own issues in the way that he had in telling the younger about his mother and being raised in the orphanage. He had seen Jimin’s face drop for an instant and knew that there was something there but then Jimin had given him that practiced smile and the wall had popped up right in front of his face.

Honestly, Hoseok had been wondering about what Jimin was hiding ever since. But now, staring at his closest friend lying unconscious on the ground, he was worried about the consequences of that final wall falling down.

His attention fell back to the phone in his hand. He worried his lip between his teeth for a second before coming to the decision. With shaking hands he unlocked the phone again and scrolled through the younger’s contacts until he found the one that he was looking for.

The phone rang a few times before picking up and a woman’s notably irritated voice could be heard over the line.

“Jimin? What is it?” Jimin’s mother demanded. “Aren’t you supposed to be at school? Why are you bothering me at work?”

“Uh… this isn’t Jimin. I’m his friend, Hoseok.” Hoseok knew there was a shake in his voice but he couldn’t do anything about it, nor could he do anything about the shaking in his limbs.

The woman’s voice suddenly turned apprehensive and he could hear shuffling like she was walking somewhere, the background noises were quieter now so Hoseok assumed she had gone somewhere more private.
“Why are you calling me from my son’s phone? Did something happen?” Hoseok didn’t miss the lack of surprise in her voice and vaguely wondered if this wasn’t the first time something like this had happened to Jimin.

“Yes, something did happen. I think that Jimin had a seizure at the bus stop.” Hoseok explained. “I called emergency services already, they’re on their way right now. I just thought that someone should probably tell you, so…”

The line was quiet for a moment and just as Hoseok was about to check to see if the line had disconnected, Jimin’s mother began speaking again though Hoseok found himself wishing that the line had disconnected.

“Did you say something to my son?” The woman hissed, all pleasantry gone from her tone and replaced with ice cold frostiness. Hoseok blinked and had the sudden realization that the woman was angry with him.

“W-what?” Hoseok spluttered, shocked by the sudden change. “No! Of course not! Jimin is my friend! He didn’t really seem okay today so I was about to tell him to stay home for the day but then he just collapsed suddenly.”

“You mean that I’m supposed to believe that my son, who hasn’t had a seizure in over a year, just so happens to make friends with you and by chance suddenly has another seizure?”

Hoseok’s mouth dropped open and his eyes stung with unshed tears. He could not keep up with what was happening at that moment but it had been hard enough to just talk to his friend’s mother, knowing that it was the right thing to do. Now, it seemed as if the woman was blaming him for her son’s condition, something that Hoseok had previously had no idea about.

Though, as her words sunk in, Hoseok also found it strange. If the only variable in the situation was Hoseok, himself, then wasn’t it likely that it did have something to do with him? It wasn’t as if he totally understood Jimin. They’d only been friends for less than a year. He could have caused something like this to happen without even realizing it.

The realization that what just could have happened could have been his fault had Hoseok feeling like ice cold water had just been poured over his head. He felt dizzy and uncoordinated as his head roared with scathing words and insults. He was worried he would just start crying but managed to take a steadying breath.
“I didn’t know he had seizures like this.” Hoseok managed to say even though it felt like his world was swaying.

“Well, if he didn’t tell you about it himself then that makes me even more suspicious of you.” The woman scoffed. “Stay away from my son from now on. You are obviously not helping his situation and I don’t want him to spend the rest of his high school career in a hospital room.”

She hung up pointedly, before Hoseok could even formulate a response and left him feeling like an utter piece of shit.

Hoseok numbly turned off the phone and held it clenched tightly in his hands. He had never felt more guilty.

Eventually the emergency vehicle arrived and paramedics rushed out with a stretcher in tow. They bombarded Hoseok with questions and after getting answers to most of them, they wheeled Jimin into the back of the vehicle. Just before they shut the doors they asked what Hoseok’s relationship was to Jimin.

An uncomfortable lump had formed in Hoseok’s throat and he struggled to speak over it.

“I’m just… a classmate.” The words stung on the way out of his mouth and left a residual pain after he spoke. The paramedics nodded and moved to close the doors but Hoseok suddenly remembered what he had in his hand and hurried to give it to them.

“It’s his phone. I called his mother already, so she’s probably on her way down to the hospital.”

As soon as they had appeared, the emergency services were gone, taking Jimin with them.

The rest of the students that had been waiting, boarded the bus and with a final glance at the retreating vehicle, Hoseok stepped onto the bus as well. He didn’t know how on Earth he was supposed to focus on his classes after what had just happened but he would manage somehow.
Hoseok had convinced himself throughout the day that he should go and see Jimin in the hospital after school. They were friends, after all, and Hoseok was worried. He had never actually seen anyone have a seizure before but after witnessing it firsthand, he found himself wishing that he would never have to see it again. It was probably one of the scariest things that he had ever seen.

He wondered if Jimin was feeling better. If the younger had woken up. If he had actually gotten any rest since the morning.

Then he remembered what Jimin’s mother had said to him and his thoughts shifted.

He wondered if Jimin hated him. If the younger blamed him for what happened. If he had grown used to the idea of never talking to Hoseok again.

So, rather than going to go and visit Jimin in the hospital, he headed home to the orphanage.

After digging around in his drawers for nearly half an hour, he found what he was looking for. The old prescription he still had for his Munchausen’s Syndrome. With shaking hands, he shook out two of the pills and without hesitation popped both of them into his mouth and swallowed them dry. He took in a deep breath as the pills eased down his throat and made his way to his bed. He had dance practice later on, but he didn’t have the energy to dance. He felt drained and a bit like he was being crushed with the weight of guilt. He crawled under his covers even though it was still pretty early in the afternoon and shut his eyes. He knew sleep wouldn’t come to him with how loudly his head was buzzing with thoughts but he could at least shut the rest of the world out for a while.

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Hoseok felt guilty. And as each day passed that he didn’t go see Jimin in the hospital or text the younger to ask how he was doing he felt even more guilty.

He felt guilty that he was jealous that Jimin had a protective mother who would snap at her son’s friend, thinking that he may have harmed her son in some way.

He felt guilty that he may, in fact, actually have been the cause of Jimin’s seizure.
Worst of all, he felt guilty that he couldn’t build up the courage to go and find out if his closest friend was okay. He should, he knew that he should, even if Jimin hated him and even if his mother told him to stay away. But he was scared to find out what happened next. He couldn’t help feeling as though Jimin’s mother had a point and that Jimin’s seizure had, in fact, been his fault. Even if it wasn’t his fault, there was a chance that he would cause a seizure the next time or even that he would hurt Jimin further.

He didn’t know nearly as much about the person he considered his closest friend as he initially thought. He found himself wondering how many walls were behind the one that he had found, just how much Jimin was hiding from him.

As it was, it didn’t seem like he would be finding out any time soon.

Jimin hadn’t returned to school ever since the incident at the bus stop.

People at school were buzzing about it for about a week, bus as time passed, Jimin’s name faded from their mouths like a distant memory. Hoseok felt like he was the only one that hadn’t forgotten. He missed sitting at lunch with Jimin, talking and laughing with him. The younger was the first real friend that he had ever made and though he regretted that they weren’t talking at all anymore, it was far too late to suddenly contact the younger now nearly a month after the initial incident.

Well, Hoseok had thought that he was only one who had missed Jimin’s presence but another friend of his mentioned him while they were sitting down for lunch.

“Hey… what happened to that other kid you usually hang out with?” Taehyung asked, leaning forward in his seat and engaging with Hoseok who had been unusually quiet during the lunch period. He was too busy worrying about Jimin to pay attention to the conversation around him.

His attention snapped to Taehyung though, as he suddenly realized he was being spoken to.

“What?”

“That kid you were always hanging out with?” Taehyung repeated. “Well, I guess I shouldn’t call him a kid, I’m pretty sure we’re in the same grade. Didn’t he get sick or something? Is he alright?”
Hoseok shrugged. “His name is Jimin. He had a- uh…. a seizure.”

Taehyung’s eyes nearly bulged out of his head and the conversation seemed to get the attention of some of the others at the table.

“Wait, what? He had a seizure?” Jeongguk gasped.

“Is he okay?” Namjoon asked, concern lacing his tone.

Hoseok sighed at the attention and forced a reassuring smile onto his face.

“He’s fine, just recovering. I’m sure he’ll be happy to have all these people worrying about him.” He lied smoothly and continued to force the smile on his face as his friends heckled him before returning to their original conversation about… whatever it was that they were talking about.

Hoseok fought to calm the ugly feeling blooming in his chest. He shook his head and cleared the sudden barrage of thoughts from his mind. It wasn’t like he could go back in time and take back his actions, and lack thereof. He’d already made his decision to stay away.

Jimin was probably better off without him anyways.

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As the end of high school approached, Hoseok began applying to universities. He knew that he would also need to move out of the orphanage’s boarding house, the place that he had reluctantly called home over the past ten years, and a college dorm seemed like the logical next step.

He wasn’t especially smart, but he was passionate. Unfortunately, his passion was for dance, which was an extremely unstable thing to make a career out of until you had seasoned years of experience under your belt. Hoseok didn’t have years of technical or even classical training. Most of his dance skill was due to his own teaching skills and honing those skills was done in a slight run down dance studio just so far outside of the city that citing it as experience was basically the same as none.
He knew that. He didn’t have experience or smarts but he had support.

If he was just given a chance, he would make it work. A degree wasn’t even his goal, it was just something that he could use to be recognized for his talent. In truth, it didn’t really matter what he had to do as long as it involved dancing, he would be happy.

Still, he couldn’t help but fall into the trap of researching all of the dance schools in the country and the different instructors that taught at them, watching video after video of dance practices and choreographies and idols performing the songs that alumni from these schools created.

He couldn’t help but dream, and his dream was to go to Seoul’s School of the Arts.

His grades had never been better than adequate but he thought that maybe a higher GPA would give him a higher chance of getting in so he busted his ass over the last few school semesters.

Of course, he wasn’t that bold and applied for several schools in the area. Cheaper ones too, ones that he may actually be able to afford. But he didn’t really care about those, his heart was set on the School of the Arts.

He worked with his dance studio to record videos of himself dancing as application submissions, making sure to send forth his best work.

He was confident about the routine, it was his best yet and with the steady increase of his grades, there was no way that he wouldn’t make it in. His friends, dance teachers, and the matrons couldn’t all be wrong about his talent. So, all that was left to do was wait until he got his shiny acceptance letter and took a few more steps down path of his dreams.

Strangely, when the letter came in the mail and he opened it with shaking fingers, shoving away the younger boys at the orphanage who were too nosey for their own good, the thought hadn’t even crossed his mind that he would be rejected.

And yet, there were the words at the very bottom, after all the babbling about how honored the school was to receive his submission and wishing him the best for the future.

Unfortunately, we regret to inform you that we are unable to offer you admission to Seoul School of the Arts. As a school with such a low student intake capacity we must decline applicants who do
not meet the minimum gross household income needed to meet the yearly tuition fees. Please know that this decision in no way diminishes your application. We were humbled by your talents and achievements and by the commitment you demonstrated in all of your academic and extracurricular endeavors.

Disappointment washed over him in a cold wave, leeching the nervous excitement out of him and replacing it with anguish.

He read over the letter a second time in case he had somehow read it wrong even though he could probably have recited every word after reading it once before shakily setting it down beside him and turning his attention to the letters from the other schools that he applied to.

His heart was beating loudly in his ears as he read similarly worded rejection letters.

There were only two schools that he had actually been accepted to. Both were the closest options which meant that they were outside of Seoul and therefore just as irrelevant as his dance studio. He couldn’t even be happy about those two acceptance letters as both referenced the orphanage he was from in the body of the text which meant that they partnered with the orphanage and would probably accept anybody that applied.

It was… it was like pity. That same disgusting tone of voice, expression of face, and now form of sympathy that he’d grown to hate more than anything else in his life. Pity didn’t mean anything. It was just something that other people used as an excuse to do things that they normally wouldn’t just so that they could feel better about themselves. Those acceptance letters weren’t because of Hoseok or anything that he had tried so hard to do. It felt like more of a slap in the face than the rejection letters had.

He threw the letters to the side, wishing that he had a lighter so that he could burn them and make them disappear as he wanted to. He huffed out a laugh, that was more of a sob since tears were openly running down his face now, and made his way over to his personal drawer in the room. The familiar bottle of numbness called out to him and he snatched it up before retreating to the bathroom quickly, shutting the door behind him with more force than necessary.

He stumbled over to the sink and glanced at his reflection. He looked like a frenzied mess and his face was streaked with tears. He guessed that the outside reflected the inside, because he felt like a complete mess.

His mother suddenly abandoning him did more damage than he would ever admit it did. He felt worthless, like his very existence on this Earth was bothersome to everyone on it. If his own
mother couldn’t stand to deal with him then who would?

They were thoughts that he’d pushed to the back of his mind for the sake of his own sanity but they reemerged in situations like this.

His dreams had just shattered to dust in front of his eyes. He had been so hopeful, so naive to think that he had actually deserved to have anything good happen to him.

He nearly laughed at the thought.

What a joke.

He’d only set himself up for failure when failure was already inevitable in the first place. At least if he hadn’t gotten so full of himself, he would have anticipated this and it wouldn’t hurt him so badly.

He tore his eyes away from his reflection and focused on the prescription bottle in his hands. Before he could even think better of it, he screwed off the cap and shook out a handful of the pills. He stared at them for a moment, warring against his mind, but he didn’t want to think anymore he just wanted the pain to stop. He turned on the tap and shoved the numerous pills, obviously way over the prescribed intake, down his throat along with the lukewarm water.

Hoseok hadn’t been trying to kill himself.

Really, he hadn’t been.

He had just been overwhelmed by his emotions and wanted to numb himself to them.

But no matter how much he tried to convince the resident Matron who acted as his caregiver in the hospital or the hospital staff of that, none of them believed him. He understood why, he admitted that it looked bad. The rejection letters were strewn across his bedroom, he’d locked himself in the bathroom, and when they’d found him, he’d been unconscious on the tiles with the open
prescription bottle still in his and the rest of the pills spilled across the floor.

They’d called for emergency services and that’s how he ended up in a hospital bed with old women sobbing over him and doctors lecturing him about the long-lasting effects of medication abuse. He knew that what he’d done was stupid and that he’d probably fucked up all of his internal organs in some way.

He’d take it back if he could but unfortunately he didn’t have that luxury.

Being in the hospital was annoying. Hoseok hated the food, hated the way that people kept hovering around him as if he would jump out of the window if they took their eyes off of him. He deserved it though and appreciated their concern.

All of his medication had been confiscated and replaced with lower dosages. He was to be monitored carefully while taking them and he’d also lost the privilege of keeping them in his room. Now, they would have to be administered by a matron. At least, until he moved out. The dosages were lowered so that he would eventually be weaned off of the medication entirely.

Luckily, once they determined that he wasn’t at risk of jabbing a scalpel into his neck and ending it, he was set to be released. He had only needed to stay seventy-two hours but they were longest hours of his life and even with the visits from various people in the orphanage, he spent most of his time being bored out of his mind.

He was most certainly looking forward to being anywhere else but in his hospital room on the third day. Even though he had texted his friends and told his friends that he was in the hospital, he hadn’t been exactly truthful as to why he was admitted. It was easy enough to believe that he’d gotten a really bad flu and was too contagious for them to visit. At least he hoped it was believable.

Hoseok was mostly alone that day, a matron had stopped by to check on him in the morning and left him with a hug and promises that they would go out for breakfast tomorrow when she returned to pick him up. She had been sneaking him candy and cookies while he was in the hospital and thoroughly reminded him why she was his favorite.

He was free to walk around now so he was interested in checking out the rooftop performance area that the hospital had. He heard that there was always volunteer performers in the afternoon and he was looking forward to hearing live music and breathing in fresh, non-sterilized, air.
He got into the elevator and pressed the button that would lead to rooftop access, wondering what kind of music would be performed that day. He had no idea what kind of people volunteered to perform at hospitals.

On his ascent upwards, the elevator stopped and opened to let a passenger on.

“Going u-” Hoseok cut his question off mid-sentence as he realized who was standing in front of him. “Jimin?”

The younger looked just as surprised to see him, evident by his wide eyed stare. Hoseok hadn’t seen Jimin in months and though his body rushed with happiness and the urge to envelop the younger in a hug, he suddenly remembered the awkward circumstances in which the two had stopped talking.

“They’re just… uh…” He scratched the back of his head nervously. “Admitted. Just some standard health issues. I’ll be released tomorrow.”

He glanced at Jimin and released he also had a question.

“What are you doing here?”

Jimin swallowed and glanced away, crossing his arms over his waist. “Just… visiting someone.”

Hoseok struggled to not raise his eyebrows skeptically. He’d never seen the younger lie so blatantly to his face.
The air suddenly became incredibly awkward between them as they each struggled with what to say. Jimin seemed the most uncomfortable of the two and Hoseok felt endlessly guilty for causing this rift between them.

“Um, I’m… I’m sorry I never came to see you or asked if you were okay.” Hoseok apologized.

Jimin raised his gaze off of the floor for a second to glance at the older and shrugged half-heartedly.

“It’s fine.”

“It’s really not.” Hoseok argued, laughing nervously.

“... It’s not like you were obligated to or anything.” Jimin muttered.

Somehow the younger’s attitude was only making Hoseok feel worse.

“It was wrong.” He insisted. “We’re friends, I shouldn’t have done that.”

A long silence stretched between them as Jimin continued to stare at the floor and broadcast a body language that told Hoseok he’d rather be anywhere else but there at the moment. Just as Hoseok resigned to the idea that Jimin wasn’t going to respond, the younger looked up and faced him fully, a look almost akin to anger in his eyes.

“Then why did you?”

“What?” Hoseok breathed, shocked to be talked to so directly all of a sudden.

“Why didn’t you come visit me or ask if I was okay?”

Before Hoseok could even respond, the younger was firing off another question.
“Is it because you think I’m a freak?” Jimin demanded and Hoseok’s eyes widened. “It’s okay, you can say it, I’ve heard it before. I probably freaked you out and you didn’t know how to say that you didn’t want anything to do with me anymore, so you didn’t say anything at all.”

Hoseok frowned and shook his head in confusion. “What? No, Jimin, that’s not what I was thinking at all.”

Jimin was outright glaring at him now.

“Of course it was,” He spat. “That’s what everyone thinks, why should you be any different?”

“I… I don’t think that you’re a freak, Jimin. How does having a seizure make you a freak?” Hoseok sputtered, not understanding how those two things correlated at all. Jimin was about to speak again but Hoseok purposely cut him off.

“I spoke to your mother that day. I was the one that called her and emergency services. I had no idea that you had seizures so she sort of made it seem like it was my fault and I just felt really guilty. If I had really caused something like that to happen to you then I thought it would probably be for the best if I stayed away from you.”

Jimin’s face fell from one of undisguised anger to perplexed shock.

“What!? Of course it’s not your fault!” He yelped. “I was having seizures way before I even met you! It’s not your fault that I’m so fucked up!”

Jimin seemed like he surprised himself by his own words and the regret was written all over his face.

“I-I mean…”

Hoseok frowned as he came to a sudden realization.
“Jimin, can you tell me honestly why you’re at this hospital today?”

The younger swallowed audibly and broke eye contact.

“I…” He sighed. “I had a therapist appointment.”

Hoseok nodded. “I’m here because I overdosed on my medication that’s supposed to help tackle the symptoms of a syndrome I have that makes me believe I have mental illnesses when I actually don’t.”

Jimin’s eyes widened comically and then narrowed just as fast. “That’s not funny.”

Hoseok shrugged. “Good, because I wasn’t joking.”

Jimin’s eyes widened again. “Seriously? But you… you seem fine.”

“So did you before you had that seizure.” Hoseok pointed out with a smile. “I guess we’re both more fucked up than we appear.”

Jimin smiled in return and Hoseok wondered if the younger felt as silly about this entire situation as he felt. They had more in common than just their poor movie tastes and favorite cartoons. Hoseok wondered if that’s why he was draw to Jimin in the first place.

“Friends?” Hoseok asked, sticking his hand out and cocking his head to the side.

Jimin laughed, a real genuine sound that Hoseok hadn’t heard nearly enough times, and took Hoseok’s hand. He pulled suddenly, startling Hoseok and forcing them closer together. Jimin’s arms were around him and the younger was squeezing him tightly. Hoseok had no choice but to hug him in return, not that he was complaining.

“Friends.” Jimin promised.
Fun Fact

There’s a scene in the Run MV where J-Hope is in the hospital, sitting in a hospital bed, when Jimin comes to visit him. This is also reflected in not only the Euphoria, Theme of Love Yourself: Wonder video but in the Lie short film as well.
I Need U

Chapter Summary

[Chapter Recap]

Jin realizes that he made a mistake in leaving his friends and would do anything to fix that mistake. The next photograph takes him to a world too beautiful to exist in reality but even the most beautiful things hide an ugliness within them. Though Jin finds out that his friends are angels capable of extraordinary things, he falls prey to evil and ends up making yet another mistake.

Chapter Notes

Part 1 of 2.

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Opening his eyes once again was strange. Waking up completely disoriented and confused had happened to Jin so many times by now that he thought he’d be used to it. But his head was aching and his vision swam as he tried to adjust to the abrupt change and push down the sudden nausea that had rushed up to his throat.

He was in a room once again, laying on his back and staring up at a ceiling with crown moulding and gold lining. He turned his head and looked around. The room was a pale blue with Victorian wall panelling, all of it outlined in gold trim. The bed was situated underneath a window that was letting in bright white light, barely filtered by the white curtains falling over it.

He sat up, swinging his legs over the bed and rested his feet on the cold surface of the wooden floor. He looked down and saw a gentle pile of white lily petals just beyond where his feet were placed.

There was no sign of the sixth and final photograph.

Jin was at a complete loss.
Where he had felt tired and exhausted before, now he just felt overwhelmed to the point of numbness. He wondered what the proper emotional response to what he just went through was and whether or not he really was going crazy.

What was he supposed to do now? And how was he supposed to find the energy to do it?

He knew it had been stupid to agree to Taehyung’s request and it had certainly shown it’s consequences. But... Jin was left to wonder if he actually had done something terrible and if the consequences continued even after he left that world. He lifted a tentative hand up to his cheek where he had seen the crack forming before being knocked unconscious. He was clammy and cold but other than that there were no blemishes on his skin that he could feel.

But he had seen it. Yoongi had told him that he had sold his soul… but had he really?

And more importantly… had it even worked or had Taehyung just been trying to trick him the entire time?

He didn’t know. And with a heavy sigh, he realized that he likely wouldn’t find out the answer if he just continued to sit there on the bed. It took a while, but eventually he was able to pull himself to his feet with no lack of grunting or effort.

The room wasn’t particularly large, nor was the bed he’d been resting on, and it still mirrored that French style he had seen before with the wall panelling and deep blue of the carpet. The blue hue of the room was calming and he took his time looking around to see what was in it. It felt like this was the first time he had ever been able to explore freely in these “in-between” rooms. Usually he was walled in somehow with limited movement or visibility but he could see everything now and he could move around as he pleased.

There were numerous pieces of furniture around the room but the thing that stuck out to Jin the most were the empty picture frames scattered about as well as the soft brown wood of the piano tucked into a corner. It looked familiar to him, which was odd because he didn’t play piano, but then he realized that Yoongi had played one that looked similar before. The one that had burned in the music store. There was also a large cream dresser settled against the same wall at the opposite end that was chained shut with a large lock on the front and Jin couldn't help but wonder what the purpose of that was. What was in it that wasn’t supposed to be reached?

Then, his attention turned to the large double doors at the far end of the room.
They were a pale blue and matched the aesthetic of the walls, causing them to blend in and if it weren’t for all the markings he probably wouldn’t have even noticed them.

He walked closer so that he could inspect the door further. The markings looked like… scratches. Numerous scratches that cut through the thin layer of paint and revealed the soft wooden color underneath.

They were on the inside of the door though, which meant that someone had been trying to get out. Presumably, at least. He reached out a hand to pull the handle down, and his eyebrows raised in surprise as he found that the door pushed open easily.

He had been expecting it to have been locked. And since it wasn’t… did that mean he could leave the room?

He tested this theory, sticking his head out into the dim space and looking around. There was a long hallway in front of him with a single painting on the wall facing the door. It looked like a bird and since it was depicted in flight it gave off the appearance of bursting through something as the hind legs and wings dissolved into messy brush strokes and hard edges. He felt compelled to approach it and didn’t fight the feeling as his legs kicked into motion on their own.

The carpet was soft between his toes as he walked and as he glanced down at it, something starkly red against all the blue caught his attention. He stopped, squinting as he looked at the object, and stooped down so he could see it better.

It was an apple.

Brilliantly red and plump, with no hint of blemish in sight. But something about it seemed wrong. It was too perfect, too red, too saturated in this dim hallway. It was sat there as if it had been waiting for him and he was immediately filled with distrust.

It took more effort than it should have to look away and continue walking.

The wallpaper was strange. And though Jin initially thought it to be some sort of strange design, the more he looked at it, the more he realized that there was a figure in the middle of the design. He didn’t know what it was but it looked like some kind of strange Grecian creature. The legs of the figure were two large snakes and the heads curled up as if the thing was a walking octopus. In one hand the figure held what seemed to be a whip and in the other hand it held a round ball of
some sort. What really confused Jin, though, was the head of the creature. It was hard to tell exactly what it was meant to be but it looked like the head of a bird… sort of similar to a rooster.

It felt *important*, somehow. Perhaps because it was repeated over and over again on every wall in the hallway. But Jin had no idea what it was or what it meant.

He took a closer look at the painting before he passed it, turning the corner and squinting from the sudden influx of light. It was much brighter there, and his eyes struggled to adjust to the change.

There were framed paintings along every visible section of the walls here and Jin turned to his right to inspect the one closest to him.

Strangely, it wasn’t a painting at all and instead was what looked to be a photograph of the pier by the sea. His friends were sitting on the edge, wearing all white and facing away from the camera. Jin’s eyes moved to the next closest photograph and saw that it was mostly the same photograph but in this one they had all turned their heads so that they could look at the camera. It was horrifically creepy and Jin didn’t remember ever taking a photo like that.

He continued on down the wall, looking at the various photographs. There was one with Jeongguk, Yoongi, and a sleeping Hoseok. He remembered taking that one the day before they went to the sea.

Jin’s blood ran cold as he looked at another photograph. It was a good bit larger than the rest and it caught his attention because Jeongguk was the only one in it. Though, what made him stop and actually look at it was the fact that Jeongguk was bathed in bright light despite the obvious night hour of the background and was looking towards the camera with wide eyes. That wouldn’t be so bad on it’s own but the photo was being naturally framed from what appeared to be the *interior of a car*.

Jin looked away hurriedly as nausea rose up from the depths of his stomach and focused on another picture a bit further down that was around the same size. It was a portrait of Namjoon but rather than the comforting image of Jin’s longest friend, it was a portrait of the demonic Namjoon he had encountered that told him how much he hated him. The soulless black eyes gleamed at him as if the photo was laughing at him and Jin quickly turned away, walking to the other side of the hallway.

The other side didn’t offer any better photographs though, Jin found as soon as he laid eyes on a portrait photo of Yoongi. The younger looked normal at the very least, but it was obvious looking at it that the man was easily a decade older than he should have been. There was something about
his posture and expression that screamed loneliness and Jin looked away, disturbed by how those
cold, dead eyes of Min Yoongi seemed to be looking straight at him.

There were also many smaller photographs of the six of his friends together and apart, smiling in
some, crying in others. Some of them were photographs Jin remembered taking and the rest were a
complete mystery to him.

His eyes fell upon another sizeable portrait, this time one of Jimin. The younger was holding a pair
of shoes in his hands, looking forlornly into the camera with a single tear dripping from his eye
with the barren tree near the sea in the background. Jin’s heart ached looking at it and he wished he
would stop being forced to see Jimin sad so often. The younger deserved to be happy, but Jin was
having trouble remembering what his smiling face even looked like.

Moving forward, Jin came across a large photograph of what appeared to be Hoseok. The lighting
was terrible in the picture and beyond the deep purple hues and dark shadows it was hard to tell
what the actual subject of the photo was. The red of Hoseok’s hair stood out amongst the shadows
even as he looked down at the ground and large wings casted a shadow on the wall behind him.
The image looked foreboding somehow and Jin stared at it for a long moment before moving on.

What caught his attention next was easily one of the biggest frames in the entire hallway. It was
hard to tell who it was since they were wearing a mask but there was just a feeling Jin had as he
looked at it. The distinct familiarity and singularity of the man translated even through the
obscurity of the photograph.

There wasn’t a single visible tell as to who it was since the mask covered everything except for the
person’s hair and dark eyes that stared coolly from behind it. But Jin had no doubt in his mind as to
the identity of the masked figure.

It was Taehyung.

Jin didn’t know why he was wearing a mask or even why there was a single black tear running
down the face of the mask, but he did know that it was Taehyung who was under it. There was no
one else it could be.

Though it wasn’t just the masked figure that had drawn Jin’s attention. It was the fact that it was
the biggest out of all the other ones in the room and that it had a giant slash through it like someone
had taken a knife and vandalized it. The glass protecting the frame had shattered and was littered
on the floor beneath it, exposing the material of the photograph underneath.
Jin lifted up a finger to trace the jagged cut across it. The slash paired with the markings on the doors from before were... disconcerting, to say the least.

After a long moment, Jin looked back down the hallway, noticing for the first time that there were two arches that seemed to lead into different sections or rooms of the space and between them sat a vanity.

Jin approached the vanity hesitantly. Where there should have been reflective glass there was only that black glass from before. It was beautifully framed in ornate gold that looked like it was being tarnished with age. Strangely, as Jin approached it he realized that the glass only reflected himself and not the scenery behind him. He also noticed that the arches to either side of the vanity were different. The right one was rectangular in shape and a soft marbled shade of white and the other on the left was black with a triangular top.

His attention turned back to the vanity and he saw that above it were words distended from the wall. They were in the same material as the wall itself which is likely why he hadn’t seen them at first and now that he had, he realized that he wasn’t able to read them.

*Man muss noch Chaos in sich haben, um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können.*

The words were written in what seemed like... german?

Jin stared at the letters for a while, trying to make sense of them but he had no idea what the sentence meant. He opened his mouth, wondering if he could try to pronounce the words but his eyes widened in shock when he spoke.

*“One must have chaos within oneself to give birth to a dancing star.”*

What had he just said? Where had that come from? His eyes widened even further when he looked at the letters once again and found that same sentence echoing in his head as he tried to read it. Was that what the writing said? Had he just translated it somehow?

And if so... what did it mean?
Rather than delving deeper into that rabbit hole of confusion, Jin turned his attention back to the mirror. Before, he had only noticed that he was the only thing being reflected in the mirror but now that he was standing right in front of it he noticed something that made his heart leap up into his throat.

*The cracks in his skin were back.*

He lifted a shaking hand up to his face, staring intently into the mirror as he did and watched as his fingers touched exactly where the cracks were but he felt nothing.

There was a table right in front of the vanity and on the table sat a vase of lilies that Jin hadn’t noticed before. He was sick of seeing the white flower by now, he felt like burning them. His gaze went back to the mirror briefly before he noticed something strange. The flowers in the vase right next to him were definitely those white lilies that he was sick of seeing… so why was he seeing a purple flower in the reflection of the mirror?

Frowning, and bursting with curiosity, he tentatively reached out a hand and gently pressed the tips of his fingers to the glass of the mirror. He recoiled violently though, as the surface of the mirror rippled under his touch like water.

*Glass… should not be doing that,* he thought wildly as he watched the ripples spread across the surface, lessening in strength until they disappeared completely and the black glass regained its smooth surface. He touched the mirror again, with purpose this time, eyebrows furrowed in concentration, and after adding a bit more pressure his fingers permeated the surface of the mirror and he felt a cool breeze on them before he pulled them back in a panic.

Something *very* strange was going on here.

The mirror cleared again, revealing his pristine reflection once more but he no longer trusted what he was seeing. The mirror led *through* to somewhere. That much was obvious from the breeze he felt on his fingers, a breeze that was completely absent from the room he was standing in. Besides, it was pressed up against a wall so it wasn’t like his fingers were just coming out in the space between the wall and the mirror.

Which only begged the question: where *was* it going to?

Where did the mirror lead?
He was hesitant to find out, but his curiosity got the best of him and he found himself taking a deep
breath before pushing his hand further into the mirror. He pushed until the crook of his elbow
began to disappear and experienced a harsh moment of panic before he steeled himself and crawled
inside.

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His shoulder made contact with the ground first, knocking the wind out of him as he rolled over
from the impact. He blinked wildly for a moment, in stunned shock, struggling to regulate his
breathing as he tried to make sense of what he was looking at.

A ceiling, that much was for sure. He turned his head so that he could see more of the room and
was surprised to see how familiar it looked.

It felt like it had been ages since he had last seen it, which was probably why it took him a few
seconds to understand why it was so familiar. He was in his apartment, and more specifically his
bedroom, judging by the stand up mirror a few feet away from him.

He sat up slowly and tried to make sense out of what had just happened. His brain was struggling
to catch up since all rational reasoning had been thrown out the window.

He had crawled through a mirror, and judging by the slight fall and where he had landed as he
came out on the other side of it, he guessed that he had somehow come out through the stand up
mirror in his bedroom.

Which… didn’t make any more sense than anything else that was happening.

He stood slowly, feeling like a baby deer walking for the first time due to how unsteady he felt. It
was if gravity had reversed and the norm had become walking on the ceiling rather than the
ground.

Eventually he was able to stabilize himself and took a better look around the room. There were still
clothes stacked up on the chair he kept next to the mirror, his bed was unmade and messy, and
sunlight was shining in brightly from the windows.
He was hesitant to look into the mirror in case he was taken back into the hallway or some other layer of hell granted to him by the limbo world he seemed to be trapped in, but he hadn’t actually found or touched the sixth picture so he managed to convince himself that it would be okay. Besides, even after touching the photos he usually had to stay in the same place for a period of time before looking at his reflection took him back.

So, Jin lifted his head and looked into the mirror.

Nothing happened, which he was thankful for, but he was also confused as to why he was wearing the same clothes he’d been wearing the last time he had been in his apartment.

Well, actually, he remembered taking off the sweater he was wearing on top of his long sleeved shirt because he thought it would be too hot. Frowning, he reached down to the hem of the sweater and pulled it over his head. His arm knocked into something in the process and he heard the distinct sound of glass shattering before he could get his head out of the fabric.

He threw the sweater onto the pile of clothes building up on the chair and looked around to see what he had knocked over. There was glass, water, and a bit of potting soil in a mess on the floor. He assumed that before it had fallen it had been a vase housing flowers. He remembered that it had been there before but… weren’t those *lilies* in it? *White* lilies?

Jin felt a certain smugness about that since he’d begun to hate the sight of those flowers but now he had a mess to clean. He wasn’t sure what may have been in the vase before but wasn’t it just *too* coincidental that he had a vase full of the same white lilies that had been plaguing him in his apartment?

*Why was he even in his apartment anyways?*

That train of thought was rapidly cut off, though, as he noticed the notebook lying peacefully on the end table next to where the vase had been before. It’s red cover screamed familiarity and Jin knew what it was immediately upon setting eyes on it.

*Hye-su’s journal.*

The one that she had dropped when they had met serendipitously at those train tracks not so long ago. The one that he had kept in his possession for nearly a month before he was able to see her again and give it back to her. The one that contained the sketches of the mysterious “*smeraldo*”
flower that she loved so much.

The one Jin had given back to her a while ago.

So, why was it sitting on his end table so peacefully as if it wasn’t wrong for it to be there?

He reached out a shaky hand and picked it up, opening the pages gently as if they would disintegrate under his grasp. His eyes burned as he saw her familiar handwriting, doodles drawn all over the pages and eventually he turned to the page he was looking for.

The one that he had spend such a long time looking at that he knew he liked the girl who had written all over the page before he had even properly met her.

The page with the flower on it. The flowers that he had gone to great lengths to get for her and the flowers that she may have never even seen.

A tear splashed onto his cheek and left a hot trail behind before it dropped to the floor. His heart ached with that familiar pain that had overwhelmed that day he drove off the pier. It hurt, it hurt so much it felt like he was suffocating. The knowledge of her death had left him for the most part when he was dealing with all the strangeness happening around him, but now that he was, for the moment, peacefully standing in his room all of those memories came flooding back.

His phone’s familiar jingle rang out in the room, saving him from the dark path his thoughts were taking. He was grateful for the distraction.

His phone was in it’s usual place, on the nightstand beside his bed from charging it the night before. It was blinking with a new text message so he picked it up to see who it was.

Jin recognized the name on the message to be a classmate, and the contents of the message were asking him about some project that they were working on together. He only barely glanced at the words when he saw the date hovering above it on the lock screen. He typed in his password so quickly he nearly dropped the phone and rushed to navigate to his calendar.

August 30th.
The day that he met Hye-su. He blinked rapidly as his breathing sped up, pushing him to point of hyperventilating.

*Had he really... gone back?* He wondered, still staring at the letters on the screen as if they would change if he looked away for even a second.

And if he had... didn’t that mean that he could fix things? Was he actually being given that chance? Had the deal that he made with Taehyung actually worked?

He turned to look at the journal sitting on the end table. His heart dropped into his stomach at the sight of it.

It had been his fault that Hye-su had been there at all that day. So, would she live if he never returned her journal? If they never met, would she have been able to live the rest of her life peacefully? Would her parents not have to grieve their only child?

Though that would mean that Jin wouldn’t experience the euphoria that he had by texting her late at night, the random conversations that they would fall into after too many hours spent on assignments, the warmth in his chest he felt when she smiled at him, or the relief that he had felt knowing that someone actually cared for him and wanted to be with him. He wouldn’t experience the nervous feeling in the bottom of his stomach when he thought about being together with her. He wouldn’t experience the hope he’d felt for the first time in so long diving into the unknown.

He wouldn’t have her nor the endless happiness that she had brought him.

But Jin remembered the desperate screech of tires, the dull thud her body had made when it fell to the dark asphalt. He remembered the way his heart had deflated like a balloon and the sorrowful wail that her mother had released when the doctor had told her that her only child had died. And above all, he remembered the *guilt*. He remembered being so crushed with it that he wished it had been *him* that had been hit that night. After all, his parents would never have cried as hard for him as Hye-su’s had for her.

Because what did Jin have to offer the world? What benefit was he giving to those around him? He couldn’t make anyone feel as happy as Hye-su had made him feel, he wasn’t as graceful, or as sweet, or as selfless. He wasn’t even half as talented as her. She had been given a full ride scholarship for her incredible skill with the arts and though she was timid about it, she was good—*great* even. He hadn’t seen much of her work, but what he had seen had left him with a good feeling in his chest and an inspiration to do *better*.
It had felt like the world itself had died along with her.

His own happiness wasn’t worth depriving the future of someone as amazing as Yu Hye-su.

It would hurt, but selfishly keeping her to himself would end up hurting him more in the end. So, he made his decision.

If this was his version of a second chance, he wouldn’t squander it. Now that he knew more about the struggles that his friends were going through, he had a responsibility to do his best to fix it.

Starting with Jeongguk.

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Everything may not have started with Jeongguk’s accident but it was certainly seemed like the catalyst that set everything off. But more importantly, Jin was tired of his friends having to be so sad all the time. It wasn’t his place to intervene and he knew that Yoongi, especially, wouldn’t appreciate it but he had to do something.

From what he remembered, he had approximately a month to fix everything and keep things from turning into a complete disaster. Which meant that he had a lot of things to get done before then.

He wasn’t sure what was harder, going to class and pretending like nothing was wrong, or walking around campus knowing that he could come across Hye-su at any given moment.

Jin had only seen her once in the few days since making his decision to save her life. She had been a good distance away, talking to a friend cheerfully, and had looked just as beautiful as he remembered. He’d nearly cried at the sight of her, and even now he wasn’t sure whether he had cried out of relief, pain, or happiness. It was great to see her alive and well but it hurt worse than knives in his heart to not be able to talk to her, to hug her, to pull her close and tell her how much she meant to him, all the things that he wasn’t able to say to her before.

He reminded himself that he was doing it to save her and that helped him to cope a bit. But he still couldn’t help but to want to hear her voice again. He wanted to apologize to her, even if she
wouldn’t know what it was for, but he had no idea how much influence him meeting her for the first time would have, so he had grit his teeth together and walked in the other direction.

From then on, he had made sure to take the long way to that particular class which was luckily the only class he had that was near the art department.

One afternoon he had asked Jeongguk to meet him for lunch as soon as he had the time in between classes. It was hard to fathom but Jin had already sat through all of the lectures and done all of the assignments, so he’d taken a few days getting a head start on everything so that he could devote more time in the coming month without worrying about his grades.

Jeongguk had agreed immediately to the invitation, which wasn’t surprising because the boy would do anything if it meant he didn’t have to go home.

Which was something that actually made sense to Jin now. Jeongguk’s family treated him like he didn’t exist and his mother only cared when something serious happened to him. Jin could relate to what that felt like, even without experiencing it first-hand in Jeongguk’s body. Why would anyone want to subject themselves to that more than they absolutely needed to?

To say Jin was nervous would have been an understatement. He sat at a table in the corner of some dingy fast food place close to the university campus, sipping on a milkshake. He’d never eaten here before and probably wouldn’t eat here again after seeing a roach scuttle under the table next to him, but it was one of the only food places near campus that he hadn’t gone with Hye-su to.

There was only so much that he could take.

Thankfully, Jeongguk walked in not too long later, looking curiously around the place until his gaze fell upon Jin. His face lit up in recognition and he slumped into the chair across from his hyung with a tired sigh.

“It’s hot outside.” He muttered, lifting his t-shirt repeatedly so he could cool the skin underneath. “Not like hot hot, don’t get me wrong I love the sun, but it’s too hot to walk the three miles that I just did.”

Jin just watched him with wide eyes. He had gotten used to the weirdness of… going back in time or whatever he had done but it was still surreal to see Jeongguk in front of him like this, seeming so much like the young man Jin knew rather than the quiet and brooding boy that he had become and
nothing at all like the broken, scared, and defeated boy he had seen in the hospital. The person he would become if Jin didn’t do anything about it. There was already a downward pull to his mouth that hadn’t been there before and an overall tired air around Jeongguk that didn’t quite suit his shy but charismatic personality.

“I’m starving, I’m gonna go order something.” Jeongguk announced, sliding out of his seat.

“Hold on.” Jin rushed, digging into his pocket to dig out the few dollar bills that had come as change for his own purchase. He hadn’t treated Jeongguk in a while and now was as good of a time as any. Besides, maybe it would help butter him up for the impending conversation they were about to have.

Jeongguk raised an eyebrow but wasted no time taking the money from Seokjin’s hand. “Oh, thanks. I’ll get yours next time, hyung.”

He smiled and walked towards the cashier counter, eyes roaming over the menu behind it.

Jin scoffed to himself. Jeongguk always said that each time but he’d never paid for Jin’s bills once in his life. Not even back when they had first met like any courteous person would do for their elder. It just wasn’t Jeongguk’s style. Besides, he had only recently graduated from high school and was still trying to figure out what he wanted to do. He had mentioned once that he wanted to move out soon, so he would definitely need to save up money to do something like that.

Jeongguk returned a few minutes later with a tray that clearly stated that Jin wasn’t getting any change back. He had two burgers, a large container of fries, some kind of chicken bites and what was probably the biggest cup of soda Jin had ever seen.

Jeongguk sipped from it and looked up at Jin expectantly. “So… what’s up? You don’t usually ask me to hang out of the blue.”

Jin chewed the inside of his cheek and pushed the milkshake away from him, it was mixing with his nervousness and settling like a brick in his stomach.

“Uh…” Even though he had been thinking of what to say for the past forty-eight hours, his mind was drawing a blank now. “I just wanted to talk about something, really.”
Jeongguk unwrapped one of his burgers and took such a monstrous bite out of it that Jin wondered when he had last eaten.

“About what? You’re not trying to evangelize me into the wonders of acting again, right?” He asked through a mouth full of burger.

In other circumstances, Jin probably would have swatted him and told him to be more polite, but now he was all too grateful to be seeing Jeongguk partaking in his regular habits.

Jin licked his bottom lip and suddenly wished that he had gotten a lighter drink so he could at least have something to distract himself with as he tried to find a way to ease into the conversation.

But there just wasn’t a good way to bring it up. “No… about you and Yoongi.” Jin stated, watching carefully for Jeongguk’s reaction.

The younger sat his burger down, unwrapping one of the many sauces that he brought back to the table with him and dipped one of the chicken bites into the bright yellow substance before bringing it to his mouth.

“What about us? He’s not smoking again, is he? I told him I’d take his favorite lighter and throw it into the Han River if he started again. And don’t tell me he’s drinking again, not that he ever stopped, but I know I’m the only who can actually handle him when he’s drunk. Not to say that he hasn’t drunkenly punched me before, because he definitely has. Seriously, what an ass—”

“I know that the two of you are seeing each other.” Jin said, only to stop Jeongguk’s rambling. If the younger had kept up talking Jin was worried he would have just lost his nerve and gone along with the conversation.

Jeongguk had promptly begun to choke on his chicken bite. The few other patrons in the restaurant looked over in mild concern and Jin jumped out of his chair so he could slap the younger on the back.

When the chicken bite had found its way out of Jeongguk’s windpipe, he shakily reached for his giant soda and drank deeply from the cup as Jin returned to his seat.

Jeongguk’s eyes skillfully avoided his. “I... we’re... we’re not...”
Jin sighed and cursed his own tactlessness. Jeongguk looked like one wrong word from Jin would send him hightailing out of the place, never to be seen again. He looked scared shitless and that had not been Jin’s intention at all.

“Listen,” He tried, trying to appear as non-threatening as he could. “I shouldn’t have said it like that, I’m sorry. But it’s not… it’s not like a big deal or anything. I still love you, both of you and I’m just more hurt that you never told us about it more than anything.”

Jeongguk regarded him carefully, like a deer around a hunter that hadn’t shot yet. His eyes were wide like one too. He slowly grabbed another chicken bite but it seemed more like he was trying to make himself look busy rather than actually trying to eat.

He looked like he was unsure how to react to Jin’s reaction, as if he had imagined this moment going very differently and now that it was actually happening- he had no idea what to do.

“Not that you were obligated to tell us or anything, I mean it’s your own personal life, I get that. I just… you didn’t have to hide it, you know?” Jin continued, since it looked like Jeongguk was still confused.

“... We’re really not, though.” He said quietly, gaze falling to the linoleum of the table and staying there.

Jin didn’t know what else to say so he waited for Jeongguk to elaborate.

“We aren’t… totally platonic or anything but… how did you know?” He looked up then, eyes still wide with fright, and it took a moment for Jin to understand why.

“It’s not obvious or anything,” He hurried to explain. “I know the two of you and I’ve just had a feeling for a while. I didn’t want to bring it up if you weren’t going to. But… then I wondered if you were ever going to mention it.” Truthfully, Jin hadn’t seen it at all until the day of Jeongguk’s accident and had only confirmed it because he had been snooping on them in their motel room, but that hadn’t happened yet if it would even happen at all so it was probably best not to mention it.

The fright left Jeongguk’s eyes and he suddenly looked very flustered, his cheeks coloring a rosy pink in the dim lighting of the restaurant.
“O-oh.” He muttered. “I was scared that everyone could see it.”

“No, it’s not obvious at all. Don’t worry.” Jin assured him. “But what is it exactly, if you aren’t seeing each other?

Jeongguk sat a bit straighter in his seat, and actually looked at Jin for a moment before busying himself with picking at a tear in his jeans, and his cheeks reddened even further.

“We… we both like each other. It’s just complicated. Things like that are a little more accepted these days but Yoongi was bullied a lot in school for it. I want to try but he doesn’t, so we’re just friends … I guess.” Jeongguk looked nervously up at Jin.

“Are you sure you’re okay with this?”

Jin gave Jeongguk his best smile to show that he was. “Of course, I am. Why else would I have asked?”

Jeongguk shifted uncomfortably in his seat, but the guard he had put up seemed to have dropped. He even went back to eating his food, albeit a little slower than he was initially.

“I don’t know. It’s just… weird. Talking about it. You’re the only one who knows and it’s not like I thought you would stop being friends with me because of this but I didn’t think you’d be so… okay with it. You don’t even seem that surprised.”

Jin thought about that for a moment, mulling over what he knew of Jeongguk and Yoongi. He supposed that he really wasn’t that surprised, he always knew there was something between the two of them but he had just guessed that it was because they were so close in school. He had been more surprised to hear about Jeongguk’s awful family life.

“I guess that I’m really not that surprised.” He explained. “The two of you are very close and Yoongi just treats you differently than anyone else. He’s… careful.”

Jeongguk scoffed lightly and returned to eating his burger.
“Even I think that he’s too careful with me. He’s scared of losing people so he doesn’t tend to let people get close to him. Before I introduced him to all of you he was always alone and kept to himself. I don’t think he really minded it, because that’s his personality, but he seemed happier when he was surrounded by people. He’s just so scared all the time that we’re all going to leave him so he drinks and smokes to deal with it.” Jeongguk sighed, and it was weighed down by more tiredness than someone his age should have.

“He pushes people away. That’s his thing. He gets scared and he tries to run. When we… when we realized that there was something more than friendship between us he got drunk, tried to beat the shit out of me, and trashed his apartment. I don’t know what I was thinking sticking around after that but… it’s probably the best decision I’ve ever made.”

Jin’s eyes widened hearing that from Jeongguk, the younger rarely ever got sentimental or expressed his feelings properly so it was the first time he was ever really hearing something like this from him. But as much as he wanted to keep talking about this with Jeongguk, he had his own mission to stick to.

“I’m thankful for both of you being with us too. We wouldn’t be the same without you. But I’m… worried about Yoongi. That was the main reason that I called you here.” Jin explained and Jeongguk paused in his eating, looking up at him in concern.

“Why are you worried?”

“Well, I was wondering if it had something to do with the relationship between the two of you. If it did then I would stay out of it, since it’s none of my business and if it didn’t then I would just talk to him personally. Now I’m really not sure, but it could be a mix of both. It’s not anything in particular, he hasn’t done anything, but when Yoongi is emotional he gets very destructive. It would be okay if he only was destructive outwardly but he’s also destructive inwardly. And that’s less okay. I just think that rather than going along with him when he gets like that, we should try to help him. Get him to stop drinking and smoking, even if he threatens to murder us. I mean, he’s our friend, we shouldn’t just let him destroy himself.”

Jeongguk nodded thoughtfully as he stuffed the remains of his second burger in his mouth. He had finished eating now, somehow, and brought the soda over to mouth so he could wash down his meal with it.

“Yeah. You guys haven’t seen him really bad but I have and it’s not pretty. He drinks soju like it’s water and beer like it’s soda. Even if he wasn’t a crazy drunk that’s still not good for his health. He has the tutoring job and it pays well but he rarely ever takes it seriously and I don’t want him to
lose it. It’s good for him and it’s what he loves to do. I don’t really know what he’d do without it.” He swirled the straw around in his styrofoam cup absently.

“I agree that we should do something. I’ve tried talking to him about it before but… I guess I’ll try harder. It’s just he probably won’t listen if it’s just me. We’d all need to be equally as annoying so he’d rather not drink than listen to us nag at him.”

Jin smiled. “I’ll talk to everyone else about it, then. And I won’t mention anything else that we talked about today. It was none of my business to begin with.”

A faint blush dusted Jeongguk’s cheeks as a shy smile pulled at the corner of his mouth.

“Thanks. I don’t know if I’m ready to tell everyone yet, but it’s nice to finally be able to talk to someone about it. But anyways,” He shoved the now empty soda cup away from him, leaning into his chair and turning his full attention to Jin.

“What about you, hyung? How have you been?”

Jin’s eyes widened in surprise at the sudden question.

“How have I been?” He echoed dumbly.

“Yeah. You’ve just seemed, I don’t know, really tired lately.” Jeongguk explained with a shrug.

Jin tried to hide his shock. He didn’t ever remember Jeongguk asking him how he was doing or making a genuine comment about his well-being. And to be completely honest, he hadn’t thought that the younger had cared that much.

But if there was anything that he felt he had learned over the course of his crazy experience, it was that there was a lot that he didn’t know and even more things he’d assumed about his friends that weren’t true at all.

“I’m… alright.” He answered with surprising honesty. “I am tired but I’ve been worse.”
He had been much, much worse.

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Speaking with Jeongguk had gone well and it had alleviated most of the anxiety Jin had been feeling about the likelihood of success in his attempt to fix everything. The two of them had spoken about the situation with Yoongi to their other friends and everyone had been on board to help out. Jin could see the immense gratitude in Jeongguk’s eyes and the younger had been reaching out to him a lot more since their talk. At some point, he was even given some more insight into Jeongguk’s troubled home life, to which Jin had responded by saying that Jeongguk could live with him if he really wanted out. The younger had thanked him endlessly, sworn that he wasn’t crying through a voice choked with tears, and promptly hung up.

Things were already changing from what had transpired originally and that only proved that Jin was making progress.

However, he couldn’t help but think that Jeongguk and Yoongi’s troubles had been the easy part. Now, he had to figure out some way to stop Taehyung from killing his father. Which was proving to be very difficult since he had only the slightest idea of what even happened and trying to figure out Kim Taehyung, himself, was entirely different problem.

He doubted that simply going up to Taehyung and telling him not to kill his father would prove to be very effective but he didn’t have too many other ideas. So, he had made up his mind to start with understanding the situation first- through Namjoon.

Though, to his surprise, Namjoon contacted him first.

His phone had rang early one morning, two weeks before what Jin had taken to calling “doomsday”. Time was moving fast and the days slipped away quickly before Jin could decide what to do. He had been writing in a notebook all the different options and the possible outcomes of those options when it came to saving Taehyung from himself but he hadn’t made much actual progress.

Jin had been hesitant to pick up the phone, thinking it was yet another one of his classmates asking for help with an assignment or wondering why he hadn’t been to class recently. He was still working hard to appear normal, though he knew that missing several classes and yet still turning in the work was working against him; but time was running out and he couldn’t afford needless
distractions.

Though his eyes had widened comically when he saw that it was Namjoon calling him. His fingers fumbled to swipe the answer button and he hurriedly brought the phone up to his ear.

“How?"

He was met with heavy, tired sigh.

“Namjoon?”

“Yeah, it’s me. Listen, can I come over for a bit? I’ve been thinking a lot about some things after we talked about looking after Yoongi more and I... yeah, I think I fucked up a little.”

Jin’s heart dropped to the pit of his stomach and his grasp on his phone tightened until his bones were showing white through his skin.

“What?” He asked, not even caring how panicked he probably sounded. “Namjoon what did you-”

“Can I just come over?”

Jin fumbled for his words, mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water for a few seconds before his brain managed to catch up with the conversation.

“Yeah, sure, come ov-”

The loud tone of the lost phone call rang in his ears and he blinked in surprise until he realized that Namjoon had hung up and cut him off in the middle of his sentence.

He sat staring at the screen for a long moment, all of the different scenarios for how he had screwed up yet again playing in his head. Namjoon hadn’t called him about this issue before, so that could only mean that Jin had influenced it somehow but had he really already made a horrible mistake?
He shook his head and attempted to calm himself down. He didn’t know what mistake Namjoon had even been talking about. For all Jin knew, he could be talking about how he quit his job or took up smoking again. It was too early to be freaking out, and he had to keep up his ruse of not knowing things that had yet to take place.

And that would start with cleaning up his apartment and putting away the notebook with all the different outcomes of his decisions.

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Jin’s doorbell rang loudly in the mildly clean space of his apartment and he nearly tripped over his own feet in his rush to get it. He stopped just in front of the door and forced himself to calm down. But it was hard knowing that even the slightest mistake on his part could mean history repeated itself and the idea of having to go through this month over and over until he got it perfectly right was his worst nightmare.

He took a deep, steadying breath and pulled the door open.

Namjoon looked equally tired and dishevelled as he laid eyes on him and the younger stepped past Jin into his apartment, taking his shoes off wordlessly.

Jin stared at him apprehensively and closed the door quietly behind him.

“It’s about Tae.” Namjoon began, and scoffed without humor. “Of course it is, everything is about Tae.”

Jin bit his lip nervously as he followed Namjoon further into his apartment.

“Do you have any alcohol in here?”

“Um… I have some beer at the back of my fridge, I think.”
Namjoon nodded and headed into the kitchen. Jin followed behind him curiously, wondering why he was acting so brash all of a sudden.

He bent down into the fridge but then seemed to think better of it and turned to face Jin.

“Uh-Do you mind if I…?”

Jin shrugged. “Sure, go ahead.”

“Thanks.” Namjoon sighed and fumbled through the contents of Jin’s fridge until he returned with a can of beer.

He popped it open and made his way past Jin again, sitting with a huff onto the couch in the living room and bringing the beer up to his mouth.

Jin hesitantly joined him, standing off to the side of the living room as if he wasn’t sure if he was allowed to be there, despite the fact that it was his living room.

“Taehyung called me during lunch a few days ago and I totally brushed him off.” Namjoon said, apparently finding more interest in the beer can than the man he was actually talking to. “And normally I wouldn’t really think twice about it because Taehyung knows that I’m done with his drama by now.”

“But…” He trailed off with a tired sigh. “It was different this time. I said some things that I shouldn’t have because I’m sick and tired of hearing about the same problem over and over again.”

Jin had been quiet but he took this as his cue to question what Namjoon was talking about, even though he had a pretty good guess.

“What problem?”

Namjoon glanced at him before turning his attention back to the beer can.
“Taehyung’s father is abusive. Sorry you didn’t know about it. Tae didn’t want anyone to know and it’s not my business to be spreading, but you should know. You’ve known him almost as long as me and even though I’m tired of his shit, I’m worried about him.”

“He called me at work the other day and he was trying to get me do something about the situation and I said some pretty cruel things to him that I really regret saying. But even if it was more cruel than it needed to be, it’s the way I feel. I don’t want to be the only person he can talk to about this anymore.”

Jin felt that his mouth had dropped open somewhere in the conversation and hurried to close it, taking a seat on the couch. He had been expecting a great number of things to come out of Namjoon’s mouth, but he had never been expecting Namjoon to be this open with him suddenly. He hadn’t changed that much between now and what happened in the past. So, why was it that things were happening drastically differently?

“Oh,” Jin began and struggled to form a coherent sentence. “I had no idea. I’m sorry.”

Namjoon shook his head and drank a large swig of beer.

“There’s nothing to be sorry about. There was no way that you’d even know about it unless you were told. Taehyung is an idiot that doesn’t know how to ask for help when he needs it but I’m not. I need help with him. I know… I know that he’s not your favorite person in the world but someone needs to talk to him before he does something crazy. I know him. It’s really only a matter of time until he lashes out in some way. I just think it might be worse this time than when he dyed his hair fire hydrant red and thought it would be a good representation of his rebellious nature.”

Jin didn’t know if he was more stunned by how well Namjoon actually knew Taehyung or if he was more stunned by the fact that Namjoon might have known this before and hadn’t told anyone about it.

“I don’t really think it’ll be a good idea for me to talk to him.” Jin stated carefully. In all honesty, he had yet to come into direct contact with Taehyung and he was terrified to have to talk to the younger face to face. One wrong move or word from him and Taehyung would be jumping from that construction platform all over again.

“I’m not asking you to.” Namjoon rushed to correct. “I was actually thinking Hoseok might be a good option. He’s good at listening and if he can handle Jimin, he can handle Taehyung.”
Jin chose not to question the comment about Jimin but he quickly realized that he should have because at this point in time he should have known nothing about Jimin’s personal struggles. He was being thrown off by how much Namjoon seemed to know about their friends and he couldn’t tell if it was because they were actually telling Namjoon things that they didn’t tell Jin or if Namjoon had just been paying more attention. Either way, the moment was gone and his silence had stretched on too long to say anything.

“So… do you mind talking to Hoseok about it?”

Jin frowned. “Why me? Wouldn’t it be better if you talked to him about it?”

Namjoon fidgeted, turning his attention back to the probably nearly empty beer can and Jin realized that it seemed as though he was uncomfortable.

“Not really… I mean you’re closer to Hoseok and all, so you could probably convince him if necessary. And since I know pretty much everything about the situation I don’t want to tell him any more than he needs to know. He can hear it from Tae if he talks to him.”

Jin looked at Namjoon for a long moment. He wondered if Namjoon had acted so obviously the first time around. He wondered if he had missed the telling signs of Namjoon’s obvious discomfort, the brash way Namjoon acted when he was hiding something, and the sudden desire for alcohol that the younger never had before. Had it really been so obvious the first time or was it just because things had changed so much now?

Jin wouldn’t get the answer but he felt like he knew it anyways.

“Namjoon.” He called and the younger turned towards him reluctantly. “What’s going on?”

He saw the guard fall into place as soon as the question left his mouth.

“What do you mean?” Namjoon asked defensively, tipping the can all the way up so he could get the remaining liquid out.

“You’re acting weird and I know you well enough that I can tell it’s something serious. So, what is it? What’s going on? Besides the stuff with Taehyung.”
Namjoon held Jin’s gaze for a while, expression hard as if challenging him. Then out of nowhere his expression fell and revealed the vulnerability underneath it.

He sighed, put the empty can down on Jin’s coffee table and rubbed his face aggressively.

“I’m… moving back to Ilsan. To go back to school. I was offered a full-ride scholarship to a university out there a few years back and I declined because my parents needed me, but they don’t need me as much as they did before and I can’t… I can’t keep working this dead end job. It’s easy to just settle for it but I don’t want to settle, I can do better, and I want to do something that I want to do for once in my life. So, I’m going. But I don’t want to leave you all so I didn’t know how to tell you.”

Jin was stunned by the confession. So stunned that he could do nothing but stare at Namjoon long enough that the younger became frustrated.

“Stop staring at me like that.” Namjoon snapped, fixing Jin with a tired but mildly embarrassed glare. “Is it that strange that I want to go back to school?”

Jin immediately began shaking his head, horrified that he would somehow anger Namjoon with his silence. He had been shocked many times that night, but he hadn’t been expecting Namjoon to tell him the giant secret he had been keeping so easily. He had always stuck to the mindset that if someone wasn’t telling him something it was because they didn’t want to talk about it. He was left to wonder what would have happened if he had asked more questions, if he had pushed for answers to the questions that he had, if he had asked his friends what was going on with them rather than waiting for them to tell him themselves. Maybe things would have turned out differently. It weighed heavy on his heart and made it hard to find a suitable response.

“No, no it’s not. You just caught me by surprise. I’m obviously going to miss you like crazy, but I’m happy for you. I’ve known you for a long time and I know how much of your life you’ve devoted to supporting your family. I also know how crushing it was when your father got sick in your last year of school and you had to decline all those scholarship offers so that you could work and take care of him. I’m glad that you’re choosing to do something for yourself. You deserve it.”

Namjoon looked visually uncomfortable from the praise but he couldn’t hide the faint smile that formed on his lips.

“Thanks, hyung.”
Jin’s heart warmed in his chest at the rarely heard formality and he resisted the urge to move over to the other end of the couch and smother Namjoon in a bone-crushing hug. Namjoon was a lot of things but he was certainly not a hugger.

The younger stood then, smoothing out his wrinkled t-shirt and old jeans as if preparing to leave.

“Right, so I swear I’ll tell the others about it before I leave. And you’ll talk to Hoseok about Taehyung?”

Jin nodded, standing as well. “Please don’t go anywhere without telling everyone. But yes, I’ll talk to Hoseok about it.”

Truthfully, he still thought that Namjoon would be the best person to explain the situation but since he was showing so much resistance to the idea, Jin decided he should give in. No matter how much the idea of directly involving himself scared him.

“You don’t have to leave, you know?” Jin stated when Namjoon began walking towards the door. “You can stay for the night. We haven’t done that since we were kids.”

Namjoon turned back around to face him, and for a minute Jin worried that his offer would be declined, but then a wide smile broke out across Namjoon’s face, exposing the depth of the dimples in either side of his cheeks.

“Good. The last bus ran a few minutes ago, I was about to ask you for a ride.”

The two laughed and Namjoon returned to the couch, making himself comfortable.

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Having Namjoon over at his apartment had been nice. It had been so long since they last hung out together as the close friends that they were that Jin had forgotten what it felt like to laugh and joke around with each other all night. It had been good. And judging by how genuine the smiles they had shown each other were, they had both been in need of it.
Even though they had been talking about such heavy topics earlier in the night, by the time Namjoon had gotten everything off his chest, the atmosphere had changed for the better. No longer did Jin feel suffocated by the weight of the secrets surrounding him, instead, he felt as if he could breathe properly for the first time in a long while. He wasn’t able to get all of his own worries off his chest since Namjoon would probably think he was insane, but he was able to talk about his frustration with his family, his acceptance of Taehyung’s actions all those years ago, and he was able to voice how thankful he was for Namjoon’s friendship.

It hadn’t been much in the grand scheme of things and it probably hadn’t altered that much in the timeline, but Jin had to work not only on fixing his friends but also improving upon himself and becoming someone that could be a better person for the friends that he loved so much.

In fact, he had only procrastinated for an entire seventy-two hours before he gave in and contacted Hoseok.

It had been a strange conversation at first, with Hoseok carrying the conversation even though Jin had been the one to call him. Jin had fumbled through the mundane topic they were talking about until he had gotten aggravated with his own inability to just say what he wanted and he had interrupted Hoseok in the middle of his sentence to mention Taehyung.

Hoseok had seemed surprised by the sudden mention of their friend but he had listened intently to what little Jin had to offer him about Taehyung’s troubles.

Though, when Jin had finished explaining the situation he had been surprised by Hoseok’s lack of surprise.

Once again, it seemed like everyone knew more about their group of friends than Jin himself. But for once, Jin realized that it was own fault and was only angry at himself for paying so little attention to his friends and so much attention to himself.

Hoseok had told Jin that he suspected that something was up with Taehyung and had been up with him since he had first met the younger. Even more surprising to Jin was that Hoseok hadn’t even bothered to ask any further questions. Jin had at least been expecting him to wonder why he was being asked to speak to Taehyung rather than one of their other friends or Jin himself.

Though Jin hadn’t said as much, it seemed like Hoseok could tell that it was a sensitive situation, and he was immensely grateful for the younger’s intuition.
Eventually the conversation turned to Hoseok’s own life. Everyone in their friend group knew that Hoseok had grown up in an orphanage, it wasn’t as if he had even attempted to keep it a secret. But Jin guessed that only Jimin was permitted to know the full story. Though, once again, he realized that he might have been allowed to know as well if he had only asked. He’d been so worried that asking about it would have offended Hoseok in some way that he hadn’t even thought of it as a possibility.

Though, as he listened to the anecdote Hoseok had begun to tell without any prompting, Jin realized two things. The first was that Hoseok seemed more than open to talking about the situation, even the story of how his mom abandoned him at an amusement park with nothing more than vague words and a candy bar, and the second was that Hoseok didn’t seem nearly as over the situation as he was trying to make Jin believe.

Afterall, he had bore witness to the mental struggle Hoseok had gone through in the bathroom the night of Jeongguk’s accident. He knew about the love-hate relationship with medication the younger had and he knew about the Munchausen’s syndrome that hadn’t been mentioned at all.

In fact, Jin found that he could relate to Hoseok’s trauma somewhat. After all, his own father had practically disowned him because of his dream. He hadn’t wanted to become a doctor but his father couldn’t understand that. It was then that Jin realized he had been hiding that pain from all his friends except for Namjoon who had known him too well to accept the excuses Jin had made for his sudden move right after changing his major. He had lived with Hoseok immediately after, but he’d only told the younger that he’d fallen out with his family and need a place to stay.

So, he had gritted his teeth, hardened his determination and made himself vulnerable so he could relate to Hoseok.

He told the younger about his own problems, his own issues with his family and how he too had been abandoned. And not just abandoned by his father but by his entire family. He told Hoseok about how his mother called him every now and then but that every conversation with her was exhausting because she was somewhat supportive of his decisions but whenever he spoke about hardships in his art major she would make an off-handed comment about more practical skills were in their blood. He told Hoseok of his brother and how Jin struggled to ever get a word in when they spoke since all Seokjung ever spoke about was the various incredible things he had learned in the states and how successful his company was. Jin told the younger that he hadn’t even heard his father’s voice in years because he wasn’t brave enough to call him after seeing the look of disappointment on his face when he told his father that he had changed majors. He admitted to how much he had struggled in the vigorously competitive first two years of his bachelor program, how he had felt like such a failure back then that getting out of bed was the hardest thing he did every day.
Jin had started crying somewhere in the middle of it. They were sad tears but he’d never been happier. It was the first time he was ever telling someone the gritty details of it and it felt so good to get it off his chest.

Across the line, he could tell that Hoseok had begun to cry as well. He hadn’t mentioned his problems with medication, which Jin had expected, but instead the younger had told him about his struggles of feeling wanted. He’d never been adopted since he had always been so consumed by the trauma and he had explained that dancing had saved him. Hoseok had hoped that acting could save Jin too and then they had both sobbed about how much not only each other but how much their friends meant to them.

They called each other all the family they would ever need and Jin had laughed about how he had to force himself to stay seated and not drive over to Hoseok just so they could hug and cry together and Hoseok seemed to find the thought hilarious. They had laughed until they couldn’t breathe nor distinguish the tears rushing from their eyes as happy or sad.

Eventually, Hoseok had said that he had to go and promised to talk with Tae. Jin had sincerely thanked him but he was grateful for much more than just that.

The conversation had been a first for Jin and it had been incredibly eye opening. He had never spoken so candidly to his friends about such serious topics, deeming them too intrusive if not brought up by the person themselves. But what were friends for if not to talk about serious issues with? Jin had been so envious of his other friends for knowing so much about each other but he had never really tried to learn more information than what he was told.

How would a question get answered, though, if it was never asked?

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Time passed quickly after that. Even though Jin knew about all of his assignments and projects in advance and attempted to work on them early to give himself more time later in the month, he had underestimated just how much he had to do. Before, he had gone to Hye-su for help and support for the projects that forced him to pull all-nighters but now, he had to do all of it himself. He spoke to Namjoon and Hoseok more often but there was only so much support the two could give him as they struggled with their own schedules. So, actually completing the projects for a second time became a much harder task.

Not to mention that with every day he came closer to doomsday his nervousness and anxiety doubled from the day before. He trusted that he had taken all the proper steps to fix his mistakes of
the past but what if it wasn’t *enough*? What if talking to Jeongguk had made the situation *worse*? What if Yoongi was the one that stepped off the curb rather than Jeongguk? What if Hoseok failed in helping Taehyung and he killed his father again?

Would Jin get *another* chance to fix everything? Or would his attempts only make everything worse? He had no way of knowing and that only stressed him out more.

If his friends’ entire *lives* were depending on his choices right now, in this moment, then he had to do his absolute best for them. He didn’t know if what he experienced before had been a sample of all the different paths his choices could take them, but he didn’t want to find out. Every scenario had been awful, traumatic, and horrible. Jin would do anything to keep them from turning into reality.

So, it wasn’t that surprising that he nearly had a nervous breakdown when he received the texts from Namjoon telling him that Taehyung wanted to hang out the day after.

His heart had been pounding dangerously hard as he read the texts and replied with the exact words he remembered saying the first time.

He had thrown the phone away from him after and collapsed onto his bed, draping his hand over his face as he fought to stop hyperventilating. For a while that day he’d seriously thought that he had messed up horrifically again and had no idea what to do to fix it. If the timelines were still the same then it was simply too late to keep Taehyung from killing his father which seemed to be the catalyst from which everything else sprung from.

But as he lay, breathing heavily and desperately searching his mind for some kind of resolution, he realized that he could *ask*. He could ask a question. He could ask and it wouldn’t be taboo, or invasive, or the wrong thing to do.

He searched frantically for his phone, nearly falling off his bed as he reached out for it from it’s haphazard position on the floor a few feet away from his bed frame.

Once it was in his hands he scrambled to right his position so he was no longer in danger of falling off and pulled up Hoseok’s number before he could even think of something to say. He pressed the call button as if his life depended on it, it truly may have, and held the phone up to his ear.

Hoseok answered on the third ring.
“Hey, Jin-hyung!” His cheerful voice rang through the phone and in the back of Jin’s mind he realized that it actually sounded cheerful and not at all like the tired and defeated tone he remembered hearing from him before. “What’s up?”

“Uh…” Jin heard his own voice shake and took a deep breath to calm himself not wanting to come across as panicked as he felt over the phone. “I was just wondering how the talk with Tae went?”

Hoseok laughed, a sound that both shocked and confused Jin. “You and Namjoon are funny. I just hung up with him and he was asking the same thing.”

Jin supposed Namjoon was also having similar worries since he had distanced himself from the situation.

“In any event, I definitely understand the concern the two of you had. I went over to his place for the first time and he was…” Hoseok sighed. “Well, some of the things that he said scared me. He was in a really dark place. I’m glad I got to talk to him before he did something he would regret. We met somewhere else and walked to his place after since he was worried about leaving his sister and his father alone together.”

“And… Jin it was wild. I really don’t even know how to put what happened into words. We walked in and his father had his sister pressed up against a wall, grabbing her by the collar of her school shirt and yelling in her face. And I guess Tae just… snapped. First thing I knew, he was next to me, and the next second he had grabbed an empty bottle and was charging at his father. He hit him over the head with it and got his sister away from him but…”

Hoseok sighed again and Jin found himself anticipating what his friend would say next with acute terror.

“I was so scared, Jin. I saw the look on Tae’s face when he approached his father with that broken bottle. I told his sister to call the police and practically had to tackle Taehyung to get him to stop. Then, I basically had to play mediator between him and his father until the cops showed up. They thankfully arrested him, which was a mess because he was shouting and calling Tae all kinds of things as they dragged him out. We all had to give a police report and after that we all just kind of sat on the floor of the living room and didn’t really say anything to each other the whole night. In the morning I told them they could stay with me if they wanted but Taehyung declined. We talked a bit more after that and I helped his sister get ready for school while Tae cleaned up.”
Jin didn’t really know what to say in response to all of that besides a low “wow”.

“Yeah.” Hoseok agreed. “I’m just glad that I was there you know? I… I really don’t know what Taehyung would have done if I wasn’t there to stop him. The look in his eyes… it was just so determined and angry. He looked… he looked murderous Jin. I’ve never seen that look in someone’s eyes before.”

Hoseok’s words sunk right to Jin’s stomach and formed like a rock there. Because he knew all too well what would have happened if Hoseok hadn’t been there. But this was also the first time he was hearing of the method in which Taehyung would have killed his father. To think that Taehyung would have… stabbed his father with the broken end of a glass bottle viciously enough to kill him sent a shudder down Jin’s spine. That wasn’t the person he knew. He didn’t even know that Taehyung could be capable of doing something that violent.

Though he also remembered the darkness that had been looming over Taehyung when he had experienced the strange sensation of being in the younger’s body. Taehyung had wanted to run from it and the almost overwhelming fear of the consequences of his actions, so he had thrown himself into the sea knowing that he couldn’t swim.

It didn’t seem like Taehyung thought himself as being capable of that kind of evil either.

Jin also recalled that strange world where they were all angels. Taehyung had fallen so far from grace that’d had apparently become an irredeemable pawn of the devil. He couldn’t help but to wonder if the two situations were related.

“Wow.” Jin repeated, still not really knowing what to say. “I’m sorry that you had to experience any of that, but I’m immensely glad that you were there for Tae. He clearly needed someone.”

“He did. He really did. But, if you were wondering what the impromptu hangout is about, he’s been in an up and down mood since everything happened but I think he just wants to spend some time with his friends. I think we should all just be there for him now. He needs that.”

Jin was nodding as he bit into his lip nervously. “Of course. We’re all here for him.”

“Good. Um, anyways I was on my way to dance practice, so I’m gonna need to go. I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“I’ll be there.” Jin confirmed.
“Great. Bye, hyung.”

“Bye.”

Jin sighed as the sound of the dropped call began to ring in his ears. The conversation had helped calm some of his anxiety but even though the crisis was averted it didn’t mean that Taehyung wouldn’t do something crazy when they hung out together.

But for now, Jin could at least be sure that he had avoided and fixed one major mistake.

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Once again Jin was the first to arrive in their hideout. Though, maybe that was because he hadn’t slept at all the night before and had paced around until he’d driven himself crazy and decided that he had nothing to lose by going earlier.

This would be the first time that all of them were meeting together all month and Jin’s mind was racing with all the different possibilities and different ways that he could mess this day up. Every word that came out of his mouth could cause an impact and that level of stress was really becoming too much for him to deal with.

He broke through the clearing that led to the abandoned pool and his heart promptly stopped in his chest when he caught sight of Taehyung lying on the mattress in the middle of the pool.

*Right*. He had forgotten that Taehyung would be the first one here. Really though, he had just assumed that the younger would just be later since things had already changed so much.

It was the first time that he’d actually seen Taehyung since he had been given the opportunity to fix things and talking to him had been the number one thing that Jin tried desperately to avoid.

But the last time Jin had been in this situation things had been completely different. He had still hated Taehyung and held a grudge of five years against him. He hadn’t understood Taehyung back then and he hadn’t tried to. At the time, he had thought that the younger’s issues were none of his business.
He was left to wonder what would have happened if he had actually tried to talk to Taehyung that day.

He took a deep breath and struggled to calm himself down. What he absolutely wasn’t going to do was repeat the same mistakes as last time.

With one last look at Taehyung, who was laying on his back with a bandaged hand in front of his face to block the sun, Jin started down the ladder into the pool.

“Hey, Tae.” He called as soon as he reached the bottom just to ensure that he couldn’t find some way to further avoid having this conversation.

The younger turned to him in surprise and Jin was more surprised than he should have been to see Taehyung’s face stretch into a wide smile at the sight of him.

“Hey, hyung!” He sat up, turning himself around so that Jin wouldn’t have to practically stand over him to talk. “What are you doing here so early?”

Jin shifted uncomfortably now that Taehyung’s full attention was on him. It was hard to not be reminded of the hatred in the younger’s eyes as he stabbed him repeatedly or the demonic twist of his lips as he smirked at Jin after the elder had made the contract with him.

Jin reminded himself that this was reality and stuff like that wouldn’t happen, but the image still haunted him like a nightmare that he couldn’t shake.

“I couldn’t sleep,” He shrugged. “I figured I’d just come early and take some pictures.” He held up the camera in his hand to prove his point. That was also something strange. When Jin had looked for his beloved pink polaroid camera all he could find was a black video camera that he didn’t remember ever owning.

Taehyung’s eyes lit up at the sight of the device. “Ah, well I hope you document us all as usual. I’m sure that when we’re older and going our separate ways we’ll look back on these moments fondly and appreciate them even more.”
Jin frowned at that, but quickly corrected his facial expression, and nodded hesitantly. “I’m sure that we will.”

His eyes fell on Taehyung’s wrapped hand once again and he couldn’t stop himself from asking about it.

“What happened to your hand?”

Taehyung’s expression dampened and he brought his hand up in front of his face once again so he could inspect it.

“My father was arrested a few days ago.” He stated, rather than answering Jin’s question. “I don’t know how to feel about it. I guess I should be happy since he’s made my life hell since my mother passed away. But sometimes I feel like it was the wrong thing to do.”

Taehyung glanced up from his hand to gauge Jin’s reaction. “He used to get drunk and beat me and my sister. So, I guess something was bound to happen sooner or later. Sorry, I’m not nearly as carefree as I pretend to be. But even when I’m pretending I’m never anywhere near as put together as you.”

“I’m not.” Jin rushed to correct.

Taehyung looked up at him again and this time his expression was confused and guarded.

“What?”

“I-I’m not.” Jin repeated, heart thudding loudly in his ears. “I’m not put together, Taehyung.”

The younger stared at him for a long moment before rolling his eyes with a scoff.

“Well, if you’re not put together than what the hell does that make me?”

Jin frowned, crossing his arms. “I’m serious, Taehyung. I may not have the same struggles as you
do but it’s not like I don’t struggle at all.”

Taehyung huffed and went to his previous position on his back, facing the sky. He wasn’t even looking at Jin now and for some reason that was really beginning to irritate him.

“Sure. I get that. But the problems you have are put-together-people problems. You know, stuff like getting your very important college assignment done in the next twenty-four hours because you procrastinated too much, figuring out how many times you can change your major before you graduate, or juggling your sex life with work and school and making sure you have time to get laid at least once a month.”

Jin’s frown had somehow morphed into a glare and the nervousness he had been feeling before had vanished and was replaced with anger.

“My father kicked me out of the house and my family practically abandoned me when I switched my major to acting.” He deadpanned. He couldn’t even try to hide his smugness when Taehyung’s gaze whipped over to him and his mouth dropped open in shock.

“What? Really? I had no idea, I’m so sorry-”

Jin cut him off with a firm shake of his head. “You don’t have to apologize. You didn’t know because I didn’t tell you. I didn’t really tell anyone because I don’t like talking about how much of a mess I am or how much of a mess my life is. But that’s not right, because you and everyone else are my friends and I can share things like that with you all and not think any less of myself because we all have issues. That’s something I’ve learned recently.”

“I really had no idea. I’m sorry. I knew that you lived with Hoseok for a while but I didn’t know why.” Taehyung insisted, and Jin could see the sincerity of his apology in his eyes. “I’ve... always been kind of jealous of you. I looked up to you from the first day that we met and eventually that just kind of turned into wishing I was you rather than being me. Everything was always falling apart around me and it seemed like everything was always going right for you.”

A small smile formed on Jin’s lips and he gestured to the mattress. “Mind if I sit?”

“Oh, of course, go ahead.” Taehyung invited, scooting closer to the edge so Jin could fit comfortably. Jin sat and layed down as well so that they were both facing the sky.

“Is that what the whole Sohyun thing was about?” Before, when he had still been angry and bitter,
Jin would have asked that with a completely different attitude but it had been five years now, maybe even more than that, and it was time to let it go.

Taehyung sighed heavily and dropped his hand over his face. “I’m so incredibly sorry about that. It was childish and stupid of me and I regretted it before I even went through with it. I knew you were dating her and I just got so… jealous seeing you so happy. It was back when my father had started hitting my sister and I was just so angry about everything. It was dumb though. And cruel. And not something that I should have done to someone I considered a close friend. I never really got a chance to apologize, since you avoided me like the plague after. Namjoon had to yell at me since you didn’t. But… I’m sorry, Jin. It’s probably the one thing in my life that I’m most regretful of.”

The apology meant more to Jin than he could put into words. He had spent so long wondering why Taehyung would do something so mean to him and what he could have possibly done to deserve it. Though, as the years passed, Jin had become more frustrated that the two of them were acting more like it hadn’t happened and stilting their friendship, rather than just talking about it.

“I missed being your friend, Taehyung.” Jin sighed, reaching over to ruffle the younger’s hair. “Apology accepted.”

Taehyung turned his head so he could look at him and the smile on his face immediately had Jin mirroring it. “I missed you too, hyung.”

“Hey! What are you doing here so early?!” A voice shouted behind the two of them, echoing across the clearing.

Jin and Taehyung turned to see the owner of the voice, Jeongguk, as well as the rest of their friends behind them.

“Hope you have plenty of space on your camera.” Taehyung joked as he stood.

Jin laughed and stood as well, the heaviness of the pressure on his heart had completely dissipated now.
Unsurprisingly, the day progressed similarly to the way that it had before. When everyone had gathered in the pool, Taehyung had insisted that they took a group photo and Jin had obliged. They were all smiling in it and Jin didn’t feel that dread in the bottom of his stomach that he’d felt before.

They played around as usual, climbing into the shopping carts they had smuggled there and held mini races as one of the boys pushed another down the length of the pool laughing and shouting.

Taehyung had brought out one of the many cans of spray paint from his secret stash and proceeded to outline Namjoon’s figure on one of the walls but it ended up with cat ears and a tail. Once Namjoon saw it he kicked Taehyung in the leg and the two ran around as Taehyung attempted to avoid further violence and Namjoon was determined to tackle him.

Jimin and Hoseok were out of the pool and play-fighting with sticks by the pond, and acted as if they were in a historical drama, and spouted the lines of a script that only they knew. It came to an end when Jimin’s stick went flying out of his hand and the two collapsed into laughter at Jimin’s completely shocked expression.

Jeongguk had perilously tried to walk the perimeter of the pool by standing on the very edge and putting one foot in front of the other, and attempted to balance by spreading his arms out. Yoongi had stood below him in the pool, watching his friend and was fully prepared to catch him if he were to fall. He didn’t seem all that happy about it, judging by the insults he hurled at Jeongguk but the younger had just smiled and continued.

Jin sat on the couch in the middle of the pool, watching them all, and he found that unlike last time the happiness and joy that each of his friends were experiencing didn’t feel forced at all but rather genuine. Where they had all been desperate to pretend that everything was okay last time, now they all seemed equally grateful for each others company.

Most importantly, Jin himself didn’t feel left out or alone. He wasn’t trying to justify his loneliness for how it had always been or trying to convince himself that he was fine like this. He actually was fine. It was nice to just sit back and watch his friends be happy. He knew logistically that it couldn’t have been that long since he had first been in this position but it felt like it had been ages since he had seen his friends laugh happily and carefree like this.

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Late into the day when everyone had gotten tired and sweaty from running around in the sun all afternoon, they sat on the couches near the bathrooms facing the projector. Once again Namjoon
had forgotten to bring the batteries but when he had begun to write a reminder on the mirror like he’d done before, Yoongi had suddenly called out and swore to bring them next time.

Also different, was the fact that they had brought sodas and water rather than liquor and booze. Yoongi was grumbling to himself as he popped open a can of coke but Jeongguk looked extremely relieved. They were all keeping true to their promise to look out for Yoongi.

Though everyone was tired, the conversation didn’t stop just because they were all sitting and drinking soda now. Unlike last time they weren’t all brooding and keeping their pain hidden under layers of false cheer. Hoseok and Taehyung were talking about some movie that was coming out soon, Jeongguk and Yoongi were debating the complexity of an overplayed pop song, Namjoon and Jimin were engrossed with some bug that was crawling around a few feet away, and Jin was reviewing all the pictures that he’d taken on his camera.

As Taehyung had hinted earlier, Jin had really taken a lot of pictures. Since he wasn’t with his usual polaroid he could easily take picture after picture without worrying about film or waiting for them to print. He’d even taken some videos. He hoped that he could play them once they finally replaced the projector batteries.

He scanned over the various photos that he’d taken over the course of the day and then found some older photos that he didn’t exactly remember taking but one of them stood out to him. The photo of the sea. The same one that had been in his pocket the first time.

He smiled and nudged Hoseok beside him so he could show the younger the photo.

“Shall we go here?”

Hoseok grinned in return and nodded. Jin worked to get everyone else’s attention and repeated his question.

Jeongguk’s eyes lit up as he realized what Jin was asking. “The sea? We haven’t been there since, what, September? Count me in.”

“Me too.” Hoseok chimed in, a wide grin stretching across his face.

“Me three!” Jimin added, raising his soda can.
“Wait, when are we going? Tomorrow?” Namjoon asked in confusion.

“Sure, tomorrow.” Jin responded, then realized why Namjoon was asking. “Oh, you have work tomorrow, don’t you?”

Namjoon avoided his gaze suddenly, kicking his foot around in the dirt.

“Uh… no. I-um… I quit.”

“What?” Taehyung asked, turning to Namjoon with wide eyes.

“I quit.” Namjoon repeated, this time a bit more confidently.

“When?!” Taehyung demanded.

“Uh… earlier today? A customer just threw money at me after I finished filling them up and instead of getting here late I just left.”

“You just left?!” Jimin echoed incredulously.

Namjoon shrugged. “Yeah.”

“But you’ve worked there forever! I’m pretty sure that when I met you, you were working at that petrol station.” Taehyung cried in clear shock.

“Yeah, well, I didn’t plan on working there forever.” Namjoon looked up from where he had been staring at the ground, avoiding all the curious eyes on him and met Jin’s eye. Jin nodded slightly with a serious expression to try to communicate to Namjoon that this was a perfect time to bring up his real reason for quitting and the younger sighed.

“Actually… I’m moving back to Ilsan.” Namjoon admitted.
“What?!” Taehyung cried in shock.


Namjoon bit his lip but looked around at all his friends, seemingly strengthening his resolve. “I’m going back to school. I was offered a full ride scholarship at a University there but I had to decline because my father got sick but he’s better now and I can’t pump gas for the rest of my life… so yeah.”

“Wow, really?” Hoseok gasped. “That’s really cool, Namjoon. I’m happy for you!”

“You should definitely do it if you don’t have to pay for it.” Yoongi piped up, reaching around Jeongguk to knock Namjoon on the shoulder.

“Yeah, hyung, it sounds like a great opportunity!” Jimin added.

Jin smiled, happy that Namjoon hadn’t waited too long to tell them. The moment was there, it would have been a shame if he hadn’t taken it. Besides, it left everyone more time to wrap their heads around the fact that he was leaving, Jin included.

Namjoon seemed flustered by all the attention and mumbled some agreement before changing the subject. “Anyways, what’s the point of waiting until tomorrow? Why don’t we just head there now?”

“Head there now? It’s almost three in the morning.” Yoongi grunted, seemingly taking extreme effort to pull himself from the depths of the couch to rest on the edge, leaning his elbows onto his knees.

“Wait, don’t you have a tutoring session tomorrow, Yoongi?” Jeongguk asked suddenly.

“Maybe.” Yoongi responded quietly.
“Don’t get yourself fired, again.” Jeongguk warned.

“I won’t. I have regulars tomorrow. They know me. They’ll understand if I cancel. Don’t worry about it.” Yoongi replied, bringing the soda to his mouth lazily.

Jeongguk pouted but left it alone, Yoongi hadn’t gotten defensive about it which was probably a good sign.

“I don’t mind if we leave now.” Jin announced. “With the lack of traffic this time of night we’ll probably get there in four hours.”

“And I can drive if you get tired.” Hoseok offered from beside him.

Jin wondered if he actually would this time but nodded with a smile and stood. “Let’s get going then.”

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They stopped to get gas at the gas station Namjoon had just quit from and Hoseok, who had of course not followed through on his offer to drive yet again, had went into the store to bring back snacks.

Jin glanced out the open window, watching as Namjoon fit the nozzle into the gas tank. He stepped back as the tank began to fill, and caught sight of Jin as he turned. Namjoon smiled and walked over.

He made a gesture with his hands that Jin understood as camera and he immediately remembered that this was when Namjoon wanted to take a picture of him. Jin smirked and reached over to give the big video camera to Namjoon.

The younger looked mildly embarrassed as he held the camera up.

“I’m gonna miss you guys when I leave. You’d better print out all of these and make me an album.” He whispered as to not wake the rest of the members who were in various states of sleep.
Jin breathed out a laugh and put up his fingers in a peace sign along with a warm smile. Suddenly, one of those passengers Jin assumed to be sleeping sprung forward to the front seat with a gummy smile and a peace sign. Yoongi.

“We’re gonna miss you too.” Yoongi muttered sleepily. “And you’d better make all of us one of those albums, Jin.”

“Yeah, yeah, I will.” Jin promised, rolling his eyes.

Namjoon snapped the picture with a laugh, then went back to monitoring the gas.

Yoongi slunk back into his position in the backseat as Hoseok returned with the snacks. He stopped by the passenger window and handed Jin what he had asked for before making his way to the trunk.

Namjoon finished filling the tank with gas a few minutes later and he tapped against the truck twice before making his way to seat in the front.

Jin started the engine and pulled out onto the street.

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In the morning, Jin woke to banging on the glass and nearly had a heart attack before he realized that it was only Jeongguk and Yoongi messing with them.

With a groan he lifted his head from it’s resting place on the steering wheel and winced as his back whined in protest.

“Did they even sleep?” Namjoon groaned, stretching his arms and rubbing harshly at his face.

“No.” Taehyung muttered from the backseat. “They got out of the car a while after we got here and woke me up, I haven't been able to properly go back to sleep since.”
Jin scoffed, not at all surprised that *that* had stayed the same. He hoped the two had gotten to spend some quality time talking over things before they thought to wake up everyone else. He opened the car door and stepped out. Namjoon and Taehyung followed him after a few minutes passed and Jin stepped around the truck to see that Hoseok and Jimin were given an even worse wake up call.

Hoseok was scowling which was never a good sign and as he jumped out of the trunk bed Jeongguk rushed over to Yoongi who was walking towards the edge of the pier. Jimin laughed and slung an arm around Hoseok’s shoulders, leading him over to the edge of the pier. Jin, Namjoon, and Taehyung shuffled over slowly as well and the seven of them stood, looking fondly out at the calm water.

Eventually, Hoseok complained of being sleepy and nearly sent Jimin crashing into the water as he sat. The rest of them slowly followed suit, serenely staring into the water.

They were sitting shoulder to shoulder and for once Jin felt as though they were finally all on the same page.

Sometime later, Namjoon had stood up to go get the bag of snacks Hoseok had bought and brought it back with him for them all to share. The area was still devoid of people except for the few workers working on a construction project a mile or so from where they were sat. The stray car passed behind them every now and then but for the most part it was quiet.

Jin waited with bated breath for Taehyung to get up and walk over to the construction platform. But when long moments of silence passed and no movement had come from Jin’s left side, he stole a glance at the younger. Tae was looking into the water, swishing his feet back and forth absently. Though, he seemed to feel Jin’s gaze on him and met it with a smile.

Jin smiled back uncertainly before looking away.

He wondered what this meant. If Taehyung wasn’t going to climb the construction platform then did that mean that Jin had fixed everything?

He frowned. It almost seemed *too* simple. He hadn’t even done that much. Not nearly enough to stop every horrible thing that had happened from occurring. Besides, Taehyung hadn’t stood up yet but what was stopping him from doing it in the next five minutes?
Suddenly, Jin had an idea. A foolproof way to guarantee that Taehyung would stay seated down here. It was stupid but Jin had to be sure, he had come too far for everything to mess up now.

He stood and met the curious gazes of his friends as he did so.

“I have an idea.” He assured them, just to make sure that they knew he wasn’t purposefully doing something dangerous.

His palms were sweating already but he tucked the camera into the pocket of his jacket and made his way over to the construction platform.

If Jin went up there himself than it would be extremely unlikely for Taehyung to go up after him.

“Jin, what are you doing?” Namjoon questioned as Jin’s hand wrapped around the first metal pole of the platform.

Jin ignored him, heart beating too loudly in his ears for him to even think straight. The plan was stupid, Jin knew that. But it was the best he had. He just hadn’t exactly factored in his fear of heights when coming up with the plan. Which might have been a really terrible oversight.

Somehow, even though his limbs were shaking like leaves in an autumn breeze, he managed to climb up the side of the construction platform even as he distantly heard the worried voices of his friends below him.

He pulled himself over the top and nearly collapsed in relief. He had done it at least, now he needed to pull off the rest of his plan before his friends seriously started to worry.

He lifted himself up shakily, forcefully keeping his eyes shut until he had stabilized. And then he opened them.

His friends were staring up at him in confusion and Jin quickly took his camera out, gesturing to it as he put the lense up to his eyes. He waved down at everyone and the confusion melted away into laughter and smiles as everyone waved gleefully at the camera. Well, almost everyone. Jin zoomed in a little, trying his best to keep his height out of his mind and the fact that he could fall easily in a harsh breeze even further from his mind, but he realized that Taehyung was looking at him strangely.
The younger cocked his head to the side as he looked at Jin and the elder was suddenly filled with a strange and disconcerting feeling. He blinked rapidly and remembered being on the opposite side of the situation, sitting down at the pier and looking at Taehyung through the lense of the camera.

_This wasn’t right._

Memories came flooding back into Jin’s mind, ones that he didn’t even realize he’d forgotten. Waking up in that blue room, walking down the hallway of framed photographs, seeing Taehyung’s masked figure, the mirror at the end of it, crawling into the glass and falling out the other side into his room.

Jin frowned and he suddenly felt incredibly dizzy. The one constant in all the worlds Jin had experienced was that he got to them through the photographs and was taken back by his reflection.

_But he’d come here without ever seeing the last photograph._

So, what did that mean? Where was he? Was he still in the mirror? Or had this really been reality?

He didn’t know. He _didn’t know. Oh god, he didn’t know._

The dizziness increased tenfold and Jin stumbled, he blinked rapidly as he tried to right himself but overcompensated and lost his balance.

He felt the air rushing past his ears before he could fully realize what had just happened and all he could see was the increasing distance between himself and the construction platform before his body hit the surface of the water enveloping him in the loud sound, not unlike the sound of glass crashing to the floor.

And then nothing.
His eyes flew open and he gasped desperately for air. Sounds were distorted and blurry images merged into nothing but colors and swirls in his vision.

“...Jin!”

“Oh... god!”

“... he okay?!”

Jin blinked rapidly trying to focus his vision, but he realized belatedly that he was being dragged which explained that strange motion that was making him dizzy. He was still hacking and coughing up water, lungs burning from the strain.

His head was aching and he was having trouble making sense out of what happened.

A hard grip clamped down on his shoulders and he was shaken violently like a rag doll. He had to force his head to stop bobbing with the motion before the dizziness he felt turned into nausea.

His vision cleared slowly and he realized that Namjoon was standing in front of him, a stern but frenzied expression on his face.

“Jin!? Can you hear me?” The younger demanded and Jin shook his head to clear the fog from his head. The shock of the situation was wearing off and he was able to realize what had happened.

*He had fallen from the construction platform.*

*And he, like Taehyung, couldn’t swim.*

One glance at his surroundings told him all that he needed to know. Jimin and Jeongguk were standing off to the side, both of them completely soaked and dripping water onto the sand. Hoseok and Yoongi were stood even further away as if they were afraid to get too close. Right in front of him stood Namjoon and just behind him stood Taehyung who was looking at Jin with an unreadable expression.
“I—I hear you.” Jin managed to respond, hoping that he could assuage his friend’s concern even by a little. It hadn’t been his intention to fall. He had just wanted to get up there so that Taehyung couldn’t but now Jin found himself in the same position that Taehyung had been in before.

“Are you okay? Why did you do that!??” Namjoon demanded.

Jin attempted to shake his head but it only made him dizzier. “I f-fell. I was just trying to… trying to get a good shot of everyone but then I got dizzy and fell.”

“You’re lucky you fell towards the water! You could have fallen to your death.” Another voice snapped from behind Namjoon and Jin leaned around him to see Taehyung. The younger was still wearing that odd expression on his face. The same expression that he’d had when he was looking up at Jin and the elder found it disconcerting for some reason but his head was spinning too much for him to understand why.

“You shouldn’t have…” Taehyung began, frowning and shaking his head as if confused. “You shouldn’t have done that.”

Jin held Taehyung’s gaze for a long moment and it was then that he realized what was bothering him so much about Taehyung’s reaction.

Taehyung was acting like he knew that he should have been the one up there and not Jin.

But Jin was the only one who should have known that, right?

Off to the side, Jin heard the sound of sniffling and he turned to see Jimin practically sobbing and Hoseok struggling to console him. Jeongguk had wandered closer to where Yoongi had stood and the older was looking at him in concern. Taehyung had wrapped his arms around himself and taken to staring at the ground.

Namjoon seemed to notice the tense atmosphere and released Jin’s shoulders in favor of slinging his arm around them supportively.

“Alright,” He said. “I think the mood is kind of ruined for today. Let’s head back home.”
There was a murmur of unanimous agreement from the group and they began walking back to Jin’s truck.

Well, everyone except Taehyung. Namjoon noticed this after they took a few steps forward and turned around to see what was keeping their younger friend.

“Tae? What are you doing?”

Jin turned around as well, curious as to what was happening.

Taehyung was walking towards the shore, bent down as if he’d seen something. He stooped down slowly and when he stood and turned to them again he had a black object in his hands.

“Jin’s camera.” He stated, looking down at the thing forlornly.

“It can’t still be working.” Namjoon sighed.

Taehyung frowned and turned the thing around in his hands until he found the power button. He pressed it with his lip caught between his teeth but even after a few seconds nothing happened.

“There’s no way it would still turn on after this, Tae. Come on.” Namjoon pressed but Taehyung looked dejected, face clouding with sorrow as if he would start crying at any second.

Jin remembered what Taehyung had said to him the day before about keeping the memories around until they were older and separated and understood what was upsetting the younger so much.

“It’s okay.” He assured. “The SD card might still be fine. Bring the camera, I’ll check it when I get home.”

Taehyung looked a bit happier at that news and he shook the excess water from the camera before joining them in their trek back to the truck.
The others were waiting for them there. Jeongguk had taken his shirt off and was wringing the water out aggressively. Jimin was still crying profusely and Hoseok was attempting to dry him off with one of the blankets from the back of the truck.

As the three approached Hoseok looked up from what he was doing.

“Are you okay, Jin?” He asked, eyebrows pinched in concern.

Truthfully, the world was still kind of spinning for him and he felt like Namjoon’s arm around his shoulders was the only thing keeping him from toppling over.

But he forced a smile. “I’m fine. I promise. I think I’m just shocked from the fall, honestly.”

Hoseok nodded but his expression hadn’t changed. “Well, I’m going to drive back. I don’t know if you should take on a four hour drive after nearly drowning to death.”

Jeongguk pulled his shirt back over his head and pushed his wet hair out of his face. “You, Jimin, and I should probably sit in the trunk bed since we’re soaking wet. Maybe we can air dry a little.”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll sit in the front with Hoseok.” Namjoon stated, already walking over to the other side of the truck.

Hoseok passed Jimin over to Jeongguk who walked the older to the trunk bed and helped him inside. Yoongi glanced at Jin in what appeared to be concern before opening the door to the truck and getting inside, and though he didn’t say anything, Jin appreciated the small gesture.

Taehyung joined Yoongi in the back and Hoseok got into the driver’s seat while Jin made his way to the trunk bed and climbed inside.

There were still blankets from when Jimin and Hoseok had slept there the night before and Jin grabbed one to wrap around himself so he could dry off.
A few minutes later the truck started and they began the journey back home.

“I thought I was gonna have a heart attack when I saw you fall, hyung.” Jeongguk sighed after a while of silence.

Jin looked at the younger and his heart clenched in regret. It had been a bad idea and there were surely consequences, but none could be worse than the consequences of letting Taehyung climb that structure.

He forced a smile onto his face and wrapped his arms around both Jimin and Jeongguk, pulling them close.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have gone up there like that, it was dangerous. But thank you two for jumping in after me.”

Jimin leaned into him like deadweight and sniffled right next to his ear. “I was so scared, hyung.” He cried.

“We saw you fall and Jimin didn’t even hesitate.” Jeongguk added, a smile evident in his voice. “He just started running. He was the first in the water.”

Jin’s heart warmed at that and a genuine smile formed on his face.

“Thank you. Really.”

They fell back into silence after that and Jin huddled himself further into his blanket. The few cars that passed them along with the breeze provided pleasant background noise over the fading sound of the sea birds and crashing waves.

Jin hadn’t slept in over twenty four hours and the lack of sleep was catching up to him. He shifted positions so he could be more comfortable and sunk into the warmth of the blanket as he was slowly lulled into sleep.

Chapter End Notes
This chapter took me about a month to write and drastically changed from what it was supposed to be originally- thanks to the release of the Euphoria in the theme of Love Yourself- Wonder video. It definitely improved from my original idea though, haha.

I do wonder if you’ve noticed something in this chapter… maybe something that was forgotten?

**Fun Fact**

If you’ve seen the Euphoria video and thought that Jimin was holding on to Hoseok because he didn’t want him to leave, there’s actually a different theory based on information from *The Notes*. Hoseok’s character suffers from narcolepsy which causes him to fall asleep randomly. In that particular scene Jimin caught Hoseok before he fell down the stairs.

And because I’m feeling nice today- extra fun fact. This is probably very obvious. There are really intense parallels between the Euphoria video and the Prologue video (and most of the HYYH era tbh). However, because things occur similarly, but not exactly the same, this feeds more into the theory that Jin went back in time and attempted to change history.
Taehyung

Chapter Notes

This chapter oddly feels like it’s been due for a long time. So... here it is.

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Are you calling me a sinner?”

Taehyung didn’t particularly like to blame anyone but himself for the way that he was. He didn’t like to, but he often did it anyways.

He blamed his father for never being the parental figure that he needed.

His mother died of a sudden illness when he was ten and though the loss affected him, his sister, and his father equally; his father was the one who decided to take it the hardest. He hadn’t been the most diligent and upstanding man, but after his wife died and left him with two kids, the man completely lost all form of sense.

First, he had become like a rock, sitting on his bed, staring at a photograph of the woman and crying silently. He didn’t eat, didn’t sleep, and if he ever moved out of that position it was specifically when he knew that nobody was watching him.

The problem with his father acting like that was that Taehyung was ten and his younger sister was six. They needed a parent to look after them.

Instead of one parent dying, it was suddenly as though they had lost both of them and Taehyung had to step up. A ten year old was forced to be an adult, because that’s what his sister needed from him.

He packed lunches and fixed dinner, he woke up early and made sure his sister was ready to go to school, he made sure they caught the bus and helped her with her homework after school.

There was no time to be a kid and no time to grieve.
Then, Taehyung’s father had broken out of his catatonic state and took up drinking, instead. Taehyung was glad that the man was actually leaving his room from time to time but as he saw his father with a bottle held to his lips more and more often, he began to wish for things to go back to the way that they were.

Rather than quietly crying in his room and frustrating Taehyung by his lack of action, it was as if a switch was flipped and his father began acting the exact opposite when he got drunk. He was loud and angry and irritable and every little thing set him off. He broke things, threw things, and was completely impossible to deal with. He barely worked as it was and they already lived in pretty poor conditions to start with. Even as a primary school student, Taehyung was scared to find out what a step down from their current living situation was.

So, yes, Taehyung liked to blame his father for his problems.

Sometimes, he liked to blame his mother for them as well and those were the times that he hated himself the most. It wasn’t her fault that she couldn’t be there but Taehyung felt that it was because she wasn’t there that these things were happening.

So, even though it made him hate himself even more than he already did going into middle school, he couldn’t help but blame his mother for the things that began to happen to their family.

Really, it had only been a matter of time.

Taehyung knew that his father was totally unreasonable when he was drunk and that the man was drunk six and a half days of the week, but he really hadn’t meant to leave his shoes in the middle of the living room. His father had tripped over them and fallen right into a rage.

That was the first time that his father had actually laid hands on him.

He’d been close before, throwing things at him and threatening him but that was the first time that Taehyung had ever been truly scared of the man.

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Taehyung never learned how to cope properly with things and he supposed that maybe it was one of the few things that he and his father had in common.

While his father dealt with his grief in alcohol and violence, Taehyung was overcome with a mortal fear.
One day his mother had been fine, laughing with them on the couch as they rewatched the same movie for the seventh time and knew it well enough to quote it backwards, and the next minute Taehyung’s life was spiraling into a pitch black darkness.

Taehyung hated that, he hated feeling out of control. He wanted to be in control of his own destiny. He feared dying like his mother so much that it kept him up at night. Humans were fragile after all and something so tiny that we can’t even see it, like a virus or bacteria strain, could kill us off so easily.

Taehyung hated feeling out of control so he made a point of putting himself in control in every situation. He didn’t want anyone dictating his life and he didn’t want to deal with the parts of him that reminded himself of his father. The aggression, the anger, the erratic nature of his behavior. He wanted to be in control. So, he pushed those parts of himself down and pretended that he was the one calling the shots when he knew that doing things because you were scared was the same as being ruled by fear.

He was impulsive, he knew that. It was a polite way of saying that he had trouble controlling himself. It’s backwards, but by not limiting the way that he acts and the things that he does, it makes him feel like, rather than being ruled by his unpredictability, he harnesses it instead.

He doesn’t let it become a weakness, he forces it to become a strength instead.

Still, he was lucky that Namjoon appeared when he did in that alley way.

Taehyung had been in a particularly bad mood that day and was not feeling like being heckled by older kids just for the sake of their own amusement. So, he might have said more than he actually meant to but if he was going to get beat up then he would make sure it was on his own terms.

He hadn’t been expecting much of the guy that had suddenly appeared in the alley with them, especially after realizing that the guy knew two of the four guys who were planning to beat the shit out of him. But he had hoped just a little when the guy started to make an argument against beating Taehyung up. Though, he hadn’t missed the murderous glare the guy shot his way when he stupidly opened his mouth again.

It wasn’t his smartest moment, antagonizing four guys while someone was trying to talk them out of hurting him.

Still, it had worked out somehow, and though Taehyung couldn’t totally swallow his pride and properly thank the guy- Namjoon, he was still grateful.

He got beat up enough by his father on the regular. He didn’t also need to be beat up by some random guys on the street, but if they had been dead set on teaching him a lesson, he could have taken it. He just didn’t really want to get beat up over nothing.
So, he was thankful.

Which is why he made sure to follow through on his promises of ramyeon for the older.

Taehyung liked Namjoon. They made good friends. Taehyung wasn’t always the best at making judgement calls and it was that lack that had often gotten him into trouble but Namjoon’s judgement was always good. Namjoon helped him to feel like he was actually in control of himself instead of pretending to be. Taehyung couldn’t be totally reckless with the older around, steering him out of crazy ideas that popped into his head at ungodly hours of the night. Ideas that he totally would have acted on if he was alone.

He wasn’t entirely sure why Namjoon stuck around though. Sure they got along well, and Taehyung was grateful for the older’s company, but he didn’t really think that he anything to offer in a friendship.

After all, Taehyung wasn’t the type of person that constantly had friends around him. He was popular in school, but that was more because he had built up a reputation for himself and people either liked him or they didn’t. Any of the friends that he made usually didn’t stick around for too long after getting to know him. They either couldn’t keep up with him or grew to hate the way that he acted. Taehyung often behaved as if he doesn’t know the words caution or thought. He’d be lying if he didn’t admit that sometimes he acted like that on purpose to push people away from him.

He wasn’t someone that others should want to be friends with. He knew that. He just thought that some people needed that to be spelled out clearly for them sometimes.

With Namjoon, though, Taehyung found himself wishing that the older would stick around.

Neither of them lived in a particularly great financial situation even though they both went to school in a rich neighborhood. Sure, there were a lot of other people at their school in similar situations but all of them were bitter and angry.

Namjoon wasn’t like that and neither was Taehyung. Their situations sucked but they usually tried to make the most of it.

While Taehyung never stopped moving long enough to let his situation truly get to him, Namjoon was responsible in a way that Taehyung didn’t think he could ever be. Both of them were forced to grow up at an early age, but while Taehyung had only acted more responsible, Namjoon had actually become responsible. The older worked a decent job at the local gas station, had decent friends, and always thought things through before he did them.

In a way, Taehyung looked up to Namjoon. He was a nice person and looked out for Taehyung’s best interests even if he didn’t have to. He was incredibly smart and many people liked him.
Unlike with Taehyung, the people that liked Namjoon, respected him and genuinely liked the person that the older was.

Taehyung didn’t understand why Namjoon stuck around but he was glad that the older did.

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It was when Namjoon introduced Taehyung to his other friend, Kim Seokjin, that everything changed.

Jin was three years older than Taehyung and would be attending vocational school once the summer ended.

At first, the two only hung out when they were both trying to spend time with Namjoon. As Namjoon became busier with work over the summer though, so they started to hang out with each other more often.

They learned that they had a lot more in common than either of them had with Namjoon and became quick friends. Not just friends, but close friends.

The two of them shared a love for theatre. Acting, movies, and dramas were their thing. Before Jin, Taehyung had never been able to properly voice his love for his acting. It was something unreachable to him. A distant dream that he could only live while he was asleep. Reality wasn’t as kind and he knew that becoming an actor was completely out of his grasp.

Although, it was Jin’s dream too, the older knew that becoming an actor would be silly.

Jin was from a much richer family than Taehyung and his parents were paying for his entire college tuition as long as he pursued something that they considered respectable. Acting was not in that list and it would be stupid to assume that it would be. So, Jin was to take over the family clinic once he finished medical school.

His future was certain and success was assured. Taehyung thought it must have been nice to not have to worry about how you would put food on the table or how you would make a stable living making enough money to support a family without a college degree.

Taehyung didn’t think that his family would ever have enough money to live comfortably even if his mother was still with them.

In any event, it was over that summer that Taehyung made what would be his first best friend.
Sure, he and Namjoon would be close but there were times when they felt more like family than friends. Namjoon liked to take care of Taehyung and made sure that he was eating, sleeping, and staying out of trouble.

Jin didn’t do any of that.

Taehyung didn’t feel like they owed each other anything. They were just friends because they wanted to be, not because they felt responsible for each other.

It was nice.

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Taehyung should have known better than to think that anything good could stay his for long, though. He had gotten so comfortable with Namjoon that he had somehow forgotten that nobody ended up staying friends with him for long. Not after the kind of shit that he could help but to pull.

The summer had passed by in a flash, and Taehyung had grown incredibly close to Jin in that time. They texted all the time and often hung out both by themselves and with Namjoon. It was strange if they didn’t see each other at least three times a week even though they were no longer going to the same school.

Things were nice, they weren’t great, but they were good. Taehyung was doing alright in school, he had two great friends and he wasn’t getting into nearly as much trouble. The latter was probably because he spent so much time with Jin. The older wasn’t the type to be out on the streets at night tagging and getting into fights. So, since Taehyung hung out with Jin so much, he didn’t either.

Then something had changed.

Taehyung had returned from hanging out with Jin and Namjoon to find his father a drunken mess and passed out on the couch. Something had felt wrong so he hurried to see if his little sister was home. He found her in their shared bathroom, sobbing as she tried to stop her busted lip from bleeding. Taehyung’s heart had fallen into the pit of his stomach and he felt almost faint from the sudden rush of anger.

His father had never hit his sister until then. That was the first time. The little shred of respect that Taehyung had for the man had been torn into shreds and as much as he wanted to wake the drunkard up and scream at him for hurting his own daughter, his sister needed him.

He didn’t ask any questions as he slid into the bathroom behind her and swatted her hands away,
instructing her to sit on the toilet lid so that he could tend to her wounds like she had done for him so many times before. He never thought that there would ever be a time when their roles would reverse like this.

He didn’t understand why his father had decided to lay hands on his sister all of a sudden but all he could think was that it was because he hadn’t been there to take the beating instead. Taehyung had always worried about leaving his sister alone for so long but since nothing had ever happened he had gotten too relaxed.

He’d become too trusting.

He whispered an apology to his sister as he put her to bed and sat awake for the rest of the night, plagued by his guilt.

Suddenly, his world had begun to fill with bright colors had desaturated once again and returned to an even murkier array of colors.

So, when Jin began to ramble incessantly about this girl that he had a crush on every time they were together, Taehyung started to get annoyed.

It felt like the weight on his shoulders had doubled in size, he didn’t have the time to worry about cute girls and whether they liked him or not. He had more important things to worry about then the grade that he got in his anatomy class. He had more to worry about then constantly trying to impress his parents.

His concerns were so much more serious than that.

What would happen when they ran out of the money that his mother had been keeping in her savings and the money that had been given to them from her funeral?

What would happen if his father beat him so badly that he needed to go to the hospital?

What if the people he had to borrow money from suddenly wanted it back?

What if his father beat up his sister because Taehyung wasn’t at home again?

He had told his little sister to text him if she was heading home and to try to spend as much as time over at her friends places as possible, but he still worried.

Taehyung worried about so many things in a single day that it felt like his head would explode sometimes.
It wasn’t something he did consciously, but he couldn’t help but look at Jin’s life and compare it to his own. The way Taehyung saw it, Jin didn’t have a single thing to complain about. He lived in a house that was at least three times larger than the shithole that Taehyung lived in. His parents were both alive and they loved and supported him so much that Jin would never probably never have to struggle financially in his life. Jin could go to a fancy university and graduate with a degree that would ensure he always had work and could live a comfortable life.

But Jin always complained.

His parents were too strict on him and his father had practically forced him into the medical field. The vocational school work was way too demanding of him and no amount of studying he did was enough. He constantly tried to win his father’s favor but the man almost always seemed disappointed in him.

Jin’s problems were rich people problems. They were problems that would be a luxury for so many other people. They were the problems that only people who have never truly struggled a day in their lives had.

And so Taehyung began to resent him.

While Taehyung’s life was falling into shambles, everything was working out for Seokjin.

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Taehyung knew who she was before she even introduced herself. Before she had left to start attending vocational school, she had been in the same popular circle as Taehyung. She was a few years older than him so he had only heard her name and seen her in passing before.

And, of course, in more recent months he had heard her name because she was Jin’s girlfriend. Sohyun.

He hadn’t actually seen her in a few years, but she was definitely even more beautiful than Jin had described in person.

He had no idea why she was standing in front of him, shy smile on her face, under the neon lights of the club he’d snuck into. People didn’t card in this part of town and the security for the place was pitiful at best. Taehyung tended to visit it only when he didn’t have to be at home, and felt like being out alone but was too tired to get up to any mischief.
The last person that he expected to see in front of him that night was Kim Sohyun.

He usually hated drinking, since he’d seen first-hand what it could do to people and one his worst fears was to become anything like his bastard of a father, but he just wanted something to take the edge off that didn’t put him at risk for a dangerous addiction. And, unfortunately, he hated cigarettes.

“Hi.” She greeted a bit awkwardly when Taehyung had only stared at her.

“Hi.” He echoed blankly.

Sohyun shifted uncomfortably, throwing a glance around the room before focusing on him. “… You’re Taehyung, right? I think I’ve seen you around a few times.”

“Kim Taehyung, yeah.” He responded, wondering why she was talking to him in the first place.

She glanced around once again before seemingly coming to a decision and sat down at the table with him.

“I’m Kim Sohyun.” She greeted with a warm smile.

“I know.” Taehyung admitted, forcing his attention away from his drink and over to her. He smiled. “You were pretty popular when you were still going to the high school. We never met but all the guys were practically drooling over you.”

Sohyun laughed in embarrassment. “Were they really?”

Taehyung nodded, amused smile taking a place on his face. “You had a bit of a cult following, honestly.”

Sohyun laughed again and nibbled on her lip as her attention turned to the table. “Were you a member, too?”

Taehyung stilled for a moment, for the second time wondering why Kim Sohyun was talking to him in this dingy club. He wondered if Jin knew that his girlfriend was hanging out in sleazy places like this. No, scratch that, he wondered if Jin was aware that his girlfriend was such a flirt.

That was what was happening right now, right? Taehyung hoped wasn’t losing his mind or reading into things. He’d flirted with girls a lot before he became friends with Namjoon. He was lonely most of the time and there were plenty of girls willing to keep him company. He knew what flirting looked like and he had no doubt in his mind that Sohyun was flirting with him now. The only
question was why?

He wondered if Sohyun was aware that he was friends with her boyfriend.

If Taehyung had a shred of decency in him, he would kindly inform Sohyun of that fact if she wasn’t aware. But every shred of decency in his body had been beaten out of him years ago. All that was left was resentment.

Taehyung smirked. “I’m not really a fan of sharing.”

Sohyun looked up at him in what seemed to be surprise.

“How do you know me, anyways? I’m pretty sure we’ve never met.” Taehyung questioned, leaning forward. If Sohyun wanted to play, then he would play too. There were worst ways to spend his time. Maybe he could give Jin an actual problem to complain about.

After all, Sohyun had come on to Taehyung first.

“You were pretty popular, too.” She smiled.

“Oh?” Taehyung questioned, taking the bait. “Did you and all of your friends drool over me, then?”

Sohyun scoffed and made a show of looking affronted. “I wouldn’t say that we were drooling or anything. It was just a little hard not to stare, especially when you had that ridiculously red hair. I don’t know how you got away with that at school.”

“Oh, is that what it was?” Taehyung teased. “Just the red hair? You found me tonight, though, so what about now?”

Sohyun bit her lip in embarrassment but couldn’t help the smile that spread across her face.

“I guess you just stand out more than everyone else.”

“And I guess I can see why there was so much drooling whenever your name was mentioned.” Taehyung smiled in return.
Taehyung wasn’t an idiot, he knew that what he was doing was wrong. No, not even wrong. It was fucked up that he was helping his friend’s girlfriend cheat on him.

Taehyung didn’t like to blame anyone but himself for the way that he acted and he wouldn’t start now. He was a fucked up person who got his kicks from doing fucked up things. He knew that and everyone else around him should know it too.

If Jin wasn’t aware of that fact yet then he would have to figure it out himself.

Taehyung and Sohyun talked for several hours that night, exchanged numbers, and had met up three other times in the week and a half that had passed since then.

It was growing close to the end of the year so it was exam season and gave Taehyung an even better excuse to avoid Jin.

He’d been doing a fantastic job of avoiding the older already, only hanging out with him when Namjoon forced him to come along. Taehyung was an asshole but even he felt bad facing Jin, knowing that he had kissed the older’s girlfriend more than once.

Doing things that he shouldn’t do was the way that Taehyung coped and after coming home to his sister tending to her wounds twice since the first time it had happened, he needed all the coping that he could get.

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Over the summer, Taehyung and Sohyun hung out frequently. He liked Sohyun. She was beautiful, funny, and surprisingly bold. She had let him kiss her first but after that, she usually initiated affection between them.

The only thing that bothered him was that she was adamant about paying for things. When he had asked her why she never let him pay she had smiled and said,

“I know your financial situation isn’t great. And… I know that you’re Jin’s friend. My family is stupid rich so I figure the least I could do is treat you for not going to Jin and telling him that I’m a cheating whore.”

Taehyung had been taken aback by her bluntness and could do little other than laugh and spit out,

“I’m not any better. Him being my best friend and all.”
Then Sohyun had smiled sadly and told Taehyung that she really liked him before leaning in to kiss him. Taehyung had held her hand after and tried to not let the fact that he couldn’t return the sentiment bother him.

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It wasn’t like they were being discreet about seeing each other so it wasn’t exactly surprising that they were caught.

Taehyung should have caught on that something was wrong when Sohyun suddenly started ignoring him. She’d never done that before, even when she was studying for exams. He just didn’t have much time to worry about it since his father had just been fired from another one of his jobs and he always got the drunkest when his failure as a adult was shoved in his face. He’d been beating on both Taehyung and his little sister so much that Taehyung was starting to wonder if they would need to try to stay with someone else for a few days.

Which is why he was in no mood for Namjoon to suddenly be texting him, demanding that he come outside. His father was going on a rampage in the living room and Taehyung had holed up in his bedroom with his sister. But he worried what would happen if he ignored Namjoon’s texts and started knocking on the door.

Namjoon would be lucky if he ended up getting spit on his face rather than fists if Taehyung’s father got to the door first.

Sighing in frustration, Taehyung promised his sister that he would be back and snuck out of the bedroom to the front door. He was grateful that his father was distracted by the television at that moment. Still, he hurried to quietly open the door and step outside.

“What do you want, Namjoon?” Taehyung demanded, not caring that he was speaking rudely. “I told you not to come here by yourself.”

It was not a warning to be taken lightly. The people in this neighborhood knew Taehyung and they didn’t like outsiders coming around. If you didn’t come with someone that lived here, you’d be lucky if you were only mugged. Taehyung knew that Namjoon didn’t much to offer in his pockets and that only angered people more.

Namjoon scoffed and crossed his arms. “Jin’s girlfriend cheated on him so he broke up with her.”

Taehyung hoped that the momentary panic he felt over the words wasn’t visible on his face and frowned in confusion.
“Okay… why did you come here to tell me that?”

Namjoon’s expression turned noticeably irritated and Taehyung knew that his words had come across too crassly.

“Because Jin is too fucking upset to even see your face, let alone yell at you.” Namjoon snapped and Taehyung flinched. He was at least hoping that he wasn’t being suspected of being the person that Sohyun cheated with but it turned out that he wasn’t so lucky.

“He knows that Sohyun cheated on him with you.” Namjoon continued, openly glaring at Taehyung now like a very disappointed parent.

Taehyung bit his lip nervously. “He does?”

Namjoon’s expression morphed into anger as he raised his voice.

“Yes, he does. You can feel guilty, you know!” The older yelled. “Why the fuck would do that to him!? I’ve been trying to figure it out since I heard about it. I saw you with her last week that one night that we were supposed to hang out, so don’t even try to play innocent right now. He’s your friend, Taehyung! Why would you do that to him!?"

Taehyung’s gaze turned downward and he scuffed his shoe on the ground. “I don’t know,” He muttered.

It was easy to pretend that he was tough shit all the time and that nothing bothered him but all of a sudden, Taehyung couldn’t remember his reasoning for doing such a awful thing to Jin. His best friend.

He didn’t even really like Sohyun. Sure, she was beautiful and everything that Taehyung could ask for in a woman, but he’d never actually felt anything romantic towards her. So… why? Why did he even bother to go out of his way to do such a terrible thing? It was fun to pretend that he actually liked Sohyun and was just being selfish, but it wasn’t the truth. It was just a role that he had played.

And now the curtains had fallen and the farce was being revealed.

Taehyung didn’t think that he’d ever seen Namjoon so angry. “You don’t know!? Do you want everyone to hate you, Taehyung? Is that what you want!? You do shit like this and you can’t even feel bad about it-”

“I do feel bad!” Taehyung interjected, his eyes were stinging with tears and suddenly the last few
months felt like the stupidest moments of Taehyung’s life. He often did things without thinking of the consequences and this was no exception. He knew that he would hurt Jin, that he was hurting the older by stealing his girlfriend away. But, for some reason, he had never really thought about the consequences of actually getting caught.

Taehyung ruined things. He always ruined things. He didn’t mean to but it always happened. Namjoon had been the anomaly but he knew that one day Namjoon would want to leave him too. There was not a single redeeming factor about Kim Taehyung. He was dirt, trash, worse than that. He hurt people for no reason and enjoyed it until he got hurt in return. He never thought that he would have Namjoon this angry at him, yelling at him this passionately. Because Taehyung never thought. He just did things and hurt everyone around him. He didn’t just hurt Jin. He hurt Sohyun, by pretending to like her as much as she liked him, he hurt Namjoon by betraying his trust, and worst of all he hurt himself.

Just like he always did.

“I feel awful!” Taehyung continued and didn’t fight the tears that dripped from his eyes. “I just get angry and I do things! Stupid things! Things that I can’t take back! Everyone should hate me! What is there about me that anyone could even like!?”

Taehyung couldn’t even like himself. Especially not in moments like these. Maybe it was because he hated himself that he always did things like this. Maybe his brain hated itself so much that it had turned against him too.

A crash echoed through the door followed by a loud voice and Taehyung flinched and glanced at the door behind him. He wasn’t sure if his father had figured out that he’d left or was heckling his sister now and he didn’t want to wait to find out which it was.

“Tae…” Namjoon started, and the look in his eyes had softened into something that scared Taehyung so he quickly cut the older off.

“I don’t know why I did it either, alright?” He snapped, sniffing. “I’m an idiot and Jin deserves a better friend than me, anyways.”

He didn’t wait for Namjoon to open his mouth again and instead turned around and hurried entered his home again, locking the door swiftly behind him.

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Taehyung texted Sohyun a few days later, asking if they could meet up.
They hadn’t texted each other in nearly two weeks and thought he was hoping that Sohyun would continue to ignore him, she texted him back an “okay”.

Sitting across from Sohyun in the quaint coffee shop, after everything that had happened, made Taehyung feel almost ill. He knew that he done it, but thinking of how disgustingly he had acted made him nauseated. She still looked beautiful as ever sitting across from him but her eyes were puffy and red as if she had been crying the night before.

Taehyung had caused that.

“I… assume Jin found out who I was cheating on him with?” She started hesitantly.

“Yeah.” Taehyung nodded.

“I’m so sorry.” She apologized, looking at him worriedly. “I didn’t tell him your name or anything but I guess he figured it out anyways. I really didn’t mean to come between you two, I know you were close…”

“It’s my fault.” Taehyung interjected. “I shouldn’t have… I don’t know why I…”

He trailed off and breathed out a frustrated sigh. He had been wracking his brain for a reason he had done something so despicable. All he had come up with was that he had been jealous.

He was jealous that Jin lived such a good life and had a pretty girlfriend and parents who cared about him while Taehyung had a shitty life and a little sister to protect and a parent that couldn’t care less about his well-being. He was still jealous of Jin because of that. But Jin was his friend. It wasn’t as if Jin had personally done anything, they were both just living the lives that they had been given.

It was no one’s fault that Taehyung got the shitty end of the stick.

It wasn’t even that Taehyung hated Jin or that he felt any better about himself after pulling this stunt. If anything, he just hated himself more. But Taehyung didn’t think that he would ever be able to truly be friends with Jin. It was as though the two had been handed a script for their lives. Jin was the shining hero with the glittery cape and flowing hair and Taehyung was the villain doomed to stand in his shadow.

It was no one’s fault. It was just the way that things were.

Sohyun frowned, and reached out a hand to grasp Taehyung’s. “I know we had bad timing, but Taehyung, I really like you. I want to try this, I want to try us.”
Taehyung laughed coldly, taking his hand out of hers. He suddenly felt like crying again.

“You shouldn’t.” He warned lowly. “You like the idea of me. Get to know me well enough and you’ll start to hate me like everyone else does. Like everyone else should.”

“Taehyung-” Sohyun began to argue. She looked hurt and Taehyung didn’t know how many more times he could handle seeing that look in someone’s eyes.

“I’m breaking up with you, okay?” He said tenderly. “I never really had feelings for you and maybe I was just using you to hurt Jin because that’s the kind of person that I am. Trust me, you don’t want anything to do with me.”

He stood up and avoided looking at Sohyun. He knew that she was crying and he had to force himself to walk out of the doors after she called out for him again.

He was so despicable that if he was dirt, not even a weed would try to grow in his soil.

—

Time passed quickly after that even if every day felt like a year to Taehyung.

Jin had avoided him like the plague so Taehyung never got the chance to apologize. He was grateful that they never had a confrontation, though. He was worried about the type of things that would come out of his mouth in front of Jin. He wanted to apologize but he wasn’t the type to usually feel regret over his actions. He regretted everything that happened with Sohyun but he really wasn’t sure he would be able to look Jin in the eye and apologize for it. He’d probably say something like the older had deserved it and there was a limit to how much Taehyung could hate himself and still stay sane.

They never talked about what happened and it took awhile for Namjoon to stop being so angry at him after. Though, Taehyung suspected that it was Namjoon’s sense of responsibility for Taehyung’s wellbeing that didn’t keep the older angry at him for longer.

Eventually, Taehyung began to hang around Jin again. It was awkward for sure, since they had never worked things out between them even though months had passed and Jin was less than happy about Taehyung’s presence. But, unlike Taehyung, Jin was a good person and didn’t make a fuss about Taehyung being there.
It was easier after time passed and more friends were added to their group. Jeongguk, Hoseok, Yoongi, and Jimin. They were all a little messed up but they got along well enough and as even more time passed it was easy to pretend that the divide between Jin and Taehyung didn’t exist.

Taehyung still remembered it, though. He remembered it everytime Jin looked at him with none of the fondness that he had once looked at him with. He remembered it when Jin took any excuse to not be alone in the same space as him. He remembered it when Jin told everyone that he had switched his major to acting. He remembered it when he tried to be happy for the older and only found burning hatred.

---

Years passed and eventually Taehyung was graduating from high school. His future was incredibly uncertain and he had no plans to go to university. He had no intention of putting his family in more debt. Instead, he had to actually become responsible for once in his life rather than pretending to be. He worked several odd jobs in order to make sure that they could at least keep the roof over their heads.

Taehyung’s father had stolen his first paycheck from him and used it to gamble and buy more alcohol. Taehyung had been so furious that he had actually yelled at his father and instigated a fight between them. He hadn’t been thinking clearly through his rage and had been the first one to throw a punch.

It was the first time that Taehyung had truly been scared of himself.

Sometimes, it felt like there was a dark side of himself living in his head. It was the side of him that loved chaos, the side of him that thrived in crime, and the side of him that had hurt Jin. It was a shadow that Taehyung couldn’t escape from and after he hit his father for the first time -he realized what he was truly capable of. He’d been overcome by anger and hadn’t even hesitated for a second before striking the man.

That wasn’t him. That wasn’t Kim Taehyung. He was a lot of things, but he would never in a million years think of hitting his father even after all the shit that the man had put him through.

Of course, afterwards, when his father had recovered from his shock he had screamed harsh insults and beat Taehyung so badly afterwards that he was sure he would need to go to the hospital.

He didn’t, though, they didn’t have the money to pay the bill.

So, his sister patched him up and bandaged his wounds with practiced hands. She was going into high school that year and had gotten far too used to tending to wounds.
Taehyung couldn’t wait until the day where they could both move out and be away from their monster of a father. It had been years since their mother had died and it seemed like the only one who refused to get over it was their father. He was determined to stay a piece of shit until the end and Taehyung had long lost hope that it was just a phase that would pass like the catatonic phase before it had.

The realization that his father would probably always be like this, was hard for Taehyung to digest. He couldn’t even remember a time before his father started hitting him. All of the pleasant memories from before his mother died had been beaten out of his brain.

It had been an entire decade of the bullshit now and Taehyung was beyond tired of it. It wasn’t right for a parent to be using their children as their own personal punching bags. He had wished more than once that his father would drink himself to death or anger the wrong people and have an altercation in a dark alley. He couldn’t even bring himself to feel bad about those thoughts anymore. His father had died when his mother had died. Now he just lived with a monster in his father’s skin.

---

Taehyung had been taking his work as seriously as he could. He didn’t necessarily have a skill or anything, so he took whatever jobs he could and though he was often fired, he didn’t let that deter him. He had to work to get his sister out of that place. Taehyung would have been gone a long time ago, he knew that Jin had stayed with Hoseok for a while and that Hoseok probably wouldn’t had any issue with Taehyung staying with him now that Jin had found his own place.

It wasn’t like Taehyung would just up and leave his sister with their father though. She still had to get through high school and Taehyung hoped that she would stop having to buy so much concealer and could actually invite her friends over. All they had was each other now, anyways.

Taehyung had practically raised her since their father had given up the job of being a parent a long time ago. He just wanted the best for her.

It was stressful, being away from home so often though. Especially since Taehyung often worked graveyard shifts and was out most of the times that his father normally got drunk. He knew that his little sister tried to be out as much as she could but she was only a high school student and could only bother her friends so much before she had to return home.

So, on days like this, when Taehyung’s earlier shift ran over time since someone else hadn’t shown up on time, it was incredibly stressful. He was trying to make enough money so that he could support him and his sister but that meant constantly putting her in danger as he worked.

He wasn’t even supposed to work that day, his manager had just happened to call him and asked
him if he wanted to come in and work. Taehyung wasn’t the type to turn down extra money so, of course, he had said yes. He was desperate to keep the job anyways, he’d been fired again earlier in the week.

Taehyung had even tried to talk to Namjoon about the situation, but as the older had been hearing about the situation for the past six years it was understandable that he was tired of hearing it. There was nothing Namjoon could do about it, anyways. Taehyung just wanted someone to tell him that it would be okay but that wasn’t Namjoon’s personality so he wasn’t exactly sure what he’d been expecting.

He regretted calling after. It had only made him feel like his situation was even more inescapable than it had already felt.

He sighed as he made the way up the stairs to the same dingy apartment that his family had lived in for as long as he could remember. He was lost in thought when he opened the door but he was immediately greeted by the sound of yelling and was shaken from his thoughts.

Anger rose just from the sound of his father’s raised voice. He could smell alcohol in the air and only grew angrier. He stepped further into the living room and could see his father’s back facing him as he pinned his daughter to the wall by her neck. He was screaming into her face and she was desperately pushing against his arms in a feeble attempt to get him to release her.

Taehyung saw red.

His mind was simultaneously blank as it was filled with thoughts. He didn’t think he’d ever been so furious in his life. He stepped forward slowly and then faster, with more determination as the situation fully dawned on him.

There was an empty bottle of soju sitting on an end table near the entrance of the kitchen along with several other bottles around the living space but Taehyung wasn’t thinking about them. He grabbed the bottle and strided into the kitchen, rage fueling his movements. Not a single thought crossed his mind as he reached out a hand to shove his father away from his sister, swinging out with the bottle in his other hand and smashing it over his father’s head in one smooth movement.

He heard his sister’s cry of surprise distantly above the sound of his own heart beating loudly in his ears.

His father crashed into the window behind him with an undignified shout and Taehyung took a few steps backwards, breathing heavily.

He’s done, Taehyung thought. That was more than enough to get his father’s attention and now he’ll put up with the beating that’s sure to happen and that’ll be that.
Except the shadow lurking in Taehyung’s brain had other plans. All he could think suddenly, was how simple everything would be if the man was dead. If he stopped him this time what would happen the next time Taehyung was late? Would he be early enough to stop his sister from being choked out or would his father not stop beating them until he killed one of them?

His feet propelled him forward again with purpose. He wrapped an arm around his father’s shoulders and with the other hand, he took the jagged edge of the bottle and forced the glass into the man’s body repeatedly. He could feel hot blood on his hands, stinging like lava but he didn’t stop.

He felt his father’s hand on his, grabbing hard, trying to get Taehyung to get the glass out of his body but Taehyung just gritted his teeth and rammed the bottle edge into him again and again.

He was pulled backwards by his jacket and suddenly the rush of blood in his ears quieted and he was able to hear again. His sister shouted at him before collapsing to the ground with a wail. The sound of dripping blood echoed in the kitchen and Taehyung blinked in shock.

His father slumped down lifelessly onto the kitchen floor, eyes closed shut with finality.

Taehyung’s draw dropped open and he stumbled backwards. The bottle fell from his hands and clattered loudly in the sudden silence. Taehyung felt cold all over but his hand was burning hot and he could feel blood that wasn’t his own run down his palm in rivulets. His chest was hot too and he realized only after looking down at it that blood had splattered onto his clothes as well.

What had he just done?

Taehyung swallowed audibly and stared with wide eyes at his father’s lifeless body.

He had just… he had just brutally stabbed his father to death.

One of Taehyung’s biggest fears was becoming like his father. He hated himself and the way that he was and was terrified that being a monster was genetic. Now, though… he had just stabbed his father. He’d… murdered his own parent. Patricide. Wasn’t that worse?

What scared Taehyung the most though, as he continued to stare at the wound on his father’s stomach as it seeped with dark red blood, was that he didn’t feel bad. And he should have. He should felt regretful or remorseful. But all he could feel was relief that he never had to worry about the man ever again.

His father was… dead. And Taehyung was glad.

But he had just committed a murder in front of his own sister. He looked down at her and saw that
she had curled up into herself and was sobbing loudly.

“C-call the cops.” Taehyung instructed, surprised by how shaky his voice sounded. He felt fine but his voice was shaking twice as much as his hands were. He stepped out of the kitchen and made his way into his bedroom. He almost reached out a hand to open the door but his red stained hands entered his vision and his world swayed violently. He put his hand down quickly and shouldered the door open.

He looked around for his phone and thought to grab his wallet before thinking better of it. His sister would probably need the money more than he would. He walked on shaky legs back to the kitchen. His sister was still on the floor but she had moved closer to the living room and looked up at him with watery eyes as he approached again.

Taehyung knelt down next to her and pressed a kiss to her forehead. “I’m sorry, but I can’t stay now. I have to go.” He explained.

She glanced into the kitchen before looking back up at him and wrapped her arms around him in a fierce hug.

“I love you.” She whispered.

“I love you, too.” Taehyung forced himself to smile. “Call the cops, alright? Tell them you didn’t see what happened. Say you were knocked unconscious or something, okay?”

She simply stared at him.

“Okay?” Taehyung prompted again.

“Okay.” She whispered.

Taehyung nodded once, twice, before standing up. His legs felt like jelly now and he felt a sudden urge of panic well up inside of him but he forced himself to leave the apartment first, putting his bloody hand under his the fabric of his shirt to twist open the door.

As soon as he was out of the apartment, he breathed out a shaky breath and forced himself to keep walking, just far enough so that he was a good distance from the apartment. There were abandoned storage units on the other side of the apartments that were usually used by druggies and the homeless. Taehyung ducked into one and walked to the back of it before he allowed himself to sit then and finally allowed the panic to take over him. He gasped for breath as he sat and let his brain sort out what had just happened.

He didn’t know how long he just sat there, staring blankly at the graffitied walls. It may have been
minutes, hours, or days, but he was startled by a sudden beam of light hitting his eyes. He squinted and ducked his head out of the way. The storage box he was in had a hole near the top that was letting in the sun. He sighed and looked around. There were a few water bottles scattered around.

Taehyung reached for one and unscrewed the top. He’d tried to wipe his hands off on his shirt earlier but they seemed to be stained permanently red. If he stared at them for long enough he could still feel the rivulets of hot blood dripping down them.

He took a deep breath as he poured the water over his hand and desperately scrubbed at the blood on his hands. He felt something strange on his face too and hurried to wipe at it. He was shaking again, he didn’t know if he’d ever stopped.

Every millisecond that he closed his eyes to blink, the scene replayed out in his mind and Taehyung could not believe that he had done that. He had thought that was a darkness in him before but now he was beyond sure that he was evil. He was terrified of himself. He still didn’t regret what he had done and that scared him the most.

The metal material of his phone glinted under the light and he hurried to pick it up, having completely forgotten that he’d brought it with him in the first place.

Tears were falling from his eyes now and desperately wanted someone to hug him and tell him that everything was going to be okay. He wouldn’t believe it, though, he just wanted to hear the words and try to pretend that it wasn’t a lie.

He barely glanced at the contact before pressing the call button and holding the phone up to his ear. The phone rang a few times and Taehyung was worried that he wouldn’t get an answer. He didn’t know what he would do if the person he wanted to hear didn’t answer. He didn’t what he would do if they did answer. He just wanted to hear a comforting voice.

“Yeah?” Namjoon greeted and Taehyung nearly sobbed with relief. His grip on the phone tightened and he forced his voice to steady before he spoke.

“Hyung… I want to see you.”

Chapter End Notes

Taehyung in Korean is spelled . However, if you spell it incorrectly like “daehyung” and try to google translate it to English, it means devil o_o so uh… InTerEstiNg… COINCIDENCE? I THINK NOT!

(ignore me and my conspiracies, I think this story has robbed me of what little sanity I
had left. Thank you for reading! I love you all so much <3)

**Fun Fact**

Taehyung, as a character, seems to struggle the most with himself. The lyrics of Singularity seem to portray the inner thoughts of Taehyung’s character as he struggles with who he is and who wants to be.
Run

Chapter Summary

[Chapter Recap]

*Jin receives a chance to correct his mistakes under strange circumstances. He tries to remember all of the things that he experienced in the worlds that the photographs have taken him to and applies his new knowledge to his friends, talking to them more openly, and working to prevent the same horrible things from happening a second time. The choices that he’s made have drastically changed the course of events… but he seems to have forgotten something.*

Chapter Notes

Part 2 of 2

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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“I’m chasing butterflies, so lost in dreams, I follow your traces. Show me the way. please stop me. let me breathe.”

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Yoongi sighed, lifting his finger from the dingy ivory of the old piano. His wrists were tired from attempting to perfect the melody for the past six hours. He wrote down the revised notes on the page of sheet music in front of him, roughly scratching out what was written previously.

He’d been working tirelessly on the song for months.

Initially, he’d written it back in his high school days but late last year he happened to think about it and realized that he had nearly completely forgotten it. He remembered the overall melody of it but since he hadn’t ever actually written the notes down there were certain parts that just… didn’t sound right. He knew it was because they weren’t parts of the melody that he, himself, had written.

It was the song that, once upon a time, had been *their* song. The song that he had written in that old,
dusty room on his mother’s piano with…

Well, he supposed it didn’t matter anymore.

He reached for his pack of cigarettes that were sat on top of the piano and pulled one of them out, placing it in his mouth. He reached out for his lighter as well but a hand darted over and snatched it before he could grab it.

Yoongi’s eyes followed the hand to its owner, Haeun. She quickly grabbed the pen that he had been writing with and wrote his initials on the white plastic of the lighter.

“I’m confiscating this.” She stated with a small smile, waving the lighter mockingly before she retreated back to her seat on the other side of the room.

Yoongi huffed in annoyance and dejectedly took the cigarette out of his mouth. He watched as Haeun sat and placed her guitar back into her lap.

“Seriously?” Yoongi asked in frustration.

Strictly speaking, Haeun was a girl that Yoongi gave music lessons to three times a week. Less strictly, and the reason why she was over at his apartment way more than three times a week, they were dating. Well, sort of. Haeun liked Yoongi and had made her feelings apparent to him within their second month of knowing each other. She was a nice girl. Pretty, smart, witty, terrible at staying focused when she was tired, and damn good at the guitar.

Somehow, Yoongi had gotten out of actually responding to her confession, and instead, they’d fallen into the normal routine of people that dated although they really weren’t. They’d kissed a few times. Yoongi had even met Haeun’s parents, although, that was more because he had attended one of her performances and her parents had happened to be there. He thought she was nice and enjoyed her company so he was glad that they hadn’t been forced to have that awkward talk about feelings and things of that nature.

Yoongi liked Haeun. She met his fiery attitude with one of her own, asked if he had eaten three times a day, and dragged him out of the house when he was being too much of a recluse. He had, admittedly, been a bit of a mess before meeting her so the stability was welcome. She was good for him.
“Yup! I’ve been telling you to stop smoking for the past month and you haven’t been listening. I stole your cigarettes and you bought a new pack in the same day. I, at least, know that you’ve kept this same lighter for years and only refill it so hopefully this should discourage you more.” Haeun responded as she strummed an echo of the melody that Yoongi had been playing before.

Hearing her play the song made him unsettled in a way he couldn’t explain, like a ruffling of feathers on his heart and he quickly busied himself with looking over the sheet music he’d written as a distraction.

“And I keep telling you that it’s not an addiction.” He argued. “I smoke because I want to. I can stop whenever I want.”

Haeun looked over her shoulder and fixed him with an unreadable expression.

“Then stop.”

Yoongi glared in her direction. “I don’t want to. It’s relaxing.”

Haeun huffed and turned back around, Yoongi heard some rustling but didn’t look in her direction again until she spoke up.

“Here.” He looked over the piano to see that she was holding up a bright yellow lollipop.

“Why are you giving me candy? You know I don’t like sweet stuff.”

Haeun sighed and Yoongi could tell that he was trying her patience. “I’ve heard that replacing nicotine with sugar works.”

Yoongi rolled his eyes. “How is that actually helping? It’s just giving you diabetes rather than lung cancer. And again, I don’t even like sweets. I’ll just take the nicotine, thanks.”

He barely suppressed a laugh as he watched Haeun send him a glare over her shoulder and put the lollipop into her own mouth.
They were quiet for a while after that. Haeun strummed lightly and Yoongi stared at the notes he’d written until they became a blur in his eyes.

“Hey, can we go on a date later?” Haeun asked suddenly. “My friend keeps raving about that new movie that came out last week and I don’t want her to spoil it for me before I see it.”

Yoongi flinched at the suggestion but managed to force a smile onto his face. “Sure. I’m not doing anything later.”

“Cool!” She smiled back at him over her shoulder. “Maybe we’ll order some jjajangmyeon after.”

The problem with their arrangement was that because Haeun had such strong feelings for Yoongi, she often asked him to go on dates with her just as she was the one that usually initiated affection between them. She was a sweet girl, and Yoongi liked her. Which is why he couldn’t find the resolve to deny her any of those things. He’d been lonely without her company and he loathed the thought of going back to that loneliness.

Haeun strummed the same part that she’d been attempting to correct for the past thirty minutes before she messed up again and turned around to face him.

“By the way, you know how I got that awesome opportunity to perform at a hospital? Do you mind if I play this song there? I think people would really enjoy hearing it.”

Yoongi was careful to keep his face completely blank. She was looking directly at him, after all, eyes sparkling in excitement. He ground his teeth together and fought against the urge both to cry and throw up, he felt nauseated and his eyes were burning.

“Th-the song I was just playing?” He asked, feeling like she could hear the thunder of his heart pounding in his chest from all the way across the room.

Haeun laughed and her eyes nearly disappeared as a smile spread across her face. “Yeah, what other song would I be talking about? Do you even play anything else?”

Yoongi swallowed down the lump that had formed in his throat and tried to ignore the taste of acid
on his tongue.

“It’s not… it’s not really finished though.”

“I know! I’ve been writing a lot of lyrics lately and there’s some that I’ve written that I think would go really well with the melody. I called it Run. So I’ll probably change it up a bit more to suit the lyrics better.” Haeun explained.

Yoongi blinked and it felt like his world went out of focus for a moment before he dug his fingers into his leg and forced it to refocus.

“Okay.”

Haeun frowned and cocked her head to the side. “I can play it? You’re sure? I know you’ve been working on it for a long time. I can just play one of my other songs if you don’t want me to play that one. I just really like it is all.”

I don’t want you to.

Yoongi fought the words back and tried to force his face into a passive expression rather than the grimace he was sure he was making.

“I’m sure. Go ahead.”

It doesn’t mean anything anymore, anyways.

Haeun grinned widely and the worried lines etched into her expression disappeared.

“Alright, thanks! I’ll perform it for you sometime if you want to hear it.”

I don’t.
Yoongi pushed himself off of the piano bench under the guise of stretching out his limbs.

“I’m going to the corner store to get a drink. Do you want anything?”

“No, I’m okay. Thanks.” Haeun smiled, pulling the guitar back into her lap once again.

Yoongi forced his legs to move despite the sudden weakness in them and tried his best to walk straight even though it felt like the entire world was spinning.

He felt like he was going to be sick.

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The base was loud. It collided with the walls and the resulting vibration could be felt in Hoseok’s bones. He was facing a mirror but his eyes were unseeing, his face was contorted in concentration and a bead of sweat was rolling down his temple from his hair that had gotten dampened with it. He relied on his memory to move his body rhythmically to the thumping of the beat.

He’d been practicing for hours already and his limbs were beginning to burn in protest. But it was a burn he had learned to enjoy. A pain that made him feel alive. The heavy breaths that resounded in his ears over both the pounding of his heart and the thumping of the beat all told him that he was alive in this moment.

He ran through the rest of the routine as he remembered it and finally he finished the entire thing without error. He smiled victoriously as the song faded out and the studio was plunged into silence as a result.

Hoseok turned around, sharing his achievement with Jimin who’d had his phone out to record the routine.

Hoseok was a dance teacher and had worked his way up to having his own studio, even if it was just a rented room, though he’d always had a hard time keeping routines in his memory when he choreographed them. Jimin had been a close friend of his for years and had been put in charge of capturing all the footage, both for documenting choreographies and uploading dance videos to the internet.
“I finally got it!” Hoseok cheered, striking an extra pose for the camera.

Jimin smiled and laughed along with him. “It only took you half the day.”

“Well, at least it’s still light outside. I wasn’t going to be able to rest without perfecting that choreo.” Hoseok responded jovially, lifting the sleeve of his sweatshirt to wipe the sweat from his face.

A sudden sound from the door rang out in the room. The two of them turned their attention to it as a girl poked her head into the room.

“Oh, Jiwoo! I thought you weren’t coming by until later.” Hoseok greeted in confusion.

“Hi!” Jiwoo greeted, “I decided to come a little earlier since I had a bit of a surprise.”

She was one of the first regulars to the studio that Hoseok had and though he was supposed to be the teacher there was no denying her talent. In fact, she often took over the dance lessons when Hoseok couldn’t be there. He had asked her to come later in the day so they could over the routine together for a video that would be posted.

Though, judging by the cake she held in her hands, she had something else planned.

Jiwoo smiled in Jimin’s direction, nodding to him as she entered and approached Hoseok with the cake.

“Is this for me?” He asked in utter confusion. He didn’t remember doing anything that would warrant a cake and unless there was some holiday that he’d forgotten, he couldn’t think of a single reason for it.

Jiwoo held the cake up so he could see the words written on it and he accepted it hesitantly. “Happy birthday!”
His gaze flicked confusedly between her and the cake.

“I-it’s not my birthday, though.” In truth, it was, but it was also the day that his mother abandoned him at the amusement park that he’d begged to go to that day. He hated celebrating the day so he’d made up the lie that his birthday was the date that the Chinese New Year fell on the year of his birth since he liked the idea of a new start. So, he said February tenth rather than his actual birthday February eighteenth and he still didn’t like celebrating it.

He felt bad lying to Jiwoo since she’d even brought him a cake, but he didn’t really know how she had found out that today was his birthday to begin with.

“I know that. I just thought that it should still be a day that we celebrate.” Jiwoo smiled and turned to Jimin who hurriedly rushed to pretend that he hadn’t been filming the whole time.

Hoseok fought the urge to laugh. Jiwoo had become good friends with the two over the time that she’d been coming to the studio. Her and Hoseok undoubtedly had more to talk about since they were both passionate about dance and often spoke of things related to that passion. At first, Jimin had been cold and indifferent to her which Hoseok had attributed to being shy. Over time the two had gotten closer since Jiwoo often went out of her way to make him feel included and it was actually her that convinced Jimin to try out dancing even though Hoseok had been trying for years. From there, their own friendship had begun, though Jimin’s timidness had remained. It had taken some time to realize but after observing all of the awkward and strange interactions between the two, Hoseok had come to the conclusion that Jimin must have a crush on Jiwoo. And at times like this, Jimin’s crush was obvious.

“Jimin, close the blinds and come over here so Hobi can blow out the candle and make a wish!”

Hoseok saw Jimin flinch at the nickname before he rushed to his feet clumsily. Hobi, according to Jiwoo, was a play on the English word for hope and was something that she thought Hoseok suited well. He hadn’t really had any say in the matter. Though, he could tell it was a name that bothered Jimin immensely. He wondered if it was the name or the fact that Jiwoo hadn’t given Jimin his own nickname. Hoseok had thought once, back when he had first discovered the crush, that he should clarify to Jimin that he saw Jiwoo like a little sister and nothing more, but he had decided not to involve himself in it since Jimin hadn’t said anything about it to him. He didn’t want to feel like he was poking into Jimin’s business.

Jiwoo watched Jimin close the blinds and she leaned over before he walked over to them.

“On today of all days, you should have something to cheer you up.” She winked before turning her
attention back to Jimin who was approaching them.

“Make a good wish!” Jiwoo instructed and grinned at him.

Hoseok was left stunned by her comment, but he closed his eyes and focused on a wish anyways.

It was his birthday. But he’d never celebrated his birthday growing up and even now it was a day that brought more sadness to him than happiness. It was the day that he’d been abandoned by his own mother. She had told him to close his eyes and count to ten and when he’d opened them she had disappeared, never to be seen again. He was so young when it happened that he can only remember those words that she said, since they’d haunted him in his sleep ever since, and that they had been celebrating his birthday on that day. There was little to celebrate now.

Nonetheless, his mood had already been lifted by Jiwoo’s thoughtfulness, even if he had no idea how she found it that it was his birthday. Maybe her and Jimin had been talking more than he thought.

Things weren’t great. But they were good. Hoseok had found his calling with dancing, even in this tiny studio that cost him an arm and a leg to pay for. He struggled every day but it was the strain in his muscles and the ache in his back from falling asleep in a chair the night before that let him know he was alive.

He was alive. He was fighting to take in breath and resisting the urge to just sit down and stop. He was running a never ending marathon but it was the burn in his lungs that he thrived upon.

There were a lot of things that he could wish for, but only one thing that he truly wanted.

I want to continue being happy like this with Jimin and Jiwoo. I hope for more bright days.

He blew out the candle and opened his eyes to Jimin and Jiwoo’s happy smiles and clapping.

Yes, he decided, I hope that we can have many more days without rain and stormy weather. I hope that we can all continue to smile brightly like this.
He put the lollipop into his mouth and couldn’t help his eyes from drifting like a magnet over to her.

*She was here again*, he thought wildly. Namjoon couldn’t believe his luck.

He watched as the girl pushed her windblown hair out of her face for the umpteenth time in the past few minutes and attempted to grab the attention of two older women walking past. They spared a glance at her at least but kept walking as if she hadn’t said anything to them at all. She tried again with some girls that looked around her age but they completely ignored her even as she stepped completely into their path with the flyers held out.

His eyes widened as a strong gust of wind blew over the overpass and the majority of the fliers were ripped from her hands. He hesitated for a moment before he made his way over to her hurriedly, stooping down to gather the papers in his hands beside her as well as the rolling water bottle that she’d dropped in the process.

He stood and offered the items out to her. She seemed flustered and embarrassed and he hoped to say something that would reassure her but she took the water bottle out of his hand, leaving him with the flyers and just like that she was already walking away. The words got stuck in his throat and he could do little but watch as she walked away. She glanced back only once but startled upon still seeing him standing there and quickened her pace.

*Damn*.

He’d been waiting for a chance to talk to her today but it seemed that she’d given up on passing flyers out in this area way sooner than he’d thought. Of course, he could follow her but now that she’d definitely seen him, suddenly showing up again in a different area would probably be a bit too strange.

He wasn’t trying to come off as being a stalker.

In fact, it was chance that he’d even seen her here to begin with. After his university classes he often did a lot of walking around the town and other than having seen her here several times before, he had no idea where she was going to be and when.
They went to the same college, but in seemingly different departments since he only saw her around every now and then. He guessed she must have come here right after her classes ended.

He sighed and turned so he could walk in the opposite direction.

Namjoon didn’t know her name but he wanted to learn it. They often ended up taking the same bus and he could still vividly remember the day that he forgot his wallet which contained both his bus pass and his money. She’d seen him struggling and just as he resigned to having to walk home, she’d pressed money into his hand and sat down without a word to him. He couldn’t even bring himself to thank her back then. Every time he saw her, the timing was off, the words got stuck in his throat and before he could organize his thoughts enough she was already turning her back to him and walking away.

It was frustrating. He just wanted to talk to her a bit, introduce himself, get her name, and treat her to lunch as a repayment for her kindness. He hadn’t even been able to pay her back the money that he owed her.

Not to mention that on the same day that she’d paid his bus fare, she’d left a hairband on the seat. He’d picked it up when he got off at his stop with the intention of returning it to her as soon as he could but the timing for that had been just as terrible. He saw her several times a week but something always prevented him from talking to her. Besides his own incompetence in bringing up casual conversation, she was always in motion. He would see her, turn away for a few seconds and just like that she’d be gone, down the street, through a door, or nowhere to be seen.

He hoped that one of these days he could actually catch up to her.

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The first time he’d seen her, Jeongguk had been revelling in his regained mobility, overworking his arms so that he could go flying down the hospital corridors in his wheelchair. The doctors had been hesitant to allow him one so soon after the accident. Though so soon was more like nearly half a year and he was going stir-crazy from sitting cooped up in his hospital room all the time.

Of course, when his mother visited they allowed her to get him into a wheelchair and roll him around, but she always walked slowly and carefully as if afraid to hurt him. He’d wanted to feel wind through his hair as if running, break out into a sweat as if playing in the summer sun. He wanted to feel alive and not like a hospital patient on the verge of death. His friends had stopped visiting a long time ago so perhaps it was his endless boredom that had finally gotten to the nurses and convinced them that he should given just a bit of autonomy.
Either before they lost their mind or he did.

So, it had been his eighth time rolling around dangerously fast in the hospital corridors when he met Eunseo. She’d been walking around herself, dragging along an IV drip with wheels and held out her hand in a stop gesture as he came barreling towards her. He’d stopped, not able to do much else and had stared up at her in shock.

Her hand shifted in position until it was held out to him in a friendly manner. He’d looked between her and her outstretched hand before curiously putting his hand in hers. She shook it, a smile pulling the corners of her lips upwards and said,

“Hi, I’m Eunseo.”

He’d given her his name and they’d been good friends since. There weren’t a lot of other people for them to talk to since most people their age were too bedridden to mess around or were discharged faster than they could even become friends.

The hospital wasn’t the best of places, and Jeongguk was incredibly tired of seeing white and beige in his eyes all the time but Eunseo made it better. She offered him friendship and he appreciated it since it was something he lacked desperately.

And now, another six months later, he was out of the wheelchair and able to use crutches. He longed for the day when he could put those away as well since he was determined to walk and the crutches made his underarms ache and his back burn in protest. He couldn’t complain that much though, since he was either walking down hallways or trying his hardest not to cry in physical therapy. He was moving all on his own and after having half of his body covered in thick casts as if he were a caterpillar trying to build a cocoon, that was an amazing feat.

Though the crutches still hurt like a bitch.

Jeongguk and Eunseo talked about a lot of things: music, books, movies, and comics. They may not have had very much in common since Eunseo wanted to be a writer and Jeongguk just wanted to pursue music in whatever way he could but they taught each other about their interests and often Eunseo would suggest a new rap song to him and he would tell her about a movie coming to theaters based on a book she’d read. It worked and they made each other happy even when being surrounded by pain, death, and illness. What they didn’t talk about were their own issues. Eunseo never told Jeongguk why she was in the hospital or why she always had to walk with an IV drip
and he didn’t tell her the reason why he’d been admitted there. They simply pretended that everything was fine, *normal*, and complained about grouchy nurses and bad hospital food.

Jeongguk didn’t ask why she’d practically disappeared one week, leaving him to wander around boredly; not even when she’d reappeared, face gaunt and skin pale, smiling like it physically pained her to do so. And she never asked why he got so angry once that he kicked a chair hard enough to send it flying across the room and ended up back in a wheelchair for a month or why she found him curled up on a hospital bench outside once crying so hard that he’d thrown up.

They never asked each other those types of things. They’d simply smile harder and joke about breaking out from the place as if it were a prison and ignore the other’s tears and sickly appearances. They talked about things that made them happy and ignored everything else.

In an attempt to cure his boredom, Jeongguk had taken up drawing. He asked a nurse for a pad of paper one day along with a pencil and had set to sketching. He hadn’t really done so since he was younger and in art classes so he’d forgotten his natural affinity for it and was halfway through the paper tablet he’d been given already.

On days like this, hot and humid with the coming of summer, Jeongguk and Eunseo often sat outside together. There was some performance today that Eunseo wanted to listen to but Jeongguk had been too excited about a new album release from his favorite artist so he had agreed to come outside with her but he had his earphones nestled into his ears, blasting the new songs, and all of his attention was on a new sketch he’d been working on. He didn’t often draw people but there was a particular face on his mind that he couldn’t manage to get rid of. He’d wondered if drawing the face would help and was determined to try even if thinking about the wide cheekbones and almond eyes brought back memories he’d been trying hard to forget.

He shaded a part of the face carefully, intent on capturing the likeliness of the person in mind as best as he could but was distracted by the feeling of his earphone being pulled out.

He heard music then, the sound of a guitar and the light singing of a voice. But he was shocked to recognize the melody of the song and leaned around Eunseo to look at the performer.

It was a girl he’d never seen before but the melody of that song… it was one that he’d never forget. There were a few changes to the way he remembered it sounding and the lyrics were a completely new experience but he knew that song. *He knew that song.*

He took out his other earphone and stood, placing the tablet with the face he remembered so well down and his pencil on top of it.
“She’s pretty good isn’t she?” Eunseo offered, smiling at him as she stood as well.

Jeongguk could do little other than nod, his heart beating rapidly in his chest as the sick feeling of both nostalgia and yearning fell upon him. He gathered his crutch under his arm, wincing at the immediate ache in his left leg as he stood on it and made his way closer to the crowd of listeners.

He couldn’t understand why he was hearing that song or why this random girl whom he’d never seen before was playing it on guitar and singing lyrics that he couldn’t remember ever accompanying it.

His eyes fell upon something hanging from the girls guitar. And they widened in shock as he saw what it was. A white lighter dangling from a chain with the letters YG on it in black ink.

His throat constricted wildly as his heart nearly leapt up into it. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing or hearing but the coincidence was far too big for it to not be what he thought it was.

That face appeared in his mind again but rather than the drawing, it was a memory. All those hours spent in that abandoned school room, the brown piano that was never dusty even though everything around it always was, that melody they had worked tirelessly on.

Jeongguk had one thought in his mind at that moment. Not a face or a memory or a song but a name. A name that escaped his lips in a breath of a whisper.

_Yoongi_.

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Taehyung blew on the noodles curled around his chopsticks. He’d heated the ramyeon too long in the microwave. The noodles were soft and overcooked, bordering on being chewy and the broth was numbing his tongue painfully with it’s boiling heat. He didn’t have time to stand around and wait for it to cool though, he didn’t want to linger too long in the convenience store.

The cashier would come check on him soon enough to make sure that he wasn’t stealing anything, which was bad for several reasons. He actually _had_ stolen from here before, he didn’t like for
people to see his face well enough to recognize it, and he really didn’t feel like talking to anyone.

It’d been a while since he last ate, so he was already cranky enough without accidentally overheating it and making it less than enjoyable, not to mention that he’d slept at an acquaintance’s apartment the night before and had woken up with empty fucking pockets. Luckily, it wasn’t the first time for something like that to have happened to him and he’d learned his lesson. If it weren’t for the bills he kept stashed in his sock he’d have probably been forced to steal something from a street vendor in order to eat and he hated doing that. The guilt always ate at him later and made the food taste stale and bland.

The bell on the door rang and the cashier greeted whoever had come in. Taehyung leaned over so he could see who it was from the mirror in the corner up near the ceiling. It was some man that looked like he desperately needed a cup of coffee.

Though, the man wasn’t what caught his attention. There was a girl that looked like she couldn’t be much younger than him standing in an aisle with a cap pulled low over her head. He watched her curiously. He’d stolen from corner stores before, he knew what suspicious behavior looked like, thankfully it seemed like the cashier hadn’t noticed her yet. Taehyung continued to watch as she put something into her backpack and then checked her surroundings to see if anyone was watching.

He sighed and threw the rest of his soggy, too hot to even be ingested ramyeon into the trash. He made his way quietly over to the aisle she was on after carefully checking to see if anyone was looking in his direction. When he confirmed that there weren’t any eyes on them, he walked down the aisle towards her.

She lifted up a hand to pick up a nail file and he took hold of her wrist before she could wrap her fingers around it. With a sigh, he took the backpack from her hands and brought it up to the front.

He set the backpack up in front of the cashier and forced a smile as he pulled out what little cash he had. He was, at least, thankful that she hadn’t tried to steal anything too expensive. But still, there went all the money he had. He guessed he would have to find some quick work at some point so he wouldn’t starve to death.

The bell above the door rang and Taehyung watched as the girl left. He scoffed, did kids really not have any manners these days?

He’d just spent his last dollar and made it so he wouldn’t be able to go into this corner store again, now that the cashier had seen his face up close, and she couldn’t even thank him?
He shook his head and muttered some pleasantries the cashiers direction before making his way to the door.

He pushed it open and stood outside wondering what the hell he was gonna do with a backpack full of women’s toiletries and other things that he absolutely didn’t need.

Then, he turned his head to the side and was surprised to see the girl standing there with her hands in the pockets of her jean vest. She glanced at him before reaching out and snatching the backpack from his hands. She rolled her eyes at him before quickly walking away.

No manners, he concluded, no manners at all.

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It was dark outside.

Late into the day and eerily deserted on a weekday night.

Nothing but the low sound of the music and his own thoughts were keeping him company.

Jimin was dancing. More specifically, he was practicing the routine that Hoseok had created. He’d been watching him practice it for weeks, constantly filming and memorizing each move and expression. He was passionate about it, but nowhere near as passionate about it as Hoseok.

In comparison, Jimin had a hobby of dancing and Hoseok had a life dedicated to it. His friend often invited him to join in on dance practices but Jimin felt so inferior that he could never bring himself to do it and though he desperately wanted to, he often smiled, declined, and brought his camera up to his face capturing everyone in dance and wishing that he was on the other side of the lense.

Hoseok had been with Jimin through a lot and Jimin liked to think that he had at least done a fraction of the same for him. They’d been friends for years even when the people around them had changed. Hoseok hadn’t even really dated in the time that Jimin had known him.
But… then Jiwoo had come along.

And she’d stayed.

Most importantly though, Hoseok had fallen for her immediately. Her friendly smile, cheerful disposition, and positive attitude paired with her natural aptitude for dance and incredible talent. She was everything that Jimin wasn’t.

It was nights like these where Jimin secretly snuck into the studio that he practiced the hardest he could, long past the sting of his limbs as he overworked them, and even further past the point when his breath would begin to strain from the exercise, all the while knowing that even if he trained for hours on end for years, he’d still never be on Jiwoo’s level. He would never be comparable to her.

Jimin was… a mess, and he was well aware of that fact. He knew that Hoseok worried for him and that he caused the older unnecessary stress. He knew that Hoseok often smiled even if he was having a bad day just so he wouldn’t worry about him. He knew that Hoseok tried his hardest to be the beacon of light that Jimin so desperately needed. And he also knew that Hoseok purposefully didn’t tell him about any of his struggles because he was selfless in that way.

That was the biggest difference between the two of them.

Hoseok was always selfless and Jimin was always so selfish.

Selfish enough to not want Jiwoo around even though Hoseok’s mood had improved incredibly over the time she’d befriended him. She was good for him, her positivity was infectious and she challenged Hoseok to not only be a better dancer but also a better person.

Jimin couldn’t do any of that so he hated her. Or, really, he wished that he could hate her but she was too incredibly kind for him to feel anything but guilt over trying to dislike her. He’d been cold to her when they first met, still hurt over losing the majority of his friends and unwilling to create new ones, but she’d taken his frigid attitude in stride and kept making attempts to include him and talk to him even when she didn’t have to. She made it hard to hate her.

He couldn’t help but think of the cake she had gotten Hoseok a few days prior as he restarted the song and continued to practice Jiwoo’s parts of the choreography. Jimin knew that Hoseok was sensitive about his birthday so he’d tried not to mention it and thought he’d been respecting Hoseok’s wishes by doing so. But the face Hoseok had made when he’d taken the cake from her
hand was ingrained into Jimin’s brain. In all the years that he’d know Hoseok he’d never once thought to battle his bad memories with better ones and therefore had never given him so much as a “happy birthday” let alone a gift.

Yet he dared to call himself Hoseok’s friend. Jiwoo hadn’t even known them for that long and already she was a better friend than Jimin could ever even hope to be. She was better than him at everything, after all.

His head snapped over to the door as the sound of it opening rang out over the music. He scrambled for his phone and rushed to turn it off before turning to see who had even entered. Though his jaw dropped in shock as he saw Jiwoo standing there with a timid smile.

Jimin just stared at her, embarrassed at being caught and irritated by who had caught him.

“Uh… sorry.” Jiwoo apologized, and her expression was a confused mix of shock and amusement. “I forgot my phone charger here, so I came back for it. I… didn’t know you were here.”

She pointed towards the forgotten cable and Jimin turned to look at it, angry that he hadn’t noticed it before.

Jiwoo stepped further into the room and her perplexed eyes studied Jimin for a moment before she made her way across the room and collected her charger, sticking it into her bag.

She was behind Jimin now and he froze as he heard her footsteps stop suddenly and his heart beat loudly in his chest when he still hadn’t heard them again.

He turned around hesitantly and was faced with her confused expression once again.

“Were you… dancing? To the choreo Hobi and I have been working on?” She asked, glancing over to where his phone was. Jimin followed her gaze and rushed over to turn his phone off when he saw that the song they’d been practicing to was on display on the screen.

He knew he was too late though and that she’d already seen it. He sighed, biting his lip furiously as he turned around to face her once again. He couldn’t even argue that he wasn’t at this point so he opted for silence.
Jiwoo looked at him for a long moment and then she shrugged her bag off her shoulder and tossed it to the side.

“Practice it with me.”

Jimin sputtered in surprise. “W-what? No! I wasn’t even… I wasn’t…”

Jiwoo rolled her eyes with a smile that betrayed her amazement. “You are practicing it with me. I didn’t even know you could dance! I always assumed you refused because you couldn’t, but it turns out you were just shy and holding back on us. Come on, then. Turn the song back on, let me see how good you are.”

She stretched and got into a position right in front of the mirror before turning to him expectantly.

“Come on! Your secret is out! Turn on the music!”

Jimin gnawed at his lip nervously but let out a heavy breath and picked up his phone. If he refused now she’d definitely keep pestering him about it and possibly even tell Hoseok. Jimin did not want Hoseok to know about this. There was a reason he came out here late at night to practice secretly. Maybe if he went along with it for a bit he could convince Jiwoo to never mention it again. He hoped that she could be that nice, at least.

He turned on the music and let the base begin quietly.

“You take Hobi’s position.” She instructed and Jimin flinched at the nickname. He hated it.

He didn’t say anything about it though and hesitantly moved into Hoseok’s starting position.

The problem here was that Jimin had mostly been practicing Jiwoo’s part in the dance. He knew Hoseok’s part well enough but he wasn’t nearly as confident in it. But it wasn’t like he could tell Jiwoo that. It was dumb enough that he was practicing to dance with Hoseok, as if he would ever be good enough to do that, but it was worse that Jimin had no intention of Hoseok knowing he could dance in the first place.
He sighed again, and worked his brain into overdrive as he fought to remember what Hoseok’s part of the routine was. The dance was mostly the same but the positions were opposite.

The routine began and the two of them began dancing. Jimin had already been tired towards the point of exhaustion so he knew that his fatigue along with the added nervousness and pressure of dancing with someone else was causing some of his movements to be too sharp in places and his footwork to be rushed and sloppy.

He chided himself as he fought to rectify his brash movements, he could do better and he couldn’t deny his desire to be acknowledged for the little skill he had by Jiwoo.

He wasn’t anywhere near her level, obviously, but if she told him he was terrible he’d probably never try to dance again. He already knew that, he didn’t need her to tell him that. He already knew that she was superior to him in every aspect and that Hoseok would be better off without him. He knew all that but he couldn’t help wanting to be selfish and stick around Hoseok because the elder made him happy and helped him feel okay in his own skin. But if Jiwoo and Hoseok began dating, Hoseok wouldn’t have time for Jimin anymore and Jimin wouldn’t want to be the uncomfortable third wheel of their group. He wanted to hang on just a while longer, be selfish a little longer, before Jiwoo took one of the best things that had ever happened to him away.

He’d lost focus. While he’d been lost in thought he’d defaulted to Jiwoo’s position. He was in the wrong place. In a panic he hurried to move back to the correct placement but Jiwoo was a step ahead of him and she was already moving. His foot made contact with some part of her leg and he’d swung so hard with his arm in the dance move that he immediately lost his balance and went sailing down to the floor.

He could hear Jiwoo’s cry of pain and the loud crash over the music as she fell but Jimin was falling as well and a searing pain spread from his arm as a large splinter in the wood, one that Hoseok had been meaning to get fixed, nestled into his skin and broke off.

Jimin clutched at it in shock, body shaking with adrenaline and panic. He’d fucked up again. He’d fucked up so badly.

He lay on the floor, merely shaking in shock, as he felt the panic crawl over him like a familiar blanket. His blood was hot as it ran down his arm and his heart jumped into his throat as he realized he was bleeding profusely and it stayed there causing his breath to shorten even further. He pulled himself up with shaking feet, crying out as he accidently put pressure on his arm.
He stumbled on autopilot to the nearest bathroom, barely even conscious of what he was doing. All he could think of was the blood running down his arm and that he had messed up, messed up, messed up.

He busted through the restroom door, smearing blood on everything he touched as he made his way to the sink and nearly fell against it in his rush. He lifted the sleeve of his sweater with trembling fingers and plucked out the rather large piece of wood with a hiss. The blood really began to pour out then and his eyes went wide as a new wave of panic hit him, his eyes were blurry with tears and he wasn’t even sure that he was properly breathing. But he managed to switch on the water and frantically tried to wash the blood away. The sink quickly filled with pink water which only made him panic more and he was scrubbing his arm with his hand directly over the wound with so much pressure that it felt like his entire arm was on fire.

He was careful to avoid his reflection even with his face just inches from the glass surface of it. He couldn’t bare to look at himself most of the time but now, after causing such a mess, he knew he would be revolted by his reflection.

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It was stupid.

He knew it was stupid.

But even though it was stupid and he knew that it was stupid, Yoongi couldn’t help but get his hopes up.

Haeun had returned from her hospital performance buzzing not only with the warm reception and nice patients but also gushing about this one patient that apparently seemed to know Yoongi. Between her rambling about how well the performance had been, she spoke of a man that had been there that seemed around the same age as her. He’d had a crutch and talked to her after the performance saying that he’d recognized the song and asked her if she knew a Min Yoongi. The man had apparently asked for Yoongi’s number and left not too long after. Haeun had complained that she wished he could have stayed since she’d wanted to talk to him more about how he knew Yoongi and what a brilliant pianist he was.

Yoongi had tuned out a little after hearing the part about her giving the patient his number.
That was yesterday. Which meant that the person Yoongi thought it was had been given his number nearly twenty four hours ago. Which was plenty of time for a text or a call.

It was *stupid* but he was waiting desperately for his phone to light up with a notification.

He was laying on his couch and had been laying there all morning. Haeun had texted him, asking what his plans were for the day, but he’d ignored her. She wasn’t the notification that he was waiting for.

He checked his phone for the seventh time in the past minute before throwing it to the ground with a huff. It was so *stupid*.

If he hadn’t gotten a text from… *him* yet, then he probably wouldn’t. Twenty-four hours was more than enough time to contact someone if you wanted to. Which meant that he… probably didn’t want to.

Which was was fine. Things were probably better if they didn’t talk. That was the whole reason why Yoongi had stopped visiting him right? Why he’d gone so far as to even change his number?

He sighed and reached up for his pack of cigarettes. He had a lollipop in his mouth since he figured he should at least give it a chance but he’d much rather a cigarette. He was in the process of opening the box before he suddenly remembered that he no longer had a lighter. Haeun still had it.

Yoongi scoffed, rolling his eyes before he threw the box to the ground as well.

People were a lot like cigarettes, he thought. Things that you wanted, but shouldn’t have. Things that gave you happiness and comfort that were also killing you and making you sick. Things that you got addicted to and convinced yourself that you could quit whenever you wanted.

But much like the brain’s dependence on nicotine, the heart’s longing didn’t stop just because of an absence of that cigarette or person.

Maybe he did have a fucking addiction, after all. And maybe this switching to candy instead method was stupid because he never liked candy to begin with and he certainly didn’t like them any more when he was craving nicotine.
A sudden buzzing caught his attention and he scrambled for his phone and ungracefully fell to the floor in his rush to reach it. He got it in his hands eventually and pulled it up to his face.

*New Text Message!*

**From:** Unknown

Yoongi sat up suddenly, typing in his password in a daze.

**From:** Unknown

*Is this Min Yoongi?*

He hesitated for a moment, suddenly feeling very, very afraid of what would happen next.

**To:** Unknown

*Yeah... who is this??*

Waiting for the next message felt like ages, years in which Yoongi completely lost his mind, but eventually his phone buzzed again.

**From:** Unknown

*Deleted my number too?*

*Haha I guess I’m not surprised*

*It’s Jeongguk*

Yoongi’s heart dropped to his stomach and then slung right up into his throat. Waiting for this text wasn’t what had been stupid, what was stupid had been Yoongi thinking that he was ready to have this conversation. Because he wasn’t. Not at all.
To: Jeongguk

Oh… uh hi I guess.

I just needed space

He typed and deleted the word “sorry” several times, but before he could decide whether or not to send it, Jeongguk was already responding.

From: Jeongguk

Hi

It’s k I’m not mad anymore

You don’t need to apologize

Yoongi read over the words as if he could somehow answer all the questions in his head just by looking at them. Did Jeongguk really still know him so well after all this time?

To: Jeongguk

I’m still sorry though

I’m an asshole

From: Jeongguk

Yeah

Yoongi didn’t know what to say after that. They hadn’t spoken in over a year. There were so many things that he wanted to ask but he felt surprisingly distant from Jeongguk. As if he were walking on eggshells and any wrong move would make the younger stop talking to him again. And though his heart was pounding violently and he still felt like this was a bad idea, he didn’t want that.
From: Jeongguk

Who was that btw?

Yoongi frowned at the text, having no idea what “who” Jeongguk was talking about.

To: Jeongguk

Who??

From: Jeongguk

The girl

That gave me your #

Who is she?

To: Jeongguk

Oh Haeun?

From: Jeongguk

Sure idk

She your gf?

Yoongi kind of felt like he was going to be sick. His hand was trembling as he held the phone now and he struggled to get it to stop. Before, he had been more than happy to play the role of boyfriend with Haeun but the truth was that he wasn’t. But he’d been living in a fragile grey area that he regretted now. Haeun was a nice girl he reminded himself.

Truthfully, though, he hadn’t thought of her once all day. He felt an incredible amount of guilt suddenly because as much as he wanted to say that she was his girlfriend, the words sat sourly on his tongue and he wanted more than anything for it to not be the truth. He didn’t want to be
Haeun’s boyfriend anymore than he wanted this disgustingly sweet lollipop in his mouth anymore.

He pulled the stick with the half eaten round ball of candy out of his mouth and placed it on his coffee table. He wanted a goddamn cigarette. But Haeun still had his lighter.

He turned his attention back to his phone where Jeongguk was likely still awaiting a response.

To: Jeongguk

No

She’s not

From: Jeongguk

Oh... k

Why was she playing the song we made???

I know we’re… w/e

But I thought at least that was special?

Yoongi cursed out loud. It was special. The song was such a special thing that he’d nearly been sick at the idea of Haeun taking it and making it her own. It was private, something that he held dear but he couldn’t make himself say that to her without feeling like he needed to explain why and he couldn’t do that either.

To: Jeongguk

It IS special

She heard me playing it
I should have told her she couldn’t do that

Sorry

From: Jeongguk

Yoongi?

To: Jeongguk

Yeah?

From: Jeongguk

I miss you

It took Yoongi longer than it should have to finally admit the facts to himself and stop pretending that his heart wasn’t still longing after someone that he shouldn’t have. Someone that was so good for him but so bad for him at the same time. He could say no to a lot of things but it turns out he couldn’t say no to cigarettes and he couldn’t say no to Jeongguk.

To: Jeongguk

I miss you too

Admitting it, not only to Jeongguk, but to himself as well hit Yoongi like a bag of bricks. His eyes were misty with tears before he even realized he had started to cry. No matter how hard or how fast or how far he tried to run away he just ended up here every time. What was the point?

He stood, leaving his phone behind and forgotten and stumbled into his kitchen in search of alcohol.

If he couldn’t smoke then he was going to drink. He needed something to deal with all of these unwanted feelings.

It was so hard.
It was so hard and there was nothing that Yoongi could do about it. He couldn’t live with himself if something happened to Jeongguk because of him but he also couldn’t live without Jeongguk. He’d tried and he’d tried and he’d tried but he just couldn’t. It was like he was being torn in half and there was no way to appease both sides by meeting in the middle. He was destined to be unhappy one way or the other and he hated that.

He raided his fridge and liquor cabinets and drank all the alcohol he found like it was water. He hadn’t done something like this since he forced himself to stop visiting Jeongguk in the hospital and felt like he had emotionally died. It just wasn’t fair. But no part of his life had ever been fair. He’d learned that truth when his mother had been taken from him in a house fire that should have taken his life too but hadn’t.

Sometimes, times like these, he wished that it had.

When he’d drank so much that the room was spinning as if he were upside down and underwater, he attempted to get up only to nearly fall flat on his face as he did. He vaguely realized that the sun was setting now or… had set? He couldn’t tell.

He slowly made his way into his spare bedroom where the piano was. He stared at it for a long time, loving and hating it, wanting to clean it and wanting to destroy it. Then his gaze drifted up to the sheet notes he had been writing and perfecting.

He suddenly remembered Haeun playing it and was filled with a rage so acute that he barely registered the journey from where he had been to standing to being in front of the piano. He swept across the stand in fury, knocking all the papers across the room and kicked the piano stool, sending it flying away from him and landing with a loud crash.

Satisfied, he turned and walked into the hallway, he wanted to go outside. He was always drawn to that music shop when he was drunk like this. Though it wasn’t even there anymore. The piano from his childhood had burned to ash just like his mother. Just another thing in the long list to be sad about.

He slammed his front door open with more force than he intended and couldn’t help but chuckle. Hopefully his neighbors would hate him and he would be evicted. Add it to the list.

Yoongi made his way down the stairs precariously, nearly falling more than a few times. Eventually he was at street level and his body could just work on autopilot on the way to the store.
Except… he was sure that he was hearing someone calling his name.

He ignored it and kept walking, crossing the empty intersection and wishing that a car might come barrelling out of nowhere and hit him. And not just hit him like that car had done with Jeongguk. He wanted it to finish him. Then he wouldn’t even need to add it to the list.

The voice calling his name got louder and more frantic and suddenly Haeun was beside him. She had her guitar case slung over her shoulder and was pulling on his arm to get him out of the middle of the intersection.

Yoongi snatched his arm out of her grip, nearly falling over from how fiercely he pulled away from her.

“Yoongi!” She cried, making an attempt to grab at him again. “What is wrong with you!? Get out of the street!”

He muttered angrily under his breath and continued his journey towards the music shop that was no longer there.

“Hey! Are you listening to me!? I’ve been texting and calling you all day, you didn’t answer so I was worried about you! What have you been doing all day?”

He just kept walking hoping that if he ignored her for long enough, she’d stop. Unfortunately, he didn’t seem to be that lucky.

“Yoongi!? Are you okay?! Are you drunk? Let’s go back to your place, stop walking around town like this, you’re gonna get yourself hurt or something!” She pulled on his arm again and he pulled away from her even more violently.

“Will you just stop!!” He yelled, teetering on his feet. Her voice was giving him a migraine and he felt once again like he might be sick just looking at her. She was reminding him of all the things he’d drank to forget.

“I don’t like sweet things, okay!?” He continued, drunkenly losing all pretenses and forgetting to
censor himself. Haeun gave up trying to move him and simply stood staring at him with an expression that strangely looked like she was holding back tears. “I just want a cigarette so give me my fucking lighter back!”

Wordlessly, she pulled the guitar case so that it was in front of her and unlinked the chain the lighter was hanging from her guitar on. She handed it to him and he snatched it from her fingers with a short laugh.

“I never said I was your boyfriend.” He spat venomously, looking at the lighter rather than her. “Don’t go around acting like my girlfriend.”

Even as drunk as he was, he knew that he shouldn’t have said that, it wasn’t nice and it wasn’t fair of him since he’d comfortably pretended to be her boyfriend just as much as she’d acted like his girlfriend.

“Don’t just go assuming things on your own. How do you know I’m even interested in women at all? What if I’m not? You gonna spit on me and call me disgusting too?”

He glanced up, clutching the lighter in his hand like a lifeline. Haeun was just standing there. Staring at him. He wished that she would at least have the sense to slap him and storm away. Then, maybe he wouldn’t feel so bad.

“I love him. I don’t want people to spit on him and call him disgusting. He’s too…” He struggled to find a single word that would aptly describe Jeongguk and gave up after realizing it was impossible. “So, I keep telling him no and doing dumb shit that hurts him anyways. What’s the point? If you’re around me, you’re bound to be just as unlucky as I am. So, just leave me alone, okay?”

Tears were falling out of his eyes freely now, stinging like fire and running down his cheeks like lava.

“Yoongi…” Haeun called softly and before he could yell at her for pitying him, her arms were around him, holding him tightly and he nearly collapsed into her. His legs had given up on trying to support him.

“It’s okay.” She muttered into his hair, squeezing him tighter to her body.
It wasn’t okay and it would continue to not be okay.

He’d just accidentally spilled some of his most private secrets to a girl that he didn’t even like, not romantically at least, and rather than getting angry at his crass words, she’d called him in a voice similar to his mother’s and he was currently a sobbing mess in her arms.

He was sure he wouldn’t live down that embarrassment for the rest of his life.

Add it to the list.

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The rumbling of the train was loud and it shook the ground as it passed by them. The world was noisy today. Cicadas cried loudly in the trees above them. The buzz and clattering of construction permeated the air with constant noise. It was a hot day, the sun was high in the sky unfiltered by clouds, luckily there was a breeze so it wasn’t totally unbearable.

Taehyung was sitting on a wooden palette, swiping through the gallery on his phone. The phone was disconnected, he hadn’t had money to pay for service in a long time. But the pictures and contacts were the reason that he’d kept it. His gallery was filled with pictures of him and his friends, back when they all talked to each other. They were fond memories of his and what kept him going most of the time. When life got hard he often looked back on all those memories he’d made and remembered times when things were much simpler.

Jiyoung was crouched next to him, drawing something in the dirt with a stick.

Taehyung had many encounters with her after the incident at the convenience store, namely because she seemed to be following him around. They didn’t talk much when they were together and often she would be right beside him and the next time he looked over to her she’d be long gone. She’d been following behind him when he made his way down the train tracks to this place.

He didn’t know much about her, he’d gotten her name the fifth time that he’d caught her following him and told her his own only when she hesitantly asked for it moments later. She was more comfortable around him after that and rather than just stalking him creepily, she walked closer behind him and sat with him whenever he decided to take a rest. Recently she’d even taken to sleeping next to him at night.
He didn’t know what her interest in him was from or why she followed him around like a puppy. Of the few times they’d actually talked he’d gathered that she’d run away from home but the reason for that had yet to be discovered. It explained why she had been stealing toiletries, though. And he felt a little better about buying them for her before she had gotten caught and arrested. He didn’t imagine that she would do well in jail.

In any event, she was cute, quiet, and shy even while being bold and daring and Taehyung found that he enjoyed her company. They both seemed to be lonely souls and he slept better at night knowing that someone was beside him. Someone that wouldn’t steal his money from his pockets as he slept and didn’t ask him too many questions about his past. He hadn’t told her very much at all and she seemed satisfied with leaving him as a mystery.

It was bright days like this that reminded him the most of his friends. He missed them. He missed Namjoon and how the older always worked to keep him out of trouble even though it was exhausting. There was no one looking out for him now. He missed the carefree days that they used to spend together in that abandoned pool. He’d taken those times for granted back then and acted as if they’d last forever. He had been naive and he regretted that the most now. Things changed and were always changing.

The only thing that stayed the same for him was his misery.

His gaze turned up to the sky for a single, forlorn moment and then he looked down and saw Jiyoung looking at him. She smiled when their gazes met and Taehyung breathed out a laugh.

The times of being naive and carefree were long gone. All those pictures did was remind him cruelly of that truth.

He spotted the water bottle Jiyoung had been drinking from earlier and an idea came to his mind.

He stood, looking around for a stray pipe or piece of wood that would suit his intentions. He saw a metal rod with a curve to end a few feet away and hurried to grab it. He returned to the water with it and gently placed his phone on top of the bottle.

A train was coming towards them, the rumbling of the tracks telling of it’s approach. Taehyung leaned over the bottle, metal rod in hand and glanced up to see when the train got close enough.

Right as it started to pass them, he swung the rod at his phone, just high enough so he wouldn’t
send the bottle flying as well and watched as it went flying over the cabins of the train, landing somewhere on the other side of the tracks.

He regretted it almost immediately, but he was used to feeling regret often enough by now that he merely sighed and began walking back towards the city. Jiyoung scrambled to get up and follow after him.

He was in a bad mood now and he always felt better wreaking havoc on the streets of Seoul to boost his spirits. Maybe he’d even get out his secret stash of spray paint.

Night had fallen quickly that day and Taehyung was drunk with mayhem. The thrill of illegal activities had always given him a rush but tonight he felt as though nothing could stop him. He was being reckless and stupid, he’d broken shop windows, spray painted cars and apartment buildings. Jiyoung had come with him and she watched him with mirth in her eyes, notifying him if anyone was coming and running all across the city with him. She was enabling him even if she didn’t realize it. If he’d been alone he probably would have called it quits after breaking the last shop window. But knowing that he had an audience was forcing him to be entertaining. He wanted her to join him and have a good time, raising a middle finger to the city that had screwed him over time and time again.

But it was very late into the night and all the running around and fearless adrenaline was getting to him. He was beginning to get tired. They approached a bus stop that already had graffiti all over it. Taehyung studied it and Jiyoung took a seat on the bench.

He shook the spray can, lamenting the fact that it was nearly empty, and lifted it up to add to the multitude of other graffiti.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the flashing lights right before the sirens started. *Shit*. Cops.

He backed away from the graffiti he had been painting and the nearly empty can fell from his hand as he began to panic. The cops had already seen them and there was no way he could pretend he hadn’t just been vandalizing the bus stop. But if they brought him to the station and did a background check he would be *lucky* if they only arrested him based on his history of vandalism and didn’t question him about the nature of his father’s death. He could go on trial for *murder*.

He reached for Jiyoung, frantically calling her attention to the approaching cops and trying to communicate that they needed to run though he was too shocked to even form the words. Jiyoung took one look at the cop car and got the message, standing and breaking into a run.
Taehyung sprinted in front of her, grabbing her hand and pulling her along. He glanced back and saw that the cops had gotten out of the car and were running after them. *Shit*.

His heart was pounding out of his chest as he forced his legs to run as fast as they could, pulling Jiyoung harder when she began to lag behind. They turned down a few streets and Taehyung glanced behind them again to see how close the cops were to them. When he didn't see them he quickly pulled Jiyoung into an alley and leaned against the wall of a building, trying to hold his breath so he could listen for the cops footsteps.

Jiyoung fought to study her breath as well and shared a worried look with Taehyung as the heavy footsteps of the police got closer to them.

He looked at her and then squeezed his eyes shut as he turned his face up to the sky. They should have split up. If the cops caught Taehyung, Jiyoung would be arrested just for being around him. He hadn’t thought about that all all. He hit his head against the brick of the wall in frustration.

“Come out.” The rough voice of one of the police officers called. “We know you’re there.”

Taehyung cursed under his breath and pushed Jiyoung down the alley lightly with a meaningful look as he stepped out onto the sidewalk. He couldn’t let her get in trouble for something she didn’t even do. Not to mention he didn’t know her history, she could be wanted for something as well. He shook his head, she wouldn’t do well in jail.

He lifted his hands in surrender as he walked towards the police officers. One of them was shining a bright light in his eyes, practically blinding him.

If he was going to be arrested this was the least he could do. He hadn’t done much good in his life but he could at least continue knowing that he saved someone else. He couldn’t keep running forever after all. He knew that all too well. Still, he had wanted to run for just a bit longer. Avoid his fate for as long as he could until he could go no further and gave into the pull of the tide waiting to swallow him.

Oh well. He’d already made his choice.

Now it was time to face the consequences of his actions.
He was on the bus once again. And once again he couldn’t bring himself to say anything to her.

She was sitting on across from him and two seats up. She’d been in her seat when he had gotten on and Namjoon’s heart had leapt up into throat as soon as he’d laid eyes on her. Out of his nervousness he’d carelessly chosen a seat towards the back rather than sitting across from her so he could have a better opportunity at making conversation with her.

He cursed himself for the mistake and leaned his head against the window.

He’d made the decision to go to university after a lot of thought. But now that he was and was nearly finished with his first year, he wondered if it was the right choice. When he was younger he’d wanted to become a literature teacher so he’d decided to pursue that. Yet now that he was actually doing it, it felt… unfulfilling. He didn’t feel like he was working toward any particular goal and he didn’t feel as though he really wanted to become a teacher. The problem was that he didn’t have a second choice. He wasn’t strongly drawn to doing anything in particular.

He thought that maybe he’d probably felt that way for a while but had been able to ignore it in favor of spending time with his friends. They’d given him comfort and a meaning that he was missing dearly without them. Hell, he even missed keeping an eye on Taehyung and making sure the younger didn’t go to jail for his rebellious tendencies. He felt… empty these days as if he was missing something he desperately needed but he had no idea how to get it back. The days blurred in and out and it felt like he was simply existing. He didn’t want to just exist, he wanted to do something important. Something that he cared about. Though that something had yet to be discovered. He’d hoped he would find it by furthering his education but he was disappointed by that so far.

He even wondered if it was because his love life was a barren wasteland, and had put in effort in an attempt to fix it but he couldn’t even talk to the girl he had eyes on. She was distant and aloof and intriguing but Namjoon couldn’t help but feel as though he had nothing to offer her.

He thought that people who were passionate were often the most attractive sort of people, appearances aside. Son Minji was probably one of the most passionate people Namjoon had ever known. He knew she did a lot of charity work and that she stood on that overpass five times a week, being ignored and treated rudely, just so that she could spread awareness for fundraisers around the city. He knew she was studying to be an elementary school teacher and he’d seen her sleeping with her face in a textbook several times in the library.
In comparison, Namjoon almost seemed lazy. He wanted to become a teacher because he liked literature and it was the simplest thing to be. He had no drive and no passion.

He felt guilty that he was even in the same school as her. Really, romantic feelings aside, he just wanted to be there to support Minji. He wanted to make sure she was eating properly and support her in her goals but he felt surprisingly intimidated by her.

The bus stopped and two girls who were sitting at the back of the bus made their way off.

Namjoon took the movement as an opportunity. He quickly got up and sat across from Minji. He glanced at her after, worried that she might have seen right through him but her gaze was permanently transfixed on the window and her head was resting against it.

She was obviously asleep.

He’d been planning to at least say hello to her but all his resolve melted in an instant and he wanted to bang his head against the glass of the window in frustration.

He wrapped the hair band around his fingers and stared at it for a long moment. He just couldn’t do it.

The bus approached a stop in Seoul and though it hadn’t been his intention to even be in Seoul, he stood. He didn’t want to be on the bus anymore. Maybe he’d spend the day here and catch the last bus back to Ilsan. He placed the hair band on top of Minji’s backpack and stepped down the bus stairs.

The bus stop was tagged with graffiti in several different colors and styles. Namjoon sighed looking at it. It looked like something Taehyung would have done and he vaguely wondered if the younger had.

He stared at it for a long moment, hit by nostalgia of the old days. When he and Taehyung would go around tagging and having fun. Before reality hit and they’d gone their separate ways. He wondered if Taehyung was eating. If he was sleeping somewhere safe or lying dead in a ditch somewhere. He knew the younger had basically gone on the run after killing his father. It had been in self-defense, Namjoon knew that, but Taehyung had only made the situation worse by avoiding the law. He couldn’t run forever. Eventually, everything would catch up to him.
Namjoon sighed and set off walking. It’d been a while since he had last been in the city. There wasn’t really anything for him besides his family but maybe if he walked for long enough he could find something that would fill the emptiness in his heart.

Or maybe he could just get his mind off things for a while.

He’d walked long past the feeling of his legs burning and now, hours later and well into the night, his legs and feet had gone as numb as he felt even as rain poured onto him and soaked him through to the bone. He had been intending to catch the last bus back but it had probably run hours ago.

Seoul felt more like home than Ilsan did and as he hadn’t been back here in a long while he’d forgotten how well he knew the streets. How familiar the stores felt and he felt a comfort being here that he hadn’t realized he’d been missing. He could have gone to his parent’s house since he hadn’t visited them in a long time but if he did, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to keep from admitting that he wanted to drop out of school. He didn’t want them to be disappointed in him. He’d been given an amazing opportunity and had gone to a lot of effort to do something that he wanted and it all felt like such a waste now. Besides, saying it out loud would make those feelings real and he wanted to avoid them for as long as possible.

He sighed, looking up from where he had come to a stop and dragged his gaze away from the wet sidewalk. It was raining really hard. At this rate he’d probably get sick but couldn’t bring himself to care. He kind of wanted a cigarette but it wasn’t like he could smoke in this weather even if he did have a pack and a lighter.

The streets were mostly deserted this late at night but as Namjoon stared blankly down the street he saw a figure running across an intersection.

He squinted to see better through the rain. The figure had turned and was heading straight for him, it was easy to see them since they were wearing a bright yellow shirt. Although as Namjoon continued to watch, it looked like the figure was carrying someone on their back.

He frowned in confusion, not understanding why someone would be giving someone else a piggy-back ride in this weather. But the man seemed to be carrying a girl and judging by how limply the girl was bouncing on his back as he ran, she seemed to asleep or unconscious.

Namjoon watched until the figure came to an abrupt stop in front of him. The man’s head was turned to the ground as he ran, likely so he could keep the rain out of his eyes, but he lifted his head
as he saw Namjoon standing in front of him.

Though, Namjoon’s mouth opened in shock as he realized that he recognized that face.

“Hoseok?”

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It had taken a while for him to calm down in the dim light of the bathroom. His arm had stopped bleeding for the most part and he had wrapped some paper towels around the wound as a makeshift bandage. It looked like a murder had transpired in the room what with his watery blood splashed everywhere and staining the sink a dingy pink, not to mention the trail of blood splatters on the floor from when he had come in and the handprint on the door from when he’d opened it.

Jimin didn’t have time to worry about that though, he had completely forgotten about Jiwoo in his panic and he felt terrible that he had just left her on the floor of the practice room. He quickly made his way back down the hall.

He opened his mouth to call her name as he entered the room but the words died on his tongue as he saw that she was nowhere to be found. He looked around in confusion. Where had she gone?

Her things were still there, he realized, spotting her backpack in the same position she’d sat it down. If she’d decided to leave then why wouldn’t she have taken her things with her, Jimin wondered. It didn’t make any sense.

His phone was still playing music so he walked over to it and paused the song that was playing. As he did so, he heard the very obvious sound of rain. He hadn’t heard it at all over the sound of the music but now it was extremely loud. It must have been pouring.

But… he was inside. Why did it sound so loud as if he was standing outside? Had someone left a window open or something?

Jimin walked back out into the hall and was shocked to see that the front entrance to the building was wide open and the door swung back and forth in the wind. He frowned at that even more confusedly and grabbed one of the umbrellas that were kept in a basket near the door for situations like this and stepped out into the rainy night.
He squinted as he stepped out further onto the sidewalk. It was really pouring down, making it incredibly hard to see. He looked down both sides of the street but he didn’t see anyone or anything in particular that caught his attention.

Something just didn’t feel right, though.

The rain was blowing sideways in the wind and the umbrella was doing very little to actually keep him dry but he couldn’t rest knowing that Jiwoo had just disappeared without taking her things. What if she’d gotten seriously injured? Where had she gone?

Jimin ran down the street in the direction of where he remembered the hospital being, in the off chance that he would see someone or something that would help explain the mystery.

There was no one out this time of night and especially not in this rain. The streets were completely deserted and nothing could be heard over the pouring of the rain. It was ominous and set a bad feeling in Jimin’s chest.

He turned the corner of the street and his eyes widened as he saw a flash of color turning the corner at the next street in front of him. He frowned and pushed his legs to run harder even through his exhaustion. He wasn’t sure what he saw but it had definitely looked like someone had been running.

Jimin sprinted to the corner and turned in the same direction the figure had gone. He could see them clearly in front of him now, even from the distance they were at. It was definitely a person running but… it looked like they were carrying someone else on their back. Jimin frowned in confusion until he took a second glance at the person’s legs. They were wearing red sweatpants.

The same red sweatpants that Jiwoo had been wearing.

But if that was Jiwoo… then who was carrying her?

Jimin squinted to see better through the rain. It was hard to see the other person since Jiwoo’s body was covering them from the back but they were wearing a bright yellow t-shirt that shone like a beacon even in the dark and rain.
He thought back to earlier in the day, when Hoseok had been instructing a dance class. He’d given Jiwoo the lead for a while, letting her give extra instruction for those falling behind in the practice and had sat with Jimin for a bit, looking over some of the footage they’d yet to post.

Jimin had made a joke about being blinded by Hoseok’s clothes when the older had sat down next to him. He… he’d been wearing a yellow shirt.

Jimin picked up his pace even more in a frantic rush to catch up to them. Why had Hoseok come to the studio at all? What had he been there for? And why had he just rushed off with Jiwoo?

**Why did it have to be Hoseok?!**

Surely, the older would be upset with Jimin for doing something so stupid! Not to mention that he was probably taking Jiwoo to the hospital, Jimin couldn’t believe that he’d screwed up so terribly. His heart pounded in his chest loud as the thunder that rang out above him. Hoseok would hate him.

If anything happened to Jiwoo and Jimin was responsible for it, Hoseok would hate him.

*Hoseok would hate him.*

The words kept echoing in Jimin’s head over and over again. They stabbed at him like a knife each time and he felt frantic with the panic they incited. He couldn’t lose Hoseok too. *He couldn’t.*

He ran even harder, not even attempting to keep the umbrella over him properly anymore.

Hoseok suddenly stopped in front of him and Jimin’s heart soared with elation over the chance that he could actually catch up to them now, but his footsteps slowed to a stop as well as he saw that Hoseok had stopped because of someone in front of him.

He watched as Hoseok spoke with the person, gesturing wildly. The person he was speaking to stepped to the side to examine Jiwoo and Jimin was able to see their face.

Even through the rain, and the distance, and the way that the person’s wet hair flopped into their
face, Jimin knew that it was Namjoon.

But what was Namjoon doing here?

Jimin continued to watch, frozen to the spot as Hoseok and Namjoon exchanged a few more words with each other before they broke into a run towards the hospital.

He couldn’t help but feel like he’d been abandoned. Surely, Hoseok had realized that Jimin had been in the studio with Jiwoo but the older hadn’t even bothered to check if he was okay. And now, even after Jimin had run after him hoping to rectify the situation and apologize for his recklessness, Hoseok had just turned to Namjoon for help and run off without him.

The wound in his arm stung from where rainwater had soaked through his sleeve.

It was just like he’d thought it’d been. Hoseok didn’t need him and there were of plenty of other people that would bring him more happiness than Jimin ever could. Though, Jimin doubted that anyone could ever make him feel as accepted and valued as Hoseok did.

He turned then, long after the figures of Hoseok and Namjoon had disappeared from his sight. He was cold. A shiver crept up his spine and rattled his bones, the rain had soaked through to his skin and the cold wind bit like needles.

The pouring of the rain had stopped but Jimin had nowhere to go.

He walked in no particular direction, going only where his feet were leading him.

Down one street that he turned onto he saw a flash of bright light. Squinting against the light, Jimin saw two police officers, one holding the flashlight that was casting the entire street in white light, the other was approaching a man that had his hands held up in surrender.

Was some idiot getting arrested?

Jimin crept closer, mildly curious as to what was happening. The officers were facing away from him though he was sure that if they turned and saw him he’d be scolded harshly. Still, something...
was drawing his footsteps closer as he tried to get a better look at the person about to get arrested.

The man’s eyes darted over to Jimin’s creeping figure and at that moment they made eye contact with each other.

Jimin’s eyes widened comically wide as his jaw dropped in shock.

“Taehyung….” He whispered.

The idiot about to be arrested was Taehyung.

Without even thinking, Jimin ran towards the officers. “Excuse me, officers?!”

The two men turned around to face him and Taehyung bit his lip as his eyes darted between the two of them. Jimin hoped that he would wait until he came up with some excuse to draw the police away.

“What is it, young man? We’re dealing with a situation here.” The one with the flashlight asked, shining the light directly into Jimin’s eyes.

“Th-there’s a convenience store clerk being held at gunpoint down the street! I was about to go inside but I saw it through the window.” Jimin cringed, he was never good at lying. He just hoped it was believable enough to get the cops to investigate.

“A gun?” The other officer asked, sounding incredibly skeptical.

“Yes!” Jimin agreed, pointing down the street. “That’s why I ran! I was going to call the cops but I think I left my phone at home.”

“That sounds serious…” The officer with the flashlight muttered turning towards his partner.

The other officer glanced at his partner and the two seemed to come to an agreement. The same officer turned to Taehyung.
“You’re getting off lucky this time. But if you continue to be a delinquent you won’t catch another break so easily. You must be worrying your parents to death, acting like this. Think of them next time, alright?”

Taehyung muttered something that Jimin couldn’t hear from where he was standing.

“What was that?” The officer inquired, apparently not hearing him either.

“I said, my parents are dead, sir.” Taehyung repeated, his expression hard and voice almost sounding amused.

The officer seemed lost for words for a moment before simply saying “oh”.

Taehyung put his hands down as the officers walked towards Jimin.

“Where was this convenience store, again?”

“Uh… right at the corner of the next street.” Jimin said, heart pounding in his chest.

“Thanks, we’ll go check it out, then.”

Jimin watched them walk away, headed toward a potential crime that had been completely fabricated. He couldn’t believe he just did that.

He turned back to Taehyung, who was peering down the alley a few feet away from them.

“Good, she left.” He muttered under his breath before turning his full attention to Jimin. He sighed and seemed to almost fold in on himself from the relief.

“Thank you.” Taehyung said and although his expression had been calm through the whole thing, Jimin was able to both see and hear how scary it had been for him.
“No problem.” Jimin responded, tossing a worried look over his shoulder in the direction the police officers had walked off in.

When he turned back to Taehyung, he was grinning and standing up straight once again.

“I’m guessing you made up the robber at the convenience store?”

Jimin couldn’t help but laugh. The adrenaline rush and fear was mixing together and making him feel silly with power. “I think there’s a laundromat at the corner of the next street up.”

Taehyung laughed along with him. “I guess we might want to get out of here before they come back, huh?”

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It had been months since he’d been discharged but yet here he was, back in the hospital who’s beige walls and tiled floors had been his home for so long that he couldn’t stand the colors anymore.

A year and a half of recovery after the accident and Jeongguk still had to come for weekly physical therapy. He didn’t think he needed it. Sure, his legs still felt like they were on fire when he walked for too long at a time and he thought he would die the first time he tried to run. Sure, he had to sleep on his back because laying on his side made him short of breath and made his ribs feel like he’d just gotten punched in the chest. And yeah, maybe it was still hard to write after having had his wrist in a cast for so long but he could get over all of that. He didn’t need to keep coming back to this place.

In fact, the only good thing about the hospital was Eunseo. He didn’t have physical therapy today, he was just here for her. He hadn’t visited her since he’d been discharged and he felt guilty for that.

He didn’t even have a reason for not seeing her. He just… hadn’t. It felt like the friendship they had formed only lasted until one of them were discharged, and well, Jeongguk had been. But he knew that wasn’t fair to her. Not after all she had done for him during his time here. He would have gone insane if not for her.

Most importantly, she was the first person he’d ever felt comfortable enough coming out to. She’d
stood next to him when he had talked to that girl that performed the song that was special only to him and Yoongi. Afterward, she asked what all of that had been about and Jeongguk hadn’t found a reason not to tell her. So, he had. And she had listened. Unbiased, without judgement, and not a trace of disgust in her voice when she had softly asked him questions.

It had been… nice.

It had also given him the courage he’d needed to actually text the number he’d gotten from the girl and talk to Yoongi.

He had been absolutely terrified that the girl had been Yoongi’s girlfriend. After all, that was the only explanation he could come up with as to why she knew their song. He’d been overcome by a sick feeling upon hearing someone else play it, especially the changed version that it had been, it felt like something once holy and sacred had been ransacked and vandalized. The thought that Yoongi might have felt what he felt for Jeongguk with someone else, to the point of giving away the song they had made together, had made him feel physically ill.

After texting the older though, he was relieved that his thoughts hadn’t been correct. Of course, Yoongi could have been lying about it but lying wasn’t really his style and he had seemed sincere.

They had only seen each other once since Jeongguk had been discharged. Yoongi had picked him up after one of his physical therapy sessions and the older had cried upon seeing him walking around. Jeongguk had teased him endlessly about it afterwards when they went to get lunch and Yoongi had been the same mildly crabby, grumpy man that he’d been before. The older had walked him home after that and Jeongguk’s legs were so weak from the earlier therapy that he’d nearly fallen.

Yoongi had been quick to grab him before he fell and after a very futile argument on Jeongguk’s side, he was forced onto Yoongi’s back and the older had carried him the rest of the way. When they’d finally made it to his house, it was dark and they had chatted a bit more before Yoongi had kissed him goodbye. It was only the second time that the older had ever initiated anything romantic between them and Jeongguk’s heart had soared. The inner fight that had always plagued Yoongi seemed to have been resolved.

These were all things that Jeongguk wanted to happily share with his only confidant, Eunseo. Of course, only after he apologized for leaving her alone for so long.

He’d also brought her flowers as extra assurance.
He made his way down the steps that he remembered once being such a challenge for him to climb that it had taken him an hour to do so and afterward he’d been drenched in cold sweat, shaking like a leaf, and very nearly on the verge of passing out. A nurse had to be called to take him back to his room. He’d been roughly scolded by his doctor but it had been worth it.

Eunseo’s room was just around the corner from those steps. After all, she’d been cheering him on the whole time.

Her door was open which meant that she was up and awake, Jeongguk’s grin grew wider as he approached it.

“Guess who’s come to- oh.” The words died on Jeongguk’s tongue as he walked in to see the room completely empty. That was strange.

The bed was even made. The sheets were neatly folded at the foot and the various flowers, stuffed animals, and books Eunseo kept were nowhere to be seen. The drawing he’d made for her right before he was discharged wasn’t where she had pinned it to the wall either.

Weird. Had she been discharged too?

Jeongguk left the room, heading toward the receptionist that worked on this floor. He knew the woman and had spoken to her quite a few times when he was here, he had always been getting into trouble after all and she was usually the one who scolded him.

He called out to her as he entered into the lobby, informally just to mess with her.

She turned to him with a look of indignation which quickly turned to a roll of the eyes.

“Jeon Jeongguk. I should have known.”

He grinned. “It’s me.”
“What are you doing here? Weren’t you discharged a while ago? Or did you come back specifically to give me a hard time?” She questioned humorously.

“To give you a hard time, of course.” He laughed as she sighed in frustration. “Actually, I came to see Eunseo. It’s been a while. Did she get discharged or something? Her room looks like it’s empty.”

The receptionist looked at him with wide eyes as her mouth dropped slightly and Jeongguk felt a horrible set of unease settle in his stomach.

“Oh… that’s right, you wouldn’t have heard about that.”

His stomach clenched anxiously and he unconsciously gripped the flowers tight enough in his hand to crush them.

“What?”

“Eunseo… passed away two weeks ago.”

Jeongguk blinked and it felt like the world swayed in front of him. He tightened his grasp on the countertop to keep from falling over.

“W-what? But she was… she was fine! She was healthy! How could she just… so suddenly?”

The receptionist made another face that made Jeongguk’s stomach roll.

“So, she didn’t tell you. You two were so close I thought she would have…” She sighed and shook her head. “Eunseo had a blood disorder that caused her have heart issues. She had several heart attacks while she was in our care and eventually she succumbed to one of them. Healthy people don’t spend their lives in hospitals, Jeongguk. I’m sorry you had to find out this way.”

Jeongguk thought he nodded. He wasn’t sure anymore. Eunseo was… dead? It was a concept that was hard to wrap his mind around. She had always been so positive and happy, how had she been hiding such a large secret from him the entire time? He regretted now that they talked about
everything but sad things, that they’d never told each other why they were there. He would have visited her every day if he had known. Never left her side for an instant. Instead, he had been selfish and she had died here all alone.

His legs carried him away from the front desk and in an unknown direction.

He bumped into someone, nearly falling over from the sudden impact before hands suddenly reached out and steadied him.

“Oh! I’m so sorry!” The voice of the person in front of him said. It sounded familiar but Jeongguk was too dizzy to catch why. “... Jeongguk?”

Why did this person know his name?

He blinked a few times to clear his eyes and force them to focus. There was a face a few inches from his, scrunched up in confusion.

“Namjoon?” He asked in surprise, immediately recognizing those features.

The hands that had been keeping him steady suddenly moved to his back as he was pulled into a hug. The arms around him were warm and comforting, and Jeongguk couldn’t help but let the tears escape his eyes.

“Wow! It is you! I haven’t seen you in... wait, are you crying?” Namjoon asked, pulling back to look at his face. He confirmed that the younger was, indeed, crying and pulled Jeongguk closer nearly crushing him with the strength of his hug.

Then Jeongguk was sobbing.

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Hoseok was endlessly glad for the stroke of luck he’d been given. His decision to visit the dance studio that night had been purely on a whim. Several new ideas for a choreography routine had popped into his head and stayed there, sticking long enough that he’d given up the idea of sleeping
and had, instead, made his way down to the studio.

It was then that he saw Jiwoo lying unconscious on the floor of the practice room. He’d looked around a bit after checking to make sure she was still breathing, horrified that someone had broken in and she’d been assaulted somehow. He had relaxed, after seeing Jimin’s phone on top of one of the speakers in the room, though it had only made him more confused by the situation. Jimin wasn’t in the room and even after having called out his name a few times, the younger hadn’t answered him.

Thinking back on it, after the fact, Hoseok probably should have looked harder for him, he knew his friend. He knew that if Jimin was somehow responsible for Jiwoo getting hurt he wouldn’t forgive himself. But his mind had been frantic and though it had just started to rain outside when he got to the studio, Hoseok wasted no time in hefting Jiwoo onto his back and running out into the storm in the direction of the hospital.

On the way there he had surprisingly run into Namjoon, who’d helped him take Jiwoo to the hospital.

She was fine, other than a mild concussion and a sprained wrist. But Hoseok had still stayed with her all night and he was surprised that Namjoon had stayed as well.

They had caught up on all that had happened in the near two years that they’d been apart. It had been nice, unexpected, but nice.

Even more surprising had been in the morning, when Namjoon had come back from getting breakfast in the hospital cafeteria with Jeongguk in tow. The younger had been just as surprised to see him, though from the redness of his eyes it was obvious that he had been crying.

They exchanged their reasons for being at the hospital, which only served to explain why Jeongguk had been crying. And the two caught up with what had been going on with him for the past year and a half.

Jeongguk had told them about his discharge and reunion with Yoongi. Hoseok and Namjoon had shared a knowing glance at that. Then, Hoseok had told him about his studio and how he’d been managing it with Jiwoo and Jimin. After, Namjoon had told Jeongguk about his college life though he’d been just as vague about things as he’d been when he talked to Hoseok about it. It didn’t seem to be going well and Namjoon seemed like he didn’t want to admit that.
Jiwoo had woken up in the afternoon, a short while after both Namjoon and Jeongguk had headed their separate ways. Hoseok had rushed in to see her, happy to see that she wasn’t gravely injured and besides her headache, seemed to be in pretty good condition.

She had explained what happened in the practice room to Hoseok, mentioning that Jimin might have been hurt too, even when Hoseok was still trying to process the fact that Jimin had been dancing at all. He’d been so adamantly against it that Hoseok had just been forced to accept that his friend wanted nothing to do with it.

The smile when Jiwoo had tiredly said “He’s good, really good”, didn’t leave him with any doubts though.

He’d immediately been filled with regret over leaving Jimin alone when he heard that the younger might have been hurt as well. That thought hadn’t even crossed his mind.

Jiwoo assured him that she would be fine and that her boyfriend would be picking her up when she was discharged anyways.

Hoseok immediately called Jimin as soon as he left the hospital. The younger didn’t respond to the first call so Hoseok left a somewhat frantic voicemail before he called again.

This time the call picked up after the third ring.

“Jimin? Are you there?” Hoseok rushed out.

“Uh… Kim Taehyung speaking. Hey, Hoseok.”

Hoseok stopped anxiously pacing and frowned in confusion. Had he heard correctly? Taehyung?

“Taehyung?” Hoseok repeated dumbly.

“Yeah. It’s me. Sorry, I answered the call. Jimin is in the shower right now, I think. You called twice so I was wondering if it was important.”
Hoseok fought to wrap his mind around what Taehyung was saying to him, and the fact that it was Taehyung who was talking to him, but he was having a hard time keeping up.

“In the-…” Hoseok trailed off in confusion. “Well, i-is he okay? I thought he might have been hurt somehow.”

Taehyung shifted and the sound of rustling could be heard over the line. “Um, he’s fine. He’s got a bad gash on his arm, but I helped him wrap it up. Other than that, he’s-”

“Who are you talking to?” Jimin asked in the background suddenly. His voice was distant but Hoseok could still hear him well enough.

“Oh, Hoseok called.” Taehyung explained. “He called twice so I thought it might be important. Here.”

There was another sound of rustling and a thud like a door being shut. Then, nothing.

“Jimin?” Hoseok asked. “Are you there?”

“…Yeah, hyung. What did you want?” Jimin’s voice was cold, almost as if he was angry but Hoseok didn’t really know why he would be.

“I… I just wanted to see if you were okay. I was with Jiwoo in the hospital this morning and she said you might have been injured. She’s fine by the way. A mild concussion and a sprained wrist.”

Jimin was quiet for a long moment, long enough to make Hoseok check to see if the call disconnected.

“Jimin?”

“…I’m fine, hyung. You don’t need to worry. I’m sure Jiwoo needs you, you should go back to her.”
Hoseok frowned. Jimin was acting strange. Not strange as though he was hiding something, Hoseok had known him long enough to know when he wasn’t doing well mentally, no, he… seemed distant. In a way Hoseok hadn’t heard from him before.

He couldn’t help but wonder if it was his own fault.

“Listen, Jimin I’m sorry for not checking on you when I left the studio. I only saw Jiwoo and I called for you but you didn’t answer. I didn’t know where you went.”

“It’s fine. I get it.”

Hoseok faltered when he went to speak again. “What? What do you get?”

Jimin sounded purely angry when he spoke next. “I get that you like Jiwoo so just ask her out already and get it over with. I get that you don’t need me when you have people like Namjoon to help you out. I just… I get it, Hoseok. You don’t have to worry about me anymore, it’s fine.”

Hoseok was momentarily stunned into silence both by Jimin’s tone and what he was saying.

“*What*? I don’t like Jiwoo. She’s like a little sister to me. I thought that *you* liked her.”

“I don’t.” Jimin spat.

“Well,” Hoseok scratched his neck awkwardly. “I mean, she has a boyfriend anyways. I thought you liked her but I didn’t know how to tell you.”

“… Why haven’t I ever seen him then?” Jimin demanded. “She doesn’t even talk about him and we’ve known her for over a year.”

“He’s training under a big company to be an idol. She doesn’t really want people to know that they’re dating since it could jeopardize his career and he’s probably really busy anyways…” Hoseok trailed off and Jimin was silent but it at least seemed like some of the hostility in the air
between them had dissipated.

“Listen, Jimin.” Hoseok began once the silence stretched on for too long. “I can’t apologize enough for leaving you alone at the studio. I wasn’t thinking straight and I was panicking. I don’t know how you got it in your head that I don’t need you, but I do. You are my best friend and nobody and no thing is ever going to change that. I’d be completely miserable without you.”

The line was quiet for a while.

“You’re my best friend too, hyung.” Jimin said quietly.

“Good! So, now that that’s settled—why is Taehyung in your apartment?”

Jimin breathed out a laugh. “Well, I saw him about to be arrested last night and I managed to lie to the police and get them to leave him alone. He’s just crashing here for now.”

“Oh, wow.” Hoseok whistling lowly. “You know I ran into Namjoon last night, and Jeongguk this morning.”

“Really?” Jimin asked with intrigue.

“Yeah, Jeongguk was discharged from the hospital a while ago and apparently him and Yoongi have been talking again too.”

“That’s crazy.” Jimin sighed and the joy was evident in his voice. “It’s like we’re all just finding our way back to each other again.”

“Yeah.” Hoseok agreed.

Maybe they could go back to what they had been before. A group of friends ready to conquer the world together.
Jin’s eyes flew open with a gasp, sitting straight up and clutching at his chest.

He was in his bedroom. It was dark and the lights were off but his blinds had been left open allowing the street lights and the light of the moon to shine in.

He had no idea how he even got here.

But, in any event did that mean that he’d been *dreaming*? It felt so *real* though, as if he were *actually* in his friend’s bodies like he’d been before. If it was a dream though… how come his friends were acting like he didn’t exist? He wasn’t mentioned once, thought of once… it was as though he didn’t exist at all and his friends were fine without him.

He felt so *unnecessary*. As though all of the effort he had put into getting back to them, saving them, *helping* them was for naught. It was a world where Kim Seokjin didn’t exist. And nobody seemed to be suffering because of it.

His chest ached and he was still short of breath. The thoughts he was having weren’t helping either.

He rubbed his eyes sleepily and got up from his bed. He was still dressed in the same clothes he’d been wearing earlier in the day, which was strange.

The last thing he remembered was getting into the trunk bed of his truck and the light sea breeze as he snuggled under a blanket. Had he fallen asleep then? If so, how did he get into his apartment?

Jin spotted a piece of paper on his dresser that he didn’t remember putting there and walked over to it. The keys to his truck were on top of it and the paper itself had messy writing on it.

*Hyung,*

*You wouldn’t wake up when we got back so Jimin and I had to carry you up.*

*You owe us BIG TIME. You are SO heavy!!!*
Jin scoffed in amusement as a smile spread across his face. It had just been a dream after all. His friends still cared about and would miss him if he was gone. And he really did owe Jeongguk and Jimin big time. They had saved his life after all and now he’d made them carry him all the way up to his apartment. He sighed, he would have to do something big to show his gratitude. He didn’t go to all the work he did just to fall into the ocean on accident and drown. Maybe he’d take them to one of those buffets that cooked the food right in front of you.

After all, he’d done it. They’d made it all the way to that night once again with minimal incident. Jin had fixed it all. He would have to continue to work hard in the future to make sure that they never got this close to falling apart again, but for now, he had succeeded. He and his friends were closer than ever before and things were only bound to get better from here.

Jin turned away from the letter, smile still spreading further across his face until he was full on grinning.

His eyes fell upon something red as he turned and the smile slipped from his face so quickly he doubted that it had even been there to begin with.

Hye-su’s notebook was still sitting in the same place it had been all month. He hadn’t had the willpower to move it from his sight and it wasn’t like he could just get rid of it. He felt guilty that he still had it, since he knew how much it meant to Hye-su but he hadn’t thought of a foolproof way to give it back to her.

He would have to keep thinking of a way. It wasn’t good for his heart to drop into the depths of his stomach every time he set eyes on the journal.

Jin heard a buzzing all of a sudden. His phone, he realized. His eyes scanned over the room to see where the noise was coming from.

He saw a faint blue light coming from the other side of the bed and made his way over to it. It was lying on the floor and though he wondered how it gotten there in the first place, he was much more curious about the fact that Hoseok was calling him at two in the morning.

He swiped to answer.
“Hoseok? What are you doing up this late? Oh, and thanks again for-”

“Hyung, it’s Jimin.”

It was like his blood had frozen in his veins and had begun to flow in reverse. He was scared, no terrified. His hand had begun to shake and his body had broke into a cold sweat.

“W-what? Hoseok, what…?” Jin attempted to ask but his body was barely under his control anymore

“It’s Jimin, hyung. Jeongguk and I were sleeping over at his place a-and he just…” Hoseok fought to catch his breath. “He said he was going to take a bath but he’d been in there for so long. Jeongguk and I had to break the door down since it was locked and he wasn’t- he wasn’t answering. He- hyung, he drowned himself in the bathtub. We just got to the hospital and they took him in, I just… I don’t know what to do.”

Jin felt like the earth was moving beneath his feet as he looked down at the carpet.

He felt like he was going to be sick.

“Can you… can you come down to the hospital? I just can’t believe he… we were right on the other side of the door. I…” Hoseok trailed off again and Jin could hear how choked up his voice had become, thick with tears.

“I-I’m on my way Hoseok.” Jin rushed out, the earlier shock melting and being replaced with a frantic urgency that had his bones shaking with adrenaline.

“I’m on my way.” He repeated, snatching his keys up from the dresser. He was glad now that he’d been sleeping fully clothed. Jimin and Jeongguk hadn’t even bothered to take his shoes off. “Call the others, okay? Call everyone else.”

“O-okay. Yeah, I’ll… call them.” Hoseok stuttered, sniffling loudly through the phone before he hung up.
Jin stuffed his phone into his pocket as he ran out the door, not even bothering to lock it behind him. He rushed downstairs and to his car, peeling out of the parking space fast enough to leave skid marks and have his brakes squealing in protest.

He remembered where the hospital was like the back of his hand and sped in that direction. It was luckily night, so there weren’t many other cars or people walking around.

Unfortunately, halfway to the hospital Jin realized that he’d unconsciously taken a shortcut. The problem being that the shortcut just happened to be the street that Hye-su had gotten killed on.

The scene was too similar to that night. Dark, the yellow light of the street lights casting the street into a golden light not unlike a sepia filter on a camera. He could see it so clearly.

Waving to her, seeing her smile and wave back, the dread that hit his stomach as he saw the headlights of the approaching car, the screeching of tires, the dull thud that her body made against the pavement.

Jin swerved onto the side of the road, barely putting the car in park before practically falling out of the door. The feeling of nausea overcame him and he threw up on the asphalt.

He’d failed again. He’d been so busy fixing the obvious issues in his friend group that he had forgotten about the issues that boiled just below the surface, ready to erupt at any moment. He had forgotten about Jimin. There just wasn’t any other explanation. He had helped and talked with everyone but Jimin. How could he have done that? Jimin was as much his friend as everyone else was. How could Jin just forget him and still have the audacity to call him a friend?

Once Jin had stopped emptying the contents of his stomach onto the pavement, he hobbled back into his car and tried to ignore the taste of acid of his tongue as he closed the door shut.

He drew a hand over his face and rubbed at his skin in frustration.

He remembered something at that moment. Something he had forgotten until now. He reached over towards the passenger side of his truck, unlatching the glove box compartment and reaching inside.
His fingers brushed against thin plastic and he eagerly took the photograph out. It was the one that Namjoon took of him and Yoongi in the early morning the day they went to the sea. He hoped to find comfort in it, but what he saw chilled him to the bone. He was the only one in the photo. Though, he specifically remembered Yoongi being in the picture along with him.

As Jin stared at the photo in shock, he heard a sound like the beginning of a rain storm. He lifted his head to look out of his truck and his jaw dropped open. It wasn’t rain at all.

The sky wasn’t dark anymore. Where there had been stars and the atmosphere dark with the absence of the sun, it was now slick with color like someone had squeezed oil paints across the universe.

A “raindrop” splashed onto his windshield but he quickly saw that it wasn’t rain water but more of the paint falling down to Earth like sheets of rain. The sound was thunderous.

With a start, Jin suddenly realized that he’d found the last photograph. He’d somehow forgotten that he only crawled through a mirror again. This wasn’t this real world. This was some mirror version of reality that didn’t actually exist. And the photograph that he happened to remember being in his glove box was the last and final photograph.

The curtain of rain approached even closer, engulfing Jin’s truck in darkness.

Jin wasn’t sure what he would do now that he’d obtained the last part of the puzzle piece. But he supposed he would have to find that out himself. He had to find a way out of this hell of a maze he’d found himself in. He would keep trying, keep moving forward. He had to find a way back to his friends. His real friends.

He had to find his way back to reality.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is so long- whoops. Getting closer to the end of all this mess! How many of you actually realized what was forgotten before this chapter?
**Fun Fact**

Jimin and Hoseok are dancing to the song “Youth” by Troye Sivan in the highlight reels.
Chapter Summary

[Chapter Recap]

Jin falls asleep after he and his friends return from the sea. He dreams of his friends in the future and who they would be if he were to not exist. They find ways to deal with their problems through girls that they meet along the way and eventually find their way back together again. When Jin wakes in his own bed after returning from the sea, he realizes that it was only a dream and is overjoyed that he managed to stop that night from happening again. He receives a call from Hoseok telling him that Jimin drowned himself in his tub and was taken to the hospital. Jin agonizes over his mistake and makes his way to the hospital but on his way there he suddenly realizes the location of the final photograph and touches it.

Chapter Notes

I’m an idiot and forgot to say that the last chapter was Part 2 of 2 when I posted it. (It’s there now). So, I Need U was Part 1 of 2 and Run was part 2 of 2. Just to clarify. I literally have a document specifically with notes to remember for when I post the chapters and I somehow still managed to forget it- wow.

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“This is a spell that will punish me”

The colors that had once been dim and muted, shone brightly now, the luminescence causing them to appear as though they were neon in his eyes. The saturated brightness of the hues made him want to squeeze his eyes closed but the moving colors didn’t change even when he opened and closed them several times. It was as though the colors were painted on his retinas.

Wind whipped around his face, sending his hair flying in all directions and the sheer force of the air stung his skin where it relentlessly beat against him. It was as though he was flying, but the weight on his body felt like there was an anchor tied to his ankle and he was sinking into the depths of the ocean.

It was a confusing feeling that filled Jin with trepidation. He’d never been pulled between these
universes so violently before. Had he done something wrong?

He scoffed but the sound was swallowed by the rushing of the air. Of course, he had. He just kept making mistake after mistake. At least, he realized that they were mistakes now, that was progress. He knew that the way he had lived up to the point of his death was incorrect. He had been selfish, narrow minded, and deluded himself into thinking that he knew more than he actually did. He knew nothing. And his constant lack of action made it certain that he would continue to know nothing.

He had been scared. Scared that the fragile pillars that held his life together would be jeopardized if he asked too many questions, if he angered someone, if he made someone cry. He had lived so carefully that he had convinced himself to believe that living that way was the best strategy to keep those pillars intact. That had been his first mistake.

Constantly protecting something that was fragile, such as a flower, was futile. The petals would wither eventually and the flower would die. Instead, he should have worked to make those foundations stronger, he should have fortified them, built them up until they could withstand anything. He should have taken risks, gotten to truly understand his friends, and become someone that Hye-su would be proud to be with.

He knew all of that now. He just hoped it wouldn’t be too late to fix his mistakes.

He’d finally found the last photograph, which had been his goal all along, and now he would see what all of the pain, anguish, and struggle he’d had to experience would lead to. He would see what the point of all of this was and whether or not all of his struggle had been worth it.

The rushing sensation stopped and Jin felt the shift in balance instantaneously. He barely had time to steady himself and narrowly avoided careening forward and falling flat on his face. He stood up straight and opened his eyes hesitantly. It was dark. The place he was in was only lit dimly with purple lights, shrouding everything in a lavender glow.

He was… surrounded by mirrors. His own confused reflection stared back at him from several different places, his face even appeared at the corners of his vision. He wasn’t completely surrounded though, there seemed to be branching paths in multiple different directions.

Jin sighed.
Great. He was back in yet another maze.

He peered down the few paths that were visible to him and after looking down each of them several times he sighed again and began walking. There was no way to tell where any of the paths led and Jin had no idea where he even was to begin with. He doubted what path he took mattered much. He’d probably end up getting lost regardless.

Jin hadn’t even realized how terrifyingly quiet this place was until he began walking and his footsteps echoed loudly in the space, bouncing off the mirrors again and again until the echo was distorted and sounded like it was coming from all around him.

He turned left, down a path and a few seconds after heading down it, he realized that it was a dead end given by his own reflection staring him in the face. He stopped, frustrated, and before he could turn around again he heard the echoing sound of footsteps.

Jin’s eyes widened as his heart skipped a beat before pounding into overdrive. Those hadn’t been his footsteps. He hadn’t moved.

Which meant that there was someone else in this mirror maze besides him. The sound stopped as soon as it started though. Jin frowned and took a few cautious steps forward. He didn’t hear any other sound than his own when he stopped once again.

Strange.

He was unsettled, but maybe he had just been hearing things. Maybe it hadn’t even been a footstep he heard but something else entirely.

He walked out of the dead end and turned down a different path. Then, unable to get the bad feeling out of his stomach and pass off the noise he’d heard for something else, he froze in his steps without warning and turned around.

The sound of another set of footsteps echoed before they also came to a sudden stop.

“Aww, you caught me. I was hoping I could play with you for a little longer.”
Jin’s mouth was dry with shock and he licked his equally dry lips nervously as he stared at Taehyung. The younger was wearing a jean jacket with large patches all over it as well as long tassels hanging low on the bottom with a white t-shirt and black pants but there was paint splattered all over him from his shoes to the strands of his hair. The way he was grinning at Jin with wide eyes and pupils blown wide in excitement was oddly off putting.

“T-Taehyung?” Jin asked, voice coming out thinly, like a whisper. He’d thought he was more surprised than scared by Taehyung’s sudden appearance but the longer that Taehyung grinned at him like that, the more unsettled Jin felt.

“Seokjin.” Taehyung stated in response, tilted his head to the side as his grin morphed into a even more disconcerting smirk.

Jin couldn’t understand why looking at his friend was causing him to nearly tremble in fear. He wanted to believe it was because he was in a new universe or in-between place and he didn’t know why Taehyung was here to begin with or why he had been sneaking behind Jin at all. But there was something about the Taehyung standing in front of him. He looked just like the normal Kim Taehyung that Jin was used to but there was something in his stance, in his smile, in his eyes that was communicating danger in Jin’s mind.

“Guess you’ll have to run now.” Taehyung said and Jin frowned in confusion even as his heart was beating so fast that he was breaking into a cold sweat.

“What?” He questioned and watched as Taehyung smiled even wider and began giggling.

The younger reached into his back pocket as he continued giggling near hysterically, and Jin took an instinctive step backward as he laid eyes on the knife that Taehyung was now brandishing.

The younger had stopped his maniacal giggling and ran the tip of his finger across the blade, which was for strange reason also covered in dried paint, pressing hard enough to draw blood. Jin stood in a paralyzed state of fear as he watched the dark bead of blood run down the edge of the blade. It dropped to the floor with an audible splash due to the heaviness of the silence and Jin’s eyes darted over to Taehyung’s.

The younger was already looking at him though, smile nowhere to be seen on his face.

“Run.” Taehyung repeated, actual threat in his voice now. He flipped the knife until it was
positioned dangerously in his hand, the downward way you would hold it if you were intending to stab something.

Jin’s mouth fell open in shock.

“RUN!!” Taehyung roared when Jin still hadn’t moved. The older cried out in surprise and only barely dodged the blade of the knife as Taehyung lunged at him.

Jin instinctively ducked and saw the blade out of the corner of his eye where his neck had been just seconds before. Was Taehyung really aiming for his neck?!

He sprinted forward, hearing the cacophony of footsteps echoing in the air. He turned down various paths, hoping his luck would continue and he wouldn’t turn down another dead end. He couldn’t even begin to think of what would happen if Taehyung caught him.

The younger didn’t seem to be playing around and though he had given Jin a chance to run, it was like he could still feel Taehyung breathing down his neck. The younger was right behind him and Jin desperately needed to lose him. Taehyung was laughing again as he ran and the sound was making Jin’s blood run cold. It was horrifying.

As much as he didn’t want to think about it, Jin had been stabbed by Taehyung multiple times. It had been in a separate universe from wherever he’d found himself now but Jin still knew exactly where the obsidian blade had entered his body and if he focused he could feel the ache of the wounds as though they were a phantom pain haunting him. He knew what Taehyung was capable of and those three stab wounds had been him holding back. Now that there was no one here to hold Taehyung back, Jin was horrified to think of what Taehyung was truly capable of.

He had to find a way out of this maze. Now.

Maybe, given that the rest of his friends weren’t behaving like crazed lunatics, he could get some help.

Though, as he ran, turning corner after corner and breathing a sigh of relief every time he didn’t run into a dead end, he realized two things. One- there were only so many more times he could keep avoiding dead ends in this maze of mirrors, and two- he couldn’t run forever. There was no flashing exit sign or any other visual cue that pointed to the exit and for all he knew there might not even be an exit. He was getting tired. His breath was coming out in puffy, labored gasps and his legs were
aching from exhaustion. He’d managed to elude Taehyung just a little, enough so that the younger
was no longer right behind him, but he was still close.

Jin looked around as he ran, frantically looking for somewhere to hide, somewhere that would lead
him to the exit, or anything that could help him. The only thing he noticed, though, was that the
mirrors had changed. Some were dripping with paint now, and others were reflecting that as if they
were dripping with paint on the other side. However, some were reflecting scenes that weren’t
depicted in the maze. As Jin ran he swore he saw a mirror with the sea reflected in it. He frowned,
paying more attention to the mirrors as he passed them. Hardly any of them were actually showing
him his reflection now. Most of them were filled with paint, completely black, or showing things
that weren’t in the room at all. In fact, he swore he saw Taehyung running in one of them and the
sight had nearly made his heart explode with panic before he realized that it had only been in a
mirror.

Still, it was strange that the mirrors had changed. Jin thought back to how he had once crawled into
a mirror that took him to what seemed to be a different universe altogether. Did that same logic
apply here? And more importantly what would happen if it didn’t? It wasn’t as though Jin had
many other options.

Squeezing his eyes shut in frustration, Jin slowed his steps so he could test his theory. He could
still hear Taehyung’s laughter echoing around so that was a good sign, he’d be able to tell if the
younger was getting closer. He heaved in a few breaths and doubled over for a few seconds to
catch his breath. Now that he’d stopped and the initial adrenaline from the panic had settled, black
spots danced in his vision from his lack of oxygen. His limbs ached to the point where it felt like
gravity had tripled its pull on his body, making it hard to even walk towards one of the mirrors.

Eventually, he made it in front of one. He wasn’t sure what this particular mirror was depicting but
perhaps it didn’t really matter as long as it would form as some sort of exit. He reached out a hand
and cautiously pressed his fingers to the glass. The surface rippled under his touch and Jin nearly
cried in relief. The mirror may lead him into an even more hellish situation but Taehyung’s
laughter was getting louder and Jin didn’t have time to be picky.

He pressed harder on the cool surface, feeling it give way and his hand emerged on the other side.
He quickly moved until he could walk into the mirror. This time there was no falling sensation. He
was just standing in the place the mirror depicted as if he’d walked in through a door. But he
hadn’t. He’d walked through a mirror. Even though he’d done it before it was still hard to wrap
his head around.

The room he was in was strange. The walls were colored like a seven year old had gotten hold of a
paint brush and a crayola paint set. Jin looked behind him experimentally, but the mirror was
nowhere to be seen. He hoped that meant that he was nowhere to be seen either.
Jin heard a sound, a bit like an annoyed groan and his gaze focused on the only thing in the room, a twin bed with steel frames. He gasped out loud at the sight of Jeongguk laying on the mattress. He hadn’t noticed him at all until then.

“... I told you to knock, hyung. You can’t just come barging into my private quarters whenever you want, even if you are in charge.”

Jin frowned at him, utterly confused. Jeongguk sat up looking sleepy, groggy, irritated, and anything but pleasant.

“Ever since I passed the test, you’ve been breathing down my neck about training all the time. Training that, training this. I get it. I’m not going to become anything like Jimin, alright?”

Jeongguk wiped a hand over his face before maneuvering that hand behind his back. He grimaced as he reached further behind him and winced as he brought his hand back out in front of him. It was covered in an almost purple tinged red and Jeongguk wiped the substance on his jean clad leg tiredly.

“I get that you’re concerned, maybe even rightfully so, but my wings are coming out, I’m bleeding all the time, and it hurts so if you could just cut me some slack, I would appreciate it.”

Jin’s head was spinning. “W-wings?” He managed to utter though he had numerous other questions that he wanted to ask, the words were getting stuck in his throat.

Jeongguk was... well he was acting like the Jeongguk Jin encountered when he’d entered that world of angels and temptation. He wondered if that was where he had found himself once again. But... Jeongguk wasn’t wearing the frilly clothing that he’d been wearing back then, he was wearing clothes that Jin was used to seeing him in. He wondered what that meant.

“Yes, wings.” Jeongguk rolled his eyes and stood, turning around to present his back.

Jin’s eyes widened as he looked at the carnage that was Jeongguk’s back. Under the blue plaid of the flannel he was wearing and the white t-shirt under that were bandages. They seemed to be wrapped around his whole torso but multiple white spiny bones had broken through the fabric and they were so long that they bent at the top and folded over into spindly things that hung low on his back. They sort of looked like the limbs of a praying mantis but the most terrifying thing was that Jin could see that they were the bones of wings. There was... blood all over them, if it could even be called blood. There were a variety of different colors dripping from the bones and coating the
bandages. A few feathers hung off the bones as if they had come too early in the growing process and were meant to be disposed of, like baby teeth. Some of them were white, stained in the same colored blood that coated the bandages but Jin spotted a few black feathers growing as well.

He chose not to comment on it. Though, he couldn’t help but be stunned at the implications of those feathers.

Jeongguk turned back around and crossed his arms as he scowled at Jin. “The pain is unreal. I wish I was given more of a warning as to how the process went. I wasn’t expecting this at all, no one even mentioned that it would hurt.”

Jin wasn’t sure how to respond. “Um… right. Sorry, I should have… warned you.”

“You should have.” Jeongguk huffed.

“You can… take the day to rest if you need it.” Jin offered, he wasn’t sure if that was actually okay or not but hopefully he’d be leaving this place before he could figure out the answer.

“Thanks.” Jeongguk sighed, sitting back down on his bed, all irritation in his voice replaced with exhaustion.

Jin tossed a fearful glance behind him. He may not have been able to still see the mirror that he’d stepped into but that didn’t necessary mean that Taehyung wasn’t able to see it. He hadn’t been that far away when Jin had stepped inside, surely he had either passed the spot or was close to it by now.

He turned back to Jeongguk who was watching him curiously.

“Why are you staring at the door like that?”

Jin bit his lip nervously. He guessed it was best to just tell the truth in this situation. Maybe there was something that Jeongguk could do to help him.

“Taehyung is chasing me. I think he’s gone crazed or something, I don’t know what’s wrong with
him, but he’s trying to kill me. He might come here.”

Jeongguk frowned, expression portraying his bewilderment as he shook his head. “What are you talking about? Taehyung is **dead**.”

Jin had been glancing at the door again but his head turned to Jeongguk so fast he gave himself whiplash.

“What do you mean he’s **dead**? He was just chasing after me.”

Jeongguk fixed him with an incredulous look. “Seokjin, are you feeling alright? Taehyung is dead. *You* killed him.”

Jin took a staggering step backwards not believing what he was hearing. How could he have killed Taehyung? No, not even that, how was Taehyung **dead** when the younger had clearly just been chasing him through a maze of mirrors? Something was not right here, Jin decided. Something was very, very wrong.

“I killed him?” Jin gasped.

“Yes,” Jeongguk explained. “He revealed himself to be unworthy of the light and attacked us. Of course, that was only because you *stupidly* entered into a contract with him and gave him enough power to actually take on all of us. It took all five of us to actually restrain him and you took a stray arrow that Hoseok had shot and pierced him through the heart. Are you saying you don’t remember that, at all?”

Jin was too busy trying to sort out his thoughts to come up with a response. He was trying to understand how it would be possible for his own choices to influence one of the universes he visited and yet also have no control over the events before and after he entered the universe. It didn’t make any sense. Jin, himself, hadn’t killed Taehyung but because of his actions another version of him had? What did that mean for the other universes that he had visited? He had just assumed that his actions had no weight or importance and that, in the long run, it was possible he didn’t actually exist in any of them. But if he *did* exist in every single universe and all of his choices and decisions actually *mattered*, Jin found himself wondering just how much he had changed and whether it was for better or for worse.

“Anyways, you’re being weird.” Jeongguk sighed, when an apparently long period of time had passed without Jin responding. “I need to talk to Namjoon so maybe you should come with me and tell him about whatever is going on. Maybe Taehyung’s unholy spirit is haunting you.”
Jin found that as horrifically ridiculous as he did believable but he supposed talking to Namjoon wouldn’t hurt. He didn’t particularly enjoy being around these angelic versions of his friends, since it seemed like they were all on the cusp of falling apart, much like his group of friends had been in the real world and it seemed like only a matter of time before disaster struck. Jin hoped he wouldn’t still be in the universe when that happened.

Jeongguk shrugged off the stained flannel he was wearing, opening a hidden wardrobe in the wall and pulling out a black hoodie. Jin watched him as he struggled to get the hoodie on over his sprouting wings, wincing as he stretched his arms over his head. Something was bothering him about what the younger had said.

“You said five of us had to restrain Taehyung?”

Jeongguk glanced at him as he reached under his jacket and adjusted the bandages on his torso. “Yeah. Namjoon and I tried to help but since I didn’t have my wings and Namjoon doesn’t have an affinity, we weren’t able to do much. You, Hoseok, and Yoongi did all of the work. The two of us just distracted him.”

“What about Jimin?” Jin knew that Jimin had been in the room upstairs during the whole incident but he wondered what had happened to him afterwards or if something had changed with him too.

Jeongguk frowned at him and ran a hand through his hair. “Seriously, Seokjin? Do you have amnesia or is this just a side effect of selling your soul to the devil? The only reason that you’re still here and haven’t been stripped of your wings for committing such an atrocity is because you were the one who dispatched Taehyung. The higher-ups were not pleased. They worried about an infestation of evil taking place, and removed Jimin from our flock. If they can’t get him to come back to the light they’ll probably dispose of him as well.”

Jin thought about the black feathers growing on Jeongguk’s sprouting wings and thought that the archangels were probably right to worry about infestation.

“Let’s go. Ask Namjoon about any other questions you have. I don’t like talking about this stuff.”

Jeongguk led him out of the small room down what should have been a familiar hallway but wasn’t. Jin was confused. He’d been expecting the lavish wallpaper, high ceilings, and golden trim that he’d seen before in this universe but instead he was greeted with a fairly plain hall. White walls, no trim, dusty baseboards, and dingy lighting.
As he followed Jeongguk through the hallways it seemed like it was still a pretty large building but the grand scale that Jin remembered it having was lost. It looked a bit more like a hotel or business office now. He couldn’t help but wonder why it was so different. It was as though the universe of angels had merged with modern day society.

Eventually, Jeongguk led Jin into a room on one of the upper floors. The room was large, a completely open space except for a large table in the middle and a wall lined with liquor display cases with neon green lights inside of them. What caught Jin’s attention and had him faltering in his steps as he entered was the large window at the far end of the room. It was also lined with lime green neon lights and outside of it were brightly lit, blinking signs against the stark darkness of the night.

They were in a downtown city. The two buildings that were the nearest to them were so close that Jin could probably jump over to them. A yellow and red MOTEL sign blinked it’s led lights at them almost violently and Jin was endlessly confused.

Nothing was making any sense at all.

Namjoon was sat at one end of the table, a wine glass in front of him, filled with a green liquid and a dark bottle sat right beside it. Absinthe, most likely, the same thing they’d been drinking before. He was also dressed casually, hair tousled carelessly, and wearing an open buttoned top over a long sleeved white shirt.

He looked up as the two of them entered and though he looked surprised to see Jin, he didn’t say anything.

Jeongguk nodded towards him and hurried to sit across from Namjoon. Jin stood at the entrance, still confused and completely unsure of what he should be doing at that moment.

“I wasn’t expecting you to bring company.” Namjoon stated, leaning back in his seat and fixing his gaze on Jeongguk.

“He has amnesia or something.” The younger explained hurriedly. “Maybe a side effect of selling his soul. I don’t know, I don’t really care. It’s not like he ratted us out before, I doubt he’ll do it now.”
Jin felt uncomfortable about the way they were talking about him like he wasn’t standing just a few feet away and was able to hear everything that they were saying. He felt that he should be upset and take some kind of action against this, since it was obvious that Namjoon and Jeongguk were on their way to being just as corrupted as Taehyung, but he didn’t know what to do. This wasn’t his world, it was another that he was completely impartial to. It was as though he was acting out a role that he wasn’t given the lines for.

Namjoon chuckled, standing up from his chair. He glanced at Jin and the look in eyes was anything but friendly.

“Look at us. A complete mess. If anyone knew just how much of a mess we were, this entire flock would be disposed of. We’re corrupt, confused, immoral, and a complete disappointment.” He laughed again, grabbing the filled wine glass and dragging it across the table as he walked until he came to a stop behind Jeongguk. He looked at Jin once again and held eye contact with him as he lifted the glass to the younger’s lips.

“I’m not even sure who’s worse. You, Seokjin. Or me. Taehyung was bad, sure. But he held no pretenses as to who he really was. He didn’t even attempt to hide it. You, on the other hand, try so hard to appear perfect that it sickens me. You may be the leader of this flock but you’re nothing but a coward. You knew about Taehyung, you knew about Jimin, you know about me, and you know about Jeongguk, but you do nothing about any of it.” Namjoon tipped the glass back, pouring the bright green contents of the drink into Jeongguk’s mouth and brought up his other hand to the younger’s neck, squeezing it into place.

Namjoon only released him when all the of the liquid had been poured down his throat and he set the glass down on the table. Jeongguk’s eyes glassed over and he swayed in his chair, head bobbing loosely as if he were falling asleep. Finally, he slumped forward and his head collided with the table and stayed there. He must have passed out.

Jin frowned at the youngest’s unconscious state. He had no idea what Namjoon was doing to him or why but whatever it was couldn’t have been good.

His oldest friends’ eyes fell upon his once again.

“I, on the other hand, am someone who thrives in chaos. Taehyung and I were more alike than anyone ever realized. Though, while he was driven and truly believed in his cause, I simply want to see the world burn. I want to watch as this tightly wound coil of order unravels and see what happens after. Of course, I just like having fun and innocent, naive, desperate Jeongguk is far too much fun to play with.” Namjoon looked down at the younger tenderly and reached down into his hoodie. Jeongguk twitched in his unconscious state and Namjoon was holding one of the black feathers that Jin noticed earlier when his hand emerged from the jacket.
“I wonder if he’s too far gone to even realize what’s happening to him. I’d imagine that he is. He keeps complaining about his wings hurting him.” Namjoon chuckled lowly. “Holy wings don’t hurt at all and they certainly don’t grow in the way that his are. I’ve never seen anything like this before.”

He tucked the feather into his pocket and made his way back to the other end of table, empty glass in hand. Namjoon picked up the dark bottle and stared at it for a long moment, a smirk creeping onto his face, before he poured out a glass for himself.

He held the green liquid up and looked at Jin once again. “Do you know what this is? Jeongguk mentioned something about you having amnesia so perhaps you’ve forgotten this too? It’s alcohol, as you would expect. A substance made from fermented products that have been distilled into a pure form. However, this is not a plant based drink. It’s made from blood. The distilled blood from an archangel. Incredibly difficult to get a hold of in these times. It used to be used in a holy ritual for initiating new angels but these days another ingredient is added to it.” Jin watched in stunned horror as Namjoon brought his index finger to his mouth and nipped the skin. He held the wounded finger over the glass and the dark droplet fell into the liquid.

It fell to the bottom of the glass and dissipated until it simply darkened the color of the liquid slightly.

“If it dissolves like this it means that the blood of the angel is pure. However,” Namjoon pulled a small flask out of his pocket and dropped some black liquid into the green fluid. “The blood of an impure angel, a fallen angel, or a demon will have a different effect entirely.”

The almost black fluid exploded into colors within the green liquid then bubbled furiously before it returned to its previous state as if nothing had happened.

“Drinking normal, distilled archangel blood will have no real effect. However, drinking this,” Namjoon lifted the glass to his own lips and drank the liquid deeply. “Will reveal true intentions of the consumer by heightening emotions and natural instinct. If there is even the slightest deviation in your heart against the light, drinking this will heighten it ten times over. It’s usually not consumed since purity can be tested by dropping blood into it and there are known consequences to consuming impure blood… but I had to sate my curiosity. Taehyung consumed it, Jimin consumed it, and of course Jeongguk did as well.”

“Ah, Jeongguk.” Namjoon sighed, looking at the younger fondly. “He has been the most fun yet. He’s completely clueless and totally malleable. He believes anything I tell him and he’s developing a strange dependence to this. Unfortunately, a side effect of the dependency is his constant nausea
and sickness. His blood is becoming tainted and he’s even growing his wings strangely with black feathers. Yet, he still passed the deviation test. It makes me wonder what else he’s capable of.”

Jin’s heart was beating loudly in his ears. He had to remind himself over and over again that this… *monster* in front of him was not the Kim Namjoon that he knew. This was just someone who looked like him, and sounded like him, but wasn’t him. He was nauseous listening to the younger ramble on like the supervillain in a thriller movie. He was truly insane and Jin wanted to stop listening to him but he was rooted to the spot.

“B-but you …” Jin attempted but he couldn’t find the words to express his confusion.

Namjoon grinned, walking towards him. “Ah, you’re wondering why I can drink it myself and haven’t become like the others? Listen, Seokjin. I am the most *pure of heart and soul*. I may sound insane to you, but I truly have no pull to the darkness at all. I have no ulterior motives. I don’t wish for violence or revenge or anything else mundane like that. I simply wish for chaos. That is not an evil wish. *One must have chaos within oneself to give birth to a dancing star*, after all.”

Jin stilled upon hearing those words. He’d heard them before, seen them before, he remembered them. The words that had been inscribed onto the wall above the black mirror he had crawled into that had offered him a second chance at saving his friends. Something he hadn’t seen in this universe at all. A cold feeling of dread overcame him, spreading out from his rapidly thumping heart and all the way to his arms and fingertips, legs and toes.

Something was not right. It was as though the universes that he’d experienced were blending together and creating something completely nonsensical. Had he done something to cause that? Was it because of the sixth photograph or because he was even jumping from all these universes and influencing them to begin with?

Namjoon seemed to notice his discontent and stepped even closer, invaded Jin’s personal space, and forced him to look up into his softly glittering golden eyes.

“You’d better get going before Taehyung catches up to you.” He murmured softly. “*He’s coming*.”

Jin’s eyes widened and he stumbled back in fear as Namjoon started laughing. A sound that sounded horrifically similar to the way Taehyung had been laughing as he ran after Jin with that knife.
Jin turned and scrambled for the doorknob as he attempted to leave. He was truly terrified now. It was like he was in a maze once again except he wasn’t so sure that this one had an escape.

He opened the door, ready to sprint down the hallway, but was shocked to see that he wasn’t in the hallway at all as the door shut behind him.

No, he wasn’t even in the same building anymore. It was still night time though. He was stood outside in what looked like an alley. He looked around, and saw the passing of cars on a busy street to his left and to the right, the alley continued and he could see where it turned and continued down another path.

He looked behind him, where he had entered this place through a door and should have been more surprised to see that there was no door there at all, just the rough concrete of the building bordering the alley.

The universes that Jin had been to seemed to be breaking apart, colliding with each other, and merging back together in strange ways. He was not looking forward to what this place had to offer.

As Jin got used to his strange new surroundings, he realized that he could hear music playing. Not just music, but a piano being played. Jin recognized the song. He’d heard it so many times now that he’d probably never forget it. He walked in the direction the music was coming from, further down the alley.

The song being played was the same song that he’d heard Yoongi play so many times. The song he made with Jeongguk and held dear to his heart. The song that he had let that girl play in the dream Jin had. The song that probably meant more to Yoongi than his own life.

So, no, Jin wasn’t at all surprised when he found the source of the noise. Yoongi had his back to Jin, completely absorbed in playing the piano. They were still in the alley which was strange, he wondered how Yoongi had even gotten the piano out here in the first place. Jin saw that it was the same old brown piano that Yoongi played as a child and frowned in confusion. Hadn’t that piano been lost in the fire resulting from Jeongguk getting hit by a car? Jin remembered seeing the small music shop the piano had sat in burst into flames as the car drove through it and exploded.

Did that mean that incident hadn’t happened yet? Or would it not happen at all?

Jin approached Yoongi, opening his mouth in preparation to call for him but Yoongi suddenly
stopped playing, slamming his hands on the top of the piano as he stood and nearly knocked the stool he was sitting on down.

“Stop, stop, stop!!” He roared. “It’s all wrong. You keep making the same mistakes over and over again! You’re completely useless.”

Jin halted in his steps. Heart pounding as he thought for a second that Yoongi was somehow talking to him.

“I… I’m sorry.” Another voice whispered just loud enough for Jin to hear it.

He frowned, who else was here?

Jin leaned around Yoongi, stepping to the side of the piano so that he could see around it.

Jimin was standing just a few feet in front of the piano. He was blindfolded, thick black fabric across his eyes, and for some reason dripping wet from his head all the way to his feet. He was heaving in breaths but his chest was convulsing strangely and when he hiccuped a sob Jin realized it was because he was crying.

“You’re sorry ?!” Yoongi demanded, voice full of rage. “Sorry doesn’t mean shit to me! How can you not even do this right? No wonder your mother can’t stand you. Do it again.”

“I-I just… I can’t see so…” Jimin defended, wrapping his arms around himself.

“What was that?” Yoongi snapped.

“I can’t see… that’s why I keep messing up. It’s hard. I’m sorry.”

Yoongi laughed, an empty and lifeless sound that was obviously meant to be mocking. “Yes, Jimin. That’s the point of a blindfold. Do It. Again. Without messing up this time.”

He sat back at the piano while Jimin took in a deep breath and assumed a stance in front of it.
Jin watched curiously, wondering exactly what it was that Jimin was supposed to be doing that he kept messing up on. He didn’t understand why Yoongi was being so mean to him either. Surely doing anything with a blindfold on was difficult and what was the point of the blindfold to begin with?

Yoongi had blindfolded Jimin in the universe with angels in order to attempt to keep him from fully deviating away from the light. But Jeongguk had told him that Jimin was no longer in their care and Jin didn’t really think that he was still in that universe anyways.

Yoongi began playing the piano again and Jin watched, transfixed, as Jimin danced to the song smoothly, fluidly moving his body as though he’d been dancing all his life.

They got through the better half of the song, when Yoongi suddenly stopped again, around the same place that he’d stopped the first time. He actually did knock the stool he was sitting on backwards as he stood, and the clatter was loud in the small alleyway. Jin had no idea how he’d even been watching Jimin dance while he was focusing so much on the playing the piano. He hadn’t actually looked up once.

“Again!? Are you even trying, Jimin!? It’s not that hard, just dance properly !!” Yoongi stepped around the piano, toward Jimin threateningly and the younger cowered in fear.

Jin thought that he’d seen enough by now and decided to intervene before he witnessed something horrible.

“Hey! Are you drunk, Yoongi?! Leave him alone!” He called out and Yoongi whipped his head around to him in surprise.

The younger scowled when he saw who it was calling out to him. “Oh, it’s you. What do you want, Jin? We’re in the middle of something.”

“Hyung?” Jimin cried desperately, he ripped the blindfold off of his face, tugging it over his hair.

“Hey !” Yoongi yelled, making a grab for Jimin as he darted around the piano towards Jin. Jimin was too fast for him, though, and the youngest of the three took hold of Jin’s shirt with wet hands and hid behind him.
“Jin, you have to help me, I don’t know what’s wrong with him.” Jimin whispered frantically. “He’s been torturing me, keeping me here and forcing me to dance to that song over and over again. I can’t even feel my legs any more.”

Jin noticed that Jimin’s entire frame was shaking and he wasn’t sure if it was because he was soaked in water or fear as Yoongi approached them.

“That’s really cute, Jimin. Now get back over here, put the blindfold on, and dance properly before you make me angry.” Jin frowned as he looked at Yoongi. His eyes were dark, not in color but as if he there was a shadow cast over them. He looked angry, violent, and unstable the way he often looked when he got drunk, though Jin had only seen him like that a handful of times and based on what Jeongguk said, that hadn’t even been close to Yoongi at his worst.

Jin wondered if he was drunk now or if something else was happening. The same something that was happening with Taehyung, perhaps.

“N-no!” Jimin cried, and Jin could feel the youngers fists poking into his back from how tightly he was holding onto his shirt. “You’re obsessed with that song, Yoongi! It’s not going to bring Jeongguk back, no matter how many times you play it.”

In the distance, a car honked aggressively and Yoongi flinched visibly. Ah, so that’s what was going on here.

“Jeongguk died?” Jin asked, just to clarify.

“Yeah, in the car accident.” Jimin whispered.

Yoongi’s face darkened even further and he dug in his pocket, pulling out the white lighter that he loved so much. He ignited it, sending tiny sparks flying out from the barrel. The flame danced around, swaying back and forth and Yoongi’s eyes followed the movement.

“I guess you’re right, Jimin.” Yoongi agreed, speaking lowly. “He’s not coming back.”

In a quick movement, he held the lighter up to the old piano and before Jin could even react the entire instrument was engulfed in flames as if it had been doused in gasoline. He could only stare in shock at Yoongi who’d just single handedly destroyed the thing that he held dearest to him.
Yoongi hadn’t moved away from the flame even as the fire was threatening to lick up his sleeve as he continued to hold the lighter up to the piano.

“*She died.*” He stated, voice venomously dark. “*He died. You died. I died. We all died. And we all will die. Over and over again.*”

His eyes were even darker now and he sounded deranged. It sent a chill down Jin’s spine. Jimin pulled on him nervously.

“Let’s go, hyung. He’s really scaring me.”

When Jin refused to move, held still by shock and struggling to decipher what those cryptic words meant, Jimin got tired of waiting for him and took off running down the alley by himself.

Jin continued to watch as Yoongi dropped the lighter on the ground and moved to set the stool upright once again, taking a seat and positioning himself to play. The flames licked at his hands as he pushed his fingers down on the ivory keys. Yoongi began playing the song again, either completely uncaring of the fact that he was currently on fire or completely unaware. The melody rang out over the sound of the crackling and popping of the burning wood and as the scent of burning flesh colored the air, Jin decided that he should have left with Jimin.

His stomach rolled dangerously and he only just managed to keep the contents of it down as he ran out of the alley. The melody could still be heard on the sidewalk next to the busy street though, echoing in the distance like a ghost song.

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When Jin finally got far enough away that he either could no longer hear the piano or it had stopped playing, he took a moment to catch his breath. He had no idea where Jimin had even *gone.* Jin had thought he’d seen him running a distance away when he’d gotten out of the alley but now that he was where he thought he’d seen the younger, Jimin was nowhere to be seen.

Jin looked around again, spinning in a circle out of frustration. Something caught his eye, a neon sign of a laundromat. He walked towards it hesitantly, something was pulling him there though he had no idea what. Maybe it was his curiosity.
He came to a stop before it, staring through the glass front, disbelief across his features. It was the same laundromat from that time. That time that all of his friends had returned to the sea to memorialize his death. They had gone into this same exact laundromat. Though, Jin was sure he was nowhere near the sea. Was this just yet another way that the universes were merging together?

Jin took in a deep, steadying breath and pulled open the door. Though, he found his eyes adjusting to the sudden change of light instead. The laundromat had been incredibly brightly lit and now he was back to dim surroundings.

He wasn’t in the laundromat, and maybe it had been foolish of him to think that he would actually get to go inside, when every door he’d opened up until that point had led him somewhere completely different. He was indoors once again, though, it seemed like he was inside of an average looking house. The windows were allowing daylight to flood into the space and it was still hard for Jin’s eyes to adjust to the sudden change of lighting. He rubbed his eyes to force them to adjust faster and when he opened them again his jaw dropped open as he gasped.

He wasn’t just inside of any house, he was in his own house. The house that he’d grown up in, the house that Namjoon practically lived in when they were in school together.

Why was he in his own house?

The house that he hadn’t been in since he decided to go against his father’s wishes. The house that held memories both good and bad.

He wandered through the living room, with the same couch that he watched dramas with his mom on, into the kitchen. He ran his hand over the marble of the kitchen counter, bathing in the nostalgia.

Tears stung at his eyes looking at everything. He was hit with every memory that he made in this house, in these rooms. All with a family that didn’t support him. A family that he hadn’t seen at all through these universes. He didn’t regret his choices anymore, though. He doubted he would spend sleepless nights staring up at his ceiling thinking that he made the wrong choice ever again. It was the one truly bold thing that he’d done in his life and even if it was hard sometimes, he could never regret chasing after his dreams.

Of the two things that kept him going, one were his friends, and the other, his need to prove to his parents that he could be successful. To prove to them that they were wrong and that he could do
what they said he couldn’t.

A giggle behind him jolted Jin out of his thoughts.

“Caught you ~!” Taehyung grinned.

Jin instantly stepped backward nearly tripping on his own legs as he did. He was shaking again, trembling now that he’d been found. He didn’t even know how Taehyung had managed to follow him across universes but here he was standing right in front of him.

Jin noticed, however, that he was no longer brandishing a knife and while that didn’t necessarily mean that the younger was unarmed, it calmed him down a little.

“T-Taehyung, what do you want from me?” He asked, in an attempt to reason with the younger.

Taehyung raised an eyebrow as he smiled. “I want to play with you, of course. I thought I made that obvious?”

Jin shook his head, adrenaline making him act more bold than he felt. “I don’t want to play games with you.”

“Good.” Taehyung grinned. “Because you’re not very good at this game. Which is funny because you always beat me at everything, don’t you? Better life, better grades, better parents, better future. I guess it doesn’t really matter though. Even when we try to be friends I end up hating you or you end up hating me. It’s the way it is.”

“It doesn’t have to be like that.” Jin argued.

“It does .” Taehyung snapped and the momentary lack of aggression returned full force. “You and I are opposite forces and we are destined to collide.”

Jin had had about enough of Taehyung spouting nonsensical shit. The one thing he hated the most about the younger was his inability to think of his actions and how they affected others before he acted. He was selfish and that selfishness often ended up getting Jin hurt.
He shoved Taehyung with all of his might as a sudden rush of anger overtook him. It was utterly ridiculous that Taehyung thought like this. That he always acted like he had nothing to lose when in reality, he had so much to lose that it was terrifying. That he thought he and Jin had to be opposing forces that hated each other when in reality opposing forces often kept the balance of things.

He’d crawled on top of Taehyung on the ground and his fists were flying before he even realized what happened.

Jin punched him over and over again until he felt a sudden sense of deja vu. He’d… done this before. Scenes rushed by his head in a flash. The sea. The construction structure. Taehyung jumping. Rage. He was doing it again.

Right after he just told Taehyung that they didn’t have to be opposing forces he went and proved Taehyung right.

Jin paused, with his fist in the air as he looked into Taehyung’s now beaten and bloodied face. He must have taken the younger by surprise because he was doing nothing but looking up at Jin blankly.

“I’m sorry.” Jin said, tears stung at his eyes again and he wished that the two of them could stop fighting each other and just be friends. He didn’t understand why they always ended up like this, hating each other. Was it just their fate? Or was it because they were too alike? Or because they just kept making the same mistakes and ending up in this position every time?

His words seemed to shake Taehyung out of his shock and he kicked Jin off of him, sending the older flying backwards across the floor of the kitchen, head smacking into a cabinet.

Taehyung looked crazed again as Jin looked at him, eyes wide with excitement and dangerous grin back on his face. He sat up, taking his knife out of his back pocket and lunged towards Jin with it.

Jin saw the paint stained blade come at him and there was nothing he could do in his shocked state to defend himself. There was nothing, at first, but Taehyung inches away from his face. Jin stared at him, mouth agape with surprise as he watched Taehyung’s eyes swell with black liquid, completely overtaking his brown irises and the whites of his eyes. His eyes were just like they had been the first time Taehyung had stabbed Jin and it sent a wild sense of fear through his body.
He felt the pain of the wound all of a sudden like a tide that had gone out to sea and was just pulled back up the sand. He wailed in agony and felt the burning sensation of blood spilling out of the wound and down his stomach.

“Sorry for what, Jin?” Taehyung whispered, so close to his face that he was all Jin could see. “We’re just playing out our roles after all.”

Taehyung drew his arm back to stab Jin again with the knife and all Jin could do was sit against the kitchen cabinet, tears falling out of his eyes, and bleeding, while he resigned himself to his fate. He would die, once again, perhaps a third time now by the hands of Taehyung, someone he considered to be a friend.

But the second stab never came. Jin didn’t realize why at first, until Taehyung was forcibly pulled off of Jin and he saw Jimin’s smiling face. Jeongguk had shown up too and he grabbed Taehyung’s other arm, effectively knocking the knife out of his hand.

The two pulled Taehyung up to his feet and restrained him from both sides as they held him against the counter.

A hand entered Jin’s peripheral vision and he followed it to see Hoseok crouched down near him, offering his hand to help him up. He took it, wincing and clutching his injured side as he stood.

As soon as Jin was up, Hoseok shoved him behind himself as he stepped closer to Taehyung, he maintained a safe distance though.

“We’ve got you.” Hoseok announced. “Give up and I won’t have to hurt you.”

Jin frowned at the sight of the green dart held in Hoseok’s hands, not believing for a second that such a thing could possibly deter Taehyung, but the younger looked more shocked by their sudden appearance than angry and he wasn’t even fighting back.

“You should go,” Hoseok muttered to him when he noticed the older was still standing behind him. “I talk a big game but we’re not going to be able to hold him here for long. You’ve gone through a lot, you’re almost there. Get out of here and get back to real versions of us, alright?”
Jin just gaped at him in shock. How much did Hoseok actually know to tell him something like that? A million questions were on his lips but the younger pushed him away, causing the wound in his side to sting like fire and the questions slipped away.

“Go.” Hoseok insisted. “We got this.”

Jin nodded and hobbled away. He didn’t know what would happen if he went through the same door he came in through and didn’t have time to find out. Instead, he decided to go out the back door and forced himself to run even as every limb in his body screamed at him from the effort.

He wrenched the door open and hobbled through just as he heard a loud commotion and yelling from the kitchen.

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Someone bumped into him as he stepped through and nearly sent him flying to the ground.

“Oh! I’m so sorry!” The woman apologized, helping to steady him.

He let her help him, worried that if he stopped he wouldn’t be able to keep going. He was exhausted beyond words, emotionally and physically. But judging by the commotion he’d heard just before he walked through the door, it didn’t seem like his friends were going to be able to hold Taehyung back for very long. He looked around, confused as to why there were suddenly so many people around him. Judging by the various voices and music, it seemed as though he was at a house party of some sort. He looked behind him and saw the inside of a restroom. Strange.

“Oh my god, you’re bleeding!” The woman exclaimed, gesturing to the stab wound that was still pouring blood down his stomach.

Jin pushed her hands away as gently as he could, hoping that she wouldn’t make too much of a commotion if Taehyung happened to follow him here.

He started walking away from her even as she protested, futilely following after him for a moment before giving up. Jin was happy for her concern but he didn’t need help right now, he didn’t want to involve anyone else in this mess. Especially not people that had nothing to do with it.
Jin pushed his way through the dense pack of partygoers in the main living room, clutching his wound and probably smearing blood on people, not that he cared. He saw a set of stairs out of the corner of his eye and made his way towards them. It probably wasn’t the smartest idea to head upstairs in this sort of situation but he had to get away from the crowd of people before more partygoers realized that he was bleeding profusely. Jin made his way up the stairs, clutching onto the bannister for dear life. He was starting to feel faint now and knew he should probably stop and try to stem the bleeding. Maybe if he managed to find a hiding spot. Right now, it didn’t seem like a feasible option.

As if being proven right, screams rang out behind him. It was Jin hearing someone specifically say the word “knife” that had him gritting his teeth and heading up the stairs as fast as he could. The stairs wrapped around to a third floor and Jin made the split decision to continue up.

“Seokjin!!” Taehyung roared from down below before letting a maniacal laugh. “We’re not done playing yet!”

Jin was struggling now, forcing himself up the stairs even as his vision swayed.

“Where are you?” Taehyung sung, and his voice was closer now. He was on the stairs.

Jin heard a scraping sound and couldn’t help but look over the bannister curiously. Taehyung was slowly walking up the stairs, all other noise from the party downstairs gone, as he dragged the blade of his knife into the wall.

He looked up suddenly, as if sensing eyes on him, and tilted his head to exactly where Jin was. If Jin thought he looked crazed before, he looked downright insane now, eyes completely black, covered in multicolored paint, deep wound right at his left temple dripping dark red down his face, all with the giddy pretense of a child just given a new toy.

“Found you.” He grinned, and continued his slow descent up the stairs, humming a tune under his breath.

Jin gasped and fear sent his limbs into action once again, he reached the top of the staircase and was met with huge white pieces of fabric strung from the ceiling in all kinds of different angles and positions. The fairy lights that hung cast the room in a warm pink glow like they were in a nightclub. It was like someone had made the entire top floor a sophisticated pillow fort. But best of all it might help him lose Taehyung.
There were people up here too, making out and smoking electronic cigarettes. Jin tried to avoid them as he passed through the layers of curtains. The last thing he needed was for someone to see him and start screaming. He had the upper hand, for now at least.

Jin kept going, trying his best to move through the room without smearing blood on the white fabric.

“Seokjin~” A deep voice cooed, and Jin couldn’t even tell what direction it was coming from.

He tried to hold his breath as he walked, all too aware of how quiet it was up here. All he heard was murmuring, the occasional giggle, and the swishing of the fabric as it moved.

“Come out, come out, wherever are you are~”

Jin felt a sudden breeze below his knees and stopped, looking around in confusion. He felt it again and suddenly noticed that a window was open, allowing the breeze in. He dropped to his knees, ignoring the ache it caused in his wound, and looked around for the opening.

He found it after a few seconds and noted that it was completely open, not even a screen was in place to filter the air. It was a strange window and seemed to open upwards from the bottom of the wall. It was about the size of a doggy door but Jin could fit. He would have to.

He crawled forward on his hands and knees, cursing his wide shoulders for the first time in his life as he had to force them through roughly, likely spraining his entire right arm in the process.

Jin forced himself to his feet and look around. He was stood on a balcony and, now that he was on the other side, he could see the actual door though it was completely obscured from the other side. The only way out would be to go back inside. He cursed under his breath. His only hope was that Taehyung would pass up the window and walk back downstairs without finding him. For now, he would move off to the side and stop his bleeding.

He leaned against the side of the balcony and tore off a strip of his shirt with what little strength he had left. He rolled the shirt up his torso so he could actually look at the wound. It was on his left side, just below his ribs. It seemed like it was deep from how much it was bleeding but it had missed anything vital. Taehyung could have easily stabbed him in the gut, throat, or the major artery in his thigh. Instead, he’d made the conscious decision to miss all deadly areas. Jin didn’t
know if that was because the younger wanted to play with him or if he hadn’t actually been trying to kill him.

He wanted to believe the latter. Taehyung and Jin had finally connected and gotten over the old scars they’d given each other in the past. He’d finally gotten to do that when he was given a second chance, so why had things gone so wrong again?

Jin heard footsteps near the window and froze, holding his breath. He wasn’t in direct line of sight from the window as the balcony was angular but it also wasn’t a place where he was well hidden.

He heard the sound of humming and knew it was Taehyung. The younger crawled out onto the balcony to Jin’s horror. But the sound of movement stopped as Taehyung stood. Jin watched him until that point but he pushed himself as far into the corner as he could and hoped that Taehyung would just give up.

“Damn.” Taehyung snapped angrily. “I thought he was out here. Where did he go?”

There was a moment of silence before Jin heard rustling again. He waited a moment more to make sure Taehyung had left before letting out the breath that he’d been holding. He winced and clutched at his wound as he walked around the corner only to stop dead in his tracks.

Taehyung was still there, standing at the railing, looking up at the sky fondly. He turned to Jin as if he was expecting him, which the elder supposed, he was.

“I can’t believe you actually fell for that. I wanted to be an actor, remember? Besides, you practically left a trail of blood all the way up here. It wasn’t that hard to find you. You are surprisingly bad at this game, hyung.”

Taehyung grinned, soulless eyes glinting in the moonlight.

“Oh well, looks like I win.”

The knife made a reappearance, this time coated in bright paint that was still wet enough to be dripping off the tip. Jin swallowed as he saw it and squeezed his eyes shut. He was so tired. Tired of being in pain. Tired of struggling. Tired of all of this. Why did he have to be stuck hopping across universes? It didn’t even make sense.
“Fine.” He spat. “If it’ll make you feel better than just *kill me*, Taehyung. I’m tired of fighting.”

Taehyung’s face fell a fraction, smile twitching at the corners as he seemingly fought to keep it on. “Well, that’s no fun at all, Jin. I didn’t think you’d give up so easily.”

“I’m tired, Taehyung. So just… do whatever you want. Whatever makes you happy.”

The smile completely disappeared from Taehyung’s face then and he looked livid.

“Of course, it’s not going to make me feel happy, you idiot! Why would killing you, someone I look up to and respect, make me feel like anything other than the piece of shit that I am?! I’ve been running from this dark cloud looming over me since the moment I was born. I’m destined to be unfortunate. I’m tired of fighting too, Jin. Don’t make this all about you.”

“No, Taehyung.” Jin snapped. “You always make everything about you. You decide everything on your own, without caring who you hurt in the process. You never think of the consequences until it’s already too late.” Jin hobbled over to the railing, leaning on it for support. It put him closer to Taehyung but he could no longer bring himself to care.

“Well, what do you want me to do?!” Taehyung shouted, throwing the knife to the ground. He looked absolutely miserable, face contorting as he tried desperately to hold back his tears. “I don’t know what to do, Jin. Please tell me. Since you know so much. Enlighten me.”

Jin breathed out a laugh. “I don’t know what to do either, Taehyung.”

The younger scoffed, rolling his eyes. “Well, that’s just great. What great insight. Thank you.”

“But,” Jin continued, glaring. “But, I know that we don’t have to know what to do. We can’t tell the future. We have no idea what will happen or when. We only have the power to choose what we want to do in this moment. You’re not a puppet on a string. You can make your own decisions. Do what you want. Not what you think people expect you to do. You don’t have to keep playing the villain, Taehyung. So, stop acting like the bad guy. It doesn’t suit you.”

They were quiet as they stared each other down, fury in both of their eyes. They’d both had
enough. Taehyung’s lip quivered and he quickly dropped his gaze away from Jin’s as tears slipped from his eyes.

Jin watched, stunned, as the black liquid that had overtaken Taehyung’s eyes came out with his tears in dark green drops. It was as if food coloring had been injected into his eye and now it was being filtered out. Taehyung kept crying long after the darkness over his eyes had disappeared though.

“I-I’ve done horrible things both to you and everyone around me. I’m a murderer, a thief, a crook, and a delinquent. I don’t know how to be anything but the bad guy.” He muttered.

Jin sighed, closing the distance between them. He wrapped his arms around Taehyung in a hug, ignoring how his wound and entire body protested the movement.

“I forgive you, Taehyung. You’re a good person who’s made bad choices. That doesn’t make you irredeemable.”

Taehyung shook with the force of his sobs as he wrapped his own arms around Jin and held him tightly.

“Th-thank you, hyung. Thank you.” Taehyung whispered, voice choked with tears.

Jin only squeezed him tighter in response. After a moment, though, Jin realized something strange. Taehyung’s back was moving beneath his hands.

Not as though Taehyung himself was moving but Jin closed his fist around the space where Taehyung’s back had been and grasped nothing. He opened his eyes in surprise and stepped back from the younger.

Taehyung’s face was peaceful, serene, as he smiled. But his entire body was disintegrating, melting down into a thick colorful liquid like paint. Jin’s arms were covered in the fluid and his heart fluttered with panic as he grabbed at Taehyung once again and his hand went straight through him, emerging covered in paint when he pulled back.

“Taehyung!” Jin cried desperately.
“Thank you.” Taehyung whispered once more before he melted completely into paint.

Jin blinked in confusion, looking down at his paint covered hands and the mess of paint on the floor and not understanding at all what he was looking at. He knew he was still in the maze of universes, stranded in a limbo that had no exit but he didn’t know what any of this meant. Were the versions of his friends that he’d been seeing made of paint? A mere imitation of the real thing? Were any of the universes he visited real or was it because things had become so broken that they were like this?

Jin didn’t know. He didn’t have the answers. He supposed that was okay. He didn’t need to know. He felt for the first time that he understood the point of his being trapped in this place. It wasn’t only so that he could realize his mistake in leaving his friends. It was so that he could learn more about them and himself in the process and finally lay to rest the demons that were plaguing him. He had no more darkness inside of him. He’d forgiven Taehyung from the bottom of his heart and realized all that he had truly left behind that day that he drove out to the sea.

He understood that much at least. He didn’t think that the rest really mattered.

“I’ll meet you again.” Jin promised to no one in particular as he stared fondly down at the mess of paint. His gaze lifted to the sky, the moon sat big and bright and he felt lighter as if the heavy weight that was on his shoulders had finally been removed.

A tiny smile graced his lips as he stumbled over to the door of the balcony and this time he completely expected the light blue walls, golden trim and crown moulding.

He was back in that hallway again. The one with the strange figures on the wallpaper and the painting of the bird. Jin hobbled past all of that, smearing blood all over the wall as he used it to hold himself up. He saw the door that he came out of the last time he was here and noticed that this time there was a chain on the outside.

The hallway was littered with feathers, both black and white; apples, some untouched and others bitten into; and paint, that was splattered across all of it.

Jin walked past all of that and arrived in front of the door, panting, sweating, and ready to leave this place.
He touched the chains on the door handles and they melted into paint under his touch.

With a firm intake of breath, Jin pulled open the double doors, nearly falling over from the exertion he had to put out in order to open them both at the same time. His vision was swaying even more now, and his breaths came out in labored pants.

In the room was a man. He was sitting on the bed just under the small window in the room. His back was turned to Jin, but his wide shoulders were obvious even under the black of his pressed shirt. His hair was cut short but a bit tousled as if he’d had a fitful sleep. His legs were long, naturally toned and it was evident that he was quite tall even without standing up.

Jin knew him, Jin recognized him.

When the man turned around, eyes coated with black and despair written all over his face, Jin wasn’t surprised at all.

Because he was looking at himself.

The self that was once a part of him, laden with uncertainty, overcome with despair, and beaten down to the point of giving up. Jin remembered the scratches on the inside of these doors even without turning to look at them. He remembered the way that they’d looked like someone was desperate to get out. He remembered the photographs and the petals that had laid beneath his feet. He remembered the dresser at the far end of the wall that had been chained as well, keeping it secrets to itself.

Jin remembered all of it. He knew the person in front of him well, but he also knew that they were not the same person anymore.

“You’re free.” Jin announced and then he felt an intense pulling motion, drawing him backwards as colors exploded and the ground cracked and shook. A hole opened in the middle of the floor and the glass from the window shattered.

He’d finally found the exit to this place that was like a maze. He hadn’t realized that all he had to was make one for himself.

Color exploded in his vision as he was pulled with astounded force as if being pulled across several
different universes as once, it all flew past him in a blur, colors and noises and smells. Eventually the pulling stopped and he was no longer in motion. It felt like he’d been slammed into something but the colors, noises, smells were gone.

It was just him and nothingness.

Chapter End Notes

One more...

Fun Fact

The Blood, Sweat, and Tears Japanese music video has much more content relating to the HYYH theory than most of the other Japanese versions of songs and far more than the official Korean music video. The video has a darker theme to it compared to it’s Korean counterpart and supports numerous theories such as the alternate universe theory with the suggestion of “world breaking” as Jimin comes into contact with another version of himself in the video among other things. Go watch it if you haven't!
Awake

Chapter Summary

[Chapter Recap]

_Jin finds himself in yet another maze of mirrors. The universes that he’d been traveling to are warped and merging together in frightening ways. Worst of all, Taehyung is chasing him with a knife and acting homicidal. Jin struggles to get away from him with the help of his friends and eventually the two confront each other. Jin forgives Taehyung and Taehyung finally accepts himself as he melts into paint. Jin has done it, he’s finally made his way out of the maze._

Chapter Notes

If you thought this chapter was going to be a cute wrap up of the story, then you were sorely mistaken. The ride isn’t over yet.

Let’s do this.

Music Recommendation

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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*“Maybe I can never fly. Can’t fly like the flower petals over there. Or as though I have wings.

Maybe I can’t touch the sky. Still, I want to stretch my hand out, I want to run, just a bit more”*

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Jin gasped as he regained consciousness, body jerking forward in panic and sending him flying into a sitting position. He found it hard to breathe for some reason and shaking fingers grabbed some sort of plastic resting on his face once he realized it was the cause.

There was loud beeping in his ears, the potent smell of disinfectant, and something else he couldn’t quite place his finger on. He was disoriented, confused, unsure as to why his body wasn’t reacting the way he wanted it to. There was white all around him, it was bright, too bright and his eyes weren’t adjusting properly.

_“Jin! Oh my god, stop! Nurse!”_ A girl was leaning over him, her soft brown hair curtaining her face and shielded it from his view. He frowned, ceasing in his struggling, and grabbed at her arm.
She turned to him, hair swinging out of the way and he gasped as he looked into her face.

Those features, the soft smile, bright eyes, and delicate face. He thought he’d never get to see them directed his way again.

She called for a nurse again, more frantically as she squeezed Jin’s hands in hers as if holding on for dear life.

Jin smiled, suddenly tired beyond belief, and his head sunk back onto the pillow it had been on previously as he drifted off to sleep.

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Consciousness pulled at him like the tide at sea, there for one moment and slipping away the next. He was just so tired. He wanted to sleep forever. Though, when thoughts like that slipped into his mind, he was hit with a sense of urgency, a feeling that he should do something but he couldn’t figure out what. Faces danced in his mind, speaking to him, telling him things. The warm hand that had held his just before he lost consciousness was still there, holding on to him tightly and grounding him. It was that warmth that kept the tide from pulling him out to sea completely.

The more Jin thought that he was used to this place and that he would be fine staying here, that urgency returned. It was frustrating him. He didn’t know what he was supposed to do and he didn’t want to do anything.

Eventually, he heard a sound, a bit like an echo that kept repeating over and over again as if it was just echoing nonstop. It took Jin a while to figure out that the sound was a voice and even longer for him to realize what the voice was actually saying.

“**I’ll meet you again.**”

His voice. His own words. Telling him to meet someone. **Who?** He couldn’t remember. Someone… important. He should know. He racked his brain for the answer but his thoughts floated away, hard to grasp, caught by the tide.

“**Jin.**”
A feminine voice. Not his. His heart yearned towards it. It burned with affection, with longing, and he pulled harder against the tide, dragging himself out of it. He had to get to that voice. It was special, important.

The darkness of his mind slipped away, slowly at first, and then like a curtain being pulled back. There was light. Too much of it, he couldn’t see.

He blinked once, twice, several times against the harshness of that light and eventually color seeped in to the shapes and objects in his eyes. There wasn’t much color to be had but it helped him to understand what he was looking at.

A wall. A window. The foot of a bed with steel rods at the end. His gaze shot downwards and he saw that he was in the bed. A mass under the sheets explaining the warmth he felt on his legs. He wiggled his foot experimentally and saw the mass poke up under the sheet accordingly.

He heard a steady mechanical beep from somewhere in the room and turned his head to see both an IV drip and a sleek white machine next to it. He was… in a hospital.

Why?

His eyelids were still heavy as if he’d been asleep for a long time and he struggled to not fall prey to the pull of sleep again. He glanced around the room in its entirety and as he did, he saw someone out of the corner of his eye. A girl, sitting in a metal folding chair just beside his bed. Her head was resting atop their held hands and from the way her breath was fanning out over his skin he guessed that she was asleep.

He hefted his body up until he was sitting more upright in the bed and turned towards her. Her face was turned towards him and peaceful in her slumber, his heart pounded in his chest as he looked at her and the beeping staccato in the room reflected it.

“Hye-su.” He whispered, testing out the familiar sounds. It was her. He thought he’d never see her again. Never be able to see her face this close, or hold her against him. He lifted his hand out of her grasp and, carefully, lifted it to her head instead and ran his fingers through her hair. He must have been dreaming. He didn’t understand why he was here with Hye-su like this but it was a nice dream, calm and peaceful. He didn’t want it to end.
Hye-su stirred, waking up slowly and blinking her eyes up at him. A slight frown graced her face as she looked at Jin and she unconsciously leaned into his touch.

“Hi.” He whispered, quietly as not to break the trance that they were in. He didn’t want to wake up from this dream so soon, he wanted just a few more minutes with her.

Her eyes watered with tears that immediately welled up and began leaking out, sending salty droplets of water down her cheeks. She hunched over as she began to sob and Jin frowned, not wanting to see her cry.

His hand dropped from her hair to her shaking shoulder, squeezing it reassuringly.

“Please don’t cry.”

“I-I’m sorry,” Hye-su sobbed. “I just… I didn’t know if you were ever going to wake up.”

“I’m awake.” Jin assured her, wishing that she would look at him again. He slid his hand under her chin, pulling upwards and she followed the movement, looking into his eyes again as more tears fell down her cheeks.

“I was so scared of losing you.” She sniffed, unable to keep her lip from trembling as she spoke.

“I’m not going anywhere.” He lowered his hand to hold hers and was surprised by the force of her grip, it was as though she was afraid he would slip out of her grasp.

There was a beat of silence between them as they held onto each other before Hye-su spoke again.

“I-I should probably go get a,” She swallowed. “A nurse.”

Jin’s heart leapt in fear and he clutched on tighter to her, worried that if she left his sight for a second this dream would end and he would wake up in misery.

“Just… just a few minutes more.” He begged, trying not to be greedy but finding it hard to let her
Hye-su nodded, holding onto his hands with both of hers and lowering her head as if she were praying.

Jin watched her quietly, an apology on his tongue but unable to get the words out. He was so tired and sitting here with Hye-su was calm and relaxing.

Perhaps too relaxing because he felt himself slipping away again, the tide lapping at his consciousness and pulling him back into the darkness. He tried to fight it, tried to hold Hye-su tighter so that she could keep him grounded, but he had no strength left. He was pulled out to sea once again and he was powerless against it.

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“... Don’t worry he’ll wake up again. His body is struggling to recover and his head injury is probably making him slip in and out of consciousness.”

Jin woke again to talking. He heard Hye-su and another voice that he couldn’t quite place. It was familiar though, which was striking him as strange.

Before, when he had woken up his head had been heavy, only barely surfacing from the depths his consciousness was swimming in. Now, however, he was wide awake and his head was pounding angrily in his skull. He whimpered, forcing his hand that felt heavier than it should have up to his head and cradling it.

“See, he’s awake again, already.”

Jin blinked his eyes open, squinting against the sudden rush of light. He must have had a migraine.

Hye-su was still sitting in a folding chair beside him and he frowned at her in confusion. Was he still… dreaming? But he specifically remembered that he’d fallen asleep and hadn’t wanted to, so why was he waking up again in the same place?
Jin turned to the other person in the room and only grew more confused.

“D-Doctor Kang?” He muttered, voice rough with sleep. Why was Jeongguk’s doctor in the room with him right now? Following that train of thought he came to an even stranger realization.

“Why am I in a hospital?”

Hye-su and Doctor Kang exchanged glances and Hye-su looked close to tears once again as she looked at him.

“Jin… do you… do you not remember what happened?” She asked carefully.

“What do you mean what happened?” Jin wracked his brain trying to figure out what she was talking about. It hit him then, the incident at the pier, him driving into the sea. Tears burned at his eyes as all the events that came after hit him all at once. He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to keep in his tears to the best of his ability but he was overwhelmed with relief that he’d finally managed to escape. He was free.

His hand wandered down to the last stab wound that Taehyung inflicted on him, reflecting on all that had happened, but he was shocked when the wound actually hurt. He looked up at Doctor Kang in confusion.

“You experienced severe internal bleeding due to the accident. We had to perform surgery in order to stop it.” She explained calmly.

Jin frowned again as his fingers traced over the gauze. “How did that happen if I drowned? I don’t understand.”

Doctor Kang and Hye-su shared another concerned glance.

“What do you mean drowned?” Hye-su asked, phrasing her question carefully but it was obvious that she was bothered.

Jin didn’t understand why the two of them were reacting so strangely to his question.
“I… I drove off the pier and I drowned. How would I have gotten severe internal bleeding from that?”

Something else was bothering him. Something that should not have been. He stared at Hye-su for a long moment, not understanding what the strange feeling was until he remembered all of a sudden.

“**You’re dead.**” He whispered, eyes going wide.

Hye-su frowned at him, leaning away from him as if startled. “What?”

“You’re dead.” He repeated, shaking his head as he looked at her. “I watched, I *saw* you get hit by a car. I went to the hospital, w-with your parents. You *died*.”

The room was silent enough to hear a pin drop.

Jin was beginning to panic. He had too many questions, too many things weren’t adding up.

“W-where am I? I thought I *escaped*! Where’s Jeongguk, Taehyung, and *Namjoon*!? Hoseok, Jimin, and *Yoongi*!? Where are they? Why aren’t they here? They should be here!” He thrashed around on the hospital bed, he was becoming dizzy with emotion and he felt like screaming, yelling, and sobbing at the same time. He’d gotten out, he’d figured the way *out* of the maze. So, why did it feel like he was right at the start again?

“Alright, I’m going to have to sedate you, Jin, okay? We need to speak calmly and it doesn’t seem like you’re able to do that at the moment.” Doctor Kang calmly walked over to his bedside and injected something into the IV that was pumping fluids into his arm.

He wanted to fight more, thrash around until he broke everything in the room but the sweet call of the sea was beckoning out to him and it’s lapping waves were drawing him back into the darkness again. He could hear crying from his side and hated that he had to keep hearing Hye-su cry. Even if this was a dream or an alternate universe, he just wanted to see her smile again.

The way she had right before she stepped out onto the street.
When Jin rose from the depths of the sea again, his head was no longer hurting but he felt dizzy and lethargic.

He opened his eyes and winced when he saw that he was still in the same hospital room. He didn’t know why he hadn’t moved on from this place yet or woken up from whatever dream he was having. It wasn’t real, it couldn’t have been. Hye-su had died, and as much as he didn’t want to believe that, there was no way to dispute it. Her death had been the catalyst that sent Jin driving off that pier and into the water, it was what had started this entire journey to begin with.

What was strange to him was that he hadn’t seen any of his friends yet. Surely, if he was in the hospital they would have come to visit him. Although, he thought back to the universes he’d visited in which none of his friends had visited Jeongguk while he was in the hospital. Perhaps, that same thing was happening to him. Doctor Kang had been Jeongguk’s doctor after all.

He frowned and grit his teeth together, curling his hands into fists. But he’d found a way out. He’d left that place of mazes and broken universes. He’d left it so why hadn’t he gone back to the universe he regretted leaving? The one he’d actually wanted to go back to. He wondered if it was too late. If he’d already died and was stuck, doomed to wander between universes for the rest of eternity. He wasn’t sure if he deserved to go to hell but that seemed like an eternal damnation if he’d ever heard one.

A light snore in the room caught Jin’s attention. The room was dark, he guessed it was well into the night though he had no idea how long he’d been sleeping. The figure next to his bed was visible though and the man had his arms crossed, chin resting on his chest as he slept. Jin stared at him for a long moment, startled by how familiar he looked. The man shifted, head dropping to the side in a sudden movement that woke him up and he raised his head, allowing Jin to see him properly.

He gasped into the dark room and his eyes widened.

“Siwon?” Jin whispered under his breath. The man was the doctor that he had met in the universe set a decade in the future. He was younger now, his features softer and less defined, but there was no doubt that it was the same person.

The man turned his head towards Jin and smiled sleepily, teeth glinting white in the darkness. “Oh, you’re awake.”
“Why are you here?” Jin couldn’t help but ask, blood running cold with fear. Siwon’s appearance was only making him completely sure that something was very, very wrong.

Siwon laughed awkwardly. “I’m your best friend. Why wouldn’t I be here?”

“Or wait- are you asking why it’s me instead of Hye-su? Sorry, I’m tired. She has class in the morning so I convinced her to go home. She doesn’t need to fail classes on top of all this.”

Jin frowned, his question was answered but it wasn’t the answer he wanted.

Siwon looked at him for a long minute, seemingly struggling to find words to say. “... Jin, I’m happy that you’re still alive. I know you... you may not feel the same. But Hye-su and I both need you.”

Jin just stared at him, confusion and anger mixing once again into a volatile mess. He didn’t understand what he was doing here and he didn’t want to stay.

Siwon bit his lip and looked down at his feet before he stood, no longer looking at Jin as if avoiding his gaze. “I’ll go tell a nurse that you’re awake.”

He walked around the hospital cot, keeping his gaze trained on the ground and then disappeared into the hallway.

Jin sighed, frustration making rage burn at his brain and tears threaten his eyes. It just didn’t make sense. He just wanted to go back to his friends but he wasn’t being allowed to. He wondered if he was going to be punished like this endlessly.

A few minutes later, Siwon returned to the room with a nurse in tow. The light in the room was turned on and rather than returning to his seat, Siwon leaned against the wall next to door. He still refused to look at Jin.

“How are you feeling?” The nurse asked. She was young, pretty, looked happy to be doing her job as if it had been her own choice rather than the influence of her parents. Jin couldn’t understand how anyone would be happy working in a hospital.
He didn’t bother answering her question. He felt such a complicated mix of feelings he couldn’t even begin to describe them. His head still felt a bit strange and the wound just below his ribs was aching. So, no, he wasn’t feeling well at all and that was obviously not an answer that the chipper, eager, young nurse would want to hear so he kept his mouth shut.

She checked his vitals and wrote a few things down on her clipboard when he didn’t respond.

“Doctor Kang will return in the morning to talk to you more in depth about the incident and your injuries since she has some concerns but she asked me to inform you of the situation if you woke prior to her arrival in the morning.”

Jin looked at her disinterestedly and was probably glaring but he couldn’t bring himself to care.

“You suffered a serious head injury in the incident and we are concerned this may have lead to memory loss and confusion. She mentioned that you said something about drowning, which is why we think this. You were hit by a car and though you sustained minimal physical damage you had a serious head injury as well as internal bruising and bleeding. You have been in a comatose state due to this incident for three months.”

Jin dropped his gaze to the bed, mind attempting to process that information. Jeongguk had been hit by the car and Doctor Kang had been his doctor. The youngest wasn’t visited by their friends in most of the parallel universes he’d experienced and his friends weren’t here now. He wondered if that meant that in this universe he’d taken over Jeongguk’s position. Though, he glanced at Siwon and realized even that wasn’t adding up.

“Do you believe that you are experiencing memory loss? Do you remember anything that occurred before the incident or the circumstances surrounding the incident?” The nurse asked patiently.

Jin shook his head, biting his lip. He wasn’t going to be careful this time and refrain from saying things. He didn’t understand why he was here or what was happening to him and he was going to make that known. He wouldn’t settle for just staying here, he had to find a way back.

“I remember something different.” He admitted and the nurse brought her pen up to her clipboard as she waited for him to elaborate. “Hye-su died after she was hit by a car on our first date. Two of my other friends nearly died within the same week and it was too much for me at once. I drove to a sea not too far from here since it usually calmed me down but I made a brash decision and drove off the pier. I don’t know why I’m here or why Hye-su is here, let alone alive, and I don’t even
know Siwon. I just want to be with my friends again.”

Siwon scoffed, kicking off the wall he was leaning on and exited the room, the door slamming resoundingly behind him.

The nurse glanced towards the door and then back towards Jin sympathetically and he hated the look on her face. He recognized it to be the look people had when they think that he’s gone insane.

“He’ll probably need to take some time to calm down. He’ll understand. He and your girlfriend have both been here since you were admitted. They’ve been switching places and made sure that you were never here alone for a long amount of time. They both love you very much. Give them some time, I’m sure this is very confusing for them.”

Jin wanted to argue that it was confusing for him since he wasn’t supposed to be here at all but bit the words down. It was obvious she didn’t believe him, though. There was no point in trying to convince her.

She sighed at his prolonged silence. “You said that your girlfriend, Hye-su, died. I understand that you’re confused and frustrated but she’s not dead and is still here with you. Maybe this is a blessing in disguise.”

The nurse smiled at him once more, though her expression was troubled, and turned the lights off on her way out.

Jin heaved out a sigh, turning so he could look out the small window in the room. He doubted that this could be considered a blessing when he was sure it’d be ripped away from him just as he got used to it. Just like it had every single time before.

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In the morning, Jin was awoken by Doctor Kang, a nurse, and someone else entering the room. Siwon hadn’t returned after he’d stormed out the night before. He groaned at the sight of them and lamented his loss of sleep. He was still feeling tired and lethargic and suddenly being woken up like this was not helping his mood.

“Sorry for waking you, Seokjin.” Doctor Kang announced, not sounding sorry in the slightest. “I
need to ask you more questions about the incident. I’m sure you may feel that you need to rest more before talking about this but it is very important that we ask now rather than later. The more time that passes,"

“The more likely it is that the fidelity of my memory related to the incident will decrease.” Jin finished in annoyance.

Doctor Kang looked at him strangely. “H-How did you know I was going to say that?”

Jin fought against telling her that she’d said the same exact thing to Jeongguk.

“My father is a doctor. I was supposed to take over the family clinic for him.”

Doctor Kang nodded in understanding. “Oh, is that so? I’m impressed with you, you must have studied hard.”

Jin hummed noncommittally in response, not wanting to talk about it.

She gestured to the petite woman and aggressively tall man beside her. “I’ve brought a nurse to check your wounds, and the hospital psychiatrist, Doctor Seo, to talk to you about what you think happened.”

Jin eyed the psychiatrist warily. It felt like he was being forced into some form of counselling that he didn’t need. He wasn’t going crazy. He knew what happened.

The nurse approached him, adjusting the hospital bed so that it forced him into a sitting position. He sighed and sat up so the position he was in was more comfortable.

“Can you lean forward for me?” She asked politely and Jin obliged. She reached forward and pulled away the gauze wrapped around his head that he hadn’t even noticed was there. He winced as she pulled the last strip of it away. She sat it on his lap as she inspected the wound before reaching into her pocket and pulling out another roll of gauze. Jin’s gaze dropped to the old gauze in his lap as she applied the new one and saw that there was dried blood on it. He remembered that they had told him he’d suffered a head wound and sighed.
There wasn’t a sliver of a chance that they’d believe anything he said if he had a head injury.

Eventually the nurse finished with that task and stood to throw the used bandage away. She returned momentarily, asking him to pull down the sheet and show her the wound in his side which is when Doctor Kang decided to speak.

“I understand that you don’t remember the events before the accident.” She stated.

Jin rolled his eyes, unable to help it. “I remember what happened just fine.” He argued.

“I drove to the sea that’s about a four hour drive from here and in a state of distress and sorrow I drove off a pier, into the sea, and I drowned.”

Doctor Kang sighed patiently. “There is no evidence of water being in your lungs or any reports of a vehicle being in any sea near Seoul. Yu Hye-su states, as a witness of the incident, that the two of you got into a heated argument and you walked out into the street just as a car approached. In an attempt to avoid hitting you, the car swerved and crashed into a cafe that the two of you frequented. It exploded and went up in flames and the driver in the incident was pronounced deceased on the scene.”

Jin didn’t know what to say to that so he turned his attention to the nurse as she inspected the stitches in his wound, rubbing over them with an alcohol soaked cloth. He winced, knocked breathless by the sting, and she apologized quietly.

“Are you sure that this is incorrect and that something else happened?” Doctor Kang asked, expression serious. Jin knew that it would be better if he just told them that he didn’t remember the incident at all but he didn’t want to. He remembered everything that happened and he’d be lucky to forget any of it. He’d experienced true hell and he didn’t want to be here. This was not where he was supposed to be and he would make sure that everyone knew it.

“I remember something entirely different.” He stated, staring directly at Doctor Kang.

The atmosphere in the room plummeted and even the nurse’s hands on his abdomen stilled momentarily as she readjusted his bandages. Doctor Kang broke eye contact with him, glancing down at the floor before she glanced at the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist, himself, hadn’t looked away from Jin once and cleared his throat pointedly.
“That’s okay.” He stated. “I’m just here to inform you that it’s mandatory for someone suspected to be a danger to themselves to undergo a few weeks of therapy, I hope you can understand that I will only be trying to help you. We can work together to determine whether your confusion is a result of your head trauma or something else. If you remember something other than what Yu Hye-su is telling us, we can talk about it. I don’t think that you would make something like this up.”

The nurse finished checking over him and pulled the sheets back up, sending him a smile before she left the room. Jin’s eyes followed her for a moment before they fell back onto the psychiatrist.

“Fine.” He acquiesced. Maybe talking with someone about all that he experienced, whether they believed him or not, would help him in the long run.

“You have one mandatory session before you can be discharged in two days. I’ll see you then.” Doctor Seo explained, nodding his head. He didn’t smile at Jin when he left and Jin found himself grateful for the lack of pretense. There was nothing to smile about in this situation.

Soon only Doctor Kang was left in the room.

“You seem to be in stable condition and your wounds aren’t so serious that we need to keep you here much longer. You’ll likely be discharged the day after your first session with Doctor Seo. Don’t hesitate to ask if you need anything.” She turned to leave but Jin had a sudden curiosity.

“Wait!” He called, and she turned around immediately, an expectant look on her face. “Has… anyone else been to visit me? Any other friends or… my parents?”

Doctor Kang frowned as she looked at him. “I believe your only visitors have been Yu Hye-su and Choi Siwon. Did… did you just ask if your parents visited?”

Jin didn’t understand why she was asking him but he nodded. “Yes, my mother or my father. Maybe my brother?”

She looked troubled then, truly dumbfounded as she looked at him. “Seokjin, the only living family member you have is your adoptive step-father. Your birth mother passed away due to an illness a few years ago and your adoptive mother passed away in a house fire over ten years ago.”

Jin’s jaw dropped open in shock and a chill set in all over his body raising goosebumps on his skin.
Panic was building up in his chest and caused his breath to come out in short puffy gasps.

“What?” He managed to ask. “M-my mother is dead? Adoptive… what?”

The machine by his bedside was beeping erratically and Jin felt dizzy like he wasn’t getting in any oxygen no matter how much air he breathed in.

“So, Seokjin.” Doctor Kang called, kneeling down by his bedside. “I need you to calm down, okay? You’re about to have a panic attack. You’re not breathing properly. Breathe in deeply and then out slowly.”

She grabbed his hand and he tried to focus on her, tried to ignore the horrifying feeling of not being able to breathe, and listened to her. He didn’t know how he would get enough air into his lungs by breathing slowly but since she was a professional he followed her advice.


He repeated this a few times and eventually he was able to breathe normally once again.

“See? It helps.” Doctor Kang smiled. “Your brain tricks you into thinking that you aren’t breathing but you are. And you already don’t have the best lungs from smoking so much. It could be dangerous. So, remember that if you start to get one again.”

She was right. It had worked. On the downside, now that he could breathe again he crumpled in on himself, sobbing violently.

She squeezed his shoulder as he cried, lifting herself to her feet.

“It’ll be okay. You’ll remember.” She promised. And she walked away, quietly closing the door after her.

Jin only cried harder. There was nothing to remember. He was once again being forced to live a life that wasn’t his. It wasn’t until after she had left that he realized she had mentioned that he was a smoker.
He’d never smoked a cigarette in his life.

—

Hye-su came by later in the afternoon. For once, Jin was upset by her presence. He didn’t want to talk to her. Though, by the way she’d been fidgeting and restless since the moment she walked into the room, she didn’t necessarily want to be here either.

“You don’t have to stay here.” He muttered in frustration as she’d taken to biting her nails and glancing at him every two seconds. It was annoying and he felt strange being around her again. He didn’t want to get closer to her only to have her disappear from his arms the second he did. Everyone always left him in one way or another. Nobody ever stayed.

She turned to him, eyes wide like she was caught doing something she shouldn’t have been.

“What?”

Jin huffed in irritation as he avoided her gaze. It hurt his heart to look at her.

“I said you don’t have to stay here. You look like you’d rather be anywhere else.”

Hye-su was quiet for a moment and after she hadn’t responded for a few minutes, he turned to glance at her. He’d almost never seen the expression on her face but she looked angry. She was biting her lip as if it was the only thing holding her back from yelling. She noticed him glance at her and she stopped biting.

“I’ve been by your side the entire three months that you’ve been comatose. The entire three years that we’ve been together, Jin.” She snapped. “Do you think so little of me that you think I don’t want to be here? That’s the most hypocritical thing I’ve ever heard.”

Jin frowned, stunned by how angry she sounded. But he was angry too. This, this wasn’t fair to him. He’d tried to do his best for her, he’d tried to love her, he’d taken risks with her, all in attempt to be happy. But everytime he got close she was snatched away from him as if the universe was playing with him, teasing him with what he could only dream to have. It wasn’t fair. And now the
universe was telling him that the two of them had been together for years now?

“Three years?” He echoed, immediately regretting the angry tone of his voice as it visibly made Hye-su wince.

“Do you not remember that either?” She asked, scoffing. “How convenient.”

She wiped a stray tear that had fallen down her cheek and Jin felt the most horrible that he’d ever felt in his life to have caused that tear.

“You said that I don’t want to be here? You don’t want to be here, Jin. You’ve made that perfectly clear. You don’t care about me or Siwon and you don’t want our help or our support because you’ve somehow convinced yourself that you don’t deserve it. You’ve convinced yourself that everyone will leave you and to prove your own point you push everyone that would never leave you away.”

Hye-su was fully crying now, sobs convulsing her body as she fought futilely to keep the tears away. Jin wanted to take his words back but all he do was sit in the bed looking at her, mouth open in shock, and listen.

“You need help, Jin.” She continued, voice choked with tears. “And you need to let someone help you before you destroy yourself and regret everything. You have a bright future and are surrounded by people that love you and respect you but you’re too caught up in the past to even look at all the things you have right in front of you.”

She sighed, taking in a shaky breath and looked at him. The expression on her face told him just how disappointed in him she was, and she dropped her gaze to the floor, shaking her head.

Hye-su stood then, gathering her things. “I think I should go. I don’t think it’s helpful for me to be here right now.”

She avoided his gaze as she walked towards the door and Jin suddenly found his voice.

“Hye-su, wait, I’m-”
She turned, eyes blazing in anger and the words escaped him once again.

“Listen, I don’t know what you experienced while you were in that coma. But I’m not dead. I’m right here, standing in front of you and I love you. Siwon loves you too but he just needs some time to calm down.”

Jin’s heart missed a beat as he heard the words. I love you. A flush rose all the way up his neck and onto his face in embarrassment. To him, he’d only known her for a few months and though he liked her, he wasn't sure if he was emotionally ready to tell her something so important. But he felt that he absolutely should not let her leave without saying it back to her.

“I-I love you, too.” He forced out and found that it didn't feel inauthentic or false. It felt… nice, like a truth that would eventually come to fruition.

Hye-su’s eyes welled up with tears and she seemed to struggle to hold on to them as she smiled waterily at him.

“Then act like it. And not just with me. You've known Siwon much longer than you've known me and he's not taking any of this well. Be a little nicer to him. You live together after all.”

Jin nodded before he actually processed what Hye-su had just said to him.

“Wait, we live together? I live with Siwon?”

Her eyes softened as if she was feeling bad for Siwon.

“You and your stepfather don't really get along so you moved in with Siwon as soon as he moved out and started going to university.”

Jin was curious about his “stepfather” and the relationship that the two had but decided to save those questions for another time.

He remembered that the first time he’d seen Siwon, he had thought that the man was much older than him but now that they weren't in some alternate dimension where they were ten years in the
future, he wasn't so sure about the man’s age.

“He’s older than me, then?”

Hye-su nodded. “He’s five years older than you. The two of you met at the orphanage you were in before getting adopted. He sees you as a younger brother. You're basically all he has, so I hope you can understand why he's taking this so hard.”

Jin lowered his gaze to the blankets on the bed. Hearing all of this made him actually feel bad. He didn’t know Siwon in this universe so it wasn’t as if he had forgotten him but it felt somehow worse to not know him at all. Not knowing him meant that Jin wouldn’t remember no matter what and that was unfortunate.

“I’m sorry.” He apologized, meaning the words.

Hye-su’s mouth twitched with a smile. “Tell that to him, okay? If he doesn’t come back in the next couple of days he’ll at least be here when you get discharged. He was really angry when I last talked to him.” She sighed and shook her head.

“Sometimes I don’t know which one of you has the worst temper.”

Jin didn’t think he was a particularly angry person or that he had a short temper at all so he was curious as to what exactly she was talking about but he let it go for now.

“I’ll tell him, too. I’m just… sorry that things are like this.”

Hye-su swallowed and her face contorted like she was trying her hardest not to start crying. Jin was glad for that, he didn’t know if he could emotionally handle the sight of her crying again.

“I’m just glad that you’re still here with us, Jin. Memory loss or not, we still need you in our lives.”

The room fell into a calm silence after that, as Hye-su fought with her emotions and Jin struggled to figure out what to say next. He still had plenty of questions, but he thought that it wasn’t the right timing to ask them.
Hye-su adjusted the bag on her shoulder and inhaled a deep, stabilizing breath.

“Okay, I’m going to get going. I’ll be back tomorrow if Siwon is still upset. If not, then he’ll be here instead of me. If you need anything, make sure to ring one of the nurses.”

Jin nodded. “Okay, got it. Thanks.”

She opened the door and sent a smile his way that looked a bit too forced to be authentic but he wasn’t going to dwell on it. “See you.”

“See you.” He echoed and the door softly fell shut.

Jin sighed, leaning back on the hospital cot, tiredly.

He wasn’t really sure what to make of anything. This place that he’d managed to find himself in was strange for sure, but it also felt different than the other universes that he’d been to. Although, as he thought about it more, he frowned, realizing that he couldn’t remember what he’d experienced in those worlds. There were bits and pieces but it wasn’t making that much sense in his head. He tried to remember the faces that he’d seen but they were all blurry now, he could only remember Hye-su’s smile when she saw him right before she crossed the road and Siwon’s aged face looking at him in confusion… somewhere. He remembered that he’d been with someone at the time but even that was hard to recall. A woman for sure, but it hadn’t been Hye-su. And it wasn’t Hye-su… then who was it?

Jin blinked in confusion. He remembered that his friends had been in all of the universes but he couldn’t remember the name of that woman he’d been with even though he could somewhat see her face in his mind. That struck him as odd since he felt that the woman was important in some way but he didn’t know why.

Strange.

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As the days passed, Jin became tired of staying in his hospital room all day and ventured through
the hallways. It was evident after seeing more of the place that it was the same hospital that both Jeongguk, Hye-su, and Jimin had once been admitted into. He wondered why it was always *this* hospital rather than any of the others in the city. His memory was fuzzy now but he thought it may have been the hospital that he’d worked at in the future as well.

He remembered how he felt after Hye-su had died, when he’d hated the hospital and had wanted nothing more to do with it. He was a bit more indifferent towards it now. It seemed like the more he resisted this hospital the more often he found himself in it, so perhaps it was better to just give in.

After he’d wandered around so long that the nurses were becoming agitated by his wayward presence he was told to go and get some fresh air outside. So, rather than walking through the hallways, he’d taken to walking in the small park reserved for hospital patients and once his legs were tired of walking, he’d sit on a bench and stare up into the sky until either night fell or the rumbling of his stomach became too much of an annoyance.

Siwon still hadn’t returned.

Jin was having his first counseling session today with Dr. Seo and the next day he would be discharged into a life he knew nothing about with people he knew less about.

He was lost.

His head still ached from the injury, not only a painful reminder that he wouldn’t be believed but something that made him doubt his own self as the hours he spent thinking and staring up into the sky increased. His memories were becoming more and more hazy. Which scared him because at this point what he remembered was all he had left. He remembered his friends and pretty much everything about them as well as his own life. He even remembered the date he was supposed to have with Hye-su and the smeraldo flowers that she never got to see.

Though, everything after that point, the point where he made the worst mistake in his life, slipped away like the color of paint as it was diluted with water. The memories were there, the most traumatic ones staying with him the best, but they were slipping away too and he couldn't stop it. He could no longer form a distinct line between each universe he’d visited, nor could he tell if the memories were all from the same universe or different ones. It was all jarbling together and mixing in his dreams of paint and faces and hurt. When he woke up from those dreams, he couldn’t remember what he’d dreamed and he realized that he’d forgotten a little more about that purgatory-like place.
It was strange that he was even beginning to feel a sense of permanence here, in this place. It still didn’t feel like home, didn’t feel like he was supposed to be here, but it felt more like somewhere that he just didn’t want to be now.

Hye-su had been by a few times in Siwon’s absence but she’d kept the talking to pleasant conversations and small talk, even suggesting that they walk through the small park together or eat together, things that wouldn’t make them have to talk to each other. She’d told him that she and Siwon had been going to therapy sessions of their own and talking about the incident and the things that happened before it with Dr. Seo. Jin guessed that talking about everything was taking a toll on her and he didn’t want to push her anymore than he already had by not remembering any of it.

As he sat outside the man’s office, waiting for his appointment, he wondered if he’d be deemed criminally insane and be locked up in a mental hospital for the rest of his life. He hoped not, for Hye-su and Siwon’s sake. He didn’t want them to waste time visiting someone that wasn’t the person they wanted him to be. Jin wasn’t the person that they wanted him to be, he realized that much at least. Maybe it was why he felt so unwelcome here, as if he was taking someone’s place.

The door to the office in front of him opened and the extraordinarily tall Doctor Seo stepped out of it. He noticed Jin immediately and smiled, the first genuine smile that he’d seen on the man’s face.

“Kim Seokjin, right? Good afternoon! We met briefly before but I’m the hospital psychiatrist, Seo Janghoon. Come on in, I was just finishing up some paperwork, sorry for the wait.” He held the door open for Jin and gestured for him to go inside.

Jin lowered his head respectfully as he stepped into the office. “Good afternoon. It’s fine, I wasn’t waiting long.”

The office was less of an office and more of a small living room. There was a desk at the far end of the room set up with a computer and miscellaneous stationary equipment, a row of file cabinets covered the entire wall that the door was on and nearest to Jin were two loveseat couches with a coffee table in the middle and a sizeable tv mounted on the wall. The news was playing quietly, just quieter than the peaceful R&B music playing from a speaker.

Jin stepped off to the side as Dr. Seo walked in, shutting the door behind him.

“Oh, just have a seat on the couch there.” The doctor instructed and Jin followed his direction, moving to sit on the loveseat closest to him.
“Do you want anything to drink?” The doctor asked and Jin turned his head to look at him. “I can get you a cup of tea, coffee, juice, water…”

“No, thank you. I’m okay.” Jin declined, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. Something about being here made him feel like his every word and action were going to be judged. It was making him nervous and stressing him out.

Dr. Seo seemed to pick up on his unease as he sat down on the couch across from him with a clipboard in one hand and a steaming mug of tea in the other hand. The smell of the tea was a strong but calming smell, and Jin was already regretting not agreeing to a drink.

“There’s no need to be nervous. I’m only here to help you. I’m not going to go out of my way to make you look bad or purposefully work against you. I’d rather work to help you with what you’re going through. I’m sure that it’s a lot, overwhelming, even.” He sat the clipboard down beside him and the cup of tea down on the coffee table.

Jin bit his lip. “I really don’t remember anything. Like I said before, the things I remember happening are different.”

Dr. Seo nodded. “I heard that you remember Hye-su well but not your childhood friend, Siwon.”

“I met him before but he was much-” Jin stopped suddenly, closing his eyes in frustration as he realized he’d said more than he meant to. “He was different.”

Dr. Seo stared at him for a long moment and then sighed when he realized Jin wasn’t going to elaborate.

“I cannot stress enough that what you say in these meetings is strictly confidential. I need you to be completely honest with me so that I can help you. Tell me what you were going to say.”

Jin held the older man’s gaze uncertainly. He didn’t really want to talk about the things that happened to him while he was in that purgatory-like place, but he didn’t think that he should pass up the opportunity to talk about it in a space where he wouldn’t be judged.

“He… was much older than me. I guess that while I was unconscious I experienced a lot of different places, like… different universes.” He paused to gauge Dr. Seo’s expression, but it was
kept carefully neutral.

“The… universe that I met him in was set a decade in the future and we were both working in this hospital, I think. We were both doctors. But I didn’t remember him then, either.”

“So, you have no recollection of Choi Siwon at all?” Dr. Seo asked, grabbing his clipboard and a pen.

“No.” Jin answered and watched the doctor write something down.

“Was Hye-su in this… universe?”

A female face appeared brightly in Jin’s mind for a moment before dissipating like mist, gone before he could catch it. It was that girl again, the one that he felt like he should remember but didn’t. That was another problem to solve but he thought that in talking to this doctor specifically, he should focus on the things that he did remember. And he knew that the girl in his head hadn’t been Hye-su.

“No, I don’t think so. And if she was, then I didn’t see her.”

Dr. Seo nodded, as if thinking about something. “I was informed that you don’t remember your family either. Or that there was some confusion on the topic.”

Jin sighed. The topic of his family in this world scared him. He remembered that he didn’t see his family once in the universes and he remembered that before everything, he had basically been kicked out of his home. It was scary enough to not know people who were claiming to be his friends, he’d hoped that his family would at least be a constant.

“I don’t remember, I guess.” Jin muttered, staring at a stain on the rug under the coffee table that looked like it might have been from a knocked over drink. “I don’t remember being adopted. I was raised by my mother and father in Gwacheon. I had a brother too, he was older than me. And we moved to Seoul when I was young so my father could open up his practitioners office that he wanted me to take over.”

“Do you think that Siwon bears any resemblance to your brother?” Dr. Seo asked.
Jin stilled, shocked by the question and thought hard about what little he remembered of his brothers appearance. He hadn’t seen him since he’d left for the United States years ago and all of the family pictures of them were when they were younger.

“They have… some similar facial features. But not enough that I would get them mixed up or anything.”

Dr. Seo wrote something else down on his clipboard and stared at the page for a long moment before turning to Jin. He reached out for his cooling cup of tea and brought the cup up to his lips.

“Okay. Could you tell me more about what you believe happened on the night of the incident? I heard part of it but I would appreciate it if you could tell me a bit more.”

Jin licked his lips nervously. Before, when he’d spoken about it, it had been because he was frustrated and angry. Now that it was one on one and his responses were being judged, it was a little hard to talk about. It felt like it had been so long since then for him. He’d accepted what he’d done and regretted it, he just hoped that he could get that across to a psychiatrist.

“There were some situations that happened very close together that just pushed me over the edge. I… was distraught and upset and… angry so I drove up to the sea that’s about four hours from here and I drove off a pier and into the water. It was… brash of me and incredibly stupid. I regret it.”

“Acknowledging that you made a mistake is a good first step.” Dr. Seo smiled. “I’m not sure if you’re aware or not, as I’ve asked them to tell you, but I’m not sure they did. I’m also seeing Hye-su and Siwon. Mostly for emotional support, as this is hard on everyone involved, but also so that I can understand what you remember and what you don’t remember. I don’t believe that you’re making something like that up, but you have to understand that there isn’t any evidence that supports what you’re saying to me. And with your head injury being where it is, it’s very possible that your memories may have been affected by it.”

Jin huffed, already fully aware of that fact.

“But,” Dr. Seo insisted. “But, I think you’ve been handling this frustrating situation very well. And as I’ve said, I don’t think that you’re making any of this up, so I’m sure it’s equally as frustrating for you. I’m not here to tell you what’s wrong or what’s right. I’m here to listen, and help you as best as I can. Now, from what I understand you were spiraling out of control for a while, getting drunk, smoking packs of cigarettes at a time, and skipping classes. Hye-su and Siwon
both say that they tried talking to you about the situation multiple times but you kept getting unreasonably angry and were impossible to talk to.”

“The day of the incident you got into a fistfight with your adoptive stepfather, dropped out of art school, and Hye-su says that she saw you and that you were behaving erratically. She was worried about you so she tried to talk to you but you got into a shouting match and when you went to storm off, you walked right into oncoming traffic. She isn’t sure if that was a purposeful move or not, and since you don’t recall it all I suppose I can’t verify that with you.”

Jin shook his head, dazed from hearing the story. He never smoked, rarely ever drank, and usually had a very mellow personality. What Dr. Seo was telling him didn’t sound like him at all.

“And you acknowledge that before, well with what you remember, that you drove off of that pier on purpose and that it was not an accident?”

“It was not an accident.” Jin answered, heart beating nervously in his chest. He didn’t like talking about this.

“Okay.” Dr. Seo wrote something else down on his clipboard. “Now… what kind of situations led you to that point?”

Jin gnawed on the inside of his lip. He’d been hoping that the doctor hadn’t caught that and wouldn’t follow up on it. There was no way that he could explain what happened without mentioning his friends and he worried about the kind of response he would get if he brought them up. As he thought about it, though, his friends were such a huge part of his life that there wouldn’t be any way for him to come up with any lie convincing enough to explain all that had happened.

He didn’t have much of a choice.

“My… group of friends were breaking apart. Taehyung tried to kill himself in front of all of us by jumping into deep water when he couldn’t swim and then went missing after we saved him. I felt like my closest childhood friend was hiding things from me. The youngest in our group, Jeongguk, walked out into traffic and nearly died. And then Hye-su and I were going on our first date and she was hit by a car and killed. She died and I will never get the sound of her mother’s wailing out of my head. I was distraught and not thinking clearly so I drove out to the sea and off the pier. I drowned. I still remember that feeling vividly. I don’t think I’ll ever forget it.”
Dr. Seo was quiet for a moment, seemingly taking all of that in.

“So, you had a group of friends that you were close with?”

Jin nearly rolled his eyes, hearing the barely concealed disbelief in the doctor’s voice.

“I know that you’re going to say that they don’t exist or something but they were my best friends. There were six of them. Jeon Jeongguk, Kim Taehyung, Park Jimin, Kim Namjoon, Jung Hoseok, and Min Yoongi. I don’t care if you don’t believe me but they helped make me into the person I am today.”

“No, Seokjin. I wasn’t going to say that they don’t exist.” Dr. Seo explained. “Just the fact that you know them makes them exist. I don’t get to decide what’s real and what isn’t.”

That calmed Jin down some. Just the thought of someone telling him that his friends didn’t exist was enough to make his blood boil.

“I think that I’ll save talking about them until later, if that’s alright with you. They seem like somewhat of a sensitive topic. Instead, I’d like to wrap up by talking about your family. Doctor Kang informed me that there was a strong disconnect between what you believe to be your family and what is your family. At the moment, that’s the most concerning to me.”

It was the most concerning to Jin as well. Just the mention of the situation with his family was causing tears to well up in his eyes.

“You say that you grew up with your mother and father along with your older brother in Gwacheon, correct?”

Jin nodded. “That’s correct.”

Dr. Seo sighed, looking over his clipboard with an obviously troubled expression.

“The records state that you were taken into an orphanage when you were eight years old. The reasoning states that you were abandoned at a amusement park by your single mother, and details
of your birth father are unknown other than his name. Your birth mother did in fact have another child a few years after you were taken from under her care.”

Jin blinked rapidly to keep the tears at bay, making sure to take in deep breaths at the risk of falling into another panic attack. He couldn’t believe that his own mother would do something like that, he didn’t know if it was even the same woman that he actually called “mom” or someone else, but it hurt just as bad either way. He breathed out a shaky breath and Dr. Seo waited until he’d calmed down a bit before continuing.

“You were adopted at the age of ten by a couple. Shortly after, your adoptive mother divorced your adoptive father and remarried three years later. She passed away due to a pipe leak that resulted in a house fire six months after the wedding. The man that she married is your current legal guardian although I understand that you live with Choi Siwon currently and up until you became eighteen he was your acting guardian.”

Jin swallowed and tried to calm his breathing. Tears were falling from his eyes freely now and he’d given up trying to stop them. It wasn’t that he was sad to be told these things. It was devastating to be sat in a chair and be told that something that horrible was supposed to be his life. He was supposed to live in a world where he was abandoned by his birth parents and the only adult who seemed to care for him had died in an accident.

He’d been practically abandoned by his family in the world he remembered but at the end of the day they were at least all alive and cared for his well-being even if they showed it in strange ways. He might not have gotten along with his father but he knew that the man just wanted the best for his son. His father was angry with him because he thought that Jin was adamant to ruin his own life and was too stubborn to listen to reason. This man that was supposed to be Jin’s father sounded like he wanted nothing to do with Jin. He’d simply married a woman and was left with a son that wasn’t even hers to begin with.

“None of that is familiar to you at all?” Dr. Seo asked softly.

Jin sniffed and tried to stop crying enough to answer him. “No. That’s not my life. It can’t be. That’s… that’s just awful. No.”

He choked back a few more sobs and Dr. Seo handed him a few tissues from a box on the coffee table.

“You’re not going to like what I’m going to say next,” The doctor began carefully. “But it’s important for you to understand why I’m saying it. I believe that you’re repressing some of these
memories. You had a traumatic experience paired with physical trauma and the fact that your memory is almost picking and choosing what it wants to remember is convincing me of that. There’s a certain type of amnesia that can occur with repression and I think that your head injury may be adding in other factors.”

“That’s bullshit!” Jin roared, standing from his seat on the couch. He was nearly shaking from rage and he couldn’t believe that he was having to listen to this.

“I know you think I’m going insane or something but this is insane! I got out why do I still have to deal with this!? You have no idea what kind of things that I’ve gone through! If you think that I actually imagined the horrible things I’ve experienced ever since driving off that pier then put me in a straightjacket and ship me off to a nuthouse, right now!” He yelled, wrapping his arms around himself for emphasis. “I went through hell and I don’t understand why I deserve any of this! I made a mistake and I regret it. But the more I try to fix it, the more fucked up things get and I’m tired of it. I just want to go back to that day and do it right this time.”

Jin was panting by the time he finished. He was shaking, a cold sweat had broken out all over his body, and his fists were clenched in rage. Tears were still freely falling down his face and he didn’t think he had ever been so angry in his life.

Dr. Seo looked up at him patiently, likely expecting that sort of reaction from him, which only irritated Jin further.

“I understand that you’re frustrated, Seokjin. It’s not an easy situation and I’m sorry for that. You probably feel like I know nothing and can’t possibly imagine what’s going on in your head right now. And that’s true. I don’t. But I want you to remember what you said to me. You said that you drowned and you remember it happening. If you drowned and you… died presumably, then can anything that you experienced between that time and now be real? It had to be something that your brain created while you were unconscious since you didn’t die and are here right now.”

Jin heard his heart pounding in his ears as he realized the truth in that statement. It couldn’t have been real and some of the things that he experienced were impossible in reality. It seemed like the world he had been in was created from paint and wasn’t real at all. He had even thought the same while he’d been there. But wait-

“This isn’t real either!” Jin shouted. “It can’t be! It doesn’t make any sense! You’re telling me that my friends aren’t real here but I remember everything before I drove into the sea perfectly!”

“Seokjin, I’m saying that’s the repression. You remember growing up nicely with a family that
“They care for me, but they don’t support me.” Jin countered, almost hysterical with his need to prove Dr. Seo wrong. “My father disagreed with my decision to go to art school and because of him, my mother and brother basically abandoned me.”

Dr. Seo sighed. “Your birth mother abandoned you in a theme park and your adoptive mother passed away suddenly, due to an accident. You don’t get along well with your step-father either from what I’ve heard and it’s possible that you feel Siwon has abandoned you in some way. You haven’t been getting along with him either as of late due to his offer to further his studies in the United States. He said that he’d only be gone for a few years and would return right after he finished but you were heavily against it.”

Jin’s legs felt like jelly under him and he nearly fell over as he rushed to steady himself. *Seokjung had left to study business and kickstart his entrepreneur career in the United States.* He wracked his brain for more evidence that would prove Dr. Seo wrong but the elder wasn’t finished yet.

“I’m assuming that reminds you of something? Perhaps the brother that you remember did something similar. I also want to pose the question of Hye-su. Why is it that you remember her and not Siwon? Perhaps because Siwon reminds you of your past and Hye-su doesn’t. She’s a great source of happiness in your life, even now. You saying that she died makes me think that maybe because you were losing her in real life, your mind made you lose her for real.”

Just like that the rage in Jin’s body drained from his blood, replaced by ice cold terror. He sunk down to his knees, into the plush rug on the floor. He didn’t know what to believe anymore. He couldn’t even trust what his own brain was telling him. Dr. Seo was arguing a convincing case and Jin had never been more completely at a loss. Sobs wracked his body as he cried, completely distraught.

He didn’t even know how to continue from here. Did he continue to live in a world of delusion and insist that this world wasn’t real, pushing away even more people that truly cared for him, desperately hanging onto the possibility that he could get out? Or did he give in to what he’d been given and make the best of it in a world with Hye-su and Siwon, without his friends, even more difficulties than he’d had before, and give up the possibility of leaving completely? He didn’t know which was the right answer, but he knew that being caught in the middle like this was only going to bring him more misery.

His memories of the different universes were only getting more blurred and faded as time passed but Jin remembered that there was one particular universe that Jin had stayed in the longest. He couldn’t remember how long it was exactly but it couldn’t have been longer than a week.
He decided then, if he couldn’t find some way to get out of this place within a week, he would give in. He couldn’t live the rest of life in this place believing that he wasn’t supposed to be here. He would have to accept it at some point.

But first, he had to check something important.

He caught his breath and looked up at Dr. Seo, who had been calmly observing him and giving him space to react. He wiped the tears from his cheeks with a tissue and drew himself up so that he was sitting on the couch once again.

“Can I… ask you to do me a favor?”

“What do you need?” Dr. Seo asked, eyebrow lifting in curiosity.

“I need to check something.” Jin started, worried that asking the question would backfire on him. “I would do it myself but I don’t want to cause unnecessary worry. I need you to prick my finger with something.”

Dr. Seo’s eyes studied him for a long moment, and just when Jin feared that his request would be shot down and he’d be held here for even longer, the man’s rigid figure relaxed.

“Is this something that will help you mentally? Is there something that you’re trying to confirm?”

Jin nodded, “Yes. There is.”

The doctor sat there for another moment, just looking at Jin until he shook his head and stood up.

“Doctor Kang would have my head for doing this.” He muttered as he walked over to his desk. He opened one of the drawers and grabbed something from inside. “I don’t even have any alcohol to sterilize this.”

He scoffed under his breath and made his way back to the couch where Jin was waiting.
“Will this work?” The doctor questioned, holding up a safety pin.

“That’s fine.” Jin assured and held out his hand.

Dr. Seo grabbed it and turned it so that his palm was facing upward. “I’m doing you a favor, so do me one as well and don’t mention this to Doctor Kang, she might not look like an intimidating woman but if you tell her that I’m going around stabbing her patients with unsanitized safety pins she’ll take a safety pin to me and it won’t be nearly as harmless.”

“I won’t mention it all all.” Jin promised and watched with rapt attention as Dr. Seo brought the safety pin up to his finger. He opened it and with a swift movement dug the sharp point of the metal into the pad of Jin’s fingertip. He gasped at the sharp pain and the stinging that it had left after it was taken out.

Dr. Seo released his hand and placed the safety pin on the coffee table as he moved back to his seat across from Jin.

Jin hadn’t let his eyes wander away from his finger and he watched, entranced, as a dark red drop of blood welled up at the tip of his finger. He didn’t know whether to be happy or sad that it was dark red blood rather than the paint that Jin had been expecting. He didn’t remember very much about the universes that he had visited anymore but he knew that paint had been a recurring factor and without strangely asking Dr. Seo to poke himself with a safety pin, he would have to trust that everything around him wasn’t made out of paint either.

“Did you accomplish what you wanted?” The psychiatrist asked and Jin had been so absorbed in watching his finger that he had almost forgotten that the man was still in the room with him.

Jin reached forward for another tissue and pressed it to his finger, soaking up the blood before it rolled off his finger and stained the rug even further.

He nodded, still in a daze. It was what he wanted but he wasn’t sure if it had actually helped him at all. So much had just happened in the last few moments that Jin felt emotionally drained and tired.

“Well, I think this is a good time to stop today’s session, then. I think that I’ve covered enough to give an educated evaluation of both your mental state as well as your mental health. I think that you’re okay to be discharged as of tomorrow. It might do you some good to be around people that really care for you right now, rather in a stuffy hospital room all alone.”
“Thank you.” Jin said, not knowing what the proper response to that would be. He was glad that he didn’t have to be in this hospital anymore but he didn’t know if he was ready to face the world outside these white walls. He didn’t know anything about it, after all.

“No need to thank me. I’m sure I’m not your favorite person right now after the session that we just had, but even so, I’m going to need to see you once a week after you’ve been discharged and determine if you need to continue seeing a specialist after some recovery time. But as I said, that’s all for today. Get some rest and fresh air.”

Jin nodded, and stood up out of his seat. His legs still felt fairly weak and overall his body felt just as physically tired as he was emotionally.

He nodded his head to Dr. Seo and made his way to the door. He had a lot to think about now.

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Getting discharged was something Jin was looking forward to. He was sick of seeing the white walls of the hospital, the neatly trimmed paths of the park outside, and the constant death and illness constantly surrounding him. He was ready to leave.

What he was not ready for was going to his apartment that he shared with Siwon who he’d accidentally angered beyond reparation. At the very least, Jin wished that Hye-su could have come as well but she’d told him that she had a presentation to give, in advance, and wouldn’t be able to be there.

Now it was just an angry Siwon and Jin trying not to make things more awkward than they already were. Even if he was angry, Siwon had arrived to the hospital early and had muttered a “good morning” to Jin after glancing at him once. He hadn’t looked at the younger since, but had stuck around to hear the long speech from Doctor Kang about Jin’s condition and how to dress his wounds as well as how to look for the signs of infection around the stitches. Jin would have to return in a few weeks to get the stitches in his side taken out and the ones in his head had already been taken out while he was still unconscious. Then the two had been led to the front desk and were given the prescriptions that would need to picked up at a local pharmacy.

Jin was formally checked out with strict instruction to return for his weekly sessions with Dr. Seo as well as regular checkups to make sure that he was staying healthy and his wounds were healing properly. Eventually, hours later, Jin was formally discharged from the hospital and he followed
Siwon out through the front doors to the elder’s sleek black sedan.

They stopped by the pharmacy to pick up Jin’s prescriptions and drove through familiar streets until they stopped in front of the apartment building that Jin remembered living in before, which was strange. Siwon got out and started towards the building without a word, which wasn’t so surprising considering that they hadn’t exchanged more than two words with each other the whole morning.

Jin stepped out of the car, closing the door behind him, and followed Siwon up to the apartment.

He shouldn’t have been surprised when Siwon stopped in front of the very same apartment that Jin lived in but he still was when the elder put the key in the lock and stepped inside.

It was decorated differently in the inside, the clutter and framed photographs of a younger Jin and Siwon together making it feel much more lived in than it had been when Jin was living in it alone. There was a dresser and a desk in the living room along with blankets and pillows spread across the couch. Jin frowned at that, confused.

“Is someone living on your couch?” He asked before he could think any better of it. Siwon stopped suddenly as he was taking his shoes off and he looked up to the ceiling with a deep sigh before he snatched the shoe off his foot and sent a glare in Jin’s direction.

“Yeah, you.” He scoffed.

Jin blinked in surprise and took a second look at the living room- turned second bedroom. Even his favorite floor length mirror was in the room, with clothes thrown on top of it haphazardly. It truly looked like two teenage boys lived in the apartment though they were both over twenty.

“It doesn’t look very comfortable.” Jin muttered as his eyes roamed over the couch once again.

When he turned to back to where Siwon had been, he saw the elder turned toward him with an annoyed expression.

“It hasn’t bothered you in the past near decade that you’ve been living with me. Anything was better than living with your stepfather.” Siwon turned with a roll of his eyes, walking into the kitchen and Jin heard him mutter something else under his breath.
“Not that you were ever really here over the past year.”

Jin followed him into the kitchen, frustration boiling over into anger since Siwon was making it impossible for them to just talk through this.

“You know it’s not my fault that I can’t remember anything, right?” He snapped as he watched the elder pull something from out of the refrigerator.

Siwon turned to him and he almost looked confused. “What? Obviously it’s not your fault.”

“Then, why are you acting like it is?” Jin demanded, crossing his arms over his chest.

Siwon slammed what he had in his hands down on the counter. “Because I blame myself! Because I swore to protect you to the best of my ability and I failed you in the worst possible way and I want to apologize and talk about things with you like I was trying to do before the incident. But you were too pissed off about me leaving to listen, and now you’re okay but you don’t remember anything, you don’t even remember me, and I can’t talk about anything because you don’t remember. And it feels like it’s my fault so yes, I’m a little pissed off.”

“You can talk to me now.” Jin suggested, still angry that he’d been given the cold shoulder for so long due to something he’d had no control over. “Tell me about what happened and my past so I’m less confused.”

Siwon deflated then, anger seeping out of him as quickly as it had started. “You’re right. I’m sorry. You just really pissed me off by saying you remembered Hye-su and not me. It’s probably because she’s prettier than me, I get it.”

Jin was about to get upset again but Siwon broke out into a laugh suddenly and Jin’s mouth fell open in shock instead.

“I’m kidding. Hye-su has nothing on me. Wow, your face just now. I wish you could have seen it.” Siwon laughed again and leaned into the refrigerator once again to grab more items.

Jin was stunned for a moment, not understanding how someone could change emotions so quickly
but after a while he recovered from the shock and looked at Siwon in confusion as he gathered even more things, this time reaching up into the cabinets and pulling down a plate.

“What are you doing?” He asked.

Siwon glanced at him with a smile. “Making lunch. I’m hungry. Are you gonna just stand there and watch me or are you going to help?”

Jin rolled his eyes, realizing that he would need some time to get used to Siwon’s personality and stepped forward.

“Nice of you to make the one who just got discharged from the hospital help.” He scoffed and as Siwon turned to him, eyes wide with an apology, he noticed the smile on Jin’s face and a similar smile spread across his own face.

“What do you need me to do, Siwon?” Jin asked.

The elder visibly cringed. “Ugh, no. Call me hyung, please. I can deal with everything else but you calling me by name is just strange.”

“Hyung.” Jin emphasized with a roll of his eyes.

Siwon breathed out a laugh and shook his head. “There are some noodles in the pantry, if you could get those for me.”

—

A while later, once Siwon and Jin were stuffed full of japchae and had made enough small talk over their food, Jin was as ready as he would ever be to hear what all that Siwon had to tell him.

They sat on Jin’s makeshift bed. He had no idea how he’d put up with sleeping on a couch rather than a bed for so long but it only gave him more insight into how little he wanted to be around his step-father.
As if reading his mind, Siwon ran his hand across the blankets strewn across the couch as if reminiscent and turned to look at him.

“You’re probably wondering why we’ve been living together like this for so long.” Jin nodded softly to encourage the elder to talk.

“Well, I guess I should start from the beginning. We… met in an orphanage on the outskirts of the city. You were eight and I was thirteen. You were a shy thing back then and once I approached you, you clung to me like a koala and I couldn’t shake you off. You got adopted a few years later and I never did. There were a few years where we didn’t talk much except for emailing and a visit every blue moon. I think your adoptive mother remarried two years after that and then she died in that house fire. After that it was just you and your drunk, homophobic, sorry excuse for a fucking adoptive-stepfather.” Siwon’s face darkened at the mention of the man.

“He’s a piece of shit and to be honest, I’m glad that you don’t have to remember him or what he did to you. He used to beat you for the hell of it and once I moved out of the orphanage I practically forced you to come and live with me. I went to your house and packed your things into a suitcase I brought and dragged you out in the same day. I almost fought him when he tried to stop me. I’m still angry that you had to live alone with that man for an entire year. He hasn’t reached out since but you’re better off without him anyway.”

Jin agreed that all of that sounded terrible and he was also glad that he wasn’t haunted by it. He was bothered enough just knowing that what Siwon was telling him was supposedly his life. Something was bothering him about what Siwon had said though. Something small that shouldn’t have been sticking in his brain but was.

“Why did you mention that he was homophobic?” He asked.

Siwon raised his eyebrows. “What?”

“You… mentioned that he was homophobic. Why did you say that?” Jin clarified.

Siwon shifted, bringing his legs up so that he was sitting cross-legged. “Because he is…? I mean, you’re bisexual and he didn’t exactly agree with your life choices, you know. I think you brought some guy to your house once and he walked in on the two of you. I don’t really know the details, you didn’t tell me much about it. The black eye you had said enough.”
Jin frowned, completely confused. “What?”

Even Siwon was confused now. “Do you not… remember that either?” He scratched behind his head uncomfortably.

“I don’t really understand how you can forget your own sexuality, but alright, whatever. I’ll talk about that too I guess.” He muttered. Jin wanted to argue that it wasn’t his sexuality and that he had no idea what had led Siwon to believe that but he figured it was probably best to keep that to himself. He wanted to know more about this life anyways, and potentially pissing Siwon off again was not the way to go about doing that.

“So, you figured out that you were bisexual around the time that your adoptive mother died and you were getting around, if you know what I mean. You had a full on rebellious phase. Rap music, hair dye, black clothes, and full on delinquency. It was pretty cute actually.” Siwon smiled as if reminded of a fond memory and Jin narrowed his eyes.

“Did we… ever do anything? Like… together?” Jin asked carefully, studying Siwon’s expression, he wondered if there was more to their relationship than he was initially led to believe. The elder looked amused by his question.

“Well… you had a little crush on me or something for a while which is a bit awkward when you’re living together. Definitely hard to hide, at least. So… yes. But I really do think of you like my little brother so it was weird and short lived on both our sides. You were also getting bullied pretty badly at school because of the way you were acting so you cleaned up your act a bit, which was good for me because I was tired of sweet talking your ass out of jail whenever you got caught tagging. And then you got a girlfriend not too long after that but…” Siwon trailed off and Jin frowned in confusion.

“But what?”

“Well, you don’t usually like bringing it up given all that happened with Sohyun.”

The name rang a bell like an alarm in Jin’s head and suddenly the blurry and unclear picture of the woman in his head came to his mind and he knew just like that, that she was Sohyun. As soon as he realized, he nearly hit himself for not figuring it out sooner. How could he have nearly forgotten her completely?
“She… cheated on me, right?” Jin questioned, wondering if that was different as well.

Siwon looked surprised. “So, you remember Sohyun cheating on you, but you still don't remember me? I don’t know if I should be offended or not at this point.”

Jin’s eyes widened. If Sohyun cheated on him in this world too then would that be the same too? Would that be enough to prove that his friends were real in this universe?

“Do you remember who she cheated on me with?” He asked, unable to keep the excitement out of his voice.

“Um… no, I don’t know. I mean, I think it was some guy who was way younger than you because I remember that the circumstances were weird. But I don’t know his name or anything like that.”

*A younger guy!*? Jin was nearly bouncing in excitement.

“That’s fine, I could probably remember her number or find someone that has it and ask her. I really need to know what his name was.”

Siwon was looking at him strangely and Jin stilled as a familiar feeling of dread overtook him. “...I knew it was little too good to be true for you to remember that. It’s like you've forgotten everything that affected you negatively.”

He sighed. “Sohyun is dead. She died in a car accident the same day that you found out about her cheating. You... kind of changed after that. I think it affected you more than you realized. It was back then when you started to believe that you were bad luck and it’s only gotten worse as the years have passed.”

Jin breathed out a heavy sigh, full of disappointment and frustration. This life *sucked*. The more he learned, the more he hated it. He couldn’t even understand how one single person could be so horribly unlucky. Everyone that he was around left him either by choice or by accident, how could anyone *not* believe that they were bad luck?

As if sensing Jin’s thought’s, Siwon spoke up suddenly.
“You’re not bad luck, Jin. You had a rough life and a lot of unfortunate things have happened to you but you are the best thing that’s ever happened to me and I wouldn’t be the person I am today if it weren’t for you.” Siwon met his eyes, looking at him seriously.

“I know you don’t remember much but the months that led up to the accident were rough. You barely ever came home and neither Hye-su or I knew where you were going and you were… you were just lost. And I should have tried harder to help you when you so obviously needed me. So, even if… even if you don’t remember. I’m sorry. I won’t lose you again.”

Jin didn’t know how to respond to that, but he let Siwon pull him into a tight hug. It was comforting at least, to know that someone had his best interests in mind and genuinely cared about him.

After a few moments, Siwon let him go and grabbed the package that held Jin’s prescription. It had been left on the messy coffee table earlier.

Siwon opened the package and took out the orange plastic bottle. “You were supposed to take this with a meal so you should probably take it now. I’ll get you some water in a second.”

He twisted the cap open and Jin held out his hand to receive the medicine. He was pretty sure this was the antibacterial he was supposed to take to make sure the wounds in his side didn’t get infected.

Siwon tipped the bottle over so one of the small white pills could fall into his open palm but suddenly, half the bottle tumbled out into his hand and Jin struggled to catch them all.

“Oh, shit, sorry.” Siwon apologized as he tried to catch the few that Jin missed.

Jin glanced up at the elder and saw tears in his eyes. Siwon turned away quickly and set the medicine bottle on the coffee table as he stood.

“I’m going to get you a glass of water.” He mumbled before quickly disappearing into the kitchen.

Jin sighed and looked at the handful of pills in his hand. They captivated him, catching his
attention and not letting go. An image of a sink and dingy white tiles. He was frantic; anxiety, anger and confusion mixing together and clashing violently in his head. the scene was somehow familiar in his head and he couldn’t quite place why.

It reminded him of someone but who?

“What are you doing?”

Jin snapped out of the trance that he’d been pulled into and looked up in surprise at Siwon who was standing in front of him with a glass of water, looking at him in concern.

He looked down to where his hand was held up to his face as if he’d been about to shove all the pills into his mouth. He lowered his hand in confusion, not knowing when he had done that.

“Nothing.” Jin assured the elder and picked up the medicine bottle with his free hand. He meticulously placed each and every pill except for the one that he would need to take into the bottle. Siwon watched him silently until he had screwed the bottle cap on tightly and then handed him the glass.

Jin popped the pill into his mouth and chased it down with water so that he could swallow it smoothly.

Once it was gone he finished the rest of the water, suddenly parched, and set the empty glass down on the table. Siwon was still watching him quietly and Jin felt restless under his gaze.

“They said that it’s okay for me to take a bath right?” He asked.

“As long as you keep your stitches above the water level I think it should be fine.” Siwon agreed. “So, you can go ahead if you want. I’ll clean up the kitchen. The bathroom is the door straight back down that small hallway.”

Jin nodded, but nearly laughed as he realized that it was one of the few things that he didn’t need to be told. He had lived in this apartment, he knew where things were.
“Oh, and make sure to not lock the door, okay?” Siwon added as he walked back towards the kitchen.

“Why not?” Jin asked in curiosity.

Siwon glanced over his shoulder at him. “Because if I end up having to call emergency services again after you fall asleep in the bath and have the door locked, I might have a heart attack. So, just don’t lock the door, okay?”

Jin was reminded of something again, someone but the image was blurry like a picture that had water spilled all over it. The face of the person was so familiar though, and Jin knew that he knew who the person was and other than the distant sound of water splashing it was all he could discern from the sudden memory.

“Okay, I won’t lock it.” Jin promised, saving the strange memories for later. Right now he just wanted to get into a warm bath and forget about everything else for a while.

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Sleeping on Siwon’s couch was as uncomfortable as Jin assumed it would be but at least living with him wasn’t that awkward after they’d talked things out. Siwon still got visibly annoyed when he mentioned something that Jin had completely forgotten about, but he always tried to explain whatever he was talking about so that Jin could understand.

The days that they’d spent together were difficult but it could have been worse. Once they had gotten used to each other and how their personalities worked together, they’d gotten along pretty well. Siwon changed emotions at the flip of a coin, which made it hard for Jin to keep up with him, but he was getting used to it.

Hye-su had given the two their space, keeping quiet on her end and leaving them alone for the most part. Jin had overheard a conversation between the two late at night and Siwon seemed to be trying to convince her to come over for a little while but given how he’d sighed and gotten quiet afterwards, it didn’t seem like she agreed.

Jin thought it was thoughtful of her, given that she had spent a lot of time with him in the hospital after he had woken up, Siwon had been too angry to and he probably regretted that now.
As the week progressed, though, Jin didn’t forget about the decision he had made. He was still actively looking and hoping for some sort of exit to this place but there didn’t seem to be one. Not to mention that with every day that passed he forgot more and more about what happened in the time between driving off the pier and now. He barely remembered anything anymore. Sometimes he dreamt of things, fragmented memories of knives and blood and paint. Other times he dreamt of nothing at all and slept peacefully.

Every now and then he would do or see something that reminded him of someone but he didn’t know who or why. Other times he’d be hit with a sense of deja vu so acutely that he’d blink and be confused about where he was and what he was doing.

He told Siwon about it after it had happened twice in the same day and the elder had been overjoyed when he told him that it must have been some signs of him memory returning. And while that was believable, Jin didn’t think that was the cause. It troubled him and he decided not to mention it to Siwon again.

He’d also learned that he dropped out of university as well. It was a brash choice that he’d made back when he was behaving erratically, on the same day that he’d stepped out onto the street and gotten hit. Siwon had asked him if he wanted to talk to the school about the incident and see if they could be convinced to let him back in. Jin wanted to, he’d worked far too hard to get into art school to become a dropout, but he also didn’t want to get too complacent with the situation so he had told the elder that he would think about it.

Siwon had joked about forcing him into going back to work at the gas station down the street if he didn’t go back to school and Jin had promptly become so dizzy that he’d thrown up right there on the living room floor. They had both been shocked by that and the elder had promptly joked about him hating the job that much before brushing off the whole situation. Jin hadn’t been able to let it go so easily though, and was even more determined to figure out something that would prove that his friends were real.

The longer he stayed here, the less he remembered and the less likely it would be for him to find out the truth.

So, one day, he’d managed to talk Siwon into driving him to the abandoned pool that his group of friends had frequented. It was difficult, considering that Jin had to convince Siwon that there actually was an abandoned pool and not some shady place where they could get mugged, and the trip was made even more difficult due to Jin’s memory of the way there being as muddy as everything else in his head.

But finally, after a lot of frustrated cussing and u-turns on Siwon’s side and a developing migraine on Jin’s side, they finally pulled into the old parking lot.
“There’s nothing here.” Siwon sighed as he pulled haphazardly into a space and cut the engine. His face showed his exhaustion as he looked at Jin, and the younger almost felt bad for dragging him all the way out here but it was necessary.

“There is.” Jin promised as he stepped out of the car.

Siwon huffed but followed him out. Jin relied solely on his blurry memories almost as if driven by someone that wasn’t him, and walked to the shrubbery that formed a wall on the border of the parking lot. He reached out a hand and pressed until it emerged on the other side of the bush. Excitement building, he brought up his other hand and pulled back the branches and leaves to expose the path within.

Siwon must have been watching him closely from behind because he whistled lowly as the path was exposed.

“It looks like no one has been here in years. How did you even know about it?”

Jin hadn’t the slightest clue as to how he had come to know about it but as he stepped through the foliage onto the stone path, his surroundings felt eerily familiar and he knew that if he followed the path all the way down he would come across the abandoned pool.

“Hey! Wait! Don’t just go in there! Do you even know where that leads?” Siwon called out behind him but Jin refused to stop, he had to see it.

The sound of the bushes rustling behind him told him that Siwon had followed him in though the elder was grumbling and complaining as he walked.

The path was barely visible and incredibly overgrown with weeds and displaced dirt from constant rain. The bushes were so dense all around them that it was probably pretty easy for the path to flood in heavier rains, the water had nowhere to go but down the path. Even now there was still a near inch of murky rainwater and from the smell, it seemed like it had been there a while. Maybe no one really had been here in years.

The two followed the trail to the end; Jin was quiet and lost in thought, depending on the sense of familiarity to guide him, while Siwon kept tripping over stray rocks and complaining every few seconds about how the water was ruining his shoes. It was annoying but Jin was glad that he didn’t
have to come here alone. Having Siwon’s company was a comfort he didn’t know he needed until he reached the clearing.

He gasped out loud as he looked at the place. The foliage was overgrown here as well, though it was still far more open than the path had been.

There had once been a pool here, Jin had at least been right about that, but it had been filled in with cement and left here to decay. It looked like people had been here before but from the makeshift campfire and stack of dirty clothes, it looked more like it had been inhabited by vagrants rather than him and his friends.

Siwon emerged from the clearing behind him and looked around at the place in shock.

“Wow. This is such a strange place. Feels like something out of a horror movie.” He muttered, wandering past where Jin was frozen still and across the cement covered pool.

Jin felt like he was in a horror movie. His blood ran cold with dread and he felt nauseated. Whatever he had been expecting to see here, this was not it. Even if he found nothing but the abandoned pool, not even evidence that him and his friends had once hung out here, he had at least been hoping that he would feel some comfort and reassurance by seeing it again. But this was giving him the opposite feeling.

Siwon knelt down near the clothes and picked through them curiously. There was a huge pile of them, as if someone had emptied their entire wardrobe onto the ground, but Jin wouldn’t dare to touch it himself. Instead, he numbly walked forward towards the old campfire.

It had been made of stray logs and branches, probably from the surrounding trees and bushes and whatever had been fueling the fire beyond that had disintegrated into a dark puddle of ash under the wood. Jin shook his head, ready to turn around but something caught his eye just before he did. Something was sticking out of the muddy ash.

He crouched down so he could see it and once he did, he didn’t think twice about reaching forward and grabbing the thing out of the mush. It was old and scratched up but it was a white lighter. Jin felt that it was incredibly important for some reason and his heart was pounding in his ears as he studied it in his hands. There were letters written on one side and although the plastic was burned like someone had thrown it into the fire, they were still there and just legible enough to read.
“Find something?” Siwon asked, walking over to him.

Jin panicked and shoved the lighter into his pocket as inconspicuously as he could as he moved to stand.

“N-no, just this old campfire. I guess I was wrong about this place. I don’t remember it being like this. Maybe it was different a long time ago.”

Siwon nodded. “Yeah, I don’t think that anyone has been out here in years. But um… if you’ve got what you need, do you mind if we go? Sorry to rush you, since we just got here and all, but this place is giving me the creeps.”

Jin looked over the area and couldn’t help but to agree. The lush, vibrant, liveliness that he remembered this place having was gone now. Maybe it had never been there in the first place.

“It’s creeping me out too. We can go.” He agreed.

Siwon turned and headed back towards the path and Jin lagged a bit behind, digging into his pocket and taking out the lighter. It meant something, like he’d seen it before but couldn’t quite place where. It was at least something gained from this trip, he reasoned, which is what he would have to settle for.

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The second therapy session with the hospital psychiatrist Dr. Seo came much faster than Jin had anticipated.

It marked a total of seven days since he’d been discharged and he was disappointed to say that, other than the excursion to the pool, it had been rather uneventful. There were bits and pieces of memories and strange occurrences and the lighter but nothing solid enough to use as evidence to prove that this world was fake. And as the days went on, Jin remembered less and less of what to look for. It wasn’t that he was giving up, finding the lighter at that pool had meant something, but he didn’t know where to go from here.
He was at even more of a loss than when he had originally left the hospital.

He knew the decision that he had made with himself, to give it a week before he started to give the reality of this world a chance. And though he didn’t want to give in so easily, he was also finding it increasingly hard to distinguish his memories from the things that he’d been told.

When he thought of his older brother he often saw Siwon instead and while he hadn’t even entertained the idea of confronting his adoptive stepfather, he kept imagining the man as the father that he knew. He couldn’t separate them as easily anymore and when he tried, he often got dizzy spells and migraines.

“Seokjin?”

He’d also developed the bad habit of getting so wrapped up in his thoughts that he mentally left the situation he was in.

Jin shook his head to clear it and focused his attention on Dr. Seo once again. The session had just started and he was already spacing out.

“Sorry, did you say something?”

Dr. Seo regarded him for a moment and Jin took the opportunity to bring his cup of tea up to his mouth, he hadn’t made the mistake of declining it twice.

“You seem to have a lot on your mind today.” The man observed.

“Sorry.” Jin apologized.

“Don’t be sorry. Tell me what you’re thinking about.”

Jin hesitated, not wanting to tell him just how much his memories were merging together. He’d probably say that it was a result of his mind struggling to make sense out of what it remembered and what it made it up and he didn’t want to hear that.
“I was just… well I was thinking about Siwon. I had him take me to an abandoned pool that I remembered visiting with my friends but it looked like it had been abandoned for a really long time.”

Dr. Seo leaned forward in intrigue. “When’s the last time that you remember being there?”

Jin closed his eyes as he fought to remember. “I think that we all went there… maybe two weeks before I drove off the pier.”

“So, it would have been about four months ago now?”

He thought for a moment, calculating in the time that he was comatose. “About that long, yeah.”

“And when you say you all went there, do you mean you and your group of six friends?”

Jin wasn’t sure where the psychiatrist was going with this line of questioning but he nodded his head.

“The seven of us often went there. It was like our home away from home.”

Dr. Seo rubbed his chin and picked up his clipboard which indicated that Jin wasn’t going to like this conversation. The doctor only wrote down certain things, usually when what Jin remembered greatly conflicted with what had actually happened.

“Alright, let’s talk about this group of friends. I avoided them before but I think that you’ve become a bit more comfortable with this entire situation since the first time that I met you. Not to mention that they obviously are incredibly important to you. Could you give me their names once again, please?”

Dr. Seo quickly wrote the names down.

“And are all six of them the same age as you?”

“No. I’m the oldest and Jeongguk is the youngest, he’s five years younger than me.”

“So, would that make him seventeen years old?”

Jin shook his head. “No, it isn’t an exact five years so he’s eighteen now.”

Dr. Seo quickly wrote down a lot more than what Jin had just said. He was quiet for a moment, flipping the pages on his clipboard while Jin sat watching him, nervous for some reason.

“Can you tell me a little about each of them? I’d like to get to know what they’re like. We can start with Jeongguk.”

Jin didn’t really understand what the purpose of this was, but he was happy that he could at least talk about them. He’d been avoiding mentioning his friends as much as he could, but his memories of them were slowly becoming just as fuzzy as everything else and that scared Jin the most.

“Well, Jeongguk is someone that I often find myself worrying about. I’m not sure if it’s because he’s the youngest of our group and I’m the oldest but I really do worry about him. His mother recently got remarried and his family often treats him as if he doesn’t exist. I don’t know how true it is, but I think he finds a family in our group of friends. He’s the closest with Yoongi. They’re both passionate about music so that’s probably why.”

“Okay, now what can you tell me about Yoongi?”

“Yoongi is… well I think he has a defensive personality. It’s hard to get him to open up, let alone talk to you to begin with. We’re the closest in age but probably the furthest in relationship. I still care about him and I worry since he smokes and drinks so much but we don’t talk often. I think it’s like that with everyone else as well, he only really opens up to Jeongguk.”

They went back and forth like that, Dr. Seo prompting Jin to talk about each of his friends one by
one and Jin found himself smiling as he talked about them. Just something as simple as this reminded him that they were *real*, that they existed, and each one of them had had a significant effect on his life.

They spoke about the close bond that Jimin and Hoseok shared, each leaning on the other for support. As well as the complicated relationships between them, not just between Namjoon and Taehyung, but also between Taehyung and Jin. That was where Dr. Seo finally interjected, taking his pen away from his paper.

“*You and Taehyung don’t get along?*”

Jin shook his head, struggling to find the words to explain their relationship.

“It’s not that we don’t get along. We have plenty in common and would probably make great friends, it’s just that there’s always something that pits us against each other. We always end up fighting or disagreeing over something.”

Dr. Seo cocked his head to the side. “Would you say that Taehyung is somewhat of an antagonist in your life?”

“That’s a little *harsh* … but I guess so.” Jin agreed. “We were friends for a time but he does things without thinking of the consequences due to some of his own situations and it often ends up hurting *me*, more than it effects him or even Namjoon.”

Dr. Seo nodded in understanding and wrote something else on his clipboard. He placed it to the side once he was done writing and turned his attention back to Jin.

“*So, how have you been adjusting to living with Siwon?*” The man asked.

Jin was confused by the sudden change of topic and wondered why Dr. Seo hadn’t actually said anything about his friends. He had only asked Jin questions about them and then promptly changed the topic.

“I’ve… been adjusting fine.” Jin responded, still reeling from the sudden switch of conversation. It made him wonder what Dr. Seo’s point had been in bringing them up in the first place.
“Is he still angry that you don’t remember anything?”

“No, we talked things over the day that I was discharged.” He explained. “Siwon said that he blamed himself and was just taking it out on me. He still gets annoyed when he mentions something that I don’t remember and has to explain it. And his personality is a little hard to keep up with sometimes but I’ve been getting used to it.”

“You still don’t remember him at all?” Dr. Seo questioned, sounding perplexed.

“I don’t.” Jin shook his head. “And I don’t recall any of the things that he tells me either. It doesn’t even sound vaguely familiar half the time.”

“It’s as if it happened to someone else.” He sighed.

Jin had meant to mutter that under his breath but by the way Dr. Seo lifted an eyebrow and changed his stance on the couch, he seemed to have heard. Jin was expecting the man to bring up something about that being his repression but, instead, he was surprised once again.

“So, have you spoken with Hye-su since you’ve been discharged?”

“No… I think she’s been giving Siwon and I some space. We’re supposed to go on a date in a few days, though.”

“Do you still remember where it was that she was hit by a car?” The man asked, seemingly out of nowhere, and Jin’s breath momentarily got stuck in his throat as he fumbled for a response.

“Y-yes… why?”

“Since you feel confident in visiting some of these places that are of great importance to you, I think it might be a good idea to go to that street where she was hit by a car. I realize this is a lot more difficult of a task than it sounds if you have traumatic memories of that place, but it’s important to distinguish between what your head is telling you and what the reality is. The reality is that she’s still alive and I think that may be what your brain needs to draw a fine line of distinction between the two.”
Jin felt shaky just thinking about going back to that place. Even now, Hye-su being hit by the car was one of the few memories that hadn’t gotten any blurrier with time. It was still clear and fresh, as if it had happened yesterday rather than over three months ago. If he thought about it and closed his eyes he could see it play it out, the sounds, the police lights, and everything that happened afterwards.

Even still, he supposed it was worth a shot. Maybe it would solidify the fact that Hye-su was still alive and not going anywhere within him.

“Okay… I’ll try.”

“Good. Trying is the first step to succeeding.” Dr. Seo smiled. “If you can’t do it at first, perhaps try going there with Siwon first and then going with Hye-su after. But that’s what I’m going to leave you with today.”

Jin looked at the clock hanging behind the desk at the far end of the room in surprise.

“Wow, that went by fast.”

Dr. Seo chuckled. “Two hours goes by quite fast when you’re talking about things that you’re interested in. Speaking of, I have a few things to look into but we’ll be talking about your friends a bit more in depth next week as well as revisiting this assignment I’ve given you. I’m sure it feels like you’re only getting more confused, but you’ve been doing a great job adjusting. These things take time. You may not ever remember anything but that doesn’t mean that it’s not your life to live. You’re still Kim Seokjin.”

Dr. Seo’s words were still echoing in his head days later.

“You’re still Kim Seokjin.”

They reminded him that no matter what he remembered and what he forgot and whether he felt like he belonged or not, one thing hadn’t changed and wouldn’t change. He was still Kim Seokjin. It helped him to be a little more confident with his actions and decisions.
But nothing would prepare him for the date he was having with Hye-su. He had gotten far too comfortable in the absence of her presence and had completely forgotten the internal conflict he had when it came to her. He just couldn’t get the idea out of his head that she would leave him. As if she wasn’t supposed to be here but she was and he was just waiting for that mistake to be rectified.

Not to mention that she was still his girlfriend, of three years no less and he had told her that he loved her the last time they had talked.

His nervousness must have been palpable as he waited for her to arrive at the apartment because Siwon suddenly snapped.

“Will you stop!? You’ve been pacing around for the last thirty minutes! Why are you so nervous!? You’ve been dating for three years already!”

Jin suddenly stopped in his tracks, not even having realized that he’d been pacing. He’d gotten lost in thought again and disconnected from what he was doing.

“I don’t remember any of that!” He hissed, frustrated beyond belief. His heart was beating so heavily he worried he would have to go and change a second time from how much he was sweating.

Siwon rolled his eyes from his position on the couch. “Well, she does. She’s not going to think any less of you for being you. You’re still the person she fell in love with and if you keep pacing you’re going to ruin the carpet!”

Jin closed his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. Siwon had a point and he knew that, but it didn’t help him feel any better. Not only were they finally going on their first date in Jin’s mind but they were also stopping by the street where she had gotten hit and he couldn’t help but feel like it was going to happen again. He hadn’t even slept the past two nights because his nightmares had been that moment playing over and over again in his head.

The doorbell rang suddenly and Jin’s heart plummeted into the pit of his stomach.

“Finally!” Siwon exclaimed as he got up to get the door.
Jin didn’t know what to do with himself as he waited for Siwon to get the door. He smoothed his clothes down and tried to appear as casual as he could, standing there in the middle of the living room.

The door opened and he could hear Hye-su’s voice from where he was stood.

“Hey, Siwon!” She greeted cheerfully.

“Hey, yourself. You need to hurry up and take him out, he’s a nervous wreck for literally no reason at all and it’s driving me crazy.”

Jin thought that he should say something to dispute that but before he could even open his mouth, Siwon stepped to the side to let Hye-su inside and all the words left him in a rush.

She was still as beautiful as ever, her chestnut brown hair was tied up into a ponytail, likely due to the heat, and she was wearing a cute floral top and shorts. He hadn’t seen her do it often but she had even put on glittery eye makeup and pink lipstick.

They stared at each other for a long, tension filled, moment.

“Is he okay? What did you do to him?” Hye-su asked, turning to Siwon in obvious confusion.

Siwon groaned out loud. “I told you he was a nervous wreck.”

Jin blinked in surprise. “W-what?”

“You look like you’re preparing to see the president.” Hye-su laughed as she approached him. “It’s just me. You don’t have to be so stiff. Relax.”

She patted him affectionately on the cheek and grinned up at him. He was pretty sure that hadn’t helped him to relax at all but her smile was warm and comforting.
“Sorry.” He mumbled, shuffling awkwardly.

“It’s okay. It’ll take some time to get used to. I’m patient.” She smiled again, and Jin found himself urged to smile in response. “Besides I’m just glad that you’re okay. I can’t really complain.”

“I can complain.” Siwon snapped exaggeratedly as he moved behind Jin and pushed him, the younger stepped forward so he wouldn’t fall onto Hye-su. “You two are disrupting my peace. Hurry up and get out.”

Hye-su laughed out loud as the two were pushed towards the front door. She turned her head so she could stick her tongue out at Siwon and the elder only shoved them harder.

Eventually, they were practically thrown out of the apartment and were standing on the other side of the threshold. All of them were laughing by then. Hye-su was doubled over with laughter and Jin turned around to face Siwon. The elder had a fond smile on his face and saluted to him with a wink.

“Now get out of here, you crazy kids!” He shouted, smile still bright as ever as he promptly slammed the door in Jin’s face.

Jin smiled. He hadn’t known what the dynamic between the three of them had been before but now that he’d seen it in action he knew they all must have been very close friends.

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Once Hye-su had caught her breath and wiped the tears from her eyes she straightened and shook her head.

“You’d think that after all these years, I’d be used to his antics. But he still gets me everytime.” She sighed, and a stray giggle escaped from her mouth as she began walking down the stairs. Jin hurried to follow after her, feeling less nervous after the whole fiasco, which he assumed had been the point of it, but still not completely comfortable.

“You two seem like you get along pretty well.” Jin observed.
Hye-su glanced at him and breathed out a laugh. “Do we? When we first met we couldn’t stand each other at all.”

Jin was surprised by that. They acted like they’d been best friends for years and to be completely honest, it was hard to imagine Hye-su not getting along with someone.

“Why did that change?” He asked, curious.

They made it to the bottom of the stairs and Jin quickened his steps to walk next to her. They’d agreed beforehand to walk to the street of the incident and get some lunch afterwards and though Hye-su could drive, she was still too shaken from witnessing Jin’s accident to be around cars if she didn’t have to be. He could understand that, too well really, and so the two had agreed to walk.

Once they were walking side by side, Jin’s hand hung awkwardly between them and though he knew that he should probably take Hye-su’s hand since they were walking together, he couldn’t bring himself to do it. He glanced down at her since she had yet to respond to him and was surprised to see that she was already looking at him with a complex expression on her face. Her mouth quirked up into a hint of a smile as they met eyes and her hand reached out for his, intertwining their fingers together. She didn’t say anything but Jin was glad that she had been on the same page as him. It was almost as if they had communicated wordlessly for a moment, which made his heart bloom with warmth.

He squeezed her hand to convey his gratitude and she squeezed back as she turned away from him.

“We bonded over you, believe it or not. I had just learned to tolerate him at first and I’m sure he probably did the same. But as time went on and you started get worse mentally… we both started to worry and since we’re your closest friends it wasn’t like we could talk to anyone else who understood.”

That was interesting. He’d heard a lot so far about how self-destructive he had become and how out of control he was on the day of the incident but he’d never really heard any details. Though, he wasn’t sure he actually wanted to hear any more than he had already. It made him feel weird, as if he should be remorseful over the way he’d acted and made his friends worry about him but it still didn’t feel like it had been him, so he wasn’t entirely sure how to feel. At least he could be glad that Hye-su and Siwon had become friends over it.

“Since, I don’t… you know, remember him still,” Jin began. “I can definitely say it took some time to get used to his personality.”
Hye-su laughed and nodded her head. “He just doesn’t filter himself at all. Even if he’s meeting people for the first time. I really did not understand what you saw in him, other than him being your childhood friend, at first.”

Jin stilled for a half second, causing his steps to falter and he nearly tripped over his own feet. His eyes were wide as he looked at Hye-su and she looked appropriately confused by his reaction.

“What?” She questioned, looking at him strangely.

Jin was silent as he wracked his brain for a way to properly phrase his question. The way that she had said “what you saw in him” made him wonder if she actually knew about the past relationship between Siwon and Jin. He didn’t know if it was possible to forget your own sexuality but he had never been attracted to men, so that entire situation was entirely confusing to him. Sure, Siwon was a good looking guy but it wasn’t like Jin wanted to kiss him. The problem was that if it was something he had been hiding from her, he didn’t know how to ask in a way that was discreet. But at the same time, if she didn’t know, he wanted to tell her. It was something that she should know especially since the two were living together.

Hye-su raised an eyebrow as he continued to remain silent and then something seemed to dawn on her. “Right… Siwon was telling me that you really did forget everything. I guess you’re wondering if I know about the history between you two? I do. You told me a long time ago. I guess I should be more upset about it since you live with him and all.”

“You’re not?” Jin asked, confused. He would be upset if Hye-su was living with someone that she had romantic history with.

She shrugged. “No. It happened almost ten years ago and you told me it was incredibly short lived and that the way you two feel about each other is more brotherly than anything else. You haven’t given me a reason to not believe you and I love you so it’s not like I’m going to judge you for having a romantic interest in men. We’re all just people and we’re all different in our own ways. I just think about it like this: your interest is in me right now and that’s all that matters. If that changes then I can only hope you that love me enough to tell me, and break things off before moving on.”

Jin was surprised by not only her acceptance, but also by her unfaltering trust in him. He would have a hard time trusting her if the situations were reversed but that only proved that Hye-su was a better person than him, but he’d already known that. His heart also hadn’t missed the casual “I love you” that she had thrown in. He supposed that it was only natural for a couple that had been together for three years to say it to each other regularly but his heart was apparently not on the
Hye-su began walking again as Jin had gone quiet and he followed her lead, deep in thought.

“Oh look!” She called out and Jin looked to her only to see that she was pointing to something in the distance.

He followed her hand and saw an old gas station across the street. His heart leapt up into his chest as he laid eyes on it. His vision swayed and he could vaguely see someone talking to him, a man-someone that he knew well, but it was gone before he could figure out who it was.

“There’s the gas station you used to work at!” Hye-su continued, not noticing what had just happened at all.

Jin shook his head to shake away the strange feeling that man’s voice had left with him. “What? I used to work there?”

Hye-su nodded with a laugh. “Yeah, when I first met you. You hated it though. You would complain about it all the time and tell us how rude and disrespectful the customers were. Although, that was back when you used to smoke a lot so I’m not sure you can really judge people for being rude when you were smoking at a gas station.”

Jin turned towards her in alarm. “I smoked at the gas station I worked at? Was I an idiot?”

Hye-su tilted her head back and laughed wholeheartedly. “I was asking the same thing. I guess one day the owner came by and saw you smoking so they fired you on the spot and that was that.”

Jin shuddered at the thought. Who was stupid enough to smoke a cigarette at a gas station?

“Good.” He muttered, annoyed with himself. He must have been tempting fate to be doing something that idiotic.

“So, how are your sessions going with Dr. Seo?” She asked after a few minutes had passed. “He’s who told you that going to this street would help, right?”
“They’re going okay…” Jin admitted, he was feeling better and less frustrated with all that was happening, but he was also battling against that feeling. He was trying not to be caught in between believing this world was real and thinking that it was fake but he didn’t want to give in either.

“I feel a lot less confused. I’m just not sure how much going to this street is going to help. My memories are all a mess but I remember you being hit the most.”

Hye-su squeezed his hand reassuringly. “Well, I’m not dead. I’m right here. So it might help. I’m glad that you decided to do this even if it’s scary. I think it’ll be good for you.”

Jin sighed, he wasn’t looking forward to it whether it worked or not.

“He told me that you and Siwon are seeing him too, how are your sessions going?” He asked in an attempt to change the topic.

If Hye-su noticed, she didn’t say anything.

“Um, pretty well, I guess. I’ve mostly just been talking to him about you. How much you’ve changed since I met you and what that day was like.” She glanced at him as they stopped to wait for the crosswalk to allow them to cross and he saw a tiredness in her eyes that he hadn’t noticed before. Her joyful expression had disappeared for a moment and behind it lay troubled eyes and a downward pull of her lips.

“I guess we’ve both seen the other get hit by a car.”

Jin’s mouth opened in shock as he realized the truth in her statement. He had been agonizing over the memory of Hye-su getting hit by a car but she had been agonizing just as much over seeing him get hit. She probably felt just as guilty as he did.

He opened his mouth to apologize but before he could get the words out the crosswalk sign turned to green and Hye-su pulled him into the crowd of people walking across and the moment was gone. He settled for squeezing her hand and she squeezed back without looking at him.

Once they had gotten across the street, Hye-su looked around and her expression was a mix of fear
and confusion as she looked at him.

“Which way are we going from here?” She asked, a strange sense of urgency in her voice.

Jin frowned at her near frantic tone, but looked around. “It should be just up the next street.”

She cursed under her breath and Jin turned to her in shock, he’d never heard her swear before. Her hand had left his and she was holding her face in both of her hands.

“Hye-su?” Jin called in worry.

She took a deep breath and her eyes were wet when she took her hands away from her face. She laughed, an airy sound of disbelief as she glanced up to the sky before her gaze focused on him.

“Are you really telling me that we were both hit by a car in the same place?”

Jin’s jaw dropped in shock. “What? I was hit there too?”

Hye-su blinked rapidly to keep the tears out of her eyes as she very obviously forced a smile onto her face.

“You were.” She answered. “I guess this is a good opportunity for me to get over that experience as well. That’s good. We can do this together.”

She took his hand in hers once again and though Jin could feel it tremble in his grasp, Hye-su kept the forced smile on her face.

“Let’s go.”

He was at a complete loss for words. But once again, he was reminded of what an amazing person Hye-su was. She always did things bravely and without hesitation. He forced a smile onto his own face, though it felt pitiful so he could only imagine how awful it looked, and nodded.
“Let’s go.”

Roughly an hour later both Jin and Hye-su were emotionally and physically drained as they sat inside a cafe. It was a cafe that was back towards Jin’s apartment since the one they usually went to had caught fire in the car accident that had hit Jin, but he was glad to be far away from that street.

It seemed that, not only had they both gotten hit on the same street but it had been nearly the same spot as well. They had held each other and cried, lost in traumatic memories, drawing strange looks from passerby, until they could produce no more tears from their eyes. They hadn’t talked much but they hadn’t needed to. Both of them were suffering a different trauma, one that the other had no idea about. Jin didn’t recall being hit by a car and neither did Hye-su but it was obvious that the incident had affected both of them greatly.

To say that Jin felt better after visiting the spot would have been a lie, he had actually cried so hard that he had thrown up right there on the street and they had decided to leave soon after. But having Hye-su with him throughout the whole thing and still have her by his side after had comforted him a great deal. He still felt that she may leave from his side at any given moment but he felt reassured to look at that street and see her safely next to him. Neither had been brave enough to cross it, but just standing there looking at it had been enough.

Now they were just trying to calm down from the emotional rollercoaster that they had just been on as they sipped at iced teas and nibbled on baked goods that they weren’t even sure they were actually tasting.

Eventually Hye-su spoke up, glancing up him briefly from the depths of her glass of iced tea.

“Do you mind telling me what happened?” She questioned, voice still hoarse from crying.

“What do you mean?” Jin asked, voice sounding even worse due to the stomach acid that had attacked his throat earlier.

“You know how you ended up walking out onto that street and getting hit. I… wasn’t hit. But since you remember it happening to me somehow, I’m curious. How did it happen?” She glanced at him
again as if checking to make sure that he was okay with the question and prepared to take it back if needed.

Jin figured that talking about it at this point would be okay. Nothing could hurt him more than standing on that sidewalk, right where he had seen it happen, had.

“We were going on our first date.” He began slowly. Hye-su’s mouth lifted in a hint of a smile.

“I had to delay it a few weeks since my other friend was in the hospital. Also from getting hit by a car if you can believe it. And so we were meeting at that street. We had planned to go on a walk and get some food if we hungry. Nothing fancy.”

He glanced up from the table to her and saw that she was giving him her rapt attention so he cleared his throat and continued.

“I wanted to surprise you by having a florist create that fictional flower that you love so much, so I came with a bouquet of Smeraldo flowers.”

“Wait what?” Hye-su interrupted, expression confused. “A smeraldo? What is that?”

Jin looked at her blankly.

“The smeraldo flower.” He repeated. “The one that you always drew in your red sketchbook? Did I read it wrong? It was that blue and purple flower that’s from a story.”

Hye-su still looked just as confused and Jin’s heart dropped into his stomach uncomfortably.

“I… I don’t know what flower you’re talking about.” She stated slowly. “My favorite flower is a white lily.”

Jin was completely at a loss for words. He felt dizzy again and nausea rushed up his throat. He stood quickly, nearly knocking his chair back with the force.
“Jin?” Hye-su called in concern. “Are you okay?”

He barely heard her, her voice suddenly felt incredibly far away. His vision swayed violently and he reached out his hands to grab onto a nearby chair. A cold sweat had broken out all over his body and he felt warm hands on his skin but he couldn’t tell who was touching him. He heard frenzied voices but they all sounded garbled like they were underwater.

His vision lurched again and his hand slipped off of the chair he was holding onto as his consciousness left him. He felt the vague sensation of falling and then nothing.

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When Jin opened his eyes once again he heard the staccato sound of beeping and groaned.

He was back in the hospital again. Of course.

The plain white walls greeted him like an old friend that wouldn’t go away. Every time he thought that he’d gotten away from this place he ended right back in it all over again.

His head was heavy, similar to how it had been when he had first woken up and found it hard to stay conscious. The evening sun was coloring the drab room in brilliant oranges, reds, and pink and Jin suddenly remembered that he had passed out.

He sighed. Something about Hye-su not remembering the smeraldo flower and instead insisting that the white lily was her favorite flower didn’t sit right with him. He wasn’t even completely sure why but there was an unpleasant feeling that had settled to the bottom of his stomach that didn’t seem to have any intention of leaving.

Speaking of Hye-su, as Jin looked around, he noticed her standing near the window looking out of it with a wistful expression on her face. Before, she had told him that painting sunsets had been one of her favorite things to do. When he had asked why she’d responded by that saying that sunsets were a beautiful goodbye for the sun and that dawn was a somber farewell to the moon. She had laughed, embarrassed and then said that happy goodbyes were better than sad ones. He wondered if he had made that up too.

She turned, likely to glance at him but her eyes widened and stayed on him when she saw that he
had sat up and was awake.

“Hey.” He muttered, forcing a smile unto his face despite the turmoil he was experiencing in his brain.

“Hey.” Hye-su returned with a warm but brief smile. She turned away from the window and walked toward him, sitting down in the chair that had been placed by his bed.

“How are you feeling?”

Jin shrugged. “I’ve been better.”

“You really scared me passing out like that.” Hye-su frowned. “You looked pale as a sheet, as if you’d seen a ghost.”

Jin grimaced, not knowing how to reply to that. “Sorry, I ruined our date.”

“We can have others Jin, don’t worry about it.” Hye-su reassured him. “I’m just worried about you. I’ll go get a nurse now that you’re awake.”

Jin nodded and she got up to leave, disappearing into the hallway.

He sighed once she was gone, rubbing his hands across his face in distress. It may not have been a ghost that he saw but he had been just as shocked, as if he had seen one. He had been worried about his own self so much, thinking that the two people closest to him in this life wouldn’t be happy with him knowing that he didn’t remember either of them or anything that had happened in their time together, but he hadn’t thought about it being the opposite. He hadn’t ever thought that the Hye-su he knew now wasn’t the same Hye-su that he had known before. The thought still sent a chill down his body and raised goosebumps in its wake.

Not to mention that out of all the flowers that Hye-su had to choose a favorite from, she had chosen the white lily, the flower that had once haunted Jin. He remembered little of what happened to him between driving off the pier and now, and what little he did remember didn’t make any collective sense, but where his dreams had been haunted by paint they had also been haunted by that flower.
So, yes, it was fairly accurate to say that Jin had been disturbed by that information.

Hye-su returned shortly with Doctor Kang behind her rather than a nurse.

“Hello, Seokjin.” She greeted with a smile. “Are you feeling okay?”


The doctor reached into one of the pockets on her smock and pulled out a tiny flashlight. She approached the side of his bed and grasped his chin.

“Follow the light with your eyes for me.” She instructed and held the tiny device up. She clicked it on, directly aiming it at his eye and he nearly pulled back from how bright it was but Doctor Kang’s grip was deceptively strong. She peered into his left eye and the slowly moved the light to the right eye and Jin followed the movement.

After a few seconds she flicked the light off and released his chin.

“Well, you don’t seem like you’re suffering from any sort of concussion. What brought on the dizziness and fainting?”

“We went on a date today.” Hye-su supplied. “But we stopped at the spot that Jin believes that I was hit by a car at, first. It’s the spot that I saw him get hit at.”

Doctor Kang looked at Hye-su as she spoke but her gaze dropped back to Jin when she was finished.

“Do you think that’s the only factor that might have brought this on? No strange head pains or spottiness of vision?” She asked and Jin felt strangely pressured by the question.

He didn’t necessarily want Hye-su to know just how bothered he had been by her response at the cafe but since she seemed to think it was only because of the street, there wasn’t really any other choice.
“No…” He began hesitantly, glancing at Hye-su briefly as she turned to him in confusion. “I was emotionally drained after that but I felt fine. I was talking to Hye-su about what I remember happening at that street and I mentioned her favorite flower which was a fictional flower from a story. It’s not something I would forget or mistake for something else. But she told me that her favorite flower was a white lily and that she had no idea what I was talking about.”

The room was quiet for a moment as Doctor Kang glanced at Hye-su and Hye-su glanced at Jin and then at the doctor.

“So, you’re saying that it was because of a disconnect between what you remember and what Hye-su said?”

Jin nodded. “I think so.”

Doctor Kang looked troubled by this and Hye-su had gone silent. Jin was afraid to look at her and see the expression on her face. He didn’t want to make it seem as though it was her fault but there just wasn’t a better way to say it.

“Alright. It’s late but I’ll see if Dr. Seo is in and if he can make an exception to see you a bit earlier than scheduled. You seem healthy to me. So, this seems like an issue that needs to be taken up with him. I’ll have him contact you with the earliest time that he can see you but you’re free to go today, so head down to the front desk to get discharged as soon as you’re ready.” The woman smiled at the two of them and left them alone, closing the door softly behind her.

Jin still didn’t want to look at Hye-su.

“I made you faint?” She asked after a long beat of silence, and Jin could hear the tears in her voice before he turned to look at her.

“It’s not your fault.” Jin pressed, guilt filling him unfairly as a tear dripped down her cheek. He didn’t want her to feel guilty but it really was her fault and he still felt bitter and strange that she wasn’t the Hye-su that he had known before. It hurt to even think it but she was like a cheap rip off of the original and he couldn’t help but be angered by that. He hated seeing her cry but even the fact that she was crying over this was only making him more upset.

“You just said that it was!” She argued. “Was it something that I said, was it the flower thing? I’m
sorry, but I really don’t have any idea about what the emerald flower is!”

Jin narrowed his eyes. “Smeraldo.” He corrected.

“What?” Hye-su asked, confused.

“It’s called a smeraldo flower and it was your favorite flower! It didn’t even exist in nature, but I got it specially made by a florist for our date to surprise you, but you didn’t even get a chance to see them before you died!” He cried.

Hye-su looked a frightening mix between distraught and livid.

“I’m not dead, Jin! I’m standing right here in front of you! I am so sick of you saying that!” She shouted.

“You’re still the same Jin that you’ve always been and I’m still the same Hye-su! I didn’t die so stop acting like I did! You act like you don’t even know me anymore! Maybe it would have been better if you had completely forgotten me too so I wouldn’t have to constantly battle with the Hye-su in your head!”

Jin had never seen Hye-su angry in his entire life, but the girl standing in front of him was completely enraged and he felt defeated. He dropped his face into his hands and sighed.

“I feel like I’m battling against the Jin in my head too.” He admitted. He didn’t want to fight with her. He just wanted to be the person she wanted him to be and he wanted her to be the person that he wanted her to be. But the little memories that he did have were interfering with reality. They were fighting each other in his head constantly and he was tired of it.

Hye-su inhaled a deep breath and it was shaky when she exhaled.

“I know. I’m sorry. I’ve been trying not to feel responsible for all of this, but I do. I was the one that let you walk away from me, Jin. I gave up on you in that moment and everything since has felt like it’s been my fault.”
“It’s not your fault.” Jin repeated, taking his head out of his hands and looking at her. She sniffed and wiped away a few stray tears that had left streaks in her makeup.

“Let’s go and get you discharged.” She said and Jin noted the stern change of subject but decided that it was probably for the best.

He stood up from the hospital cot and Hye-su led the way out as they left the room. The sun had begun to fully set now so the hallways were lit with overhead lighting. It was also late in the day so the usual hustle and bustle of the hospital had quieted down for the most part. There was a stray patient here and there as well as a nurse running down the hallway as they passed but it was quiet.

They were in a different part of the hospital from where Jin had been before. Probably because he’d been in the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital and today he’d simply been admitted into the emergency room. In any event, it meant that he would need to go all the way down to the main front desk of the hospital to check out.

The two were silent as they walked and Jin took this time to look around. He’d definitely been in this part of the hospital before but he couldn’t remember why.

He looked down one of the hallways as he passed but quickly looked again once he realized what he had seen. There was someone in a wheelchair down the hallway, it was dimly lit causing most of the light to come from the large window which the man seemed to be staring out of. He glanced towards Jin before rolling down the corner.

Jin paused in his steps, heart thumping noisily in his chest. He knew who that was.

Without a second thought, he turned down the hallway in search of the figure in the wheelchair. It looked like it had been Jeongguk. He would recognize that face anywhere, but he didn’t understand why Jeongguk would have rolled away from him.

He turned down the same corner that he’d seen the wheelchair turn down and stilled in surprise when he didn’t see it. The person had been in a wheelchair there was no way they could just disappear like that. He peered frantically down each of the various hallways that the original corridor divided out into. This was a strange section of the hospital so Jin was already getting turned around.

“Jeongguk!” He called desperately, turning in a circle and looking down each of the hallways as if
waiting for the wheelchair to magically appear again.

“It’s me, Jin! Where did you go!?” He tried again, but there was no response and the figure seemed to be long gone.

“Jeongguk! Jeon-”

“Jin? What are you doing?”

Jin whirled around startled to find Hye-su behind him all of a sudden. He’d somehow completely forgotten that she was in there in his hunt to find Jeongguk. He huffed and turned away from her, peering down the halls once again.

“I thought I saw someone…” He sighed.

Hye-su tenderly grabbed his arm and pulled him towards her. “There’s no one here. Come on.”

“But-” Jin resisted not able to believe that his friend had just disappeared like that, he had to have gone somewhere.

“Jin.” Hye-su called, tugging him harder. If Jin had been paying more attention he probably would have heard the fear in her voice. “Let’s go.”

Jin sighed and let himself be pulled, looking forlornly down the corridor as they walked away from it. Maybe he’d just been imagining things.

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“So, I heard that you fainted yesterday afternoon.” Dr. Seo began, placing a cup of steaming coffee in front of Jin.

He hadn’t slept in almost a week now and it was starting to catch up with him. He needed the caffeine.
It turned out that Dr. Seo had an availability due to a cancellation of another patient the day after Jin’s date with Hye-su. The ride home with her had been quiet and uncomfortable and he had dodged Siwon’s questions when he returned home, simply telling him that he’d fainted but was fine and was going to get some rest. And by rest, he had meant staring up at his ceiling the entire night and trying to make sense of what was going on in his head to no avail. Nothing was making any sense and he was more confused than ever.

So, in a way, though he was dreading it, he was grateful to have the opportunity to speak with Dr. Seo so soon after everything.

“I did.” Jin confirmed.

“Did you go to the street that you saw Hye-su get hit by a car on?”

“Yes, but that’s not what made me faint.”

Dr. Seo seemed intrigued by that and leaned forward in his seat. “Okay, well tell me about your experience with the street first. Did it help at all?”

“It… was comforting to see the street and know that Hye-su was safely next to me but it was also the same exact spot that she saw me get hit on so that sort of added to the confusion.”

The psychiatrist wrote something down on his clipboard and then turned his attention to Jin once again.

“Well, I applaud you for going to that place even though I’m sure it must have been hard emotionally. Now, explain to me why you believe you fainted.”

“After we went to the street we stopped at a cafe a while away. I felt fine then. I was emotionally drained and tired but I felt fine. Hye-su asked me what happened to her since she… since she didn’t actually get hit by a car and so I told her that we were going on our first date and I was waiting across the street with a bouquet of her favorite flowers that I would surprise her with. But they weren’t just any flowers, they were a fictional plant that came from a story that she loved and I got it specially made for her. She had no idea what I was talking about, though, and told me her favorite flower was a white lily and that’s when I got dizzy.”
Dr. Seo nodded, writing a few more things down. “I see. So you believe that you fainted as a result of that strong disconnect?”

Jin nodded. “I felt fine after the street. I only got dizzy then. I also think that the white lily that I mentioned was a constant in whatever happened when I was unconscious. I still remember a few things from then and paint, glass, and white lilies appear in my dreams a lot, even now.”

“Have you ever gotten a dizzy spell like that before?”

“I guess that I have. But none that bad.” Jin hesitated, not exactly wanting to admit how much everything had merged in his brain. “It always happens when I think too much about certain things. When I try to separate what actually happened from what I remember.”

Dr. Seo frowned at that, cocking his head in confusion. “You’ve never mentioned this before. What do you mean by separate?”

Jin sighed, giving in. “Ever since you told me about my family and how I might be repressing those memories, whenever I think of my brother I see Siwon’s face and when I think of my adoptive stepfather, I think of the father that I remember. So, I’ve tried to separate those sorts of things in my head so it could be like how it was before but I always get dizzy and have migraines after.”

Dr. Seo thought about that for a moment before he nodded and looked down at his clipboard.

“It may not seem like it Jin, but it’s actually a good thing that that’s happening. It means that your brain is dropping the pretenses and you are actually acknowledging the similarities between the people you held close and the people you currently hold close. That’s wonderful news. I was actually going to wait until our last session to talk about this but since your brain is being much more receptive to these sessions than I originally thought, I think we could talk about it now.”

The man unclipped some papers from his clipboard and stood, towering over Jin. The younger watched as the psychiatrist cleared off the coffee table and then set down six different pieces of copy paper with nothing on them other than a single name on each. Jin read them and his eyes widened in surprise.

“What is this?” He asked in confusion.
“I’m sure you recognize the names.” Dr. Seo stated, sitting back down in his seat. “Written on this page is each of the six friends that you mentioned to me in order of age.”

“Jeon Jeongguk, Kim Taehyung, Park Jimin, Kim Namjoon, Jung Hoseok, and Min Yoongi.” He pointed to each as he said their names and Jin followed his hands movements with rapt attention. He was worried about what would happen.

“I’ve done some extensive research into what you told me and have had several long conversations with my colleagues and other professionals in the industry specializing in these types of brain complexities. I’ve finally come to a conclusion about each of these six friends that I can guarantee you will not like. As I speak, I only ask you to listen to what I’m saying without immediately rejecting it. Can you do that?”

Jin looked at the man apprehensively. He had an incredibly bad feeling about the conversation that was going to happen. “I’ll try.”

“Good.” Dr. Seo nodded. “That’s all I’m asking from you.”

“So, let’s start with Jeon Jeongguk. The youngest of your group. You worry about him like a parent would and he’s just recently come out of grade school. He lives with his family, his mother, step-father, and step-brother yet rarely wants to be at home because ever since his mother remarried he feels that nobody in his family actually cares for him at all and spends most of his time with his friends. He is especially close with Min Yoongi, whom he met when he was thirteen.”

“Then, we have Kim Taehyung. Taehyung acts as the antagonist in your life, and though the two of you have a lot in common, his irresponsible personality and brash decisions often end up affecting you and this is why you can’t be friends. He is closest with Kim Namjoon. He likely sees Namjoon as a parental figure given that his own father has been an abusive drunk since his mother passed away when he was little. Taehyung and Namjoon are both delinquents, however, and they have each have been arrested for tagging and things of that nature.”

“Moving along, we have Park Jimin. Jimin keeps his problems to himself, only sharing them with his closest friend Jung Hoseok. And though you do not exactly know what sort of problems they are, you think that it has something to do with his mental health. He also seems to have some sort of issue with his father and possibly his mother as well.”
“And Kim Namjoon. Your close friend since you were young. His family struggles financially, forcing him to often put aside his own wishes in order to work and bring in income. He’s a responsible person who doesn’t let people down but even he has a rebellious nature to him as he has engaged in vandalism with Taehyung several times. He used to smoke but he tried to quit by switching to candy. He seems lost in his life, as if he wants to have more purpose but can’t quite find how to get that to work.”

“Jung Hoseok, the sunshine of your group. His bright disposition is contagious and often ends up bringing up the atmosphere within your group. He’s closest with Park Jimin but also quite close with you. He was abandoned by his mother when he was young and spent most of his life growing up in an orphanage. Dancing is his passion and he dedicates his life to pursuing it.”

“And finally, Min Yoongi. He’s a few years younger than you but often acts as if he’s older. He’s quiet, reserved, and doesn’t talk about himself very often. He’s closest with Jeon Jeongguk and the two have the same passion for music and have even made a song together than Yoongi holds dear. You don’t know much about him but you are aware that his mother died when he was younger in some sort of accident and he doesn’t mention his father. He also smokes.”

“That’s everything that you’ve told me about these people.” Dr. Seo concluded and Jin was entranced. He loved talking about his friends, especially now when even his memories of them were getting blurrier as each day passed, but he was sceptical as to why Dr. Seo had gone to such lengths just to talk about them.

“In both thinking about these boys as well as listening to what you’ve said about yourself and what I’ve heard from Hye-su and Siwon, I can’t help but notice how many similarities you have with your friends.”

“You and Jeongguk both think that you’ve been deserted by your families after gaining a stepfather. You and Taehyung have almost every interest in common despite your opposite personalities. You, similarly to Jimin, tend to keep all of your problems to yourself even if something horrible were to happen. You and Namjoon both seem to searching for purpose, evident by your sudden decision to drop out of university. You and Hoseok were both abandoned by your mothers and grew up in orphanages. And you and Yoongi both lost your mothers in an accident, though this was your adoptive mother in this case.”

Jin thought for a moment, confused. He felt that some of that was not the case. As if he hadn’t actually experienced some of those things but he could no longer remember why that was. It bothered him but he was more concerned with why Dr. Seo was telling him all of this. He felt that the man had yet to get to his point.

“I’m sure you’re wondering where I’m going with this.” The man observed and Jin was disturbed
by the serious expression on his face.

He nodded though, and waited for Dr. Seo to continue.

“I, as well as the various experts that I’ve spoken about this to, believe that these friends of yours aren’t friends at all.”

“What do you mean?” Jin demanded, feeling a rush of heat through his body. “If you’re trying to say that they aren’t real then explain to me why my brain would make up six different people’s backstories, appearances, and voices that I can still hear in my head!”

Dr. Seo regarded him quietly for a moment.

“It’s just that, Jin. I believe that these six people are reflections of yourself. I think that you’ve dissociated so intensely with yourself, that on top of your memory loss and repression, you’ve created six different people that seem like they’re their own people but aren’t.”

Jin was stunned into silence and he could do little but breathe heavily and stare at Dr. Seo as the man spoke.

“Isn’t it too coincidental that all of your friends except for one have some problem with their fathers? That two of them lost their mothers? That the person you have the most in common with is an antagonistic figure to you, says a lot. I think that Taehyung is a culmination of all of your negative qualities and the Jin that you think you are in your head is a flawless being with all of your positive qualities. That’s why Taehyung and Jin always clash, they’re both a large part of you but you’re only fighting the bad parts of yourself that you don’t want to accept.”

Jin still said nothing even as he was practically shaking in his seat.

“I know it’s a lot to process, Jin. I know that you desperately want to prove that I’m wrong, but think about it. All of your younger friends are closest to the older friends in your group, and all of them seem like they reflect your relationship with Siwon, who you still don’t remember at all.”

*He was wrong*, Jin thought desperately, *he was wrong*. But no matter how many times he repeated that in his head he couldn’t remember the information he needed to argue his case. It was all a mess in his head of blurry faces and voices that had once meant something to him and no
longer did. He couldn’t remember. And in the spaces where the memories had once been, the words that Dr. Seo was saying were filling them. He wanted to fight against it but even without his permission, his brain was accepting the words as truth.

“I’m not saying that they don’t exist, Jin.” Dr. Seo spoke when Jin still had yet to speak. “I’m just saying that they’re a part of you.”

“B-but I knew them before the incident at the pier.” Jin argued near breathless with panic. He was completely overwhelmed and it felt like his own brain was betraying him.

Dr. Seo sighed. “You were in a coma for three months. That means that your brain had over two thousand uninterrupted hours to fabricate a world, similar to a dream, in your head. That’s why they feel like memories to you but I’m sure that, like a dream, the memories are fading in your head and barely make any sense now.”

Jin’s mouth opened and closed with the intention of forming words but nothing was coming out and a hot tear splashed down his cheek as he realized just how bad this situation was. He couldn’t argue even though he fundamentally felt that was Dr. Seo was saying was wrong. It sounded right, though, as much as that scared him. What the psychiatrist was telling him sounded like it made more sense than whatever Jin had experienced before.

Just like that, Jin was forced to accept the place he was in now as reality because he’d lost the only argument he had left as to why it was fake. He couldn’t even remember what Jeongguk looked like anymore. It was as though all those memories had puffed into smoke and Jin was unable to grasp them anymore.

“I think the best step going forward would be to stop trying to remember things. Learn more about your life from your friends and get back to your regular schedule. Enroll back in school. I’ll even write them a letter explaining the medical circumstances so that they’ll be more likely to accept you. Spend time with Siwon and Hye-su and live your life. Stop holding onto memories that conflict with this moment in time. You won’t be able to live like that for long without going crazy.”

But Jin already felt like he’d gone crazy. The only threads that were holding him to the world that he actually remembered had been savagely cut and now he was stuck here with no hope of escaping. The worst thing was, he couldn’t even remember where he would have escaped to anymore. As crazy as it sounded, he wondered if he had been trying to escape when he’d walked out onto that street.
After the session with Dr. Seo, Jin was lost. He went back to the apartment with Siwon and didn’t speak a word to the elder even as he attempted to make conversation several times. He had nothing to say. He’d walked into the apartment and layed on the couch, facing the ceiling and willed himself not to cry even as he felt like sobbing. He felt empty as if the only things that were making him complete were snatched away.

He stayed like that for two days, wordlessly eating whatever Siwon cooked and ignoring the rumbling in his stomach when the older went to work. He only got up to use the restroom occasionally but he just returned to lying on the couch, staring up at the ceiling, afterwards.

By the third day, Siwon had had enough of his vegetable state and had dragged him out of bed to go on a walk with him. The elder had told him stories from when they were younger, all things that Jin didn’t remember, and hadn’t expected the younger to speak which he was grateful for. At the end of the walk Siwon had frustratedly reminded Jin that he was lucky to be alive and that he should act like it even though he didn’t remember anything. It was a chance to start over, Siwon had said.

Jin hadn’t responded at the time, which had only caused the older to sigh in annoyance and walk them back to the apartment, but he had been thinking it over. He couldn’t live the rest of his life mourning over a history that he couldn’t even remember anymore. He still hated sleeping since his dreams never made any sense and only frustrated and terrified him. But he was alive and had people that cared about him and a chance to start over that wouldn’t be from scratch. Siwon and Hye-su would support him no matter what, and they had made that abundantly clear in the past two weeks though Jin had been too busy trying to remember things that he hadn’t realized it at first.

So, on one of Siwon’s off days, Jin had asked the older to drive him to the university. He was going to re-enroll. He still wanted to act, and he wouldn’t give up on that dream. Siwon had been pleasantly surprised and took him there with no complaint. The university had been a little skeptical about letting him back in since he’d already missed nearly four months of classes but he’d negotiated a deal to catch up on all his missed classes during the summer. If he couldn’t do that, then he would completely fail the semester and have to take the classes all over again. Jin was confident in his abilities though, and just like that- he had university classes again.

Without his permission, Siwon had told Hye-su about the news and the three celebrated in the apartment with pizza, beer, and movies. It was the first time that the three of them were honestly hanging out and Jin was overjoyed to be around them. Hye-su had brought Jin’s old video camera by, one that he had left at her place a long time ago, and though he had been intending to look through it, Siwon had spotted a large roach in the apartment and all hell broke loose as the three of them fought to find and kill it.
After that, Jin easily fell into a structured routine. He had to start going to classes again as soon as
possible so that he wouldn’t fall behind any more than he already was. Siwon would take him to
classes when he could and since Hye-su went to the same school they would take a bus together
when Siwon had work.

Jin went to classes, did his assignments, spent time with Siwon, and finally had a successful date
with Hye-su at the end of the week.

He didn’t worry about what he remembered and what he didn’t. He just lived each day the way he
wanted to and it was good. Great, even. There were still some things that he would need to
confront, like the situation with his family and his relationship with his stepfather, but he was
enjoying the time he spent with Siwon and Hye-su. He’d even met some friends that were
understanding about his situation and memory loss at university.

He even talked to Siwon about his plans to study abroad in America, since he remembered that
Hye-su had mentioned it once.

“‘I decided not to go.’ The elder had admitted.

“What? Why?” Jin had cried in shock. Surely, being personally invited to study abroad had meant
a huge opportunity for Siwon who wanted to become a surgeon.

The elder had simply smiled and patted him on the head affectionately. “I don’t know if you
realized but you were in a coma for three months. I couldn’t just leave to another country.”

“You turned it down for me? Why? Couldn’t you have just explained the situation to them?”

Siwon smiled then but it hadn’t quite reached his eyes. “You’re more important. I can stay here
and become a surgeon just as easily. Besides, I don’t even speak English, you know how much
work it is to learn another language?”

And that had been that. Jin couldn’t help but feel guilty. He didn’t want to be the cause of someone
giving up on their dreams. Though, Siwon hadn’t seemed that bothered by it, it was obvious that
the elder had wanted the opportunity. But if he had already declined the opportunity there wasn’t
much Jin could do about it.
In no time, the final session that Jin would have with the hospital psychiatrist, Dr. Seo, rolled around. Three weeks had gone by in a flash and Jin felt that he’d been through so much in that short time. He didn’t particularly dislike Dr. Seo, it was just hard to like the man that constantly shook Jin’s world with just his words. He understood that the man was just trying to help him, though, and he couldn’t deny that he was in a much better condition mentally than he had been in his first session.

“You look like a whole new person, today.” Dr. Seo commented as he brought Jin a cup of iced tea. The weather had been hot lately, far too hot to drink hot beverages even in the cool conditioned air of the hospital.

“I feel like one.” Jin replied pleasantly. He’d been in a fairly good mood over the past few days and though he was tired from staying up late working on an assignment, he was in relatively good spirits.

“As you know, this is the last session that I’ll be having with you. It’s been a busy three and a half weeks. I apologize for all that I’ve had to put you through in that time.”

Jin nodded with a breathy laugh. “It’s been a lot. I’m thankful though. I think I’m doing way better than I was when I had my first session with you. I’m not looking back anymore and I’m only moving forward with what I have now. Hye-su and Siwon have been great support and it’s a lot easier knowing that I have them with me.”

“That’s good.” Dr. Seo smiled. “I had my final sessions with them last week and they’re both really proud of how hard you’ve been trying to get back to normal. Some bumps in the road, of course, but I think that you’ve handled everything really well, considering the circumstances.”

“Thank you.” Jin grinned. It felt good to have his efforts acknowledged. The path to get to this point hadn’t been easy and was proud of himself for continuing to push forward even through everything.

“Now, how are you feeling about everything? Have you given more thought to what we talked about last session?”

Jin shifted, looking around the room reflectively. “I have. I think… that you’re probably right
about all of it. Even when I came out of the coma, I rejected this life so harshly that it’s not surprising my mind did the same. I also think that it’s possible I wanted to get away from all of it however I could, the day of the accident. It’s hard even now to acknowledge that this is my life. I still don’t remember it, but that doesn’t mean that it’s not mine. I don’t remember Siwon but I definitely think that he resembles my brother, so I can’t just pick and choose what I want. If I accept Siwon, I have to accept everything else too.”

“That’s a really good way of thinking.” Dr. Seo agreed. “You’ll have to face the demons of your past at some point in time, but given how you handled the incident on the street, I think that you can handle that as well. But give it time. You’ve been through enough for now.”

“I will, though. At some point.” Jin promised. The obstacle of his family was something he was dreading but he couldn’t ignore it forever.

“I believe you. Well, now that some of the major issues are solved it’s time to talk about the next step. This is the point where I would usually talk to you about how I feel your progress has gone and if I believe that you should continue to see a professional outside of the hospital. However, because you’re such a special case with such a strong case of repression, memory loss, and false memory in addition to your brain injury; I, as well as Doctor Kang, think that it would be best if I were the one to continue seeing you on a monthly basis rather than weekly.”

“Okay.” Jin responded. He was glad for that. He’d probably have a hard time speaking to someone else after all of this.

“Doctor Kang and I also want to continue to monitor your health and make sure that you don’t have a memory relapse which is possible in this kind of sensitive situation. If you experience another traumatic event it could trigger your memory to erase again.” Dr. Seo continued.

“I’ll be careful not to be traumatized, then.” Jin joked.

“Please do.” Dr. Seo laughed in return as he began to stand up. “But unless you have anything else you want to discuss, that’s all I had for you today. Sorry to call you all the way here for such a brief session. Especially when this isn’t the last time we’ll meet like this.”

“No, I appreciate it. Besides you have to be here just for this, too.” Jin said as he moved to stand as well.
“That’s true. Well, I’ll see you again next month. Good luck with your studies and say hello to Siwon and Hye-su for me.”

Jin bid the man goodbye and promised to pass along the greeting. He exited the office feeling light and carefree. He could begin to put all of this behind him and move towards his bright future with the people that wanted to see him succeed.

He walked down the hallways toward the elevators. Though, Siwon usually brought him to these sessions, he had to go to an early lecture this morning and he’d still been passed out in his bed when Jin had gotten ready to go. It was still hot outside even as it neared evening but Jin didn’t mind the walk.

He passed a hallway and saw movement out of the corner of his eyes. He stopped and turned to look down it just as the back of a wheelchair turned a corner. His heart had begun to beat in double time as he continued to stare and his palms were suddenly clammy with sweat. He felt a sense of dejavu as he remembered that he’d seen someone in a wheelchair after he had come here from passing out in the cafe with Hye-su. He’d seen a person in a wheelchair and chased after them but couldn’t find them. He didn’t remember who he thought the person was now but he had desperately wanted to find them.

He continued to stare down the corridor, conflicted. Bile was rising at the back of his throat as he fought down every urge in his body telling him to go after the wheelchair. He had just promised not only Dr. Seo that he would stop chasing after the ghosts of his past, but himself. He would never get the real thing again and he would just make himself miserable.

With considerable effort, Jin managed to force his head to turn away from the hallway and with even more effort he was able to force himself to continue walking all the way to the elevator.

He was proud of himself but for some reason he felt like crying.

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Jin stopped for some dinner on the way back to the apartment since Siwon was probably still sleeping and Jin, himself, was in no mood to cook. He felt better after walking and even better after eating and wrapping the rest up for Siwon to eat later. But the whole wheelchair thing was still bothering him.
Especially as he sat on the couch, bored, and wishing he understood how he could have lived on a couch in the middle of a living room for so long. He had a project for one of his classes that he should have been working on but he had no inspiration for it yet and he honestly wasn’t up for it at the moment. He’d turned the tv on for a total of fifteen minutes and after flipping through all of the channels, he decided that there was not a single thing on that was worth watching and promptly turned it off.

Jin had defaulted back into his regular position of laying down and staring at the ceiling but doing that always forced him into his thoughts and he didn’t want that either.

He sighed, looking around for something that would occupy his mind but not require his focus.

His eyes fell on the old camera Hye-su had brought by last week that he still hadn’t gotten the chance to look at. He reached for it, excited that he had found exactly the sort of thing that he was looking for.

Besides, he’d been interested in hearing more about the fun parts of his past. He’d heard some pretty wild stories from Siwon, particularly about his delinquent phase. But he was curious to see the moments that he had apparently wanted to document. Moments that he felt were important.

He powered on the device, glad that it didn’t die of low battery as soon as he did. There were over a thousand photos and a handful of videos in the storage and Jin made himself comfortable on the couch as he started with the videos.

The earliest was in the winter of 2008. It was taken on his birthday, December 4th, which meant that he had just turned sixteen.

He pressed play and watched as the cameras view wobbled on a view of concrete dusted with snow. He heard music and chatter in the background and his own younger voice say,

“Hold on.”

And then the camera’s view panned up suddenly to Siwon’s face, Jin noted that he would have probably been twenty-one at the time. The elder had on a beanie, though it was apparent that his hair was much longer than it was now, and a coat. The light poles in the background made it seem like they were standing outside.
“Is it on? Did you get it to work?” Siwon asked, raising his eyebrows curiously.

“Yeah, it’s recording now!” Jin responded, a cheerful laugh in his voice. “Don’t you see the red light?”

“Oh!” The elder gasped and he grinned widely. “This is Choi Siwon here with Kim Seokjin who was just given his first camera as a birthday present by yours truly. How do you like it, Jin?”

The camera moved a bit as a sixteen year old Jin walked into the frame smiling from ear to ear.

“I love it! I’m going to take so many awesome pictures with this, thank you so much!” Younger Jin cried and threw his arms around Siwon.

The camera angle changed to the fabric of Siwon’s coat but Jin could still hear their mumbled voices.

“You’re welcome. But if you take any pictures of me naked to sell online, at least give me a cut of the profits.”

“As if I would do that! All the profits are mine!”

Jin smiled as the video promptly shut off and laughed under his breath at their antics. He flipped through the rest of the videos. Most of them were a younger Jin messing around with Siwon and there was even a video of him tagging a bus stop, which he thought was a bad idea to have. There was also a simple video of a butterfly flying near a patch of grass which was a really cool and interesting shot to begin with but as Jin continued to watch it, it looked like the butterfly was flying backwards. He wondered what he had done to get it to look like that but moved on after a few seconds of staring at it in confusion. The most recent video was taken a year ago and featured Hyesu walking carefully across a stone barrier with a beach in the background and sunset coloring her in pink hues. She looked beautiful. Which was probably why he had taken the video in the first place.

He moved over to the photos and began flipping through those, starting from the oldest once again.

As expected, there were a ton of pictures taken from the day Jin got the camera, both pictures of Siwon and pictures of the two of them as well as a few pictures of Jin alone. He wondered if
had taken them himself or had Siwon take them for him.

He continued flipping through the pictures, snickering as Siwon let out a loud snore from his bedroom and wished that he had been recording that so he could make fun of the elder later. There were plenty pictures of Siwon as Jin kept looking through the storage but eventually the pictures of him thinned and rather abstract photos of regular household objects took their place. Then there were nearly a hundred photographs of the sky at different times of day and at seemingly different places. After that were the occasional photo of Siwon, done in a way that was clearly trying to be professional. And then the pictures showed Jin with a girl that wasn’t Hye-su. Jin had to search for her name in his mind but he remembered it after a few moments. Sohyun. The girlfriend that he had once had before she died in a car accident.

Jin wondered why he and cars were such an unlucky combination. So many of his troubles involved cars in some way or another.

He sighed as those pictures disappeared and the pictures changed to animals and candids of people. He didn’t recognize anyone in them and flipped through them rather quickly.

Eventually he stumbled upon a few stray pictures of Hye-su. One in particular made him laugh. It was obviously back when Hye-su and Siwon didn’t get along. He had somehow captured them giving each other glares that probably seemed discreet but were so blaringly obvious it was a wonder they hadn’t gotten into a shouting match.

Then the photographs changed into landscapes. A park at night, the sunrise over the skyline, a quiet street in the rain.

One caught his eye though, evoking a strange feeling as he looked at it. It was a picture of a sea, very obviously not a beach from the lack of sand and no river he knew of was that wide. It was a sea.

Jin didn’t know why that was making his hands shake. He frowned and forced his hands to steady themselves. It wasn’t even that good of a picture. It looked like it had been taken in the early morning, as the fog was still hovering over the water. There was barely anything to see except the expanse of water.

So, why was it bothering him so much?
He flipped to the next picture, agitated, and the old device fell from his hands as he laid eyes on the next picture and gasped out loud.

His eyes were wide for a second in shock before he hurried to collect the camera again, a desperation in his actions that had him moving clumsily.

There was a photo of three men on the camera. The two on the left and right had their arms intertwined with the person in the middle and each of the three were holding out peace signs with goofy smiles.

Jin shakily moved on to the next photo, not even sure that he was breathing, and not caring if he was or wasn’t.

The next picture also had three people in it. The one that was obviously sitting on the ground, fast asleep, with a wall of graffitied concrete in the background had been the person on the left in the previous photo. Two other people were crouching next to him. One had a gummy smile and a peace sign held up while the other was blurry as if he’d run to get in the picture just before it was taken.

Jin flipped to the next picture and saw that it seemed to have been taken a few seconds after the one before it because the same three figures were in the shot but the one on the left that had been sleeping was awake and smiled tiredly into the camera, while the one on the right was actually visible now and grinned mischievously into the camera lens.

Jin continued to flip through the pictures, seeing different variations of the same six people doing different things and smiling widely in all of them. A hot tear rolled down Jin’s cheek and splashed onto the display of the camera before he even knew he was crying.

Just by seeing these pictures, memories had come flooding back in like a damn had been opened. He remembered all of it. He remembered Namjoon, Jeongguk, Hoseok, Jimin, Taehyung, and Yoongi. He remembered the day that these photos were capturing. The day before they went to the sea and everything had changed for the worse. He remembered Taehyung jumping off the construction platform, he remembered Jeongguk being hit by the car, and he remembered Hye-su being hit by that car vividly. He remembered the way he had felt after and the sensation of drowning so well that it was if he couldn’t breath even now.

He remembered all that had happened after too. The weird room that he had woken up in, the platform that had been surrounded by water. Being in all of his friend’s bodies the night that Jeongguk was hit and learning more about them than he had ever knew. He remembered the black
eyes and the sacrificial blade that he had been murdered with, he remembered the seething words and Taehyung’s fury. He remembered that place with the fences and that strange reality ten years in the future where he had met Siwon for the first time. He remembered going out to the sea with his friends and being unable to interact with anything as they paid their respects to his memorial plaque covered in dead petals. He remembered the dark room with the white butterflies. He remembered the world of angels and demons and the deal that he had made with Taehyung. He remembered the cracks in his face and the sky blue walls with the victorian moulding. He remembered that he was given a second chance and he remembered screwing that up too. He remembered the messed up world that he had found himself in after and finally making amends with Taehyung.

He remembered it all. He had found the six photographs and he had gotten out. He was horrified that all of it had nearly slipped away from him that easily. He had forgotten all of it until this moment.

He hadn’t even realized the signs. Him being bisexual. The pills. The bathtub. The white lighter at the pool. The gas station. The wheelchair in the hospital.

All of it had been reminding him of what he was leaving behind. He had been convinced that this world was real, and at this point he had trouble arguing that it wasn’t.

He couldn’t help but wonder why he had been taken here rather than to his friends, like he had initially wanted. Then, he realized that he was being given a choice. This world was presented to him with things that he desperately wanted, but for each thing he wanted there was a downside. He had Hye-su and a great, brother-like figure in Siwon but his family situation was in shambles and he had far more ghosts of the past than he was used to.

He had been given a choice. And he had almost made the wrong decision.

It was nice here, he had to admit. He barely knew Siwon but he loved him and Hye-su was everything he had ever hoped for. He would have neither of them if he went back because Hye-su was dead and if Siwon existed, Jin didn’t know him.

He would still have mistakes to fix if he went back to his friends and there was a chance that he would lose them all again.

But Jin couldn’t stay here.
It was just like he thought to begin with, he wasn’t Siwon or Hye-su’s Kim Seokjin. He belonged to others. He owed it to them to try. He hadn’t gone through all that he had in those different universes to give in so easily.

He put the camera down, having seen all that he needed to see.

His gaze fell upon the standing mirror in the room. He nearly scoffed at himself. The mirror had been one of the first things that he had noticed but he hadn’t thought about it at all. The way out of here had been staring him in the face this entire time.

He stood, ready to dive into it right away but Siwon snored pointedly and Jin hesitated.

It wasn’t that he was having second thoughts about leaving, he had already made his decision. But he felt immense guilt over just disappearing from Hye-su and Siwon’s lives. They would worry about him and search endlessly for him because that’s just the kind of people that they were. He still had no idea what happened when he left these universes. Whether he completely disappeared or if it was just his consciousness that moved. If it was the former he wouldn’t be able to forgive himself, he had already messed with their lives enough, he didn’t want to cause them any more pain than he already had.

He looked around the room and located his backpack. He dug into it, getting out his notebook and a pen. He rushed over to the kitchen counter, hoping that Siwon wouldn’t wake in the middle of this, and began writing the note.

Jin addressed the letter to both of them and explained his disappearance, pleading that they wouldn’t go looking for him and would accept that he was gone in the same way that he had accepted this life. He apologized several times, hoping that his sincerity would come across with pen and paper, but knew that it wouldn’t. He had to do this much, at least. Even if some other Jin took over after he left, that Jin would just have to deal with whatever it meant if Siwon were to find the letter first. He had to prepare for the possibility that Siwon and Hye-su wouldn’t get their Jin back and he didn’t want to leave them with nothing.

He sighed when he finished and placed the pen down. He looked to Siwon’s room wishing that he could hug the man one last time and wished that he could tell Hye-su just how much she meant to him and how much he would miss her, but he couldn’t do either of those things. So, he sighed again, and approached the mirror.

He didn’t exactly remember what he had done before to go through mirrors. He only recalled touching them and seeing the surface ripple under his touch. He reached a hand out hesitantly and
felt the cool surface of the glass.

Nothing happened which filled him with a fiery sense of panic before he took a deep breathe and focused, pressing his fingertips harder against the glass.

The surface rippled out from his touch slowly and Jin nearly shouted in relief. Tears were burning at his eyes as he pressed even harder. His hand went out the other side of the glass and only his wrist was visible on his side.

He pulled his hand out, steeling himself to go in all the way. He turned so that could step sideways into the mirror and then he was pushing against the surface with his shoulder.

He stepped forward and just like that he was stepping out on the other side.

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Jin looked around, completely disoriented after stepping through the mirror.

He was in the same apartment, but he’d stepped out of the mirror from the position it was usually in, his bedroom, and there was no longer a couch draped with sheets and blankets in front of him.

“Siwon!” He called out, just to make sure that he had, in fact, ended up in the right place.

The apartment was silent in response and Jin let out the breath he hadn’t realized he had been holding. He turned his attention back to the mirror and pressed on the glass experimentally. It didn’t budge even as he added more pressure and when he took his hand away the only thing on the mirror were smudged fingerprints from where his hand had just been.

There was no going back now.

His phone vibrated from its usual place on his nightstand and Jin rushed over to get it. He wasn’t that interested in who had texted him but needed to know what day it was.
The text was from a classmate and its contents seemed so familiar that Jin was sure it was his third time seeing it.

He placed the phone back down and turned back towards the mirror. His eyes caught a bright red object and he walked over to it, heart thumping loudly in his ears as he picked it up. It was Hyesu’s journal, as expected. He opened it, turning it the page he was looking for immediately. He sighed with relief as he saw the familiar drawing of the Smeraldo flower.

So far everything had been the same, which Jin was immensely thankful for.

If he was indeed being given another chance, he had a lot to do. And little time to waste. He was going to start by changing a few of the things that he had tried before. So, the first thing he was going to do, was return the red journal to its rightful owner and then he would go pay a visit to an old friend.

Jin stepped up to the mirror once again and realized that he was wearing the same clothes he’d been wearing when he was given this chance before. Well, actually, he remembered taking off the sweater he was wearing on top of his long sleeved shirt because he thought it would be too hot. He remembered doing that before as well. He was already sweating from wearing it. Frowning, he reached down to the hem of the sweater and pulled it over his head. His arm knocked into something in the process and he was quick to reach out and catch the falling vase before it made contact with the wooden floor.

He smirked to himself as he placed it back in it’s rightful spot. There were still white lilies in the vase but it didn’t bother Jin nearly as much as it had before.

He had long since been over the fear of the unknown. Really, he was ready to jump headfirst into it now. It was like that old saying he’d learned in this long journey of his.

*Man muss noch Chaos in sich haben, um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können.*

*One must have chaos within oneself to give birth to a dancing star.*

Even planets, as large as they are, came from conflict. Atoms meeting in the solar system and colliding painfully, bursting into light and creating a fragment of a world beyond our greatest imaginations. Just because we can't see the end result doesn't mean that it should be feared. The greatest things in life came from meeting, parting, and creating something in that serendipitous
moment.

Jin had learned that. He understood what it meant, now. Things had to change in order for them to get better and being afraid of change was just as bad as not wanting things to get better.

But more importantly, he’d finally realized that the most important thing in life, the most beautiful moment in life was when you finally learned how to Love Yourself. The road may not have been pretty and Jin had certainly experienced his fair share of hiccups, but what mattered the most was that all of those experiences had changed the kind of person he was for the better. He loved himself and he was finally ready to truly love with all his heart.

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Jin pulled up to the gas station late into the night. It was late, much later than he’d anticipated getting there but he’d a long and eventful day. He had a lot of setup to do before he could start to fix things between him and his friends, including getting his love life in order. But he was finally here.

He pulled up next to the gas pump and the man working the night shift approached the car tiredly, preparing to fill the truck up with gas. He had a yellow lollipop in his mouth but he took it out as he got ready to speak.

Jin rolled his window down and a smile naturally formed on his lips as he saw the man’s face. It really had been a long time.

Before the man could get a word in, Jin offered a white lighter through the cracked window. The man took it, looking down at it in confusion and when he looked up to the window again it had been rolled down exposing the person within the car.

Namjoon’s eyes widened with shock as he realized just who he was looking at.

“Oh? Jin-hyung!” He exclaimed in surprise.

Jin smiled.
“Long time no see.”

If we could turn back the clock, where should we go back to? Once we reach that place, can our mistakes and errors be undone? Will happiness be ours to stay?

Though many seasons pass, there are places that cannot be reached. There will always be yet another storm to face and it will need to be weathered head-on. The journey will always continue; just as I will continue loving without fear, hesitating and parting, and merely living as the person that I am.

As spring turns to summer, summer turns to fall, and fall turns to winter the sound of cicadas that chirred like showers end in an instant. In the abrupt silence, I realize life’s immense beauty. Just the fact that I am in it makes all the difference. I may never make the perfect decision. I may never save everyone. But I will continue on, moving forward without looking back.

Even if this were a dream, this is where I choose to be.

Chapter End Notes

I’m not saying I cried writing those final words but I may have cried. (Which is a bit weird for me because actually the last words I ever wrote for this story were in Taehyung’s chapter.)

This story was written from February 2018 until October 2018 and in those eight months I wrote something incredibly important to me and I’m so happy that I was able to do this and that all of you were able to join me on this journey.

Thank you all so much x

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My -dead- twitter is @amaranthine_x if you wanna yell at me for making you cry over DM. or if you just wanna chat, ask me questions? I like talking to people lol

And! If you were still curious about some of the things in the story, I made a youtube video talking about the different universes and everything! Check it out here if you want!
(Also [here's](#) the playlist for the whole fic!)

**Fun Fact**

I finished this chapter before the Love Yourself: Answer comeback. I’m not saying I called the epiphany music video but if you spotted that red journal… i TOTALLY CALLED THE EPIPHANY MUSIC VIDEO.

Also Namjin AU coming soon! ;) Might be guns and lies involved so stay tuned if you’re into that! (UPDATE: The Namjin AU is [here](#)!)  

**End Notes**

Thanks for reading <3

Oh and let me say in advance to please not repost or translate this story without permission. Thanks!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!