Days Like These, Nights Like This

by yoongi Pt2

Summary

Jimin is about to start his college life. Hoseok is agonising about how stagnant it feels. Maybe one summer at Pine Lake is all it will take for everything to change - that is, if they can put up with each other for that long.

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Alternatively, Jihope are camp counselors of rivalling cabins and can't figure out either their lives or their feelings.
fifty-four days

Chapter Notes

inspired somewhat by a prompt i found on a tumblr au prompt masterlist - "we’re both ‘team leaders’ at a summer camp for little people and you may be hot but goddammit my collection of twelve-year-olds are going to beat yours into the dust"

as soon as i read this i knew jihope deserved some justice and whipped open a word doc to give them that justice. this has been a lot of fun and i’m excited to get the rest of their story out xox

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hoseok wished it was the gentle chatter of the local wildlife that woke him up on the first Monday of summer. A chirping of birds, perhaps, or the rustling of squirrels, perched precariously on the branches shadowing his cabin window. It would be fitting, he considered, a gentle way to set me into a routine for the next eight weeks. Come to think of it, even his alarm would be preferable, slowly ascending into the slightly jarring (yet, at least familiar) piano riff which sent shivers down his spine every morning back in the city.

Instead, he’s drawn out of his slumber by a considerably loud thump, followed quite successively by the choice words of a stranger. Hoseok let out a sigh – I guess I’m awake now – and turned around from his position facing the wall to meet the gaze of his human alarm clock. On the other side of their small cabin, maybe only two or so metres away, the culprit returned his look with a grimace. After dramatically scrunching up his face, the boy rubbed his forehead and pointed to the top bunk’s underside in a self-explanatory manner.

‘Heads up,’ he groaned in defeat.

Hoseok couldn’t help being amused: despite his lingering doziness, he let out a twisted half-laugh, half-yawn. ‘Nice wake-up. Maybe I’ll be able to turn off my phone alarm if you’re planning on throwing your head against the bunk like that every morning.’

At that, his cabin companion’s grimace flashed into a quick, scrunched smile. ‘Yeah, sorry. It might take me a few more concussions but hopefully you won’t need to rely on that all summer.’

Still trying to properly wake up, Hoseok nodded in gentle acknowledgement of the boy’s eager chatter. Just give me two minutes, he thought. Two minutes, then I can try to be a functioning human.
‘Hey, I don’t think we met last night,’ Bunk Boy continued, despite the lack of response. ‘My parents dropped me in to camp a bit late, and you were already crashed out,’ he explains, gesturing to Hoseok’s bunk. ‘I’m Jeongguk.’

*Okay, time to finally commit to getting up.* He quickly checked his phone for the time – quarter to eight, close enough to the alarm, anyway – and lazily kicked back the off-white sheets. Turning back to Jeongguk with a brightening smile, he offered back an introduction. ‘I’m Hoseok, but just call me Hobi if you want.’

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Jeongguk seemed happy enough to sneak in a few more minutes of shut-eye when Hoseok excused himself for a quick morning shower (or, more likely, the boy was checking his Instagram feed before he said goodbye to his phone for the rest of the day). After rambling for a few minutes about how he was ‘super keen to work with you, Hobi!’, Jeongguk’s mane of black hair had miraculously found itself resting against the pillow once more. He did seem like an energetic guy, but what boy on the cusp of seventeen wasn’t madly in love with their bed to some extent? So, he thought he’d let the younger one have his rest before their first big day as cabin leaders, and slipped off to the bathroom to freshen up.

A morning shower is kind of like a good stretch, the dozy boy thought to himself. It sends warmth rushing through your body, leaving a placid feeling of contentment behind. He could still feel the comforting echoes of warm droplets across his chest as he dried himself off and slipped into a bright blue camp polo. Blue to signify *Cabin Counselor*, freshly ironed last night to signify his eagerness. Or apprehension, depending on how an outside eye looked at it.

Taking a deep breath, Hoseok eyed his reflection in the dusty bathroom mirror. An unexpected pang flew through his chest when he remembered that he had, in fact, *deliberately* left his hair gel back in his college dorm. His natural waves would be staying for the summer. Really, he had to laugh at how funny it looked when the ends of his hair dipped and curled up under his *Pine Lake* cap. Aside from the more pronounced eye-bags (courtesy of two years studying Business Admin), he almost looked like the same charismatic eighteen year old who flashed up in his Facebook Memories a few weeks ago and prompted this spontaneous return to his hometown. Namjoon would probably label it a nervous break, but potato potah-to, right?

It was standing in front of a bathroom mirror, slightly bigger than this one, with a knock-off Rolex and his hair tamed with product, that Hoseok had realised he needed to turn down his summer internship. He just needed to get *away*. 
‘Hey, Joon?’ he had almost whispered, hoping his shaky voice wouldn’t betray his surprising bout of emotion; wouldn’t make it real. ‘Can you come here for a sec?’

‘Hobi, you’ve literally got this in the bag,’ his roommate repeated for what was probably the third time that morning, holding a half-eaten piece of jam toast as he ducked his head into the bathroom. ‘Your GPA is great, you’re a networking genius: they’d be idiots to not hire you. You know this.’

He had turned back to face Namjoon, his worried eyes probably giving him away. The taller boy raised an eyebrow, a shadow of concern dancing across his face. Yeah, he’d definitely given himself away. Namjoon confirmed his transparency with a well-meaning, ‘You okay, dude?’

Slight hesitation. Then, a delicate utterance - ‘No.’ Hoseok had placed his head in his hands and let out a sigh that incrementally took over his whole body.

After standing nervously in the doorway for what had felt like a few hours (but was probably only half a minute), Namjoon led him out into their shared living space. He went to make tea while Hoseok managed to draw out that he saw a photo of himself 2 Years Ago Today! online, where his eyes were shimmering and he had a grin that threatened to take over his whole face. Just-graduated-Hoseok had tiny dimples peeking from under his rosy cheeks (still a bit flushed from crying, probably). He was throwing his graduation cap amongst a crowd of previously-forgotten faces, with an air of genuine triumph, of unbridled joy. It was the realisation that not only had Hoseok forgotten he could smile like that, but that he couldn’t remember the last time he had even felt like that since moving away from home for college, that brought this all on. At least, that’s how he tried to explain it to his concerned, but cautious, roommate.

‘I mean, just look at me, Joon!’ he had exhaled, gesturing wearily at nothing in particular. ‘I look exactly like everyone else in my cohort, going for the same summer job that everyone else wants, just to make it easier for me to work in some fifth-floor New York cubicle in a few years!’

Namjoon had really been great at dealing with the sudden outburst. They’d talked it out, and, an hour or so later, Hoseok had made two phone calls. The first, to politely cancel his internship interview; the second, to tell his parents he was coming back home for the summer. To work at the same summer camp his eighteen-year-old self was just so excited to be returning to for his supposed last hurrah.

Any attempt to reignite that spark he’d almost lost, to truly reassure the teenager in that photo that things didn’t turn out so bad for him after all. Pine Lake wasn’t a solution, but it was something to halt the path of despondency Hoseok hadn’t even realised he was treading on.
So, looking at himself now in the mirror that was to become much more familiar over the next two months, Hoseok gently gave himself an encouraging smile. He had made it back here. He knew these people, this place - he could almost draw up in his mind’s eye a foggy map of the secret corners by the lake he used to take his camp friends to eat candy and skip stones. He knew the freshness of the air around him. Pine Lake was an old friend, and Hoseok was ready to reabsorb everything that had made it such a special place in his younger years.

It didn’t even cross his mind, as he passed back out of the tiled bathroom, that, perhaps there were also new lessons to learn here – ones that would infuse gently with the old, intertwining as ice melts back into a lake at the end of a cold winter.

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‘Just saying, Hobi, we need a good chant to rile up the troops every day for eight weeks. Twelve year old boys operate in bursts of energy, they don’t just keep powering on all day long.’ Jeongguk placed a hand on Hoseok’s shoulder, pausing their steady gait towards the dining hall just to add, ‘I wouldn’t expect you to remember what that’s like. The memory is much fresher in my youthful mind, you see.’

Hoseok exhaled in mock frustration, narrowing his eyes at the younger boy with a sly look. ‘Very bold, Jeongguk. You’re lucky we’re in the presence of others.’

As the jolly pair made their way to a last-minute counselor’s briefing, they were flanked by a mixture of old and new faces. Hoseok was pleasantly surprised to hear two familiar yells, which promptly startled him out of the Cabin 4 Chant Debate with Jeongguk (to dab, or not to dab?). Before he could answer Jeongguk with a resounding there will be no dabbing in my cabin, a strong pair of arms had lifted him off the gravel.

Judging by Seokjin’s wild guffaws, he didn’t seem to mind that he had mildly winded his old camp friend at the expense of instigating such a dramatic reunion. ‘Part the seas! Hobi is back in town!’ he proclaimed, sending nervous first-time counselors to the very perimeter of the main path. Seokjin snuck a cheeky glance at his cackling shorter companion, who Hoseok took a few seconds to recognise. But, as Pine Lake had seemed to deliver so far, yet another memory of Hoseok’s reliably snapped back into place. Yoongi had definitely slimmed down, and his raven locks had been washed out with an icy blonde, but it brought the returning boy’s heart immeasurable comfort to drown in the familiar ocean of these boys’ varyingly boisterous laughs.

‘Alright, drama queen, you can put me down now,’ Hoseok chuckled in endearment. Turning to face the duo, any apprehension he’d been feeling about the ease of settling to camp routine faded gently – it was like it had never even been there, churning inadvertently in the bottom of his gut.
‘Of... of course you're both in fucking bandanas,’ he made out, shaking his head in disbelief as his eyes adjusted to the visual monstrosity in front of him. Yoongi was in a blue camp polo (the same frighteningly bright shade as those worn by Hoseok and Jeongguk), while Seokjin was decked out in a viciously red version. The boys had apparently abandoned the rules of fashion in the outside world, with bandanas not matching the shade of their own shirts, but that of the other’s. On closer inspection, Hoseok even spotted a ‘50% off!’ tag dangling off the edge of Seokjin’s frayed piece. Bought from the closest Walmart on a midnight whim of Seokjin’s the night before camp? It warmed Hoseok how clearly he could picture the best friends’ antics. *Yoongi and Seokjin, chaotic as ever.*

‘Hobi, it’s great to see you again and all, but I just need to make it clear that the colour-coordination,’ Yoongi chimed in, while pointing accusingly at his best friend, ‘was absolutely not my idea.’

‘Now, now, I couldn’t have you forgetting about me while I’m all up in my lonesome in maintenance this year!’ Seokjin teased. *Ah, so that’s the red, then,* Hoseok noted. *I’ll get there with the details.*

‘Not my fault you wanted to trim the gardens and fix the leaky showers all summer instead of killing it...,’ Yoongi turned to the others to gather some faux support, ‘...in Cabin 3 with me.’

Seokjin hummed, obviously enjoying their back-and-forth. ‘I know, I know, I’m the backbone of Cabin 3 every year. If you can forgive me for wanting to enjoy my last year with a double bed and a cabin to myself, I might allow you into the kid-free zone every now and then, Min.’

Their banter was infuriatingly infectious. As the dust settled from the trio’s exuberant reunion, Hoseok noticed Jeongguk standing back a little. *What would eighteen-year-old Hobi do?* he pondered. A devious grin overtook his face as he made for the shyer boy, wrapping his limbs vigorously around him until he successfully drew a giggle out of the new counselor.

‘Have you guys met my summer protégé, Jeonggukkie?’

Three successive, sharp whistles in earshot drew the forming foursome’s attention back to their destination. Hoseok smirked as they all reoriented themselves towards the dining hall, picking up the pace a little as they collectively realised they made up the tail end of the arriving counselors.

There was just enough staff gathered in the hall to take up the first row of tables, leaving six or seven more rows stretched out behind that would soon accommodate the kids. The wooden walls were still
adorned with framed whole-camp photos from decades past, knitted banners with the trademark Pine Lake logo (a tree, of course – the camp founders had not been particularly imaginative folk) covering up what little blank space remained. Taking in the sea of faces, both at the tables and framed on the walls, made Hoseok feel as though he had smoothly woven his way into a faded summer of some ambiguous timeframe, one that had a legacy among parents, college kids, middle schoolers. It was like he was suddenly immersed in that one summer, the one that parents snickered about at the dinner table when remembering how they snuck out of cabins to drink by the lake, the one that high schoolers who had found and lost their first love cried about. The hall was grand, the memories within it grander, and the energy contained within was subtly electric. There was something obscurely poetic about it, Hoseok considered as his eyes continued to dart around. These walls contained the apprehension of young people looking to live another year suspended in that one summer, where they would come together only to disperse once more, like dandelion seeds at the gentle blow of fate.

The recognisable call of ‘Counselors!’ echoed throughout the hall, reverberating off the walls and gradually quietening the herd’s chattering. The Head Counselor, standing tall at the head of the pack, threw out a warm smile before continuing her introductory address in a firm, yet, still fond, tone. Janine was a respected and loved authority figure, and Hoseok found himself relieved that her role had not been filled by another.

‘It’s truly a pleasure to have you all here with us for another action-packed summer at Pine Lake,’ she continued, panning the room with her commanding gaze. ‘Before we welcome the kids this morning, I wanted to personally extend my own welcome to you, and quickly confirm a few details about our schedule each week.’

Janine ran through the ‘few details’ a lot more meticulously than she had let on, but Hoseok only half-listened. He heard her announce each new day, and let the words calmly wash over him when he felt the details mould together from his memory – Wednesday nights are full-camp activities, Mondays and Fridays are inter-cabin challenges and counselor’s evenings on Fridays, too. Growing somewhat restless, he allowed his eyes to wander left, studying the crowd for other friends. Hoseok’s smile was easy, as he recognised and made eye contact with as many familiar faces as he could, throwing a few closer counselors a small wave. It wasn’t until his stare danced to the very opposite side of the hall - landed on a new boy sitting with his chair backed against the wall, one leg crossed over the other, hands poised fluidly yet purposefully on his lap – that Hoseok actually felt his wide grin, and let it drop gently into a subtle smirk.

The other boy’s gaze was fixated steadily, unwavering, on Janine as she came to the end of her address. Hoseok considered the notion that he had maintained this level of intentness for the last few minutes - imagined his eyes narrowing every so often, imagined him letting out an involuntary slow nod at each piece of important information. When he blinked, he blinked slowly, as if he was acutely aware of his own movements. With intrigue, Hoseok watched him lightly adjust his posture - rolling his shoulders gently, arching his neck so delicately, that the simple stretch seemed fascinatingly rehearsed. Whether the boy was intensely absorbing each detail out of nerves or of resoluteness was a question even more enigmatic in its ambiguity.
Hoseok only noticed that Janine had finished her spiel when Seokjin began to clap immediately to his left, quickly snapping his attention back to the front of the hall. After a brief moment, he joined in the applause with the other counselors. As he brought his hands together, he was attentive to the precise rhythm they created, a metronomic beacon to centre himself with the same level of effortless precision in the other boy. Hoseok wondered if his concentrated thought process mimicked that of the other’s – or did he move that way, flow that way, of his own intuitive accord? Hoseok almost went to sneak a curious glance to compare how they both clapped, but tossed the thought away as Seokjin unexpectedly snapped into a standing position. Letting out out a mildly embarrassed giggle, Hoseok stared up at his friend, who had swiftly turned to stand tall on his chair. They locked eyes, and Seokjin gave him a cunning wink from his standing position. Oh dear.

‘Hey! Everyone!’ he projected, turning his upper body to face the row of staff, as if daring anyone to not pay attention to him. Hoseok couldn’t help but to snicker at Yoongi, mouth gaping in droll horror but eyes glowing with an unspoken fondness. The boy in red pressed a hand slowly against his chest, and declared with mock formality, ‘I’m Jin, if you didn’t know.’ The chorus of muffled sniggers communicated a clear response of how could we not know?

‘Just wanted to quickly mention that, after two whole years of being boring, Hobi has finally decided to come back to Pine Lake and is gonna take the reins in Cabin 4 this summer!’ Seokjin exclaimed triumphantly, leading a new round of applause with admirable enthusiasm. Hoseok could feel his cheeks heating up slightly, but nodded his head exuberantly at the silly introduction, and even matched his friend by standing on his seat for a few seconds to deliver a royal wave. More laughter. Janine was shaking her head from her sitting position at the front of the hall, but the camp leader’s cheeky wink in Hoseok’s direction said it all. His heart swelled as he felt the room welcome him back wholeheartedly, a disjointed yet somehow still fitting injunction in the morning’s events.

As he went to sit back down, Hoseok felt brave and let his eyes dart for a split second to the other side of the hall once more. Considering how much attention Seokjin had drawn to their end of the table, Hoseok considered that he shouldn’t have felt so surprised to have had his glance returned with the intense gaze he’d been so drawn to a mere few minutes prior. The boy’s eyes were locked directly on his. Even with the distance separating them, Hoseok felt a daring energy radiate from his glare. Their mysterious impromptu exchange was affirmed by an elusive raise of the boy’s eyebrow, a shadow of some blend of emotions dancing down his face and across his lips. Hoseok almost reflexively mirrored the expression, despite feeling unsure himself about the nuances it was trying to convey as he went to take his seat.

With their two or three seconds of eye contact then broken, he found it difficult to recall the details of their interaction as he commenced light-hearted conversation with Jeongguk. As the four friends merged with the crowd of counselors in haste to meet the soon arriving kids, Hoseok resolved to file his unusual staring match as just another amusing exchange to joke about later.

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'Alright, can I get Cabin 12 pushing in a little closer?'

Hoseok’s heart ached for the poor photographer, as she gestured desperately from the top of her step-ladder at the counselors in charge. Cabin 12 was composed of a tight-knit group of girls (maybe around eight or nine years old?) who kept drifting out of frame, all voices of authority tuned out in the midst of their intense start-of-summer catch-up.

‘I feel bad for her,’ Jeongguk commented, as he straightened up from giving one of their boys a hi-five. ‘Surely she’s not getting paid enough for this.’

Hoseok scoffed at his co-counselor’s remark. ‘Surely none of us are, dude,’ he laughed, then shot another look of sympathy at the photographer. She squinted into the viewfinder and went to look back at the crowd gathered before her with dismay. Hoseok swore he could hear her let out a sigh, before she yelled –

‘Actually, can I get Cabin 3 switching with Cabin 5 as well? Yes...yes, Cabin 3, please!’

A chorus of murmurs, of sorrys and my bads. Hoseok tilted his head to the left, searching for the predictable sight of Yoongi comically leading his band of eleven-year-olds closer to the centre of the camp cohort. He caught his friend’s eye after a few seconds, giving a playful wink which was immediately returned with an eye roll. After snickering at Yoongi’s exaggerated response, his vision drifted of its own accord to the slightly shorter blue-shirt next to his friend.

Hoseok had only truly felt like the universe was toying with him a few times in his life. Once was when his car broke down two hours before his last ever end-of-year dance concert, and he only realised that he had forgotten his dancing shoes twenty minutes into a bumpy bus ride. The shoes he had hastily borrowed were one size too small, kind of sweaty, and, despite still placing, the angry blisters didn’t fade for at least a week after. Another time, the morning a 40% paper was due for a first year business ethics class, Hoseok’s printer, fittingly, experienced an irrecoverable technical fatality. Namjoon had no money on his card to print at the library, and the fatigued boy had to practically plead his lecturer to let him print for free in the staffroom five minutes before the deadline. Now, he sighed in something between disbelief and amusement, was another one of those times where he could swear there was some omnipresent force who decided they wanted a laugh out of Hoseok’s day.

Of course, Yoongi’s number two was him. And, of course, he had caught Hoseok seemingly mid-stare. It probably seemed as though he had been studying him for a few seconds – Hoseok almost wanted to wander over and bashfully clarify my friend is your co-counselor!
After regarding him for a few seconds, the other boy turned leisurely back to the resigned teenager on the step-ladder, as she pleaded for no more anarchy. Unperturbed, with eyes still ahead, he delicately ran a hand through his fair head of hair, letting it rustle and settle like a wave crashing airily on a shoreline. *Is it even possible for someone to push their hair back assertively?*

Hoseok speculated in bewilderment for a few seconds before he spied a flash in his peripheral vision, flicking his head towards the bemused photographer as she stepped down carefully from her ladder. ‘Alright, that’ll be good enough,’ he thought he heard the poor thing exhale. He let out a scathing sigh of his own, just gentle enough so Jeongguk wouldn’t pick up on it, as it dawned on Hoseok that his inadvertently peculiar gaze was likely to be cemented forever on the walls of Pine Lake’s dining hall. He had to laugh at the situation when he imagined campers jesting and theorising about *who that counselor was staring at* in years to come.

The crowd began to disperse haphazardly towards the morning’s activities from the camp’s central meeting point (what was to become the toasty campfire of many forthcoming evenings). Hoseok shook away thoughts of his mystery camp rival and rallied around his group of seven keen preteens. From the first few minutes of introductions and fistbumps, it was clear that the boys were already friends from previous summers. While he and Jeongguk wouldn’t have to work hard to break the ice between their campers, they’d surely have to fight harder to keep their attention.

‘Alright, crew, we have *dodgeball* lined up today!’ Hoseok blurted before giving a resounding, single clap. He rubbed his hands together in hyperbolic excitement to get a few laughs out of the boys, shooting Jeongguk a cheeky side-grin.

‘You wanna head over, guys?’

In just under five minutes, Cabin 4 had navigated their way to the multipurpose ballgame courts on the other side of camp. The asphalt base, striped with freshly done-over white paint in markings suitable for basketball, was a mere few metres from Pine Lake’s perimeter. A sturdy wooden fence barred the campers from the dense fringe of greenery that enclosed the grounds, although a few stray branches looked like they were beginning to arch over the boundary. Hoseok thought of obnoxiously calling up Seokjin on his walkie-talkie to summon him for his first maintenance task of the summer, but quickly reconsidered at the thought of potential shade if the trees were given a few more weeks to grow.

He threw an automatic wave to the cabin group already waiting to play against his boys…and then had to laugh again at whatever being was pulling the strings of the morning’s events. Hoseok was proud of himself – he only managed to falter for about half a second when he realised (*of course*) that it was Cabin 3, featuring Yoongi and mystery boy, hanging out by the boundary fence. At a quick glance, their campers appeared to be similar age groups, so he supposed it made sense for them to be natural rivals, paired together for the first inter-cabin activity.
‘Ah, boys! Long time, no see!’ Yoongi announced, reaching out his right hand in a playful *come hither* gesture.

‘I wouldn’t be so eager, grandpa!’ Hoseok quipped back, scoring a few giggles from his boys as they all approached and organised themselves on the court. He deliberately didn’t seek out the other counselor’s reaction.

Jeongguk eagerly volunteered to demonstrate the main rules of dodgeball. It was, admittedly, fairly simple, and mostly muscle memory for Hoseok and the returning campers, so the warm-up period didn’t last long. Each cabin was getting in some testing hits – ‘*waist-down!*’ Yoongi kept interjecting fervently, his cherry bandana flapping dramatically as he whipped around the court.

After a Cabin 4 boy scored a ripe hit against Yoongi’s left thigh (to cheers of triumph on the sidelines from Jeongguk and on-court from Hoseok), his friend gestured to his co-counselor to swap into the game. Hoseok planted his feet firmly into the ground, and he kept a watchful eye on the blonde-haired boy as he waltzed onto the field for the first time. Mystery Man leaned down to pick up a ball rolling slowly across the ground and exuded a light grunt as he sprung back into a standing position, facing Hoseok with confidence, with something that was almost a smile but hadn’t quite made up its mind yet.

*Two can play at that game*, Hoseok thought. He bounced the ball he was holding once, letting it smack firmly back into his grasp before he jested, ‘Ready, newbie?’

Despite the rowdy boys pelting balls at each other all around the two, the yelps were somehow drowned out by the *swoosh* of Hoseok’s challenger as he spun a ball effortlessly on his index finger. He slowly pulled his vision from the rapidly twirling globe to methodically survey Hoseok’s expression, and gave a cocky eyebrow raise to seal the deal.

‘I don’t know, are you?’

Hoseok couldn’t recall who threw their ball first, but before he knew it, he was locked in an intent tug-of-war with this other boy. It was almost like their role as counselors was forgotten, instead single-minded and hell-bent on scoring tally-mark number one against each other. The familiar burn in Hoseok’s calf muscles as he twisted and leapt across the court was, admittedly, thrilling – a sensation he hadn’t felt rushing through his body since quitting dance. His ego was boosted a little when Hoseok allowed himself to scrutinise the other boy’s face and noticed glistening sweat beads dotting his forehead. He was keeping up with Hoseok’s pace well, but it was impressive to notice how he was still managing to keep his movements fluid – fresh, sure, but still with an unescapable sense of preordained rehearsal to them.
A sudden jolt rushed through him as he felt the ball smash against his hip. Hoseok winced a little, but he automatically conceded that it had been a good throw. Not that he would ever admit that verbally. Instead, an exhale of mock frustration would do. Hoseok shook his head at his opponent and waggled his index finger with a sly smile, before offering a loud retort of ‘It feels nice to give the new kid some confidence,’ to nobody in particular. Jeongguk snorted from the sidelines, before taking Hoseok’s place back in the game.

Only a few calf stretches into his break, Hoseok heard a pair of gentle footsteps approach from his left. He only had to lean slightly into his peripheral vision to recognise the slightly scuffed, sky blue sneakers that had finally snuck close enough for a proper conversation. Straightening up, he turned to face the smaller boy, and crossed his arms a little. This will be fun.

‘Shame really, champ. How’s your ego? Must suck getting out to a newbie.’

Hoseok raised a surprised eyebrow as their layered stares finally met at a closer range. He had always been an expert of not only reading a room, but changing the mood of it. However, decoding the unfamiliar nuances skirting across this boy’s face proved to be a much more formidable task. He found himself still unsure as to where he stood, or how he had gotten himself enticed there in the first place.

‘Ego’s fine,’ he replied, quite deliberately breaking their eye contact and arching his neck to face their teams. ‘Considering you just got out to a twelve-year-old.’

The other made a teasing sound of disapproval, and shook his head gently, intricately. ‘Touché.’

Their bodies both turned incrementally, unthinkingly to face the courts rather than each other. They stood in a few seconds of silence. It wasn’t awkward, but not wholly pleasant either – like something unknown was burning in the space between them, and Hoseok just had to figure out what it was. So, tilting his head ever so slightly in his companion’s direction, he offered out a white flag - ‘Name’s Hoseok. But, everyone here calls me Hobi.’

A scoff. Hoseok felt the burn of that unknown force a little more. ‘I bet they do.’

After pausing for a few more smouldering seconds, mystery boy’s shoulders loosened. ‘I’m Jimin. But, everyone here calls me your worst nightmare.’
Hoseok began to sense the boundaries of the dynamic a little more. Barely any time had elapsed between finally learning Jimin’s name before he quipped back with ‘I don’t know, it doesn’t really have a ring to it, dude. How about I just call you… Jiminnie?’

A quizzical, but curious sound. Hoseok continued.

‘You know, like… Jim-mini? Everyone thinks it’s a cute nickname, but, really, I’m just dissing you 24/7.’

‘Haven’t heard that one before,’ Jimin conceded. He let out a burst of laughter suddenly, which embarrassingly startled Hoseok, his embers poked. ‘Anyway, while you were busy coming up with an imaginative nickname for me, looks like our boys are back to 1 for 1.’

Jimin nodded precisely to his end of the court, where Yoongi was dealing out hi-fives enthusiastically to his bandwagon of youngsters. Hoseok stared, mouth open a little, before his opponent gave him a friendly nudge. ‘Stay sharp, Hobi,’ he jested, jogging backwards towards his team.

‘Guess the youth have just needed a new, handsome face to inspire them all along.’

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After a few sweaty rounds of dodgeball, it didn’t take much convincing on Hoseok’s part for the boys to breathlessly make their way to Pine Lake’s namesake. The water was shockingly clear, sparkling and casting flakes of light jaggedly across its surface in the early afternoon sun. Somehow, the lake seemed even bigger than Hoseok had remembered – the flagged portion specifically designated for swimming seemed on the verge of being swallowed up by the sheer mass of water that enveloped it. He had volunteered to take a seat on the leisurely beach chairs by the lake’s perimeter, to take in the freshness of the sight, to sense out its pure reality.

A few other cabin leaders seemed to have had the same epiphany as the sun’s rays beat further on into the day. As their corner of the lake became busier, Hoseok noticed Jeongguk trudge out of the water, blue shirt sticking unforgivingly to his chest. He met the approaching boy with a warm smile, as Jeongguk dropped himself onto a chair next to his companion and began casually drying his hair.

‘The water’s sick, Hobi,’ he said, muffled under his Hawaiian-print towel. ‘You should get in.’
‘Ah, it’s kind of busy, don’t you think?’ he responded, keeping his eyes firmly drawn to the lake. It’s almost exactly how I remember it, but not quite.

Jeongguk let out a non-committal shrug. ‘Not stopping anyone else.’

They sat in a few seconds of peaceful silence. The chaotic splashes and cheers of kids echoed across the surface of the lake, probably echoed further into the woods. Hoseok found himself thinking about the scale of things and how everything here fit together, like puzzle pieces which merged with each other of their own predestined accord.

‘So… Jimin, then?’

Hoseok was startled, embarrassed to admit he’d almost forgotten that Jeongguk was perched next to him, and had probably spent the last few seconds trying to track his unbroken line of vision. He hadn’t even been looking at Jimin – more so, the lake and everything in it, which Hoseok supposed did technically include Jimin. Either way, now he definitely was focusing on the counselor.

Jimin had just burst from under the water, sending kaleidoscopic droplets ricocheting into a short radius around him. Hoseok could hear him laugh, faintly, and his rise and fall of pitch, of volume, merged smoothly into the echoes dispersing across the lake’s surface. His shirt was stuck to the crevices of his chest in the same way that Jeongguk’s was, but there was something oddly magnetic about the way he looked, the way the bright blue popped against his honey skin –

‘I’m watching the kids, FYI,’ Hoseok replied in a surprisingly defensive manner, painfully drawing his attention away from the lake and towards his co-counselor.

‘Didn’t think the Cabin 3 kids playing Marco Polo around Jimin were our responsibility, but, okay,’ Jeongguk challenged.

‘We’re supposed to be looking out for all the kids, Jeongguk,’ Hoseok deflected, although it sounded like a weak excuse when the words left his mouth. ‘Look, is it really any of your business?’

Jeongguk looked timidly at him. Hoseok couldn’t help melting a bit – he hadn’t meant to come off so harshly.

‘Right… sorry, Hobi.’
'No, it’s okay, dude,’ Hoseok assured after a pause, and he reached over to give Jeongguk a friendly pat on the back. ‘Guess I’m still a little on edge from the end of semester.’

Jeongguk latches on to the new conversation topic with relief. ‘Yeah?’ he enquired.

They proceeded to give each other the condensed version of their past few months leading up to camp; Hoseok’s delayed existential crisis, as he put it, and Jeongguk’s grand gesture to prove himself to his parents. ‘I want them to know I can do stuff, I can commit to something, you know?’

Something about Jeongguk’s spark lit a warm fire of recognition in Hoseok’s heart; the same drive he felt that his younger self used to have. The younger’s buzz was intoxicating. Still, despite the proximity, Hoseok couldn’t help but feel a stronger pull to Jimin’s enigmatic energy, sneaking another quick glance in hopes to get a step closer to unravelling him before the bugle sounded for finish-up and showertime.

Chapter End Notes

this was so fun to write. alas i have never attended a summer camp myself so i hope the descriptions aren't inaccurate! more juicy jihope interactions next chapter, i promise!

a big thank you has to be said to kim (@dygonilly on twitter), for inspiring me and giving me the confidence to plot and write this crackhead concept. she has gorgeous fics on here that you should also absolutely read!

find me on twitter to yell about the drought of hobi POV on this hellsite xxx
It was only once their eyes flew up to inadvertently meet that Hoseok realised he’d been staring. Jimin raised his eyebrows gently, but it didn’t seem to be laced with provocation – rather, the soft warmth of daybreak. First light, a shift in time, moving into a warm sunrise.

‘Hey,’ Hoseok blurted out.

‘Hey,’ Jimin responded coolly.

Week two at Pine Lake raises more questions than answers.

Mornings in Cabin 4 continued to begin with Jeongguk smashing his forehead against the surprisingly sturdy underside of his bunk. Hoseok grew increasingly astounded at his co-counselor’s seeming inability to wake up like he did, as one slowly sifts through a blanket of fog on a cold morning. Rather, it was like a jolt of on-schedule adrenaline was sent coursing through the younger’s veins, his body clock hell-bent on self-sabotage. By the end of the first week, Hoseok gently suggested that he claim the empty top bed in order to avoid actually splitting his head open.

Apparently, Jeongguk had never heard a more ridiculous suggestion in his life.

‘Seriously?’ he had exclaimed, promptly swinging his legs to sit facing Hoseok. ‘The whole concept of sleeping on the top bunk is just offensive.’

‘Dude, it has side-railings. It’s not like you’re going to fall off.’ Hoseok tried to bite back a chuckle as the image dashed briefly into his mind.
‘But what if it collapses?’ Jeongguk insisted. ‘Have you seen the state of this timber?’ His arm reached over to the frame, gripping it and attempting to give the bed a convincing shake of frustration.

When the second week rolled around, Hoseok quietly resolved to start setting his alarm ten minutes before Jeongguk’s. Now, each new dawn started with moments of distant, echoey birdsong, before moving stealthily across the cabin to give his friend a calming pat on the shoulder, drawing him peacefully into the next day. Despite remaining unvoiced, the younger’s warmness on the first day of their new routine was enchantingly infectious – it was surprising how having one less bruise for their band of campers to jokingly tease him about could set a day’s tone.

It was choices like these which brought Hoseok to consider the value of small gestures. Gestures of his own, gestures made by others - the hidden words that lace grand deeds, the honesty contained in quieter ones. Hoseok had come back here to gaze at himself in the lake’s reflection – but, seeing Jeongguk’s smile of recognition that morning, he wondered whether he should start to cast his gaze more to those who stood beside him each day at the water’s edge.

**MONDAY – CONVINCED A CABIN OF PRETEENS THAT FRIENDSHIP BRACELETS ARE COOL AS F**UCK

It was hot.

The forecast from the night before promised a day of mid-morning warmth, transitioning sharply into sweltering humidity and sweat by the time lunch rolled around. Indeed, when the sun was sitting at its peak, rays of heat were beating evenly across Pine Lake - Hoseok was sure many campers would be learning the inevitable value of hats and sunscreen a little too late. After a vitalising morning in the water, he felt a wave of relief swim through his body at the reminder that their cabin would be indoors for today’s afternoon rotation. Leaving from the dining hall to their cabin’s respective allocations, Jeongguk was even bold enough to cast out a few devious waves to less lucky counselors, who were trudging towards more painful periods of basketball or rock-climbing.

The work at camp went through moments of difficulty – continuously, however, it did prove draining. From dawn to dusk, six days a week, Hoseok had to be totally alert to the needs of his campers. His one day off thus far had been mostly spent resting, and a follow-up afternoon in Arts and Crafts on the warmest day of summer was certainly very welcome. He ushered their group along the gravel path in haste, when he became charged with the sudden, vivid memory of a rotating pedestal fan that sat, upright and perfect, in the room’s corner.

‘Jeongguk, we need to claim the back-left table,’ he muttered, the whole group slowing as they
approached the specialist activity cabin.

‘Why?’

‘There’s a fan right next to it. It may save my life,’ Hoseok panted. Almost to prove his point, he took off his cap to run his fingers messily through his mop of hair, cringing a little at the freshly frizzy texture. Jeongguk nodded in recognition, forehead glistening a little as they both went to scale the creaky steps and claim their spot.

Pushing the doors open to the cabin, his relief doubled at the sight of an empty space. There were four large tables, spaced out evenly throughout the room. Two dusty windows adorned the space’s left and right sides, letting in a warm, yellow glow that disguised the outdoor heat. Despite being slightly stuffy inside, at least the air wasn’t sticky.

The Cabin 4 boys bolted for the corner table closest to the fan: two of them crouching down to figure out how to switch it on, the others manically pushing and prodding to claim the nearest seats. Hoseok and Jeongguk shared a fond chuckle, before walking over to ensure nobody was about to electrocute themselves. ‘We’ve trained them so well,’ he commented.

Before too long, a mess of crafting items and tools were laid out across the table. Fuzzy pipe-cleaners balanced precariously upon stacks of shaded paper and cardboard, tubs of glue that looked potentially out of date – any earlier comments of testosterone-fuelled criticism were silently retracted, buried deep amongst the kaleidoscopic table of textured materials. Despite it seeming as though Jackson and Mark were more heavily focused on peeling dried glue off their fingers than toying with the materials, campers and counselors alike seemed to be revelling in the simplicity of a calm afternoon.

‘Jeez, how early did you guys get here?’ a familiar voice chorused from Hoseok’s left. Turning his head, smirk already fixated, he let out a wave to Yoongi and the others from Cabin 3 who had arrived to crash the crafting party. Ignoring the way his heart hiccupped at the sight of Jimin in tow, Hoseok resolved to greet them by inviting the extra faces to sit at the neighbouring table.

It only took a few moments for him to come up with an excuse to meander closer to their camp rivals.

‘Yoon, my man,’ Hoseok declared, strolling loudly behind his friend to clamp his hands firmly on either shoulder. He dared a glance at Jimin, who was sitting opposite, deep in what appeared to be a playful conversation with a Cabin 3 camper.
‘You have never once called me that, Hobi,’ Yoongi responded, tone outwardly dark but laced with a familiar pleasantry that only few in the camp would pick up on. Jimin certainly seemed to notice, head tilting ever so slightly in the direction of their conversation.

‘Well, I’m switching it up. Roll with the punches, bud!’

Yoongi rolled his shoulders gently, letting out a cordial sigh of acknowledgement. Taking the hint, Hoseok started softly rubbing his friend’s shoulders, making small circles with his thumbs.

‘How do I compare to Seokjin-ah, huh?’ Oddly, Hoseok thought he felt Yoongi tense for a brief second under his touch – but before he even had time to be confused, the sensation had melted away, as footprints wash back into an ocean at dusk.

‘Jin actually puts his back into it,’ he affirmed, no hint of the prior jolt of restlessness in his voice. *Maybe something happened over the weekend? A fight?* Hoseok resolved to leave it alone – they were among others, after all.

‘What’s that supposed to mean?’ he quipped, keeping the fun edge while steering their banter away from taking an icy turn.

‘Just looks like you make a shit masseuse, to me.’ Hoseok glanced ahead to meet his gaze with Jimin, smiling devilishly from opposite the table. The child sitting next to him started cackling in ecstasy at the hilarity of a counselor throwing out a casual curse word, face burning tomato red. Sighing in exasperation, Jimin rolled his eyes, pushing his hair back reflexively as he turned to the hysterical camper. Hoseok couldn’t help letting his vision trail softly across Jimin’s hands, the two silver rings on his middle and index finger, the way his golden locks gently fell back into place, sitting softly askew and delicate on his head –

‘You didn’t hear me say that, right?’ He tried to look serious, speaking to the boy, but it was pretty clear that Jimin’s bashful laughter was desperate to burst out - to echo throughout the cabin, to wash over everyone.

‘What… *shit*?’ the camper swore in response.

A chorus of snorts from the other Cabin 3 boys. One slip of the tongue among friends was enough to cause ultimate preteen anarchy, apparently.
‘Ah, I’m going to pretend I didn’t just hear that,’ Yoongi lamented. ‘But keep up the cursing and I might not let you make a friendship bracelet today.’

Yoongi’s threat seemed to catch the whole cabin off-guard. Hoseok took a few moments to himself to conclude that, no, he was absolutely not being sarcastic, Yoongi had, indeed, just taunted a twelve-year-old boy with the horrifying proposition of not being allowed to make a friendship bracelet. The kids promptly exploded into a cacophonous harmony of cackles. The matching grin drooped off Hoseok’s lips, however, when he peered over Yoongi’s shoulder to see a cherry-red elastic wire, twisted delicately around a vibrant blue counterpart. Threaded neatly along the bracelet, already, were the letters S, E, O – and Hoseok had seen enough.

*Did something actually happen between them?*

Hoseok pulled his hands off Yoongi’s shoulders abruptly. The words tumbled out of his mouth before he’d even had enough time to properly process them.

‘Hey!’ he commanded, turning his head to take in the small group seated in front of him. ‘Friendship bracelets are wicked. It’s like…’ he grasped abstractly to conjure up the appropriate teen lingo, ‘…telling the world who your ride-or-dies are.’

There was a snicker, but it was less harrowing than the previous. He couldn’t see Yoongi’s face, but his whole frame had certainly tensed up. Setting Hoseok on slight edge, he nervously continued.

‘You know, it’s like when you wear team colours or a school uniform, but…more you. It’s letting your friend know that you’re on the same team, you…you have their back, no matter what’s going on.’

He thought he heard Yoongi sigh at that. A branch rustled outside – perhaps it was just the afternoon breeze.

‘So…’ one of his campers, Mark, offered up, ‘…like gang colours?’

The tension dropped – although, Hoseok thought that maybe it had only existed, momentarily, between the older members of the room in the first place. ‘Sure, dude, gang colours.’
Hoseok let the boys delve into the details of what the appropriate *gang colours* to be adorned on Cabin 3 and 4 bracelets were, feeling unsure of whether he had overstepped as he resigned back to their table in the corner. He noticed Yoongi smile softly at Jimin, nodding, mouthing some unknown conversation – the two ended their exchange in a round of warm laughter, settling Hoseok’s nerves for the moment. He felt an unexpected warmth rush to his cheeks when he noticed the way Jimin’s body fell lightly against the table whenever he found something really funny, eyes scrunched at the corners.

*Cute,* Hoseok’s mind abruptly offered. He thought he heard the boy say something about *keeping my mouth shut around him,* but quickly dismissed it when Jeongguk asked him to pass the glitter.

- **THURSDAY – SHOWED JIMIN THE WAY**

The rest of the week bore on, continuing to fluctuate predictably between exhausting and exhilarating. When Hoseok’s morning alarm rung on Thursday, it was much more resembling the former. It had been a night of oft-interrupted slumber. The boys were decently energised after the latest Avengers flick was shown for the camp-wide movie night, and Hoseok swore if he had to hear the word *Thanos* one more time…

The familiar rowdy din of a new day resonated through the dining hall that morning. Sitting at the counselors table and laughing along to the complaints of others over toast and hash browns, Hoseok’s fatigue slowly began to evaporate from his body. Despite there being no seating plan for counselors during mealtime, he couldn’t help but feel his chest sink when his eyes drifted to spy Seokjin sitting, irregularly, at the far end of the table. His movements were animated and loud, laughing along with some vaguely familiar faces that Hoseok obviously hadn’t interacted with enough to remember.

‘Where’s Yoongi?’ he mumbled to himself.

‘Hmm?’ Jeongguk murmured lukewarmly.

Hoseok scanned systematically along the row of counselors, delaying his reply just in case the lack of sleep was betraying his brain. Smaller groups of new workers, counselors-in-training that Hoseok didn’t recognise from his earlier days at camp – and Jimin, with Yoongi noticeably absent from either his or Seokjin’s side. Jimin was taking sips of orange juice, sitting opposite Hoseok to make it clear that his gaze was flicking to his wrist watch at an intriguingly regular pace.

It was only once their eyes flew up to inadvertently meet that Hoseok realised he’d been staring. Jimin raised his eyebrows gently, but it didn’t seem to be laced with provocation – rather, the soft
warmth of daybreak. First light, a shift in time, moving into a warm sunrise.

‘Hey,’ Hoseok blurted out.

‘Hey,’ Jimin responded coolly. A few steady seconds later, ‘Have I got jam on my face or something?”

The stirring edge to the other boy’s words had unknowingly returned. Hoseok found himself frustrated that he still couldn’t determine where the unspoken boundary between them lay, whether it was inviting or unnerving.

He decided to settle on inviting, for the moment. ‘No, just checking you out, of course.’ Just testing the waters. Good fun. Hoseok struck an invisible tally mark against his name at the sight of Jimin choking on his drink at the unexpected remark.

‘Don’t worry, I was actually just going to ask where your number 2 is,’ he went on, heart tugging a little at the unfamiliar sensation that came with seeing Jimin speechless. ‘Not like him to miss out on Thursday hash browns.’

He gave an eventual shrug. ‘I don’t know, man, he said he was sick this morning. He didn’t come to the movie last night, either.’

_He wasn’t at the movie last night? _For a moment, Hoseok was disappointed in himself for not realising, before grimacing at the recollection that he _had_ dashed out to clean up some suspiciously orange vomit for a good portion of the film.

Hoseok let out a hum, nodding in acknowledgement. He found himself, again, wondering what the line was, especially considering he hadn’t really been a constant presence in his friends’ life for the past few years. Inadvertent messages of pleasantries scattered along a timeline of Facebook updates perhaps didn’t qualify to prod into the intricacies of a friendship like Yoongi and Hoseok’s.

‘Question,’ Jeongguk offered, interrupting the odd pause that had settled between Hoseok and Jimin. ‘If I drink _super_ cold orange juice, do you think that’d be a good coffee substitute?’

Jimin’s laugh was like bells, ringing and swaying, almost infectiously melodic. ‘How cold are we talking?’
‘Just out of the fridge…chilled. Just cold enough to snap you out of drowsiness, you know?’

‘It’s a temporary fix to a more permanent problem,’ Hoseok added. ‘The permanent problem being that you’re delusional and coffee is just superior.’

‘You’re just saying that because you’re a business major and it’s part of the business major code to pretend you like coffee.’

‘Give it a few years, Jeongguk. You’ll switch out your juice boxes for adult drinks, I’m sure of it.’

The morning had broken, fresh breezes and glow dancing into the dining hall as everyone finished the last scraps of their meal. It was easy to drift out of stress when Hoseok was among friends, in a place as oddly transient as this – things would work themselves out, he finally concluded, wolfing down his last piece of marmalade toast as the sun began to scatter through the windows.

**

‘Hobi?’

Hoseok flicked his gaze up, quietly pleased to see that it was Jimin. The sun shone across his hair, making it appear glossier – he hated how he noticed that there was a bit of sunscreen by his nose that hadn’t been rubbed in properly…

‘What’s crack-a-lacking, Jiminie?’

‘I’m going to ignore the fact that you just said crack-a-lacking un-ironically,’ he said, shaking his head in exaggerated disappointment. Hoseok couldn’t help letting a laugh slip out before Jimin continued. ‘As much as I regret having to actually come to you…’

‘Say no more. You demand my leadership advice – the kids don’t listen to you! Don’t take it personally, I think you’re shorter then all of them so it’s going to be hard to establish dominance.’
Jimin gave him a gentle hit, scowling. ‘Ah, you’re so annoying! I was actually coming to ask you where the maintenance cabin is, there’s a hole in the roof of our cabin but Yoongi’s busy with the kids and sent me to go. Figured you probably know since you’re apparently Pine Lake’s returning hero.’

*Of course Yoongi didn’t want to go,* Hoseok thought with a sigh. Then again, this was probably a good opportunity to cunningly enquire about whatever drama was happening between Seokjin and his best friend.

‘Fine, my break’s almost over anyway.’ He got up with a stretch (not disappointed at the way his shirt accidentally lifted up for Jimin to *maybe* see) and walked over to let Jeongguk know that he’d be back before the next afternoon rotation.

They strolled in silence for a little while. Hoseok took in the surroundings, the main path bound by soft grass and framed by rustling branches. Glimpses of afternoon light speckled across his face, making him squint a little as he looked over at Jimin. The other boy was taking in the sight, no doubt enjoying the brief moment of respite from their busy schedules.

‘It’s so quiet,’ he said, finally, looking back to meet Hoseok’s glance.

*Why do we keep doing that?*

‘Yeah,’ he replied, breaking the look instinctively. ‘Usually everyone heads for the lake or the campfire site for the free hour. Maintenance is closer to the entrance – it’s pretty quiet around this part for any time of day, really.’

He felt Jimin nod in his peripheral vision. If he was bothered by the hasty rupture of their glance in conversation, he didn’t seem to show it. Then again, there had been very few moments where Hoseok felt that Jimin wasn’t in *total* control of the way he presented himself. He felt almost envious of the perfect image conveyed, effortlessly, fluidly, naturally.

‘See, just there by the tree,’ he pointed ahead, gesturing at the smaller cabin.

‘Ah, great,’ Jimin responded. They paused for a moment, halting a short distance from the cabin. *Why did it feel weird all of a sudden?*
‘Hobi! Jimin!’ A familiar yell echoed from the maintenance doorway, Seokjin breaking the sudden confusion Hoseok had felt at the thought of leaving Jimin. The taller man was gesturing wildly for them to come closer, smiling as they approached. ‘I was sitting in my room and I saw you coming through the window! What’s crack-a-lacking?’

Hoseok snapped his head at Jimin, smiling widely and knowingly to evidence the validity of the phrase he’d dropped earlier.

‘You all speak so weirdly,’ Jimin chided, but the overriding pleasantry was clear. ‘Basically, Cabin 3 has a hole in the roof. Yoongi sent me over here to tell you.’

Hoseok could’ve sworn he saw Seokjin’s eyes glaze over momentarily, before the boy in red nodded slowly. ‘Alright. I’ll check it out later.’ He paused, as though he was trying to decide what to say next. Seokjin was a lot of things, but short of things to say was certainly never one of them.

‘How long until you guys are back at the cabins?’ he finally asked, voice strong and unwavering.

‘Uh,’ Jimin looked to Hoseok momentarily, before returning his gaze to Seokjin. ‘We’ve got afternoon rotation starting in a bit, Yoongi and I will be out kayaking with the kids for a good hour or two.’

A nod. ‘Alright. I’ll check it out then.’ Seokjin gazed down from the doorway, resting his frame against it casually. He glanced quickly between the two boys, eyebrows raised in contemplation, before thanking them for letting him know and sending them back on their way – a muttering of got some other stuff to do.

‘That was kind of weird, don’t you think?’ Hoseok enquired, after a few moments of walking back to their respective allocations together in thoughtful silence. Their pace matched on the path, gravel crunching underneath their feet to maintain a regular tempo – like a grainy heartbeat, almost.

‘Hobi, you know him better than I do,’ Jimin reminded him. ‘I don’t really know what’s going on.’

Crunch, crunch, crunch.

‘It was good of you to do what you did on Monday.’
Hoseok didn’t slow their walking pace, despite feeling his heart accelerate to a casual double time. Right, so they were talking about this, now. He snuck a side glance at Jimin, before humming in recognition.

‘I don’t know Yoongi that well, but he’s…obviously got some stuff going on. I think he’s trying to keep everything private, but I could tell he appreciated how you…deflected everyone’s attention off of him.’

Hoseok nodded. ‘He would’ve made it pretty clear by now if it was the wrong move. I don’t tend to expect actual thank you’s from him.’

‘Like anyone would want to sink low enough to thank your smug ass, anyway.’

The remark flew off Jimin’s tongue, and Hoseok grabbed onto it. Moving out of emotional territory was good – classic banter, he knew the realms of that much better.

‘My smug ass is what keeps me on every gross corporate tycoon’s ‘To Hire’ list back in the city. Can’t be scared to be assertive.’

Jimin absorbed the comment for a second, before turning to smile deviously at Hoseok.

‘Can’t say you really strike me as a scary businessman right now.’

Hoseok tried to model his heartrate off their footsteps. Tried, failed.

‘Just picture me with hair product and Saint Laurent. I don’t usually look like a crazy hippie, you know.’

Their pace broke as Jimin burst out into laughter. He doubled over a little, reaching out his hand to clasp against Hoseok’s forearm. He almost reflexively jolted his arm away, but let Jimin rest it there for the moment as he instinctively went to memorise the way his touch felt against his skin.
‘Ah, Jiminie, what’s so funny?’ He realised that his cheeks were starting to ache from smiling.

He straightened up, eyes still scrunched in clear amusement. ‘You? In Saint Laurent? You are the most Target-looking motherfucker I’ve ever seen.’

Hoseok couldn’t help gasping, but it was mostly out of the irony of the comment. ‘Jimin, have you seen your roots?’ He pointed tauntingly at the boy’s head, even though there was only an inch or two of darker hair pushing through, before Jimin reached out (again), latching his hand around Hoseok’s finger and pushing it firmly away.

‘Ah, screw you, there’s no time to fix it here!’

He prodded a little further, relaxing into the conversation’s flow, now. ‘So, was this your mum I’m finding myself moment?’

‘Hey, my mum thinks I suit blonde!’ You do, he almost conceded, but that would ruin the fun, so he sighed vaguely instead. Hoseok was surprised when Jimin followed on from the off-hand comment.

‘The finding myself moment is kind of coming to an end now, actually.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Yeah. Gap year sort of thing, you know?’ Jimin’s tone was much steadier, now, recovering from the earlier bout of giggles. Hoseok was surprised momentarily at how intently he listened. ‘Classic post-high-school crisis. I’ve just been trying to work and get up college credits before I move away in a few weeks.’

‘Cool,’ he acknowledged. ‘Major?’

‘Sociology,’ Jimin smiled.

‘You’d better not be like Jeongguk,’ Hoseok insisted, chuckling. ‘Get ready to drink coffee, and lots of it.’
‘I’ve accepted my blood is about to be an even mix of coffee and alcohol.’

‘Yep, your body is a temple. Love it.’

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Even though Hoseok enjoyed basketball, he found it difficult to play his best game that afternoon when the chorus of Jimin’s laughter after a good comeback was all he could hear.

He slept much better that night.

FRIDAY – APOLOGISED? TRIED TO APOLOGISE

When Hoseok was much younger, he used to sit in their family’s living room after school and wait for his father to get home from work. He would fidget, peeking out the front window, keeping an ear out for the sound of a car door closing shut and footsteps approaching the foyer. His mother bought him a watch for his 8th birthday, taught him how to differentiate between the two miraculous spindles that edged ever closer to the next hour.

Each afternoon’s waiting paradoxically, then, became a much more painful, but also exciting, process. Staying hyper-fixated on the achingly slow movements of the minute hand seemed to bring the world to a halt around him – for all Hoseok knew, when he was waiting by the clock, birds paused in their flight and waterfalls froze still. Despite this, those inductive moments where he drifted deep into thought, where he grew focused on something else, made it even more exhilarating when (as though he’d been locked in trance) he’d refocus to the sound of a car engine dying and the minute hand miraculously far accelerated to the very time he’d been pining for.

He found himself thinking of those transient afternoons on the second Friday morning of camp. Between sunrise and sundown, it felt like three whole days were condensed into one. Moments sat by the lake, listening to the birds, walking with friends, stretched out into blissful aeons. Even so, two weeks in already, he couldn’t decide whether the progression of time in this temporary retreat was something that relieved him or terrified him. Though he’d spent the past week trying to do more for Yoongi, for Jeongguk, (for Jimin), it was difficult to settle the gnawing uncertainty that he was missing something essential that would jolt him forward to the abstract epiphany waiting at the climax of the endlessly slow minute hand.
Perhaps it was this growing edge that made today with Jimin feel a bit … off.

They were both standing next to each other, facing the camp rock-climbing wall, dotted with holds of varying shapes and colours. After the safety induction run by a new, specialist counselor (Tae, Hoseok thinks he introduced himself as), Hoseok and Jimin had hooked themselves up to harnesses – not to climb, but to stand below and keep the ropes taut for the adrenaline junkies among their cabins. As one of Jimin’s campers let out a hellish yell, attempting to scale the wall like some B-grade Spider-Man, Hoseok felt like he could cut the icy groan of his colleague with a knife.

‘Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning,’ he mentioned, trying to figure out what was wrong without…well, asking.

‘I’m fine.’

Hoseok raised his eyebrows at Jimin’s cold reply. The usual fun edge to their conversations was totally absent. He wondered whether he’d done something to annoy Jimin, but concluded that was ridiculous when he cast his memory back to their entertaining walk after visiting Seokjin yesterday.

‘O-kay.’

Hoseok jolted his climber’s rope up suddenly, pulling it tight to catch up with the pace of his camper. Getting into a rhythm, the rope reached its limit when he realised that Jackson had made it to the top of the wall.

‘Yeah! Nice one, Jay!’ he yelled out in encouragement. The boy started laughing in glee, gathering some applause from the others in Cabin 4, eagerly waiting their turn.

The lack of acknowledgement or encouragement from Jimin struck Hoseok as exceedingly odd, especially when he gave his own camper a mere hi-five upon coming down from the top of the wall. No over-the-top cheers? No jesting and rubbing in Hoseok’s face how Cabin 3 proved their superiority once again?

It kind of started to piss Hoseok off when he stayed reserved and kept any hint of cool counselor Jimin to himself – three kids in a row. Even if he’d slept badly or had a bad morning – whatever it was – it wasn’t really an excuse to translate that over to the kids they were supposed to be taking care of. *He can’t even just fake it for an hour?*
‘Hey, Jiminie,’ he mentioned, after the fourth Cabin 3 boy went up with little excitement. ‘Wouldn’t hurt to hype them up a little more. Or at least switch in with Yoongi, your kids look kind of miserable.’

Jimin yanked the rope tight, startling Hoseok a little. Jesus. He didn’t usually find the counselor genuinely intimidating, but he was starting to really be put off.

‘Just leave me alone, Hoseok. Not now.’

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Fridays were counselors’ nights, consisting of quiet activities organised by the camp after the kids had gone to bed to blow off some steam for an hour or two. Last week, Hoseok had dreadfully looked forward to it, and he had tried to feed off of Jeongguk’s excitement that evening as they walked over to the dining hall. He’d managed to put on a faux smile by the time they made it through the big wooden doors, but it became a lot harder to maintain when his gut twisted at the immediate sight of Jimin. He couldn’t figure out if he was relieved, or stressed out, that he was here.

Jimin sat close enough to Hoseok that it was immediately very clear he was being avoided – he seemed pleasant enough in conversing with others around them, but didn’t even grace Hoseok with a look.

He hated being on Jimin’s bad side. He’d barely even said anything, he thought, but it seemed like Jimin had labelled their weird little dynamic as pretty much irrecoverable. The thought made his heart wrench pathetically. Tonight was supposed to be fun – they’d laid down a few cheeky dares as to
who could eat the largest quantity of spicy Mexican food earlier in the week, but, the nachos tasted stale without the fun premise of Jimin egging him on.

Minutes pass, conversations pass, the night moves. When Jimin excused himself to go to the bathroom, Hoseok resolved to catch him on his way back out. Waiting by the door, he felt his heart rate step up with each second passing. He barely even knew what he wanted to confront him about – or why he was so upset about Jimin just being moody. He was still deciding when the boy swung the door open – Hoseok reached out and grabbed his wrist firmly. Trying to ignore the rush of warmth that flew through him at the sensation of his hand on Jimin’s soft, honey skin (Honey skin? Maybe I’m the one that should get a grip), he managed to splutter out –

‘We should talk outside.’

Jimin groaned, but didn’t put up any resistance, following him outside. Hoseok didn’t let go of his wrist (didn’t want to) until they were outside the hall, standing by a wall shadowed in darkness.

Hoseok took a gulp, peeling his fingers off Jimin’s skin, and started the intervention with ‘What the fuck did I do, Jimin? You’ve been acting so weird to me all day.’

Jimin laughed, but it was so, so wrong. ‘Are you serious? Jesus, you’re too much. Just leave me alone, I didn’t want to talk today.’

He felt a pang in his chest. Leave me alone?

‘Oh, my God. Jiminie, if it’s about anything that I said earlier…’ he hesitated, trying to think about anything he could’ve thrown out rather than get a grip, ‘…it’s on you for taking it so seriously.’ And then, the presuming nail in the coffin. ‘It’s just camp banter.’

Jimin sighed. It was dark outside, but his eyes glistened in the moonlit reflection, darting across Hoseok’s face, before settling on his eyes. That look – it was endlessly enigmatic, endlessly confusing, the looks that they shared. This one, now, just seemed filled with melancholy, before shifting to something darker.

‘You just…you just don’t get it.’

‘What don’t I get, Jiminie? Tell me what I’ve done so wrong to make you this pissed off at me.’
Another sigh. Laced with danger.

‘It’s just…it’s so easy for you to just take everything on the chin, all fucking day. I’m trying so hard to get this right, to – to make this count and figure my shit out before I do “move away for real”, as you so kindly put it.’

His heart sunk. Oh.

Jimin wasn’t yelling at all, but the venom in his tone was resonant enough to strike a chord in Hoseok’s heart. He wasn’t done elaborating yet, apparently.

‘My dad called me this morning. He asked me how the babysitting was going and how long it was going to be before I got a real job. It made me feel like shit, and you distracting me from work this morning wasn’t helping, okay?’

‘I-I’m sorry, I didn’t know that, but…’ Hoseok couldn’t help still feeling slightly offended, so he continued. ‘…but I definitely wasn’t distracting you. I barely even said anything to you!’

‘It’s not fucking professional, Hoseok, okay?’

‘Are you serious?’ Now, Hoseok really felt like Jimin was out of line. When had they ever been lazy in front of the kids, or bad counselors, because they had some banter? ‘You don’t mean that. We work at a goddamn summer camp. Our Cabins are efficient, and it motivates the kids if we play up on our…on our cute little rivalry.’ Hoseok’s voice wavered at the label. It didn’t feel right. But he continued, anyway. ‘We can still have fun and be good at what we do. Loosen up a bit, Jesus Christ.’

Jimin shook his head, moving to walk back towards the cabins. Shit, he’d really gone and blown it now. ‘Hoseok, what we have is not a ‘cute rivalry’, or whatever the fuck you just called us.’

His heart flashed with an image of them laughing, walking through camp. Us? No, this wasn’t how this was supposed to go.

‘For someone who’s older than me, you’re still such a child. Just stick with Jeongguk from now on,
yeah? He seems more your maturity level.’

Hoseok didn’t try to stop Jimin from leaving. The other boy seemed to be upset for a lot of reasons, but he didn’t want to make things worse. He didn’t feel like going back inside to well-meaning, questioning glances, so stood by for a moment, listening idly to the echoes of the night, before trudging back to his own Cabin.

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Unsurprisingly, Hoseok didn’t sleep well that night. He’d pretended to be asleep when Jeongguk came back from counselors’ night – maybe he was as childish as Jimin had suggested. Thoughts of what he had said kept flashing into his mind. He found himself unsure of how much of it he had meant and wondered if Jimin was feeling the same. Mostly, he felt uneasy at that one word – *us*.

*Us was laced with unity. Us was laced with teamwork. Us was laced with…growing. With learning. With forgiveness.*

**

The weekend’s first light had barely poked its way underneath the drawn curtains when Hoseok went to clear his mind by the lake. He’d only gotten a few hours of troubled rest. When he checked his phone and saw that it was quarter past five, he gave up on getting a sleep-in and felt that it would be better to start the day on a more reflective note. Literally, metaphorically – whatever. (He smiled at the thought of Namjoon giving him a hi-five at that doozy of a pun.)

A wave of comfort washed steadily over him when he finally approached the lake. Stepping down to the edge of the wooden dock, he took off his sneakers and left his toes just dangling across the water’s surface. Hoseok marvelled at the way tiny ripples cascaded across the deep blue surface, spreading out, echoing into each other until they dissipated into the further depths.

He used to sit here a lot. It was easy to marvel at the vastness of the water, to feel like your problems were small in comparison. Trying to channel that same mantra now, Hoseok gathered a few small pebbles from his pocket that he had spontaneously thought to gather on the way over here. He palmed them, rolling a thinner one over for a few moments in his right hand, before casting it out to skip across the water’s surface.

Hoseok (past, present) merged into one as the stone flicked once, twice, thrice, across the lake,
before taking undefined moments in time to *plop* down in finality and sink to the sandy floor. Watching how things skimmed the surface was fun, but eventually they all settled somewhere deep underneath. Guilt surfaced in Hoseok’s mind, and he went to put the remaining stones in his pocket.

Moments passed. The sun began to edge over the mountains in the far distance, and gentle rays began to dance across the pearlescent water. Today, they looked especially radiant. His eyes darted across the water’s perimeter – feeling the beginnings of morning glow radiate across his skin was almost comforting. As he was starting the horizontal scan of Pine Lake over again, he recognised a familiar figure moving closer in the corner of his view – head darting over, he saw just the person he was convincing himself that he didn’t want to stay away from anymore.

There was no avoiding it. They both made tentative eye contact as Jimin halted what appeared to be a morning run from a few metres away. Instead of burning flames, it felt instead like they were walking on nervous embers. Hoseok reached out his arm and motioned anxiously for the boy to come closer – to not turn around, walk away, end everything so soon. He felt a wave of relief engulf him as Jimin swooped back his hair and roamed closer towards the dock.

And, then, he was standing next to him. Staring down at his interlocked fingers, Hoseok offered out the first tentative olive branch – still unsure of what Jimin wanted to say, he started with a neutral, ‘So, you’re here.’

‘I’m here.’ Hoseok slowly turned to see that Jimin was looking down, sighing. ‘Do you mind if I sit?’

Hoseok nodded, trying a small smile. He hoped it didn’t appear as a grimace, although he couldn’t help feeling lighter when they were both sitting close to each other once more. Maybe things were salvageable.

They both sat together, like that, as though each didn’t want to be the first to talk. The gravity of this invisible thing that made last night so difficult weighed heavily, present and consuming, on Hoseok’s heart. Birds began to chorus, breaking the trying silence gently – a mysterious invitation to reach out…perhaps. Just as Hoseok turned his head, mouth opening to fumble his way through a foggy explanation of *what happened yesterday*, Jimin mirrored him and began to blurt out his flood of brimming words.

‘Look,’ he began resolutely. ‘After getting back to my cabin last night, I sulked for a little while. About what my dad said, about what you said. But…I thought about my campers.’ He let out a grand sigh, as though he was willing the tension to leave his body. ‘I thought about how much they laugh when they see us talking…well, talking *shit* to each other.’
Hoseok smiled fondly at that. He liked this Jimin, the one that only cursed sparingly, for comedic effect. He never wanted Jimin to curse at him with venom again – he wrestled with the understanding that the other boy wasn’t the only one who had been so careless with words, yesterday. But, still, he let Jimin continue, nodding him along.

‘I thought more about how much they were thrown off by me yesterday, and how weird things would probably be if…if we suddenly changed overnight, as well. I don’t want to complicate things.’

Another breath. Jimin turned now to face the lake – his profile was positively glowing, the water casting gentle speckles of golden glow against his cheeks, his eyes, his lips (his lips) –

‘I suppose I might’ve overreacted a little to your comment.’ Jimin began to subconsciously twirl the ring on his index finger, and Hoseok let himself notice how the jewellery caught on the light as well, but how it could never shine as much as its wearer. He went on, still twirling the ring, left to right. ‘I’ve just been kind of stressed about what happens when this whole summer does finally come to an end. I guess it hit a nerve.’ He turned once more – Hoseok ran to chase his glance, following it up from his hands to his shoulders to his cheeks to his eyes. ‘I shouldn’t have been so cold to you, and I’m sorry. I don’t want us to be…’ Hoseok found himself overthinking the pause, once he realised they were now sitting quite close. Don’t want us to be what?

‘I don’t want us to be unprofessional for the rest of the summer.’

It seemed like Jimin took some time to consider his final statement, but he had considered it, and Hoseok found himself needing to respect that. All in all, he felt pleasant surprise, gentle sparks, at how much Jimin had opened up – how much he wanted to know more about him, his confidence, charisma.

I don’t want us to be unprofessional.

‘It’s kind of on me as well, dude.’ Hoseok eventually conceded. ‘I…I didn’t really know that you were feeling that way. I didn’t really think much about what I was saying. I’ll…try to be more careful.’

‘No, no,’ Jimin replied promptly, shaking his head with a shadow of a smile making its way across his face. That odd wave of warmth returned quietly. ‘I don’t want you to filter yourself. We’re good now, seriously.’
‘Okay.’

‘Seriously. Hobi, you’re a bit of a loose cannon, sure, but I like how you force me to roll with the punches.’ The warmth must just be the sun’s growing glare, surely. It’s starting to lighten up rapidly, now – the day, the mood.

Hoseok eventually settles, after casting his gaze to the furthest side of the lake in hopes that the ambiguous heat filling his cheeks won’t be picked up on. After a few moments of preventative pausing, he attempts to switch back to a common expression shared between the pair – a classic smirk.

‘Thank God. You’re just too fun to stir up, Jiminie. How could I have survived without pissing you off every time Cabin 4 absolutely obliterates you?’

‘Don’t get too cocky, bud, you forget that I’m still the dodgeball champion,’ Jimin quipped, slapping his hand lightly against Hoseok’s thigh. It was meant to be a playful gesture, and Hoseok didn’t jolt (thank God) but the hairs on his legs betrayed him by standing on end at the unexpected touch. Just edgy from the convo, he convinced himself.

‘Yeah, yeah, go finish your run before I push you into this lake.’ Jimin laughed, a real gorgeous velvety chirrup, before smoothly pushing himself back onto his feet and trotting away.

‘I’ll see you later, Hobi.’

Hoseok cast a smile to the now-empty space next to him at the return of the nickname. The warmth in his chest had crept up slowly, and it felt a lot like the inexplicable moment, the ignition he had been searching so longingly for. Not in Pine Lake’s reflection, he recalled his thoughts fondly from earlier in the week, but in the people that stand beside you at the water’s edge.

It had been a good week.

Chapter End Notes

so glad to be back in the swing of this work again.

next chap has one of the scenes i’m most excited to write, it came to me before i’d even
started plotting the fic properly so stay tuned for that gem!!

if you enjoyed the update, please feel free to let me know about it! i love my jihope boys and you can find me ranting about them plus the rest of bangtan on twitter!

lots of love xx

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!