Never Alone

by S0lstice

Summary

While on vacation in northern Japan, the boys wake up in the middle of the night to find that Jungkook is missing. Meanwhile, an incident has left Jungkook injured and bleeding in the middle of the woods with no way to get back to the house.

Notes

This is something that I have been working on for quite a while now, and have planned far enough ahead that I think I can safely start posting it. :) Prepare for a lot of angst. :D

See the end of the work for more notes.
Yoongi's brow furrowed in annoyance as a blast of cold air hit him in the face, making his dark hair fly about his head. He felt the urge to yell at Jungkook to roll the window back up but resisted, instead closing his eyes and leaning his head back on the headrest. Half of the members, their youngest included, had been acting like grown puppies ever since they landed in Sapporo over a half hour ago and to be honest, Yoongi couldn't blame them. They were minutes away from starting a seven day vacation. A pure vacation; no cameras, no staff, just the seven of them.

"You're letting all the cold air in," Namjoon said casually, not so much a complaint as an observation. Still, the point got across and Yoongi heard a small "Aw," from Jungkook before the wind disappeared from his face.

"I assume you all agree that I should get the biggest room to myself when we get there," Seokjin announced from the driver's seat of their rented van. Yoongi could almost hear the smug grin in his voice. "Without me, you'd be walking on the side of the road right now. I'm owed a lot."

"Hobi and Jungkookie can drive too," Yoongi reminded lazily, keeping his eyes closed.

"Ah, they're amateurs though."

"I didn't see you driving around Malta," Jungkook challenged. Seokjin didn't seem to have a response to that other than to sputter indignantly.

"Hyung, the house is going to be just up ahead on your right," Jimin said from the passenger seat, his eyes trained dutifully on his phone.

"Thank you navigator Jimin!" Seokjin praised loudly. "Here is a useful dongsaeng, take note all of you. Jiminie gets the second largest room. The rest of you can fight over whatever is left."

"I'm so happy to not be in a hotel for once," Taehyung said, staring out the window at the trees as they whipped by. "I wish we could rent our own house everywhere we go. It's so much more private."

"I would agree with you if it weren't for the half hour trip just to get back to the city," Namjoon replied.

Yoongi opened his eyes at the sound of gravel crunching under the wheels of the van and saw a large sage green house with white trim come into view.

"Is that it?" Hoseok asked excitedly and squished Yoongi into the window as he leaned over to get a better look. "It looks big!"

"Yah," Yoongi complained and shoved him back, more out of principle than any real annoyance.

"It is big," Namjoon confirmed, already starting to gather his belongings and flashing them a brilliant smile. "It has three bedrooms with a king sized bed in each one, and it even has a game room and apparently a huge tv."

"Three beds?" Jungkook asked suspiciously. "If it's two people per bed, where is the last person going to sleep?"

"You can sleep on the kitchen floor, Jungkook-ah," Seokjin suggested lightly. He brought the van to
a stop outside the house and everyone began to filter out.

"I don't think so, hyung."

"We'll figure it out!" Namjoon called back as he led them in.

The interior of the house was modern but in a homely way, full of tans and warm grays. Everyone dispersed to explore the bedrooms, bathrooms, game room, and even the closets. After a cursory look around, Yoongi dumped his bags and stepped out onto the small deck at the back of the house. The air was crisp and clean and he inhaled slowly in appreciation, settling down on one of the wooden steps that led into the back yard. Truthfully it was more of a field than a yard, unkempt yet charming in a free and natural sort of way. Beyond that was a wide expanse of forest that stretched as far as he could see, eventually disappearing into a series of low hills in the distance. The leaves had already turned the colors of fall, making a beautiful sea of golden yellows, crimson and brown.

The screen door creaked behind him and he was joined by Seokjin and Jungkook.

"Ah, the air is so nice up here." Seokjin gave a long, contented sigh and sank into one of the deck chairs nearby, pulling his hands into the sleeves of his soft pink sweatshirt.

Jungkook walked to the edge of the deck and stared out at the woods, stretching his arms above his head with a grunt as though just waking up. A few seconds went by in comfortable silence, then Jungkook pointed at the trees and turned back to look at them, his eyes bright and curious.

"Hyung," he said, addressing neither of them and both of them as he often did. "There's a path into the woods."

Yoongi followed his finger and saw the beginnings of a dirt path leading into the forest. Jungkook looked at him hopefully. Yoongi simply raised his eyebrows in return and the maknae quickly turned his gaze to Seokjin instead.

"Hyung, take a walk with me."

Seokjin just stared back with an expression that said that was the last thing he wanted to do. "We just got here," he whined.

"I know," Jungkook said easily. He gave Seokjin's arm a soft slap. "Come on."

"I want to sit, not walk."

"We've been sitting all day," Jungkook countered, giving him another slap, this time on the back of his neck. Seokjin tried to smack his hand away but missed.

"Didn't Namjoon say that land was used for hunting or something?" Seokjin looked into the trees with what seemed like genuine worry. "Aren't there bears?"

"That was years and years ago," Yoongi said, and leaned forward to rest his elbows on his knees. Namjoon had shared some of the knowledge he'd gathered about the area on the plane. Apparently Yoongi was the only one who listened, even if it was just barely and he had pretended to be asleep at the time. "Supposedly there haven't been bears or hunting here for a very long time. Might be some aggressive squirrels though."

"Don't worry, I'll protect you," Jungkook said, tugging on Seokjin's sleeve. Then a smirk pulled on his lips. "I know you're not as durable as you were in your younger years."
The oldest member's demeanor immediately changed to playful anger. "Listen, I'm stronger than you'll ever be. I only go easy on you because you're just a baby maknae and I might accidentally kill you if I used my full power." He got up and pretended to box with their youngest member, bobbing his head and punching the air around him. Jungkook just gave a small laugh, eyes crinkling, and hopped off the deck onto the grass. He started walking towards the path and sure enough Seokjin followed after him.

Yoongi watched them play fight all the way across the field, which mostly consisted of Seokjin trying to hit Jungkook and Jungkook dancing away, his black hair bouncing with every step. Yoongi smiled internally and wondered for the thousandth time if Seokjin truly was the oldest member. Eventually Jungkook started kicking at Seokjin's feet to try and trip him up, and just before they disappeared into the woods, Yoongi heard Seokjin's voice float faintly back across the field.

"Hey JK. What kind of tree can you fit into your hand? A palm tree."

The rest of the day passed in a blur of activity. Yoongi took it upon himself to cook dinner, if for no other reason than to avoid the loud karaoke, gaming arguments, and blaring television. At some point the oldest and youngest members returned and while they didn't necessarily look tired, they slurped up dinner like they had been starved for days.

After dinner everyone gathered in the large living room with blankets and pillows and watched a string of bad movies that they found in one of the cabinets. Grievously bad movies, in Yoongi's opinion. But he knew that the point was not what they were watching but the fact that they were together, on their own, and could truly relax for the first time in a long time.

Jungkook rolled onto his back to stare at the ceiling, crossing his arms over himself with a bored sigh. The room was dark except for a small blue light that shined from the nearby television. At first it had been barely noticeable, but after lying awake for what must have been over an hour now it seemed to light up the room like a tiny blue sun. It wasn't often that he had trouble falling asleep, even in unfamiliar settings such as the living room he found himself in now. Losing in rock paper scissors twice in a row had landed him the fate of not only washing all of the dishes after dinner but also being the one to sleep on the couch that night. He didn't actually mind, now that he was here. The couch was large and soft, the only problem in the room being that incessant blue light.

They may have only just gotten to the house but the past eight hours had been more fun than he could remember having in the past several weeks combined. The forest path had been beautiful, refreshingly opposite from the regimented and often indoor environment that he was used to. It gave him a sense of life and adventure. Not to mention that the invigorating exercise and exposure to fresh air made Yoongi's dinner taste like the most delicious meal he had ever consumed. He had eaten so much that it should have been impossible to fit anything else in his stomach, but the junk food that was being passed around while watching movies was just too tempting.

Though perhaps I went overboard on the caffeine, he thought as he tapped his foot idly against the couch cushion. He rolled over to check the time on his phone, squinting when the bright screen lit up.

1:36 am.

He whipped the blanket off of him and stood, rifling through his nearby suitcase for a pair of
sweatpants. There was only one way he knew to quickly expend excess energy and that was running. He and Seokjin had found that going to the left at every fork in the path conveniently led them back out not far from the house. It had taken them about an hour to complete the loop while walking and Jungkook figured it would take him half that time at a run. Truthfully, he was happy to have an excuse to travel it again. It would be far more interesting than running along the road or on the treadmill in their gym back home.

He pulled a thin black hoodie over his head and dumped his pajamas on the couch, popping his earbuds in as he quietly slipped out the back door. The moon was nearly full and was more than bright enough for him to see as long as he stayed close to the path. The temperature had dropped significantly now that the sun had set and he shivered briefly before taking off at a brisk run, knowing that his body would soon heat up on its own.

Sure enough, fifteen minutes into the woods he found himself slowing back down to a walk, dabbing sweat from his forehead. Eventually he stopped altogether and leaned forward with his hands on his hips as he tried to catch his breath.

He should have paced himself better, he realized, because the energy he had when he left the house had been completely drained five minutes ago. He was only halfway into the long loop of the path but he was so tired now that he was sure he could settle down on the moonlit dirt and leaves below him and conk out. He looked to his left. The trees were more dense and it might be more difficult to see, but he could get home in half the time if he left the path and cut straight across the woods.

It didn't take him long to decide. He took off into the trees, trying not to go too fast but also wanting to get home as soon as possible so he could flop onto the couch and finally get the sleep that he craved. He began to worry that one of the other members might get up in the night and find the couch empty. It was a little late for him to be thinking that way but now that it was in his head he could think of little else. He hated making them worry. They dealt with enough stress as it was and the absolute last thing he wanted to do was cause his hyungs any anxiety on a trip that was supposed to be a stress-reliever. He quickened his pace and pulled his phone from his pocket to check the time. 1:53 am.

Suddenly a loud metallic snap rang out in the woods and Jungkook's foot was wrenched out from under him. A sharp and agonizing pain shot up his leg and a harsh scream was ripped out of his throat before being suddenly cut off as he slammed hard into the ground. His breath was knocked out of him and for a few brief, terrifying moments he struggled to pull air into his lungs. Then it rushed back in all at once and he rolled onto his side, hugging his chest and coughing. He tried to pull his throbbing leg up toward him but it jerked to a stop, sending another sharp spike of pain through it, and then he heard the disturbing clinking of a chain.

His heart began to pound in his chest and he looked down to see a huge metal bear trap clamped around his right leg. The teeth had bitten deep into his skin and even in the pale light of the moon he could see blood oozing out at an alarming rate. The primal instinct to escape took over for a split second and he pulled at it again, crying out as the teeth ripped further into him.

Panic surged through him and he reached down and grabbed the jaws of the trap, pulling with all his might in an attempt to free himself. The movement jostled the teeth even more and he even felt the metal begin to cut into his hands but he kept pulling anyway, groaning in effort and trying to push past the blinding pain. There were gashes down his calf where the teeth must have dragged through it due to his momentum. The jaws weren't moving and when he couldn't take the pain anymore he sank down to the ground with a moan, his hands covered in rust and blood.

He laid quiet for a long moment in shock, breathing hard and struggling to cope with what was
happening. Stepping in a bear trap in the middle of the woods at night in northern Japan was so far outside of anything he ever considered having to worry about that his mind was having a hard time processing it. There was only one thing he could focus on with any clarity and that was the immediate need to get help.

He rolled over and propped himself up on his elbows, searching the shadows for his phone. But the moon had moved behind the trees, darkening the land around him. He could make out the vague shapes of trees and weeds and a few rocks, but he could see nothing else on the ground. No phone.

He felt warm tears begin to wet his eye lashes but swiped them away in frustration before they could spill over and instead turned back to the trap. He shifted closer to it and this time, instead of trying to pry it open with strength alone, he carefully felt around to see if he could figure out how it worked. The whole contraption was heavily rusted, which was not surprising seeing as how it had to be several years old at the least.

He felt big springs on either side of the trap that were connected to plates of metal about the size of his hand. He pressed on them experimentally, trying to ignore the way his blood was making his fingers slip on the metal, and while nothing moved, there didn't seem to be any other obvious way to get the trap to open. But he would need a lot more strength to try and force those plates down, which meant stepping on them and using his body weight. Which meant standing up.

He stared hard at the rusted metal device that had trapped him out here, bleeding and hurting in the middle of the cold woods. After taking one last desperate look into the darkness hoping to see his phone, he shifted forward and slowly moved into a crouch, the chain clinking as the trap was moved into an upright position.

He rose up gingerly on his left leg. His thigh and calf muscles were already weak and trembling from his exhausting run and he took a moment to make sure he could stay upright before inching his foot toward one of the metal plates on the side of the trap. He could feel warm blood running over his right ankle and knew that being upright meant the injury would bleed much faster than before. The throbbing was getting worse by the second but he fought through it with deep breaths and finally managed to wedge his heel up onto one of the metal plates. He carefully began to let his weight down on it and hope flared within him when he heard a creak and the jaws shifted a tiny bit. He tried to push harder but there was only so much weight he could put down on it and his heart sank when there was no further movement.

A wave of dizziness and nausea hit him without warning and, immediately knowing that he was seconds away from passing out, tried to lower himself back to the ground as quickly as possible. Halfway down his leg buckled and he crumpled backwards, landing on his back with a soft thump. He stared dumbly up at the sky, panting in exertion, as despair began to settle deep within him. He couldn't push on those plates hard enough to open the trap. He couldn't pull the jaws apart. The chain was keeping him staked where he was and he was losing blood quickly. The pain in his leg was only growing worse, the night was only growing colder, and he had no way to reach the other members. He was totally helpless.

This time when the tears came, he didn't have it in him to push them away. Instead, he curled onto his side on the hard packed dirt and gave in, letting them trickle in warm paths over his cheeks.

_Hyungs_, he silently begged, bringing his hands up to cover his face, _Please, please, please wake up. Please look for me. I need help. I need you._
Seokjin's eyes opened and the first thing he felt was thirst. He briefly considered trying to ignore it and going back to sleep but his throat was dry to the point of being demanding, so he sat up and blinked, trying to clear the sleep from his eyes. He glanced at the bedside clock. It was 2:27 am.

Why did I eat so many chips and salty things, he thought dismally as he got up, careful not to wake Yoongi on the other side of the bed.

He shuffled past the entryway to the living room as quietly as he could, knowing that Jungkook was asleep on the couch. Not that it was really necessary to try and be quiet. He could yell in Jungkook's face and pull him off the couch by his ankle and still the kid probably wouldn't wake up. Though it was certainly frustrating when they had a schedule to keep early in the morning, Seokjin had always found Jungkook's deep sleeping habits to be pretty darn cute. No matter how old he got, his sleeping face was always one of such innocence and peace that it reminded Seokjin of the shy 15 year old boy he had been introduced to all those years ago. Not to mention that when their maknae was asleep, Seokjin was free to give him a kiss on the forehead without being slapped away.

He filled a glass of water and went back toward the living room, intending to steal such a kiss while he had the opportunity. But he paused in the entryway, glass halfway to his lips, when he saw that the couch was empty.

Huh, he thought, lowering the glass again. He pushed down his instinctual alarm, reminding himself of how many times members had been found somewhere other than where they were supposed to be. Thirst forgotten, he set his glass on the kitchen counter and went toward the bedrooms, opening each one in turn.

Room one: Namjoon and Jimin on the bed, no one on the floor.
Room two: Taehyung and Hoseok on the bed, no one on the floor.

He felt a nervousness begin to settle in his stomach as he opened the door to his own room, already knowing he would find nothing. Yoongi on the bed, no one on the floor. He moved briskly through the entire house, flipping the lights on in the bathrooms, game room, even the back deck. He ended up back in front of the couch and pulled his phone out.

Seokjin> JK, where are you?

When he lowered his phone his eyes landed on the pink Cooky pajamas that Jungkook had tossed casually on the arm of the couch. His suspicion was confirmed when he saw that the young man's sneakers were also gone.

Did he seriously go outside in the middle of the night? he thought, shaking his head. While it was not at all uncommon for Jungkook to be exercising at ungodly hours, it was usually in the safety of their dorms or the studio. They had never been to this house before and knew virtually nothing about the surrounding area.

Seokjin> You better answer me, maknae.

He sat on the arm of the couch to give Jungkook some time to reply, his emotions battling between worry and irritation.

Seokjin> Jungkook-ah? Did you go out for a run?

His concern grew with every second that ticked by with no answer and soon he was racing back to
his room.

"Yoongi." He shook the younger man on the shoulder and whipped the covers off him. "Wake up. Now."

Yoongi groaned in annoyance, his hand searching blindly to pull the warm covers back over him. "No," he muttered, his already deep voice gravelly with sleep.

Seokjin flipped the bedside lamp on, flooding the room in bright light, and leaned over Yoongi.

"Jungkook isn't in the house."

Yoongi's eyes opened slowly, one hand raised to block the light, and his brow furrowed as his sleep-muddled mind tried to catch up to what he had just heard.

"What? What do you mean?"

"I mean I can't find him. He's not on the couch and he's not with any of us."

"Is he in the game room?" Yoongi asked, sitting up and rubbing his face.

"No. And he's not answering any of my texts."

"He never answers texts."

"Okay, but he's not here. It's the middle of the night, Yoongi, and he's not here. I have no idea where he is."

The rapper's deep brown eyes met his and as they sharpened and came into focus, Seokjin could see the same anxiety he had been feeling slowly take hold of Yoongi as well.

"Stay here," Seokjin told him. "I'm going to get Namjoon."
Chapter notes

A little bit of a longer chapter for you. <3 And for those wondering, I'm aiming to update every Friday! Because who doesn't love Fridays, right?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jungkook laid shivering and hugging himself in the dark. He hadn't worn anything under his sweatshirt and the sweat from his run had long ago cooled off, leaving the already thin fabric damp and cold against his skin. His jogging pants had previously been rolled to just below his knees, but he'd pushed them down as far as he could on his one good leg and pulled his hood up in an attempt to conserve as much body heat as possible. The ground below him somehow seemed even colder than the air and the chill seeped up into him from the hard packed dirt.

Pain pulsed through his leg with every beat of his heart. He closed his eyes tightly and tried to keep his mind focused by imagining what his hyungs might be doing right at that moment. Maybe they had seen his empty couch and were making plans to look for him. Maybe they were already in the woods. Maybe they were just minutes away from him and he would hear their voices soon. Maybe they were still asleep.

What if no one woke up in the night? Why would they, after all? What if they all slept in late? They were on vacation, of course they were going to sleep in late. What if someone did get up in the night but walked right past his room and never saw that he was missing? Even if they did, would they even think to check the woods? He wasn't even on the path. He was in the middle of nowhere.

He felt the beginnings of panic start to press into his chest again and quickly pushed those thoughts down, turning his mind instead to memories of earlier that night. Just hours ago really, when he was warm and nestled between Tae and Hobi. A movie was playing but he was barely paying attention to it, instead focused on tossing m&m's at Jimin. If he landed them just right it would hit his friend's opposite shoulder and Jimin would turn accusingly at Yoongi instead of him. Yoongi never acknowledged either of them and just continued arguing with Namjoon about how unrealistic the plot of the movie was.

A deep shudder shook Jungkook's entire body, dragging him away from the good memory and dropping him right back into the cold and the pain. His eyes welled with tears at the stark difference between how happy and warm and safe he had been then and how cold and scared and alone he was now. The only warmth he felt now were the tears that occasionally trailed over his frozen skin, and even they turned cool within seconds.

The dizziness from almost passing out earlier had never quite left him and seemed to only be getting worse as time passed. Despite the solidity of the ground below him, at times it felt as though he was floating, while other times it felt as though the world was tipping to one side or the other. Minutes dragged into what felt like hours. He didn't even know how long he had been out there, really.

Is this what happens when you lose too much blood? he thought hazily. He was finding it more and
more difficult to keep his thoughts clear and shivered violently, eyelids fluttering in his attempt to keep them open.

_They'll be here. Just a little while longer. They'll find you._

"He changed his clothes and his shoes are gone," Seokjin announced, sitting on the arm of the couch with his arms crossed. Namjoon and Yoongi both stood tensed in front of him. "He probably just went for a run but I've been texting him for a while now and he hasn't answered yet."

Yoongi shifted back and forth restlessly on bare feet. "He wouldn't go anywhere without his phone. And he would've made sure it was charged."

"We should call him, not just text," Namjoon said. "Yoongi, could you -"

"Mm hmm." Yoongi stepped off to the side, pulling his phone out.

"I guess he could have dropped it, but phones don't easily break these days," Namjoon mused, biting his lip. His voice was calm and measured, but he couldn't hide the worry in his eyes. "Unless it fell in a storm grate or something. Either way, if he lost it he's smart enough to come straight back to the house."

"What's happening?"

Seokjin and Namjoon looked up to see Jimin in the doorway, his sandy hair fluffed from sleep and his eyebrows knit together.

No one said anything as the older members glanced at each other.

"What's happening?" Jimin repeated, his voice slightly more demanding. He cast his eyes about the room. "Where is Jungkookie, wasn't he sleeping in here?"

Namjoon took a small step toward him. "He's probably okay, but...we don't know where he is."

Jimin's eyes widened and his mouth opened silently. He looked around the room again and then behind himself into the kitchen as though he might find their youngest member sitting at the table eating a sandwich.

Yoongi turned back toward them. "I don't know if this is bad news or not," he started, the phone still up to his ear, "but his phone is ringing out. It would go straight to voicemail if it was broken, right? Which means that it's turned on somewhere but he's not answering it."

A heavy silence fell on the room and then was suddenly broken when Namjoon clapped his hands. "Okay, we can't stand around any more. Jimin could you go wake Hobi and Taehyungie? I don't care if Jungkook just lost his phone and is two minutes down the road, we're going to go get him."

Jimin took off down the hallway and soon Hoseok and Taehyung were stumbling into the living room behind him. They looked half asleep, their expressions both concerned and confused.
"We can't find Jungkookie," Namjoon said quickly, now that all members had gathered. "His shoes are gone so we think he went out running but he's not answering his phone. Jin-hyung, how long ago did you start texting him?"

"About twenty minutes now," Seokjin answered, glancing at the time on his phone. *Oh my God,* he realized silently, *it's almost three in the morning and Kookie is out there somewhere.*

"Oh my God," Taehyung murmured, echoing Seokjin's thoughts. All traces of sleepiness were gone from his face and replaced by open worry. "So he's just out there somewhere? Why the hell are we still here, we need to go out and look for him!"

"Here's what we're going to do," Namjoon continued steadily. "Some of us are going to stay here in case he comes back on his own and the rest of us are going to split up and go down the street in opposite directions. If he went running he should be somewhere along the road."

"Wait," Seokjin interjected, his mind travelling back to that afternoon. "There's that path in the woods behind the house that Kookie found. He really liked it. It took a long time for us to walk but it might be good for running."

"Okay," Namjoon took a second to think and then looked around at each of them in turn. "Hobi and I can split up and check the road. Hyung, if you could take Taehyung with you and check the path... and Yoongi and Jimin will stay here. Everyone obviously keep your phones on. Stay in contact and keep calling him. Does that sound good?"

There were nods and murmurs of ascent around the room and then they were all moving.

Jungkook hovered on the edge of unconsciousness, not knowing whether he was awake or not, and not having the awareness to realize that there was a difference. There were times when he felt overwhelming pain, though he couldn't pin point where it was coming from. Once in a while he found himself shaking but he was too numb to actually feel the cold. He would sometimes see the tall, imposing lines of tree trunks surrounding him in the dark like huge bars on a cage. He knew he was trapped wherever he was but he couldn't remember why.

At some point he realized that he could hear music. It was distant and intermittent, but he tried to stay with it, finding comfort in the melody. It sounded vaguely familiar, and his mind began to focus as he struggled to figure out how he knew it and where it was coming from. He was just about to place the melody and even managed to pull his sluggish eyes open but as soon as he did the music stopped.

His eyes roamed dully in the darkness, barely making out the shadows of the branches and brush around him. The music must have been a dream. He shifted slightly, trying to understand his situation. He knew he felt pain. A lot of it. He was shivering again and he was alone. Whatever was happening, he needed the other members. Any of them. All of them.

They'll be back, he tried to reassure himself, but somehow that didn't feel right. Back? Had they been there already? That couldn't be true, they would never leave him like this. They would have done something about it, or at least stayed with him. Which had to mean that they didn't know he was
there or even that something bad had happened to him. Whatever that might be.

A loud musical tone suddenly hit his ears and he jerked in surprise. There was a pale light a ways off to his right and he turned his head towards it, staring at it for a few seconds in confusion before realizing that he was looking at his phone. He gasped and immediately rolled over towards it. He could barely get his frozen, shaking body to cooperate, but he half crawled, half dragged himself towards it. He only got a couple of feet when he heard the clanking of a chain and his right leg was pulled back by what felt like a mouth of jagged icicles biting into his calf. The knowledge that he was stuck in a bear trap slammed back into him with blinding pain and a pounding heart.

But on the other end of that phone were his hyungs. They were awake and they were looking for him. He dragged himself toward it until his leg was pulled as far as it could go and then some, not caring about the amount of damage it was causing. He stretched his hand toward the still ringing phone only to find it several feet out of reach. He pulled desperately at the dry leaves under it, hoping to slide it closer to him, but it was no use.

The music stopped and the phone went dark. He sat there, stunned, staring at the inky blackness where he now knew his phone lay. He needed to get to that phone. He needed to tell them where he was.

The phone began to ring again. He didn't move for several seconds, staring at it where it lay just out of reach. Then he began to crawl back to where the chain was staked into the ground. He knew even before he got there that it wouldn't work and that he was an idiot for trying. He hadn't even attempted this when he first tried to escape because he knew it wouldn't work. But still he wrapped his hands around the metal loop at the top of the stake and pulled as hard as he could. It was a pitiful attempt. His hands were too numb and bloody to even get a proper grip and his arms were too weak to do any real pulling. He felt the cuts on his palms reopening and tears began to sting his eyes and blur his vision.

It was a trap designed to keep a bear in place. He had never really had a chance to get out since the beginning. The phone went silent again but he couldn't stop himself from yanking feebly at the stake, tears running over his cold cheeks. When his hands hurt too much to continue he leaned back and began to kick at it, his grunts of effort soon turning to sobs. He only landed a few kicks, each one weaker than the last, before he just couldn't lift his leg anymore. Then the small surge of adrenaline left him completely and his body gave out, sinking limply to the ground, unable to get up again.

They don't know where I am. They won't be able to find me. They won't find me.

His head began to pound and his body suddenly flushed with an unnatural heat. The phone began to go off behind him again, taunting him from just a few feet away, but the ringtone sounded odd and distant and the light from it was getting harder to see.

Don't pass out again, he pleaded desperately. Please don't pass out!

But despite his efforts to stay conscious, his eyes slid closed and darkness claimed him again.
Seokjin's footsteps crunched on the dry leaves and twigs below him as he walked. The night sky had clouded over and the soft bluish light from his phone was feeble, barely enough to see by, so he couldn't travel nearly as fast as he would like. Not to mention that he had to pause every so often to try and call Jungkook. Half the time the line was busy, meaning one of the other members was already calling him.

"Jungkook-ah!" He yelled, his voice echoing into the trees. He was met with the soft chirps of a nighttime bird but nothing else. He had been walking for about twenty minutes already and it was getting more and more difficult as time went on to keep himself focused and calm as worst case scenarios flooded into him. He shivered a little and rubbed his arms to try and warm them up. The night was a cold one, a fact that only served to intensify his worry for Jungkook's well-being.

He had directed Taehyung to the other end of the trail so they could each take a side and meet up in the middle. He had no idea how far he had gotten but he couldn't hear Taehyung yet so he guessed not too far. He stopped and tapped Jungkook's contact number on his phone. The line was busy. He turned the flashlight back on, took a single step, and then froze.

A tiny, distant musical ringtone drifted out from the forest on his left.

He spun toward the sound in disbelief and then dashed into the trees, barely able to see where he was going but trusting and hoping that his reflexes would be quick enough to avoid any big obstacles. The music began to grow louder but then suddenly stopped and the woods went silent. He kept going a few yards before slowing down, not wanting to go off course.

"Jungkook-ah?" He called hopefully, but heard nothing in response. The ringtone started up again and he darted toward it.

When he saw the light from Jungkook's phone just up ahead, a sudden fear hit him and he slowed to a walk. All the worst case scenarios rushed back to him but he forced himself to keep going, letting out a long calming breath. His dim blue light glinted on something metal and then fell over Jungkook's dark form huddled on the ground. Seokjin's whole body went rigid, his eyes going immediately to the iron bear trap clamped brutally around the young man's torn and bloody leg. He found it suddenly hard to breathe as he stepped forward.

"Jungkook?" He said softly.

Jungkook didn't move. He was curled up in a ball on his side, with just the one leg extended. He was in all black with his hood drawn up and blended so well into the darkness that Seokjin probably would never have seen him if his phone wasn't going off so close by. Reminded then of Jungkook's phone, Seokjin turned toward it and saw Taehyung's name on the screen.

"I found him," he said breathlessly as soon as he answered the call, but left the phone on the ground, going instead to kneel by Jungkook's side.

He purposely kept his gaze away from Jungkook's bloody leg and instead placed a hand gently on his back. The sweatshirt was damp and cold. He carefully pulled Jungkook's hands away from his face and saw that they too were cut and bleeding. His heart twisted painfully when he looked at Jungkook's face. His skin was pale and his eyes were closed, with clear tear tracks running through the dirt and blood that was smeared over his skin. Seokjin couldn't see any rise or fall of his chest in the pale light of the phones. He was too still.

"Kookie?" he breathed, his heart pounding and tears brimming in his eyes.

Taehyung's voice, which had been frantically begging for answers over the phone, went silent.
"Please, please, please, be okay," Seokjin muttered, and held his hand in front of Jungkook's nose. "Please, please, please."

It took a few moments but then he felt a small huff of breath against his fingers and he sagged in relief. "Oh thank God. Thank God."

The sound of Taehyung crying reached his ears and he grabbed Jungkook's phone, bringing it up to his ear.

"Taehyungie," he said quickly.

"Please," Taehyung begged, "Please tell me what's going on. Is he okay? What happened?"

"It's okay," Seokjin assured him with as much composure as he could manage while still struggling to keep his own tears at bay. "I'm with him. He's unconscious but he's alive."

"What happened to him?"

Seokjin looked down at Jungkook's leg, his stomach clenching.

"He stepped in a bear trap. His leg is stuck and it's torn up pretty badly. I don't know how long he's been out here but I think he's lost a lot of blood."

Taehyung was silent and Seokjin gave him a moment to process. He himself was still in near disbelief that such an unthinkable thing had happened to their maknae.

"Uh," Taehyung finally spoke, sniffling. "Where are you? How can I find you?"

"You might actually be close, if you've kept walking. We're not on the path though, he must have tried to cut across the woods to get home." Seokjin laid a hand on the side of Jungkook's cool face and then slid it into his hood to cup the back of his neck, rubbing softly. "Hang on a second," he said, then pressed the phone against his stomach and called Taehyung's name out loudly into the woods.

"Oh, I actually heard that!"

After calling back and forth a few times, Taehyung finally emerged from the trees. Seokjin saw the same hesitancy in the younger singer's eyes that he had felt when he first approached Jungkook and had been afraid of what he might see. But as soon as Taehyung actually saw their youngest member curled up on the ground he shot forward and knelt, slowly and carefully rolling Jungkook onto his back. He was so limp and unresponsive that Seokjin couldn't help but press a hand to the maknae's chest just to double check that he was still breathing and his heart was beating. Taehyung took Jungkook's face in both hands and leaned in close.

"Jungkookie?" he called softly. He got no response. He moved his hands down to Jungkook's shoulders and then slid one of them onto his chest, presumably to also check his heartbeat. He looked back to Seokjin, his dark brows pulled together in worry. "He's so cold."

"I know."

Taehyung turned to look at Jungkook's leg, staring in silent horror for just a few seconds before leaning over him again and gently rubbing his shoulders. "Jungkook?"

"We have to get the others," Seokjin said urgently. At first Taehyung ignored him, cupping Jungkook's face again and running his thumbs gently over his cheeks to try and wipe off some of the
blood and dirt. His face was twisted in anguish and Seokjin knew that he had seen the tear tracks as well.

"Tae."

"I know." Taehyung bent down and briefly pressed his face against the side of Jungkook's, leaving a small kiss on his cheek before standing up and brushing his knees off. "I can run back to the house if you stay here with him."

Seokjin nodded, looking back down at Jungkook's still form. "I'll try to warm him up somehow. Make sure you bring back a blanket or a coat, or...something. I don't even know what we're going to need," he said, realizing suddenly how out of his depth he was. He knew that as the oldest he should be expected to know what to do but his mind was reeling. "Maybe pain killers and water? If we can wake him up. See what the house has for first aide type stuff. I don't even know how we're going to get this thing off of him. Call Namjoon on your way back and tell him what happened. Actually no, call Yoongi first. He's at the house already. Wait, if you -"

"Hyung," Taehyung interrupted. Seokjin looked up at him and was surprised at the amount of steady reassurance in his dark eyes. "Don't worry. I'll take care of it, you just stay with him. I'll be back."

"Tae," Seokjin said quickly as the younger man turned to leave. "Don't run. I know you're going to want to but you have to walk and be very careful where you step. There could more of these...things... out here." He glanced meaningfully down at the trap and Jungkook's damaged leg.

Taehyung glanced down at it too, but quickly looked away again. "...Okay."

His footsteps receded into the night, leaving Seokjin alone with Jungkook once again. He immediately went to work rubbing Jungkook's arms up and down in the hopes of getting his circulation going. He couldn't stop glancing at Jungkook's face but it hurt him every time he did so. Their youngest member's expression was supposed to be childlike and serene when he slept, but now Seokjin could only see tension and pain. What little light fell on them from the clouded over moon and the phones nearby was devoid of all warmth and provided no comfort.

After a while he moved up to Jungkook's shoulders and began to massage them, as well as the back of his neck. He had no idea if he was helping or not. Jungkook didn't seem to be getting any warmer and in truth, Seokjin was scared out of his mind. Right now he alone was completely responsible for keeping their maknae alive. He didn't know if Jungkook was actually close to death or not, but it sure as hell didn't look good and what Seokjin did know was that if things should get worse or if the unthinkable should indeed happen - he would be the one responsible. A part of him - a part that he was too ashamed to even acknowledge - wished he had been the one to go back for the others. If Jungkook died in front of him right now, he would witness it alone.

You're not going to let him die, he ordered himself, picking up his pace and moving down to Jungkook's sides. Seokjin shivered a little, his own hands growing chilled. He adjusted his position to try and keep as much of himself as he could off of the cold hard ground. The cold hard ground...he glanced down at Jungkook. No wonder he wasn't warming up. Seokjin could rub his arms and sides as hard as he wanted but it would never be enough if the ground was sapping his heat from below. He stared at him for a few moments in thought.

"Okay, Kook-ah, let's get you off the ground," he murmured aloud. He took off his own sweatshirt, immediately shuddering in the cold air and wishing he had worn more than a t-shirt under it. He gently rolled Jungkook onto his side and wormed one arm and one leg under him. Then, after some careful maneuvering, hugged Jungkook close against him and slowly rolled onto his back so that the younger man was laying face down completely on top of him. He tucked the maknae's arms up close
to his chest and then laid the sweatshirt over his back, wrapping one arm around him tightly to hold him in place and using the other to rub his frozen back up and down.

Immediately Seokjin knew it was a good idea, mainly because of how quickly he himself was growing cold. It was almost startling how fast the ground sapped the heat out of him and it made his heart ache to know that their youngest member had been forced to lay out here alone for who knows how long.

He felt small breaths against his neck and the steady beat of Jungkook's heart against his chest and tried to draw comfort from it, praying to God that he wouldn't feel either of them begin to slow down.

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Taehyung had only gotten a few yards into the woods when tears began to spill again. He had managed to keep it together in front of Seokjin, knowing that what his eldest hyung needed was strength and support, not a blubbering mess. But now that he was alone he couldn't hold back his emotions. He wiped his nose on his sleeve and tried to blink his eyes clear enough to see where he was stepping. His progress was excruciatingly slow. There was no path to follow, the leaves and brush were thick, and the phone flashlight only went so far.

He stopped briefly to wipe his vision clear yet again and send a group text, his thumbs feeling stiff and slow from the cold.

**Taehyung**> Everyone get back to the house

**Taehyung**> We found him in the woods, he stepped in a bear trap

**Taehyung**> Jin-hyung is staying with him

**Taehyung**> I'm on my way back

He wasn't surprised when he didn't get any immediate responses and started walking again. They were no doubt in shock, just like he had been. He still couldn't get the image of Jungkook out of his mind and could see his bloody leg and pale face almost more clearly than the ground in front of him. Surely they were in some sort of horror movie. He wasn't sure quite what he had been expecting when they set out to find their youngest member, but this wasn't it. He had felt a moment of exhilaration when Jungkook's phone actually picked up his call, but seconds later he was crouched in the middle of the path crying, listening to Seokjin talk as though he was approaching a dead body. Taehyung couldn't bear to think about how easily that could have been true. Or could still come true.

His phone buzzed and he stopped again.
Jimin> What?? Is he okay?

Taehyung> No he's not okay, his leg is messed up and he bled a lot.

Taehyung> Too much I think.

Namjoon> How long has he been out there?

Taehyung> I don't know, he wouldn't wake up.

Taehyung> He was really cold and there was a lot of blood though, so I'm guessing a while.

Jimin> How did you even find him? How far away are you?

Taehyung was itching to start walking again but knew how stupid it would be to go forward blindly.

Taehyung> Jin-hyung must have heard his phone going off in the woods and followed it. I might be getting close to the house now but it's hard to tell.

Taehyung> I can't talk anymore, I need my phone to see where I'm going.

Taehyung> Just get to the house, I'll be there soon.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this chapter! What do you think so far? I love hearing your thoughts!

Much love to you! (Yes, you.) <3
Namjoon had always been praised for his ability to stay cool and prioritize in a crisis. As leader it was his job to be a levelheaded pillar of strength that the others could count on. But right now he was finding it nearly impossible to compartmentalize his thoughts the way he usually did. There was just too much fear running rampant in his mind for him to keep things organized.

When everyone was gathered at the house, how much longer would it take to get to where Jungkook and Seokjin were in the forest? How long had Jungkook been out there? How much blood had he lost? Could he have hypothermia? Would they be able to get the trap off without hurting him further?

*Stay focused,* he chided himself. He and Hoseok should get back to the house around the same time as Taehyung, if all went well. When everyone was gathered again they would need to divide jobs. Most of them should go to Jungkook and Seokjin, but at least one person would need to stay behind to prepare the van and gather what they would need to get to the hospital. Because they would need to get to the hospital as soon as possible. Did they know where the hospital was in Sapporo? Did they speak enough Japanese to understand the doctors and nurses? What if they got lost on their way there? What if they didn't make it in time? What if -

*Focus!*

His breath fogged the air in front of him. Since leaving the house, he had been jogging and running for a half hour now and despite the cold, he was feeling more than a little overheated in his tan wool jacket. The driveway came into view and he pushed his tiring body into a sprint. It wasn't fast enough. Nothing was happening fast enough. He needed to be with Jungkook *now.* He needed their help *now.* Who knew how much longer-

*Stop. Focus.*

The front door of the house was already wide open, the light from inside spilling out onto the lawn. He dashed inside, sparing a worried glance at Jungkook's pajamas and the empty couch as he passed by, and found Yoongi and Hoseok in the kitchen. Hoseok appeared to have arrived just moments before him, out of breath and looking slightly frazzled. Yoongi sat at the kitchen table in his long black puffy coat, chin resting on his intertwined fingers and staring forward.

"Yoongi?" Hoseok questioned, talking a step toward him.

"I found a flashlight," Yoongi responded, not looking at them. He tipped his head to indicate a bag that was sitting on the counter nearby. "Bottles of water. A blanket. A shit ton of painkillers. There
was a first aid kit in the bathroom but I don't think band-aids and alcohol wipes are going to help him much."

Namjoon glanced around the room. "Jimin?"

"On the back deck waiting for Tae."

Yoongi's eyes dropped to his phone.

"Depending on the trap, we should be able to open it by having two people stand on the release bars. If it's a standard bear trap." He held the phone up for them to see, and Namjoon's stomach turned at the images. "Let's just pray it's a standard trap, because some of these other ones you need special tools to open."

"Jungkook's leg is in one of those things?" Hoseok's voice was low and unsteady. Namjoon glanced over to find his friend as white as a sheet, large eyes glued to the pictures on Yoongi's phone. "Wouldn't it... I mean it looks like it could chop a leg off."

Yoongi saw his stricken expression and quickly put his phone back down. "No, it's nowhere near strong enough to actually chop a leg off. It's apparently possible for it to break smaller animals' bones, but I don't know about a human."

Hoseok backed up and leaned against the counter, crossing his arms over his stomach. There were a few brief moments of tense silence and then the back door swung open and Taehyung came into the kitchen. Namjoon's heart twisted at the expression on the young man's face. He looked emotionally beaten, face red and eyes wet.

"Let's go." Yoongi stood as soon as he saw him, transitioning out of his previously languid state into sudden action. He grabbed the bag off the counter. Jimin trailed in behind Taehyung but had barely stepped into the kitchen when the younger grabbed the flashlight off the table and pushed past him out the door again, saying nothing and waiting for no one.

"Wait, someone needs to stay and pack extra clothes and stuff for the hospital," Namjoon said quickly, trying to catch Yoongi by the elbow.

"I'll stay," Hoseok offered immediately. He looked rattled, his face still unusually pale. "Please."

Yoongi pulled out of Namjoon's grasp and disappeared, Jimin following behind him, and Namjoon turned back to Hoseok.

"It'll be okay, Hobi," he reassured, trying to sound confident. But one look in Hoseok's knowing brown eyes told him that he didn't believe it any more than Namjoon did. Not knowing what else to say, he gave his friend's hand a squeeze before following the others out into the night.

Seokjin stared up at the dark sky and shivered. The sky had cleared and at first he had taken the sight of the stars and the moon as a comfort, but as time passed they only seemed to grow more distant and somehow more uncaring. Now, the tiny, crisp specks of light just stared back at him blankly and only made him feel more insignificant and inadequate than he already did. He felt chilled to the bone, his exposed arms covered in goosebumps and well on their way to going numb. He had the hard dirt chilling him from below and a maknae popsicle sapping his heat from above. He hummed softly off
and on simply to fill the unsettling silence. With his thoughts glued to Jungkook only, his mind first went to Begin but he had to stop after the first few notes. The lyrics that Jungkook had lovingly dedicated to them were too difficult to think about, so instead he turned to Euphoria, finding it far more soothing and comforting.

He had been rubbing Jungkook's back non-stop, to the point that his arm ached. But to his great relief, it seemed his efforts were not in vain, as Jungkook had been slowly but surely warming up. It lessened his worry some, to know that at the very least his youngest dongsaeng probably would not freeze to death. Of course there was the blood loss...

He couldn't suppress the maddening need to be doing more for Jungkook. He knew there was nothing he could do but try to keep him warm until the others arrived, but it just wasn't enough. He wanted to remove this experience from Jungkook's life. It wasn't right. He was too innocent and pure-hearted to have to go through this kind of fear and pain. No, he wasn't innocent in the sense of being blameless. Like all humans, he made poor choices and could be selfish and petty. But there was an innate quality about Jungkook that had always been somewhat child-like. When they met him he had basically been a child. But even after all these years, as they watched him grow tall and fill out, mentally mature and become more confident, he had never grown out of the little things that made Seokjin and the other members fall in love with him. His Bambi eyes that would grow as wide as saucers and stare off into the distance when he was confused or in deep thought. How he could be completely unaware of his facial expressions when he was enthralled by something. The way he jumped up and down and clapped his hands when he was excited, or the way his entire face lit up and his eyes crinkled when he laughed.

It was to see those delighted smiles that made Seokjin act like an idiot most of the time. He never used to make such an effort to be comical as he did now. Sometimes he wondered if it was too much. He wanted to make his members happy, he wanted to keep them laughing. Especially Jungkook, who responded to his playful teasing and fighting the most. But he rarely had any serious conversations with him. The fact that they cared about each other had always been known and assumed, but not often spoken aloud. Sure he would say he loved him, but it was often flippant and said during some sort of joke. It was rare that he ever went any deeper than that. He was always worried about making an unnecessarily awkward situation.

Now that thought felt ridiculously immature. He never told Jungkook just how much he meant to him because he was afraid of it being awkward? Considering it now, Seokjin couldn't help but feel ashamed. Jungkook was five years younger than him, his littlest brother. He should be doing more than simply making him laugh.

Seokjin stopped rubbing Jungkook's back for a moment, feeling that for now his maknae was probably warm enough for him to rest his cramping arm for a little while. Instead he made sure that Jungkook's arms were still tucked up near his chest and then squeezed him tight to feel his heartbeat more solidly against his chest. To his surprise, Jungkook took a deep breath and then let it out in a long sigh that tickled the small hairs on Seokjin's neck. It was different from the shallow breaths he had been feeling so far and Seokjin felt a spark of hope within him. Different had to be better. He started to rub his back again.

Why was it taking the others so long to get there? He must have been laying out there in the dark with Jungkook for....he didn't know how long. Maybe it was only his worry that made it feel like ages. His worry and the cold light of the moon and the inability to do anything but wait. Was this how Jungkook had felt waiting for them?

Of course not, he berated himself harshly. For Jungkook there was horrible pain and bleeding. Not worry, but fear. At least Seokjin had Jungkook there with him, despite the fact that he was
unconscious. Jungkook had been out there truly alone. He was chained to the ground, not knowing whether the other members would even wake up, much less see that he was missing or be able to find him.

"...Jin-hyung...?"

He froze. There had been no movement against him, so hearing Jungkook's weak and slurred voice took him completely by surprise.

"Jungkookie?"

No response. He tried to look down but couldn't see Jungkook's face, so he tapped gently on his back.

"JK?"

Nothing. He patted his back and called him a few more times but Jungkook must have fallen unconscious again, or perhaps he hadn't quite been awake to begin with. Seokjin just sighed and hugged the younger man tight again.

"I'm so sorry you had to suffer out here all alone for so long," he said quietly, hoping that just maybe Jungkook would hear him in the depths of his mind. "But I promise you're not alone anymore."

Jimin's skin felt prickly and his heart was thumping with anxiety as he waded through the dark brush behind Taehyung. He kept one hand on Taehyung's jacket and was holding Yoongi's hand behind him to make sure they stayed together and could follow the safe path that Taehyung was making for them. The air was tense amidst the small group.

"So you guys don't know how long he's been out here, right?" Namjoon asked from the rear of the group, and Jimin could hear the soft chattering of his teeth. They had been questioning Taehyung for a while now, but it was just a way to keep their minds occupied. The inquiries had become repetitive and it was clear that Taehyung had already told them everything he knew, which was really very little.

"Right," Taehyung answered curtly.

"But he was really cold and you couldn't get him to wake up?"

"Right. I was only there for like a minute though."

"What...um," Jimin began haltingly, trying to gather the courage to ask the question that had been on his mind for some time now. "What does it...look like?" He wanted to prepare himself as much as he could.

"It looks like he's one of the victims in those Saw movies," Taehyung answered immediately, his voice cracking. Jimin swallowed, his mind instantly conjuring a series of grisly images, and tightened his grip on the back of Taehyung's jacket.

There were no more questions after that, and for about ten minutes the only noise surrounding them was twigs snapping, branches rustling, and the sniffling of runny noses.
"Jin-hyung?!" Taehyung shouted suddenly, causing Jimin to jump in surprise. Yoongi's hand twitched in his.

"Taehyung-ah!" Seokjin's relieved voice filtered back to them not too far away. "Over here."

They all broke into a mad dash toward Seokjin's voice, no longer caring about where they stepped or bothering to hold onto each other. The scene they came upon was one that under any other circumstance Jimin would find endearing - Seokjin laying on the ground, hugging a sleeping Jungkook on top of him. But he knew that Jungkook was not merely sleeping, and the sight of the rusty iron trap around his leg was nothing less than horrifying.

As the beam of Taehyung's flashlight spilled over them, Seokjin laid a gentle hand on the back of Jungkook's head to protect it and then slowly rolled over to lay his limp body back onto the ground. Namjoon was there instantly, leaning over Jungkook and tenderly smoothing the hair back from his forehead. Jimin crouched cautiously on his other side and reached out with one hand but then hesitated, his heart pounding. Jungkook looked...dead. His complexion was ashen and he knew his skin would feel cold. If Jimin touched him...would it feel like he was actually touching a dead body? He didn't want to associate Jungkook with that feeling. He would never be able to forget it.

He was startled when Seokjin grabbed his wrist and pushed his palm down onto Jungkook's chest, holding it there firmly. It was warm. Not nearly as warm as it probably should be, but... it was warm. There was a steady heartbeat there and Jimin felt a small amount of the fear he had been feeling begin to fade. Seokjin let him go with a reassuring pat and then scooted back a ways to give them room.

"What happened to his hands?" Namjoon lifted one of Jungkook's hands into the light to show them the bloody scrapes.

"I think he was trying to pull the trap open," Seokjin said.

"We can get this off." Yoongi was lingering near the trap itself, studying it and glancing occasionally at his phone. "It has to be upright for us to open it though, so we need him to be standing to get his leg out without hurting him any more than he already is." His voice was flat and matter-of-fact, as though he was solving a simple algebra problem. While they didn't hear it often, Jimin knew that disconnected tone well enough to recognize it as one of Yoongi's many emotional coping mechanisms.

"I don't know that we'll be able to wake him up," Namjoon said, eyebrows furrowed in concern. He shook Jungkook's shoulders experimentally. "Jungkookie?"

"He almost woke up a few minutes ago," Seokjin said hopefully, his teeth chattering. He was sitting nearby with his knees up, hugging himself and shivering in just his t-shirt. Jimin quickly whipped off his own coat and wrapped it around his eldest hyung's shoulders.

"What do you mean 'almost'?"

Seokjin's eyes were glued to Jungkook's face as he clutched Jimin's fleece coat around him. "Well, he said my name. But that was it."

Namjoon looked back to Jungkook and began to shake him again, a little bit harder this time. He continued to call his name and rubbed his arms, his chest, even his thighs in his attempt to bring him around. The others watched by the cold beam of the flashlight in silent apprehension. Jimin felt his lips begin to quiver when a minute or two went by with no response. He pressed the sleeve of his sweater up to his running nose, blinking through the tears that were slowly beginning to fall from his
eyes. Between the sounds of Namjoon pleading for Jungkook to wake up, he heard a muffled sob and looked over at Taehyung, who had been quietly keeping the flashlight trained on Jungkook. His figure was shadowed behind the light, but Jimin could see an elbow covering the bottom half of his face and his body shook every so often.

There was a sharp intake of breath from Yoongi and Jimin whipped his head back over in time to see their maknae roll his head to one side. Namjoon saw the small motion and immediately grabbed Jungkook's face, patting his cheeks.

"Come on, Kookie, that's it" he called, his voice firm and insistent. "We need you to wake up, just for a little while." He began massaging the back of his neck vigorously. That elicited a soft moan and Jimin's heart skipped a beat when at last Jungkook's wide eyes blinked slowly open. Relief began to flood Jimin but was abruptly cut off when almost immediately Jungkook's face scrunched in pain and tears welled up in his eyes. Jimin could barely restrain himself from rushing closer as their youngest member glanced around in distress and confusion, but Jimin knew not to crowd him.

"Jungkook-ah," Namjoon said, quickly trying to catch his attention and guiding his face toward him. "Hey, look at me."

Jungkook obeyed sluggishly but then his gaze wandered again and he squeezed his eyes shut as though he was too distracted by pain to focus on anything or even acknowledge their leader's presence.

"Jungkook? Are you with me?" Their youngest dragged a hand over his eyes, leaving small smears of blood in its wake, before letting it fall limply to the ground again. "What's happening?" he drawled weakly, his voice sounding as though it hadn't been used in years.

"We found you out here in the woods. Do you remember how you got here?"

"Hyung?" Jungkook opened his bleary eyes again to stare at Namjoon in confusion before struggling up onto his elbows. "I think something is wrong with my leg."

Before anyone could reply or stop him, he pulled his leg up and everyone jumped forward in a panic as the chain rattled and jerked him to a stop. He grunted loudly, his head tossing back and his whole body seizing up in pain. Yoongi, who was still near his feet, grabbed his leg just above the knee to hold it still, shouting for someone to get the pain medication out of his backpack. Jungkook glanced down in fright and caught sight of the trap before Namjoon could lean over and block his view. Taehyung shoved the flashlight into Jimin's shaking hands and began digging through the backpack as Jungkook crumbled back down to the ground and began to cry.

"Why is it still there?" he moaned brokenly, bringing a forearm up to cover his eyes. "Just take it off, please!"

"We shouldn't have woken him up!" Jimin burst, his heart breaking and emotion tightening in his chest.

"We're going to get you out, Kookie, we just need you to help us a little bit, okay?" Namjoon said. His voice was wavering and Jimin knew he was scared. They were all scared. Seokjin had crawled back to Jungkook's side and was petting his hair, his anxious eyes never leaving Jungkook's face.

"Here," Taehyung said quickly, opening the bottle of pain medication and dropping into a crouch near Jungkook's head. "Pain meds, Kookie."
Immediately Jungkook reached for them and Taehyung and Namjoon pulled him up into a sitting position before helping him swallow the pills down with a bottle of water.

Yoongi yanked off his long black puffy coat and tossed it to Taehyung before returning his death grip to the maknae's leg, obviously not quite trusting Jungkook to keep it still on his own. "Put that on him."

Taehyung grabbed the coat and quickly fed Jungkook's shivering arms through the sleeves before flipping the hood up over his head and pulling the coat tight over his chest. Jimin's heart melted when Jungkook huddled forward into him and in an instant Taehyung's arms were wrapped around him in a crushing embrace. In the light of the flashlight Jimin could see the shine of tears on Taehyung's cheeks before he buried his face into Jungkook's neck.

"You found me," Jungkook said as though it was just now dawning on him that he wasn't alone. His voice was small and muffled in Taehyung's shoulder. "I was out here alone for so long and I couldn't tell you where I was. I didn't know if you would wake up in time."

Jimin's fingers tightened around the flashlight. He had been hoping and telling himself that maybe Jungkook had only just gotten injured when they noticed he was missing and hadn't been out there suffering for too long. It sounded as though that wasn't the case.

"We're here with you now Kookie, and we're not going to leave you," Namjoon reassured as Taehyung pulled back. "Let's get the trap off, okay?"

Jungkook nodded, still sniffling slightly as he glanced down at the trap. "I think you have to step on those plates, hyung, but I couldn't do it by myself."

"Don't worry, we can do it," Yoongi said, his husky voice full of conviction. He picked a small piece of leaf out of Jungkook's hair before giving his leg a gentle pat. "Okay, let's go. We're going to stand you up now."

Jungkook didn't say anything but let Namjoon and Seokjin pull his arms over their shoulders and begin to lift him off the ground. He immediately hissed in pain despite Yoongi's efforts to help guide his leg and the trap up together. He dragged his other leg under him to try and stand, trembling and breathing hard through clenched teeth. Jimin waited near one of the plates, nerves and the cold making his fingers tingle, and as he stared down at it he got his first real look at the damage to his friend's leg. Taehyung had been right - it looked like a scene from a horror movie. But this wasn't a trick or a result of special effects. The darkened blood soaking Jungkook's sock, saturating through his sneaker, and staining the dirt around them was real. The ripped skin, those knife-like teeth that had dug deep into his flesh. The light glinting off the newer blood, bright red and still seeping down over his ankle. It was all real.

"Go, go, go," Yoongi ordered sharply and Jimin snapped out of his horrified stupor to find Jungkook standing fully upright, supported between Namjoon and Seokjin. Quickly but carefully Jimin began to step down on the plate, Taehyung doing the same from the other side. The rusted device creaked and the jaws began to shift outward.

But then they stopped.

"Harder, come on!" Yoongi snapped. Jungkook was shuddering and almost growling in his attempt to stay upright. His labored breaths fogged outward to join theirs in the beam of the flashlight as Jimin pushed the plate down as hard as he could. But whether it was from age or rust, it had caught fast where it was.
Without hesitation, Yoongi grabbed the jaws of the trap himself and Jimin's heart stopped at the sight of another one of his members in between those jagged teeth. The rapper started to drag them apart and with Jimin and Taehyung still applying pressure to the plates, the jaws finally began to move.

"He's passing out!" Seokjin suddenly called out the warning and sure enough, Jungkook's head began to loll forward.

The trap had only just begun to open but Yoongi yanked his leg up and out of it seconds before Jungkook's muscles gave out and he went limp between Seokjin and Namjoon. They lowered him gently back to the forest floor, Yoongi keeping a hold on his damaged leg to keep it off the ground. Jimin and Taehyung let the trap snap closed and Jimin found a strange satisfaction at the sight of the jaws shut tightly with nothing between them.

"We need to wrap his leg in something," Namjoon said urgently.

"There's a couple of clean shirts in the bag," Yoongi replied, and Taehyung scrambled to pull one of them out.

Namjoon took the shirt from Taehyung and wrapped it quickly around Jungkook's lower calf and ankle, then asked for anyone with a hoodie to pull the strings out before using them to tie the shirt on.

"Help get him on my back." He said, already trying to pull Jungkook's body up, and they rushed to assist him. Soon they had Jungkook draped over their leader's back and he hefted him up with his arms under Jungkook's thighs.

"Tie his arms in front of me."

Jimin lowered the flashlight, his mouth dropping open in shock and disbelief.

"What?" Taehyung drew the word out incredulously. His eyebrows were raised so high they disappeared into his messy blonde hair. "Are you kidding? Why?"

"He's going to fall off if we don't," Namjoon replied, his voice reluctant. He didn't look happy. "He can't hold on."

"So?" Seokjin interjected. "We'll make sure he doesn't fall."

"I don't think you can, not the whole way. There's no path, we have to go in a single file line. We only have one flashlight so you won't be able to see us very well and the ground is uneven. If I lose my footing even once, he could slide off to either side. He's dead weight right now. He can't hold on to me and I wouldn't be able to catch him. It's not like it is in the movies, guys."

No one could argue his logic. They would have to go extremely slow as it was and nothing was worth the risk of hurting Jungkook any further.

"I've heard of this being done before." He hiked Jungkook up a little higher on his back. "Come on, we don't have time."

Looking extremely uncomfortable, Seokjin held Jungkook's arms close together in front of Namjoon while Yoongi wrapped the other shirt protectively around his wrists. Then he took an extra hoodie cord and tied his hands tightly together.

"Okay," Namjoon turned towards the house. "Let's go."
Comments will be received with much love and adoration and in return I will give you a kiss and a mug of hot chocolate! (Marshmallows available upon request). <3
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning for a panic attack, just in case. I say just in case because I have panic attacks that are very different from what's in this chapter, but I know not everyone experiences the same thing and I don't want to take any chances. This chapter might be the most angsty so far, at least in my own opinion!

And yes it's a day early, but I just finished it and didn't think there was any reason to make you wait another day. I might move my update schedule to Sundays, but I'm not positive about that. So if you don't see the next chapter up next Friday, then know it will be up Sunday!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jungkook knew he was being carried on someone's back. He could feel the warmth of the person pressed against his front and recognized the pressure of arms holding his thighs up. He heard his members' voices nearby but his mind was too hazy and out of focus to understand what they were saying. A scratchiness was tickling in his throat and he swallowed in an attempt to soothe it. It felt as though he was trying to swallow past a lump and the tickle returned, prompting a reflexive cough to sputter out of him.

The members' voices paused briefly before starting up again in a slightly different pitch. He heard his name but couldn't respond and instead coughed a few more times. A hand began to rub against his back, but all it did was make him suddenly aware of how sticky his back felt. He felt sticky everywhere, actually. There was an uncomfortable heat surrounding him and he squirmed a little bit, hoping to somehow escape it.

"Do you think he's getting sick?" Jimin's voice came distantly from somewhere behind him.

"I would be shocked if he didn't get sick." Jungkook felt a slight vibration against his chest along with Namjoon's voice close to his head. "Hours of damp and cold only wearing one layer. Not to mention his immune system is probably shot with the amount of blood he lost."

Jungkook suddenly rocked forward as Namjoon stumbled under him, and it sent Jungkook's head into a dizzying spin. He moaned softly against the nausea that rolled in his stomach.

"Do you need someone to take over, Joon?" Seokjin asked, his voice full of concern. Namjoon had stopped walking altogether and Jungkook thanked him silently, as it lessened his vertigo somewhat.

"No, I just need a few seconds," their leader huffed. Jungkook felt him draw a few deep breaths slowly in and out underneath him. "I wish it was someone else who needed to be carried so
Jungkookie could help us. He probably wouldn't have any problem carrying someone the whole way."

Jungkook didn't know he had opened his eyes until he realized he could see shadowy tree trunks and brush. He was beginning to feel as though he had been in this forest for years. Every time he woke up he was in this forest.

"I'm sorry I'm so heavy," he mumbled, without intending to.

There was a rustling nearby and then Seokjin entered his line of view, big brown eyes glinting in the beam of the flashlight. "JK?"

Jungkook just stared back blankly.

"Is he awake again?" Yoongi asked from somewhere ahead of them.

"Yeah." Seokjin put a hand up to Jungkook's face, wiping sweat from his forehead before snaking his hand into the hood to feel the back of his neck. "How are you feeling?"

How was he feeling? He was feeling so many things. His head was pounding. His leg was throbbing. He was dizzy, weak, sticky. And hot. Way too hot.

"...Are you sure he's awake?" Suddenly Yoongi entered his vision as well, his eyes squinting. "Jungkookie?"

"Mm," Jungkook managed to reply this time.

"How does your leg feel?" Namjoon asked, trying to crane his neck back to look at him.

"It hurts, but..." He couldn't quite focus his thoughts, but nonetheless tried to remember what it felt like the last time he was awake. "Not as bad, maybe."

"Good, the painkillers must be helping a little," Yoongi said, and gave Jungkook's head a very gentle pat. He mustered a small smile in return, his pain momentarily overridden by a drowsy sort of contentment knowing that they were taking care of him. Finally he was mobile. Finally he was free.

But his peace only lasted a few seconds.

He felt another cough coming and instinctively tried to cover his mouth but was shocked when instead he hit Namjoon square in the face with both hands. Namjoon yelped and Jungkook started coughing into his leader's shoulder instead, his already muddled mind reeling in confusion. He was left feeling lightheaded when the coughing subsided and tried to separate his hands, his heart immediately starting to pound when he found that he couldn't. He tried to struggle away from Namjoon in alarm, forcing his older friend to crouch down before they could lose their balance.

"Jungkook, it's okay. Stop moving," Seokjin said next to him. "Jungkook, stop!" He put his hand on the back of Jungkook's neck. It was a light hold, as Jungkook could barely move on his own to begin with, but it was just enough to hold him down on Namjoon's back. Jungkook could hear the pulse of his heartbeat in his ears and anxiety twisted in his gut. He had spent the last several hours restricted and out of control. There was no way he could handle more of that.

"Stop, Kookie, you're just going to feel worse if you let yourself get worked up."

"Then take this off," he said weakly, twisting and pulling at his wrists. "Why did you do this?"
"I'm sorry Jungkook," Namjoon said below him, sounding genuinely remorseful. "We had to to get you home safely. It's okay. It's already saved you twice from falling off. You could have broken something or hurt your leg even more than it already is."

He tried to understand, he really did, and tried to keep his fear from becoming overwhelming. His mind raced in its attempt to make sense of what he was hearing, but it kept coming up empty. They finally freed him from the trap but then they tied him up of all things? How was that any better? What was even happening?

"It's helping you, okay? Just relax, it's keeping you safe."

"Why can't you guys just keep me safe?" his voice wavered, and he went slack against Namjoon, exhausted. He couldn't take much more torment tonight.

Yoongi and Seokjin's faces saddened in front of him, and Yoongi looked away in guilt.

"We are, Kookie." Jungkook heard Taehyung's deep voice but couldn't see him. A hand briefly touched his head before disappearing. "This is what we have to do to keep you safe."

Heat flushed over Jungkook's skin and he shifted uncomfortably, feeling sweat dampening his back and chest. He tried to kick his head back to get the hood to fall off but it just caused a spike of pain through his temples, followed by a wave of dizziness. He laid his head back on Namjoon's shoulder as dry coughs bubbled out from his throat again. He felt miserable. He couldn't remember ever feeling this poorly in his entire life.

The hood was gently lifted back from his head and he saw Seokjin crouching next to him, holding a bottle of water. His face was painted in anguish.

"I'm so sorry this is happening to you, Jungkook-ah," he said, and there was real sorrow in his eyes. "I wish I could make it go away. We all do. We're doing everything we can to make you feel better as fast as we can."

"Then untie my hands. That will make me feel better."

Seokjin just held the bottle up to Jungkook's lips and helped tip his head back. The water felt amazingly cold sliding down his scratchy throat and spreading into his stomach. He kept swallowing, eyes closed, until the bottle was empty. Seokjin stepped away and Jungkook breathed deeply a few times, enjoying the tiny amount of reprieve from the heat. But the water didn't soothe his pounding heart or his rising anxiety.

"Please, hyung," he said to any one of them that was listening, his numb fingers fumbling around for the knots as though moving on their own. He had never had his arms tied together before and it was a horrible feeling. "Let me hold on by myself."

Namjoon, who had been hanging his head below him, looked up to glance at the others.

"You could pass out again at any time, Kook-ah, we really can't risk it," he replied.

Heat was already rolling through him again and his mind felt hazy. "I'm awake now though."

"I know, but you might not be in another minute and we still have a ways to go."

Jungkook tried to wipe some of the sweat off his face with his shoulder. "But I'm...well, so just let me hold on by myself until then."
Namjoon chuckled just a tiny bit under him. "That's not how that works. It could be too late by then."

Jungkook struggled a little bit, trying to squirm away from the heat pressing in around him. "Can I take this coat off? It's way too hot."

"It's freezing out, Jungkookie," Jimin spoke up behind him, sounding both worried and confused. Jungkook tried to look for him in the dark. "We can't take it off, you'll just get sicker. Can you not feel how cold the air is?"

"I'm too hot though, can you help me take it off?"

"Kookie -"

"Listen," Yoongi suddenly interjected. "Confusion and disorientation are some of the main symptoms of blood loss. I hate to say this but we don't have the time to try and get him to understand why we are doing what we are doing. We shouldn't have stopped this long."

Were they not going to help him at all?

"No, I understand what you're doing, really," he lied, his voice rising. "Please, just take the coat off." He felt like he was boiling up. His breathing started to pick up and anxiety coiled around his chest.

"And untie my hands, let me hold on by myself. I don't understand why I can't." He realized belatedly that he had just told them that he both did and didn't understand.

"Hyung, he already barely knows what's going on," Taehyung said. "He's just going to get scared if we force him to stay like this and he doesn't understand why."

"Do you want to sit here and try to walk him through it while he continues to bleed out?" There was an edge to Yoongi's voice.

"I didn't say that," Taehyung countered, a hardness entering his voice as well. "I'm saying that he spent hours suffering alone wanting us to come help him and now that we're here he thinks we're making it worse."

"He can think what he wants right now. He's not himself, he'll understand later."

"So you want us to just ignore him?"

"No, we just can't spend any more time trying to explain things to him."

"That's the same as ignoring him!"

"Namjoon, come on, let's go."

"No, don't!" Jungkook exclaimed. Namjoon's arms tightened slightly around Jungkook's legs but he didn't get up. "Please, just let me cool down first. Let me move my arms."

He heard restless shuffling close by followed by Jimin's tense voice. "Come on, we can untie his hands for a little while. We should do it now, while he's awake."

"I told you, we can't take the time! If we untie him and keep walking, he could pass out and we might not know until it's too late, and we definitely can't sit here any longer than we already have."

Jungkook squirmed nervously. He glanced up at the forms standing over him, seeing only bits and pieces of jackets and faces in the gold beam of the flashlight. No one was even looking at him
anymore. They were arguing over his head.

"Take the coat off," he demanded desperately, but his voice was small and weak and dissolved into a series of coughs, making his head pound painfully. His body was hot far past the point of being uncomfortable and he couldn't wrap his mind around the fact that his hyungs didn't seem willing to help him.

"He needs to know that he's safe now with us! Just give him two minutes!" Taehyung insisted loudly. "He's already traumatized, do you really want to keep adding to that?"

The words were becoming overwhelming and hard to keep up with. No one was listening to him. He was still out here in the woods. He was still in pain and he still couldn't move. Finally his hyungs were with him but his suffering had only turned from cold to heat. From a trapped leg to trapped arms. Those were the two things they could relieve him from but instead they were forcing him to stay that way.

The panic and claustrophobia that had been steadily building in him finally burst and self preservation kicked in. While the others continued to argue, he lifted his trembling arms up over Namjoon's head and scrambled to get his feet under him in an attempt to push away from Namjoon. He didn't know what he was hoping to accomplish or how far he would get, he just knew he needed to get out, and it needed to be now. But as exclamations broke out around him, Namjoon tightened his grip on Jungkook's thighs to keep him in place and hands landed heavily on his back to push him right back down. Then Namjoon stood again, bringing Jungkook up with him.

"No!" Jungkook felt frustrated tears begin to fill his eyes and kicked his legs feebly, hoping to somehow still feel the solid ground beneath them. "Just untie me or take the coat off, please! Why isn't anyone listening to me?"

"Hyung, stop!" Jimin protested nearby.

"I'm sorry, but Yoongi is right," Namjoon returned, and started walking again.

"Hyung!" Taehyung called emphatically, his voice angry.

"If you want to keep arguing, argue while we walk."

"Hyung, please!" Jungkook cried in distress. He squeezed his legs into Namjoon's sides, hoping to get his attention. "I'm serious, I hate this! Put me down!"

"You're making this so much worse for him!" Taehyung continued, his shadowy form struggling to walk next to Namjoon and stumbling over rocks in the dark.

"He's getting worse no matter what we do. But getting him to a hospital is priority number one."

Jungkook squirmed in another fruitless attempt to somehow worm his way out of the coat, and continued to pull at his bound wrists.

"Just let his hands free while he's awake, let him hold on," Jimin urged.

"There's no guarantee that he's going to stay awake the whole way back," Namjoon continued steadily, but there was definite irritation creeping into his voice. "Maybe you two are willing to risk that but I'm not. Jungkook stop moving."

Jungkook stilled at the commanding tone.
"Kookie I'm sorry," Namjoon apologized, but the irritation hadn't left his voice. "I know you feel too hot right now but the air is freezing and it would be too dangerous to take your coat off. You're still shaking and you're getting sick."

"We honestly shouldn't have even let him drink that whole bottle of water," Yoongi muttered.

"You've got to be kidding me!" Taehyung exclaimed in return.

"You think pouring cold water into someone who has been laying out in freezing conditions all night is a smart idea?"

"I'm not cold anymore though, I'm hot," Jungkook insisted yet again, wishing he didn't sound so pitiful. The level of heat he was feeling had to be dangerous. "Please believe me, I need to cool down."

The lump in his throat was beginning to hurt when he swallowed and his chest felt tight, making it hard to breath. He couldn't handle this pain and fear and lack of control anymore. His hands clenched into fists. It was just too much. If they weren't willing to help him, he would rather...

"If you're not going to help me then just leave me alone! Put me down, please, I'll find my own way back. I need to cool down, I need to be able to move! I can't stay like this! Just leave me alone, please, I can't do this anymore -"

"Put him down!" Taehyung demanded loudly over Jungkook's weak but desperate babbling. "He's scared, why the hell are you still -"

"Shut up!" Yoongi yelled, his voice echoing in the forest. "We're not stopping. We're not doing anything but getting him to the hospital as fast as possible. I know he feels like he's burning up, and I know he's feeling out of control and I know that that's scaring him. Do I have to remind you why? Because he's lost a dangerous amount of blood and is still bleeding out. That's the problem we need to fix."

"But he thinks we're doing this to him on purpose," Taehyung challenged. "He obviously doesn't think that he's safe with us and he's -"

"No he doesn't and we are doing it on purpose," Yoongi cut Taehyung off again. "Not to make him suffer more but to end it in the smallest amount of time possible. I told you, he doesn't know what's best for him right now. This is what's best for him, this is the lesser of two evils."

"Yeah but if we can make him feel even a little bit better right now, why don't you want to even try?" Jimin countered sharply.

"Because taking his coat off in freezing conditions is stupid and will make him worse, and untying his hands means risking him falling and getting hurt the second he passes out again, which I'm willing to bet will be any time now. Not to mention that if we untie him now he'll probably just try to take the coat off himself."

"Then let's just stop for a minute and -"

"Stop arguing!" Namjoon finally snapped. Jungkook jolted at the loud noise right beside his ear and Namjoon immediately lowered his voice. "I told you before, Yoongi is right. We're not talking about this anymore."

Although Jungkook had barely been able to keep up with the conversation, any hope he had dwindled to nothing at the finality in Namjoon's voice. He heard nothing now except the trudging of
feet on the forest floor, labored breathing, and his own hammering heartbeat. Namjoon hiked him up higher onto his back and Jungkook grunted as the motion brushed his leg against Namjoon's hip. For a split second, the concentrated pain sent him back to the cold hard ground, put the metal trap around his leg again and chained him to the ground again. Fear punched him in the chest as though it were a physical blow and immediately tears were trickling from the corners of his eyes and his already rapid breathing started to hitch sporadically.

He was just as powerless now as he was then. There was so much pain. He still couldn't walk, and now he wasn't even allowed to move his arms. Possibly worst of all was that his members were doing nothing about it. He could do nothing but hurt and suffer and wait for someone to do something to help him.

"Hyung, please," he begged softly, his voice cracking. "Please do something."

"I'm so sorry, Jungkookie." Namjoon sounded broken. "It's just for a little while longer, I promise."

With a whimper of defeat, Jungkook dropped his head onto his leader's shoulder and soon the uneven breaths that were catching and constricting his throat turned into miserable sobbing. Tears spilled in hot streaks down his face and dripped off his chin to wet Namjoon's jacket. He was too weak to even try to squirm away from the suffocating heat anymore and just let it roll through him over and over as his body shook. He tried to bury his face into his arm as he wept, tasting the salt of tears and sweat.

He was vaguely aware that he wasn't the only one crying.

Long fingers briefly touched his face, blessedly cold, and Jungkook wanted to lean into them but an instant later they were gone.

"Try and trust us Kookie," Seokjin's voice reached his ears from right next to him. "I promise we're taking care of you. Please trust us."

Trust them, his mind instantly latched onto the phrase and began to repeat it over and over like a lifeline. Trust them, trust them, trust them.

His skin began to tingle and then, as though water was being poured on his head, a cooling sensation spread down through him. But before he could register relief from the unbearable heat, it went from cool to cold to frigid and he almost stopped crying at the shock of the transition. A violent shudder shook him as the sweat and tears on his face and neck suddenly chilled and he clenched his now painfully cold fists, trying unsuccessfully to pull his hands into his sleeves or pull his hood back up to protect his head, anything...but of course he was helpless. He squeezed his shaking legs, trying to somehow huddle closer to Namjoon's warmth.

Trust them, trust them, he tried repeating, but he didn't understand the words anymore.

The frigid air felt like cold knives slicing down his sore throat and into his lungs with every gasping sob, but his chest was heaving and he was too overwhelmed to know how to calm down. He was starting to grow dizzy and suddenly felt hands on his back. He heard them call his name but then he recognized the light, floating feeling that came just before passing out and immediately chased after it, longing for the relief of unconsciousness. The last thing he was aware of before letting go of all thought and sensation was the feeling of his hood being pulled gently back up over his head.
Yoongi's heart pounded like he was running a marathon. There was a stabbing pain deep in his chest that he knew was from more than just the harsh cold air making his lungs burn. He couldn't think. He couldn't let himself think. He couldn't let himself listen to the members who continued to cry behind him, or even let himself try to figure out who it was.

Stress was not new to him. Over the years he had gotten good at staying relatively calm, staying practical, and taking things in stride. However the higher the stress level rose, the more difficult it became and the more his mind began to shut down. Emotions were slowly pushed to the corners of his mind and he built a wall behind which only logic was welcome. In times of crisis, it was all he had. Logic and practicality. He knew himself well enough to know that he couldn't deal with just one emotion at a time. It was either feel nothing, or feel everything all at once in a rush of overwhelming grief and fear. Detachment was safer. Not just for him but for everyone. He could at least be somewhat helpful by providing an objective view on a difficult situation instead of being a useless broken mess.

This particular level of stress, however, was so far beyond what he had ever experienced that he was losing his grip on what was the the best course of action and what wasn't. Staying calm had clearly gone out the window long ago. Now all he had was logic but he couldn't ignore the little voice in the back of his mind that told him he had lost that as well. It felt as though this time his protective wall was built not of strong concrete but of glass. He may have managed to push his emotions to the other side, but he could still see them, looming just on the other side and waiting for the glass to break.

Like the oh so fresh memory of Jungkook sobbing and begging them to stop. And not only had Yoongi ignored him, but he had forced the others to as well. Despite having happened almost ten minutes ago, it felt as though it was still happening even now. Warm tears gathered in Yoongi's eyes and a tiny crack formed in his wall before he was able to turn away. That couldn't matter right now. Jungkook crying couldn't matter. Jungkook living. That's what mattered. Get him to a hospital. Get him to a doctor, get him to a nurse, get him to anyone who knows what they are doing.

Suddenly Yoongi stopped short, his mouth dropping open and the burning in his chest flaring painfully.

"Shit. Shit!"

Seokjin bumped into his back and Yoongi spun around.

"We're fucking morons!" Yoongi said. Everyone had come to a stop and Yoongi saw Seokjin's wide and tear-filled eyes look back at him in something close to fear. In the back of his mind Yoongi knew he had been yelling way more than he should be but he couldn't let that matter and pushed the thought to the other side of his wall.

"Why?" Seokjin asked, voice wavering and hesitant.

"Keep moving," Namjoon urged firmly.

"We need to call a fucking ambulance," Yoongi said, shame and self hatred bleeding through the growing cracks in his wall.

He was met with a deathly silence. Seokjin, the only member he could see clearly, didn't move a single muscle and just stared back at him as though his mind was still elsewhere. Yoongi fumbled for
"But we're like two minutes away from the house now," Taehyung replied, his voice rough and interrupted by sniffling. "Isn't it too late to call an ambulance?"

Yoongi's hands shook as he tried to unlock the screen. His fingers were too cold to hold still and his phone wasn't recognizing his thumbprint. "It's not too late. We have no idea what we're doing, we can get someone who does."

"If I'll take a half hour for them to get here. After what just happened, after refusing to stop regardless of what it did to him, now you're thinking of sitting down to wait?"

"Keep walking!" Namjoon called. He pushed forward, forcing Seokjin into Yoongi, who stumbled forward. A branch bumped into his shoulder and he almost dropped his phone but kept trying to get it open. He got his hands to stop shaking long enough to hold his thumb over the button but all it did was leave a bloody thumbprint.

"Well now it's necessary."

"You realize it would take them another half hour to get back to the city," Jimin pointed out. "You're the one that said getting him to the hospital in the shortest amount of time possible is the most important thing. You want to delay that an hour now?"

Yoongi's mind was racing, thoughts pingding back and forth. "I don't know, okay?"

"Listen, I can feel his heartbeat once in a while," Namjoon said. "It was going really fast before but it calmed down, it feels almost normal now. He's breathing normally too I think."

"We're not professionals!"

"We're almost to the van. We need to just get him in and go." Namjoon was breathing heavily and grunted as he struggled to adjust Jungkook on his back while they walked.

"Yeah, but it would be better to have him driven there by someone who can actually be helping him on the way."

"I know. And you're right, we are all humiliatingly stupid for not thinking of calling an ambulance before. But from where we are now, it's going to be a half hour until he gets help either way. Either we spend a half hour in the van after which he gets hospital care, or we spend a half hour at the house after which he gets first responder care, then it's another half hour to get to the actual hospital. Which one do you think is the better option?"

Yoongi couldn't answer because he knew the right answer. But it felt wrong, somehow, to not use that option now that he had taken his head out of his ass long enough to remember it. What a blatant mistake. What was the point of being the bad guy, of pushing all empathy aside for the sake of being so-called 'practical', when he missed something that was so clear a grade schooler would have thought of it.

Logic was all he had left. But what was the most logical thing to do thing to do when someone needed serious medical attention? Call a fucking ambulance. No, the others hadn't thought of it either, but they had the excuse of actually dealing with their overwhelming emotions. His only role was to stay smart, it was the only thing he was good for. Now he realized with a slow wave of nausea deep in his stomach that he had never even had that from the beginning.

He couldn't hear any crying behind him anymore and wondered if they had become as numb as he
was. He had shoved his phone back into his pocket and now felt branches scraping against his hands as he tried to push through them. They should be reaching the end of the forest soon, or so he hoped. Shame and regret were staring him down, pushing against that glass wall and seeking out the cracks that were continuing to multiply. He had to hold out as long as he could. No longer under the illusion that he would be more useful but out of pure fear. Because it was just a matter of time before that wall broke, and then he would be forced to face the reality that his stupid mistake may just end up costing Jungkook his life.

Chapter End Notes

Please don't hate me for putting Kookie through that! But I would be VERY interested to hear if you guys would have been able to take a side in that argument, and if so, which side would you have ended up on? I did my best to make it a nearly impossible choice.

(PS. I don't know why ao3 sometimes continues to post chapter one's end notes at the end of every other chapter after that. It's kind of annoying and I'm sure it is for you guys too, so if anyone knows whether there is a fix for that or not, please do let me know! Watch, it won't do it this time and I'll look delusional.)
Hoseok sat perched on the back bumper of the van. He had backed it onto the lawn towards the rear of the house, getting it as close to the tree line as he felt he safely could without it getting stuck in the field. He left it running to heat the interior and watched the exhaust curl out over the grass in front of him.

Guilt crawled under his skin. He had avoided it for as long as he could by busying himself with preparation. He had stuffed the van with pillows and comforters, packed bags with fresh clothes for each of the members, gathered all of their phone chargers, toothbrushes, and anything else he could find that they might possibly need in the next twenty-four hours. He had found the closest hospital online and punched the address into his phone’s GPS. He had even gone through the route mentally several times and could probably get there without help if need be. He had re-installed his Korean to Japanese translator app and typed in a list of questions, answers, and phrases they might need to use when dealing with the doctors and nurses. When he couldn’t think of anything else to do, he made tea and put it into thermoses. Then he found crackers and put them into the van as well.

Finally he was left with nothing to do. Nothing to do but sit and wait and admit to himself that he was a coward. He had backed out and taken the easy route for no reason other than that he was afraid. The others had all gone without hesitation, into an unknown forest in the middle of the night for the sake of their youngest member while Hoseok stayed in the warm house and packed bags. Jungkook had been out there for hours suffering and afraid and alone, and Hoseok didn’t go to help him, and for what reason? Because he was afraid to look at him. He was afraid to see the blood and gore. Jungkook was living it and Hoseok was afraid to even look at it.

He bit hard on his bottom lip to stop the tears of shame that had begun to gather, leaning back and staring at the sky until they were completely gone. The very least that he could do for them now was stay strong and stay in control of himself. He didn’t know in what state they would return to him and vowed that no matter what happened, as soon as they got there he would take over and he would take care of them.

The sky began to lighten and the van continued to idle under him. He stared at his phone, longing to ask someone what was going on and whether or not they were okay but he resisted, knowing he would just be a distraction. They would tell him what he needed to know and that was okay.

Then his phone chimed as a text message came in.

Seokjin> Is the van ready?

Hoseok’s thumbs tapped rapidly on his screen to reply.

Hoseok> Yes, it's at the back of the house.

He lowered his phone and began to bounce his legs up and down anxiously as he scanned the trees.
for his friends. He cupped his hands in front of his mouth, exhaling slowly on them to try and warm his fingers. Another several minutes went by and he began to pace behind the van, unconsciously growing closer to the forest's edge.

Finally he heard faint movement in the woods and one by one his members trailed out into the field. For a moment he froze, confronted with what he had tried to avoid when they first left. But the state that they were in shoved the fear straight out of his mind and replaced it with an overwhelming protective instinct.

From what he could see in the grayish pre-dawn light they looked beyond exhausted both physically and mentally. Some of them had dirt smeared over their clothes. More alarming were the smears of blood in seemingly random places. Yoongi's hands had blood on them. Seokjin's jeans had blood on them. Half of them were wearing someone else's jacket. Taehyung, Jimin, and Seokjin's eyes and noses were red as though they had been crying but there were no tears on their sullen faces, as though they didn't have it in them to cry any more.

Yoongi's face, on the other hand, was deceptively empty. Uncaring, even. But Hoseok knew him more than well enough to know that that was merely a fragile shell. Namjoon was having a difficult time holding Jungkook up, breathing heavily, arms and legs shaking almost imperceptibly. Hoseok wondered just how long he had been carrying their maknae.

Then there was Jungkook himself, who was limp over Namjoon's back. For a moment Hoseok blanked in confusion at seeing his arms tied. Had he tried to fight them off for some reason? Was he that bad off that he had somehow become delusional? But then Namjoon's steps stuttered and Jungkook slid slightly to one side before their leader could shift him upright again and Hoseok realized that it was to make carrying him easier and safer. It was a smart idea. He couldn't actually see a whole lot of Jungkook himself other than the bloody shirt that was tied tightly around his leg and he wanted so badly to run over to him and pull back that big black hood so he could see his face. He wanted to ask Namjoon to put him down so Hoseok could look him over and hold him and just be reassured that he was really there with them. He wanted to take the time to tell Jungkook that everything would be okay, whether or not he would be heard.

But all those things would be for his own comfort and benefit, not Jungkook's, so instead he dashed back to the van and opened all of the doors for them.

"Lay him down in the middle row," Hoseok said quickly as they approached. He had laid a plush comforter over the seat along with a couple pillows. "Someone can hold him and then someone else can hold his leg up on one of those pillows."

No one answered him, but they worked as best they could to get Jungkook into the van safely and quickly. They untied his hands and Yoongi crawled in first, pulling Jungkook in after him to lay mostly on his lap, curled slightly against his chest with a pillow between him and the window. Jimin followed and held Jungkook's damaged right leg carefully on a pillow in his lap. Namjoon and Taehyung filed into the back of the van and Seokjin joined Hoseok up front in the passenger seat.

"How is he?" Hoseok asked, immediately putting the van into drive and pulling out of the yard and onto the road. He glanced worriedly into the rear-view mirror to see Yoongi pulling part of the comforter up to wrap around Jungkook's body over the coat. Jungkook looked haggard, his usually silky black hair matted and dirty, his face streaked with blood and dirt and covered in a sheen of sweat.

Yoongi held Jungkook tight against him but just stared impassively out the window as he answered. "Not good. He lost a lot of blood."
"Has he woken up at all?"

"A couple of times."

"That's good. Was he talking? What did he say?"

Yoongi didn't answer at first, as though he was carefully considering his reply. "He was really confused a lot of the time."

"Oh...that can't be good."

There was an uncomfortable silence and Hoseok started to feel strangely uneasy the longer it stretched. Truthfully, he had expected them to be full of worried chatter and thought that he might have a hard time figuring out what happened because they would all be trying to talk at the same time. But no one had spoken a word other than Yoongi and even he seemed unwilling to give anything other than simple replies.

"You made it though," Hoseok broke the quiet as positively as he could. "You got the trap off of him. He's here because of all of you. I can't even imagine how relieved he must have been to have you guys there with him."

More silence. There was an air of tension in the van that made Hoseok's eyes flicker up to look at them in the mirror. There was worry, concern, and fear for sure...but there was something else there too.

"There's hot tea in those thermoses in the cup holders. It might help, if you can wake him up again you can see if -"

"No," several members said at once. He heard Namjoon and Taehyung's voices but wasn't sure who else.

Hoseok raised his eyebrows. "Okay..."

"Sorry Hobi," Namjoon immediately apologized, glancing at Jungkook's tense face before quickly looking away again. "If he comes to on his own maybe, but I don't think we should wake him up."

"Why? Isn't it a good thing if he's able to wake up?"

Surprisingly, Namjoon didn't answer him. No one answered him.

"What's wrong with you guys, what happened?"

"He's just in a lot of pain, that's all," Jimin spoke up softly. "It's better for him to be asleep, I think."

"Seeing us might just upset him now anyway," Taehyung added.

Hoseok glanced at the mirror in time to see Taehyung flash a subtle glare at both Yoongi and Namjoon and was shocked when Namjoon shot an angry look back at him. Yoongi's gaze hardened as he stared out the window, and Jimin was chewing on his lip, staring purposefully at the back of Seokjin's seat.

Something had definitely happened out there.

"You know what, we're that much closer to the hospital though, and that's what matters," Namjoon said plainly, in a tone of voice he only used when he didn't want anyone to argue with him.
"Let's hope he feels safe with the doctors, then. He needs to be able to trust someone," Jimin muttered in small but uncharacteristic rebellion.

"Well, then you guys have some tea at least," Hoseok said quickly, hoping he might distract them from whatever conflict was going on as he pulled onto the highway towards the city. The sun had still not quite risen yet and the roads were blessedly empty. "I'm sure you're all still freezing."

"Jin-hyung, you should have some," Taehyung called up. "You were out there a long time."

Seokjin had been quiet in the passenger seat, leaning against the door with his head in his hand. He looked like he was barely holding himself together. Jimin reached forward and gently bumped a thermos of tea into his arm until he finally took it, but still said nothing.

"Anyone need to charge their phones?" Hoseok asked.

Several phones were passed up in silence to be plugged into the car chargers. Taehyung's was almost dead, as was Yoongi's.

Finally he couldn't take it anymore.

"What could there possibly be to fight about? Why wouldn't Kookie want to see you?"

"Because he was scared and upset and suffering and we didn't help him," Taehyung provided immediately.

"What?!"

"We did help him, we did the best thing for him," Namjoon returned sharply.

"Not from his point of view," Taehyung maintained, refusing to look anywhere but out the window.

"I'm sorry, but his point of view can't be what we make our decisions based on."

"We really could have made things better for him, though," Jimin added. "I still don't understand why we didn't. One or two minutes couldn't have hurt and he wouldn't have passed out crying his eyes out because of us."

"One or two minutes couldn't have hurt? Really?" Namjoon said heatedly. "Do you think he's out of danger yet? He's been bleeding out all night and we're still fifteen minutes away from the city. You don't know that a simple one or two minutes won't still make the difference. You can say that when he's in a hospital bed hooked up to an IV and surrounded by doctors."

"I just hope he remembers that not all of us were against him," Taehyung countered. "That at least some of us were listening to him."

Hoseok's eyes widened at the sudden vehemence that seemed to have exploded inside of the van.

Yoongi hadn't spoken yet and Hoseok was a little surprised at that. He had a way of staying calm and providing a voice of logic amidst flaring emotions that often stopped conflict before it got out of control. But when Hoseok looked back at him he saw that his older friend's eyebrows were knit together, and his chin was quivering ever so slightly. He was still facing out the window but didn't seem to be looking at anything in particular, his nose a soft pink and his eyes shiny with tears.

It all felt so wrong, and Hoseok had no idea how to handle what was happening. Namjoon was uncharacteristically angry and gave no indication of letting up. Taehyung and Jimin were talking
back to their leader, fairly seriously. Yoongi was crying in silence, and Seokjin, the only one who could actually pull rank on all of them, seemed to have checked out of the situation entirely, just leaning on the window with his head in his hand. It was as though the group's whole dynamic had shifted, in a very bad way.

"As soon as he's better he's going to understand that we were all helping him," Namjoon was saying. "It's not hard to see that."

"Or maybe we'll hear the doctors say that we had plenty of time and that we should have tried to cool him down like he was begging us," Taehyung replied. "Or given him the tiniest bit of relief by untying him instead of traumatizing him and forcing him into a panic like that."

"He passed right out again, Tae, we were obviously right to keep his hands tied!"

"He might not have passed out at all if we hadn't upset him that badly," Jimin said. "He was hyperventilating or something, he might have been able to stay awake if we had just listened to him. I can't believe we did that to him."

"There's no way to -"

"We didn't do anything to him, Jimin," Taehyung cut Namjoon off. "That's all on them."

Hoseok's hands tightened on the steering wheel. His members were fighting among themselves in a situation that was already dire, a situation that should do nothing but bring them together. Yoongi had pulled the unresponsive Jungkook close against him and Hoseok could hear quiet sobbing as he buried his face into Jungkook's neck and softly rocked him back and forth. No one was comforting each other. No one was even paying much attention to Jungkook besides Yoongi, the realization of which made anger begin to bubble up within Hoseok.

"Then you know what, it's all on you for arguing and wasting time if we don't get to the hospital in time!"

"What is wrong with all of you?" Hoseok finally burst, struggling and failing to keep the anger out of his voice. Everyone went quiet and he took a moment to once again force his mind to go blank. He needed to stay practical. "I don't know what happened between you in the woods. I don't care what happened between you in the woods. And you shouldn't either, not right now. Right now our maknae is unconscious and covered in blood right in front of you and you would rather fight with each other? I hope to hell you didn't act like this when he was awake."

Yoongi's sobbing intensified behind him and Hoseok's heart clenched, but he kept going. "I know tensions are through the roof. We've never had to deal with anything like this before and we're all scared out of our minds. Everyone is over-tired, especially all of you, who have obviously been through a lot that I don't know about. But lashing out at each other is probably the worst thing you could be doing right now."

His eyes darted briefly up to the mirror and he saw nothing but anguish and regret on their faces. Truthfully he didn't know what he was saying until it was coming out of his mouth, but it seemed to at least be getting their attention.

"Do you care about Jungkook?"

No one answered, but it was a rhetorical question anyway. They all loved him more than they loved themselves.

"Then he is the only thing you need to focus on right now. Not each other. Not even yourselves. He
needs us united, so whatever this is, finish it when he's safe and being taken care of. Until then, pull yourselves together."

For a few seconds the only sound that could be heard was the tick of the van's blinker as Hoseok raced past the only other car on the highway. Then Namjoon gave a long sigh and dragged his hands down over his face before leaning forward to rest his arms against the back of Yoongi's seat. He hid his face in one as he stared at the floor and reached over the seat with the other to squeeze Yoongi's shoulder. No one else moved.

Hoseok was a little bit stunned with himself. He had never spoken to them like that before. It was one thing to be strict in the dance studio, but that was generally where his responsibility ended. Namjoon was the natural authority figure in the group, and if for whatever reason he wasn't able to fill that role, it was Yoongi or Seokjin that stepped in. Hoseok couldn't think of a time that a voice of authority was needed and all three of them had been physically or emotionally absent.

When Hoseok looked back he saw Yoongi sniffling and trying to wipe the dirt from Jungkook's cheeks, but his own hands were still smeared in dried blood so he was making little progress. Jimin was picking idly at Jungkook's shoelaces, seemingly desensitized to the blood that had saturated them. He looked as guilt-ridden and forlorn as Hoseok had ever seen him. Namjoon hadn't looked up but neither had he moved his hand from Yoongi's shoulder and Taehyung's face had turned a soft red, whether from shame or oncoming tears or some combination of both, and alternated between looking at Jungkook and staring anxiously out the window.

"Taehyungie," Hoseok said. "I put some of those anti-bacterial wipes under your seat. Can you give them to Yoongi, or maybe help him?"

Taehyung looked grateful to have something to do, and soon both he and Namjoon were carefully leaning over to help Yoongi clean off both himself and Jungkook.

"Hey, I think it stopped bleeding," Jimin said a few moments later, staring down at Jungkook's leg. "I wonder if maybe we should take off his shoe and sock? They are all bloody and still pretty cold on his foot."

"That might be a good idea," Yoongi replied, but then seemed to almost immediately backtrack. "I really don't know though. I don't know anymore."

"Well, it would help to warm his foot up, right? The air in here is nice and warm," Namjoon said slowly, wiping down the back of one of Jungkook's hands that Yoongi was holding steady for him. "Do you think you can do it without moving his leg too much?"

"I think so."

Hoseok listened to them move around behind him, Taehyung helping Jimin pull Jungkook's shoelaces out and then ease his shoe off.

"Why do you think he overheated like that?" Taehyung asked in a carefully neutral voice as he peeled off Jungkook's sock and dropped it to the floor of the van. "He still feels cool to me."

"It's a fever, right?" Jimin replied, starting to wipe the dried blood from Jungkook's foot. "There's no way he's not sick."

"Well, I didn't want to say anything while he was awake because it might have scared him even more," Yoongi started, letting Jungkook's head fall gently back just far enough to wipe a spot of dirt from under his jawline, "but I'm pretty sure that's one of the signs of hypothermia."
The anxiety that had been simmering in Hoseok's chest flared at the word.

"It might not be that," Yoongi continued on quickly. "It might be a fever like Jiminie said. I don't know."

"I was actually worrying about that too," Namjoon said. He was holding one of Jungkook's hands carefully between his own to keep it warm. "I've read about people with hypothermia trying to take their clothes off because their bodies tell them that they are burning up instead of freezing."

"Could be a combination of things," Yoongi answered. He felt Jungkook's forehead before unzipping his coat slightly, just enough to get his hand inside and press his palm on the young man's chest. "His heart is beating really fast again," he said, his expression uneasy. "He's breathing fast too..."

"We're almost there, guys," Hoseok said as a sign flew by indicating the approach of their exit.

"I can't believe not a single one of us thought to call for help," Yoongi muttered bitterly. "We could have gotten a helicopter or something."

"I doubt a helicopter would even have been able to get to us," Taehyung replied. "We were in the middle of a forest. Besides, who here speaks Japanese well enough to have explained over the phone what was happening? We could thank them for coming to our concert and tell them we love them, but that's about it. We don't even know the emergency numbers in Sapporo."

"Still, why didn't we even think to try?"

"You know his phone was right there," Seokjin suddenly said, speaking for the first time since they had gotten in the van. His voice was cracking and his nose sounded stuffed up.

"What?" Hoseok asked, sparing a glance over to him. His heart dropped when he saw that Seokjin was weeping, his face red and scrunched up and tears already wetting his cheeks.

"His phone was right there next to him but he couldn't reach it." Seokjin had pulled his sleeve up over his hand and now held it under his nose, his breath catching in his throat as he spoke. "It was right there. He had to lay there and listen to us call for him and he couldn't do anything to respond."

Before he could stop himself, Hoseok made the mistake of picturing Jungkook on the ground, scared and crying and in pain. All alone. The mere thought was utterly heartrending, and tears sprang instantly to his eyes. Not for the first time, he felt the strong urge to abandon his responsibilities, to pull the car over and crawl back to hold his youngest friend close. Hold him close and comfort him and cry for him. Almost too late, he remembered his vow to himself and shoved his feelings down, swiping the tears away before they could dangerously blur his vision, and forced his mind to empty. No matter what it took, he would take care of them. His own emotions could be dealt with later.

Seokjin had turned around to look at their unconscious maknae but it only seemed to upset him further, and he reached his hand back to hold onto Jungkook's thigh. Hoseok wasn't sure what he could say that would be of any comfort and it seemed no one else did either. He squeezed Seokjin's leg with one hand, wishing he didn't have to pay more attention to the road than his crying friend. He could try to tell him that Jungkook wasn't alone anymore, that soon he would be safe and on the mend.

But memories aren't always so easily mended, and the fact that something so horrible had happened to him at all was just that. A fact.
Chapter End Notes

This was a difficult chapter to write, because staying in character is one of the most important things to me and here you have seven main characters all interacting in one small place (granted one of them is out cold) and I had to try to write them being out of character while somehow staying in character. I was probably way overthinking it. Haha... It was also hard simply because there were several things I wanted to happen and struggled a little bit with how to get it all in there in an organic way. I hope it came across okay!

By the way, I have LOVED the discussions in the comments! Reading and talking about everyone's take on what is happening has been awesome and has genuinely helped with the writing process! Keep up the good work, guys! <3
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

I was done early again and didn't want to make you wait. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Namjoon stared down at the thermos in his hands, twirling it in tiny circles and feeling the warm tea slosh around inside. His body ached all over, his arms, legs and back sore and weak from carrying Jungkook through the woods. His eyes burned and felt strained in the too-bright florescent light of the hospital waiting room. His head and face and neck ached from tension and pent up emotion.

His heart ached.

His heart ached for his little brother who had just been through what was probably the most painful and frightening night of his life. And the knowledge that Namjoon himself caused a large portion of that fear and suffering was tearing him up inside.

It was nearing 7:30 in the morning and they had already been in the waiting room for about an hour and a half. Jungkook was in surgery. They had learned that while his leg wasn't broken, he had been running so fast when the trap closed that tiny bone fragments had been scraped off of his shin bone that would need to be removed before receiving what would no doubt be many stitches. They had all changed into the fresh, comfortable clothes that Hoseok had packed for them, washed themselves up as best they could in the bathroom sink, and were now waiting in a small break room that the hospital was allowing them to use, separate from the larger public waiting area.

Seokjin and Hoseok were asleep on one of the other couches across the room. Seokjin had been coughing on and off and rubbing his eyes, then fell asleep almost immediately upon laying down, his head in Hoseok's lap. Namjoon had a sinking suspicion that his eldest hyung had caught a cold, which shouldn't be surprising considering how long he had been out in the cold in just a t-shirt. Namjoon's eyes went to Hoseok, and he couldn't help a small appreciative smile. His friend's head was tipped back, his mouth opened in sleep and his hand tangled in Seokjin's soft brown hair.

Hoseok had been nothing short of amazing. He seemed to be two steps ahead of everyone from the second they entered the van. Seokjin had been coughing on and off and rubbing his eyes, then fell asleep almost immediately upon laying down, his head in Hoseok's lap. Namjoon had a sinking suspicion that his eldest hyung had caught a cold, which shouldn't be surprising considering how long he had been out in the cold in just a t-shirt. Namjoon's eyes went to Hoseok, and he couldn't help a small appreciative smile. His friend's head was tipped back, his mouth opened in sleep and his hand tangled in Seokjin's soft brown hair.

Hoseok had been nothing short of amazing. He seemed to be two steps ahead of everyone from the second they entered the van. He had tissues the second they needed them, wet wipes to clean off the blood when they needed them. He'd packed so many pillows and blankets into the van that it looked like the inside of a mental institution. They were in clean clothes and had even been able to brush their teeth because of him. He knew exactly where the hospital was, knew exactly which entrance to use, and communicated with the Japanese doctors as though he had already had the conversation before.

He had shown more leadership in two hours than Namjoon had all night. Hoseok had somehow been able to remain calm and rational while Namjoon lost his mind and let fear take over to the point that the most basic of emergency steps had never even occurred to him. He had never had such tunnel vision before, and it was more than a little frightening to know that he couldn't handle a crisis like he had always assumed he could. Now that Jungkook was actually safe, it was all too easy to take a step back and realize just how many times he had failed. He should have immediately tried to call an ambulance. He should have applied a tourniquet. There were so many things that he should have done, but instead he rushed blindly into the woods, yelled at his band mates who were only
trying to help, ignored his poor scared and suffering friend and made him cry until he passed out.

Namjoon chewed the inside of his mouth and dropped his eyes to stare at his lap in shame. Logic told him that he had at least made the right decision to keep walking and not stop the night before, that Jungkook's physical well-being had to take precedence over his mental well-being, as difficult as that choice was. But his heart kept telling him otherwise. He couldn't forget the feeling of Jungkook fighting desperately to get away from him. Or the tears that he felt wetting his neck, or the sobbing and soft broken pleas in his ear. Or the sight of his blood-smeared hands, tied right in front of Namjoon and bunching into fists as he told them he would rather they leave him bleeding on the forest floor than go on with them.

He knew how much Jungkook looked up to him. His youngest friend never missed an opportunity to tell him how cool he thought he was and how much he loved him and loved the way his mind worked. It was blatantly evident even in just his eyes, the way they would sparkle in wonder when Namjoon explained certain lyrics to him or showed him a new song. Even the most simple things like giving a speech in English seemed to baffle him. His open admiration never failed to make Namjoon's heart melt and only increased his already unbelievably huge soft spot for their maknae.

He always followed Namjoon's lead so easily and trusted him so implicitly. Even if he had been near delusional while saying it, for Jungkook to think he was better off fending for himself in his condition than trust in Namjoon... the amount of betrayal and hurt he must have been feeling made Namjoon's already broken heart sink into a sea of guilt. But with the amount of failures he had displayed the night before, Namjoon was beginning to wonder whether he was even worthy of that trust to begin with.

"Why didn't you say anything about your ankle?" Taehyung's deep voice drew him out of his brooding and he felt the vinyl couch cushion dip low as the singer sat down next to him. Namjoon continued to stare at his lap, not quite bold enough to look him in the eye just yet.

"There was no real need to say anything, I guess," Namjoon replied. He had rolled his ankle at some point during the night while carrying Jungkook to the van. He didn't know exactly when it happened. He had stumbled and tripped so many times and at some point just realized that it was twinging and hurting every time he stepped on it. It had been throbbing ever since, and as soon as he was confident that the doctors had taken over care of Jungkook, he had quietly asked one of the nurses for a bag of ice.

"Maybe you should have someone look at it."

"No, it's not that bad. Really. I would have asked one of the nurses if I thought something was actually wrong with it," he assured, leaning back on the couch. The movement made the bag of ice slide off his ankle where it rested on the coffee table but before he could move to readjust it, Taehyung leaned forward and moved the ice back into place for him, holding it there briefly to make sure it stayed.

"Any one of us could have taken over, hyung," the younger man reminded quietly. He sat back and pulled his feet up under him. There was a bandage on the back of his hand and forearm from where he had apparently tripped in the dark and careened into a tree to catch himself, scraping himself up in the process.

"I was afraid he would wake up if we tried to transfer him to someone else," Namjoon admitted. "It was sometime after he passed out again and it wasn't slowing me down, so I just thought it would be better to keep going. It wasn't worth the risk of waking him up." He didn't mention that a part of him wanted to feel the pain. That a part of him knew he deserved it, in return for what he had done to Jungkook. Even if his own pain was laughably inferior to what Jungkook experienced, it somehow
eased his guilt even if just a tiny bit.

"I know you're blaming yourself, Namjoonie-hyung," Taehyung said, picking idly at the medical tape on the back of his hand. "Because you always do. But we were all just trying to help him. Like you said. We just... we don't agree on what that meant."

"I guess," Namjoon sighed, finally risking a glance up. He saw a reserved sort of understanding in Taehyung's eyes and relaxed a bit. "It's just... he wanted us to leave him there."

Taehyung let out a humorless chuckle. "Yeah, well not even I was going to listen to him when it came to that."

Namjoon smiled briefly before dropping his gaze again. "He must hate me. He must feel so betrayed."

"He's not going to hate you. I think you were right when you said he would understand when he gets better. I don't agree with your decision, but I still understand why you made it, and I know he will too." Taehyung shifted a little bit closer and gave Namjoon's thigh a small pat. "It's not your fault. And you're acting like you were the only one who wanted to keep going. Yoongi-hyung made the decision too."

Namjoon tipped his head back to rest on the back of the couch. "I know," he drawled. "Yoongi was even more in favor of it than I was, but... I'm the one that could have physically stopped and put him down at any time. And I didn't. And he just kept begging and fighting, and I felt like a monster for forcing him like that. Even though I still think I did the right thing... or at least I hope I did..." He scrubbed his hands over his face in frustration. "Ugh, I don't know. I just don't know. I feel so guilty."

"I don't know either. But I know you shouldn't blame yourself."

They heard footsteps and glanced up to see Yoongi and Jimin entering the room, Yoongi slipping his phone back into his pocket and Jimin's hands full of snacks from the van. Yet another thing Hoseok had thought of.

"The company says to just stay put for now," Yoongi said, sitting carefully on the coffee table in front of them. Jimin sat down next to him, putting granola bars and crackers into Namjoon and Taehyung's laps. "They are going to decide what to tell the press and in the meantime we should bring Jungkook back to the house and let him recover here. Travel is obviously out of the question right now and it's smarter to stay close to the hospital where he was initially treated anyway. We still have the week to ourselves here and the company said that can easily be extended. The rest of us will need to get back to work in a couple weeks, obviously, but there is nothing major coming up so our schedule is going to be lighter than normal anyway."

Namjoon hummed in acknowledgement and Taehyung nodded, already tearing into one of the granola bars. A few moments of silence went by and then Yoongi crossed his legs and laced his fingers over his knee.

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"So," he murmured, and Namjoon immediately knew what was coming. But it was needed and now was as good a time as any. "We all yelled at each other and acted like children and made a bad situation worse."

Jimin immediately looked nervous, fiddling with a cracker in his hand. "Was it childish though? I mean I was just fighting for what I thought was best for him. You guys were too, right? I wish we hadn't argued in front of Kookie, but at the same time I thought stopping was going to make him
"Me neither," Taehyung said, his mouth full of granola. But then he swallowed and his eyes darted between Yoongi and Namjoon. "But I am... I know I was being really disrespectful to you two. And...bratty. So. I really am sorry for that."

Yoongi nodded, picking absently at a stray string on his jeans. "It's okay, I was being a huge dick too. I yelled way too much... well, I handled the whole thing really badly."

"Anger is easier to handle than fear, you know," Namjoon said. "It's human nature. Anger lets you feel like you are still somewhat in control of something. I know we were all terrified, and we were all fighting for what we thought was best for him so I suppose we shouldn't feel sorry for that. But I feel bad for losing my cool so much. I'm supposed to be levelheaded."

"Yeah you are," Jimin said, and Namjoon glanced down, his gut tightening. "You're supposed to be a robot for us. You're not allowed to be scared. Or mad. You're not allowed to feel emotions."

Namjoon snapped his eyes over to Jimin and saw a sly smirk on his face as he finally bit into his cracker. Namjoon smacked his arm lightly and looked back down with a smile. "Still. What a horrible night. I'm so disappointed in myself. It's like we didn't have a leader until we got to Hobi."

"We don't expect you to be a leader in situations like this, Namjoonie, you know that, right?" Yoongi said, and Namjoon could feel the other rapper's gaze on him. "You're our leader when it comes to organizing our schedule and speaking for us. And many other things, of course, but that's all in the context of our normal lives as idols. We are all still relatively inexperienced when it comes to life outside of that and we thought Jungkookie was dying. Well, he was dying. Don't feel like your leader position extends to situations like this."

Namjoon nodded slightly, but it wasn't that easy for him to accept. He didn't think there was any excuse for him to fail so badly and get so angry and completely lose sight of what mattered. "I don't know how we should resolve this. I'm just sorry for everything."

"I feel like none of us should need to apologize," Jimin said. "We were all fighting for Jungkookie."

"I kind of agree," Taehyung added. "I don't think anyone was wrong."

"I think everyone was wrong," Yoongi responded.

Jimin frowned. "I think everyone was right."

Namjoon pinched the bridge of his nose. "Oh my god, we can't fight while making up."

"Mr. Kim?"

They looked to the door where a small nurse in blue scrubs stood with a folder of papers in her hands. "Your friend is out of surgery," she said. To Namjoon's great relief, the hospital had eventually found a bilingual nurse that spoke Korean, something that had already made their lives infinitely easier.

Jimin reached behind him and patted Hoseok on the leg to wake him up, who in turn groggily scratched his hand in Seokjin's hair until he too sat up rubbing his face.

"The surgery went well," the nurse started, sitting politely nearby and glancing around at them with warm eyes. "All of the bone fragments were removed without any complications. He needed forty-seven stitches in total, some internal, some external. His hands weren't as bad as they looked and will suffer less and I'm not sorry for fighting for that."
heal just fine on their own without the need for stitches as long as they are cared for properly. He did lose a lot of blood but I'm happy to say he won't need a transfusion. The low temperature actually helped slow down the blood flow, and when body temperature drops low enough it will actually direct the flow away from the limbs and towards the vital organs in the core like the heart and the brain."

Namjoon nodded rapidly, trying to file away the information as it came at him.

"Of course that left him more at risk for other conditions. He did have hypothermia and was in shock when he got here. The hypothermia was only in its initial stages, however, so there was no lasting damage. He does unfortunately have a sinus infection along with a common cold virus, though. We'll give him a prescription for pain medication along with some antibiotics to clear up the sinus infection and help reduce the risk of infection in his leg. His body will slowly regenerate its blood supply on its own but we'd like to keep him here for the rest of the day and keep him on an IV to help speed that process along. He'll need to use crutches for a couple weeks to avoid putting stress on the stitches but after that he should be able to move around as long as he's careful."

"I-...um, yes, okay," Namjoon stuttered, his mind reeling. He must have looked shell shocked, because the nurse smiled gently and put a hand on his arm.

"Don't worry, I will give you a print out of all this information along with some instructions on how to help him care for the wound."

"Thank you, yes," Namjoon replied, nodding quickly.

The nurse gave his arm a soft pat and smiled encouragingly at the other boys before leaving again. Taehyung trotted after her into the hallway, leaving the others to stare at each other and try to process everything they just heard. Seokjin and Hoseok looked especially bewildered, having so much information dumped on them within seconds of waking up.

"Sinus infection too, huh," Seokjin finally said, running a hand haphazardly through his hair to try and smooth it down. "Poor Kookie."

"And forty-seven stitches?" Hoseok wondered, his eyes round.

"Why the hell was there still a bear trap out there?" Yoongi blurted angrily. "Did they not think to check when they banned hunting? Did the hunters just stroll out and leave everything behind?"

"They turned it into a conservation area two years ago," Namjoon mused. "So yeah, they definitely should have gone through and cleared it of traps."

"They should get sued."

Jimin chuckled a tiny bit, but Yoongi just shook his head. "I'm serious. They almost had a death on their hands, a very high-profile death, and it can only be because of laziness or incompetence."

Hoseok tilted his head to one side. "Who is even in charge of that? Is it just... the government?"

Taehyung wandered back into the room. His dark eyebrows were furrowed in thought, a strange sort of self-doubt flickering in his eyes. When he realized everyone was staring at him, he sat on a nearby chair and leaned forward to rest his elbows on his knees.

"I asked the nurse. I told her a little bit about the, uh... the thing we disagreed on last night. I asked her what the right thing to do in that situation was. I'm sorry, I had to know."
Namjoon felt his heart rate speed up ever so slightly. He cleared his throat and played with the cap of the thermos that had been forgotten in his hands. "What did she say?"

"Well, she said we probably would have had time to stop for a while," he replied, and Namjoon's stomach flip flopped. "But she also said that we did the right thing by not letting him take his coat off. That would have been too dangerous, no matter what he was telling us. She said that in our situation, not knowing how much time he had, that we made the right choice by continuing on, even though it brought on a panic attack for Kookie." He met Namjoon's eyes with an apologetic smile and then looked at Yoongi as well. He seemed almost glad to tell them that he had been wrong.

"So... no need to feel guilty, guys."

Namjoon didn't even try to suppress his deep sigh of relief and let his head drop back against the couch. Yoongi sagged just a tiny bit and looked away with a few silent nods.

"Oh, and she also said that Jungkookie should wake up in about forty five minutes or so and that while he's supposed to rest, we can go see him and let him know we are here."

"Yay!" Hoseok clapped his hands a few times with a wide heart shaped smile. "I really need to hug him."

As soon as Jungkook became aware enough to realize he was waking up, he resisted and tried to force himself unconscious again. He couldn't handle any more. Not the pain, the panic, the helplessness, the burning heat or the freezing cold. He tried to release his grip on his thoughts and push them back to the corners of his mind, but the more he pushed the more they took root and grew until finally he had to admit he was awake.

He felt... tingly. Heavy and numb and dull. There didn't seem to be any pain at all, something that made his eyebrows scrunch together in confusion. He stayed still and kept his eyes closed, afraid that if he made a single change to his current state that he would break whatever spell he was under. Maybe he really wasn't awake, maybe this was a dream. He couldn't feel the movement of being carried or hear the labored breathing and heavy footsteps around him that he was expecting.

Don't move, he told himself carefully. Whether it was a dream or not, he would do anything in his limited power to stay exactly how he was right now, blissfully numb and devoid of pain. His throat felt dry as he breathed and he couldn't stop his tongue from reflexively rolling out to lick over his chapped lips. He swallowed experimentally and found his nose to be almost completely stuffed up and his throat sore.

The sound of a doorknob clicking and swinging open confused him even more. There were hushed voices thanking each other and his brows pulled together again. Several seconds of silence passed and then he felt a small hand lightly smoothing his hair back from his forehead, followed by Jimin's soft voice whispering next to him.
"He looks so much better. Doesn't he? He's not so pale anymore."

He cracked his eyes open. Or at least he tried. His body seemed to be slow to accept the fact that it was awake, and he only managed a ridiculous flutter of his eyelashes.

"Yeah," Seokjin whispered back, his voice drawing closer as well. "Thank God."

"He looks so peaceful. I kind of don't want him to wake up yet."

*Me neither,* Jungkook muttered mentally. He felt his hand lifted and held against someone's cheek, a nose brushing against his fingers.

"I do," Seokjin replied quietly. He sounded so serious, not at all what Jungkook was used to hearing from him. "I want to see him smile and be awake without being in pain for once."

*Okay, fine.*

He pinched the nose.

"Jungkook-ah?" Seokjin's voice sounded funny with his nostrils closed and Jungkook finally got his eyes open enough to see his eldest hyung's eyes comically round. Then they morphed into crescents, his mouth widening into a happy chipmunk smile. Jungkook let go of his nose and tried to laugh but was apparently only capable of a lazy upturn of his lips and a short exhale.

"Hey!" Jimin said gently, moving closer to meet his eyes. "Hi Jungkookie! How are you?"

It seemed that Jimin and Seokjin were the only people in the room with him. He looked downward to see his leg suspended just slightly off of the bed with slings under his ankle and knee. His calf was wrapped in white bandages. There was an IV taped to the back of one of his hands, both of which were also lightly bandaged. There was no pain from his leg at all, so he just nodded in response.

"I'm glad we were here when you woke up," Seokjin said, rubbing the back of Jungkook's hand affectionately. He looked more than a little exhausted but the grin was still on his face, making his cheeks look puffy. "Like in the dramas. You are our brave but injured heroine and we are your beautiful prince charming here to hold your hand when you wake up. We're not going to kiss you though."

Jungkook smiled again, weak but genuine. He shook his head gently and rolled his eyes.

"You don't speak for me," Jimin said indignantly and, like a child rebelling against a parent, leaned down to plant a messy kiss on the side of Jungkook's forehead. It was wet and Jungkook made a face, wanting to wipe it off but his arm was too heavy to lift more than a few inches off the bed.

"The nurse said not to upset him, Jimin," Seokjin scolded, drying Jungkook's forehead for him. "There's nothing more upsetting than a kiss from you."

"What a mean thing to say!"

Jungkook smiled lazily again. This wasn't a dream. He was in a hospital. His head ached slightly, his throat was sore and he couldn't breathe out of his nose, but he could feel no pain coming from his leg. He was warm... but not too warm. And not too cold. All things considered, he was... comfortable.

"Do you want some water, Kookie?" Jimin asked, and Jungkook immediately nodded. His bed was one that could be raised into a lounging position with the press of a button, so once he was somewhat
upright, Jimin poured a glass of water from a pitcher by his bedside and held the glass to his lips. Jungkook tried to help, this time getting his shaky hand halfway up before giving up and resting it on the bed again.

The water felt good, and once he had swallowed a few times, trying not to wince at the soreness of his throat, he decided to try out his voice.

"Hi," he croaked.

Jimin and Seokjin's faces lit up.

"Hi!"

"Hey!"

He looked at his leg again, then back to them. "I can't feel it."

"It's okay," Seokjin answered. "It's just numbed up still and you're on some good painkillers. They had to take out a few bone fragments that were scraped off -"

Jungkook's eyes widened in worry.

"- just little chips, don't worry. Nothing big. And you got a lot of stitches. But they said it should heal up really well."

"Dance?" Jungkook asked.

"Of course," Jimin chuckled, pinching Jungkook's cheek gently.

"But when?"

"The nurse said there wasn't a lot of muscle damage so you might be able to start dancing gently in a little over a month. Maybe less, depending on how it heals."

It sounded like a long time but all things considered he supposed he made out pretty well. His leg could have broken completely.

He glanced toward the door. "Where is everyone else?"

"The nurse asked us not to come in all at once just yet, so we're going just a couple at a time," Seokjin said, then looked at Jimin. "I say we just stay in here though. They can't come in if we are here, and I'd like to spend more time with our heroine. I haven't professed my love yet."

"We have the best bedside manner, so we came in first," Jimin said proudly, ignoring Seokjin. "But we need to let you rest a lot. We can take you back to the house tonight if you are doing well. But don't worry, we are going to stay here with you all day."

Jungkook nodded in understanding, giving them a grateful smile.

Despite Seokjin's protests, they did step outside to let the others in. Yoongi and Hoseok came to see him together, Hoseok immediately squishing his cheeks together and peppering his face with kisses in his typical aggressive form of love until Jungkook groaned and Yoongi pulled him off.

"I was so worried, Jungsweetie," Hoseok said, coming forward again but this time he just carefully leaned down to hug him as best he could in the bed. Jungkook couldn't remember Hoseok at all the night before. Truthfully he was actively resisting all memories of what happened. He knew the basic
timeline and he knew roughly who had been there but refused to recall anything more specific. Realizing that Hoseok hadn't been there somehow made it feel as though Jungkook hadn't seen him in ages. He had been through a long and trying experience without him and it hit Jungkook just how much he missed Hoseok's presence.

"Where were you?" Jungkook wondered aloud, his voice rough. He wrapped his arms as tightly as he could around Hoseok's waist and rested his head on his shoulder. "I don't remember you last night. Were you there?"

Hoseok froze in his arms. Jungkook froze too, confused. Then Hoseok slowly pulled back to look him in the eye and Jungkook was surprised at the sober expression on his usually upbeat friend's face.

"I'm sorry, Kookie," the older dancer said, his eyes glimmering with an emotion that Jungkook didn't quite recognize.

Jungkook cocked his head to the side. "What? Why?"

Hoseok dropped his gaze to somewhere around Jungkook's chest. "I... I didn't go with them... to get you."

Jungkook's head just tilted further.

"I was..." Hoseok sounded... guilty? "I couldn't -"

"We asked him to stay behind," Yoongi provided. He had moved to the other side of the bed and was running his fingers absentmindedly along Jungkook's forearm. He stared at Hoseok for a moment before looking back down at Jungkook. "We knew we would probably be spending a while here at the hospital so we asked him to stay back and pack a couple bags. He went way overboard though, he pretty much packed the entire house."

Hoseok's smile sprang back to his face at the teasing.

"It's okay, Hobi-hyung," Jungkook replied, then had to take a few moments to cough before continuing. He was starting to feel a little bit hazy again, his limbs and eyelids heavy. Nevertheless he motioned slightly toward his leg. "You wouldn't have wanted to see that anyway, believe me. They probably would have had to carry you back too."

Hoseok looked at him for just a few more seconds before leaning in to hug him again. Jungkook blinked slowly at Yoongi over Hoseok's shoulder. From the little he allowed himself to remember of Yoongi the night before, he knew his older friend had been yelling. He remembered feeling ignored and even slightly scared of Yoongi. Detached from him.

He stopped there, not letting himself look any deeper or linger any longer on those memories. Yoongi was smiling silently at him now but it was tentative and there was a deep seated guilt in his chocolate brown eyes. For now, Jungkook just reached an arm out towards him and was happy when his friend came forward to hug him as well.

"Kookie?"

Jungkook realized his eyes were closed and pulled them open again to find that his arms had slipped back down onto the bed and Yoongi and Hoseok were no longer hugging him. Hoseok was gently rubbing his shoulder and watching him closely, a look of affection on his face.

"Hobi," Yoongi whispered, taking Hoseok's arm and drawing him towards the door. Then, slightly
louder, "It's okay, Jungkookie, go back to sleep. We'll send in Taehyung and Namjoon a little later."

Jungkook suddenly felt an uncomfortable tightness in his chest. Unwanted images and sensations began to filter into his mind, like arms wrapping too tightly around his thighs and not letting go. Fighting to get away. Being lifted off the ground despite his most desperate pleas.

He sensed Yoongi and Hoseok's gaze still lingering on him so he closed his eyes again and tried to make his body relax. Even after he heard the door click shut behind them he kept his eyes determinedly closed, hoping that he could fool his rapidly focusing mind into thinking it was still falling asleep. He knew the others had been arguing over him the night before. He was pretty sure Taehyung and Jimin were trying to help him and the others weren't listening to him, though he couldn't actually be sure. Seokjin's voice was the only one he couldn't remember yelling or being angry.

He kept pushing the memories away, not willing to risk mentally reliving the experience. It was too soon. He was finally safe and in a good place and refused to break that feeling by remembering the trauma of the night before. He tried to concentrate instead on the muted sounds of the hospital outside his door - footsteps travelling down the hallway, soft conversations between doctors and nurses, distant phones ringing. It was comforting somehow, to hear the world continue to operate around him. It was the sound of people living their own lives with their own struggles, some easier than his, some harder.

He began to relax as finally the majority of the unwanted memories began to fade into the background again. Maybe he would be able to look more closely at them tomorrow, or the next day. But for now he let himself rest his mind. But even as a warm sleepiness began to overtake him again, there was one tiny yet uncomfortably persistent sensation simmering in the back of his mind that refused to disappear despite his purposefully ignoring it. The feeling of being trapped unwillingly against his leader's back and knowing that no matter how much he cried to him for help, it would fall on deaf ears.

Chapter End Notes

The obligatory hospital scenes. ;) I hope it's not too boring of a chapter, especially since there has been so much action in every other chapter leading up to this one. Although I know a lot of you have been looking forward to the fluff, too! But stick with me, because this story ain't over just yet.
Chapter 7

The sun was setting when Jungkook opened his eyes again. Taehyung had been dozing off and on in an uncomfortable plastic chair nearby. He wanted to stay awake and played meaningless games on his phone to try and keep himself alert, but often found his head dipping to his chest. Namjoon was across the room, sound asleep. Taehyung had insisted that his older friend take the larger and more comfortable easy chair, knowing how sore he would be from carrying Jungkook all night. Namjoon too had tried to stay awake but Taehyung was glad that he had almost immediately lost the battle to keep his eyes open.

For a long time Jungkook had been completely still in his sleep, which Taehyung found unsettling. Like himself, Jungkook was one that usually moved around when he slept, rolling and stretching and finding odd positions that should be uncomfortable. Watching him lay there like he was in a coma felt unnatural, and Taehyung was comforted when eventually his black-haired friend started to shift in his sleep, even if it was just the occasional sigh or turning of his head.

The warm pink light of the setting sun was soft on Jungkook's face when Taehyung realized his friend's eyes were open. His face was turned away and Taehyung wouldn't have even noticed but he saw the slight movement of his eyelashes when he blinked. He was staring straight at Namjoon. Something about the way Jungkook was studying him made Taehyung stay silent, as though he would be interrupting something if he spoke. He waited, watching Jungkook's brow furrow occasionally. Several minutes went by with just the quiet ticking of the wall clock filling the room. Then Jungkook heaved a great sigh and finally turned his head the other way, noticing Taehyung for the first time.

"Oh, hi," he said with a shy smile, apparently self-conscious now that he realized he too had been watched that whole time. "Sorry."

"It's okay, you looked deep in thought," Taehyung replied, standing and coming closer. "I didn't want to interrupt."

Jungkook held his arms out to him expectantly and Taehyung had to pause.

"You look like a toddler waiting to be picked up," he observed with a grin.

Jungkook rolled his eyes, but before he could lower his arms again Taehyung tapped the bottom of his chin affectionately and leaned down to give him a tight hug. He closed his eyes, taking a moment to revel in the feeling of his friend's arms around him.

"Are you tired of people asking how you are feeling?" Taehyung asked. He rubbed Jungkook's back, his fingers catching slightly on the ties of the hospital gown, before straightening again. He left his hand resting on the maknae's arm. "Because I want to know how you're feeling."

"I'm not feeling that bad, which is a really nice change," Jungkook answered. He moved Taehyung's hand so that they were holding hands, and Taehyung's heart swelled. His younger friend didn't always think to initiate physical affection, but considering what he had been through Taehyung
supposed he shouldn't be too surprised that Jungkook was craving the comfort. Taehyung, for his part, practically lived off of physical contact and would be perfectly happy living the rest of his life with his arm around Jungkook's shoulders.

Jungkook frowned in concern when he noticed the gauze covering the back of Taehyung's hand and forearm.

"What is that? How did that happen?"

"I tripped and scraped it on a tree," Taehyung said sheepishly.

Jungkook went quiet, pressing a little bit on the medical tape as though he could adhere it more surely to Taehyung's skin, and Taehyung could already see ridiculously unfounded guilt begin to hunch his friend's shoulders.

"You look good," Taehyung said light-heartedly, squeezing Jungkook's hand to try and divert his self-deprecating thoughts.

"I look greasy, probably" Jungkook said, patting his unwashed hair. He sounded nasally and sniffed a few times to try and breathe better through his nose.

"Me too," Taehyung returned. None of them had been able to shower, as they'd stayed with Jungkook at the hospital all day. Taehyung had smoothed his hair back and was wearing a white baseball cap backwards to cover it. He took it off to give to Jungkook but instead of putting it on his head, he laid it over his face. "Here you go."

Jungkook giggled under the hat before handing it back. "Gross, I don't want your grease too."

"Kookie?"

They turned to see Namjoon sitting up in the chair, eyes wide. For a long moment he just stared at Jungkook, the orange-pink sunset lighting his hair and shoulders from behind. Then he stood up, looking stiff and unsure.

"How are you feeling?"

"Not too bad, actually."

Namjoon came over to them, limping a little bit, and stood hesitantly at Jungkook's bedside. He moved like he wanted to bend down to hug their maknae but paused, waiting for Jungkook's reaction.

Jungkook just smiled brightly and reached up for a hug. Immediately Namjoon wrapped his arms around Jungkook's waist, at first squeezing so tightly that he almost lifted him off the bed, before settling into something more gentle. Jungkook wrapped his arms over Namjoon's shoulders, but Taehyung saw his smile fade ever so slightly as soon as Namjoon couldn't see his face.

"I'm so sorry, Jungkookie," Namjoon said fervently, and he pressed a little closer. "I'm so sorry I had to do that to you. I'm so sorry."

Jungkook's smile morphed into something that was sad but genuine. "It's okay, I know you had to. Please don't feel bad."

"I do, I feel horrible." Namjoon pulled back and Jungkook's smile quickly brightened again. "I'm so sorry."
"Really, it's okay," Jungkook chuckled and then glanced around the room. "Where are the others?"

Neither one of them was fooled by his blatant change of subject and there were a few beats of silence. Namjoon's face saddened but he didn't look entirely surprised and just stepped back in understanding. Jungkook needed time. Their maknae coughed a little bit and sniffed before looking down at his lap.

"They took the hotel to pick up your prescriptions," Namjoon answered, leaving a reassuring hand on Jungkook's shoulder. "And groceries and other cold medicine and stuff like that." Jungkook looked back up at him questioningly.

"The hotel?"

"That's the van," Taehyung informed. "Anything you'd ever need, Hoseok packed in the van. I'm pretty sure he even packed things that weren't ours."

"Ah," Jungkook said with a grin, as though that was an obvious answer.

Getting Jungkook back to the house that night wasn't as difficult as Taehyung thought it might be. Their youngest was relatively talkative during the van (hotel) ride, though he mostly brought the conversation away from the details of what happened whenever he could and they followed his lead as soon as they realized what he was doing. He teased Hoseok for packing so much in the van that they barely had any room for themselves and apologized for 'bleeding all over that pretty comforter in the middle row'.

He refused to be carried into the house, instead hobbling awkwardly on his new crutches that he couldn't even grip properly because his palms were still healing. Taehyung followed him closely up the few steps to the front door, keeping his hands on his back to steady him. As soon as Jungkook got inside, he sank down onto the couch, drained.

"Hi, couch," he drawled, laying carefully on his side as the others starting flicking the house lights on around him. He started hugging the cushions with a silly grin. "I've been trying to get back to you for a long time."

"I see your meds are in full swing, Kookie," Jimin said with a chuckle as he passed by, grocery bags hanging from his arms. "Yoongi-hyung and I are going to make some food. Are you hungry? They said you should eat something when you got home."

"Yes, I'm so hungry. I'm going to try to shower or take a bath or something while you cook though, I'm so dirty and gross."

"Uh," Yoongi said, glancing to Namjoon, "Can he take a shower?"

"I smell," Jungkook pointed out, his face pressed into the cushions. He raised an arm as though welcoming Yoongi to go over and smell his armpit.

"They said he can take a bath as long as he keeps his leg out of the water," Namjoon replied. "Steam might help your sinuses too, actually." He patted Jungkook on the back.

Seokjin plopped next to Jungkook and laid his head on the arm of the couch. "I'm sick, someone take care of me."

Despite being dramatic, their oldest member was absolutely sick. He had been hacking into his arm
and blowing his nose the entire ride home and even fell asleep against Hoseok for a short time.

"I'll take care of you, hyung," Jungkook said, his voice muffled in the couch cushions. "It's my fault you're sick."

"You're right. Go get your hyung some soup."

"Okay."

"But first blow my nose."

"Okay."

Taehyung left them laying lifelessly on the couch to commiserate with each other and took one of the pharmacy bags down the hall. They had decided that they would set Jungkook up in the bedroom at the far end of the hall, as it was the only one that had its own small half-bathroom attached. Taehyung had slept there the night before with Hoseok and spent some time fixing it to better accommodate Jungkook. He laid out cough drops, a tissue box, and cold medicine on the bedside table and pulled the waste basket closer.

He stared at the bed longingly. Apparently this room's bedding was the only one left untouched in Hoseok's house raid, and looking at the pillows and soft blankets made the ache in Taehyung's bones really set in. Less than twenty four hours ago, he had been laying right here scrolling happily through his phone, completely unaware of the horrible events that were about to occur. When he really thought about it, none of them had slept more than a few hours in the last two days. Other than Jungkook, ironically.

The evening's events were haphazard and subdued. Jimin suggested that Jungkook wait to take his bath until after he'd eaten, wisely anticipating that Jungkook would have a very hard time staying awake after that. The rest of them took turns rushing through showers while dinner was being cooked, then brought things back in from the van and grabbed food when they could. Hoseok found a washing machine in the basement and started washing their bloody and dirt-covered clothes. Conversation grew less frequent as exhaustion set in and sleep in real beds grew closer and closer.

Taehyung stayed close by when Jungkook's turn in the bathroom came. Namjoon had filled the tub and left towels, soap, shampoo, and clean pajamas all within close reach, but Jungkook insisted that he didn't need any more help.

"You don't have to stay there," Jungkook said from the other side of the bathroom door, voice echoing faintly on the tiles. Taehyung heard the dull clunk of Jungkook sitting down on top of the toilet seat and crutches being rested against the sink.

"I know, it's just in case you need anything," Taehyung replied, sitting down in the hallway with his back against the wall. The others were still scattered about the house. They had given Seokjin first dibs on food and the shower so he could go to bed before them and hopefully he was already asleep in one of the other rooms. Namjoon was eating standing up at the end of the hallway, obviously also wanting to stay within earshot of Jungkook.

Clothes rustled on the other side of the door and then he heard the gentle sloshing of water followed by a long sigh of appreciation.

"Oh my god, this feels so good," Jungkook said.

"Hey," Namjoon hissed from down the hallway and Taehyung glanced over to him. "Make sure he keeps his leg out of the water."
"You're not getting your leg wet, right?" Taehyung called.

"You helped me wrap it in plastic wrap, hyung."

"I know, but that was just in case it got splashed, you're not -"

"Yes, I'm keeping it out of the water," Jungkook said. "I'm not dumb."

"You're literally on drugs, though."

"Yeah, and it feels great."

Taehyung laughed quietly and looked over at Namjoon, who was smiling with a mouth full of noodles. Jungkook feeling good felt good. He rested his head on his knees and just listened for the next ten minutes or so to the soft splashes and drips inside the bathroom and the clanking of dishes coming from the kitchen. Hoseok and Yoongi both occasionally popped their heads down the hallway to make sure that Taehyung was still on Jungkook watch.

When their maknae opened the door again, it was with a cloud of steam and a tired smile. He smelled of shampoo and was back in his pink Cooky pajamas. Taehyung helped him put new gauze on his hands and while he wanted to go to bed immediately after that, Taehyung and Namjoon made him blow dry his hair first to avoid worsening his cold. Which ended up being Taehyung blow drying his hair while Jungkook sat on the toilet and rested his head on the counter.

"How is our golden maknae?" Jimin asked as soon as Taehyung turned the hair drier off. He stood leaning against the threshold in a white t-shirt and loose pajama bottoms, his sandy hair still damp from his own shower.

Taehyung looked down at Jungkook. His hair, now fluffy and dry, had flopped over his closed eyes. His face was a soft pink and he was breathing steadily out of his mouth.

"You still awake, Kookie?" Taehyung asked, ruffling his hair slightly.

Jungkook just groaned and reached for the toilet paper roll, pulling off a piece and blowing his nose loudly.

"I need to sleep," he moaned, and Taehyung felt a pang in his heart at the lack of humor in his friend’s voice.

"Okay let's go, you can sleep now," Taehyung said, helping Jungkook up to his feet. His friend fumbled sleepily with his crutches so Taehyung just wrapped an arm around his waist and let him lean on him instead. His body felt hot through the silky fabric of his pajama top and Taehyung wondered guiltily if maybe he should have taken him out of the hot steam of the bathroom before blow drying his hair.

The other members were all still awake, looking to make sure Jungkook was going to be okay before going to sleep themselves. Even Seokjin poked out of one of the other bedrooms, mumbling a few words and giving Jungkook a loose but genuine goodnight hug before disappearing again. Jungkook was eased into bed and Yoongi gave him a handful of pills while Namjoon arranged pillows under his leg, one under his knee and another under his ankle.

"Try not to move around too much in the night, Kook-ah," their leader said, giving Jungkook's socked toes a little squeeze. "Try not to move your leg at all, actually, if you can help it."

"I'll try," Jungkook said unconvincingly after chasing the pills down with a glass of water. "I've
never really had too much control over that though."

"I'm sleeping here too, in case you start moving too much," Jimin said, plugging his phone charger into the wall on the other side of the bed.

Honestly, Taehyung had wanted to share the room with Jungkook. He wasn't ready to leave him yet, but Taehyung was too deep a sleeper to be useful if Jungkook needed anything. Jimin slept lightly and was easily wakened, so if Jungkook began tossing or turning he would have a better chance of feeling it. Granted, with the amount of meds Jungkook was on there was a good chance he wouldn't be moving at all.

Goodnight hugs and head pats were given and by the time Taehyung got to him, he was laying back, already half asleep, with a small smile on his lips.

"Goodnight, Jungkookie," Taehyung whispered.

"Mm, goodnight Taehyungie-hyung," Jungkook murmured, his eyes closed. Taehyung leaned in, hands on either side of him, to give him a kiss on the cheek but paused over him. He wanted to fix this image into his memory. Less than a day ago he had been staring down at Jungkook just like this but at that time he had been pale, covered in dirt and blood and had tear tracks staining his cheeks. Taehyung's eyebrows pulled together at the memory and he kept staring, wanting to replace that image with this one - Jungkook clean, soft, warm, safe. Eyes closed because of sleepiness and not blood-loss induced unconsciousness.

Jungkook sensed his lingering presence and his eyes slid open to stare back at him. Taehyung waited for his friend to complain at him for being creepy but he didn't. He was tempted to ask him about Namjoon and what happened at the hospital, but his younger friend's eyes were bleary and it was an obvious struggle for him to keep them open.

Finally Taehyung gave him a fond smile.

"Goodnight, Jungkookie," he repeated and dipped down to kiss him lightly on the cheek.

He felt Jungkook smile in return.

"Goodnight, Taehyungie-hyung."

Seokjin did not sleep well. Despite taking night time cold medication, his nose just wouldn't clear up enough for him to breathe easily. He tried not to swallow too much because it sent a slicing pain down his throat, but breathing through his mouth for so long didn't leave him much choice. When his nose finally did clear, it was so clear that the air passing through felt uncomfortably dry and almost painful.

Seokjin got a few hours of sleep here and there but woke up late the next morning feeling as though his eyes hadn't closed once. The sun was filtering brightly through the blinds as he sat up and reached for more cold medicine and the bottle of water that he'd set on the nightstand. He glanced over to Taehyung as he swallowed the pills down. The blond was still dead to the world next to him, his limbs twisted in the sheets and his head underneath a pillow. Seokjin was grateful to see that at least
one member had slept well.

He heard IU’s voice when he stepped into the hallway, and quietly closed the bedroom door behind him. He followed the music down the hall to find Yoongi, Hoseok, and Jimin all sitting on Jungkook's bed playing cards with him. There were abandoned dishes scattered around with the remains of what looked like pancakes and fruit and Jungkook's phone was plugged into his travel speaker on the nightstand. They glanced up at him and Hoseok immediately frowned.

"You don't look so good," he said, himself looking clear skinned and fresh like he had just come off of a photo shoot.

"Don't be foolish, I always look good," Seokjin returned, but his nasally and cracking voice gave away his condition. He came into the room, spying a few forgotten strawberries on one of the plates and popping one into his mouth before going to feel Jungkook’s forehead with his hand. It definitely felt warm.

"He's got a low fever," Yoongi supplied, glancing at his cards before putting a few down in the center. "They said it's normal though, I guess."

Jungkook looked up at him. "How are you feeling? I almost asked someone to go check on you." His eyes looked tired but so earnest and sincere that Seokjin couldn't help a fond smile. But then he followed with, "I was getting worried, the elderly don't handle illness very well."

Seokjin's smile turned to a glare and he slid his hand from Jungkook's forehead down to cover his eyes instead before taking a look at the younger singer's cards.

"He's got three sevens, guys," Seokjin announced.

"No I don't!" Jungkook said with an indignant laugh, pushing his hand away. He pressed his cards to his chest.

"They don't know that."

"Yeah but now they think I do!"

"Well, use that to your advantage," Seokjin said, taking a seat between he and Hoseok and pulling one of the half eaten plates closer. "He may or may not have three sevens, guys. You're welcome."

He enjoyed watching his little seed of chaos affect their game, and picked at leftover fruit as they continued playing for the next hour or so. He couldn't help letting his gaze linger every so often on Jungkook any time he laughed or smiled. The smiles weren't as bright and the laughs not as loud or pure as they usually were and sometimes ended in coughing fits. But in comparison to the painful tears of the forest, even tiny indications of happiness were like rays of sun breaking through a cloud-darkened sky.

The game eventually petered out when Jungkook's laughs became slower and he started resting his head back on the headboard. Yoongi insisted that he try to sleep for another few hours before lunch and Hoseok made him drink some of the gatorade that was in a bottle on the nightstand, reminding him that his body was still trying to rebuild its blood supply. They started collecting the dishes and Seokjin was about to follow them out when Jungkook suddenly took his hand, holding onto it until the other three had left the room. The serious look in his eye made Seokjin instinctively want to make a joke to ease the tension, but he held back and just sat next to him, patiently waiting for Jungkook to speak.

"How are you feeling?" the younger man asked again when it was just the two of them in the room.
There was no trace of teasing in his voice this time.

"I'm feeling how you'd normally feel when you have a cold," Seokjin answered. He glanced to the window. The curtains were drawn most of the way closed, but through the opening he could see sunlight on the scattered trees of the side yard. "It's just a cold, JK."

"I'm really sorry you're sick, hyung." Jungkook let go of his hand, instead looking to his lap and fiddling with the hem of the sheets. "I feel really bad. It really is my fault."

"It really isn't," Seokjin returned firmly. "Not even a little bit. Don't start blaming yourself for things that are out of your control. Let me guess, you think it's your fault that Taehyungie scraped his arm and that Namjoonie twisted his ankle too, right?"

"I mean, yes, of course!" Jungkook immediately said. He put the edge of the sheet down, finally meeting Seokjin's eyes. "Of course it's my fault. You were all out there because of me, because I'm... because I'm so stupid. Who goes running in the middle of the night?"

"You do," Seokjin said. "That's not a stupid thing to do, people do that all the time."

"In the woods?"

"I mean..."

"Where they've never been before? And then leave the only path they know?"

Seokjin smiled. "So it wasn't the smartest decision you've ever made." Jungkook's injured leg was resting over the covers and Seokjin put his hand on his thigh, massaging it gently. "It doesn't mean you're stupid or that it's your fault I'm sick or that the others got hurt."

Jungkook looked away again, clearly not convinced in the slightest. "Well, that's not what I wanted to ask, anyway."

"Okay."

"I wanted to ask if you were there."

"There?" Seokjin's eyes narrowed in worry. "Like in the woods? Of course I was there, do you not remember me being there?"

"No no, of course I remember," Jungkook amended quickly, waving his hand a bit. "Believe me I remember way more than I want to. I just mean were you there, like... like before the others got there?"

"Yeah, I found you. You remember that, though? You were unconscious."

"Well I don't remember it really. I know when I actually woke up everyone was already there, I just feel like I remember it being just you at some point. Were you singing or something?"

Seokjin felt a weird rush of embarrassment. "I mean I hummed for a while, I guess." He sniffed and tried to cover his embarrassment by pulling out a few tissues and blowing his nose.

Jungkook just nodded thoughtfully. "Okay, yeah. There's some stuff that I can't tell whether it was a dream or a hallucination or what. But I remember hearing that and feeling warm. It was nice."

"Yeah, I was hugging you to keep you warm. You were an icicle."
"Aw," Jungkook said, smiling widely. "Thanks, hyung."

Seokjin shrugged dramatically. "What can I say, I like having you around. The others aren't as fun to beat u-

Jungkook suddenly pulled him into a hug, and immediately rested his head on Seokjin's shoulder. There a few moments of silence and then Seokjin heard a quiet "Thanks, hyung."

Seokjin raised his arms to return the embrace, squeezing him tightly.

"I like having you around, Jungkook."

Jungkook laid awake in the dark, staring at the ceiling much like he had the first night they arrived. Only this time it wasn't caffeine and boredom that kept him awake but an aching body and a troubled mind. He had awoken feeling relatively okay that morning, and playing cards and laughing with the other boys had left him in a good mood. Unfortunately the day had only deteriorated from there. He came out of his room to eat lunch in the kitchen with the other members and then spent most of the afternoon reclined on the couch with them in the game room. Objectively, it should have been a good afternoon. They played video games, watched tv, joked around. It was a good distraction, a break from the stress and strain they had all been under and a taste of what their vacation should have been like.

He tried to use the activity to start facing the more difficult memories. Slowly. Casually. Think about pulling at the jaws of the trap in a panic, then play another round of Mario Kart. Remember laying on the cold, unforgiving dirt, shivering, scared, alone. Then tease Jimin for accidentally disconnecting his controller. Picture the blood, feel the pain, remember the fear. Then hog all the tissues from Seokjin and make him use napkins to blow his nose instead. But despite his careful approach, each snippet of memory darkened his mind just a little bit more until all his smiles were forced and his laughs were merely a cover for the benefit of the other members.

His body seemed to decline simultaneously. The television started to hurt his eyes. Trying to follow the moving screen of the video games became dizzying. His throat hurt just a little bit more each time he spoke, and he started to lose his voice. There was a constant dull ache in his leg that would spike significantly if he didn't take his pain killers exactly on time every four hours.

He did everything he could to hide it. He had already ruined their vacation beyond repair. He had caused his hyungs so much anxiety and even physical hurt that they didn't deserve and he wanted to make sure their experience only got better from there. He was okay with keeping his pains to himself. It wasn't the first time he'd done it and he'd like to think he was actually quite good at it. He could stand lying to their faces when he told them his headache was almost gone when in reality it had continued to get worse until it was almost hard to think. He could stand all of his physical pains. What he couldn't stand was how he felt every time he looked at Namjoon. He knew that Namjoon had done the smart thing by not listening to him. He knew that it may well have saved his life. He also knew that it wasn't just Namjoon, but Yoongi too who had refused to stop for him. They had done the right thing.

But it still hurt. Despite knowing they'd been right and had done it out of worry, the memory of
being repeatedly turned down no matter what he said was painful. He had been so scared and in so much pain, and pleaded as earnestly as he possibly could to those he trusted most in the world and had been dismissed. In truth, it wasn't just painful, it was frightening. He could trust them to do what they thought was best, but now he knew that he couldn't always trust them to believe him or help him in the way that he thought was best. None of them knew first aid or emergency procedures. What if they had been wrong? What if he was of sound mind next time but they still didn't believe him and forced him to do something that made it worse?

With Yoongi it made him uncomfortable, but there was something different when it came to Namjoon, something more deep seated and visceral. It was Namjoon he had been trapped against, Namjoon who wouldn't put him down or let go of him, and Namjoon he'd wanted to get away from. It was Namjoon's ear he had pleaded into and Namjoon's voice that told him no. He couldn't seem to get that instinctual feeling of betrayal and hurt out of his heart despite his brain telling him that it was completely undeserved.

And he hated himself for it. Of all the people in the world to feel misplaced hurt towards, it had to be Namjoon? The man who, simply by being himself, had drawn Jungkook to Big Hit and changed his life forever? He was the smartest person Jungkook knew, and one of the most selfless. His mind was so deep and his thoughts so poetic, in ways that Jungkook strove to emulate in his own clumsy way but never quite could. He had taken Jungkook under his wing, shown endless patience for him and taught him anything and everything that Jungkook wanted to learn. He was so talented, so wise, so strong, and Jungkook loved him so much.

And now whenever Jungkook looked at him he had to struggle to push his hurt down.

He let out a long, dejected sigh and tried to roll onto his side as best he could without moving his leg too much, which wasn't easy. He had taken every one of his pills before getting into bed -his hyungs had made sure of that- but he was still far too uncomfortable to fall asleep. His whole body ached despite the pain killers, and he was sticky with sweat, overheating despite having pushed all of his covers off and changing into a t-shirt.

He stared at the thin glowing strip of light under the bedroom door and wondered how many of the other members were still up. He didn't know who would end up coming in and sharing the bed with him but he was grateful to be alone for the time being. He wasn't sure how long he laid there in the dark trying to fall asleep, but at some point he realized he was shivering. The air felt colder, as though a window had been left open and he ran his hands up and down his arms to try and warm up.

He reached an arm behind him to grab for the covers but froze in confusion when instead of landing on soft blankets, his hand hit something hard and flat. And cold. He moved his fingers on the surface and felt... dirt?

"No, no, no," he whispered. He could smell pine and damp leaves and glanced slowly to his left and right. Trees. Rocks. Brush. Fear began to coil and tighten around his chest. It just wasn't possible. He stared at the sky and waited for it to dissipate and change back to the ceiling of the bedroom. He waited. And waited. His leg started to ache. The chill of the air began to hurt his skin and cold seeped up into his back from the ground below. His heart rate steadily increased as minutes passed by until it was hammering in his chest. The ache in his leg continued to get worse until sharp pains
were shooting through it and he clenched his fists, only to feel more pain in his palms.

He swallowed slowly again, afraid to move. The need to look down and confirm what he already knew pulsed at him but he couldn't bring himself to do it. A small breeze rustled the leaves of the trees hanging over him, sending a few fluttering gently down to the forest floor nearby and he chewed on his bottom lip anxiously. The inside of his nose tingled and he felt the promise of tears making his eyes burn as the need to look grew stronger and brought him closer to accepting the reality of where he was.

Finally he shifted his leg, just a little bit, and there it was. Disturbing and unmistakable, the dull rattle of chain links. The tears began to trickle down from his eyes, over his temples and into his hairline. It was a nightmare. It had to be a nightmare. He sat up slowly and sure enough the iron trap was there, biting into his leg.

His breath quickened as a familiar panic began to set in. It wasn't possible. He had been rescued, he had gone to the hospital. This was a dream, not that.

Right?

Had he hallucinated that? No. Seokjin had found him. He had felt Seokjin's arms around him and heard him talking and humming. Although admittedly that was an extremely hazy, dream-like memory and the pain and cold he was experiencing right now sure as hell felt real.

"Jin-hyung!" he screamed into the darkness. Maybe his eldest hyung just hadn't found him yet. He heard his voice echo back but there was no other response. "Jin-hyung!"

He called twice more, his voice breaking just a little bit more each time when no one called back. He was alone.

He fell back to the ground, clutching at his chest with one arm and covering his eyes with the other as tears continued to fall and soft sobs wracked his frame. If he really was still there, if they really hadn't found him... he wasn't going to make it. He knew that. He had been out there too long. He had lost too much blood and he almost surely had hypothermia at that point. It was so cold that he was starting to feel hot.

Or was he actually hot? His skin suddenly felt like it was burning and he pulled at his shirt only to realize that he was now wearing a coat. He also realized that he was no longer alone. There was a dark shape standing nearby.

"Jin-hyung?" Jungkook said hopefully, wiping at his eyes to clear them of tears. A flashlight moved and in its beam he saw that it wasn't just Seokjin but all of the members standing in a loose group to his right. "Hyungs!"

They didn't respond or look at him. They were talking casually to each other, seemingly unconcerned. He could see their mouths moving but couldn't actually hear any of their voices.

"Hyungs!"

Nothing. Could they not hear him either? His body temperature continued to rise, frighteningly so, and he broke out into a sweat. The coat was too tight around him and he tried to get it off, but the zipper was stuck. Then he tried shifting closer to them to get their attention but as soon as he moved the iron teeth jostled painfully in his calf, forcing him to stay where he was.

"Hyungs, help!"
Finally they looked over, but he saw no concern on their faces, just indifference. Maybe even a little annoyance. Namjoon was closest to him and Jungkook looked up into his eyes hoping to see compassion.

"Namjoonie-hyung, can you help me?"

Namjoon leaned down towards him and Jungkook's heart sailed until he saw hoodie cords in his hands.

"Wait, no," Jungkook said, realization hitting him like a punch to the gut. He quickly pulled his arms to his chest. "Please don't! You don't have to do that, I'm awake!"

Namjoon didn't acknowledge him, he just reached for Jungkook's hands.

"No, please, please don't!" he cried again. He felt tears of distress wetting his cheeks and shoved at Namjoon's chest as hard as he could.

Suddenly his leader's expression was one of pure alarm and it wasn't trees or sky behind him but the bedroom ceiling once again. Namjoon wasn't touching him but Jungkook pushed against him again in fear. His arms were too weak to move him but Namjoon backpedaled quickly anyway, holding his hands up.

"Kookie, you're okay! You're okay, you're at the house!" he said.

Light from the hallway was flooding into the room. Hoseok was standing just behind Namjoon, staring at him in open worry and dismay. Jungkook sat up, his eyes frantically going down to his leg to see that the trap wasn't there, just the bandages from the hospital. His mind reeled in panicked confusion and he crumpled back into the bed and started to sob into his hands. His entire body felt sore and weak as though every single one of his muscles had been clenched for too long.

"Kookie, you're okay," Namjoon was repeating, his voice tense but gentle and careful as though he was approaching a wounded animal. "You're okay, nothing's going to happen to you. You're safe."

Jungkook just rolled away onto his side, shaking and crying. He didn't know what was a dream anymore. He didn't want this to be a dream too. He could still smell the dirt and hear the branches creak in the wind. Yoongi's frightened voice entered the room, followed quickly by Namjoon warning him to not touch Jungkook yet.

"I don't know, hyung, he just kept saying your name!"

Jungkook glanced up at Taehyung's anxious voice and through his tear-blurred vision saw Taehyung's shape blocking the light from the hallway as he rushed in, pulling Seokjin in behind him. Seokjin looked disheveled and unwell but he dropped the blanket that had been around his shoulders, going immediately to Jungkook.

"JK?" he said softly.

Namjoon stepped back and Seokjin moved in, carefully putting a hand on Jungkook's side. Jungkook instantly found the contact to be grounding and comforting but he didn't move. Seokjin went to the other side of the bed and slowly crawled in until he was right next to him. Jungkook looked up at him, desperate for something, though he didn't know what. He could tell Seokjin was afraid of upsetting him further, but he took Jungkook's arm and pulled on him gently, encouraging him to come closer. Jungkook's paralyzing fear broke at the invitation and he quickly pushed himself up and into Seokjin's embrace. His eldest friend's arms were tight and protective around him and Jungkook broke down even further, burying his head into Seokjin's chest and clinging onto him.
It wasn't just the nightmare anymore. It was all the memories and deep-seated fears of that first night, the ones he had tried to avoid, tried to approach carefully and on his own terms. They were crushed back into him in the worst way possible, with no control or consent on his part. And he had yet to regain that control. He couldn't stop himself from crying into Seokjin but his friend just held him tight, kissing his hair and murmuring gentle words of safety and comfort.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, I know that's a really awkward and probably jarring place to cut off the chapter but good Lord I had to stop myself or I definitely wouldn't have gotten it out today. The next chapter will pick up from the same spot. That being said, there may only be one chapter left but it will most likely be a long one, kind of like this one. It also may not be done by next Friday because although I've always known how I want it to end, I'm not sure yet exactly how I will go about it and I don't want to rush through it and put out something mediocre just for the sake of keeping a schedule. I hope you can understand! Besides, there is already a lot going on next weekend with the comeback and all :D I've also always been most comfortable writing action so it takes me a little longer to organize chapters such as these because I'm less sure of myself.

Please let me know what you think of this chapter! (And again, I'm sorry for such a weird cut off). Much love to you, and happy comeback! (I'm so freaking excited) <3

(P.S. Feel free to share with me if there is anything you've been hoping to see in this fic before it wraps up. I won't be changing anything major to the plot line, but stories are organic things and I love taking input from you lovely readers, so I'd love to hear where you think the story is going and where you'd like it to go. There may be certain areas I can focus more on or elements that I can enhance. That long last chapter can always be stretched to two.) :)

Hoseok had never seen someone having a nightmare in person before. Only in the movies. And the movies, he understood now, did not come close to capturing how frightening it was to witness. Perhaps it was because it was happening to someone he cared about, not just some actor or actress on the television screen.

He was the one to first realize it was happening, as he had planned on sharing the room with Jungkook that night. It was just after ten thirty when he decided to go to bed, leaving the other two members of the rap line dozing on the living room couch with the tv playing softly to itself. The room at the end of the hall was quiet when he stepped in. It was pitch dark but he didn't want to disturb Jungkook by turning the light on so he left the door slightly ajar, letting just enough light in to see where he was going. He glanced at Jungkook's leg to make sure it was still safely on its pillows and was moving to the other side of the bed when he heard a quiet groan.

He paused and listened. Jungkook was breathing deeply, but perhaps a little bit too fast. He heard another sound, this time something between a groan and whimper. He frowned and took the edge of the door, opening it until he could see Jungkook more clearly in the hallway light before going back to the bed where his friend was laying on his back.

His body was shiny with sweat, his crimson t-shirt damp and clinging to his skin and the ends of his black hair clumping together. His hands were down by his sides, gripping the white sheets under him with almost equally white knuckles. He wasn't moving but his muscles were straining and Hoseok could see his eyes moving under his eyelids.

"Jungkookie?" he said cautiously. The young man started breathing even faster and his eyebrows pulled together but otherwise he didn't respond. Hoseok watched him nervously, one hand hovering over his shoulder as he tried to remember whether or not you were supposed to wake someone up during a nightmare. But then Jungkook jerked his leg slightly and tears began to leak out from his eyes and Hoseok decided that whatever was happening to their maknae, he wanted it to stop. He heard Namjoon's deep voice in the hallway mumbling quietly with someone and rushed to the door.

"Namjoon," he hissed, swinging the door open all the way to see Taehyung and their leader look back at him questioningly. "Something is happening to Jungkook."

Their expressions immediately changed to worry and they followed him back into the room in time.
to hear Jungkook mumble Seokjin's name. He was rigid like he wanted to move but couldn't, distress clear on his features and tears continuing to trail from his closed eyes.

"Oh my god, Kookie," Namjoon breathed and ran to his side but, like Hoseok, paused just before touching him. Jungkook said Seokjin's name again and Namjoon turned back to Taehyung, "Go get Jin-hyung!"

Taehyung bolted. Jungkook began to whimper something they couldn't quite make out and then pulled his hands to his chest as though he was trying to protect himself from someone. Namjoon almost reached for him but stopped again and glanced at Hoseok, his eyes wide with the same helplessness that Hoseok himself was feeling.

"Kookie?" Namjoon finally tried. "Kookie, you're okay-

"Don't!" Jungkook suddenly cried, and his arms shot out to push frantically against Namjoon's chest. Their leader immediately backed off and Jungkook struggled upright, his tear-filled eyes wide and terrified as they flew about the room. He looked like he had no idea where he was and Namjoon tried to calm him down with soothing words but he just fell back to the bed and turned away sobbing. Hoseok felt paralyzed, his heart pounding and his mind frozen with worry. But before he even had time to realize that he didn't know what to do, the other members came pouring into the room and Hoseok watched as Seokjin crawled onto the bed and managed to coax their shaking maknae into his arms.

That was several minutes ago and Jungkook hadn't stopped crying since. He was clinging onto Seokjin like it was the only thing keeping him alive, his fists clenching into the back of of their eldest hyung's pajama top and his face buried in his shoulder. Seokjin had pulled his upper body onto his lap and was holding him tightly, murmuring gentle words and occasionally kissing the side of his head.

After turning on a small bedside lamp, Hoseok settled quietly at the foot of the bed. Jimin joined him, wringing his hands in his lap like he was trying to physically stop himself from going closer. Namjoon was sitting in the only chair in the room, chewing on his fingernail. Taehyung was perched on the arm of the chair, arms crossed over his middle and head hanging, while Yoongi sat on the carpet at their feet. His legs were drawn up and he was looking away towards the hallway, one hand in his hair and partially blocking his face.

Hoseok had never seen Jungkook cry this hard before and it was frightening to see their strongest member in such a miserable and vulnerable state. It had become apparent that it was no longer just the nightmare itself that was causing him this amount of prolonged grief, and as he listened to his gut-wrenching sobs, Hoseok started to understand how the other members had cracked so badly. Jungkook wasn't even in physical danger anymore yet Hoseok knew if there was a way he could lessen his suffering even a tiny amount, he would fight the world if he needed to.

Every so often, Seokjin would glance at them over Jungkook's head, each time his eyes becoming more red and glassy.

"I thought I was going to d-die," Jungkook finally whimpered. His crying was starting to slow to a more controlled level, but still he barely managed to get the words out. "I thought I was g-going to die alone."

Hoseok felt a clenching pain in his chest as though someone had reached in and was squeezing his heart in their fist. It was like he was in a dark dream himself, hearing those words from his youngest friend who was so sweet and so brave. He appeared to be growing weaker, sagging a little bit in Seokjin's arms, and Hoseok was reminded of the amount of physical pain he was most likely in right
now as well. At least in his own experience, crying for any significant length of time (even while healthy) often resulted in a pounding headache. He could only imagine how much worse it must be to have both a cold and a sinus infection on top of that. Not to mention crying that forcibly on an already sore throat.

Seokjin, however, didn't loosen his grip on their maknae. Instead he just bent his legs up to help support him in his lap, and Hoseok felt a new appreciation and admiration for their oldest member. Just as he had never seen Jungkook cry this hard before, he had never seen Seokjin quite this tender before.

"You didn't though," Jimin pointed out gently. "You didn't die, we found you and took you home."

"That was almost just as scary," Jungkook answered, his voice cracking. His arms slid heavily from around Seokjin's shoulders but he just laid them on his chest and let the older singer support him as he tried to wipe his nose on the back of his hand. "I didn't know what was happening. And no one would believe me."

Namjoon leaned forward in his chair and put his face in his hands, his shoulders slumping. Hoseok saw a box of tissues nearby and slid it into Jungkook's view, who took one gratefully and blew his nose. Jimin had been slowly inching closer to them and now ran his hand softly up and down the top of Jungkook's foot. Taehyung looked heartbroken, and stared at Jungkook longingly like he was far too far away from him, but there was no space for him on the bed.

"I'm sorry," Jungkook continued, and Hoseok took the used tissue out of his hand to throw in the wicker garbage basket nearby. "I'm so sorry for everything. I know I shouldn't be feeling this way. It was just so scary."

"There's nothing you should feel sorry for," Seokjin stated gently. Hoseok put his fingers in Jungkook's sweaty hair, combing it back from his face and scratching the back of his head lightly as their oldest hyung spoke. Unsurprisingly, his head felt far too warm. "It's us who are sorry, Jungkookie. We were all really scared too, and we didn't know what to do. We tried to do what we thought was best. I'm so sorry we traumatized you like that."

"It wasn't you," Jungkook sniffled so softly that Hoseok was sure only he and Seokjin had heard him. Then he gave a long sigh, or at least tried to with his breath still hitching, and stared at the ceiling. "My head hurts so much."

Yoongi got up and walked out of the room without a word or a glance back, his bare feet silent on the carpet.

"Jungkook-ah," Namjoon began, his voice low and unsteady. He stared at them with his head between his hands. "Please believe me when I tell you how sorry I am."

Jungkook's eyes stayed trained on the ceiling, still red, still tear-filled. "My throat really hurts too."

Namjoon stood up and walked towards them and Jungkook noticeably stiffened. "Kookie, please. I know you're mad at me, and that's okay -"

Jungkook started shaking his head. "I'm not mad at you."

"- and I'm not asking you to forgive me -"

As though suddenly uncomfortable with his own vulnerability, Jungkook pulled away from Seokjin to sit up against the headboard by himself. Namjoon hesitated but then sat down on the edge of the
bed, arms folded over his chest like he wanted to make it obvious that he wasn't going to try and touch Jungkook.

Jungkook noticed and he shook his head again, lips starting to quiver. "Please don't do that, hyung," he said, voice wavering. "I'm not scared of you. Please don't feel bad." He grabbed several tissues out of the box and began to dab at his eyes, and Hoseok could tell he was on the verge of losing it again.

"It's okay if you're mad at us. Or just me," Namjoon said, dipping his head a little bit to try and meet Jungkook's eyes. "Or if you're afraid of me or can't trust me. I don't blame you."

Jungkook just kept shaking his head vigorously as new tears began to spill. "I'm not mad at you! I'm mad at me!"

Maybe this wasn't a good idea. Jungkook was stripped emotionally raw right now, fresh off of what appeared to be a fairly traumatic nightmare. They shouldn't press him to try and explain feelings that he likely had little control over at the moment and possibly didn't even understand himself.

"Why? Why would you be mad at yourself?"

"Because!" Jungkook stopped abruptly and looked down, pressing his wobbling lips into a thin line. "Because... I know you did the right thing, but I still... I can't." Then his face crumpled and he hung his head, covering his eyes as his shoulders started to shake.

"No, JK, please don't cry again," Seokjin soothed, immediately sliding a hand across his back. He pulled at him gently but Jungkook didn't go to him this time. They all moved toward him except Namjoon, who quickly stood and backed away a few steps, his expression somewhere between guilt and sorrow. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, you don't have to say anything. I shouldn't have pushed you." Like all of the members, Hoseok knew that Namjoon's first instinct was to go to Jungkook when he was crying but he stood still and kept his arms wrapped tightly around his mid-section.

Jungkook just shook his head again, bending forward slightly. "You didn't, you're not doing anything wrong! You never did anything wrong. I'm sorry, I can't..."

"Hey, hey, hey," Yoongi's voice cut in as he came back into the room with a glass of ice water, a cold compress, and a couple of dish towels. "It's okay, Jungkookie. We can do this later. Here, drink this, it'll help you feel better."

Jungkook looked up, his nose pink and his eyes puffy and wet, and accepted the cold glass that Yoongi handed him. It took him a few tries to get his breathing under control enough to start drinking.

"We should finish this tomorrow, guys. Or at least let it go for now." Yoongi stood next to Jungkook with a hand on his shoulder as he drank, his fingers fiddling with the sweat-dampened collar of their maknae's shirt. "It's late. He should change out of this and he needs sleep."

They were all quick to agree with him. Yoongi and Seokjin helped him peel the sweaty shirt over his head and he patted himself down with one of the dish towels, trying hard to breathe deeply and evenly to calm himself down. New medication was handed to him, including ibuprofen to try and get his fever down. A dry shirt was tossed to him but he shook his head against it, scooting down to lay flat on top of the covers in just his shorts. Yoongi laid the cold compress on his forehead.

"Are you going to be okay, Jungkookie?" Taehyung asked, hovering by his bedside and looking like he wanted to do more to help.
Jungkook just nodded, eyes closed. His eyelashes were still damp with tears, lips still wobbling ever so slightly and cheeks flushed pink. No one said anything and no one moved. They couldn't stand leaving him like this.

"Hobi-hyung will be with me," Jungkook said in response to their hesitation. There were a few more seconds of silence and then he opened his watery eyes briefly to look at Hoseok. "You were going to sleep here, right? Will you still stay?"

Hoseok couldn't help feeling surprised. He had just assumed that Jungkook would want Seokjin to stay with him, as it was clear that he felt safest with their eldest member.

"Yeah," Hoseok answered. "Yeah, of course. Thanks." He didn't know why exactly he was thanking him but it somehow felt right.

Just like the night Jungkook was taken home from the hospital, he was given a round of goodnight hugs. Only this time they were twice as gentle, three times as loving, and all head pats were replaced by kisses to his hair and his cheeks and his eyes.

Namjoon didn't get too close, simply squeezing their maknae's hand and whispering a quiet goodnight. But before he could let go, Jungkook squeezed back and held him there a moment longer.

"I don't hate you, hyung," he whispered, his voice tight like he was still trying to hold back emotion. He opened his eyes to look at their leader but quickly closed them again as though he didn't want to see the expression on Namjoon's face.

Namjoon just smiled softly. "I know, Kook-ah. Don't worry about that." He placed a quick kiss to the back of Jungkook's hand before placing it down on the young man's stomach. He reached for the bedside lamp to turn it off again but not before sending Hoseok the same look he had gotten from every other member before they'd left the room. A look of trust and reassurance, telling him that they knew he would take good care of their maknae.

Namjoon paused again at the doorway to look back, the gold light from the hallway back-lighting his tall form.

"Jungkookie."

Jungkook didn't move or open his eyes.

"Whatever you're feeling, it's okay to feel it. Even if you don't understand it."

He closed the door quietly, casting the room into near darkness save for the dim light of the moon filtering in through the curtains, and the shine of silver tears began to trail from Jungkook's eyes.

That's when Hoseok lost it himself. His throat constricted and Jungkook's form went blurry before him. His heart ached with a burn that he didn't know was possible as he watched liquid pain leak from eyes that were supposed to gleam with mischief. He sat up, unable to stop the sob that forced its way up and out of his chest as he reached instinctively for Jungkook's face, cupping it between his hands and wiping clumsily at the tears. Jungkook's features were scrunched in his effort to not cry and he kept his eyes squeezed shut and his lips pressed together.

There was something wrong with the world, there must be, for such a sensitive and playful person to have experienced something so frightening and painful. Hoseok couldn't help feeling a level of anger at the world, at the event itself even, and wondered how long it would torment Jungkook before deciding to let him go.
The cold pack slid back from Jungkook's forehead, revealing his furrowed black eyebrows and the deep wrinkle that had formed between them. Hoseok blinked rapidly to try and get the tears in his eyes to spill so he could see as he moved his thumbs up to the tightened muscles of their maknae's forehead, pressing gently and rubbing outward over his eyebrows. Jungkook sniffled but otherwise didn't say anything, so Hoseok decided to continue, massaging over and under his eyes where he knew the sinuses to be before moving on to his temples. He had to occasionally press his nose into his shoulder to stop it from running and tried his best to stifle the sounds of his own crying.

Jungkook was trying to relax, he could see that he was. But their youngest had always struggled when it came to separating himself from negative thoughts and every time it seemed that the tension was starting to leave his face, his eyebrows would pull together again.

"I think there's supposed to be another super moon this year," Hoseok said. "It won't be as close to the earth as the last one but it should still look really cool."

Jungkook's eyes cracked open to look at him in confusion but Hoseok just ran his thumbs over them to make them close again.

"I like those better than the blood moons," he continued. He couldn't stop his voice from cracking but speaking was helping him to focus his mind. "Yoongi-hyung and Taehyungie say they are poetic but honestly I think they are just creepy. I mean you don't see red moons in light-hearted movies, just creepy horror movies and anime."

He gently pressed the cold compress back onto the young man's forehead and then moved his hands to the back of his neck, kneading into the hard muscles there. They were tight and knotted and Hoseok remembered how rigid Jungkook's body had been during his nightmare. His skin was hot and already sweaty again from the fever.

"I like the sun better though. It's warm and comforting and it makes things smell good." Hoseok watched Jungkook's face. His expression was still tense but the tears had stopped. "Don't ask me why or how, it just does. Dirt smells richer, the flowers smell brighter."

"How can something smell brighter?" Jungkook's voice was weak and rough, but his lips curled a little at the corners.

"I don't know... It's true though, isn't it?"

A few seconds passed in silence.

"Food tastes better in the sun too. Eating a hot dog tastes way better if you eat it in the sun than if you eat it in the rain."

Jungkook's lips curled into a smile again. "That's definitely true." He drew in a long, deep breath and let it out again slowly and calmly.

Hoseok kept talking, saying anything that came to his mind. He told him about a new game he'd downloaded onto his phone. He listed his favorite things about each of the seasons. He told him about an idea he had for a new song. Simple things, things that didn't require a response from Jungkook and had nothing to do with his current situation.

It occurred to him then, that perhaps that was exactly why Jungkook had wanted Hoseok to stay with him instead of Seokjin. As far as Jungkook's memories were concerned, Hoseok had nothing to do with what happened. Seokjin had been the most comforting presence to him in the forest from what he'd heard and seen, but he could still associate him with that night. But when Jungkook thought
about Hoseok, he wouldn't even be able to picture his ordeal at the same time because Hoseok was never a part of it. He was a third party, completely removed, and whether Jungkook was even aware of it or not, perhaps if he was with Hoseok he could pretend that he too was safely removed.

Jungkook's breathing started to slow and deepen. When the previously hardened muscles of the back of his neck and shoulders had been worked out of their knots, Hoseok laid down beside him again. He kept a hand in his hair and watched the young singer's features relax and his mouth part slightly. His eyelids were still puffy but there was no trace of tension on his face anymore.

Hoseok just kept talking, lowering his voice little by little until it was a whisper, and ran his fingers through Jungkook's dark locks until he too fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I always want to make sure that I don't make Jungkook more emotional than he would be in real life but for goodness sake, we keep getting videos of him being too sweet and sensitive for his own good. Like crying after messing up Euphoria and crying while watching Dolly Parton. This kid is a freaking treasure and we need to form a protective human barrier around his heart. <3

Updates will probably be a bit slower like this one was, like maybe every two weeks. That being said, I genuinely work on this every single day and will post new chapters as soon as I can get them done! Without compromising quality, if at all possible. ^_^

Feedback is greatly welcomed and truly does encourage my creative juices to keep flowing! I hope you are all doing well and have a wonderful day or night!
The room was still dim when Yoongi woke up the next morning. He thought perhaps the sun hadn't risen yet but a glance at his phone told him that it was almost eight o'clock, so he begrudgingly sat up. Normally he would snuggle back down into the warm covers for another few hours, but a sense of responsibility to his members kept him from self indulging. A peek between the window blinds showed a gray sky, with mist hanging thick in the air. Sadness hovered around the edges of his mind and he pulled the collar of his sweatshirt a little closer to his neck as he stepped into the hallway, leaving Namjoo snoring softly in the room behind him.

The house was quiet and the wooden floorboards were just a little bit too cool under his feet to be comfortable as he headed toward the kitchen. His stomach ached with hunger, and while he wanted to just grab a bowl of cereal to soothe it, he decided that cooking a warm breakfast for the other members to wake up to would feel much more satisfying.

When he arrived though, despite the silence of the house, he found that he was not the first one awake. Hoseok sat slumped at the table, head and arms resting on the table top and a half-full bottle of water next to him.

"Hobi?"

The younger man lifted his head to look at him before dropping it again. There was a smile on his face but dark circles under his bleary eyes.

"Morning, hyung."

"You okay?"

Hoseok shrugged slightly. "I think I caught Jungkook and Jin-hyung's cold. My head aches and feels really heavy and my throat hurts a little bit. I'm pretty happy about it though."

Yoongi's heart twinged and grew just a little bit heavier as he went towards his friend. "I don't think you know how being sick is supposed to work."

"Well, it sucks."

"That's the spirit."

"But I feel like I'm paying my dues. I haven't done enough yet."

Yoongi couldn't help but chuckle as he made his way to the refrigerator and stared sleepily at the food inside. "What does that even mean?"

"Everyone has suffered for Jungkook but me."

"Don't say that in front of him."

"I don't mean because of him. I just mean you've all been through so much. I feel guilty, like I got off
Deciding on a traditional American breakfast, Yoongi set some eggs and bacon on the counter and then turned to look at the dancer. Through the large windows behind him, Yoongi could see the back field and the forest beyond it, fog rising from the overgrown grass and obscuring all but the first few trunks of the tree line. "And feeling poorly is making you feel better?"

"Yep."

"That's dumb. I mean I kinda get the feeling guilty part," Yoongi said, turning back to the stove and starting it up with the click and hiss of a gas burner. "I feel guilty for not doing enough and I was there the whole time. Of course in my case maybe I did enough but it was all the wrong things to do. But you've been perfectly helpful this whole time, and being sick is only going to be counter-intuitive."

"It's too early for a word like that."

"Meaning being sick is only going to make you less helpful and then you'll feel even more guilty."

Hoseok heaved a long sigh that ended in coughs. He swallowed down some more water.

For a few minutes there was just the sizzle of eggs as Yoongi moved them around in the pan.

"Someone had to stay and you were the right choice to stay. If Namjoonie or I were thinking straight to begin with, I think we both would have asked you specifically."

"Why?"

"Because you're smart and levelheaded when it counts. You know, there's a reason why Namjoon said that if he had to choose another leader in the group it would be you. You stayed calm and did way more than I would have thought to do in that position. The fact that you were afraid to come with us doesn't really have anything to do with it. Not to mention how impressive you were in the van. We really needed you. I think you've done more for us than you think you have."

Yoongi felt the familiar warm blush of self-consciousness as he often did when he came anywhere close to verbalizing affection, but Hoseok just murmured a quiet thank you behind him.

"But now you're sick, so I guess that's over."

Hoseok laughed. "I'll still be helpful, I'm just going to feel like crap while I do."

"Speaking of feeling like crap, how was poor Jungkookie after we left last night?"

"Aw," Hoseok said, his voice lowering and saddening considerably. "He was still crying. I started to cry too, I couldn't help it. It's so hard to see him hurting like that."

"Yeah, no kidding," Yoongi murmured.

"It must have been a really realistic nightmare."

"Well, fever, heavy medication, and trauma will do that to you. Was he awake for a long time after that?"

"Actually, I think I distracted him by talking about random stuff. And then I gave him a face and neck massage and he fell asleep," Hoseok replied and Yoongi could hear the proud smile in his voice. "I'm good at that, if nothing else."
"What, putting people to sleep?"

Hoseok just gave another good-natured chuckle. "I mean massages."

"Well, see? You helped. A lot. And that's what's important. Suffering just for the sake of suffering is stupid."

They went silent when they heard a door opening and closing followed by the muted click of crutches in the hallway. They glanced at each other and Yoongi raised an eyebrow. It was pretty early still for Jungkook to be awake. The young man in question appeared in the entrance to the kitchen in a huge white hoodie, black bangs peeking out from under the hood, and a blue fleece blanket hanging off his shoulders. His face fell when he saw Yoongi at the stove.

"Aw, man. I wanted to cook breakfast for everyone."

"Yeah, Jungkookie?" Hoseok's mouth formed a wide, heart-shaped smile as he sat up at the table. "Are you feeling okay, then?"

"I'm alright," Jungkook answered. His voice was shot, raspy and quiet, and the tip of his nose was red from blowing it too often, but his eyes looked bright and clear. "Better than last night at least. Good enough to try and make an apology breakfast."

Yoongi had a sudden urge to take the few steps over to Jungkook and pull him down into a hug but instead he snorted faintly and turned back to the eggs. "Well, you're just going to have to relax and let me cook for you like everyone else."

Jungkook hopped towards Hoseok and leaned down, wrapping his arms around his shoulders from behind and resting his head lovingly on the older dancer's shoulder. He didn't say anything, but there was no explanation needed to see the gratitude in his closed eyes and soft smile.

"You don't feel like a furnace," Hoseok observed hopefully, squeezing what he could reach of their maknae's arms.

"Yeah, I checked my temperature just now and it's down by a lot." He stood again and hobbled towards Yoongi. "Can I finish making whatever you're making?"

"You can make toast," Yoongi offered, and pointed towards a paper grocery bag on the floor next to the refrigerator. "There's bread in there."

"Is that all there is?"

"There's probably jam in there too."

"I mean is that all there is to do?"

"It's all the work I'm willing to share with you," Yoongi said, and pulled a chair over to the counter near the toaster for Jungkook to sit on. He pointed to it with the spatula. "Take it or leave it."

Jungkook sighed but sat down with the bread and got to work. Yoongi watched him out of the corner of his eye, apologies bubbling in his mind and pushing to get out. He needed Jungkook to know how sorry he was for scaring him in the forest. For handling the situation so poorly that he undoubtedly caused his pain and suffering to last even longer than it already had. But Jungkook looked content, talking idly with Hoseok while buttering the toast as it popped out. After a difficult and emotional night, the last thing Yoongi wanted to do was draw his thoughts back to what happened. What Jungkook needed right now was normalcy.
Eventually Taehyung wandered into the kitchen, blond hair in disarray and eyes barely open. He ignored all greetings, instead dragging another chair up behind Jungkook's. He plopped down, slung his arms over their youngest member's shoulders and seemingly fell back asleep against his back. Namjoon came out quietly followed shortly after by a more talkative Jimin, and as conversations shifted, Yoongi was pleased to find that they all seemed to have the same thought in mind: keep the atmosphere easy and casual.

When breakfast was almost ready to be put on plates and Seokjin still hadn't come out of his room, Jungkook left his position as toast-butterer to check on him. They both came out a few minutes later, but Seokjin looked exhausted, his face uncharacteristically devoid of smiles, and Jungkook was noticeably more sullen than when he went in.

During the meal, Yoongi couldn't help but notice that despite the conversation being upbeat, very few members actually looked happy. The few jokes that Seokjin made were half-hearted and had no real humor behind them. Taehyung stayed glued to Jungkook's side, always with a hand on his arm or his back or over his shoulders as though through contact alone he might be able to siphon some of their maknae's troubles away and into himself. Jungkook, who usually ate every meal as though it was his last, didn't seem to have much of an appetite. His shoulders tensed every time Seokjin coughed and Yoongi often caught him staring dejectedly at Namjoon, who, despite obvious attempts to participate in discussions, spent more time staring out the window at the fog.

Jimin and Hoseok were the only two who seemed to be in relatively good moods and they carried the majority of the conversation until Hoseok got a tickle in his throat. What started as a few subtle coughs quickly turned into an alarming hacking fit, his face red and reflexive tears gathering in his eyes from the strain. He finally stopped coughing long enough to get some water down, and then held his head in his hands with a pained groan.

Jimin rubbed his hand over Hoseok's back. "Are you sick too now? I really hope you haven't caught the Kookie cold."

"Don't call it that," Seokjin said, standing and gathering his dishes to bring to the sink. "He already thinks everything is his fault."

"I'm so sorry, hyung, are you really sick?" Jungkook asked, eyebrows drawn together in worry. "I'm sorry."

"See?" Seokjin turned on the faucet to start running warm water over the dirty dishes in the sink, keeping his back to them. "It's not a Kookie cold, Jungkook-ah, it's just another Bangtan plague."

"I can still feel bad though. I'm allowed to feel bad."

"It's not as bad as what you and Jin-hyung have," Hoseok assured, still trying to clear his throat as he spoke. "I promise."

"I hope not," Jungkook mumbled, glancing at Seokjin's back. He moved the rest of his mostly-uneaten breakfast onto Hoseok's plate.
After breakfast, Jungkook had to look at his leg for the first time since seeing it bloody and torn up in the trap. It was past time to clean it and put on new bandages and truthfully he probably should have done it the night before. It was aching and tender and he could feel that the bandage was stuck to the wound, which meant he needed to soak it before trying to take it off.

He sat on the edge of the bathtub as it slowly filled with warm water, dropping in a small amount of soap and swishing it around with a wash cloth. He was nervous to see what it really looked like. It had been difficult to see at night and covered in blood, but now in the overhead light of the bathroom he would be able to see every laceration and every stitch.

Suds swirled in circles over the surface of the water as he moved his hand through it and he followed the pattern with his eyes, wishing he could forget everything about the last three days. He wished they had never come to this house. He wished he had never gone running. He wished he hadn't caused the other members so much worry and guilt and pain. He wished he knew how to get over his own lingering hurt and anger towards himself.

He couldn't help but feel embarrassed about the night before. He felt weak for crying so hard and so long over a nightmare, like a child. A large part of him knew that it was justified, that he had almost died, and undoubtedly would have if it had simply been raining or snowing or if his hyungs hadn't found him when they did. But completely exposing his emotions like that always left him feeling frightfully vulnerable and out of control, even if it was with the people he trusted most in the entire world. He only ever wanted to be strong for them. He didn't want them to have to worry about whether he could handle difficult situations. Seeing his pain in turn only caused them pain and last night he had been completely defenseless and unable to hide behind the walls he was usually able to build. They saw how weak and afraid he really was.

It seemed he was unable to stop causing them worry on this ill-fated trip.

"Jungkookie."

Hoseok's voice startled him out of his reverie, and he twisted the knob of the bathtub faucet to turn off the loud rush of water.

"Can I help?" The older dancer stood at the threshold, one hand playing nervously with a loose string on his jean shorts as the last few drops of water plunked into the half-full tub.

"No, it's okay," Jungkook replied, pulling off his sock and tossing it to the other side of the room. No one needed to see what a mess his leg had no doubt become.

Hoseok just stepped in, closing the door down to a crack behind him.

"Please? I want to help."

Jungkook looked up and saw a strange but sincere determination in his friend's tired brown eyes. "You sure you want to? It's probably gonna be ugly."

"It might not be. Really, I want to."

He didn't look like he wanted to. Jungkook wasn't sure he wanted him to either. Hoseok had trouble
looking at cuts and blood and wounds for good reason - because it was gross. And Jungkook's leg was going to be gross. He wasn't sure he wanted anyone to see it, much less the person who would be the most sickened by it.

"So what do you have to do?" Hoseok asked uneasily, sitting next to him on the edge of the bathtub. "Do you take the gauze off first?"

"I can't, it's stuck on," Jungkook said, watching for Hoseok's reaction. "You really don't have to stay. You don't like this stuff. It's okay."

"I know, but I want to. I mean I don't actually want to, but... I do want to."

Jungkook grinned and gave his friend's leg a pat. "I think you need to go back to bed, hyung."

Hoseok snorted. "Yeah I probably do. But really, I want to see what it looks like."

Jungkook raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"I mean if you're okay with it," Hoseok quickly amended.

Jungkook just shrugged. "If you really want to, sure. We can be grossed out together."

Hoseok didn't respond, so Jungkook swung his leg over, but then hesitated with his toes hovering just over the suds. It was going to hurt. A few seconds passed and then he slowly lowered his leg in, and he was right. The water wasn't hot by any means but it soaked through the bandage immediately and burned into his damaged skin. He grimaced but held it under and waited, hoping it would acclimatize.

There was a soft knock on the door and Yoongi poked his head inside. "How is it going? Do you need help?"

Jungkook smiled internally but just shook his head. They really did worry about him too much. "No, I'm okay."

Yoongi came in anyway, again closing the door behind him, and then sat on top of the toilet. He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. "Listen, Jungkookie. I want you to know that I'm sorry for everything that happened. I messed up. We should have called an ambulance for you. If we had, you would have been better a lot sooner."

Jungkook quickly turned his gaze down to the soapy water, caught off guard by Yoongi's sudden admission. That was the way it usually went with Yoongi, however. He often struggled with getting his feelings out, but once he did he was straight forward and wasted no time telling it like it is.

"I tried to be smart about it but I wasn't, and I handled the whole thing really badly. I'm sorry I scared you. I'm sorry we had to ignore what you were saying."

"It's okay," Jungkook said quietly, still staring at the bath water. The burning sensation on his skin was beginning to fade. "I know you had to."

"We did. But it felt awful doing it, I hope you know that."

Jungkook nodded. Even though he already knew it must have been difficult for them, it still felt good to hear it from Yoongi's own mouth.

"And Jungkookie."
He waited a few seconds and then glanced up at his older friend, who was staring at him with a seriousness that almost made him uncomfortable.

"Don't blame Namjoonie more than you blame me."

A rush of guilt swept through him and he dropped his gaze again. "I'm not blaming him."

"He didn't do anything worse than I did. Even if he put you down, I would have picked you up and carried you myself," Yoongi said. Then his voice became a little more light-hearted. "Well. I'm too weak to have been able to do that for more than a few feet, but you know what I mean."

Jungkook gave a long, frustrated sigh and leaned back to rest his back against the wall. "I don't know why it's so different with him, hyung," he finally admitted. "I know it wasn't just him and I know you guys did the right thing. I mean, maybe it's because... Well, with you, you were just another voice floating around nearby. But I was so much more aware of him."

Yoongi watched him carefully, his expression soft and understanding. Hoseok shifted quietly next to him.

"I couldn't always follow or understand what everyone was saying, but I could definitely understand that he was right there and wasn't listening. He was the one that was actually... doing it. Does that make any sense?"

"Yeah, Kookie, it makes sense."

Jungkook bumped his head gently against the wall behind him. "It's so frustrating and so embarrassing. I hate it. I don't want to feel this way."

Yoongi smiled and leaned forward to ruffle his hair. "It's okay. You know the right things in your head. Your heart will catch up. It only happened a few days ago, just give yourself some time."

"I hope you're right," he replied simply. Then he glanced reluctantly down at the now water-logged bandage. "Well. Time to rip this off painfully." He rolled his sleeves up and dipped his hands into the warm water to pick at the medical tape.

Yoongi came to kneel next to him and together they slowly peeled away the gauze, pausing every so often to let the scabs soften. Hoseok didn't help them and grew more and more pale as the minutes passed, but he also didn't leave, something that left Jungkook more than a little befuddled.

Finally the bandage was completely off and they got a look at what was underneath. It wasn't great. Perhaps better than the nightmarish images Jungkook had been fearing, but it still wasn't easy to look at.

"Not bad," Yoongi commented lightly and Jungkook shot him an incredulous look.

"Seriously? I'm never going to be able to wear shorts again!" As soon as he said it, it sunk in. He was permanently marred. These wounds would turn into ugly scars that he would have to live with his entire life.

"You don't have to be ashamed of it, Jungkookie. Scars are hot," Hoseok said. He tapped Jungkook's cheekbone where his small trademark facial scar rested. "Like this one. Everyone loves this one."

"There's a big difference between a tiny line that you can barely see and whatever this is going to end up looking like."
"I honestly don't think it's going to be that bad. Look." Yoongi carefully lifted Jungkook's leg out of the water and guided his heel to rest on the faucet. "It's mostly going to be these three or four major lines. I bet all those smaller ones will fade away."

Jungkook looked at the stitches holding his skin together. There were several sections at the top of each jagged line where they hadn't been able to make his skin meet completely, leaving still somewhat open wounds where the teeth had first bit into him. "What about these parts? Those are just going to be big ugly splotches."

"Maybe they will look like flowers." Hoseok, despite looking a little green in the face, was studying Jungkook's leg surprisingly closely.

"...what?"

"Look," Hoseok began, trailing a finger along the lines without actually touching him. "These are like stems. There's only going to be a couple splotches and they will all be right at the top of the stems. Maybe they will look like flowers."

Jungkook smiled. It would definitely not look like flowers, but trust Hoseok to put an extremely positive spin on a bad situation.

Then Yoongi leaned closer to him and looped an arm around his head, pulling him into a loose hug.

"Don't be ashamed of it, Jungkookie," he encouraged softly, right next to his ear. "It won't be ugly, it'll just show people how strong you are. And you are strong. We're really proud of you."

Jungkook felt a warmth spread in his chest at the kind words from his normally stoic friend, and over Yoongi's shoulder he saw Hoseok's lips slowly pull into a grin as he watched them.

"I really think it'll heal better than you think it will. So until your leg blooms into flowers, we'll just call you Franken-Kook."

"Aw!" Hoseok exclaimed loudly, and Yoongi immediately tried to pull away but Jungkook quickly captured him in a hug to hold him in place.

"No, you ruined my moment with Yoongi-hyung!"

"Ugh," Yoongi grumbled and let his arms go limp at his sides as Jungkook squeezed him. "I knew that would be corny. This is why I don't say things."

For the first time since they began their vacation, all seven of them ended up having a relatively good day. Despite Seokjin's rough start, he seemed to improve as the day went on, and while Hoseok didn't actually get any better, neither did he get any worse, and his sickness truly didn't seem to be as bad as Seokjin and Jungkook's.

Jungkook, for his part, was relieved to find that the pressure in his head and behind his eyes was fading. He could breathe clearly through his nose. His sore throat was almost completely gone, though his voice itself remained crackly and hoarse, and the scrapes on his palms had healed up enough that he didn't need to apply new bandages after getting them wet in the tub. He still got tired easily, and his leg still hurt, more than he suspected it should at this point, but he was happy enough with the rest of his improvements to not pay it much mind.
He purposely stayed close to Namjoon all afternoon. He wanted to convince both himself and his leader that everything was okay between them. The more he acted as though everything was normal, the easier it would be to forget that anything happened at all, the less guilty Namjoon would have to feel, and the faster his heart could catch up with his mind, as Yoongi told him it would.

So he sat next to Namjoon whenever he could, made sure to give him pats on his leg and shoulders, and smiled at him often. Perhaps he was over-compensating, and perhaps Namjoon could tell. But the smiles he received in return were always affectionate and genuine, which was enough to make Jungkook happy.

His efforts to get his mindset back to normal, however, was made more difficult by the subtle looks he got from the other members throughout the day. He was sure they didn't realize they were doing it, but every so often he caught one of them staring at him. Sometimes fondly, as though appreciating his presence, which he found heart-warming. But other times their expressions would be dark, and he knew they were imagining what their lives would be like if he'd died. When they realized he was looking, they would either smile at him wistfully or turn away in guilt.

As evening drew closer, it became it painfully obvious that there was virtually nothing left for any of them to do at the house. There were only so many movies they could watch and video games they could play before they lost their appeal. The trip was never intended to be spent indoors. Their week had been planned around sight seeing and experiencing the culture and food of Sapporo. Those plans had understandably been forgotten after what happened, but now that things had settled down, Jungkook was reminded of all the things his members were missing out on. Things that they still had an opportunity to experience but no doubt weren't considering because they would feel too guilty to leave Jungkook behind.

So when he stepped out onto the back deck to enjoy some of the milder air that the fog had brought with it and found Yoongi, Namjoon, and Jimin watching first aid videos on a laptop, he decided he needed to help them along.

"We're almost out of cold medicine," he informed, taking a seat on the arm of Namjoon's deck chair and leaning on his shoulder so he could see the laptop too. There was a man on the screen demonstrating how to perform CPR.

"Are you sure?" Jimin replied dubiously, not taking his eyes off the screen. "We bought a ton."

"Well, there are three of us who need it now. I was also wondering if you would do me a favor."

All three of them looked up, and he felt a flood of affection at their immediate readiness to listen.

"I was kind of hoping to buy a souvenir or something while we were here. Like maybe a shirt that says Sapporo? Or... or maybe a bag or a key chain or something?" It sounded silly, even to his own ears. It's not like they'd never been to Sapporo before or would never go again. There wasn't even anything particularly unique about the city. It was nothing like Malta or their Europe trip, which had been a (possibly) once in a lifetime experience. He fiddled nonchalantly with the fabric of Namjoon's gray sweatshirt. "Maybe you guys can go into the city tomorrow and pick some stuff up? You can do some of the things we were thinking of doing while you are there, too. Like that sushi restaurant?"

"I don't want to go if you can't come with us, Jungkookie," Jimin said plainly.

"Not even to buy me things that I'm asking nicely for?"

"Well, we are running out of food," Yoongi pointed out. The humidity in the air had caused the
edges of his dark hair to wave ever so slightly. "So at least one person will have to make the trip at some point, especially if you're running out of medicine."

"Why don't you all just go?"

"We're obviously not going to leave you here all alone, Kookie," Namjoon replied, laying his arm on Jungkook's lap and patting his knee. "Maybe some can go and some can stay."

"But I'd like a souvenir from each one of you. I've just decided."

"Well, maybe whoever doesn't go the first day can go the next day. We can figure something out."

Jungkook was happy enough with that answer so he just smiled and relaxed further onto Namjoon, turning his attention back to the screen. He spent the next half hour or so there with them learning how to treat various injuries and what to do in emergency situations.

Jungkook, Seokjin, and Hoseok all went to bed early that night. Seokjin and Hoseok because they both wanted to try to go into the city the next day and Jungkook because, despite having done nothing but rest all day, simply couldn't keep his eyes open any longer. Dinner had felt long and, for whatever reason, seemed to take a lot out of him. He'd begun feeling drowsy partway through and couldn't work up the desire to eat what was put in front of him. Despite the odd looks it gained, he ended up handing most of his meal off to Taehyung next to him. The ache in his leg had steadily increased over the course of the afternoon and by the time he hobbled down to his room for the night, it had become painful enough that he was feeling a little disconcerted by it. So, although it wasn't quite time yet to take his next dose of pain meds, he popped an extra pill down anyway after saying goodnight to Hoseok and Seokjin.

Seokjin woke up with a start, cold sweat beading on his brow and his heart thumping rapidly in his chest.

Jungkook was dead.

He remembered it now. He had found him on the ground covered in dirt and blood. Not breathing, not moving. His body had felt cold and rigid. Dead.

But that couldn't be right. He also remembered finding him breathing but unconscious. He remembered sending Taehyung back to the house and hugging Jungkook on top of him in a desperate attempt to keep him warm. But he also remembered how Jungkook's breathing had slowed down. His heartbeat had slowed down. Seokjin rubbed his back frightfully but his youngest friend had just grown colder and colder against him until the small breaths against his neck stopped. He had rolled Jungkook over onto the ground to look at his face, only to see unfocused dead eyes staring past him.

Seokjin scrambled frantically out of bed onto wobbling legs, his chest heaving and his head
pounding. He saw spots drifting through his vision from standing up too fast but stumbled to the door and out into the dimly lit hallway. He could hear the sound of a television coming from somewhere else in the house but made straight for the room at the end of the hall and shoved the door open.

Jungkook was there on the bed and raised his head to stare back at him with wide, expressive eyes. Seokjin walked toward him in disbelief, his mind warring between what he remembered and what he was seeing now. Jungkook slowly pushed himself into a sitting position as he approached, eyebrows raised in concern and confusion. As soon as he was close enough, Seokjin laid one hand flat against Jungkook's chest and placed the other on his back. There was warmth beneath his fingers. A strong heartbeat pulsed against his palm. His hands moved ever so slightly as steady breaths expanded and contracted between them.

He heaved in a shaky breath, sliding to his knees as relief began to sink in. Jungkook's eyes were searching his in bewilderment but then suddenly relaxed in understanding and a soft, sympathetic smile curled his lips.

"Did you just have a dream?"

Seokjin dropped his forehead to rest on the edge of the bed and just nodded into the sheets, struggling to get his emotions under control and his heartbeat back to a normal rate. He felt fingers in his hair and as soon as he raised his head, Jungkook hugged it against his chest.

"I'm okay," the younger singer reassured, resting his cheek atop Seokjin's head. Seokjin straightened and wrapped his arms around Jungkook's middle, squeezing him tight enough to feel him breathe.

Their position was slightly awkward but Seokjin stayed there on his knees for several minutes, for the first time in a long time letting himself be comforted by his youngest friend's hand rubbing his back. Then Jungkook drew away and began to shuffle to the other side of the bed.

"You can sleep here if you want," he said, his voice strained but hopeful. He patted the now open space next to him and Seokjin crawled in without a second thought. They settled in under the covers and Seokjin rolled onto his stomach and rested his arm over Jungkook's torso.

They laid in silence. Jungkook seemed relaxed next to him, but the image of his maknae's dead eyes was still painfully fresh in Seokjin's mind. He had seen it so clearly. He had felt his cold body. And the thought hurt so badly, crushing his heart and making his chest ache.

"Jungkookie, you mean so much to me," he finally said aloud. "You're so sweet. You're such a good person, and you're so fun to be around."

Jungkook was quiet, but his eyes slowly opened to stare at the ceiling.

"You inspire me all the time to work harder. I get jealous sometimes because you are so good at everything you do. But I'm always so proud of you. Bangtan would never survive without you. I don't think we would have even made it past debut without you."

He let the words pour out, everything that he had always assumed Jungkook knew but never told him. All the things that he had feared would be too awkward to express in the past. All the things that he thought he would never have the chance to tell him again.

"It would kill me if anything happened to you."

Jungkook swallowed and raised a hand to hold Seokjin's where it rested over him.

"You're so cute. You're so funny. You're so sensitive but you're also so strong. You work so hard
and you're so talented. And you're really young to have to deal with a life as extreme as ours is but you handle it so well."

It didn't feel awkward. It was surprisingly easy.

"I love you so much."

Jungkook let out a tiny laugh and hugged Seokjin's hand against his face.

"I love you too, hyung."

Chapter End Notes

A long and relatively slow moving chapter, compared to past chapters. But I wanted to get all of that in there now, because the next chapter should be the last one, and it will be far more exciting than this one! It's been planned since the beginning and I've been looking forward to writing it, so I'm excited too.

A couple of you have asked if I have Twitter and I do. :) I don't post much myself, but if anyone wants to talk or has questions or anything, please feel free to drop by!
@S0lsticeTitania

As for when the chapter will go up, basically I will post it as soon as I can get it done, and I am guessing it will take me about two weeks again, give or take a few days.

I hope you are all doing really well! As always, feedback is greatly welcomed and genuinely helps in terms of motivation and inspiration! Whenever I feel stuck or unmotivated, I often go back and read some comments. <3 Much love to you!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

I'm going to stop saying that the next chapter is the last chapter because I've said that twice now and it hasn't yet happened. :)
"Mm. Good morning, Jimin-ssi," Jungkook said, staring at the blackness inside his hood.

"Have some breakfast," Jimin suggested with a smile as he took the hood back off and patted Jungkook's cheek.

Jungkook looked to the counter where he saw a mass of eggs, fruit, and toast, and boxes of cereal. Just the sight of the food made his stomach roll with nausea. The only thing that sounded remotely appetizing to him was water. Maybe. But he was also feeling a little bit lightheaded and knew that he hadn't eaten much of anything the day before so he took some berries and toast and pulled a chair over to sit close to Namjoon.

"How are you feeling, Kookie?" Namjoon asked, giving him side-glances as he ate his eggs. "You look a little... I don't know. You look tired."

"I do?" He hoped he sounded casual and forced himself to take a bite of the toast. "I didn't sleep a lot, I guess. Thinking too much."

"Well, you can sleep as much as you want today." Namjoon gave him a sympathetic smile and rubbed a warm, comforting hand over his back.

Jungkook just nodded and took another bite of toast, happy to find that he was able to keep it down despite his stomach threatening otherwise. "So are you guys still going into the city today?"

"I think so," Taehyung replied. He was slouched back in his chair, fluffing the hair on the back of his head. "Are you sure you're okay with it though? I really feel bad."

"Don't feel bad," Jungkook chuckled. "Seriously, I want you to go. You have to buy me souvenirs and bring back more things to do here. I'm just going to sleep today anyway, you guys might as well do something fun."

"What sort of stuff do you want us to bring back?" Hoseok asked from across the table. He still sounded stuffed up and his voice was uncharacteristically gravelly, but thankfully he didn't otherwise seem bothered by his cold.

"Could you buy me a sweatshirt? A red one?"

"Sure! What else?"

"Um... Ironman?"

"We can't purchase Ironman."

"You're not even going to try?"

"We'll find something with Ironman on it."

"Yay," Jungkook grinned, wondering if they would actually manage to come up with something. He took one more bite of toast but then had to put the rest of it down. "So are all of you going then?"

"No way," Namjoon answered immediately. "Like I said yesterday, we're not about to leave you here all alone."

"It would be okay if you did." Jungkook wasn't at all sure that that was true. It didn't feel right saying it. He was beginning to feel a little bit too warm in his sweatshirt and ran a hand over the back of his neck.
"Well I'm staying here anyway," their leader said, putting his fork down and wiping his hands off on a napkin. "I don't think I can walk around for very long. Or I shouldn't, at least."

Jungkook tilted his head and looked at Namjoon in confusion for a few seconds before it came back to him.

Oh.

That's right. Namjoon had twisted his ankle because he'd had to carry him for so long. Jungkook hadn't thought about it because Namjoon was no longer limping, but he was right. Walking around a city wasn't a good idea.

Namjoon must have noticed his expression changing because he quickly followed with, "I think I would have stayed anyway. I want to spend some time writing. There's a lot on my mind that might make good lyrics."

The corners of Jungkook's lips curled a little in admiration. He had spent the last couple days feeling sorry for himself and wallowing in his fears and insecurities, and here Namjoon was looking to turn his own thoughts into something meaningful and productive.

So cool. Jungkook should be trying to do that too.

When Seokjin came out it was with a smile and a chipper disposition. As breakfast continued, Jungkook couldn't help but notice how much happier everyone seemed compared to the day before and he knew it was because they were going to get out of the house. They kept their discussions calm and casual as they made plans, no doubt for his sake, but there was no mistaking the excitement that bubbled just under the surface. It warmed his heart to see that spark of life return to their faces. That was all he needed to be happy himself.

He stayed on the couch and watched as they got ready to go, showering and changing and moving about the house to gather their things. He had to lay down after a little while when he got just a little bit too dizzy to stay upright. He was still feeling too warm, and his leg hurt when he moved it. Keeping up with their activity soon became too tiring for him so he closed his eyes and let the noise fade into the background.

Then there was a hand on his shoulder, gently shaking him awake.

"Jungkookie, we're leaving," Taehyung said softly. He ran his hand down Jungkook's arm, his brown eyes filled with what looked like part worry and part fondness. "Wow, you really are tired."

Jungkook just nodded sleepily, his mind feeling slow and somewhat hazy.

"Is there anything else you want or need? Last chance."

"Oh, what snacks do you want, JK?" Seokjin interjected, appearing in Jungkook's line of view and zipping up his coat. "We'll bring you some banana milk."

Jungkook made a face and stretched his arms briefly before pulling them back in. "That's such a stereotype, hyung."

"What is?"

"Banana milk. I drink it once or twice on camera and suddenly everyone thinks it's all I ever want to drink." He didn't mention that just the thought of milk made him queasy.
"Is it still your favorite?"

Jungkook paused. "I mean... yes, but..."

"Then we'll bring you some."

Jungkook just sighed in resignation and laid his forearms over his face. He really didn't want any. Truthfully he just wanted them to leave so he could go back to his room. The worse he felt, the more difficult it would be to pretend he was okay. "If you feel like you have to."

He was met with silence and he let it drag for a few moments before moving his arms to look up at them again. Taehyung was openly staring at him but Seokjin's eyes were narrowed slightly.

"Are you sure you're okay?" their eldest member asked in a more serious tone. Taehyung glanced between them.

For a split second, Jungkook was tempted to tell him the truth. That he wasn't sure whether or not he was okay anymore and it was beginning to worry him. That he wasn't feeling good and his leg was hurting more than it should be. But he just nodded. "Yeah, just tired. Hurry up and go so I can go back to sleep."

There was another beat of silence before Seokjin spoke. "Okay. Well, sleep lots then. We'll be back tonight with presents."

"Don't get more sick, hyung. Hobi-hyung too. It's raining."

"Aw, JK!" Seokjin smiled affectionately and ruffled up Jungkook's hair, not stopping until it was wildly out of place. "Don't worry, we'll be fine."

Jungkook was left to try and smooth his hair back into something recognizable. Within another minute he was pulling himself up and holding onto the back of the couch to watch through the window as the van splashed through the puddles of the driveway and disappeared down the road.

"I'm going to be in my room, Kookie," Namjoon said, lingering in the doorway. "Do you need anything? Do you need help getting back to the bedroom?"

He might.

"Um. No, I'm okay. I think I'll stay here and watch tv for a little bit."

"Okay. Seriously, let me know though. I'm only going to be a couple rooms away."

"Thanks hyung, I will."

Namjoon gave him one of his trademark smiles - close-lipped, dimpled, and somehow more profound and meaningful than most other smiles. Jungkook felt a twinge of guilt as he watched him leave. He knew they hated it when he hid things from them. And he hated hiding things from them too. But he hated worrying them even more, and that is what always won out in the end.

He turned on the tv and let it play for a little while simply so that he wouldn't be a liar, but it was a struggle to stay awake. The couch was soft and comfy and his muscles felt weak with an unnatural fatigue. But he wanted to get to his bedroom where he could change into his shorts and a t-shirt and close the door while he slept, so after a few more minutes he dragged himself up.

It took him even longer to get down the hall than it had before, but again he just took his time.
Getting out of his sweats proved difficult and exhausting. His eyelids were heavy and kept pulling him down so as soon as he got his shorts on he decided that the shirt wasn't as important and lowered himself onto the sheets, falling immediately into a deep sleep.

Before he was aware of being awake again, he was aware of the overwhelming heat on his skin. The kind that made you not want to move, as though the air itself was too hot and too thick. For a few moments he thought he might be in a sauna, but the air was far too dry for that. And then there was the pain, radiating up from his calf, all the way through his knee, and into his thigh. He groaned and reflexively shifted his leg to try and find a way to relieve it, but moving just made it worse.

There was a steady thrumming in his head, not necessarily painful, but confusing. He couldn't tell what it was or where it was coming from until he heard the distant crack and rumble of thunder and remembered that it was raining. He slowly pulled his eyes open, blinking a few times at the ceiling before turning to the digital clock on the nightstand. Two hours had passed. Despite it now being midday, the room was much more gloomy than when he'd fallen asleep. The clouds outside were darker and more threatening. Rain pounded on the roof and splattered against the window as though it was trying to get inside. Maybe he should let it. It would feel good to have cold rain splashing against his overheated skin.

His leg must be infected. He couldn't think of any other reasonable explanation for the fever and the growing pain. But at the same time he didn't understand how that could be possible. He had been taking the antibiotics exactly when he was supposed to since day one.

No matter what was happening, he wanted to cool down as soon as he could. He was covered in sweat and the pillow and sheets were damp under him. He needed ice water, he needed a cold pack, he needed to climb into the refrigerator and fall back asleep inside. Maybe stick his head under the faucet and blast the cold water. He carefully rolled over and started to push himself up. His arms felt shaky and as soon as he got into a sitting position the room grew blurry and began to spin, so he lowered himself back down with a moan. Maybe it wasn't an infection. An infection wouldn't make him this weak and dizzy, would it?

He should get Namjoon. Namjoon might know what was going on and could help him. But right now his older friend was probably enjoying himself. He was probably peaceful and letting his mind relax, something that none of them had been able to do for days. If he told Namjoon, Namjoon would tell the other members, and if the other members knew, they would all rush home for no reason. After, what... two hours of happiness?

He fumbled for the pain killers and antibiotics on the nightstand, along with the bottle of leftover gatorade. It was too early to take his next dose but he swallowed the pills down anyway. He needed the pain to go away. If he could just get it down to a more tolerable level, maybe he could ride it out a little longer.

He tried to get up again. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and reached for his crutches, taking a moment to lean forward onto them before rising to his feet. The room tilted again but he closed his eyes and hung his head in the hopes that it would recede. Pain pulsed up and down his whole leg and he couldn't help but reach a hand down to massage at his thigh.

The last thing he wanted to do was put on more clothes, but he also didn't want to walk around topless and get his sweat everywhere, so he took his black t-shirt from the foot of the bed and slowly pulled it on. There was a vaguely floating feeling in his head but he was able to keep his balance.
enough to start forward and reached the bedroom door without incident. As soon as he stepped out it occurred to him that he had to pass by Namjoon's room to get to the kitchen. Thankfully the rain was still loud, drumming steadily above them, and he hoped it would be enough to mask the noise of his crutches on the hardwood floor.

His door was open a crack and Jungkook couldn't resist peeking in to check on him. His older friend was sitting cross legged on the bed facing away from him, looking out the rain-smeared window. He had his earbuds in and was swaying his head slightly back and forth. There was a notebook next to him on the bed, scribbles covering half of the page. Jungkook wondered what he was listening too.

He wanted to go in. He wanted to ask for help. He was so tired and didn't want to try and take care of himself all alone anymore. But he left Namjoon there and kept going, trying to go a little bit faster now that he knew he didn't have to try and be quiet. He wanted to give Namjoon and the others as much time as he could to enjoy themselves. He knew they were going to get scared and go way overboard with worry the second they found out that he wasn't feeling well. So as long as he wasn't on death's door, which he wasn't, he was just going to hang on as long as he could.

He was almost surprised when he made it all the way to the kitchen. He immediately went to the sink, grabbed a dish towel, and ran it under cold water before pressing it to his face and dabbing the back of his neck. It eased the heat a little bit and he repeated the process a couple more times. But the longer he was upright the dizzier he got, and he knew he had to keep moving.

He found two cold compresses in the freezer and took both of them, then filled a glass with ice and water and tried to get back to his room. He immediately discovered that trying to walk on crutches while holding a glass of water was near impossible. His hand was trembling and the glass was slippery with condensation. He had to try and hold the cold packs in his other hand, he couldn't even touch the ground with his bad leg but it felt so heavy that trying to hold it off the ground was somehow starting to hurt too.

He got to Namjoon's doorway, again taking a glance inside as he passed. Namjoon was lying down now doing something on his phone, earbuds still in. Lightning flashed outside his window. Jungkook got to his bedroom just as the thunder hit, still distant but certainly louder than before. He closed the door clumsily with one of his crutches and finally, finally reached his bed. He set the glass down shakily on the nightstand, spilling some of it on the carpet in the process, and laid down as quickly and carefully as he could, letting the crutches clatter to the floor. His leg was too tender to rest on the pillows so he kept it bent as he rested one of the cold packs over his forehead and wrapped the other one under his neck.

He laid there for some time, hoping desperately to fall asleep again, to try and get some more time to pass before calling for Namjoon. His whole body ached with exhaustion but the pain kept him trapped in the world of the living, pulsing repeatedly upward until he couldn't help but wince. The cold packs helped cool his head for a while, but his chest was still too hot, as was his back, his arms, his legs... And too soon, it seemed, the compresses were room temperature and useless again. He eventually remembered that he had ice water and tried drinking some, but the ice was mostly melted. Thankfully the water itself was still cool, though now it was filled right up to the brim and despite his attempt to keep his hand steady, he couldn't avoid spilling some again.

The time when the pain medication should have taken effect came and went with no change. Lightning flickered every so often and the metal gutter outside his window clanked with the force of the rain pounding against it.

Finally he decided he should actually look at his leg and see if it was swollen or red. He took a few deep breaths before pushing himself up onto his elbows and reaching down. His fingertips just
touched the edge of the tape and he picked weakly at it. When he tried to lift his leg to bring it closer he found that he could barely move it. It felt heavy like lead. His heart began to beat just a little bit faster and he pulled more insistently at the tape but only got it part way off before both of his arms grew too tired and he flopped back down.

Okay. He had been stupid long enough.

Namjoon laid on his side, staring out the window at the sheets of rain falling through the air. Every time lightning lit up the sky he tried to see if he could make out any actual strikes but the line of trees blocked most of his view. Classical music flowed into his ears. Though he didn’t often listen to classical, he felt drawn to it today, as it seemed to best suit his introspective and somewhat melancholy mood.

He wondered how the other members were faring. At this point they had to either be drenched to the bone or, more likely, stuck inside somewhere. For some of them it would probably somehow be both. Even so, he envied them. He really did want to get out of the house and explore the city. He had been looking forward to visiting some of the parks and hoped he would still get a chance to. He needed to clear his head.

He hadn't been quite truthful with Jungkook when he told him he had ideas for lyrics in the works. And he hadn't been truthful with any of them when he said he shouldn't be walking around. He probably would have been fine. His ankle hadn't hurt at all for days. But him staying back was best for everyone. The other members could go without worry or too much guilt, and Jungkook would have someone there with him just in case, hopefully not taking it as a pity stay or feeling like he required a baby sitter.

Jungkook had been pretty cute the last couple of days. He had been following Namjoon around the house, sitting next to him whenever there was room, and touching him and smiling at him almost all the time. It was blatantly obvious to the rest of them that their maknae was over-compensating, but Jungkook himself clearly thought he was being subtle so no one called him out on it. Namjoon absolutely appreciated the effort. It was a pleasant, constant reminder that Jungkook truly loved him and was trying to forgive him. Though he worried that the 'fake it till you make it' mindset was not going to help Jungkook in the long run. Pretending you were okay and trying to heal your emotions on your own might work under certain circumstances, but Namjoon suspected that this wasn't one of them.

He knew there was hurt there but he felt that there was definitely a level of anger there, too, that Jungkook wasn't facing. So often hurt and anger went hand in hand. But no doubt the thought of feeling angry towards Namjoon was so appalling to Jungkook that he wasn't acknowledging it. It was so endearing and Namjoon loved him for it, but he hoped it didn't go on much longer.

Regardless of whether or not he'd done the right thing, Namjoon had genuinely hurt his youngest friend and felt as though he had gotten away with it without suffering the full repercussions that he deserved. He didn't think his own guilt would go away unless Jungkook yelled at him, or at the very least told him the truth about how he felt. And he knew that Jungkook would never be able to heal in
a healthy way if he didn't stop stuffing his anger and pain.

Maybe there was a song somewhere in there after all. He heard thunder rolling through the violins and cellos in his ears and sat up to reach for his notebook when his phone buzzed in his hand.

He frowned when he saw Jungkook's name on the screen and held his thumb over the button to unlock it.

**Jungkook** Could you come here for a sec?

His frown deepened. He hadn't actually expected Jungkook to need help with anything. He'd been mobile and self-sufficient for over a day and a half.

He pulled his earbuds out and made his way down to the last room at the end of the hall. Maybe Jungkook finally wanted to talk. When he opened the door, Jungkook was pushing himself up onto his elbows on the bed. His room was a lot dimmer than Namjoon's had been and he looked for the light switch on the wall.

"Hey, Kook. Can I turn on the light?"

"Mm hm."

He flipped the light on and took a few steps toward the bed but stopped when he saw the state that Jungkook was in. His friend was covered in sweat, his hair damp and in disarray, strands of his bangs clinging to his forehead. His face and neck were flushed a deep pink.

"Oh my God, Kookie. What happened, did you have another nightmare?"

Jungkook shook his head. His already abnormally large eyes were wide, glassy, and feverish. He looked scared.

"What happened? Are you okay?" Namjoon went to his bedside, noting the crutches that seemed to have been dropped in a hurry, and felt Jungkook's forehead, his eyes flying wide and his heart clenching in worry when he felt the level of heat under his hand. "Jesus, how long have you been like this?"

"A little while. Can you check my leg? It hurts really bad and I can't reach it."

Namjoon glanced from Jungkook's anxious face down to his leg. How was he not able to reach it? Then he noticed the tremble in his friend's arms and shoulders, as though it was a strain just to hold himself up.

"Um, yeah, just. Just lay down, okay?"

Jungkook wasted no time obeying, staring at the ceiling and flapping weakly at the front of his shirt to try and cool himself down. Namjoon peeled off the white tape that held down the end of the gauze and slowly began unwrapping it. At first there didn't seem to be anything wrong. But then he took Jungkook's ankle and lifted his leg, bending it back just far enough that he could get a good look at his calf. Immediately his heart dropped.

It was bad.
The underside of his calf was red and swollen. Two of the stitched up cuts were reddened and puffy, crusted along the edges with what looked like a mix of blood and some other liquid that Namjoon was very sure should not be there. But most worrisome of all were the crimson streaks that had spread out from the wounds and had almost reached all the way up to the back of his knee.

Chapter End Notes

Any thoughts/predictions?
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Panic attack

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jungkook watched Namjoon's expression turn from worry to alarm and lifted his head to try to get a look at his wound, but his leg was lowered out of his view again before he could.

"Wait, what does it look like?"

"It's really infected, Jungkook," his leader said simply, immediately gathering up the discarded bandages. Jungkook caught a glimpse of some sort of splotchy stain discoloring the bright white gauze and his eyes widened as Namjoon disappeared into the attached bathroom. "Did you stop taking the antibiotics?"

"No! I've been taking them all, how can it be infected?"

He heard the faucet turn on briefly as Namjoon rinsed his hands, then he was coming back out with a fresh roll of bandages. "Well, they did say that it just reduces the risk. There's a hundred different types of bacteria and that trap was really rusty. And you were out there for such a long time."

"So can the doctor prescribe another type of antibiotic if we call her? Maybe the others can pick it up on their way home tonight." He didn't want to wait that long. But he didn't want them to have to come back so soon.

Namjoon scoffed, though it held no malice. "No, we don't need to call the doctor, we need to go to the doctor."

He unrolled the new bandages and Jungkook tensed, not sure that he wanted anything to touch the tender area. But Namjoon was gentle and wrapped it loosely, just enough to protect it from the open air.

"Can we wait a little bit longer before calling the guys to bring the van back?" Jungkook asked, turning his attention slowly back to the ceiling. "They only got to the city like three hours ago. I can last longer, if you don't mind bringing me some more ice or something."

"No, we're calling them now."

Jungkook felt the tiniest pang in his heart at the dismissal, but easily pushed it away. He knew it would be dangerous and just plain stupid to try and wait until that night. And truthfully, underneath
his desire to be strong and his willingness to suffer as long as needed to give his hyungs even a small amount of happiness... the pain and the fever were becoming too much, and he was getting scared. He couldn't stop himself from rubbing at his thigh, as though he might be able to push some of the ache downward.

Namjoon already had his phone out, fingers flying over the screen as he sent out what Jungkook assumed was a group text. His hyungs' peace of mind was about to be cut short because of him yet again.

As he watched, Jungkook began to notice little details about his leader that made the anxiety in his chest really start to take root. His fingers weren't just moving fast, they were jittery. He was chewing nervously on the inside of his mouth and his jaw muscles were visibly tensed. Not from concentration or anger, but the kind that resulted from the strain of trying to keep a calm expression on his face.

Was Namjoon scared too? How bad had his leg actually looked?

He shifted uncomfortably, the cloth of his shirt sticking to his sweaty skin. The room was too hot. The bed under him was too hot. He rolled slightly on his side to try and escape it, but the sheets and pillow were still too damp from sweat and the water he'd accidentally spilled earlier. He listened to the rain splatter against the window and considered his options.

"Can you help me get to the living room couch?" He asked. Namjoon lowered his phone, putting it back in his pocket.

"You sure? You can just wait here until they get back if you want."

"I'll have to get to the door either way. And I kind of want to get out of this room." The more time passed, the harder it would be to get down the hall. The couch would be dry. It was right under a window that he could open. Maybe watching television could help distract him from the pain.

"Uh. Sure, yeah I guess that's okay," Namjoon said, picking up Jungkook's fallen crutches for him. "Do you want to use these or do you want to lean on me?"

"You, please." He didn't trust his shaky limbs to function well enough to use crutches. Too much coordination was needed. He wasn't even sure he would be able to sit up on his own.

But he took a few breaths and tried anyway, pushing against the mattress under him. He must have looked pitiful, because Namjoon gripped his upper arms and did most of the work in getting him upright. Immediately gray spots began to dance across his vision and the room tilted but Namjoon didn't let go of him, and Jungkook just clung weakly onto him until the dizziness passed.

"Jesus, Jungkook," Namjoon said. His voice was as tight as his grip. "Why didn't you say anything? Why didn't you get me earlier?"

"I'm just lightheaded." Jungkook struggled to keep his muscles from trembling, fighting against his body's desire to simply go limp again.

Namjoon made a face at his vague non-answer. "Did you even eat anything for breakfast? I only saw you eat toast."

"Not really."

"What about yesterday?"
"I ate more yesterday, but still not a lot. I keep feeling queasy."

Namjoon was shaking his head in disbelief. His phone started ringing in his pocket but he ignored it. "Have you been feeling this badly since yesterday?"

Jungkook started wiggling sideways, trying to get his legs over the side of the bed. "It only started getting bad a few hours ago."

Namjoon wrapped an arm behind Jungkook's back, letting him hold onto his shoulders and helping him adjust his position. Jungkook's leg felt too heavy for him, as though he didn't have enough muscles to move it, and the muscles he did have shot pain through him with every contraction. He couldn't help but grimace with every small movement and when he was finally situated at the edge of the bed, Namjoon crouched in front of him and looked him straight in the eye.

"Jungkook I think we should call an ambulance."

Jungkook was breathing heavily from the effort but just shook his head. "I'm not dying."

"No, but you're really really sick."

Lightning flickered over the trees outside his window and he could hear the wind moving and shifting the rain to splash against the house in sheets. He hadn't let go of Namjoon's shoulders for fear that he would get woozy and lose his balance, but his arms were weak and he knew he wouldn't be able to stay upright for much longer. Jungkook looked toward the door. "Can you just help me get to the couch for now? I need to lay down and I don't want to stay here."

Namjoon stared at him calculatingly and for a brief moment Jungkook was afraid he was going to say no and make him stay there. He dug his fingers into his leader's shirt, toes curling and uncurling nervously. He tried to ignore the drip of sweat running down his spine and tickling his overheated skin.

"Okay," Namjoon finally sighed, to Jungkook's relief, and stood up. "Come on."

He pulled Jungkook's arm over his shoulders and wrapped a hand around his waist as Jungkook tried to stand up.

"You're seriously burning up," Namjoon murmured.

He had only just started to rise when a wave of dizziness hit him and he groaned, nausea pushing upward from his stomach. Namjoon immediately lowered him back down and Jungkook hung his head, focusing all his attention on keeping his minuscule breakfast inside of him.

"Okay, you can't even stand. Here, let me just carry you." Namjoon crouched and turned around. Jungkook started to reach for him but then went rigid, eyes trained on the center of Namjoon's back. There was a brief moment of silence and then Namjoon slowly turned back as though he had just realized what his words meant.

"Would that be okay? I'm sorry, we don't have to."

"No, it's okay," Jungkook replied reflexively, but he didn't move.

"I can carry you a different way, if that would help. Like bridal-style?"

Jungkook considered it but glanced down the hallway and knew almost right away that that wouldn't work. Having Namjoon's arm under his knees would just hurt and the hallway didn't look wide
enough anyway. Namjoon followed his eyes and seemed to come to the same conclusion.

"Why don't you just stay here, Kookie."

Jungkook shook his head. He refused to be afraid of a piggy back ride. This was a totally different situation. This time he knew where he was. He wasn't confused about what was going on. He wasn't dying, and his hands weren't tied together.

Different.

"It's okay. I'll be okay," Jungkook said quietly, as much to himself as it was to Namjoon. Pain pulsed upward from his calf and again he couldn't help but rub at his thigh in an irrational attempt to massage the ache away.

"Kookie." Namjoon's hand landed on his shoulder. He waited for Jungkook to meet his eyes before continuing. "Just say the word and I'll put you down. I promise. It's just right down the hall and you'll be in control the whole time."

Jungkook nodded rapidly in return and Namjoon moved his hand up to brush some of Jungkook's sweaty bangs out of his face. Then he gave a small, encouraging smile and turned back around. Jungkook leaned forward to try and climb on. Namjoon's fingers closed around his wrists to help pull him on and Jungkook's heart instantly began to pound at the feeling of restriction.

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It was okay. It was just to help him get situated. As soon as he was resting high enough on Namjoon's back the hands disappeared and Jungkook drew in a shaky breath, wrapping his arms around his friend's neck.

He was lifted up and as instantaneous as the crack of thunder that made them both jump, he wanted to get back down. The already suffocating, dizzying heat bloomed even hotter against his chest and he couldn't help but squirm, feeling the constricting pressure of Namjoon's arms around his thighs. He couldn't move them.

No, it was okay. This was different. Namjoon started forward and Jungkook tried to tighten his grip but there was only so much his trembling arms could do. What if Namjoon thought he couldn't hold on by himself and tried to -

No, that was ridiculous. It was just down the hall and this was a completely different situation.

Was it? There was a heat against him that he couldn't escape. His leg was in agony. He couldn't walk. He couldn't get down. He wasn't in control. He couldn't move. They had only reached the bedroom door and already Jungkook's breathing was picking up. He squeezed his eyes shut to try and purge the panic inducing thoughts from his mind.

It was a big mistake. Without the sight of the house around him he had only the sense of touch to go on and his mind filled in the blanks with the most prominent memory of what those sensations were related to. His eyes flew back open but not before seeing flashes of black tree trunks surrounding him.

It was the same. It was happening again.

No it wasn't.

His throat began to squeeze tight and the tips of his fingers began to tingle and grow numb. He was hyper aware of every single touch and sensation on his body. When he tried to turn his thoughts away from the pain in his leg, he became aware of his heart pounding. When he tried to ignore his
heart pounding, he felt the heat and the sweat trickling down his neck. Above all was the overwhelming need and inability to escape.

He tried to hold on. He tried to turn his mind off or at least mentally huddle down in the hopes that he could protect himself, but the panic stabbed away at any walls he tried to erect until they crumbled, leaving him wide open and defenseless.

"S-stop! Put me d-"

Namjoon dropped, almost too quickly, to the ground. Jungkook scrambled frantically off of his back and onto the hardwood floor of the hallway. A cold sensation crawled up his back like a frozen hand, sliding upward until it reached the back of his neck and squeezed. He whimpered at the distressing sensation and rubbed his hand against it to try and get it to go away, but it just prickled at his skin and spread slowly over his shoulders and up the back of his head.

He could feel his heart hammering rapidly against the floorboards under him and when he couldn't get the chill grip on the back of his neck to loosen, he curled onto his side and brought his hand to his chest instead, pressing against his heart to try and get it to slow down. Namjoon was talking to him from a few feet away, soothing words that meant nothing and passed straight over him. He wanted to close his eyes to try and hide but he was afraid that the second he did he would see those trees again. He stared, frozen, at the wall opposite him, only occasionally letting his gaze flicker over to Namjoon as the panic ran unhindered through his mind.

He was going to die. His heart was beating too fast. It was going to give out. He was going insane. His mind was working without his consent. He had no control over what was happening to him. His whole body was hyper sensitive, every inch of his skin vibrating, tightening, too hot and too cold. Overwhelming dread was lodged like a heavy boulder in his chest.

"You're okay, Jungkook. You're going to be okay."

He wasn't.

Fingertips brushed against his where his hand was planted flat against the ground. His eyes flew to the point of contact and then up to Namjoon's distressed face. His leader seemed to know not to come any closer, as he was still several feet away with just his hand stretched out, and Jungkook was grateful. He didn't know if he could handle anything else touching him. That icy hand was still clutching the back of his neck and he felt trapped in place, afraid to move.

"This is temporary, okay? It's going to pass."

It wasn't. His heart was being squeezed too tightly and it wasn't slowing down. He tried to regain control of his thoughts, catching them as they flew past and attempting to hold on to the ones he thought might be more rational than the others. He didn't know whether or not he was breathing too fast but he tried to slow it down anyway, counting to three as he breathed in and out through his nose. He knew he had a better chance of controlling that than he did his heartbeat and he wanted to cling to any level of control he could find.

"You're doing good, Kookie."

Namjoon's fingers tapped against his own and he looked back to them, trying to ground himself on the sensation. He was doing good. If he could control his breathing he might be able to control other things. He kept the hand that wasn't touching Namjoon's pressed against his chest, rubbing slightly. He pushed his awareness outward and into his surroundings as soon as he realized he could, desperate and willing to do anything to escape his frighteningly uncontrollable mind.
He tried to focus on the heavy rain drumming against the roof above him. The wind pushing through the branches and leaves of the trees outside. Flashes of lightning illuminated the dim hallway once, twice, then a third time in rapid succession.

He started counting. He remembered his mother telling him when he was little to count after he saw lightning. If he got to five seconds, that meant the storm was one mile away. Ten seconds meant the storm was two miles away. He didn't know if it was true. Perhaps it was just something she told him to give him something to focus on, so he wouldn't be scared.

He got to seven seconds before thunder crackled in the clouds and sent its echoes rolling past the house.

He was breathing slower. His heartbeat felt softer. Still racing, but less... violent.

"Jungkookie."

Jungkook looked up and saw that Namjoon had been slowly inching closer. He saw anxiety and anguish in his leader's eyes, but there was empathy there too. Jungkook moved a little bit but then gasped and jolted when his leg accidentally brushed against his other knee and sent a spike of pain through him.

"Don't move, Kookie. Just stay there, I'm going to call an ambulance, okay?"

Jungkook shook his head against the floor. "I don't need one." His words sounded foreign. Irrational.

"Are you kidding me?"

Jungkook moved again, just a little bit. His joints and muscles were beginning to ache against the hardwood. "I'm not dying." He drew in a shuddering breath, not understanding why he was saying what he was saying.

"You don't have to be dying to need one. You have to be in a serious medical emergency though, and you definitely are."

"I'm not dying," Jungkook repeated, again as much to himself as to Namjoon. He wasn't dying. He might be okay. His heart might be slowing down. He might not be going insane. "The others will be here soon and can drive me. It's just a fever."

"No, you have a serious infection, Jungkook. If it gets into your bloodstream, which I think it already might have, then it's going to go straight to your heart. You just had a panic attack, or might still be having one, I don't know. You can't stand and you're too traumatized to be carried anywhere. What are you going to do when the guys get here, crawl to the door?"

Jungkook looked down the hall in the direction of the front door. Maybe he could.

"You can't." Namjoon said sternly. "I'm calling an ambulance."

"I don't want you to, though. Don't." But Namjoon was right, they should call for help. Maybe Jungkook was going insane after all.

Namjoon ignored him, pulling his phone back out of his pocket.

"I said no," Jungkook said slightly louder. He struggled up onto one elbow, feeling a small thrill of pride that he was able to do so. "I want to wait for the others."
They both started when the phone began to ring in Namjoon's hand. He stared at the screen for a few seconds in hesitation, glanced at Jungkook, and then answered the call.

"Hyung... No, he's not fucking okay, he just had a serious panic attack... Yeah, I know... No, we're on the ground in the hallway and I don't think he can get up... Yeah I know, I was just about to..."

Jungkook closed his eyes for a moment and let his head fall back, still fighting, and mostly failing, to push the crippling fear from his thoughts. He pressed against his racing heart again, willing it to slow down. Heat and pain pulsed through him, the exposed skin of his forearm sticking to the floorboards.

"Okay, here." Namjoon put the phone down on the ground face up between them. "Okay, you're on speaker."

"Jungkookie." Yoongi's gravelly voice came through low and calm. "How are you doing?"

Unexpected tears sprang to Jungkook's eyes at the question. It was so simple, but it had such a complicated answer. He furrowed his brow hard in an attempt to keep it from going any further than that. He didn't want to cry this time. He was weak enough as it was.

He sniffed once, his breath hitching only a little bit as he answered. "Not too good. My leg hurts really bad. Namjoon-hyung says it looks infected."

"Okay, we're going to call an ambulance for you, alright? Just stay there where you are."

Jungkook heard quiet voices in the background along with the hum of tires on the road and realized that the other members must be listening on speaker phone in the van as well.

"No, just drive me in when you get here. You're going to get here sooner. I'd rather do that." Why was he arguing?

He heard slight movement on the other end and then Yoongi's voice sounded farther away, as though he was leaning away from the phone."Hobi, look up the emergency numbers for the city and call an ambulance, please. I want to keep them on the line."

Jungkook heard a soft but immediate 'okay' from Hoseok and his heart clenched tight.

"I just said I don't want an ambulance!" He didn't know why he was disagreeing so insistently. His thoughts felt scattered still, hard to hold onto and hard to understand, panic taking hold of them, twisting them, and whisking them away one by one. He knew he was being completely irrational.

"Why?" Namjoon exclaimed, frustration bleeding into his voice.

He didn't know.

"It doesn't matter why, I'm saying I don't want one! Don't just ignore me and call one anyway!" He felt his hands trembling and clenched them into fists. Fear and frustration shoved at each other inside him until he couldn't tell one from the other. He heard Hoseok murmuring to someone in the background, presumably talking to the hospital.

"Yes it does matter, Jungkook, why don't you want us to call for one?"

"Because I want to decide!" Jungkook finally burst, feeling something inside of him crack. "I want to decide what happens to me this time, not you!"

Namjoon's expression softened in sudden understanding and other than Hoseok's quiet voice, there
"You can't just override me like that and make me do things I don't want to do!"

"But Jungkookie, you actually need emergency services, you know that, right?" Seokjin said gently.

Namjoon's eyes darted to the phone, almost as though he didn't want them to talk.

"Yes, I know, okay?" Jungkook replied. "But it doesn't g-"

"Then you know we have to -"

"It doesn't give you the right to just decide things for me!"

"Do you not trust us anymore, Kookie?" Namjoon interjected. His expression had settled into something neutral but there was an odd, provoking tone to his voice. "You're going to have to trust us at some point."

"I do, I trust you, I just... I don't want..."

"Why don't you trust us? Why don't you trust me?"

"Joon..." Yoongi murmured.

"I do!"

"I don't think you do."

"Well how am I supposed to?! You didn't believe me or listen to me! I was telling you that I couldn't take it anymore, and you didn't do anything about it! Do you have any idea how scary that was, to beg for help from the people you trust most in the world and get turned down over and over? The people you thought would do anything for you? How am I supposed to trust you to take care of me?"

Heat that was unrelated to his fever had risen to his face and his jaw clenched tight. "You had no idea what you were doing! You just assumed you knew better than I did. I know I was out of it, but you didn't even try to make me feel better! You could have at least believed me and tried! I don't care how stupid it sounds to say that I thought I was going to die just because I was scared and I was too hot. I don't care, it was true."

"I know it was true, Kookie. You had a panic attack like you did just now. It's legitimate. I know, I used to have them too. When you're in that moment, you don't just feel like you're dying or think you're dying, you know you're dying."

"Yes! And you still didn't stop, even though I was begging you to!"

"No, I didn't. And it sounds trivial to say that you were just too hot but I know it's not. It's a part of hypothermia to feel like your skin is literally on fire. That's legitimate too, Kookie. I believed you."

"Yes! And you didn't help me!"

"No, I didn't."

Jungkook felt the tears that had been slowly filling his eyes finally breach his lash line and spill down his face. He dropped his head, his heart aching at the memory and emotion tightening his throat.

"Why? Why didn't you do anything? Why didn't you help me? You didn't even try, and you expect
me to keep trusting you?"

_They were just doing their best._

"You're not always going to be right. What if I'm right next time? I can't trust you to not just disregard me again, like you're doing right now. Because you know what, I _don't_ need an ambulance. I know it's the better choice but I'm not going to die if we don't get one. It should be my choice, not yours. Now I know that whether or not you're right, you're just going to do things without my consent like you're always going to know better than I do what's good for me."

He felt so wildly out of control of himself as words he never wanted to say kept forcing their way out of him. He had no time to think about the repercussions of what he was saying before it had already slipped out, as though he had been stripped of any mental filter. He felt too vulnerable, too exposed.

He tilted his head up slightly, eyebrows still scrunched together to try and keep his face from totally crumbling, but he couldn't stop the tears that continued to fall in wet tracks to join the sweat already dampening his skin. Namjoon's eyes were locked on him, patient, calm and accepting. But the longer he looked, the more sadness he detected in his friend's eyes.

_You're hurting him._

He dropped his head again and shook it, pressing his lips together in an attempt to keep them from trembling. "I don't want to be saying any of this," he said, his voice cracking. "I can't."

"No, say it. Keep talking." Namjoon's voice sounded strained. Forced.

Jungkook's arm was shaking from holding him up for so long and he dropped down, rolling onto his back and covering his eyes with the heels of his hands to hide from Namjoon's gaze. He felt unbelievably foolish and knew he must sound foolish too, because everything he was saying was invalid and undeserved.

_Stop talking._

"I was stuck out there all night and thought I was going to die. It was so awful, I never wanted to feel that trapped ever again. And then you finally came and got me out. I was so happy. I thought it was all over." Grief took hold of him, curling around him and constricting until it felt like his chest was being crushed. His breathing hitched sporadically, making it more and more difficult to speak and the tears just kept coming, seeming to only flow faster and hotter the more he tried to hold them back.

"But then... then you tied my hands together and wouldn't let me go and I was trapped again and I couldn't get down. And I was so scared and felt so horrible. But the worst part was that you were all there and you weren't helping me. It was like you suddenly didn't care about me. It was terrifying. I felt like I was all alone again, like I had to fend for myself. But I couldn't."

He was sobbing softly now between his words, no longer able to keep his pain inside. "It hurt so much. How could you do that to me?"

Silence descended as he was finally bled dry of all words and thought. Only the sound of the wind and rain battering against the house remained. He kept his face hidden behind his forearms, trying to suppress the sound of his crying. He couldn't bear to look at Namjoon.

He heard the sound of the van's tires on the road, occasionally rushing through the puddles of the highway on the other end of the phone.

No one was saying anything.
What did you just do?

Jungkook tightened his arms over his face.

They didn't deserve any of that.

Regret and shame began to pool deep inside of him.

He slowly lowered his arms and turned to look for Namjoon, blinking to try and clear his vision.

His friend sat with his back against the opposite wall, legs bent. His elbows rested on his knees and his fingers were laced together and pressed against his mouth. His eyes were filled with pain, puffy and red, his cheeks shiny with tears that were rolling all the way down to his quivering chin.

He was crying.

Namjoon never cried.

And with that, Jungkook's heart broke into a thousand pieces.

Chapter End Notes

I love you all and hope you're doing well. <3
Status Update!

Chapter Summary

Not a chapter!

Sorry, I know there's always that rush of excitement when you see that there is an update, followed by the disappointment and annoyance when you find out it's not actually a chapter. D: But instead of leaving everyone hanging, I just wanted to pop in and let you know that the next chapter is very much in the works! I've had some serious writer's block along with some ongoing medical issues that have made things difficult. But I'm getting through the writer's block and things are starting to run a little smoother.

I'm also taking a little bit longer with this chapter because it will be the last one. (I mean it this time lol) So it might be a little longer than normal as I wrap things up. Just know that it is being worked on with much love and attention! Thank you guys so much for your patience, and I genuinely hope you are all doing well.

Okay, I'm going to go make myself a hazelnut coffee and get right back to our poor lads. <3
Namjoon couldn't remember a single moment in his life when it had been more difficult to hold back his tears. Not on stage. Not when accepting awards. Not even from physical pain. But listening to Jungkook bare his soul, watching him cry and suffer right in front of him was absolutely heartrending. He held on as long as he could. His head ached from the tension of trying to keep a calm expression. The inside of his cheek was bitten raw in his attempt to keep his lips from trembling. His throat had seized up, tight to the point of pain in an effort to make no sound.

He watched the tears stream from his youngest friend's eyes, watched him struggle to get his words out, watched him shake and grow too weak to hold himself up any longer. Namjoon wanted, needed, so badly to hold him and comfort him and try to calm him down, but now that Jungkook was finally talking and expressing his feelings unhindered, Namjoon feared that any move on his part would do more harm than good.

He knew that Jungkook had been hurting because of them. Because of him. But actually hearing it was so much worse than he ever thought it would be. Realizing just how deeply Jungkook's pain ran, hearing him say aloud how betrayed he felt and how frightened he had been because of them made Namjoon's heart feel like it was collapsing in on itself. It should never be that way. They were his hyungs, they were supposed to be his support, his safe place. His protectors.

No, we were protecting him that night. We did the right thing.

"...I was so happy. I thought it was all over." Jungkook's voice was cracking, muffled slightly by the arms covering his face. The skin of his neck was flushed pink from fever and emotion, his chest heaving erratically as he tried to force his words out. "But then... then you tied my hands together and wouldn't let me go..."

Should I have put him down? The nurses did say we might've had time...

"...and I was trapped again, and I couldn't get down..."

No, there was no way for us to know how much time he had, we had to play it safe.

"...I was so scared and felt so horrible. But the worst part was that you were all there and you weren't helping me."
Was I wrong to just assume we knew better than Jungkook in that situation? No, Jungkook couldn't have known what was best. He was confused and disoriented.

"It was like you suddenly didn't care about me. It was terrifying. I felt like I was all alone again, like I had to fend for myself. But I couldn't."

Tears began to slide over Namjoon's cheeks without his permission as self-doubt gnawed deeper and deeper into his gut. Should I have tried better to help him understand instead of just forcing him to endure it?

"It hurt so much. How could you do that to me?"

The words pierced like sharpened daggers straight through his heart. It was the question that Namjoon hadn't stopped asking himself since the moment Jungkook passed out panicking and crying on his back that night in the cold, harsh forest.

He had yet to find an answer. Perhaps there was a part of him that didn't want an answer, that knew there was no answer that would soothe Jungkook's hurt or ease his own guilt.

The storm outside was loud and insistent, but all Namjoon could hear was the gentle, miserable sobbing coming from one of the people he loved most in the world. Remorse and sorrow pulled at him, heavy and overwhelming, pushing all thought from his mind except for one:

You did this to him.

Jungkook peered fearfully at him from between his arms, his eyes shimmering with tears that reflected the golden hall light and the flickering lightning. He looked so lost, so hurt, so broken. When their eyes met, Jungkook only seemed to grow more upset and he hid his face again. He started to roll away from him and Namjoon's body acted purely on instinct, moving to his knees and grabbing Jungkook's arm to stop him.

Stop forcing him.

He instantly released his grip, but Jungkook stayed on his back and didn't try to turn away again.

"Jungkook-ah?" Seokjin called, reminding Namjoon of their presence on the other end of the phone. "Jungkook-ah, we're so sorry. Jungkook?"

Their maknae just kept crying and sniffling and gave no indication of trying to answer, or even being capable of it.

"Namjoon, are you there with him?"

Namjoon's throat felt closed off still, constricted and aching. He feared that if he tried to talk he would be reduced to sobbing as well.

"Namjoon!" Yoongi's voice cut in. "Fuck, how far away are we?"

"I don't know, like ten or fifteen minutes maybe?" Hoseok answered tensely.

Namjoon reached forward again, briefly touching Jungkook's chest before pulling away. He was overheating badly, his black shirt still damp with sweat.

"Hyung, I'm so sorry," Jungkook whimpered shakily. "I didn't want to say any of that. I never wanted to say that. I'm sorry."
Namjoon shook his head in denial even though Jungkook couldn't see him.

"I really didn't want to say that, I don't know why I did. I'm so sorry, I didn't want to hurt you."

The cold stone of guilt in his stomach grew heavier in realization. He said it because Namjoon provoked him to it. Because Namjoon had self-righteously assumed, yet again, that he knew what was best for Jungkook's well-being and then taken advantage of his friend's mentally and physically weakened state and pushed him to say things that he clearly hadn't wanted to say.

Jungkook should have been able to choose when and how he expressed his feelings.

He swallowed past the lump in his throat and took a chance, laying his fingers into Jungkook's palm where his arms were crossed over his face. He expected his friend to pull away or at least not respond, but instead Jungkook closed his hand around Namjoon's, holding on tightly as though he was afraid Namjoon would leave him. Namjoon immediately squeezed back and ran his other hand up and down Jungkook's arm and shoulder in what he hoped was a reassuring manner.

"...okay that you said all that," Seokjin was saying, his voice sounding distant and small over the hum of the van. "It's probably good actually. You always bottle things up. It's good to let that stuff out... Jungkookie?"

Jungkook was just shaking his head and sniffling while their oldest member spoke.

"Namjoon, seriously, you're with him, right?" Yoongi said, a little sharply.

Namjoon wiped a few of his tears away with a shaking hand and tried to clear his throat.

"Jungkookie, are you all alone th-"

"No, he's here," Jungkook responded, his voice rough and wavering heavily. "It's okay, he's here with me still." He lowered his arms a little bit to look at Namjoon again. He looked so unsure, like he feared he had driven Namjoon away forever. It was both endearing and heart breaking.

Namjoon gently pulled Jungkook's arms all the way down, ready to let go at the slightest resistance, and brushed some of the tears from under his friend's reddened eyes. Jungkook just stared up at him, lips and chin quivering and tears continuing to leak out with every blink of his eyes.

"I'm so sorry, Kookie," Namjoon finally managed to croak out, his voice low and cracking embarrassingly. He saw one of his own tears drip from his chin to land on the collar of Jungkook's t-shirt. "I'm so sorry I hurt you like that. You trusted me and I betrayed you."

Jungkook immediately started shaking his head again. "No, don't. You didn't do anything wrong, I know you didn't."

"Yes I did, Kook, you trusted me and needed me to help you and I didn't. I forced you to do stuff you didn't want to do."

"But you did the right thing."

"It still hurt you, though."

Jungkook's eyes quickly darted away and Namjoon ran his thumb over the back of his friend's hand.

"Don't feel guilty or ashamed for feeling hurt."

"It's stupid though. I know that you guys did everything right." Jungkook kept his eyes averted and
began to chew self-consciously on his bottom lip.

Namjoon let out a small, wet laugh. "Did everything right? We made so many mistakes. You were right when you said we had no idea what we were doing. We were all just so scared of losing you. We just sort of... I don't know. We panicked and fought with each other, and... well. We didn't know what we were doing."

"You saved my life though. It's so embarrassing and stupid to still feel hurt."

"Why? We were hurting you at the time."

Thunder rumbled through the clouds, rattling the windows slightly before fading into the distance. Jungkook searched his eyes for a moment before furrowing his brow and glancing away again.

"Right?"

Jungkook swallowed and pressed his wobbling lips into a thin line. A few tears slid out and then he nodded ever so slightly in affirmation. Fondness blossomed in Namjoon's aching heart and he couldn't help a soft smile. He ran his fingers through Jungkook's bangs where they had been stuck to his forehead and then laid his hand on the side of his head.

"I'm so, so sorry, Jungkook. I'm so sorry we did that to you. I'm sorry I didn't listen to you and I'm sorry I didn't put you down when you needed me to." He put the tiniest amount of pressure under his hand in the hopes that he could draw Jungkook's gaze back to him and was encouraged when their maknae turned to meet his eyes. "I'm sorry we tied your hands and trapped you again and scared you even more than you were before. I'm sorry we forced you to keep the coat on even though it was painful for you."

Jungkook opened his mouth briefly and Namjoon feared he would start trying to refute him again, but after just a few seconds he closed it, remaining silent.

Finally.

Finally he was letting Namjoon apologize, something they had both needed for a long time.

"I'm sorry we didn't try harder to help you understand what was happening. I'm sorry we made decisions about you without taking your wishes into consideration. I'm sorry we ignored you. I'm sorry we acted like we didn't care."

Round bambi eyes stared at him quietly, intimidatingly vulnerable now that he was letting Namjoon say what he wanted to say.

He'd always had a mystifying ability to go from stubbornly withdrawn to completely and utterly unguarded almost instantaneously. It was something Namjoon had always loved about him, but he would be lying if he said it wasn't also just a bit frightening. When Jungkook dropped his guard he dropped it all the way, as though he forgot that his heart was something that should be protected.

It made Namjoon's guardian instincts kick into high gear and was perhaps one of the reasons why he, why all of them, tended to feel over protective of their youngest. He hadn't experienced the heartbreaks and betrayals and harshness of a typical high school or young adult experience. He had spent those years instead surrounded by the six of them, who he found completely trustworthy, and rightfully so. But one of the side effects of that upbringing was this almost naive side of him, gullible and ready to believe whatever was said.

Namjoon could say anything he wanted to him right now and it would be accepted as fact. He was
so trusting, even now. It was a heavy responsibility, but one that Namjoon wouldn't trade for anything.

He moved his hand from the side of Jungkook's warm head down to the back of his neck and rubbed it gently.

"I'm sorry we yelled and fought with each other in front of you and talked over you. We made it so much worse. You must have been so much more confused and scared, and it didn't have to be that way. If we had spent less time arguing and more time talking to you, we might have been able to help you understand."

Jungkook's gaze was unwavering, eyes so dark they were almost black yet still somehow able to reflect all the light in the world.

Just four days ago, Namjoon had feared those eyes would never open again. Just four days ago, Namjoon had been rubbing the back of his neck much like he was doing now, though far less gently, and calling to him in a desperate attempt to wake him up. His skin had been cold and pale then. Dirty and bloody.

They had come so close to losing him forever.

Namjoon didn't realize he had started crying again until fat tears began to drip down onto Jungkook's shirt and his young friend's face began to screw up with emotion in response to his own.

"I keep making you cry!" Jungkook burst in distress.

Namjoon dropped his forehead onto Jungkook's chest and let out a half laugh, half sob, holding tightly onto his hand. "I'm not crying for me, Kookie, I'm crying for you."

When he felt arms wrap around his head, he finally gave in to what he had been longing to do from the beginning and pushed his hands under Jungkook's warm, sweaty back, lifting him just enough to envelop him in a full embrace.

"I'm so sorry, Jungkookie." His throat was constricting again but he managed to get the words out, squeezing Jungkook as tight as he could. "I'm so sorry for everything I did to you."

"It's okay, hyung," Jungkook was quick to answer, sniffling and tucking his head into Namjoon's neck. His arms were linked behind Namjoon's back. "I forgive you."

"I'm so sorry that ever happened to you. You don't deserve it. And we made it so much worse."

"It's okay."

"I didn't even think of calling an ambulance. You could have gotten help so much sooner. It's not fair that you had to go through all that."

"Hyung, it's okay."

"I was so afraid of losing you." He pulled Jungkook even tighter against him and felt his friend's fingers curl into the back of his sweatshirt. "I messed up so badly. And I just keep messing up and I don't know how to fix it."

"It's okay," Jungkook said more softly. His hand began to move in soothing little circles over Namjoon's back. "You don't have to fix anything. We're okay, everything is okay."
Namjoon squeezed his eyes shut and let himself cry, no longer able or caring to try and stay strong. All of the self-hatred he had been carrying leaked out in his tears, eyes stinging and breath catching in his throat. The fear of losing Jungkook, the fear of damaging their relationship beyond repair bubbled straight to the surface and he let it. Jungkook just kept rubbing his back as he cried, sometimes scratching it lightly up and down.

"Everything is okay now," his maknae whispered into his ear, his voice sweet and caring. "You saved my life, hyung. Everything you did is why I'm still here. I love you."

The words felt like warm caramel spreading over his heart, filling in the cracks and divots and then sinking deep in.

"You're always here for me, hyung. I know you love me and only ever want me to be safe and happy."

Namjoon nodded his head quickly against Jungkook's and felt his friend smile. He let himself cry for a just little longer, holding Jungkook close against him and rocking him ever so slightly until he was able to push his sobs down into sniffs. When he had regained enough control of himself, he realized that Jungkook was breathing heavily and trembling from the strain of trying to hold on to him. His arms were shaking around Namjoon as though about to give out but like the little soldier he was, he was refusing to let go until Namjoon did.

Namjoon quickly laid him back down on the floor and pulled away, dabbing at his eyes with his sleeve. "Sorry," he murmured, and Jungkook gave him a weak smile. A new sheen of sweat had broken out on his forehead and it dawned on Namjoon that being wrapped in his warm embrace while already feverish must have been extremely uncomfortable. Not to mention that his leg had to have been in pain that whole time.

"Stay," Namjoon said, and rose to his feet, knees creaking and aching from being planted on the hardwood for so long.

"Hyung..."

"Stay." He went to the kitchen, grabbing a few dish towels and rummaging in the freezer for ice or anything cold that he could find.

"It's not like I'm going to crawl away," he heard from down the hall.

He put a bunch of ice cubes into a zip lock bag, using the time to breath deeply and continue to calm himself down, then deposited the ice on Jungkook's chest along with a bag of frozen peas and the towels before going into the bathroom and then the bedroom. He brought back a pillow, a roll of toilet paper, and a waste bin.

He helped lift Jungkook's head and shoulders far enough to tuck the pillow under him and couldn't help giving his head an extra little scratch with his fingers before pulling away.

"Do you want some cold water, or gatorade, or anything like that to drink?"

Jungkook shook his head, already blowing his nose on the toilet paper.

"I don't suppose you want anything to eat?"

Jungkook closed his eyes and shook his head more vehemently, then sniffed and tossed the scrunched up toilet paper in the waste bin. He dabbed his face and neck with one of the towels and arranged the bag of ice on his forehead. He seemed happy to leave the peas on his chest. Finally he
closed his eyes, going still with a long, exhausted sigh.

Namjoon sat next to him and blew his nose as well. The rain continued to patter against the roof above them and the gutters clunked rhythmically in their attempts to keep up with the water gushing through them.

"Thanks," Jungkook said quietly after a few moments.

"You're welcome."

"For everything." Jungkook looked toward him and moved his hand a little closer, opening it. Namjoon took it in his own and Jungkook laced their fingers together. "Thank you for doing what you did, even though it really sucked for me at the time."

Jungkook's bad leg was bent, his knee resting against the wall, and he reached his other hand down to squeeze at his thigh with a wince and Namjoon couldn't help but wince with him. There was already a new stain in the gauze around his calf. "I'm only alive at all because you guys found me and took care of me. And hyung?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry for only making things harder for you this whole time. It must have been really difficult to make decisions like that and all I did was fight you the whole time."

"It's okay, Kookie, I probably would have too in your position."

Jungkook looked back to the ceiling and then closed his eyes. The corners of his lips twitched upward ever so slightly. "You're such a good person."

Namjoon snorted and laid down on his back next to him, using his free arm as a pillow behind his head. The hardwood floor was cool but sticky with humidity.

"Really. You're such a good leader. You're so smart. And you're really strong. Like... mentally. I mean physically too, because you carried me for a long time. You must have been really sore after that. You're so selfless."

Namjoon felt a blush rapidly creep up on him as Jungkook continued to babble praises at him. The combination of the fever and of finally releasing the choke hold he'd had on his feelings seemed to have really done a number on his verbal filter.

But then he went quiet and Namjoon turned to look at him. His face was tense and he was gripping his thigh again. He let go of Namjoon's hand to move the ice from his forehead and held it against the side of his neck. Sweat and condensation from the bag trickled over his temples and into his hairline as he moved it.

"I just want to feel normal again," he murmured, and Namjoon felt a pang of sadness and sympathy. "I'm so tired of having fevers and feeling sick. I'm tired of always being tired. I hate this stupid house. I hate this. He hit his thigh lightly with his fist. "I want to walk around on my own again without it hurting all the time. I want to take showers instead of baths. I want to go home."

"I really want those things too, Kookie," Namjoon replied softly.

"Guys?" Jungkook suddenly turned his face toward the phone, where it still lay near his head.

"Yeah, Jungkookie?" Yoongi answered.
"Did you guys call the ambulance?"

"Yeah, Kookie, we did. It should get there not long after we do."

"Okay." Jungkook glanced at Namjoon and then closed his eyes again. "Okay, thank you."

"You're welcome."

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay."

"It was stupid of me to say I didn't want one."

"Sorta yes but mostly no."

"...what?"

The call went dead and Jungkook turned questioningly at Namjoon but then they heard the front door opening, followed by the rustling of several bodies entering and bags being put down. The sound of pouring rain increased briefly and then dulled as the door was closed again.

Taehyung appeared in the hallway first, looking like he had walked fully clothed through a waterfall. He came toward them, dribbling water the whole way, and Namjoon backed away from Jungkook to let Taehyung sit down next to him. Their second youngest didn't say anything but his eyebrows were furrowed in worry and he used the cuff of his jacket to try and wipe the sweat from Jungkook's forehead, apparently oblivious to the fact that all he was doing was smearing rainwater on him. The other members filtered into the hallway behind him.

"Oh my god, stop," Jungkook said with a fatigued but good-natured chuckle, turning his face away. Namjoon handed Taehyung one of the dishtowels instead, who took it gratefully and used it to dab at Jungkook's face and neck. Jungkook made a face but Namjoon could tell he liked the attention.

"I know Jungkook-ah has a high temperature right now, but you should really use a stove if you are looking to cook those peas," Seokjin said, staring down at them.

Jungkook touched the frozen peas on his chest with a tired smile. "I'm trying to make dinner."

Yoongi went straight to Jungkook's feet to take a look at his leg and Jimin laid a hand on his forehead. Namjoon half expected Jungkook to grow self conscious and push them away but he must have been feeling too poorly to put up a fight. Or perhaps it was because he no longer felt there was a reason to hide how bad off he was. Either way, he just laid passively and let them hover around and inspect him.

"Oh wow, yeah you're really hot," Jimin said, and then looked expectantly at Namjoon as though waiting for him to do something about it. Namjoon took Jimin's hand off their maknae's forehead and replaced it with the bag of ice.

"God, I'm so sorry Jungkookie," Hoseok breathed, pulling his dripping jacket off and tossing it into the nearby bathroom before settling down near Jungkook's head. He immediately combed at Jungkook's hair with his fingers, his go-to soothing technique when he didn't know what else to do. "How did this happen so fast?"

"It didn't, really." Jungkook admitted, his eyes going up to Hoseok. "I started not feeling good last night. It was worse this morning, but I wanted you guys to have a good time so I didn't say
anything."

Seokjin sighed loudly, not even trying to hide his exasperation. He had sat down next to Namjoon, their backs against the wall. "Look, I know you hate making us worry but this is your life we're talking about, JK, you can't just hide stuff like this from us. You're not helping anyone."

Jungkook's mouth dropped open slightly in surprise and Namjoon shot a wide-eyed look at their eldest member.

"I'm sorry, I... I just..." Jungkook stuttered.

"That sounded meaner than I meant it to be, I'm sorry," Seokjin amended, his tone softening some. He put a hand over his eyes briefly, rubbing at them, before letting it drop again. "But did you ever stop to think that our worry would have been so much less if you had just told us something was wrong last night? Or when we woke up even? You could have just gotten a change in prescriptions or something, but now you're in horrible condition, laying on the floor waiting for an ambulance."

"I know, I'm sorry," Jungkook answered quickly. He took the ice and the peas off, placing them on the floor nearby and began to rub at his arms. "I know I messed up. I should have just said something. But you guys have just been so sad and this house is so depressing and boring now. I wanted you to enjoy yourselves for once."

"It's not worth it. Any enjoyment we would have gotten just turns to guilt when we find out you've been like this the entire time. I'm sorry, I just hate seeing you like this, especially knowing it could have been avoided."

"Can you maybe not scold him right now?" Taehyung said, giving Seokjin a meaningful look. He hadn't moved from Jungkook's side and had his arm protectively over him, rubbing their maknae's side gently.

"No, it's okay." Jungkook said. He folded his bare feet, one over the other. "He's right. I'm sorry, it's just... instinctual. And I wasn't sure what it was, so I didn't want to make a big d-" suddenly he cut off and squeezed his eyes shut, grimacing and holding his breath for a moment before letting it out slowly. Namjoon glanced down to find all of his leg muscles tensed up.

Yoongi put a hand carefully on Jungkook's knee. "Can you take any more pain meds, Kook-ah?"

Jungkook shook his head, not opening his eyes. "I took the max amount already."

Taehyung stopped his hand's movement along Jungkook's side and looked down at in confusion. "Are you shivering?"

"Uh. Yeah, I'm kind of cold now," he answered sheepishly, looking up at them. He closed his arms over his chest and stuck his hands in his armpits. He looked exhausted. "Chills I guess?"

Yoongi quickly brought out a blanket and helped Taehyung tuck it in around him until just his leg and head were exposed.

"I'm sorry you guys had to come home so soon." He said dejectedly, his teeth chattering just a little bit.

"If it makes you feel any better we were already planning to come back early," Jimin replied, sitting cross legged next to Yoongi by Jungkook's feet.

"You were?"
"Yeah, I mean, look." He gestured vaguely into the bathroom, where a rain-smeared window was visible. Wind continued to shove the trees to and fro outside, the rain falling in sheets. "We were dumb to think going out in that would be remotely fun in the first place. We just got soaked and Jin-hyung and Hobi-hyung will probably be sick an extra day now."

"Mm hm," Hoseok hummed in agreement. He had settled into a relaxed pose against the wall but still had his fingers playing aimlessly in Jungkook's hair. "We decided to just get groceries, buy you a few things, and then come back."

"Hey yeah, Jin-hyung and I found a game shop and bought a couple new video games," Taehyung said, perking up a little and patting Jungkook's side. "I looked for Ironman figurines but couldn't find any, but we got you an Ironman lego set."

Jungkook immediately gave an embarrassed smile and his fingers peeked out of the blanket to pull it a little closer to his chin. "I was just joking, you didn't actually have to get me something like that."

But despite his words, the small smile didn't leave his face for several minutes as they kept talking. They showed him the sweatshirt they'd bought him, red just like he asked, with the word Sapporo dashed stylishly across the back of it in the form of tiny white birds. Hoseok's hand stayed in his hair, running through it slowly, causing Jungkook's eyes to dip closed every once in a while in comfort.

Seokjin told him an animated story about how he and Taehyung had stood under a bus stop overhang outside of the game store to shield themselves from the rain while waiting for the others to pick them up. How, when they saw the van at the end of the block, Taehyung grew impatient and stepped out too early, getting splashed fully by another car passing by, which accounted for his overly water-logged appearance.

Taehyung kept his arm over Jungkook the whole time, only removing it to help him pull the blanket off when the chills passed and he grew too hot again.

Namjoon stayed silent through their gentle banter, watching with quiet pride how they subtly cared for Jungkook in their own ways. The smile on their maknae's face was tired but genuine and though it was occasionally interrupted by a wince, the little crinkles around his eyes kept returning until finally they heard knocks on the door and the paramedics were let in.

Jungkook pressed his fingers into the soft beige armrests under his hands, watching how the plush fabric sank down and popped back up under his touch. The other members were still moving about the cabin, putting their carry on luggage into the overhead bins and using the bathroom before take off. Jungkook just waited, warm, soft, and comfortable in his new red sweatshirt. BigHit had sent a private jet to bring them home and Jungkook was able to use two seats that were facing each other alongside the window, sitting in one and propping his leg up on the other.

The doctors had had to reopen the stitches in Jungkook's calf when he was brought back to the hospital the day before, as the infection had stemmed from a tiny bone fragment that had been missed during the initial surgery. He spent that night at the hospital so they could keep an eye on him as the new antibiotics took effect and by late the next morning most of his symptoms had faded along with the storm, leaving clear skies and a much happier Jungkook.
Despite the Japanese doctors strongly recommending that they not travel for at least another day, they had eventually gotten them to okay him for a plane ride back to Korea. They all just wanted to go home and leave that house and experience behind them.

He still had to take extreme care, using a wheelchair to get to and from the van and then the plane. But he didn't mind, and now that he was finally sitting in the brightly lit private cabin about to go home, blissfully painless with new pain killers doing their job well, he couldn't be more pleased. He watched out the window as other planes rolled along the tarmac and tiny little luggage carriers drove about in the late afternoon sun.

Jimin passed by him, giving him an affectionate smile and a pat on the cheek before going to take his turn in the small rest room. Jungkook returned the smile, following him with his eyes for a moment before turning to look out the window again. Early that morning at the hospital, Jimin had slipped into his room alone. He was quiet and gentle as Jungkook woke up, getting him water and juice and speaking of little nonsense matters until Jungkook became cognizant enough to carry conversation. Then he found that there was reason Jimin was there alone.

"There's something I need for you to know, Kookie," his friend began, looking down at his folded hands. His foot tapped idly against the tile floor where he sat on the bedside chair. "I think it might be more for my own benefit that I tell you, but it's just something I need to say."

"Okay," Jungkook said, sipping on his orange juice. He wondered if he should be worried.

"I don't know how much you remember of who said what that night. And of who wanted to do what when we were fighting." He paused then, chewing a bit on the inside of his cheek, still staring at his hands. He didn't seem upset, more thoughtful. "It's petty for me to even tell you this, but I feel like I've been a little bitter about it and I think I just need you to know that I wanted to stop. And Taehyungie did too. We wanted them to stop and put you down like you were asking."

"Oh," Jungkook responded softly. He'd already suspected as much. He did remember a lot of the words that were said back and forth that night, and while they didn't make much sense at the time, in the following days it was pretty easy to piece the argument together. He knew Namjoon and Yoongi wanted to keep going. And he knew that Jimin and Taehyung were the ones fighting against that. Still, he waited patiently for Jimin to say what he needed to say.

"I just... since then, I've just felt like I needed you to know that not all of us were ignoring you." He glanced up then, looking for understanding. "Taehyung told me to just let it go, that we were ultimately wrong and that there was no point in saying any more about it. And he's kinda right I guess. I mean, I still can't help thinking that we should have stopped. The nurse even said we probably could have, and you might not have had a panic attack..."

But then he tipped his head to the side in dismissal. "But whatever, Taehyung is right, it's already done and we'll never know. I don't think Yoongi-hyung and Namjoon-hyung did the wrong thing either, necessarily." He shrugged and leaned back in the chair, running a hand through his sandy blonde hair. He looked at Jungkook fondly for a few moments, then sighed. "Like I said, I think it's just me being petty. But... two of us weren't ignoring you and would have done what you were asking if we had been able to."

Jungkook's lips pulled back in a slow smile. Despite having already guessed that the two other members of the maknae line had been fighting for him, he was surprised at how good it made him feel to hear Jimin say it. It helped soothe that little part of him that still felt distrustful when it came to the other members overriding his opinions. While it felt at the time as though they were all against him, at least there were two of them that had genuinely listened to him, regardless of who was right and who was wrong in the end.
"Thanks, Jiminnie-hyung," he said. "That actually means a lot."

A grin sprang to his friend's face in return. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. I'm glad you told me."

"Okay." Jimin let out a whoosh of air, as though releasing a great weight. "Okay, good. I just had to say it."

Jungkook felt himself smiling again at the memory. They were all still dealing with what happened in their own ways, and it helped him to see others come to terms with their lingering demons.

"Hey."

A hand landed on his shoulder and he looked up to see Yoongi sliding into the seat across from him that wasn't occupied by his foot. Hoseok sat down next to Jungkook in the aisle seat.

"You're an over-achiever," Yoongi said flatly, pulling earbuds out of his bag and starting to untangle them.

"Eh?"

"Yeah. I realized you had both hypothermia and hyperthermia in less than a week."

"I... wait, hyperthermia?" Jungkook glanced down to his hands where Hoseok had placed a bag of barbecue chips that he hadn't asked for.

"Yeah, technically a fever is hyperthermia. Hypothermia is when the body's temperature is too low. Hyperthermia is when it's too high."

"Oh!"

"Yeah. So. You don't always have to do everything. It would have been okay to do just one of those things."

Jungkook giggled a little bit as he opened the chips. "Okay, thanks, good advice hyung."

"Yeah."

Everyone settled in, opening books or playing games on their phones, and soon the plane began moving, tires lifting from the pavement and bringing them into open air. Jungkook gave a slow, contented sigh as Japan began to recede beneath him.

About an hour into the flight, he was dozing against the window when he felt a pat on his knee and glanced over to see Yoongi watching him, along with Namjoon leaning over the back of Yoongi's chair.

"What's up?" Jungkook asked, popping the earbuds out of his ears.

"We thought we should talk to you before we get home," Yoongi said. He still had his face mask on, pulled low under his chin.

"Oh, okay."
"We want to say sorry for still overriding you when it came to the ambulance."

There was some rustling in the chair next to Namjoon and then Seokjin popped up next to him in interest.

Jungkook stopped himself from immediately responding with 'it's okay', and took a minute to adjust his brain away from the light dreamlike thoughts that had been floating through his mind while drifting off.

"Well, I was glad to have one," he said instead, picking at his fingernails.

"We want you to be able to trust us, Kookie," Namjoon said earnestly. The sun was low in the sky now, sending soft pink light through the small rounded windows and into the interior of the plane. One of the beams was catching Namjoon's face, lighting his eyes from the side and making them look more like honey and glass than their usual brown.

Hoseok had removed his own earbuds and was listening quietly next to Jungkook. Jimin and Taehyung were watching from across the aisle.

"I know you guys have my best interests in mind," Jungkook replied truthfully. He pulled the sleeves of his sweatshirt down a little bit to hide his hands.

"Yeah..." Yoongi trailed. "But it really isn't right for us to treat you like that. To just assume we know better than you. We're not parents and you're not five."

"He's five," Seokjin countered with an exaggerated wink in Jungkook's direction. Jungkook sent him a little glare.

"Can I say something?" Jimin spoke up from across the aisle. He brought a hand up as though he wanted to run it through his hair - a nervous habit - but he was wearing a baseball cap, so he just touched the brim awkwardly and let his hand drop again. "I want you to be able to trust us too, Jungkookie, but... sometimes it's hard to trust you too."

Jungkook's eyes widened. "It is?"

Jimin turned to face them fully. "Because you hide things from us. I mean, you really didn't tell us the truth at all when we asked how you were doing yesterday and the night before."

"Actually that's a good point," Hoseok said murmured, as though he was talking to himself.

"True," Yoongi agreed. "Maybe part of why we overreact is because you under-react. It's no one's fault, I think it's just instinctual for all of us. But there has to be a middle ground that we can find."

Jungkook felt a little twinge of guilt as things started to make a little more sense. They didn't dismiss his wants because they thought he was incapable of making the right decision, they did it because they couldn't trust him to be honest and didn't want to take any chances when it came to his well-being. It was actually very sweet.

"Ah," he said softly, and couldn't help a small smile as he looked down at his lap. "That does make sense. I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Yoongi replied. "We are too."

"Kookie," Namjoon spoke up again, "I'll try - well, we'll try, I assume, to be better at listening to you and trusting you, and not acting like we know better than you. And not overriding you."
Jungkook nodded. "Okay."

"But you have to promise us too, to tell us the truth. If you're ever not feeling good, or ever feeling sad, or anything like that. I want you to tell us. Please? Don't lie to us, even if you know we'll get worried."

Jungkook nodded again. "Yeah, I promise. At least I promise I'll try, I don't know how easy it'll be."

"Well yeah, same," Yoongi said. "Nothing is going to happen overnight. We'll just have to work at it and hopefully get better at it together."

"I've never really properly said thank you to all of you," Jungkook suddenly realized aloud. "Have I?"

"You don't have to, Jungkookie," Taehyung immediately replied.

"Yeah I do. I want to. Thank you guys, you saved my life. I would be dead without you."

"You know in some cultures, this means you have to be our slave now," Seokjin pointed out.

"No, really. Thank you for everything you went through for me. It was traumatizing for you guys too."

"Well, it was totally worth it and we'd do it a hundred times over," Namjoon replied, then his eyebrows pulled together. "I don't ever want you to feel alone again, Jungkook. We love you more than you know and would do anything for you. I hope you know that you never were alone, and you never will be."

Jungkook could do nothing but grin down at his hands and keep picking at his nails.

"I know," he mumbled, embarrassed. "I love you too. You guys are everything to me."

He heard a slight grunt and looked up to see a hand flapping about a foot in front of his face. Seokjin was reaching over the back of his chair clearly trying to pat Jungkook's head but he was comically out of reach. Jungkook chuckled and leaned forward far enough for his eldest hyung to get his hands in his hair and ruffle it beyond recognition.

Before he could lean back again, Hoseok wrapped an arm around his neck and pulled him over to give him a series of loud kisses on the side of his head.

"Our Jungkookie is so sweet," he said when he finally released Jungkook.

The sun continued to set and for some time the cabin glowed with orange and pink. Jungkook spent his time leaning against the window and watching the rolling clouds far below, the ocean a glittering blanket laid out beneath them. A hush had fallen over the inside of the plane some time ago and when Jungkook turned from the window he saw that he was the only one left awake. Namjoon and Seokjin were slumped in their seats. Yoongi's cheek was smooshed against his neck pillow, arms and legs crossed. Taehyung had pushed his seat all the way back and was on his side, eyes closed and hugging his pillow. Jimin was reclined across from him.

Hoseok was limp in his seat next to Jungkook, mouth slightly open. He was leaning heavily toward him, his head just inches from Jungkook's shoulder. One of his earbuds had fallen out.
Tiny specks of dust hung suspended in the air as he let his gaze linger on each of his hyungs.

Every piece of himself could be traced back to one of them. He was tied to them and they to him, and to remove one of them would be like cutting out a piece of his heart. He was okay with waiting a little longer to be able to walk. He was even okay with whatever ugly scar he was left with. The only way he could truly be damaged would be if one of his hyungs left him and at that moment he had never been more sure of their love and devotion to him.

They held him together.

They were precious.

Very slowly and quietly, Jungkook slipped his arm around Hoseok's and eased him down the last few inches until his friend's head was resting on his shoulder. He kept their arms linked and briefly pressed his cheek to the top of his head, the strawberry smell of Hoseok's shampoo wafting up to his nose. He left a quick kiss on his hair and then rolled his head toward the window to see the vibrant red sun dip below the horizon. He relaxed into his chair and smiled, knowing that before long he would see the twinkling lights of Seoul.

Of home.

Chapter End Notes

I can't tell you how many times I wrote "Jungkoko" throughout this entire story from typing too fast. But good heavens, I can't believe it's actually over! This story has gotten such a positive response, it's made me so happy to write and share it. I hope it ended in a way that felt good for you guys!

I have several other stories/projects in the works, a couple of which were already partially written before I started posting this one and I would love to hear if you guys have an opinion as to which one you'd be most interested in seeing first.

One of them is an interactive, choose your own adventure type story where the end of each chapter leaves off at a choice and the readers/you guys would vote in the comments what decision you want the characters to make, then I would continue the story based on the winning vote. It's something I've seen used once or twice in my fanfic travels and I've never tried myself but I think it would be very fun and I've already mapped out several chapters worth of choices. The story itself would be sort of a survival au set in a dystopian society where a small part of the population have special abilities but the government turns against them and the boys have to try to find each other and escape the city.

Another one is a more simple Jungkook whump story set in their real lives like this one
was. I'm a little stuck on it right now, however. I have the exciting part written but I'm not sure whether to form the story before it or after it. It wouldn't be very long, I don't think.

Another idea that's been forming is a slow burn Taekook au probably centered in a fashion or modelling magazine setting but with a darker undercurrent of gang/mob related things going on behind the scenes. Not at all an original idea, of course, but the story itself hopefully would be and I have some good plans for it I think. It would be my first attempt at a ship fic, but I've been feelin' it lately.

I could have a couple of them going at the same time too I suppose. Anyway, does anyone have thoughts? I think I'd personally be most excited to do the dystopian one but that might be because I recently rewatched all the Avengers movies and a couple of the Maze Runner movies. XD

(I found out you can subscribe to a particular author, so you can do that with me if you want to see when I start posting the next story!)

Regardless of all of that, I want to say a HUGE thank you to all of you for reading this story! It's been such a pleasure. I love you! <3

End Notes

What are your thoughts so far? Is there anything you particularly like or don't like? Any other writers out there can attest that when you've read and edited something over and over, you get to the point where you will never be able to look at it objectively again because your mind has memorized it all. So your feedback will not only be like spoonfuls of glitter that I can pour into my eyes and make me happy but will also be hugely helpful as I continue writing!

Much love to you! (Yes, you.) <3

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