Wings of Gold

by seokjins_forehead

Summary

'The troubled man leaned back into his chair and sighed. Raising his hand up above his face, he glared bitterly at the shiny gold ring on his left index finger—an exorbitant 18th birthday gift from his father. It was a deplorable indication of nobility, his family’s crest arrogantly carved into the precious metal. Seokjin frowned at his golden shackle, desperately wishing to trade it in for the bird’s boundless wings.'

Pirate AU where Jin is an unfortunate nobleman and the rest of BTS are notorious pirates

Notes

Hi guys!
This is actually my first time writing a fanfic so please spare me lol. 100% self-indulgent, so it'll be full of things (tropes) that I like! So, um, if you're not into the same things, then I'm sorry? Beware clichés? (⊙︿⊙;)

Please don’t expect regular updates from me. I’m currently running on 'dumb bitch' energy \(\_\(\_\)ﾉ/

_Unnecessary explanations to save myself from any future embarrassment:_

*Sorry, the beginning is long. I literally had to split it up into two parts and the other boys don't appear until next chapter. But I promise that I have an interesting story planned out (imo)! So I hope that you'll stick around even if you find this first chapter to be a bit boring (■ꞌ ॢ ꞌ■) Dis gon' be a long story, so if you're looking for a short-read then this ain't it, chief

*Historical inaccuracies, which is why I chose a fictional setting during an unspecified time period. Be aware that things will be made up to suit the story's convenience. Nothing too nonsensical though. Also, this is obviously going to be a romanticized portrayal of pirates. So yeah, please don’t come at me trying to correct my facts. Nothing is real here lmaooo

**(omg also please don’t clown me on the fictional names I used ahh I fr used a name generator because I'm hella lazy >////<)**

*Jin ships only ♥ Eventual Smut with Bottom Jin only.


*Varying degrees of gore in certain chapters. I’ll put content warnings when it comes up.

Sorry I talk a lot (I can’t help it (ꞌ●ꞌ)) but anyways you've been warned so plz don’t come for me if you don't like what’s in the story. Unless you didn't read this note...if so, then it's no longer my problem lol

Enjoy! ☺
Seokjin shifted his attention to the small creature chirping on the window sill. It was a silky black bird with golden feathers adorning its chest and wings.

With its round head tilted towards the man, the bird sang as if it were serenading the man. Seokjin pressed his eyelids closed, enjoying the creature’s cheerful melody. His elbow was propped up on the smooth mahogany desk before him with his chin firmly planted into the palm of his hand.

It was late April and the weather was beautiful in the Kingdom of Ethil. He could feel the sunlight warming his pearly skin, filling his body with the pleasant serenity of spring. His breathing slowed to a steady pace and his shoulders relaxed.

A colorless voice droned on in his tired ears, ruining his brief moment of peace. It’s been over three hours and Cohen, his personal attendant, was still presenting him with last week’s financial summary reports.

Seokjin was completely exhausted.

Tuning back into the bird’s sweet song, he attempted to escape the stodgy drawl that was forced upon him. Finally, he managed to drown out Cohen’s voice, allowing his crowded mind to drift.

Seokjin was the eldest son to Prince Renaud, the Duke of Ashe and the younger brother of Ethil’s reigning king. As the heir apparent, Seokjin was set to succeed an esteemed dukedom—reserved only for peers of royal descent. Unfortunately, along with affluence and nobility, inevitably came the never-ending onslaught of drab and tedious responsibilities.

Much to Seokjin’s displeasure, the Duchy of Ashe was very wealthy and vast, making the management of its countless estates an exceedingly arduous task. Seokjin, now at the age of 23, has already undertaken several of the dukedom’s obligations, and despite his burning desire to do something else—anything else—he could not bring himself to utter even a single complaint.

His father has been terribly ill as of late, which came as no surprise to Seokjin. The Duke’s health was on a slow decline in spite of the many doctors that have come to the chateau in the past. They say that it’s most likely some type of degenerative cancer. However, with the current advancements available within the realm of medical science, there was no official cause or cure.

Seokjin has had to bear witness to adult men shamelessly flaunting their prestigious medical backgrounds and screeching at each other in heated disagreements over who could pioneer the proper treatment for his father’s condition. These so-called ‘experts’ have managed to accomplish absolutely nothing besides having given him over a decade’s worth of headaches.

The young heir was filled with absolute dread, fearing that his father’s end was finally near. That thought alone was enough to send him into crying fits. To make matters worse, if his father dies then Seokjin would have no other choice but to inherit the dukedom and all of the duties that came with it.

He never wanted to be the one to inherit his father’s title, especially not like this. It was a burden to him—a sentencing to an unfulfilling lifetime of monotony. Overwhelmed enough as it is, he couldn’t help but feel like he got the short end of the stick. Sadly, Fate had an undying hatred for the young man as the odds continue to be against him.
“My Lord!”

Seokjin’s eyes fluttered open at the sound of his attendant’s voice, effectively snapping him out of his thoughts. He forgot that he had stopped listening.

“My apologies, Cohen. What were you saying?”

Cohen is a dutiful man in his mid 20s with a round face and bright, green eyes. His light brown hair was combed back neatly giving him an appropriately clean appearance. With furrowed eyebrows, he sighed. “My Lord, are you feeling unwell?”

Seokjin gave a weak laugh as he tried to assure Cohen that he was fine, but by the tight look on his face he knew that the fiercely loyal man wasn’t buying any of it.

“My Lord, you mustn’t overwork yourself!” The man looked upset but his face softened as he spoke in a soothing voice. “I know these past couple of months have been very trying for you, but you are doing a marvelous job.”

Feeling awkward at Cohen’s gratuitous praise, Seokjin averted his attention back to the fluffy animal which was surprisingly still perched on the window sill.

“How about we give you a break and set the work aside for next week?” Cohen continued, “You look tired so please rest well.” The attendant excused himself, leaving Seokjin to stare at the carefree bird that had unknowingly monopolized his attention.

With a resounding click, the office door was pulled shut. As if taking that as its own cue to leave, the bird spread its wings and flew into the air. Seokjin gazed longingly at the creature flowing freely with the wind—the brilliance of golden wings shimmering across a vast blue sky.

The troubled man leaned back into his chair and sighed. Raising his hand up above his face, he glared bitterly at the shiny gold ring on his left index finger—an exorbitant 18th birthday gift from his father. It was a deplorable indication of nobility, his family’s crest arrogantly carved into the precious metal.

Seokjin frowned at his golden shackle, desperately wishing to trade it in for the bird’s boundless wings.

Negative thoughts began to fill his mind again so he hastily made his way over to the bookshelf. He picked something up and brought it over to the couches in the middle of the room, promptly taking a seat with his ankles crossed on the ornate coffee table. He quickly opened his book to where he had last left off, diagrams of the human body and complicated text decorating the pages. It was a medical textbook.

When Seokjin was younger, he foolishly believed that he could find the cure for his father’s illness. He read countless books about ailments and medicine, but as time passed and his father’s condition gradually worsened, Seokjin realized that this was a battle he could never hope to win.

It was upsetting that he had to sit back and watch as his father wilted away over the years, powerless against Fate’s cruelty. How stupid he was for believing that he was capable of saving his beloved father, a feat that not even first-rate medical practitioners could accomplish. He was naive to think that he had a greater purpose in life than what was already laid out for him—to become a servant to his noble bloodline.

It was Seokjin’s misfortune that Fate had already planned out his whole life, signed and sealed. There was nothing he could do. His life was out of his hands and he hated it.
Despite his begrudged acceptance of Fate’s will, Seokjin’s old habit of reading still persisted. It had developed into some sort of coping mechanism as he found comfort in these medical textbooks. He probably deluded himself into thinking that if he kept reading then he could hold on to those warm feelings of hope he once had as a child.

He was so desperate for it, reading beyond what he had originally intended. Opening himself up to more random topics, he learned about things like surgical practice and field medicine—things that he knew he would never use in this lifetime. It was fascinating though. The human body was truly a strange existence.

A brisk knock at the door pulled Seokjin’s attention away from his safe place. He called for the unexpected visitor to enter and the door swung open, revealing a panicked chambermaid.

“My Lord, please come quickly! Your presence is needed in His Grace’s chamber at once!”

Seokjin dropped his book and was on his feet in an instant, feeling his heart sink into his stomach. “Is my father alright!”

The chambermaid was already urging Seokjin out of the office. “Yes, My Lord, but His Grace’s condition will surely get worse if you do not come with me right now!”

They rushed through the hallways, arriving in front of the Duke’s bedroom door. There was a commotion coming from the other side as Seokjin hurried into the room, the chambermaid close at his heels.

“What’s happened?” he blurted out as he caught sight of his father sitting at the edge of his oversized bed. Seokjin’s mother, Hesa, was standing in front of the older man. Her hands were firmly planted on his shoulders as she tried to keep him from getting up.

“Darling, please be reasonable! You will do nothing but aggravate your condition if you continue like this!” She tightened her grip on the man’s shoulders in desperation.

“What nonsense! I am perfectly fine!”

“Father?”

Finally noticing the perturbed young man, Seokjin’s parents turned their heads. Hesa’s face lit up. “Seokjin, dear! Please say something to your father! He is behaving like a reckless fool!”

“My Lord,” the chambermaid chimed in to ease Seokjin’s confusion, “His Majesty the King has called for an emergency council meeting at the castle. His Grace insists that he must attend.”

Seokjin’s eyebrows raised. “Father, you know that you are not well enough to travel!”

The Duke scoffed at his eldest son’s objections, “Must I repeat myself? I am perfectly fine!” He turned his attention back to his wife, weakly trying to pry her hands off of him. “Now release me. I have a duty to my brother, His Majesty, and I will not neglect his summons.”

Wanting to say something, Hesa opened her mouth but quickly pressed her lips together in a tight line. She was clearly frustrated with the man’s stubbornness.

Seokjin knew that his father’s pride was impassable and that trying to reason with him with mere words would be futile. Biting down on his lower lip, he fiddled with the ring on his finger. He needed to change tactics.
With his chin up high, he took a deep breath and fixed his posture. “Your Grace, please allow me to go in your stead.”

His father seemed slightly taken aback by Seokjin’s request. He raised an eyebrow at the young man, his expression quickly morphing into skepticism. “You…wish to attend a council meeting?”

“Yes, Your Grace. It would be an honor to attend the meeting as your stand-in,” Seokjin plastered a fake smile onto his face as he continued, “and I find that this would be a very advantageous opportunity for me, especially if I am to one day inherit your noble title.”

He knew that the man had high expectations of him. After all, Seokjin was the first son of a reputable duke and a member of the royal family, so of course he would be very eager to inherit his father’s domain.

If only that were true. Seokjin has kept this charade going for most of his life, even trying to convince himself that the dukedom was what he desired. He couldn’t possibly disappoint his prideful father, especially since he was ill. Seokjin just hoped that his acting was good enough to convince the man to stay in bed.

His father mulled it over for several seconds before finally grumbling out his approval. Begrudgingly, he laid back down as Hesa readjusted the silken covers over him.

Seokjin let out the breath he had been holding. He was relieved that his father had calmed down, but at the same time he was filled with dread over what he had just signed himself up for. Fate really had it in for him. He just couldn’t catch a break these days.

Once his father was settled in bed, he asked that Hesa prepare Seokjin for the council meeting. She acknowledged his order and planted a kiss to her husband’s cheek before excusing herself. “Seokjin, dear. I will be waiting for you in the hall.”

Now that the situation had been handled, Seokjin could see just how tired and unwell his father looked. The sick man stood out like a sore thumb amongst the rich golds and plush velvets decorating the room; his sallow skin was damp and blotchy, and his sunken eyes were a glassy red. Seokjin felt the knots in his stomach tighten.

“Seokjin, come here.” His father spoke in an uncharacteristically soft voice as he patted his hand on the bed, motioning for his son to sit next to him. He took Seokjin’s fair hands into his own mottled ones as the young man delicately lowered himself onto the bed. His father’s voice dropped into a croaky whisper, “I’m sorry.”

Seokjin’s voice wavered a bit. “What do you mean?” He could hear the other man wheeze softly.

With a rough thumb and downcast eyes, his father rubbed gentle circles onto Seokjin’s hand. “I never considered how you felt when I forced you into this. I’ve been selfishly relying on you this whole time.”

With his heart beating erratically, Seokjin felt like a deer caught in headlights.

He knew.

He had seen through Seokjin’s pathetic facade.

A nervous chuckle escaped his lips as he tried to smile. “I haven’t the slightest idea of what you could be referring to.”
His father frowned deeply. “Son, you don’t have to force yourself.”

Seokjin stood up abruptly, cutting off his father’s words. “But I’m not forcing myself. This is what I want.” He knew that his father could see through his blatant lie, but he just couldn’t find it in himself to admit how unhappy he is. It was a difficult habit for him to break.

The sick man gave in. “I understand. Please do take care of yourself during your trip.”

“Thank you, Father, I will. Please rest well. I love you.” Glad that they could finally move away from the uncomfortable subject, Seokjin leaned down to kiss his father’s head before turning towards the door.

“I love you too,” he heard as he opened the door. The chambermaid, who was still in the room, rushed past him to tend to his father. Chewing the inside of his cheek, Seokjin cast one last glance at the feeble man tucked into his father’s bed before closing the door behind him. He felt somber.

Hesa was waiting at the end of the hallway, the epitome of a refined noblewoman: beautiful and poised with her silky champagne-colored hair tied neatly at the base of her head. Gracefully, she opened her arms upon seeing her son’s forlorn expression. Seokjin quickly made his way over to her and sank into her warm embrace.

Even though Hesa was actually Seokjin’s stepmother, he had always thought of her as his real mother. To be honest, he didn’t really want to remember his birth mother. She had abandoned him and his father years ago—an unforgivable act of betrayal to her husband and child.

But Seokjin was fine with that. He liked Hesa better anyways.

The sophisticated woman stroked Seokjin’s stark black hair before letting go. She gave him a sympathetic smile. “Shall we discuss?”

Seokjin nodded his head. “So, what’s happened? There must be a serious issue for the King to have called for a council meeting on such short notice.”

A sigh escaped Hesa’s lips as she crossed her arms. “Yes. Well recently, there has been a major influx of piracy along the Eastern Sea trade routes, and as you can imagine His Majesty is deeply concerned for the state of our economy.”

With a wrinkled brow, he vaguely remembered hearing more gossip about pirates lately. He would have to ask Cohen more about it later.

Just then, the thundering of footsteps caught Seokjin’s attention. He turned around to see his stepbrother, René, rushing towards them from the other end of the hall. Although he was younger, the man was much taller and bulkier compared to Seokjin’s delicate form.

Hands placed firmly on her hips, Hesa aimed a sharp glare at her other son. “René! Cease that stomping right this instant! It’s inelegant.”

René slowed himself to a tolerable stride before coming to a halt in front of Hesa. He threw Seokjin a scornful look before turning back to his mother. “How is Father? I heard there was some sort of incident.”

“Nothing of the sort, dear. Your father was merely throwing a fit, but the matter has been settled.”

René raised an eyebrow. “What matter?”
Seokjin thought as he rubbed the back of his neck. René was not going to be pleased with him.

“Seokjin has graciously volunteered to attend an emergency council meeting in your father’s stead,” Hesa said with bright enthusiasm. It sounded a lot like praise.

Seokjin smiled nervously as he braced himself.

René’s eyes grew wide and his nostrils flared. “Council meeting? As in the King’s council? Why was I not informed of this!?”

Hesa knitted her eyebrows together. “And why would you need to be informed of such a thing?”

“Every time something happens, he’s the only one that gets called upon. It’s not fair!” René was fuming. “Why is it always him? I am also perfectly capable of representing Father at the council meeting!”

Not wanting to be involved in the conversation, Seokjin began fiddling with his ring again.

Hesa spoke with a firm tone as an annoyed look contorted her face. “No, René. You have no business being involved in such things. Seokjin is heir apparent. You know this already.”

“But, Mother-“

Hesa raised a hand. “Stop this fussy behavior. It’s unsightly. I did not raise you to be so boorish and impolite.”

Snapping his mouth shut, René clenched his fists in anger. Seokjin avoided making eye contact as he felt a contentious glare pierce through him. He was very much aware of René’s unwavering hatred for him.

Ignoring her son’s hostility, Hesa continued. “If you want to be involved so badly, then you will accompany Seokjin to the capital and assist him there.”

René was about to protest, but quickly silenced himself when his mother scowled at him.

“A carriage and horseman are currently being prepared. Now, hurry and pack your things.” With a disgruntled sigh, Hesa waved her two sons off as she glided down the hall.

Seokjin fidgeted awkwardly. He never knew how to deal with René since the younger man despised him for as long as he could remember.

René snapped his head towards Seokjin, startling him. His stepbrother scoffed in contempt—eyes narrowed and jaw clenched—before storming off. Seokjin was very familiar with that look; it undoubtedly screamed ‘I fucking hate you.’

Rubbing his temples, Seokjin trudged down the hall towards his room. “What did I even do to deserve this?” Seokjin mumbled to himself.

A lively voice called out to him as he made his way around the corner.

“Jinnie!”

Seokjin groaned. He really didn’t have the energy for this. He turned around to see his younger sister, Rémi, barreling down the hall towards him.
Following close behind was her personal guard, Abel, with a worried look on his face. “My Lady! Please stop running or you’ll fall!”

Rémi ignored the panicked man as she jumped up onto her tippy toes, her dainty arms wrapped around her brother’s neck. She smiled brightly at him. Her long, wavy hair was the color of honey and her round eyes were a glittering amber. Seokjin couldn’t help but flash the lovely girl a smile of his own.

Out of the three siblings, the kindhearted Rémi was the youngest. She was Hesa’s second-born child, making her Seokjin’s half-sister. Their parents lived very busy lives, so they didn’t have much time to spare for Rémi while she was growing up. Thus, Seokjin took it upon himself to take care of and play with her. As a result, they grew very close and Rémi became quite attached to him.

Neither of them had a very good relationship with René, which was unsurprising since he had a nasty personality. It was hard to believe that he and Rémi were full-blooded siblings. They were complete opposites.

“Hey, you’re almost eighteen! Mother would throw a fit if she saw you running around like a child.” Rémi gave her brother a defiant pout. “So? What she doesn’t know won’t hurt her.”

Seokjin chuckled. “Did you need something from me?”

The petite girl released Seokjin’s neck and bounced back onto her heels. “Jinnie, I heard that you’re going to Dalena today! You have to take me with you!”

Dalena was the capital city of the Kingdom of Ethil. It was where the castle was located and where the council meeting would take place.

“Why?” Rémi puffed her cheeks. “Well, you’ve been so busy lately. I’m lonely!”

“What do you mean? You have Sir Abel, don’t you? You two lovebirds are practically joined at the hip.”

Abel rubbed the back of his head as Rémi blushed. They were so obvious about their feelings for each other, and Seokjin loved to tease his sister on that fact.

“That’s different!” Rémi said, her cheeks still flushed pink.

Seokjin tried to suppress his laughter at his sister’s cute reaction. “Rémi, you know that I’m still going to be busy in Dalena, right? I’m not going to have any spare time to spend with you, and I doubt that you’d want to sit through some boring council meeting.”

“I know, but there’s still the carriage ride there and back. And Abel and I can spend time in the city while you’re busy!” Rémi grinned.

Seokjin smiled back. “Alright, if you really want to go, then I’ll take you with me.” Rémi squealed with delight. “But you have to pack your things quickly or I’ll leave you behind.”

Rémi’s smile widened. “Yes sir!” She grabbed Abel’s hand and dragged him off towards her room.

*What a handful*, Seokjin thought as he continued his walk down the hall.
Seokjin crossed his legs, drumming his fingers on his knee. The carriage was uncomfortably silent.

They were nearly out of their territory in Ashe, and would be arriving at their destination soon.

Next to him sat Rémi who was gazing out the window. She was sulking since she hadn’t realized that René would be joining them in Dalena.

René sat in front of her with his arms crossed. His piercing stare made Seokjin squirm in his seat.

Cohen sat facing him. He had his face buried in some lengthy documents. Seokjin suddenly remembered that he had some questions to ask Cohen. He called his attendant’s name, causing the man to snap his head up.

“Yes, My Lord?”

“Can you tell me more about the pirates in the Eastern Sea? I would like to be properly informed before meeting with the council.”

“Of course.” Cohen placed his documents down on his lap. “There have been several reports of new pirate crews appearing along our eastern trade routes. As you know, these trade routes are crucial to Ethil’s economic stability. Exports to the foreign markets in the Oclarian Empire produce a large percentage of our kingdom’s trade revenue. And there’s also the other eastern countries to worry about too.”

Seokjin rubbed his chin. The Oclarian Empire was a wealthy country on a large peninsula east of Ethil. The two countries were separated by the Eastern Sea, making these trade routes essential for their international transactions. He could understand why the influx of piracy has become a serious problem. They were rapidly losing money, which can just as quickly lead to severe inflation.

More pirates meant that more goods were being stolen from the surrounding countries. If the goods are stolen then no profits can be made. Piracy also poses another issue as unique goods from each nation could not be traded. Seokjin recalled that many goods, such as spices and silks, could only be produced within the Oclarian Empire.

“Do we know the cause for this sudden increase in piracy?” Rémi chimed in.

Cohen tilted his head and hummed in thought. “Well, there’s been a lot of buzz surrounding this one pirate crew going around the Eastern Sea. They’ve been making quite a name for themselves recently, raiding merchant ships left and right. They’ll pick fights with anyone they come across, including other pirates.” He shook his head disapprovingly. “It seems that the brutes have inspired other degenerates to become pirates themselves. What a mess! It’s like some new age pirates’ competition!”

Rémi brought a hand up to her lips. “Oh? Could they be referring to the Pirates of the Blood Rose?”

“That’s unlikely. The Blood Rose hasn’t been seen in the Eastern Sea for over seven years,” said René with a trademark scoff.

Cohen nodded. “Right. The rumors are referring to the Pirates of the Pied Piper. I heard that they’re led by a dangerous bunch from the Oclarian Empire. They’re a group of six very skilled pirates called the Bangtan Boys—infamous on both land and sea. But apparently nobody knows what they look like.”

Seokjin arched an eyebrow in disbelief. “What? If they’re really that famous, then how is it possible that no one has ever seen what they look like?”
“They’re very secretive about their identities, making sure to always conceal their faces in public.”
Cohen pursed his lips and leaned forward. “And according to the rumors, if you happen to see any of their faces then you are certainly doomed to perish at their hands. They’ve murdered hundreds of people just for this reason.”

As soon as Cohen finished speaking, the carriage came to a halt consequently putting the informative dialogue to rest.

“My Lords and Lady, we have arrived,” said Abel as he opened the carriage door. He had been riding his horse throughout the trip, keeping an eye out on the roads.

Seokjin stepped out of the carriage and looked up at the lofty castle. He was definitely not looking forward to this.

❦❦❦

It was the morning after they had arrived in Dalena, and Seokjin found himself sprinting through the castle halls. Quickly ducking into the nearest room, he struggled to catch his breath. The sound of frantic footsteps coming from the other side of the door made him tense up.

“Where did he go?”

“He must have gone down a different hallway!”

With bated breath, Seokjin listened as the footsteps faded away. He waited for a few minutes, making sure the coast was clear, before opening the door.

Why is it always me?

The clock hadn’t even struck noon yet Seokjin was already exhausted, again. The council meeting would not be taking place until that afternoon, so Seokjin had decided on taking a stroll through the castle to pass the time. It was very peaceful and relaxing up until the point where a group of unmarried noblewomen caught sight off him.

Seokjin was a stunning man—a young and handsome bachelor of royal status—so it was a given that women would be desperate for even a fragment of his attention. They were self-seeking bloodhounds when it came to him. Even going as far as to pursue the unfortunate man to the ends of the earth in hopes of becoming a bride to the royal family.

Suddenly a hand appeared, grabbing one of Seokjin’s broad shoulders from behind. He gasped as he spiraled around. Upon seeing a cheeky grin and lively eyes, Seokjin felt both relieved and annoyed.

It was none other than his cousin and best friend Ken, the crown prince of Ethil.

“Ken! You weasel!”

“Hey, that’s not nice!” He clutched his chest in feigned offense.

Seokjin rolled his eyes. “You know, it’s impolite to sneak up on people. Didn’t your mother teach you that?”

The impish man donned an exaggerated pout. “I was simply trying to greet my beloved cousin whom I haven’t seen in ages. Just cut my heart to pieces, why don’t you?”

“Oh please. It’s only been a few months. Now wipe that pitiful look off your face. It’s unbefitting for a prince.”
“Yes, Your Lordship.” Ken let out an amused laugh. “By the way, why were you so jumpy earlier? All I did was touch your shoulder.”

Seokjin pinched the bridge of his nose as he recalled his vexing excursion through the castle halls. But, before he could even think of an explanation, Ken had already answered his own question.

“Wait! Let me guess. You were chased by those social climbing witches again.”

The look of exasperation warping Seokjin’s face was enough to confirm the prince’s assumption. Ken’s shoulders shook as he snorted, shamelessly entertained by his cousin’s rotten luck. Seokjin shot him a dirty look.

“Aww come on, Jin! It was funny! You know, like your stepmother says, you wouldn’t be having this problem if you would just get married already.” As if feeling guilty, Ken suddenly dropped his playful demeanor. “Oh. But I guess that’s no good, huh?”

Feeling awkward, Seokjin shifted his eyes to the side. His cousin was definitely referring to the fact that Seokjin had absolutely no interest in women. It was a clear explanation for why he had been avoiding the topic of marriage for so long. He had always been attracted to men, unbeknownst to his family (except for Ken, of course).

Besides, it probably wasn’t something his stepmother would take too kindly to, seeing as she would nag him constantly about how most nobles were already married at his age.

So Seokjin definitely had good reason to keep it under wraps. Any excuse he could find to delay his marriage—to a woman, no less—was an absolute godsend.

Having had enough of the conversation, he swiftly turned on his heels and walked off—leaving Ken to scurry after him apologetically.

❦❦❦

The council meeting began promptly at the fourteenth hour with the King’s councilmen seated around a large circular table in the middle of the room. Seokjin had taken his seat next to his cousin as he listened to Marquis Châtillot’s dogmatic prattle regarding the Bangtan Boys and the Eastern Sea’s piracy issue.

“Those abominable fiends and their lowborn crew of savages have gone too far! How dare they encroach on our Kingdom’s illustrious territory!”

Seokjin frowned at the Marquis’s unsurprising bigotry. In fact, most of the nobles sitting at that table were known to be grossly pompous, always looking down their fat noses at anything they deemed inferior and meritless.

“I propose that we form alliances with the other affected nations in an effort to purge the Eastern Sea of its pirate scum infestation.” The Marquis’s voice was obnoxiously loud and authoritarian. There was a snobbish gleam in his eyes. “Let’s put a high bounty on the heads of those Bangtan pests. Naturally others will come running to collect, and if those bastards are as good as the rumors say, they’ll destroy the greedy pigs for us. We won’t even have to lift a finger against them! And finally, once those fools have been captured, we will hold a public execution. It will set the perfect example to anyone who even thinks of choosing that atrocious life of piracy.”

The room was filled with deafening approval for the Marquis’s strategy. He angled his chin upwards in self-satisfaction.
Seokjin sat in silence as the men around him jumped up to begin putting the plan into motion. They would have to enact new anti-piracy laws, arrange for negotiations with the Eastern Sea’s surrounding nations, and of course set an appropriate bounty for the Bangtan pirates.

Now, Seokjin definitely agreed with much of what the Marquis had said—eliminating the source of the issue was the best move to make in this situation. However, he was not too fond of how these old noblemen were blinded by their own hubris. He couldn’t help but feel like there was a slippery slope somewhere within the Marquis’s proposition.

The meeting finally came to an end with Seokjin having little to say in the matter—the stiffs had even turned their noses up at him.

“Man, those geezers sure do get excited over the wrong things,” Ken groaned, shaking his head. “It’s almost scary considering that they’ve been in charge here for eons.”

Seokjin stretched his arms out in front of him and yawned. “Well, what can you do when our country is ruled by the pretentious upper-class? You’re the crown prince and even you can’t manage to get a single word in.”

The pair had lingered and were the only ones left in the meeting room. They were just about to get up to leave when a castle aide popped into the room.

“Good afternoon, Your Highness.” The aide directed his attention towards Seokjin, bowing his head slightly. “Your Lordship. The horses have been prepared for you, sir.”

Seokjin tilted his head. “What horses?”

“The horses that will take you to the harbor, sir.”

“And why would I need to go to the harbor?”

The aide looked genuinely puzzled. “My apologies, sir, but I was told that you had volunteered to take care of the harbor’s monthly inspection today.”

“What? This is my first time hearing about this. Who told you that?”

“Um...Your Lordship’s brother, sir.”

Oh. Now that made perfect sense. It was René again. His jackass stepbrother was dead-set on making his life a total shit show.

Ken spoke up. “Ugh. What a prick!”

Even though René was also his cousin, the prince had absolutely no love for that devil. He turned to the aide and asked him to find someone else to do the inspection.

Seokjin put a hand up to stop him. “It’s fine, Your Highness. I can do it.”

“But—“

“No, it would take way too long to find someone else available to go, especially in the middle of all this chaos. Meanwhile the dock workers are already expecting someone to show up soon. I might as well just go and get it over with.”

The prince pursed his lips in disapproval of Seokjin’s self-sacrifice. He was about to say something when his eyes caught sight of Seokjin fiddling with his gold ring.
Ken was well aware of his cousin’s discrete habit. The poor man would instinctively touch his ring every time he felt pressured to fulfill his patrimonial duties—as if reminding himself that it was obligatory.

With a shake of his head, Ken decided to yield to Seokjin’s insistence. “Okay, fine. Just watch yourself okay? There are plenty of freaks out there and I don’t want you getting into any trouble.”

“Relax. I’ll take Cohen with me so don’t worry about it.” Seokjin gave the man a gentle smile. “I’ll get it done quickly, okay?”

❦❦❦

The sun was already beginning to set as Seokjin and Cohen made their way through the last few inspections. It would be dark soon and Seokjin was eager to get back to the castle.

He was relieved as they were finally moving on to the final pier. At long last he would soon be able to curl up in his warm bed and sleep the day’s grievances away.

As they approached the last pier, Seokjin noticed that pretty much all of the workers had returned home, leaving the dimly lit harbor vacant. It was no matter though. Before long, he would also be following suit.

“Excuse me! Are you from the council?”

Seokjin was startled by the gruff voice. He turned to see a burly man who seemed to have appeared out of thin air.

“Ah, yes. We just need to quickly verify that your landing is up to code and we’ll be out of your hair.” Seokjin signaled for Cohen.

“Excuse me, sir, can I please have your name? It’s necessary for the paperwork.” Cohen held a pen to his clipboard.

The burly man put on a friendly smile. “My name is Leroy Weaver.”

Cohen scribbled his name down on a sheet of paper. “Thank you, Mr. Weaver. Now we would like to inspect all vessels that are currently docked at this landing.”

Weaver’s lips stretched further. “Of course. Right this way.” There was something unsettling about his expression.

“What a creep.” Seokjin couldn’t wait to hightail it out of there.

They were led to a small boat tied to the landing with a thick rope. The inside of the boat was concealed by a sheet of ivory-colored canvas. “Shall I remove the cover for you?” He turned to look at Seokjin.

“Um?” He felt really gross under that sickening gaze. “Yes...please.”

Now Weaver was outright grinning at him. A chill ran down his spine. Before he could even take a step back to distance himself from the bizarre man, Weaver was already yanking the cover off the boat.

Seokjin’s eyes widened. There was nothing in the small boat other than two dangerous-looking men. They had been hiding under the covers, waiting to ambush him.
"Pirates!?"

"My Lord!"

Seokjin felt strong hands latch on to him as they pulled him, face first, into the boat. He tried to get up but a hand gripped his neck, holding him down against the boat’s damp floor.

"Stop! Release him!"

The sound of Cohen’s panicked voice filled the empty harbor. Seokjin wanted to cry as he struggled against his captors.

"Oh, shut up." Weaver’s voice was impassive yet dreadful.

"What do you think you’re-!?”

Cohen’s outcry was cut off by the unmistakable, ear-splitting bang of a single gunshot that was quickly followed by the sound of something plunging into water.

In that instant, Seokjin’s heart dropped. He felt absolutely sick to his stomach. He started screaming and flailing his whole body, trying to wrench himself out of the tight hold.

As a result of his meaningless struggle, he was slammed into the gunwale of the boat. Harsh fingers dug into Seokjin’s soft skin—most definitely leaving deep, dark bruises behind. Seokjin could feel his vision fading. Loud voices echoed throughout his eardrums as the sway of the small boat drew him into complete darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Oh jeez, I did not mean for this one chapter to be so freaking long. Y’all, mah b..
I’m trying to not be too embarrassed about my writing haha, please don’t be mean to mee I stg the boys are in the next chapter! No cap, on god. ●(╥﹏╥)●

Again, I’m sorry for the slow start. With the plot points that I have planned out, having a long introduction was kind of unavoidable. I will say though, that next chapter is far more interesting (at least I think it is) so really I hope you decide to continue reading!

(Also, damn, writing is hard. Eek.)
As promised, the boys are here! \(^{(* whispers *)}/

Sorry for any mistakes! Hope my writing’s not too terrible

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Splash**

Seokjin jerked awake; the sting of cold water lingered on his skin. He shivered at the sight of a tall, bristly man hovering over him.

“Time to get up, sleeping beauty.”

Forced into a sitting position, Seokjin’s head swirled as he tried to grasp his current situation: a dark room, wooden floor boards, the musty smell of brine. He squeezed his eyes shut as a wave of nausea hit him. It felt like his body was swaying in the ocean.

A ship.

The tall man crouched down, directing his nasty gaze at the drenched man before him.

In response, Seokjin pointed his chin up at the man with an unfocused glare—a dizzying attempt at a confident demeanor.

“Who the hell are you?” Unfortunately, his voice completely betrayed him, allowing only a feeble groan to pass through his dry throat.

Privy to the fear and unease that Seokjin had tried to mask, the man’s lips curled into a grubby smirk.

“Oh, my apologies, Your Lordship. It was rude of me to stare without even introducing myself.” He was definitely mocking him. “I was just worried since you’ve been asleep for two days now.”

**Two days!?**

“I’m the captain of this here ship.” The man stood up, chuckling darkly as he bared his discolored teeth. “Welcome to the Pied Piper.”

Seokjin’s eyes widened. The Pied Piper? As in the Bangtan Boys’ Pied Piper? Seriously, how could his luck be *this* bad?

“Why am I...?”

The question tailed off as Seokjin spotted a familiar figure in the shadows, leaning against a dingy wall. With squinted eyes, he racked his befuddled mind trying to remember who this other man was.

“It’s you!” he said, letting out a short gasp of recognition.

It was Weaver who stood there hauntingly, looking at Seokjin with sheer boredom on his face.
Suddenly, the horrifying memories from the harbor rushed into his head.

“Cohen...” This time, only a whisper could escape from his quivering lips. He was on the verge of tears.

“Huh? Who’s that?” The captain tilted his head at him.

“Oh, that guy?” Weaver stepped out of obscurity to chime in, taking slight interest in the inadvertent change of topic. “Man, he was so loud and annoying!”

He looked Seokjin dead in the eye, shrugging his meaty shoulders. “Had to shut him up. Couldn’t just leave a witness behind.”

“Fucking bastard!” With blood boiling hot in his veins, Seokjin vehemently spat his rage at the despicable man. How dare he treat his dear friend like a piece of trash.

Delighted by the angry outburst, the smug-faced Weaver cackled jeeringly. His reaction infuriated Seokjin even more but before he could say or do anything further, a sharp pain spread across his cheek. The captain had slapped him—hard.

“Now now, pretty boy. You better watch that little mouth of yours. You’ve got no power here on my ship.”

Shocked into silence, Seokjin bit down on his trembling lower lip. It was getting harder to hold in his tears.

He flinched as the captain placed a chapped hand on the reddened cheek.

“Better. Now I’m sure a smart boy like yourself can guess why you’re here, right? Come on! Take a guess!” The captain seemed a little bit too excited about this.

“Um, I...” Seokjin’s eyes darted around, catching sight of a few other pirates occupying the room. They were all watching him with belittling scrutiny. With quickened breath, he tried to respond. “...I’m guessing you want money?”

The captain was definitely amused by Seokjin’s trepidation—his eyes were gleaming.

“Right! You’re our big payday and I’m sure the royal family will pay top dollar to get you back. Lucky you!” His voice dropped into a sinister tone. “Time for your reward, pretty.”

He grabbed Seokjin by the wrist and yanked him to his feet, dragging him to a table in the middle of the room. Still feeling very seasick, Seokjin stumbled over his feet and flopped his upper body onto the table for stability. The captain held Seokjin’s left wrist down against the discolored wooden surface as one of the other pirates handed something to him.

It was a disgusting looking cleaver, its worn out blade was rusted and stained with dried blood. Seokjin sucked in an alarmed breath. “W-What are you doing!?”

“I’m holding you for ransom, so obviously I gotta send your folks proof of life,” said the captain matter-of-factly.

Desperate and terrified, Seokjin’s head spun as he tried to reason with the demented pirate.

“Wait! My ring! Why don’t you just send them my ring? It has my family’s crest on it, so they’ll definitely recognize that it’s me!”
Contemplating the sudden suggestion, the captain tapped the instrument’s blunt edge to his chin. A terrifying grin spread across his face as he pointed his cleaver at the panicked Seokjin.

“Ohh, good idea! I’ll send the ring along with your severed finger so they’ll be doubly sure that it’s you!”

He raised the cleaver up, looking much too eager to hack through the pale flesh and bone.

“No! No please wait!”

The tears Seokjin had been holding finally fell, gliding fervently down his baby doll cheeks. He became erratic, trying to pry his hand away from the cast-iron hold.

“Stop struggling or I’ll chop your whole hand off instead.”

The captain’s merciless warning made Seokjin’s blood run cold. He began to weep as his body shook relentlessly.

Seokjin shut his tearful eyes as the cleaver went back up into the air, ready to chop down through his finger. Taking ragged breaths between sobs, he braced himself for the excruciating pain.

Suddenly the ship lurched causing Seokjin to look up, tears still hot and sticky on his face. If it weren’t for the captain’s heavy grasp on him, he most definitely would have tumbled to the floor.

“What the hell was that!?” said the captain looking around at his equally confused subordinates.

As soon as he spoke, loud noises and grunts resounded from the other side of the door. Seokjin saw the captain’s eyes widen.

He tightened his grip on the thin wrist and gestured to Weaver who was completely unbothered by the strange disturbance. “Go check what’s going on outside.”

Weaver looked annoyed as he walked casually to the door. “It’s probably just our crew having one of those drunken brawls again.” With a scoff, he reached for the doorknob heedlessly. “I’ll go tell those dumbasses to shut the fuck-”

Bang!

The entire room was stunned into silence as Weaver dropped to the floor, a bullet hole still sizzling through the door right where his forehead used to be. Before anyone could react, the beginnings of a heated argument could be heard from right outside.

“Why the fuck did you do that!?”

“How? The fuck are you complaining about now?”

With a loud crack, the door flew off its hinges. There stood three attractive young men with unusually clean appearances. Sailors were notorious for having poor hygiene and these guys certainly did not fit that mold. They were all very well-dressed, sporting neat clothing and ritzy jewelry.

“W-Who the fuck are you!?” A dirty cleaver was pointed at the men in the doorway.

Distracted by these intruders, the captain unknowingly let go of Seokjin’s bruised wrist. Seeing that as an opportunity to distance himself from the situation, Seokjin backed away until he was crouched down in the corner of the room—partly concealed by some wooden barrels.
I should probably hide this, he thought as he slipped the ring off of his finger. He put it into his mouth and tucked it underneath his tongue. He’d rather not swallow it if he didn’t have to.

Without even acknowledging the startled occupants of the room, the handsome men continued their crude bickering.

The man with red hair glared at his shorter companion. “I’m talking about you recklessly shooting that damn pistol of yours through the fucking door!”

The short man rolled his eyes. “What the hell did you expect me to do? This fucker’s loud ass voice was so goddamn annoying, so I shot him! It’s not like it was hard to do. Anyone could’ve heard his gorilla feet stomping around from a mile away.” He looked down at Weaver’s lifeless body and laughed. “Besides, my aim was fucking perfect! Capped him right through his massive forehead!”

The short man seemed to find it awfully humorous that he just murdered someone in cold blood—through a freaking door, no less. Normally, Seokjin would’ve been absolutely horrified by this, but he couldn’t help but feel satisfied that Weaver got what he deserved.

“HEY! Who the hell do you think you are!?” The captain was fuming from being blatantly ignored.

The red-haired man turned to glare at the captain. “Shut your ugly ass up. We’re in the middle of something.”

“How dare you speak to me like that! Do you know who I am!?” The captain looked just about ready to explode. “You better show me some damn respect because you’re in the presence of the one and only captain of the Pied Piper!”

He squared his shoulders at the three men who merely blinked in response.

With a loud snort, the short man broke the brief silence in the room. He howled with laughter as the red-haired man smirked, amused by the captain’s declaration.

The third man, who had been silent this whole time, maintained an expressionless face.

Taken aback by their reactions, the captain quickly became flustered. “Why are you laughing!?” He had probably expected them to weep in fear upon hearing his identity.

Trying to contain himself, the short man wiped a shallow tear from his face. “You? Haha! Holy shit! You’re the captain of the Pied Piper? Man, that’s fucking hilarious!”

The red head snickered at the captain’s angered expression. “Aw, come on. Don’t be mad...,” he said as he bit back his laughter, “...Captain.”

As soon as the word left his mouth, he immediately joined the shorter man in their mockery of the captain’s ego—cracking up from the simple taunt.

With a red face, the captain swiveled his head around at his subordinates. “What are you all just standing there for!? Kill them!”

The other crewmen in the room were startled into action. While pulling weapons from their belts, they scrambled towards the three men who didn’t look the least bit worried about it.

Seokjin ducked to the floor as gunshots and clashing metal permeated the room. The sounds quickly dissipated into screams and groans of pain as he peeked an eye open.
The only men left standing amongst the bloodied mess of unmoving bodies were the three strangers and the trembling captain.

The intruders, save for the silent one, chuckled at the captain’s cowardly form. With a smirk, the red-haired man took a threatening step forward. “So? What now, Cap?”

The captain dropped the cleaver and pulled his pistol out, aiming it at the red head’s looming figure. His voice was pathetically high-pitched as he screamed at the intimidating man. “Stay back! If you know what’s good for you!”

There was an odd smile on the red head’s face as he halted near the wooden table from earlier. “Ohh, because you’re the captain of the Pied Piper, right?”

Something was totally off about his expression: the corners of his eyes were crinkled, smooth lips were still curled, and white teeth were flashing brightly. It had everything a typical smile was supposed to have, and yet this one conveyed absolutely no happiness or warmth. Rather, his heart-shaped grin seemed to be dangerously laced with bad intentions—like a silent warning to those that face it.

With venom dripping off his perfectly-aligned teeth, the red-haired man spoke pointedly. “Ya know, that’s real funny. Because last time I checked our ‘one and only’ captain wasn’t an ugly fucker like you.”

“Wha-? What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Beads of sweat had formed on the captain’s tanned forehead. He looked agitated.

A frown quickly replaced the shorter man’s amused state as he responded with an impatient scoff. “It means that we’re the real deal and your dumb ass is just a fake.”

The so-called captain’s mouth dropped at the revelation. Outright fear flashed on his clammy face, turning it into a shiny beacon of regret.

A loud explosion from outside sent the ship careening in the water, pulling the red head’s attention away for a brief moment. "Damn, already?"

The unhinged captain took that opening to fire his gun. Unfortunately for him, there was another explosion as he pulled the trigger, causing his aim to falter.

“Shit!” With a hand clutching his bleeding shoulder, the red head glowered. He was seriously pissed, looking like a red-eyed bull ready to charge. “You fucker!”

Absolutely horrified by his total failure, the captain’s trembling legs were frozen into place. The red head rushed forward and disarmed the petrified man, pointing the pistol in his face.

“Any last words bitch.”

“Oh god.”

Four pairs of eyes shifted their attention to Seokjin’s disheveled figure crouched down in the dimly lit corner. Fuck. He didn’t mean to say that out loud.

The short man looked Seokjin up and down. “Hm? What’s a pretty face doing on a tasteless ship like this?”

Seokjin wanted to punch himself for being so stupid. He really just screwed himself over. Again.
A shiver ran down his spine, interrupting his self-chastising. He peeked up at the silent man who looked hard at him. The icy gaze felt like it could rip Seokjin open and see right into his miserable soul.

“What’s with that look?” The short man had glanced over, and was now studying his companion’s expressionless face.

With deep-set eyes still trained on Seokjin, the silent man slowly raised a finger up to rest against his lips.

After a few seconds of silent speculation, a look of newfound interest flickered across the short man’s face. “Oh?”

He approached Seokjin curiously—his confident gait was entrancing and, dare he say, incredibly alluring.

Seokjin held his breath as the man crouched down, leaning in close to his face. As embarrassing as it was, Seokjin could feel his cheeks heating up at the proximity.

Extravagant rings were pressed against delicate flesh as the short man grabbed Seokjin’s chin firmly between his finger and his thumb.

“My friend just told me that you’re hiding something in that lovely mouth of yours. How about you show it to me, hm?”

Seokjin’s jaw tightened.

First of all, how the absolute fuck did that quiet guy even know about that? Seokjin could’ve sworn he hid his ring while everyone was distracted.

And secondly, what was up with that weird telepathic bullshit? The guy didn’t even say anything! All he did was subtly hint to his mouth with a finger, and yet somehow this man knew what he meant by it? Who the fuck communicates like that?

The red head sighed, pistol still aimed at the wannabe captain. “Ugh. This freak show again?”

Ignoring the other’s comment, the short man’s eyes zeroed in on Seokjin’s lips. He dropped his ring-laden hand from the pale face—holding it out in front of the nervous man’s mouth with his palm facing up. “So, are you gonna spit it out for me?”

Seokjin’s lips trembled. Maybe he should just swallow his ring now.

“Aw fuck. Don’t tell me you swallowed it?”

The short man frowned, releasing an exasperated breath.

“Goddamnit. Now I gotta cut you open and get my hands dirty. These rings are expensive, you know,” he grumbled as he ran his hand through his smooth, caramel locks.

With wide eyes, Seokjin watched as the man reached towards his belt. One look at the dagger hanging forebodingly off his hip was enough to set Seokjin’s pulse racing.

Scratch that. He definitely should NOT swallow his ring.

The man’s short fingers lifted up the flap covering the sheathed dagger. But before he could grip the handle, Seokjin let out a tentative whimper. Freezing at the sound, the short man looked up to see the
other reluctantly open his mouth.

With an extremely pleased look, he reached his hand between the parted lips. Seokjin unintentionally moaned at the sensation of rough fingers sliding under his tongue.

Feeling intense embarrassment and shame, he turned a dark shade of pink as the the gold ring was pulled from his mouth. The short man’s fingers were now wet with saliva as he looked at Seokjin—a satisfied smirk plastered across his gorgeous face.

“What’s this?” he asked, holding up the ring.

“It’s a ring. Obviously.” Seokjin managed a snappy tone, maintaining eye contact with the man.

Surprisingly, the snarky response earned him a light chuckle rather than a slap to the face.

“Oh, really? And what’s so special about this ring that you had to hide it under that sensitive tongue of yours?”

Remembering his momentary loss of self-control, Seokjin turned an even darker shade. This must be karma for pretending to be straight all these years. Now he’s all backed up sexually, and a trio of super hot pirates showing up out of the blue was certainly not helping his situation in the slightest.

Before he could think of a response, the ship’s wooden surfaces groaned loudly to the sway of the ocean.

“Shit, we better get going or the others are gonna nag us again.” Grabbing Seokjin by the arm, the short man stood up with a grunt. “Guess I’ll just take you with me for now.”

He turned to the red head as he stepped over the stiff bodies littering the floor, Seokjin’s wobbling figure in tow. “Now hurry up and kill the guy so we can go.”

The pistol-wielding man responded with an annoyed side glance before refocusing his attention on the pitiful captain. “Damn. Just give me a minute, okay?”

“No please! Spare me!”

“Ha! And why the hell should I do that? You fucking shot me.”

The captain was putting on a pathetic show, practically groveling at the man’s feet. “I beg you! Please have mercy on me!”

As if he were actually considering it, the red head hummed at the thought of letting the foolish man live.

“Just fucking shoot him already!” The short man, who was now standing impatiently in the doorway with Seokjin and the quiet guy, stomped his foot at the two individuals left in the room.

Much to the captain’s relief, the red-haired man seemed to disregard his friend’s order by lowering the pistol.

“Allright since I’m such a nice person, I won’t kill you.”

*Oh dear...* That heart-shaped smile was back.

Feeling more relaxed, the captain dropped his strained shoulders and breathed out a sigh.
Bang!

The captain was now screaming in pain. In an instant, the red head had aimed the pistol back up at the man and shot him directly in the shoulder. The wound perfectly mirrored the one that the red head had received earlier.

Stunned, the captain could only look up in bewilderment.

With a gratuitous laugh, the red-haired man tossed the gun to the floor and shrugged. “I said that I wouldn’t kill you. Never said I wouldn’t shoot you. I mean, it’s only fair. An eye for an eye, right?”

Unable to speak, the captain simply stood there with wide eyes.

The heart-shaped smile disappeared. Looking incredibly annoyed at the lack of a response, the man spoke with a lot more bite to his voice. “Right?”

“Y-yes! Right!”

The red head looked satisfied with this and dropped his harsh tone. “Now be a good dog and sit here quietly while we leave. Okay?”

Frantically nodding his head, the captain dropped down to his knees as the menace turned away.

Seokjin took a look at the defeated man bleeding on the floor as the red head made his way towards them. He walked past the group through the threshold and down what looked to be a dark hall way.

It was baffling. Out of nowhere, these three guys showed up and somehow managed to subdue an entire roomful of formidable pirates without even batting an eye.

“That wasn’t very nice of you,” the short man said as he followed the red head out with narrowed eyes.

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“You didn’t kill him.”

With his trademark smile, he turned to the shorter man quizzically. “He begged me to let him live. How could I say no to that? Isn’t that the nice thing to do?”

The short man scoffed. “How’s getting the guy’s hopes up and leavin’ him to drown considered ‘nice’? You know damn well that we’re sinking this ship before we leave.”

*Was that what the explosions were for? The damn ship is sinking?* Seokjin wanted to puke.

Near the hatchway leading to the main deck, the red-haired man shrugged with a dimpled grin aimed at his companions. “Haha! Damn, must’ve slipped my mind. Good thing I left the pistol there, huh?”

He laughed even harder as he climbed through the opening, feeling very pleased with himself.

*A freaking sadist*, Seokjin thought as the short man forced him up onto the deck.

“What the hell took you so long?” A gruff voice called out to them as they made their way across the deck.

It belonged to another short man with blonde hair and a grumpy face. His eyebrows knitted together as he noticed Seokjin’s unfamiliar figure amongst the three pirates. “What is that?”
Seokjin frowned at the blonde man. That? Apparently he wasn’t even considered a person anymore.

There were two other men standing near the blonde. They were both much taller, probably around Seokjin’s height. One had silver hair and sharp eyes and the other had chestnut-colored hair and large doe eyes.

Behind them was another ship anchored right next to the one they were standing on. Seokjin was guessing that was probably the real Pied Piper.

“Hey Captain, what is this?” Ignoring the blonde’s question, the short man tossed the gold ring he had been holding to the silver-haired man who caught it effortlessly.

The man examined the ring for a few seconds before looking up with a raised eyebrow. “Where the hell did you get this?”

“Fished it out of this guy's mouth,” he said, gesturing to Seokjin with a slack finger.

Subtle disgust flashed on the man’s face as he glanced down at the ring in his hand.

Seokjin really wanted to just crawl into a hole and die already.

With a sigh, the man pocketed the ring and jumped up onto the long plank of wood that was laid out between the two ships, providing access to the Pied Piper. “Whatever. We’ll talk about this later. Let’s hurry up and get off before we end up at the bottom of the sea.”

The ship was definitely sinking by now as Seokjin was beginning to lose his balance on the slippery deck.

He was propelled forward by the short man who still had a hold on his sore arm. “What do I do with him?”

With piercing eyes, the silver-haired man directed his attention to Seokjin. A chilling smile appeared on his dimpled face, making the wide-eyed man shiver. “Take him onboard. I’ll decide what to do with him later.”

And with that being said, Seokjin was forcefully hauled up onto the plank as the other pirates were already crossing over to their ship’s main deck. He bit his lower lip apprehensively, fearful of what they would do to him once he was on that ship.

The Bangtan Boys were even more terrifying than Seokjin had anticipated. From one bad situation right into another—he really had the worst of luck.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked this chapter! (cuz I certainly did)

Yo, this was kinda hard to write because most of the characters in this chapter were left unnamed.

Can you tell who's who? (You probably can lol)
The end was kinda rushed, sorryyy. On the bright side, writing a bunch of curse words into the dialogue was incredibly cathartic. A+

(Also, idk why I like these text emojis so much. Such a mood.)
Kettle of Fish

Chapter Summary

Strangers on a ship.

Chapter Notes

I'm finally back! Thank you for the nice comments and kudos :) It made me really happy that y'all liked it and are interested in this au too. I'm really excited to continue writing this!

And sorry for the 2 month wait. It was unintentional, but maybe this ~10k chapter makes up for it? It was a huge challenge to write, so go easy on me please lol

**Content Warning: This chapter contains a bit of light gore.** You should be able to see it coming. Nothing scary, just a little gross. But if you're squeamish and it bothers you, DM on twt @jinniesforehead and I'll summarize that part for you, minus the gore of course. I know not everybody likes gore and I don't want to ruin this fanfic for anyone just because I like it, so please lmk.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cold sweat crepted over Seokjin’s skin as his fatigued legs trembled beneath him, wobbling with the ocean’s sinuous movements. His tongue skimmed over his once-immaculate lips, which were pale and cracked from the dry ocean air; no longer smooth to the touch.

The short man’s fingers had become a relentless ligature around Seokjin’s arm, preventing him from sitting no matter how badly he wanted to.

This day had become a total nightmare and, oh, how he wished he could escape from it—to return to the warm embrace of his own bed. But there was no time for rest as his bleary eyes bounced back and forth between his new captors.

“How many times do I have to tell you idiots to stop messing around!?”

From the moment they had all set foot on the Pied Piper’s main deck, the peevish blonde had taken to berating the three pirates that brought Seokjin onboard.

“I wasn’t messing around,” the shortest of the trio argued, making an accusatory gesture to the red-haired man. “It’s all Hoseok’s fault for taking so damn long.”

“My fault!”

“Well no one asked you to play around with that shitty poser. So yeah, it’s your fucking fault!”
The man named Hoseok scoffed and leaned in. “Says the bitch who was too busy shoving his stubby fingers down some guy’s throat.”

Seokjin cringed at the mention of his recent obscenity. It would be really great if everyone could just forget about that.

“Hey, you wanna die?” Still tightly gripping onto Seokjin’s arm, the short man reached his other hand to the pistol holstered on his belt. “‘Cause I’ll fuckin-!”

“Stop fighting or I’ll put a bullet in both of you.”

The two paused at the sound of their captain’s authoritative voice. With a sharp click of his tongue, the short man backed off and slipped his hand into his pants pocket instead.

“Sure you wanna do that, Cap? This guy’s stupid ass already got himself shot.” He smirked, giving a side-eye to his wounded companion. “One more and he might actually drop dead this time.”

The silver-haired captain turned his attention over to the red head, scanning him with acute vision. His eyes landed squarely on the man’s injured shoulder.

The bullet hole was almost entirely shrouded by the front of Hoseok’s loose-fitting shirt. Dark and sticky blood had seeped through the cotton fibers, camouflaging itself in the fabric’s black color.

With a pronounced sigh, the captain shook his head in exasperation.

“Why the hell didn’t you say anything?” said the blonde, having spotted the damage as well.

Looking thoroughly embittered by the short man’s betrayal, Hoseok rolled his eyes in an attempt to downplay the severity of his bullet wound. “It doesn’t even hurt. Stop making such a big deal out of it.”

A frown stretched across the captain’s stern features, ready to reprimand the red head. But before he could even open his mouth, he was interrupted by a neutral-sounding voice.

“Hey, we should hurry up and go before someone comes snooping around.” The doe-eyed boy nodded to the neighboring ship.

Only partially submerged, its hull had begun its slow descent beyond the water’s surface, tilting away to expose a small portion of its barnacled bottom.

The ship was painted in flashy colors; bright reds and golds were much too striking against the gentle blue that surrounded it. Etched along its side, in curly letters, was a shameless display of undeserved notability—Pied Piper.

The captain pinched the bridge of his nose and groaned. Indeed, they looked suspicious idling around near the sinking vessel; its ostentatious appearance would definitely attract the unwanted attention of passing ships.

Seokjin regarded the doe-eyed boy, somewhat amazed by his unexpected prudence. Going by the spaced out look he had been sporting, one could assume that he was tuned out of the conversation.

As if calculating the best course of action, the captain eyed each individual with careful scrutiny. He released a dragged out breath, appearing inconvenienced by the continuous slew of issues.

“Jungkook, go gather some men and prepare the sails. Yoongi, come with me.”
The doe-eyed boy walked away, leaving the silver-haired man to redirect his steeled gaze at the remaining pirates.

“And you three.” He spoke with a firm tone, edged with slight frustration. “This isn’t over, so don’t even think about wandering off somewhere. Stay here and keep an eye on...him.” The man skimmed over Seokjin’s worn figure before heading towards the stairs leading up to the quarterdeck where the helm was located.

“And put some pressure on that goddamn wound you dumbass,” said Yoongi as he eyed Hoseok’s bleeding shoulder. He passed by the trio to follow the captain, but not before casting a hostile glare in Seokjin’s direction.

Seokjin shivered. It was obvious that the blonde was not too keen on having a random stranger onboard.

Without warning, the short man released Seokjin’s arm in a brusque manner, making it quite apparent that he had not been supporting his own weight.

In a feeble effort to stop himself from collapsing to the floor, he reached out to grab something. He flung his arms along the edge of the gunwale with his head hanging loosely over the billowing waves below.

“Great. You just had to open that big mouth of yours.”

Hoseok’s contentious voice rang in Seokjin’s ears as his head started spinning. The seasickness was hitting him again at full force.

“How ‘bout you stop running your big mouth and do what Yoongi told you to do.”

Feeling an uneasiness in the pit of his stomach, Seokjin attempted to relieve his nausea by taking deep breaths.

“Are you deaf? I said it’s not a big deal.”

The dizzying waves below made his eyes lose focus, and his head was already pounding from the two men’s incessant bickering.

“Okay fine. Go ahead and bleed to death, idiot.”

He glanced up; his glazed eyes were met with the sight of the Pied Piper’s garish imitation, only about halfway submerged in the abysmal water. The ocean was slow to swallow the gaudy thing up.

“Oh you’d love that, wouldn’t you?”

He felt something bubble up from his stomach into his chest. Remembering the events that took place on the sinking ship—the pungent smell of blood and the grisly sight of dead eyes among piles of mangled flesh left on the floor—Seokjin couldn’t hold it in anymore. He threw up into the sea.

“Ugh gross.” The short man’s face creased with disgust.

The ocean breeze cooled the sweat that had formed on the back of Seokjin’s neck. He spat out the remnants of his vomit, a subtle burning sensation still hanging in the back of his throat.

At least he felt a little bit better. He wiped his mouth and turned back around, stopping at the sight of Hoseok’s shoulder.
The wound was still bleeding from where the bullet had pierced him and, as nonchalant as he was, it’s a wonder that the man could act as if he wasn’t in need of immediate medical attention.

“Um…are you sure you want to leave it like that?”

The red-haired man raised an eyebrow. “What’s it to you?”

Running a hand through his damp hair, Seokjin released a heavy breath. This man was far too stubborn for his own good.

“You know, you shouldn’t take gunshot wounds lightly. Even if it’s a minor injury, it could still kill you without the proper treatment.”

The short man whistled in amusement. “Smart. Snow White over here has a good point.”

Upon hearing the impromptu nickname, Seokjin whipped his head around to protest but was interrupted by Hoseok’s curtness.

“Fine. Since you know so much about this shit, hurry up and do something about it.”

He was seriously ordering him around now? What kind of attitude was that? Seokjin hesitated for a moment before reaching over to tear the man’s bloodied sleeve off.

“Hey, my shirt!”

“What about it? It was already ruined,” Seokjin quipped back as he tied the black fabric around the man’s shoulder, temporarily sealing off the bullet hole.

Hoseok narrowed his eyes, silent, but clearly not happy with the man’s small show of brazenness.

The short man chuckled. “What a moody princess.”

“Don’t call me that!”

“Why not? It suits you.” Tilting his head forward, the short man’s lips curled into a charming smile. “A pretty princess.”

A mixture of frustration and embarrassment pooled into Seokjin’s face and much to his displeasure, the shorter man seemed to really enjoy messing with him.

“God Jimin. Stop flirting.”

The short man’s smile fell as he turned, managing to catch sight of Hoseok rolling his eyes at him.

With gritted teeth, he placed his hand over the man’s injured shoulder and squeezed. “Maybe you should worry ‘bout your own shit.”

Hissing in pain, Hoseok slapped the offender’s hand away.

Jimin’s face scrunched up, ever so slightly. “Not a big deal, my ass. Wait ’til Namjoon hears about this.”

“Fucking snitch.”

“What was that!”
The pirates were once again back to their bickering. Wanting to avoid the resurrection of his pulverizing headache, Seokjin made an attempt to tune their voices out, but was startled by a stony expression.

He had unintentionally made eye contact with the silent man who easily went unnoticed behind his noisy companions.

Seokjin twiddled his thumbs, blinking rapidly. He felt skittish under the thorny gaze, and although the man was certainly handsome—his dark brown mullet framing the tanned skin of his beautifully carved face—he was starting to give Seokjin the creeps.

“Can you please stop staring at me like that?”

Seokjin awaited an answer, but the man remained silent. Did he not hear him?

“Um…hello?” Again, nothing.

The silence was jarring; it had Seokjin caged in the unshakeable scrutiny of the pirate’s prodding eyes—ice cold needles dragged across his skin, scratching away at what little courage he had left in his delicate pigeon-heart.

A sudden laugh resounded from Jimin as he turned away from Hoseok, both seeming to have lost interest in their pointless argument.

“Don’t bother, princess. Taehyung’s not gonna talk to you.”

Seokjin forced his eyebrows together, frowning at the shorter man. “And why is that?”

“I dunno?” There was a smugness to Jimin’s voice as he placed a hand on his own hip, shifting his weight to one side. “Maybe because he doesn’t want to?”

Seokjin’s eyes floated back towards the statue of a man. Neither confirming nor denying the short man’s statement, Taehyung’s face remained static and void of even the tiniest bit of recognizable emotion.

So...an absolute flirt with a temper, a self-negligent sadist, and now an impassive guy that refused to talk to him. Just great. These men were quite peculiar flaunting their quirky—rather unpleasant—tendencies, but they were still dangerous pirates and Seokjin hadn’t the slightest idea of what was to come.

Nothing good, that’s for sure.

❦❦❦

The afternoon sun filtered in through the crosshatch windows along the back wall with its feverish spotlight centered on Seokjin’s kneeling figure. Six sets of hardened eyes were fixated on him as his knees sunk into the elegant rococo rug he had been forced down upon.

They had moved to some sort of office on the quarterdeck, located at the stern-end of the ship; its large windows showcased the glittering sea that the Pied Piper sailed over. A clock was ticking from somewhere within the ornate office space, every second passing by to remind him of his impending doom.

Fenced in by the pirates’ looming presence, Seokjin kept his head down as he watched himself wipe his sweaty palms on his lap. Despite the number of chairs in the room—six surrounding a wooden
table to his left, one behind the desk in front of him, and a loveseat next to the glass door bookcase in the back right corner—the men remained standing, making Seokjin feel even smaller.

At their mercy, he was nothing more than a mouse trapped between the jaws of an unpredictable lion.

“So…”

Jumping at the sudden voice, Seokjin peered up through his lashes at the intimidating man before him.

Shadows inhabited the silver captain’s face, emphasizing his frightening aura as he leaned back against the wooden desk. The man flipped the gold ring up into the air like a coin, catching it in his rough hand before continuing. “How’d a rich guy like you end up on that hideous ship?”

Clutching at his pants, Seokjin responded with hesitation. “I’m…not rich.”

He’d rather not go through a repeat of what happened on that other ship—a situation he narrowly escaped from, and not even of his own accord.

The captain, who’s name was apparently Namjoon, lifted an eyebrow as he glanced at the ring in his hand. He crouched down in front of Seokjin and held the glistening gold piece up between them. The man’s eyes were narrowed and smoldering, burning holes right through Seokjin’s apprehensive form.

“Only nobles from Ethil wear stupid rings like this.” He tilted his hand to expose the crest etched into the gold. “So, what are you?”

Seokjin’s face was clouded with confusion, not quite understanding the question at first. It took a moment, but something clicked in Seokjin’s head.

He didn’t know.

The pirate captain had made no indication that he recognized the family crest, completely unaware of his captive’s royal status. Seokjin’s heart swelled a bit at the discovery. He gathered up some courage with the determination to make good use of this unexpected lifeline.

“I don’t know what you intend to do with me, but please understand that I have nothing to offer you. My family is noble in title only—no land, no money…” He licked his lips, slightly unsure of himself. “It would be pointless to keep me here, so save yourself the trouble and release me.”

Namjoon hummed in response. “Is that so? But you didn’t answer my first question. Why were you on that ship?”

“Oh, uhh…” Chewing his bottom lip, Seokjin fumbled a bit thinking up his next lie. He wasn’t very good at this. “It was...a mistake.”

“A mistake?”

“Y-yeah. Like a mix-up.” His confidence was beginning to wear thin; his words were barely trickling past his chapped lips. “I...work as house staff for a wealthy marquis and, um, those pirates...they must have mistaken me for his son or something…”

The captain rubbed his chin as he processed Seokjin’s story. “Are you lying to me?”
“O-of course not!” By this point, Seokjin’s hands were even sweatier as he drummed his fingers on his thighs.

He knew he was skating on thin ice, teetering along the edge of his own mortality. There was no going back. His next words would either set him free or put the final nail in his coffin.

“If I were actually rich, don’t you think I would have tried to buy my way out of here from the start? Honestly, who in their right mind would lie about being broke? You’re pirates.”

Namjoon stared at him, eyebrows raised slightly.

Praying for a miracle, Seokjin held his breath as he awaited the captain’s verdict. The tension was amplified tenfold by the ticking of the clock and the volatile beating of his own heart.

A short snicker escaped Namjoon’s lips as he stood up, returning to the desk; the wooden floor creaked eerily beneath his boots. “Okay. Makes sense.”

Seokjin allowed his stiff neck and shoulders to relax. “So, you’ll let me go?”

To his confusion, the question was met with laughter that permeated the room. Seokjin’s eyes pivoted, catching the amused looks that occupied the room.

“You’ve heard the rumors about us, right?” Namjoon offered a dimpled smile as he sat down in the velvet desk chair—the sun’s orange glow blazing like hellfire behind him.

“What?” Seokjin shot up to his feet. “You gain absolutely nothing from keeping me here!”

“I’m aware.”

“Then why!?”

Treacherous eyes shone on the captain’s face as he sloped forward, lazily resting his elbows on the wooden surface, his long fingers laced together beneath his chin. He sent Seokjin spiraling down from his outburst with a bone-chilling gaze; a voice dripping with disdain.

“I’m sure even a sheltered puppy like you can understand how unforgiving the sea can be. Full of imbeciles that only care about getting rich. Jumping for gold and jewels like dogs to a bone.” He paused, focusing on Seokjin’s perturbed expression. “We’re different though.”

At a loss for words, Seokjin merely shook his head, wrinkling his brow.

Namjoon chuckled, smiling sweetly at him. “You’ve heard the rumors about us, right?”

Seokjin’s stomach lurched. Of course. Out of everything he had heard regarding the Bangtan Boys, he had forgotten the most important detail: if you see them, you die.

And not only had Seokjin seen their faces, he also knew their names.

“Don’t worry. I know none of this is your fault, so I’ll make sure it’s quick and painless.”

And that was supposed to make it better? His whole life was just one long string of bad luck, and now that was finally coming to an end. Fate had screwed Seokjin over once again, except this time would be the last.

Or so he thought.
Fortunately enough for him, the sudden interruption of a loud thud became his saving grace.

“Hoseok!” Yoongi was the first to react.

Seokjin turned to his right to see that the red-haired man was now seated on the floor; his face was much paler now.

“Fuck off! I’m fine.” After swatting away the blonde’s helping hands, Hoseok made a weak attempt to stand on his own, only to fail halfway up.

He was grumbling, hunched over on one knee, as Namjoon rushed to his side. “Are you dizzy?”

“No really.” Hoseok was trying to conceal his labored breath, but it was quite obvious how unwell he was feeling.

“You’re always like this.” Yoongi came around to Hoseok’s uninjured side, hooking the man’s arm around his own neck, anchoring it in place. With his other hand gripping onto Hoseok’s waist, Yoongi hauled the red head up onto his feet.

“Hey!”

“Shut up,” said Yoongi as he forced the man to sit on top of the desk. “Now let’s see it.”

Hoseok rolled his eyes, but allowed the man to remove the makeshift tourniquet. As soon as his shoulder was unwrapped, his shirt was pulled off of him to reveal a very messy wound; a hole that was charred on the edges, encircled by the debris of his ruptured flesh and blood.

Groaning at the sight, Yoongi turned to his captain. “What should we do?”

Namjoon was visibly concerned, inspecting the wound while nibbling on his thumb nail. “God, Hoseok.” He sighed, eyebrows squished together. “What the hell.”

“Relax.” Hoseok’s tone was dismissive as he tilted his chin down to look at the bullet hole. “The bastard used some shitty old gun. Just gotta pull the bitch out and I’ll be good.”

Seokjin squinted at the man’s shoulder. Sure enough, the injury itself was small and probably shallow—he couldn’t really tell from this distance—but the real problem here was the slow bleeding. This should be a nonissue, though; it was an easy fix for any moderately trained physician.

“Oh!” Jumping up enthusiastically, Jungkook reached out towards Hoseok’s shoulder. “Can I help?”

The red-haired man immediately jerked his shoulder away from the boy’s hands. “With what!?”

Jimin snorted. “What’re you gonna do? Stick your fingers inside his hole?”

Seokjin must be dreaming because there’s no way these guys are for real.

“Stop! You don’t even know what you’re doing.” Hoseok pushed Jungkook’s hands away and snapped his eyes in Seokjin’s direction. “I want him to do it.”

What? It wasn’t just blood the red-haired man was losing. Now he’s gone and lost his damn mind too.

Everyone’s attention shifted back to Seokjin. Oh no.

“Oh yeah,” Jimin began, ever so aloof. “He seemed to know what he was doin’ when he patched
Hoseok up earlier. Right, Taehyung?

With a silent nod from said man, the captain seemed to actually consider Hoseok’s absurd request. “Okay,” said Namjoon, coming to a decision, “fix him.”

“But I’m not even-!” Seokjin was floored. Just a second ago they were ready to send him straight into the afterlife, and now they were telling him to do something he had absolutely no business doing? “W-wait a second. Where’s your ship’s doctor?”

Disregarding Seokjin’s implied objection to the matter, Namjoon shrugged his shoulders. “He fell overboard last week.”

“Wha-?” As horrifying as that detail was, Seokjin shook his head and decided to not dwell on it. “Okay...then I don’t see why you can’t just go into town and find one.”

The captain’s strong jaw went rigid, snapping his words out like he’s finally run out of patience. “An entire day will have passed by the time we get to the nearest town.” He reached for his pistol—a clear threat. “Now get to it.”

God. Every time Seokjin thinks he’s about to die, Fate decides to shake things up on him which somehow manages to make the situation far worse than it already was.

Instead of taking his final breath, Seokjin was now being put on the spot, expected to somehow pop this bullet out of the man’s shoulder without killing him.

And just how exactly was he supposed to do that?

Sure, he may have grown up reading medical textbooks; and sure, he may have read a book or two detailing the practice of field medicine—but none of that would count for shit here in the real world.

Seokjin took a deep breath. “Fine. Where’s your suture kit?”

He was going to have to wing it.

Namjoon tilted his head, thinking for a moment. “I don’t know about that, but there’s some first aid stuff under the desk.”

Moving to the other side of the wooden furniture, Seokjin pushed the chair out of the way and crouched down. He quickly found what he was looking for, just as the man had said, promptly placing it on top of the desk. He opened the dusty, metal box and sifted through its disorganized contents.

Most of what he needed, or at least what he thought he needed, was in the box. He pulled out forceps, scissors, a scalpel, small tweezers, what looked to be a needle holder, and of course, a package of sutures. He was only missing two things: disinfectant and a pair of sterile gloves.

He could probably make do without the gloves as long as he’s careful, but the disinfectant was a must in this situation.

Scanning the room, Seokjin noticed an expensive-looking glass bottle left out on the wooden table. He rushed over to grab it and, sure enough, the label read:

**VODKA**

**40% ALC./VOL.**
After making his way back to the desk, he twisted the cap off and poured the vodka over his grimy hands, doing the same for the steel instruments. He didn’t really care that he was spilling it all over the floor.

“Aw, man. Not the good booze.”

Ignoring Jimin’s whining, Seokjin thrusted the bottle towards Hoseok. “Drink.”

The man seemed irritated, but did as he was told, snatching the bottle away and guzzling the crystal inebriant. With a clean piece of vodka-soaked gauze, Seokjin wiped the browned blood away from Hoseok’s skin, careful to not get any alcohol inside the bullet wound. He could see the hole more clearly as he took the scalpel into his stiff hand.

Seokjin wasn’t really the type to get squeamish, but now he was standing here with his hand hovering a mere few inches from the small patch of gore. It was enough to make his stomach turn knowing that he needed to remove the damaged tissue before he could do anything further.

He didn’t want to, but he had to. It’s always best to be thorough—especially with the threat of his own death hanging over his head.

Leaning in a bit, he could smell where the gunpowder had left its scorching mark in the man’s shoulder, like acrid smoke nipping lightly at his nose. He gulped, closing in on the wound with his shaky grip, holding his hand there in a brief moment of faint-heartedness.

 Fuck.

And with the unnerving weight of the pirates’ watchful eyes pressing down on his shoulders, Seokjin began to scrape.

He gagged a bit. The scalpel shaved away at the edges of the bullet hole, grating the tissue into a blackened sludge. The texture was just awful. It was burnt flesh and bodily fluids all mashed together into a dark, gelatinous mess scooped up by the blade of his tool.

An uncomfortable itch prickled across his glistening skin as he discarded the scalpel onto the desk; the biological goo splattered against the varnished wood. He had barely done anything and yet, he was already grimacing. But the worst has yet to come with the bullet still lodged in Hoseok’s shoulder.

Seokjin reached for the forceps with his right hand and slipped his thumb and ring finger through the finger loops, lifting the grasping end up to the edge of the hole.

With his left hand, he pressed his fingers to the man’s skin, gently stretching the wound open. He could see the bullet now; its copper surface shimmered behind its deep crimson coating. The blood dribbled out slowly, staining his thumb red as it spilled over his ashen knuckle. It felt wet—warm at first—but it quickly grew cold as it dried on the skin, like sticky relics of the man’s life force evaporating into thin air.

 What if he bleeds to death?

There was a chance that this tiny copper pellet was the only thing keeping the sanguine liquid inside his body, where it belonged. Removing the dam would allow the river to flow as it pleased, and if that river ever ran out…
Seokjin’s breath caught in his throat as he recoiled, pulling his arms closer to his own body. “I-I don’t think this is a good idea…”

“Did I ask?” Hoseok glared at him. “Just take it out.”

“But—"

Seokjin gasped as Hoseok seized his, already bruised, left wrist with a heavy-handed grip. As he pulled the trembling hand towards his chest, a heart-shaped smile—like the one he showed to the imposter on the other ship—slithered onto the pirate’s face...except this one was meant just for Seokjin.

Hoseok pressed the hand against his skin, right next to the wound, as he leaned in closer. His voice dropped low, like crushed velvet that breezed across Seokjin’s face, tickling the flushed cheeks with his warm breath.

“You better hurry the fuck up, princess.”

Hoseok let go and Seokjin, as if he were put under a spell, immediately assumed his previous position. He blushed at the cool feeling of the man’s skin against his fingers. What the hell was wrong with him?

He inhaled sharply, holding the air in his lungs, as he dug the forceps into the wound. Pausing for a short moment, he glanced up at the pirate.

Hoseok’s face had scrunched up a bit, but he didn’t seem to be in too much pain. So Seokjin continued pushing further towards the bullet, cringing at the revolting sensation of the metal instrument shifting its way between the slippery muscle tissue.

Fresh, glossy blood spewed and bubbled out with a squelching noise, cascading past the torn flesh in undulating lines down Hoseok’s chest as the forceps tunneled its way deeper into the wound.

At last, he felt something blocking his way, the copper face of the bullet barely peeking out from where it had burrowed itself. With his index and middle fingers tucked under the forceps for stability, Seokjin gently slid the parted tips around the small projectile, squeezing the finger loops together and pulling.

The clamp snapped closed on itself as it slipped from the bullet’s bloodied surface. He winced and tried again. And again. And again.

He was getting frustrated as he couldn’t get a proper hold on the slimy bullet, and the fact that they were on a moving ship didn’t help either.

“Ugh. What the fuck are you doing?” Hoseok had his eyes squeezed shut. Having a metal object digging around inside his shoulder was definitely starting to hurt him—a lot.

Seokjin could feel his neck receding between his shoulders. “Sorry…”

Sweat-soaked bangs clung to Seokjin’s forehead as he made another heedful attempt, this time waiting for the rocking of the ship to subside before pulling. Finally, he managed to remove the bullet, releasing it onto the desk with a weighted clunk.

Letting the bloodstained forceps drop from his jittery hand, Seokjin hurriedly reached over to grab another piece of gauze and pressed it firmly against the pouring wound.
Please clot.

It felt like forever had passed. Bright red had soaked all the way through, reaching the tips of his fingers. A bead of sweat fell from his dampened hairline, gliding down the side of his face as he anxiously peeled the gauze away from the skin.

Thankfully, the blood was no longer wet and dripping, having dried to a seemingly unmoving viscosity. The carmine fluid became a parched pool of garnets, browned to the richness of an aged cabernet.

Feeling the heaviness ease up from his shoulders, Seokjin straightened his aching spine to take a breather and wipe the sweat away from his brow with a grubby sleeve.

The lining of the wound was still raw and he could see where the thin layer of fat below the skin was cut and exposed.

Almost done.

Seokjin picked up the needle holder, holding it the same way he held the forceps, and used it to remove the curved needle from its small package.

With the tweezers in his left hand, Seokjin proceeded to lift the top edge of the wound with its blunt tips, baring the skin so he wouldn’t accidentally pierce through muscle.

Black thread dangled from the needle’s other end as it punctured downwards through the raised flesh.

This wasn’t so bad—at least when compared to all the other nauseating things he had already done.

He rotated his right hand clockwise, following the needle’s arc until it punctured the other side of the bullet hole. Seokjin’s head felt hazy as he followed through with the process, pulling the needle and thread through until he could tie a knot at the end.

Seokjin continued to suture the wound with a running stitch—it was the easiest one he could remember—until the entire length of the split skin was secured together. One final knot, a quick snip, and he was done. He took a step back to check out his work.

Oh.

The stitching was poorly done; the thread had pulled and pinched the hole into a bent line where the skin flaps were hideously scrunched together. It looked as if he had haphazardly sewn shut a lipless mouth: blanched and fleshy.

Seokjin puffed out his cheeks, way too tired to even care. Could be worse.

With his thumb, he fixed a new piece of gauze against the sealed wound as he pulled a pressure dressing out of the metal box. He wrapped the dressing around Hoseok’s shoulder neatly, making sure that the gauze was held in place while using short tugs to ensure the tightness of the bandage.

Hopefully the compression would be enough to keep the wound from getting infected, at least, until they reached land. Then maybe a real doctor could come and fix the mess that Seokjin had made.

“Okay. Done.”

“Finally,” Hoseok groaned as he slid off the desk, planting his feet to the floor.
Seokjin flinched as a hand touched the small of his back and glided up along his spine. A sinful thumb had grazed past his right shoulder blade so that ring-trimmed fingers could curl around his upper arm like a grappling hook.

“Whoa. Not bad.” Jimin was looking at the handiwork, his body flushed against Seokjin’s left side.

The vibrations of the man’s silken voice fluttered from his rock-like chest, sending an exquisite rush of heat straight into the pit of Seokjin’s stomach; a carnal shiver lingered about his back, ghosting the sultry trail left behind by the pirate’s lascivious hand.

Seokjin’s face was steaming as he tried to swallow back his swelling libido. Here he was, tangled up in a room with nautical marauders: killers. He already had enough to worry about—his death sentence was still up in the air after all—and yet, he found himself stupidly beguiled by the ruinous enchantment of this male siren. His dignity was waning at a pace that not even a lifetime of self-discipline could control.

“What now?” The words fell stiffly from his mouth.

Jimin tilted his head to look at the man he had adhered himself to, a moment that had Seokjin’s ears sizzling; red-hot at the tips. He twisted himself to meet Namjoon’s watchful eyes, dragging Seokjin along beside him. “So, what’re we doin’ with him? It’d be a waste to just kill him, don’t you think?”

Namjoon had his arms crossed as he regarded Seokjin, who apparently was standing in a new—hopefully, more positive—light.

“I suppose we can keep you alive for now. We do need a new doctor,” he said as he glanced at Hoseok’s bandaged shoulder.

Seokjin tensed up in Jimin’s hold. This was good news, but at the same time, it wasn’t. “You do realize that I’m not an actual doctor, right?”

Namjoon scoffed. “That’s obvious. Of course we’ll be in the market for a new one, but in the meantime...” He shifted his weight back, standing tall with his head tilted gently to the side. “Just try to make yourself useful, okay?”

Seokjin did not like this one bit.

Out of habit, his right hand reached over to fiddle with his ring only to be reminded that he was no longer in possession of it. Feeling a foreboding panic rise up and quake through his bones, he clutched at his disheveled shirt instead.

“Then...what happens to me when you find one?”

Namjoon didn’t say anything, not that he needed to, because Seokjin already knew exactly what would happen—the silence just confirmed it.

He wrenched himself free of the jeweled fingers on his arm and took a step closer into Namjoon’s space, his desperation apparent on his face.

“I helped your friend just like you asked! I think you owe me enough to at least spare me my own life.”

Though his eyes were unblinking, Namjoon seemed to falter a bit.

“Sorry. You know that just isn’t going to work out for us.”
It was faint, almost imperceptible under the practiced guise of stoicism, but Seokjin saw something beyond those turned down lips; a shred of compassion, perhaps?

Well, whatever it was, if this guy had even the smallest trace of a human heart somewhere in his body, Seokjin was certainly going to take advantage of it.

“You’re worried that I’ll tell someone about you guys, right? Well, I won’t!” Seokjin took another step forward so that he was right in front of the pirate. “I’ll forget about everything. I swear!”

He saw the man’s eyes flicker away for a split-second.

Now within striking distance, he put on the most pitiful appearance he could muster: tearful eyes and pouting lips, all dovetailed together with a gentle pleading voice. “Please. I just want to go home.”

Namjoon paused; his expression became rigid and forced—a frown cemented across his face. “I’ll… think about it,” he answered quickly, averting his gaze.

With lips slightly parted, Seokjin’s shoulders sank as sheer disappointment washed over him. That wasn’t exactly the answer he had been hoping for.

“Namjoon.” Yoongi’s darkened voice was taut and stringent as he glared, not at his captain, but at Seokjin.

Namjoon’s eyebrows knitted together in solitude before allowing his arms to drop down to his sides. “Jimin, take him down to the gun deck so he can sleep. And you…” He pushed against Hoseok’s back lightly, his voice softening. “You go to bed too.”

As Jungkook and Taehyung helped Hoseok down what looked to be a staircase by the wall closest to the loveseat, Namjoon pulled Yoongi aside to speak. They seemed to be in disagreement, but Jimin didn’t allow Seokjin the chance to eavesdrop as he began ushering him out of the room.

“Come on. Let’s go.”

Once they were back outside, Jimin pulled Seokjin into his lax pace. The ship was now coated in an orange-red brilliance as the sun in the sky dipped low towards the horizon.

They went back down to the main deck, still noisy and swarming with busy pirates, and traversed it until they reached the large mast in the center of the ship. There was a square hole in the floor next to it, providing access to a flight of stairs that led to the deck below.

As they stepped down into it, Seokjin could see that the lower deck had several well-kept canons lined up against the sides; pointing out of the openings in the walls. There were very few pirates scattered across the dimly lit area. Having already given in to the harsh labors of the day, they were either tucked into their hammocks swaying between the canons or settled down on the unswept floor wherever there was room.

Dawdling halfway down the stairs, Seokjin turned to Jimin incredulously. “I have to sleep down here?”

“Problem?” Apparently the question had irritated the man.

“N-no.”

Seokjin was alive right now, and he’d like to keep it that way for as long as possible. Upsetting the scary pirate any further would be a mistake.
“Good.” Jimin halted a few steps up from the dusty floor. “Go ahead and sit wherever you want. I’m sure Snow White could use some beauty sleep now.” He turned back to look Seokjin up and down. “Lots of it.”

Seokjin glowered at the man, but only received a smile in return. A perfect, gorgeous smile.

With a honeyed voice, as sweet as a lover’s kiss, Jimin waved Seokjin off before heading back up to the main deck. “Sweet dreams, princess.”

Annoyed, Seokjin watched as Jimin’s figure disappeared into the light of the setting sun before finding a place to rest. It was a bit difficult to see; the only lighting, besides whatever trickled in from outside, came from the lanterns hanging from the ceiling.

Still, he managed to spot a promising location—an empty corner that was a good distance away from anyone else. Wanting to avoid accidentally waking one of the slumbering pirates, he was slow and careful to not trip on anything as he made his way across the deck.

His legs felt heavy with every step, aching with the urge to speed up so he could curl up on the floor and finally take a much needed break from his overstimulating day.

Squeak.

Seokjin barely heard it. The tiny sound of the floorboards was masked by how loudly the ship had been creaking with the sway of the ocean.

Squeak.

He had already grown accustomed to the Pied Piper’s never-ending groans. Soon, he would get used to the floorboards as well.

Squeak.

Seokjin stopped dead in his tracks. The sound was suddenly much louder. It wasn’t the floorboards squeaking. No, something was definitely near him, below his line of sight. With wide eyes, he tilted his head down almost robotically.

Right next to his scuffed up boot was the biggest, most rancid-looking rat Seokjin had ever laid eyes on. The devil’s deranged pet began to squeak erratically as its foul, beady eyes stared up at him.

Repulsed by the horrid creature, probably chock-full of diseases, Seokjin stumbled backwards trying to hold in a scream. His foot collided with a wooden bucket and he lost his balance, loudly knocking over a large barrel.

“Are ya fuckin’ kidding me right now!?” One of the pirates that had been sleeping in a hammock sat up angrily. “Keep it down!”

Seokjin instinctively ducked his head, dodging the empty bottle that was thrown in his direction. It shattered against the wall, leaving Seokjin’s heart racing as he hurried to his targeted corner.

“S-sorry.”

Gruff complaints streamed into the air by the handful of men that had been disturbed by the noise. To his relief, the hostility towards him was short-lived as the grumpy pirates quickly fell back into slumber.
Seokjin sat on the floor with his back pressed to the wall. He brought his knees up under his chin and hugged his legs, staring down at one of the many dust bunnies littering the deck.

His nostrils stung from the potent scent of his vodka-stained hands. He felt disgusting and uncomfortable with his sweaty clothes sticking to him, making his skin crawl and itch. Why couldn’t he just go home and bathe? Why did he have to be stuck here, utterly humiliated?

He was starting to hate everything and everyone on this godforsaken boat: the rat that crawled out from the pits of hell, every single one of those nasty pirates, and the stupidly handsome men he had the misfortune of meeting.

Now, he was even starting to hate himself too—always listening to what other people tell him to do.

Seokjin bit his lower lip, trying not to cry as he curled up even tighter against his folded legs. He pressed his forehead down on his knee caps and squeezed his eyes shut to keep the tears at bay.

There would be no crying. Not where someone could see him.

So he sat there silently, alone in a dirty corner, praying that the ocean would be kind enough to lull him away into the only thing he was free to do—sleep.

❦❦❦

It was mid-morning when Seokjin returned to the main deck; he squinted as the rising sun jabbed at his light-starved eyes. Everyone was already awake, hollering at each other as they bustled about, doing whatever it was that sailors did on ships.

They seemed energetic as opposed to Seokjin, who was not well-rested at all. His sleep had been repeatedly interrupted—either by the sudden harsh movements of an offbeat wave, or the chilling jolt of even the slightest brush against his skin from the paranoia of nightmarish rats lurking in the dark.

Seokjin huffed and began to take note of his surroundings. Given the circumstances, he never had the chance to look around at the ship until now.

He was surprised to see that the real Pied Piper was not grand or extravagant like he had imagined. Rather, it was totally plain in appearance, having nothing more to show than its basic woody colors and blank sails.

There wasn’t even a jolly roger displayed anywhere; just the lonesome flag of the Oclarian Empire flapping in the wind overhead.

He thought back to the ship that the Bangtan Boys had sunk the day before. The over-the-top imposter looked very different from the original and, to put it simply, the damn thing was just way off base.

With nothing to do, Seokjin wandered back to the quarterdeck. He peeped through the office door’s porthole window and saw Namjoon and Yoongi in the room. There were sheets of paper in Namjoon’s hand as they stood behind the desk, tied up in some sort of discussion.

Their lips stopped moving as soon as they looked up, having noticed Seokjin’s head peeking up at the door. Namjoon stuffed the papers into the desk drawer and closed it shut. At the beckon of the captain’s elegant finger, Seokjin entered the office.

Namjoon smiled at him as he approached the desk. “How was your sleep?”
In spite of how blindingly beautiful this man’s smile was, Seokjin managed to remain expressionless and curt. “Awful.”

“Hey, you should be grateful you even woke up in the first place.” Yoongi looked at him like a dog trying to catch the scent of a rat.

Since the beginning, the blonde has been liberal with his dirty looks, clearly outraged that this stranger would be staying with them indefinitely. Well, Seokjin wasn’t too happy about this arrangement either, but he’d rather be stuck on a boat full of pirates than to be killed by them.

The two of them would just have to suck it up.

Their standoff was cut short by Namjoon, having sensed the growing animosity in the room. “Alright, you must be hungry. How about you go get something to eat?”

Seokjin perked up. It had been days since he last had a meal and, with his lack of a proper rest, he was seriously running on empty. “Where?”

“The galley’s at the other end of the ship.” Namjoon, still smiling, was much more temperate and composed this morning than he was before.

Seokjin let his eyes linger between the two pirates. The juxtaposition of an inviting smile and a death stare emphasized the glaring difference between their attitudes towards the newcomer.

Without a word, Seokjin briskly left the room to find the galley. Food was now his top priority.

After trudging down the stairs to the main deck, he headed towards the front of the ship. There was a double door propped open with two large cinderblocks on each side. It was the only doorway on this side of the deck, so it was safe to assume that this was where he needed to go.

He crossed the wide threshold tentatively, despite how eager he was to finally fill his empty stomach. Somewhat reminiscent of a small eatery, the galley was fairly compact with only a small number of pirates scattered about.

Cross-sectioning the room into two halves, was a long counter parallel to the front and back walls, lined with bar stools along its front side. Several chairs surrounded the two tables that occupied the half closest to the door, whereas the kitchen area was situated at the back end of the room.

Unsure of how things worked around here, Seokjin approached the polished counter gingerly and saw a young man sitting on a chair in the kitchen. “Um…excuse me?”

The man looked up from the book he was reading, brows raised. “Oh, a new face?” He stood up with an affable smile. “Take a seat.”

Seokjin paused, blinking for a couple of seconds. Given the fact that this was a pirate ship, he never anticipated coming across such a cordial man. Still, he planted himself on one of the bar stools, relieved to not be dealing with some brute thug instead.

Seokjin’s eyes followed the man’s figure as he sauntered throughout the kitchen with ease, amassing food onto a plate with every stop.

“Here.” A modest assemblage of bread, ham, and cheese was placed on the counter in front of Seokjin as the man stationed himself directly across. He folded his arms along the spotless surface, catching his first-time visitor in a gentle but steady gaze. “You came here to eat, right?”
Seokjin stared down at the simple meal, his mouth watering at the sight. “Yes. Thank you.” He reached down to take the bread into his hand. Its golden crust flaked between his fingers as he brought it to his mouth, taking an ample bite.

A blissful sensation coated his tongue as he chewed, comforted by the long-awaited nourishment. The bread was flavorful and surprisingly soft, not at all stale like he had expected it to be.

Cracking a bright smile, the man raised a hand to cushion his cheek and prop his head up. “You like it? I baked it myself.”

Seokjin swallowed, cocking his head to one side as his tongue swiped the stray crumbs away from his lips. “On a ship?”

The man’s expression blossomed into a contagious grin, one that stretched to his warm brown eyes. “I’m just that good.” He laughed.

Seokjin could feel the corners of his lips curve up a little. It was the first time he had smiled since his nightmare began, and he was incredibly appreciative of the cheerful atmosphere that surrounded this man he had only just met.

“So what’s your name? Mine’s Marsh.”

“Jin.”

Marsh nodded his head and hummed, maintaining eye contact. “I haven’t seen you ‘round before… when did you get here?”

“Yesterday.”

“Yesterday?” Marsh’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully, his eyebrows scrunched together until eventually his lips parted in understanding. “Oh, that. Did Cap and the others bring you on?”

Wrinkling his nose, Seokjin frowned as he picked at the food on his plate. “Yeah.”

Marsh—looking genuinely taken aback—rubbed the back of his head and tangled his fingers in his wavy espresso locks, neatly pushed aside by the cream-colored headband tucked behind his ears. With a straightened posture, he quickly bounced back into a smile and rested his palm flat against the counter next to Seokjin’s arm.

“Hey, don’t worry. They’re all really great people.”

Seokjin’s chin tilted down slightly as he flashed the man a skeptical look. “Are… you sure about that?” He found this very hard to believe. After all, weren’t pirates supposed to be evil?

Marsh chuckled lightly, tapping his hand down on the counter with an assured knock. “You’ll see.”

❦❦❦

The conversation between Seokjin and Marsh had moved on to more pleasant topics. He learned that the two of them were very close in age, and that Marsh enjoyed reading adventure novels when things slowed down in the galley.

Seokjin was glad to have met such a friendly person. It made being confined to an infamous pirate ship—against his will—just a touch more bearable.

Unfortunately, their cheery exchange met its end as pirates, having completed their morning
activities, began filtering into the galley until it became much too crowded for Seokjin’s liking. As soon as he was done eating, he excused himself with the promise to visit Marsh again soon.

The sun was high in the sky as Seokjin strolled across the main deck. The crisp ocean air flowed around him, imparting a hollow and idealistic sense of freedom that numbed his emotions with each breath he took.

Since he hadn’t been assigned any tasks—or even a specific purpose, really—he decided to make a beeline for the office. It was either that or sit around by himself doing nothing, and Seokjin would much rather do something about his dreadful situation.

Once in front of the door, Seokjin peered through the window to see if anyone was inside. The room was empty. He glanced around briefly before entering the office.

Remembering what he saw earlier this morning, Seokjin tiptoed towards the desk and quietly pulled the drawer open. Inside was a thin stack of papers, the focal point of Namjoon and Yoongi’s private discussion from before.

He rifled through each sheet, which upon further inspection, appeared to be official documents. The first two read:

PERMIT TO DOCK AND UNLOAD

Port of: Lillon, Ethil

Vessel: Cargo Transport/Voyage OE 037

Cargo Manifest Required

Vessel Identification Required

Captain Passport Required

-

CARGO MANIFEST

Voyage No: OE 037 Authorization Date: 02AprXX

Operator: Commissioned Merchant Vessel

Point of Loading: Parica, Oclarian Empire

Point of Unloading: Lillon, Ethil

Vessel Identification: MMRD 0051-X12778264

The manifest went on to list the quantities of several items such as salt, spices, and tea—all of which were expensive luxury goods—and the last few accompanying documents contained relevant information and authorizations.

Where the hell did they get these? Each page was signed and complete with either a stamp or a seal, indicative of the documentation’s authenticity.

Seokjin looked back down at the drawer and scanned its contents. He found a small brown booklet
and a scuffed up identification card with a shimmering gold seal in the top right corner. Both were marked by a name that Seokjin didn’t recognize, and the number on the card was an exact match with the number on the manifest.

The gears in his head were turning as he became totally engrossed in trying to put these pieces together, consequently failing to notice the audible footsteps drawing near.

“What do you think you’re doing?” An abrupt voice, low and stiff, sounded from a dangerously close proximity.

The documents were snatched away from Seokjin’s hands, forcing his widened eyes to meet Namjoon’s tight-lipped expression. Yoongi was standing right behind his captain, his arms crossed in front of him with a disapproving scowl carved across his face.

Seokjin felt his muscles tense up as he drew in a shallow breath. He had been caught red-handed.

Namjoon placed the documents back into the drawer; his narrowed eyes remained heavily fixated on Seokjin’s glossy ones.

“You really shouldn’t be sticking your nose around in such dangerous places.” He slammed the drawer shut with excessive force, resulting in an emphatic boom.

Seokjin flinched at the loudness, instantly turning his gaze down to his perspiring hands. “I…I was just looking for my ring,” he whispered, almost breathlessly.

The lie hung in the air, suspended in an unsettling quietness. Seokjin did not dare to look up until Namjoon started speaking again.

“I already put it somewhere for safe keeping, so how about you keep your hands to yourself from now on, hm?” He angled his head back, staring Seokjin down. “Just a suggestion.”

Namjoon’s frost-bound tone sent a sickening chill down Seokjin’s spine, paralyzing him into silence.

A mere few hours have passed since the silver-haired man had smiled so graciously at him. It was but a faded memory now that intimidation was put back into play, making Seokjin wonder just how many faces the pirate captain had hidden in his hand.

“Aw, is the princess in trouble?” Jimin was standing by the stair railing, having just come up from the floor below.

Behind him, Hoseok was plodding up the stairs—cherry hair glistening wet. He donned only a pair of trousers and boots, leaving his muscular torso uncovered. Hoseok moved towards Seokjin and tossed the pressure dressing, which should have been wrapped around his shoulder instead of on the desk where it landed. “Here.”

“What?” Seokjin took the beige bandage into his hand and eyed Hoseok’s exposed stitches. “You’re supposed to leave this on. Why did you take it off?”


With a disgruntled sigh, Seokjin reached down to retrieve the first-aid kit for a new piece of gauze before approaching Hoseok on the other side of the desk.

Seokjin began to rewrap the man’s shoulder, but his hands stilled upon a pleasant scent wafting into his nose. Refreshing notes of citrus and mint floated from Hoseok’s damp hair and skin—sweet yet
rugged.

Odd. Just yesterday, the pirate had been bloodied by his own carelessness. Seokjin had smelled the iron and gunpowder on him then, but now… “Why do you smell so good?”

A slick smirk pervaded Hoseok’s attractive features. “Baby, that’s just my natural scent.”

Seokjin frowned and tugged the end of the bandage, pushing much too strongly against the wound. “Ow! Okay, I took a shower! Isn’t that obvious?”

Letting the bandage go slack in his hands, Seokjin frowned even deeper. “A shower? There’s a shower here?”

Hoseok raised an eyebrow as he loosened the bandage himself. “Yeah?”

*Since when did pirates take showers?* Seokjin whirled his body around to glare spitefully at Jimin, who was now lounging back in a chair.

The man shrugged in response, looking quite humored, like he had just won a fuzzy prize from a carnival game. “You didn’t ask, so I just assumed that you *like* being dirty.”

There was an obvious innuendo in his words, provoking Seokjin’s cheeks to erupt into a scarlet heatwave. “Why would I-!?"

“Just go ahead and use it.” Namjoon cut in, raising his voice harshly. “We’ll be reaching land soon anyways, so I’d rather you be clean than to look like we just pulled you out of a dumpster.” He gestured to the stairs as he walked towards Hoseok. “Downstairs. Last door to your left. I’ll finish up here.”

Like oil to a flame, Seokjin felt his face burning hotter as he practically barreled down the stairs—humiliated.

He slowed down towards the bottom steps and entered a very short hallway that extended out to his left. Almost immediately, the hallway veered left again into a much longer section of the hall, creating a backwards L-shape.

Seokjin sped past several doors lining the hallway until he reached the end where there was a door with a porthole leading out to the main deck. He opened the door to his left and found the bathroom: the sink on the left, a toilet in the back right, and finally, the shower in the back left.

Light entered the small room through two portholes along the back wall, reflecting off of the few puddles of water that were left on the floor—probably from the shower that Hoseok took not too long ago.

Leaning over the sink, Seokjin gazed at his dismal appearance in the large mirror fixed to the wall. This wasn’t him…darkness smeared below his eyes, blotches of pink ablaze on his skin, dust and grime that adhered to his clothing.

He hated this.

Seokjin ran the tap, bending down to cleanse the misery and despair that sullied his face. He lifted his head and wiped the water away from his eyes only to be met with that same man, dripping and defeated…no, this wasn’t him.
Suddenly, a towel was plopped down onto the counter next to Seokjin, forcing him to tear his eyes away from the soul-shattering mirror.

“Pretty stupid of you to go through a pirate’s things.” Namjoon stood next to him with what looked to be spare clothing crumpled in his hand.

“I’m sorry…I-”

The man held up his other hand to stop Seokjin from talking. “Just mind your own business and do exactly as we say from now on.”

Before turning around to leave, he threw the wrinkled clothes down onto the wet floor. He paused, lingering with his hand resting on the door knob.

“Don’t make me regret keeping you alive.”

After casting Seokjin one last cautionary look, the silver-haired pirate exited the room, brutally slamming the door behind him.

The sound echoed in Seokjin’s ears until it faded away into nothingness, leaving him to stew in the silence alone.

He was alone, now.

He rushed to lock the door, sealing himself away in his newfound sanctuary.

After much effort, Seokjin dragged himself into the shower and turned it on, not even bothering to remove his clothing. Streams of tepid water beat down on him from above as his shirt and pants clung like a cheap, uncomfortable glue against his body.

_I thought you said you were different._

Having reached his limit, he finally began to cry. Pathetic sobs were drowned out by the drumming of the labored shower head. Wretched tears washed away from his eyes, swirling—forgotten—down the drain at his feet.

Seokjin thought back to the day at the harbor, replaying every scene until this very moment, circling back to every bad thing that has happened to him. His head was stuck in a loop of suffering, trying to find some way out of the torment that surrounded him.

But the nightmare continued.

Chapter End Notes

_Uh, so hopefully this chapter was okay? I had a lot of trouble writing this and I tried my best, but I’m just not too proud of this one ( ﹏-)_

_And again, I apologize for taking so long to update. I recently had to go to the ER because I had a random fever on top of some other stuff, but all is good now :)_
I think next chapter will be better so I'll try my very best to get it done sooner! See ya then!

Feel free to chat with me on Twitter @jinniesforehead! I promise I'll respond, and if ya wanna be moots, I'm down (just lmk)!

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