for the future us

by joongfilms

Summary

Their problems can’t be easily solved, but perhaps having each other is enough.

Notes

it's 1am and this isn't proofread but here we go!
i appreciate any feedback hhhh thank you

By the time Hongjoong emerges from the bunker, there is nothing left.

He’s too late.

Only a few years earlier, the land was covered in colours and teeming with wildlife but nuclear war has ravaged the Earth, nuclear winter bringing with it a blanket of cold and dark. The previously dazzling blue sky is now a dull tone of grey and clouds that were one fluffy and light begin to sag over the barren land. A thick fog riddled with radiation and strange black smoke lingers in the atmosphere, absorbing any light that manages to peek through the clouds and the sun now hides behind their mistakes, making seeing further than a few metres difficult, if not impossible.

There doesn’t seem to be much else around. As his gaze flickers over his surroundings, Hongjoong can just about see the remains of what was there before. There are no longer any trees to decorate the
side of the road, only burnt stumps and branches without leaves scattered over the street, which has become cracked and broken in the wrath of the bombs. There are no houses to hide in. Any buildings that are still standing are just mere moments away from crumbling and mostly dust and rubble remain, a hazardous mess all around him.

Warmth is a distant feeling. The permanent winter wraps its numbing fingers around Hongjoong’s body, sending chills straight down his spine and showing no mercy to his goosebump-covered skin. Even down in the bunker, it was cold, but this is worse. He yearns for the comfort of warmth, although he knows it’ll never come so long as he’s above ground. But he refuses to go back down to rot away alone—the memories of everything that happened down there are too painful for him to want to reminisce. He just wants an out, though he’s not sure in what form he’ll find it or whether he’ll find it at all.

All that seems to be left is a mind-numbing depression that accompanies the cold.

Hongjoong takes a deep breath before letting out a painsed cry which is still muffled by the gas mask adorning his face. He doesn’t receive any sort of response, anyway. All that follows is the sound of his own voice as it echoes in the empty air until silence falls over him once again. Only an ominous wind is left to blow, coming across as more threatening than comforting.

He is haunted by the voices of his lost loved ones; haunted by the remains of the place he once called home and he hates the way the fog envelopes him, trapping him in his head. He doesn’t want to remember but that’s all he has—memories. There is no one to relish in those memories with him, nor anyone to create new memories.

Never had he felt so alone.

He walks down what he recognises as the old high street of his town, heart aching at the sight of the place he used to hang out with friends completely ruined. He never believed that they’d be affected—it started so far away and so he was sure that they would be okay, but he was so, so wrong. It didn’t take long for the bombs to reach them and he’s not sure whether he’s glad that they had time to prepare for it or not. Perhaps it’s survivor’s guilt, something his father told him to ignore in drastic times, or maybe it’s something else. Either way, it brings pain to his chest and causes a giant wave of sadness to come crashing over him.

With a sudden urge to leave, he picks up the pace and gradually starts to run, almost tripping a couple of times over pieces of rock that he fails to spot but persisting nonetheless. He doesn’t know what time it is, what day it is, what year it is, but he keeps running. Adrenaline courses through his veins and the voice in his head screams at him, telling him that he can’t be the only one around, that he isn’t the last one left.

Eventually, Hongjoong stops running.

It becomes exhausting all too quickly and any hope he might have been holding onto is gone entirely. No matter how long he searches, the chances of him finding anything are extremely low.

He sits down on the dusty ground, taking a moment to adjust his gas mask, before heaving a sigh that only serves as a reminder of his lonely state as he, once again, receives no response. He leans against the wall behind him, carefully, and takes some time to catch his breath. At that moment, he wonders whether it would just be easier to die right then and there.

Hours must pass before the boy gets up from his seated position after sighting moving figures not too far away from him, even through the thick fog. His feet hurt and there is a sick feeling in his stomach as well as a scratchy dryness in his throat but he begins to run toward them in the hopes of reaching
them before they can disappear. He doesn’t yet know if they are, in fact, people or nothing more than a dehydrated illusion, but at least it’s something other than dead trees and dust—it’s better than nothing, and he can’t help the feeling of hope that suddenly sparks in his heart.

“Hey!” he yells, once again muffled by his gas mask. He knows they can hear him, though, as they stop moving all of a sudden and turn to face him. “Can you help me?” he calls again in between breaths once he draws nearer, his heart racing. They’re definitely people, not just a vision, adorned in protective clothing and faces covered by the same sort of gas mask as his own. Relief washes over him, although he still can’t help but feel just a little uneasy—their lack of words is unsettling.

All Hongjoong hopes is that he’ll be able to find appropriate shelter and perhaps if he’s lucky, something other than his thoughts to keep him company.

“I take it you haven’t been out since it happened, then?”

“No, I haven’t. Why do you ask?” Hongjoong questions, feeling tense under the other boy’s scrutinising gaze.

“Because if you had, you’d know not to fucking shout like that. We don’t know what’s out there and the last thing we want is to attract unwanted attention to ourselves. I understand that it might be difficult from now on but, when you go up there, don’t make a fucking sound,” the boy responds, his tone laced with poison and his eyes filled with fire. “You’re lucky we even let you come with us after you made such a racket. Who knows what could have followed us here? If something actually has traced us back to here, the first person I’ll rid of is you. Don’t assume that just because we’re letting you stay that you’re safe.”

“That’s enough, Mingi. Leave him alone and go and cool off before you do something you’ll regret. He looks like he’s been through hell, and he probably doesn’t need to deal with your anger right now,” the other boy, who was standing on the other side of the room, interjects, walking over to Mingi and gently pulling him away from Hongjoong. Mingi just shakes off the boy’s hands before exiting the room, fists clenched and angry mutters leaving his mouth. “Sorry about him. He can be hot-headed at times, even to us, so don’t let it get to you. We’ve all been through shit and everyone’s a little tense. I’m sure you can understand,” the boy continues after sitting down opposite Hongjoong, who only nods in response.

He knows all too well how difficult it can be to trust new people, especially in times such as these. Just a week after the bombs had hit their town and they had managed to build a small community within their bunkers and through underground tunnels, someone came rushing to their door, begging for help. Of course, oblivious to the kind of awful people that still scurried around outside, they let the man in out of pure kindness. At first, it was fine. They got on well and the man, who wasn’t that much older than Hongjoong, developed good relations with everyone. After only two weeks, on the night of Hongjoong’s sixteenth birthday, almost fifty people were murdered and the man was never seen again. And Hongjoong still blames himself for what happened—he was the one to convince everyone to let the man stay. Despite most of them managing to survive until much later, he still carries the shame and guilt in his heart. It’s something that he can’t seem to shake. It was his fault that so many people died and yet he’s the one who’s still standing.

“Yeah, I understand. I can’t expect anyone to trust me when they don’t know me. Too many of my friends and family had to die before I realised that there will always be people out to get you. “I—I can go back if you want. I don’t mind. I don’t want to cause any trouble,” he speaks up after a moment of thought, although the last thing he wants is to go back. There are tears in his eyes but he
furiously blinks them away, wiping any strays with the back of his hand.

The boy in front of him only chuckles. “Don’t worry. It may be hard to develop trust at first but you seem fairly harmless, so we won’t kick you out. Frankly, we’ve lost a lot of our own so a bit of extra company might help morale a little, although you may have to stay away from Mingi for the time being,” that earns a laugh from Hongjoong and it sounds strange even in his own ears. It’s been a long time since he’s laughed, or even smiled, for that matter. “I’m Jeong Yunho, by the way.”

“Kim Hongjoong.”

“Nice to meet you, Kim Hongjoong,” Yunho sends him a kind smile. “Do you want to go and get something to eat? You look like you’ve never even seen food before,” Hongjoong laughs again, louder this time, although he feels a little unnerved as the boy’s words aren’t too far from the truth.

Yunho shows him all around the facility and he learns that they are approximately fifty feet underground. He also learns that they’ve already reached January of 2019 and that it’s been just over four years since nuclear war broke out. Yunho tells him about how the seven of them have managed to create perfect conditions in which to grow fruit and vegetables and how one of them figured out a way to generate their own electricity. There is a small library and an even smaller infirmary, along with a kitchen and a few bedrooms. Besides Yunho and Mingi, five people are living there, all working tirelessly, not stopping even as Yunho interrupts them to introduce the newcomer. Hongjoong finds himself amazed at the small community they’ve built, but he can’t help but wonder what the others’ thoughts on his arrival are—if they don’t like him, he’ll have no choice but to leave.

After the tour, they make their way to the small dining room, where a boy by the name of Yeosang places a plate filled with hot food down on the table. Hongjoong thanks him awkwardly before sitting down and taking the knife and fork that are laid out for him and beginning to eat. He has to admit, he wasn’t expecting anything particularly overwhelming, but it tastes good and it seems to restore the warmth that disappeared when he left the bunker.

“Won’t you eat?” he asks after a few mouthfuls, feeling uncomfortable with Yunho just watching him.

“No, I already ate today,” the taller boy says, then waits in silence until Hongjoong has finished his meal, which doesn’t take very long. “So, Hongjoong, tell me about yourself. Where you came from, how old you are, stuff like that. I want to know.”

“I used to live not very far from here,” he begins, a sad smile on his lips. “Well, I don’t really know where here is, but my house must be close seeing as I didn’t travel very far before finding you guys. I was born in late 1998 in Seoul. We had to stay at the hospital for a long time, though, because there were complications with the birth. Then, about a year later, after my mother had passed away, my father, brothers and I moved down to Ulsan,” he adds before tensing up and wondering if he should continue or not—he doesn’t want to bore Yunho.

The boy only smiles and gestures for him to continue, which makes him relax significantly.

“It was nearing Christmas at the time, I think. My dad told me I was moving around a lot by then, despite what doctors said, and they had to get our new neighbours to look after me because I was such a nuisance. Anyway, I’ve been interested in music from a very young age and I was determined to go back to Seoul to become either a rapper or a music producer. We didn’t have enough money so I couldn’t really, but I saved up all the money I could so that when I finished school, I’d be able to go to university there and pursue my dream. Then all this shit happened, so I don’t really know what I’m doing.
“I feel like all I can do is wait. I don’t know what I’m waiting for, but I hope there’s something on the other side of this. This can’t just be it, right?”

“Right.”

“Sorry. That got a little too serious too fast,” they both laugh, decreasing the tension.

“I was born in 1999. I moved around Gwangju for about ten years, being forced in and out of foster homes before leaving for Ulsan when a couple finally adopted me. They didn’t survive this war, unfortunately. I also have a brother, although we didn’t stay in contact after I was adopted so I don’t actually know where he is now,” Yunho responds, sounding sad for the first time since meeting Hongjoong. “Mingi was my first friend here and we’ve known each other for around nine years now. It took him a while to warm up to me, though, so it definitely doesn’t feel like nine years,” Yunho dodges Hongjoong’s curious eyes, smiling at the memory of meeting Mingi. “Still, here we are today.

“I wanted to be a police officer when I was a kid, but Mingi started teaching me dances when we hung out over the weekend and I picked them up pretty quickly so eventually, I aimed to become a dancer with him. We still dance together to this day, although it’s pretty difficult finding the time and energy to do so.”

“That’s still cool, though. My friend always told me that I could become an idol. Pretty sure she was just trying to take the piss because I can’t dance for shit but I appreciated the sentiment regardless.”

“Maybe I can teach you someday,” Yunho says, though they both know that it’s likely not possible.

“Maybe.”

Yunho laughs once more and Hongjoong can’t help but notice how bright the boy seems. Every time he laughs, his own lips form a smile and he wonders how Yunho can be so positive in such dire times. The others in the facility seem somewhat solemn, not once cracking a smile in his presence (although he suspects that that might just be the fact that he’s new and therefore untrustworthy), whereas Yunho radiates and entirely different kind of energy. It’s strange, albeit refreshing. After being on his own for so long, Hongjoong is grateful for the brightness amongst the dark and depression.

“By the way, I hope you don’t mind sharing a room with Seonghwa. I asked San to let you swap with him, just for a few nights while we’re all getting to know you, but he’s pretty stubborn, so you’ll have to room with Seonghwa. He’s the only one that has his own room and there’s not enough space for the extra mattress in mine. Don’t worry, though—he’s nice,” the taller boy explains as they leave the dining room and make their way over to Seonghwa’s room.

Hongjoong lets out a sigh at the realisation that he doesn’t have many of his belongings with him besides a few hastily packed clothes and a couple of items he had deemed essential, but he supposes that it’s too late now. He doesn’t think he can even remember the way back to the bunker anyway.

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Three months pass and Hongjoong quickly becomes familiar with the schedule all eight of them have to adhere to. He sleeps, works and eats, and that’s all he can really do but he doesn’t mind. It’s all made more bearable by the time he spends with Yunho and the fleeting glances he shares with Seonghwa, with whom he seemed to immediately click. Even Mingi apologised for acting so harsh in the beginning and the two have started talking a lot more since then.
He’s settled well and has become close with almost everyone, although he’s still yet to have a proper conversation with Wooyoung and San, who prefer to keep to themselves a lot more than the others.

When he’s finished with his duties for the day, he heads back into his bedroom and smiles at the sight of Seonghwa already there, waiting for him.

The rooms have changed over the past few months, although Seonghwa and Hongjoong made a silent agreement to stay together, having both thoroughly enjoyed the time they spent together of an evening. It was nice, having someone to talk to, and neither of them wanted to change that, even if the reason that they gave to their friends was different to the one they told themselves. But at this point, they just want their moments in peace—neither are ready to label themselves. The last thing they want is to ruin something perfect.

“Tired?” Seonghwa asks as Hongjoong flops onto the older boy’s bed, receiving a small nod. “Well, you can’t fall asleep just yet. Yunho said that he and Mingi need to speak to us all about something in a bit. Not sure what, but he told us not to get too comfortable just yet,” Hongjoong just groans at the words before moving to sit up and face the older boy.

“For fuck’s sake. It’ll probably just be Yunho complaining about someone swiping food from the kitchen and everyone will start yelling at each other until Mingi confesses that it was actually him. Then those two will have a full-blown argument and Yunho will make everyone watch because he refuses to admit that he was wrong. That’s what happened last time so I don’t see why we need to witness that again,” the shorter boy whines and Seonghwa just laughs in response, knowing full well that it’s true. That occurred only two weeks ago, although Seonghwa suspects more this time around.

“I don’t want to cause any arguments, so we have to go. Besides, he sounded serious, so I think they’ve got something important to say this time.”

They pass the time in a silence which is not uncomfortable but not necessarily happy either. Despite the jokes, both boys are quite anxious to hear what Yunho and Mingi have to say. Bad news is something they definitely don’t want to hear, not when everything seems to be going so well.

Hongjoong runs his hand through Seonghwa’s soft hair and lets out a sigh of content as soon as the older boy pulls him into his lap, snaking his arms around his waist. He feels warm, comfortable, safe, in Seonghwa’s arms, like nothing can hurt him. Which, for the most part, feels true. He’s forced himself to remain ignorant of the reality of their situation, having become so afraid. They always say that ignorance is bliss, and Hongjoong finds that detaching himself can make it easier to become immune to any hurt.

Mingi eventually begins to shout all of their names to get their attention and everyone heads to the dining room, where Yunho is pacing back and forth, the cogs in his head working. He stops once everyone has sat down and leans over the table, looking a lot tenser than usual.

“About six months ago, when Mingi and I were out on a supply run, we noticed an abandoned boat on the beach close by. We didn’t think it’d be of any use to us at the time, hence why we kept it to ourselves—we didn’t want to give anyone false hope. But since that day, we’ve been searching for parts to fix the boat up, gathering enough fuel for a journey and now we think we’re ready to move away from this place,” he states, earning several gasps and widened eyes from everyone around the table.

“Where would we even go?” Jongho interrupts with a tone soaked in curiosity.

“Not too long ago, we managed to pick up a signal on my phone and received word that both Alaska and Canada were almost completely unaffected by the bombs. Any damage was minor.”
“So what are you saying?” Yeosang asks.

“We’re saying that we think we can make it to one of those two places. We worked—”

“You think we can? Do you even know what you’re doing?” San stands up and shouts, interrupting Mingi. “If you’re seriously thinking about this, then prepare for people to die. We’ll never make it to Canada and by the sounds of it, you’re completely unprepared,” he says as he steps forward, seemingly furious. Wooyoung pulls him back and forces him to sit down again with a worried look on his face. Hongjoong only watches and listens, undeniably anxious but in awe at the prospect of making it back to civilisation, escaping the memories that still haunt him.

“Like I was saying, we worked out how much fuel we would need for the journey and we now have enough, although it did take us a while to siphon what we need considering most vehicles were damaged by the bombs. The boat is also big enough to carry all of us as well as food and water supplies, so long as we don’t bring anything unnecessary,” Mingi continues with a hopeful glance at those sitting around the table.

“It’s going to be tough, but we’ve made it this far, haven’t we?” everyone just nods and Yunho gives them a smug smile. “Then I think we can do it.”

Hongjoong is extremely nervous as they head to the beach the following week, gas masks on and protective clothing covering their pale skin. The boy, despite being excited to leave the depressing fog behind, has never really liked boats and doesn’t feel so reassured by the fact that no one in the group actually knows how to drive a boat, but he knows he’s not the only one reluctant to board.

San spoke to him after their meeting, worry in his eyes. Hongjoong was surprised as the younger didn’t seem to have taken a liking to him since his arrival, but was somewhat pleased to find that he didn’t resent him.

Just as he had taken the time to understand Mingi, he took the time to understand San’s perspective as well. The boy expressed his concerns having noticed Hongjoong’s shaking hands and sensed his overall anxiety during the meeting, and they comforted each other with words that neither really believed but helped regardless.

They’re loading their supplies onto the boat when Seonghwa notices Hongjoong just standing there, once again shaking. They narrowly avoided conflict when they passed another group of boys on their way down, all nine of which seemed ready for a fight, and the boy’s heart is still racing from the occurrence. He’s worried that they’ll come back but he can’t see shit because of the fog, and he suddenly feels exposed.

When Seonghwa asks what’s wrong, he tries to excuse his shivering by saying that it’s cold, but even in their permanent winter, spring has drastically changed the temperature and the older boy can see straight through his lie. Instead of revealing his worries and concerns, however, he wraps his arms around Seonghwa and holds him tight. The older boy reciprocates the action, holding him seemingly tighter than he ever has before, and Hongjoong finds himself smiling at the warmth. It’s a somewhat reassuring feeling and although a possibly treacherous and troublesome journey lies ahead of them, at least he’s not alone anymore.

And that is enough.
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