Your Silence Is My Favourite Sound
by mangomya

Summary

“I will allow anyone in this court to take a knife and cut away a portion of my clothing— as big as they please, from wherever they please, and take it home with them.”

The omega’s words are met with silence.

He sits in the middle of the court on his knees, wrapped in silks of the finest quality, the glittering knives spread out in front of him. Still as a statue, proud to the bone.

The sacrifice for this war is a single person.

Notes

you should see me in a crown,

your silence is my favourite sound,

watch me make them bow—

one by one by one

—
thank you ella!!!

inspired by an art piece performed by yoko ono

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

“A war of two long years and so many of our men shed their blood and bodies. We dug their graves and bid them an untimely farewell. We cried tears of grief yet we fought to strive for victory and protect this clan and its people. But today—today I stand before you to tell you that the war has finally come to an end!” The King roars, arms raised towards the ceiling. “The conflict has ceased, and peace has finally graced us with her blessings!”

The court bursts into a loud roar of applause, the war that had been looming over their heads like an overcast sky for the past two years has cleared at last. Yet Taehyung sits unmoving in his seat, still as a statue behind his father’s looming figure, knuckles white against the armrest and his stomach twisted into knots. The war has come to a close, but Taehyung understands that peace isn’t so easy to achieve.

Peace isn’t easy to achieve, with men driven to a carnal hysteria by rage or revenge or greed, peace isn’t so simple to achieve. A war doesn’t end like this. A war ends in nobody's victory, it brings only death, and there’s no glory to speak of—only fools speak of glory. There’s nothing glorious about death.

War brings death, and death doesn’t discriminate—it takes from both sides equally. And to achieve peace, sacrifices must be made.

The sacrifice for this war is a single person.

“On this day of celebration, I bring to you another joyous occasion—one of the betrothal of my youngest son!” The King announces.

Taehyung pushes himself to stand despite the way his knees lock stiff in refusal, and walks to his spot beside his father. His father wraps an arm around his shoulders, tight and proud, and Taehyung swallows the dry knot in his throat and curls his fingers into fists at his sides.

The crowd breaks into a deafening applause. Taehyung stares straight ahead and meets his eyes. The omega stares right back.

“With this marriage comes the promise of peace after a years long feud. The Alpha and the Omega clans will come together for this historic celebration; I hereby welcome Min Yoongi, the Prince of Omegas, into this palace as a gesture of our goodwill, and give you my own son, Kim Taehyung, in holy matrimony.”

Taehyung watches the omega take a delicate step forward into the court. It feels eerily like watching a lamb walking into a den of wolves. Except Yoongi looks nothing like a lamb.

He’s beautiful, viciously so.

His eyes glitter dangerously against Taehyung’s, his spine straight as a rod and head held high as if in defiance—nothing like the subservient nature expected of omegas. Perhaps it’s fear that manifests into the omega’s dauntless walk, a barricade of facade or the last attempt at maintaining dignity as he walks towards the platform Taehyung stands on, robes hitched above his ankles and face bare of a veil.

“Your Majesty” Yoongi halts and comes to a bow before them.

Forehead pressed against his knee and bent over the floor, yet he looks proud.
“For the sake of this peace, please allow me an opportunity to display my clan’s trust.” Yoongi looks up, eyes fixed onto Taehyung's father.

The King tilts his head in curiosity and makes an acceding gesture.

The omega straightens, then proceeds to untie the belt of knives from his waist. Taehyung watches, curiosity heightened, as he simply spreads the knives on the floor in front of him and seats himself on his knees before the entire court.

“For several long years, our clans have been locked in conflict. But as of today, we bear no animosity for we share the same dream of peace. As a gesture of trust, and for the sake of this peace—" Yoongi's eyes find Taehyung's. There's a challenge in them, a withering stare and a contemptuous curl of his lips to compliment it.

"I will allow anyone in this court to take a knife and cut away a piece of my clothing— as big as they please, from wherever they please, and take it home with them."

The omega’s words are met with silence.

He sits in the middle of the court on his knees, wrapped in silks of the finest quality, the glittering knives spread out in front of him. Still as a statue, proud to the bone.

The sacrifice for this war is a single person.

For a while, the court is silent, everyone’s eyes on a single figure. Yoongi's eyes don't leave his, and Taehyung feels like he's beginning to lose breath, like there's something sitting in his lungs that's squeezing him impossibly tight.

Then a rustling of clothes is heard.

Taehyung’s eyes snap to his right where he sees one of the courtiers make a motion to stand.

He looks back at Yoongi who sits unmoving as the man makes his way to him and grabs one of the knives at his disposal— the largest one.

Yoongi remains resolutely still and there's something horrific fermenting in Taehyung's chest. It grows roots and Yoongi stares straight ahead as the alpha inspects the knife. The man’s eyes roam up and down the omega’s body before he tilts his head in curiosity and brings the knife’s blunt edge to brush against Yoongi's cheek softly.

Yoongi doesn't move, doesn't even flinch, and it sickens Taehyung.

The first cut emboldens others. More courtiers approach the silent figure and cut away chunks of the omega’s silk that was once a beautiful vesture of blue and silver but now sits at his feet in tatters, slashed away by his own knives.

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Yoongi remains motionless through it all, his face devoid of any expression, but his eyes— his eyes find Taehyung’s as one of Taehyung’s subjects hacks away at his warring tunic, exposing the pale
Taehyung holds his gaze, stares at the omega’s unblinking black irises and it’s like Yoongi is showing him something.

Like Yoongi is showing him the reality for what it is. The peace between their clans– what it truly and actually is.

Taehyung glances at his father’s face from the corner of his eye. The King looks smug. But to his right, Taehyung’s older brother, Namjoon, observes the spectacle with his lips pressed into a thin line. Taehyung lets his eyes roam across the hall, at the alphas who have pieces of blue silk fisted between their fingers, those who’re eyeing the omega’s skin– the little that is visible, and those who’re eyeing the daggers in front of the omega.

There are whispers, a few laughs. The court titters, it’s a humiliating spectacle.

An alpha who holds the knife in his hand hacks away at the last remaining piece of cloth on the omega’s chest and the tunic falls apart.

Yoongi stands with his bare chest to the court, his chin lifted up and a harsh pull to his lips, like he’s not the one who’s been disgraced, like Taehyung should be the one ashamed.

The alpha with the knife in his hand doesn’t drop it. He stands before Yoongi, blade in hand, the omega’s skin up for display.

Yoongi meets Taehyung’s eyes again. The alpha raises the knife, this time bringing the blade to Yoongi's face, and presses it against his cheek.

A drop of blood trickles down. Yoongi watches Taehyung, as if saying look at this, this is your peace.

Taehyung’s striding towards them before he can think through the rage. He yanks back the alpha’s hand, wringing his wrist till the man drops the knife. It clatters on the floor and the noise resounds in the silent court.

“That is my mate whose blood you spilled just now.” He snarls, shoves the alpha away.

And then, with a meaningful look sweeping across the court, meeting every courtier's eyes, Taehyung takes off his own crimson and gold ornamented robe and wraps it around Yoongi's shoulders. He takes in the sight of the omega prince, who looks smaller shrouded in Taehyung’s robes, and grits his teeth.

Making a sharp turn, he puts himself between Yoongi and the court, and looks at everyone in the crowd before him.

“Everyone who laid a hand on my mate--” He glares at the court, and barks “have their clothes ripped off and give them twenty lashes.”

Taehyung’s orders have the court gasping and whispering. Taehyung meets the King’s eyes stonily.

“I shall escort the prince to his chambers.” He doesn’t ask for permission, cups his fingers around Yoongi’s wrist and tugs at it slightly. The omega stands up and Taehyung twists around to look at him.
Yoongi stares back at him, his pretty face devoid of expression save for a single line of blood streaked across his cheek– red like the color of Taehyung’s clan. Taehyung clicks his tongue in irritation and strides out of the court, dragging the omega behind him.

“You didn’t have to do that.” It’s Yoongi who breaks the frosty silence between them.

Taehyung doesn’t reply. He pulls him into his chambers, but once they’re inside, the prince yanks his wrist out of Taehyung’s grasp and Taehyung turns around to face him.

He finally spots signs of the omega’s facade breaking, the stiff shoulders, the mouth that’s pulled into a fierce snarl, eyes narrowed, bare chest heaving– Taehyung’s robe now on the floor.

“I did not need some fucking saviour.” Yoongi spits.

Taehyung narrows his eyes, regards the man who would soon be his mate. “Did you expect me to simply sit there and watch your clothes get torn off you?”

Yoongi sneers, “I’d believed you would've enjoyed the show, your Highness. Your people certainly did.”

Taehyung’s expression hardens and he clenches his fingers into fists.

“What do you expect to gain from your demonstrations? The war is over, we’re finally moving towards peace, I don’t understand why you are bent on–”

At this Yoongi laughs, abrasive and sarcastic, it’s a crude sound.

“Of course you don’t understand. Why would you? You call this peace? You say that we are equals now? Surely you don’t think that if you were to take my place, you would have your clothes torn off you by the hands of your subjects?”

“I certainly would not have asked for it.” Taehyung replies, scathing. He feels strangely belligerent, the omega infuriates him, he is arrogant, and condescending, and yet he’s the person Taehyung's fate is going to be tied to for the rest of their lives.

Yoongi’s eyes smoulder and incinerate, his irises charred black with rage, even as the rest of his face remains carefully blank.

When he speaks, his voice is bone-chilling and menacing. “Since we are to be wed, let’s make some things clear between us. Your peace – ” he aims a disdainful look, a loathing snarl, “is a travesty at best. It’s a sham.”

He takes a step closer, leaning right into Taehyung’s air. “And the oppressed sit still for only so long, my lord. The war is far from over.”

They’re close, chest to chest, at this distance Taehyung can see the dried blood on his cheek, can feel Yoongi's hot breath against his skin. And Taehyung smiles, lips curling up in a cruel sneer, no longer bothering to keep up a pretence as the contempt smiles in his eyes.

“We will be betrothed in three days,” He says coldly, turning around and walking to the door. He
pauses right before he leaves the room and drawls over his shoulder, “it wouldn’t remain your clan much longer.”

“He’s obnoxious.” Yoongi curses, lips curled in a snarl. Jungkook is seated on the bed, his face pinched with concern, while Yoongi paces around the room. “He’s insufferable and egoistic. He degrades me like I’m some weakling omega–”

“Hyung,” Jungkook interrupts him, his voice so soft it’s almost a whisper. “Was this the only way?”

The tremor in his voice makes Yoongi halt.

Yoongi looks at his younger brother, and the anger seeps out of him, replaced instead by an incapacitating helplessness. Jungkook’s head bent down, and his shoulders dipped in a defeated curve, Yoongi sighs.

“It’s our only chance.” Yoongi whispers, the words feel poisonous, and they burn the flesh of his tongue. “You know that.”

“But–” Jungkook takes a tremulous inhale, his nails digging into the fabric of his dress. “Alpha troops will invade our land under the pretence of providing us protection.” He insists. “We’ll be robbed of self-governance. Not to mention the stress our land will bear, having to feed their gigantic army. How are we to prepare an attack under these circumstances?” Jungkook looks up, eyes glistening with the tears he tries to hold back. “If it comes to the worst, the nation will reach the brink of starvation, if not a civil war first.”

Yoongi drops himself on the bed, robes splayed out around him. The crown on his head feels heavy, unforgiving in its weight.

“Jimin and Seokjin are working on allying other captured kingdoms against the alphas.” Yoongi whispers, reveals. Jungkook’s eyes widen. Yoongi knows all too well that Jungkook has managed to read between the lines, that he hears what Yoongi doesn’t say. But he carries on, nonetheless, “what our kingdom needs at this moment is a strong unfaltering ruler.”

Yoongi stares hard at him, “Jungkook–”

“No” Jungkook gasps, immediately whipping his head up, but Yoongi cuts him off.

“You know there’ll be no better opportunity than this. This is the only way.” Yoongi grabs Jungkook by the shoulders and tries to exude a confidence he does not feel. “I trust you. You’re the lifeline of this kingdom.”

“But–” Jungkook’s voice is thin, “you can’t– no–” he gasps, frantic, his fingers coming to fist around Yoongi’s robes and pull him closer. And Yoongi feels his chest constrict at the panic in Jungkook’s eyes.

“I won’t let you do this–” Jungkook rasps, the tears fall and streak his face. His voice cracks mid-sentence, and Jungkook lets out a loud agonized sob.
“Kook-ah” Yoongi murmurs, gently wiping the tears off his face but they keep falling.

“I’m sorry,” Jungkook cries. “You don’t deserve this, they don’t get to sell you– I’m sorry,” he gasps for a breath, his shoulders quiver, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry–”

“Kook-ah, look at me– here, look at me” He tilts Jungkook’s chin up. “Being a ruler isn’t the only way you protect your kingdom. Sometimes– sometimes your duty is to simply be a pawn, a decoy, a sacrifice. And if this is my fate, I’ll do it.” He kisses his wet cheek and pulls him into an embrace.

“So don’t let my sacrifice be in vain, yes?” Yoongi whispers, his own voice growing wet.

Jungkook cries even more at his words, trembles in Yoongi's arms, but nods in a silent promise.

Yoongi sits still as his skin is painted with ancient runes and glyphs running and winding down his torso like an encircling dragon, spiralling down from his spine to his hip, intricate threads of violets and reds colouring his body.

His eyes are rimmed black with kohl, and he’s made to turn in circles as the servants drape the ceremonial cloth around his waist, tucked in and tied in a knot behind his neck. Servants flutter around him, staining his lips with a deep rose red, dusting a faint blush on his cheeks and weaving flowers through his dark hair.

Yoongi finally gazes at his reflection in the glass, and his lips curl in distaste. His skin appears even paler in the red royal robes draped over his dress. He looks delicate, dainty like a prey covered in the Alpha clan colours.

He holds his tongue on his appearance since this celebration is to be held according to the Alpha traditions in their kingdom and will be followed by another in the Omega clan. The decision had been made to hold two ceremonies instead of one– better to have two separate weddings according to the two clans’ customs than have a single poorly executed compromise.

Yoongi picks the veil kept on the dresser and places the sheer cloth on his head, pinning it under his crown. The veil is kept long, falling till the hem of his robes. A servant hands him a large fan, red like his clothes and decorated with pictures of heroic roaring golden wolves. Yoongi opens the fan and holds it before his face.

The clothing is stifling and weighs heavy on his body yet Yoongi’s heart is the heavier burden to bear.

The ceremony is held outdoors, Yoongi can hear the cheers of the gathered crowds all the way inside his chambers. And when the horn blares, Yoongi is escorted to the ceremonial grounds. Horns and drums announce his arrival and the crowd immediately hushes.

He descends the marble steps, mindful of not stepping on his clothes, face hidden behind the fan held in one hand, the other hitching his robes to his ankles. The staircase descends to a path littered with flowers– white magnolias and red blossoms, leading ahead to the wide ceremonial grounds. An elevated platform sits to its right, with four figures seated on high chairs.
Yoongi spots Taehyung seated on the platform, clad in the same crimson as Yoongi’s clothes.

Their eyes meet, but Taehyung’s face is carefully blank, his eyes stormy and his lips set in a firm line. He looks daunting, impressively handsome and Yoongi grits his teeth when his cheeks start to colour unbidden.

He looks away reluctantly and continues to walk at a controlled pace, forcing a small smile on his face as he regards the crowds before him that stretch all the way to the horizon, all of them with their eyes trained on him. The sight should make him nervous but Yoongi feels a strange calm, feels an odd flush of power with their eyes on him.

The servants halt and Yoongi resumes walking alone, careful graceful steps, his robes swishing against his legs, till he stands alone before the four figures—Taehyung, his older brother and Crown Prince, and the two clan Kings. His own father watches him with an unreadable expression. The Alpha King is smiling and Yoongi forces himself on to his knees, the scene feels familiar, and touches his head to the ground before them.

After receiving the Kings’ blessings, he quickly rises to his feet and walks forward to the center of the clearing where they’ve made room for him, gathering around him in a wide circle. Two servants, one from either side, approach him. Yoongi lifts his arms and they pull the red robes and veil off his body, retreating again.

The ritual dance is something Yoongi had to be forced to learn against his will, he’s not a dancer but his body is thin—lean and flexible, and it’s almost like swordplay but to a choreographed melody. Yoongi’s not a dancer, he’s a warrior, and the alpha prince is sure to find out soon enough.

The song starts off slow, drums playing a steady rhythmic beat. Yoongi flicks his fan open and bends on one knee, his dress flaring out. The posture itself is not traditional, not the grace of a dancer but the poise of a hunter.

When the beat picks up, becomes faster, Yoongi’s feet move. His dress had been hand-picked by himself, chosen for a simple purpose that its full-length slit allows his legs to move freely. Yoongi twists his body to the beat, forcefully slicing the air with the fan like he would with a sword. He keeps his eyes on Taehyung as he spins, his silk dress flowing around him like water, and sure enough his mate’s eyes are wide as he watches Yoongi’s powerful dance.

Yoongi turns on the spot in succession, and the dress flies as he comes to an abrupt stop—body bent on one knee, fan covering his face save for his eyes. The music comes to a halt as well.

With an arrogant smile Yoongi rises to his feet, stands straight, chin up, eyes still on the alpha prince. He drops the fan at his feet. A deliberate step forward and a hand slowly reaching his throat, Yoongi sharply tugs at the knot tied to the back of his neck, undoing it.

There are exclamations of shock in the crowd as Yoongi’s dress comes loose and he makes quick work of tying it around his waist, leaving his oiled painted chest bare. He smiles.

The servant arrives with the items and diligently places them before Yoongi—a cup of soju, and two torches, lit and unlit.

Meeting Taehyung’s eyes once again, Yoongi picks up the cup of soju and downs it.

Making his way back to the center of the clearing with the two torches, Yoongi brings the fire to
his mouth and in one powerful move, spews out the soju into the air in front of him, breathing out a column of fire as the alcohol catches fire.

He hears the awed whispers, and he wants to look at his mate again but his eyes are unfocused and teary from the heat. The sky is turning dark, breaching into late evening. Spinning the torches in his hands, Yoongi lights the unlit the torch as well and the music picks up once again.

This time it’s louder, faster, Yoongi’s heart hammers in his chest and he can’t hear past his own chest gasping for air. He spins the torches around his waist, over and under his body, throws them in the air and twirls his oiled body in a twisted intricate dance, nothing like the delicate grace expected of omegas, but harsh and thunderous– a precursor to his mate of what and who he is.

Approaching the end of his ritual, Yoongi catches the torches mid-air, brings them to his mouth, throws his head back and swallows the fire. A ripple of alarmed gasps flows through the crowd.

Yoongi throws the torches in the sand and finally nears the closing act of his orchestrated performance. The sky has turned a deep blue, closing into the night, and the moonlight shines on his glistening body. Yoongi can tell he has everyone’s attention on him, the crowd has gone deathly silent, and he’s almost pleased to have them looking at him like he holds the power despite there being someone else sitting on the throne.

With a flick of his eyes he can make out the downward twist of his father’s lips, he’s clearly not pleased by Yoongi’s choice of demonstrative power play. The alpha prince however– Yoongi can read the amusement in Taehyung’s eyes, accompanied by something darker.

Yoongi gestures to his right, a quick snap of his fingers, and another servant comes up to him, this time with a sword in hand.

Unsheathing the sword by the hilt, Yoongi takes measured steps towards the platform. He climbs the stairs slowly and deliberately, letting the crowds absorb his intentions, before coming to a stop before his mate.

Taehyung raises an eyebrow at him in question, nothing on his face gives away how he feels. Instead of answering him, Yoongi goes down on one knee and bows, raising the sword in front of him as an invitation. The reaction from the crowd is discordant, Yoongi hears an audible gasp from the first prince sitting on Taehyung’s left.

It’s an ancient tradition, not one practiced by them anymore, where a wolf would decide their mate by duelling them. Only if the wolf was defeated by the opponent would they select them as their mate.

When his invitation is met with silence, Yoongi glances up at the alpha. Taehyung is watching him, his gaze dark. Taehyung makes no move to accept the sword, and Yoongi cocks a brow at him.

“Your Highness, are you implying that you don’t have faith in our parents’ judgement?” Taehyung says, smiling, but his voice is condescending.

Yoongi tilts his head slightly, and replies just as cockily. “My lord, are you suggesting that you may lose?”

Taehyung laughs loudly and startles Yoongi by accepting the sword.

“As you wish, I accept your challenge.” He leans forward in his seat, his next words a hot breath against Yoongi’s ear. “But having said that, there isn’t a single warrior here who has defeated me.”
They make their way to the center of the clearing, standing a few feet apart. A servant fetches Yoongi’s sword for him. Taehyung has abandoned his outer robe as well and has his blade aimed at Yoongi. His body is more built, his frame broader than Yoongi’s, and he holds his weapon with familiarity like he’s had enough practice spilling blood with it.

The moon is high in the sky, torches are hung on the trees in the periphery to provide light. They circle one another, one foot in front of another, gauging the other’s posture. The crowds are silent as they watch them with bated breath.

Taehyung smiles at him, he looks at ease, and it irks Yoongi. The alpha holds the advantage with Yoongi’s body being worn out by the rituals, and a prolonged duel will only work against him.

Taking advantage of the choice of timing, Yoongi leans to his left to throw Taehyung off but immediately steps to the right and attacks.

Taehyung meets him in a flash, blocking his attack with ease. Yoongi pivots on his foot and strikes him on the other end. Taehyung counters it swiftly, side-stepping Yoongi’s feint. They seem to be matched in power, although Yoongi feels beads of sweat roll down his back– his muscles weary by the ritual dance. On the other hand, Taehyung doesn’t seem to be jaded in the least.

Yoongi is startled when Taehyung chooses to shift to offensive. He constantly deflects Taehyung’s blade with his, barely keeping up with the alpha's incessant attacks. But Taehyung’s strikes slowly increase in power and Yoongi is gradually pushed back.

Yoongi has heard of Taehyung’s reputation on the battlefield– a demon, they call him, cruel and relentless, but it's only when he’s on the other end of his sword does he truly acknowledge the alpha’s skill. Yoongi’s clan doesn’t have as strong a military prowess as the alphas but Yoongi prides himself on being an impressive swordsman, especially since he’s never solely relied on fair play.

He allows himself to be pushed back by Taehyung’s ceaseless attacks, searching for the right opportunity. And it presents itself when Taehyung and him have locked blades and by now Yoongi’s arm strength has evidently diminished, giving Taehyung the upper hand. Taehyung pushes on with his blade, Yoongi’s arm trembles slightly.

He sees it in Taehyung’s eyes– the delusion that he’s already won, and just as Taehyung goes for his last strike, confident that he’ll emerge victorious, so does Yoongi. Taehyung takes a step forward, the sword’s edge raised high, and Yoongi deliberately swings his leg to knock Taehyung off his feet.

Taehyung notices it but his reflexes kick in a second too late. He manages to avoid Yoongi’s leg and side-steps to the right, but his balance falters for a moment and Yoongi takes the opportunity to turn on his foot and ram an elbow into the alpha’s back.

Taehyung falls to the floor with a sharp hiss of pain, but before Yoongi can completely trap him immobile, Taehyung’s twisting around and meeting Yoongi’s sword with his own. His sword keeps Yoongi trapped long enough for Taehyung’s feet to kick at his own, pushing him off his feet, using his own move against him.
Yoongi’s falling to his feet, sword clattering to the right but before he can make a move, Taehyung’s on him. His hands slam Yoongi’s wrists to the sand, and his thighs trap Yoongi’s hips in place.

“You’re impressive,” Taehyung pants, and again with his conceited grin, “but there isn’t a single warrior who has defeated me.” He repeats.

Their faces are close, and Yoongi notices his state of undress and Taehyung’s scent clouding the air between them. It’s heady and so overwhelmingly alpha that it should feel repulsive but instead Yoongi’s thighs tremble, involuntarily closing into themselves.

“Perhaps you’re truly thrilled at the prospect of mating me, your Highness.” He pants out instead, voice coming out breathier than he’d like it to be, and attempts to distract himself from his body’s reaction to the alpha’s scent.

There’s a moment of dissonance where Yoongi doesn’t know if he imagines Taehyung’s eyes flickering to his lips before snapping back to his eyes. Something thick and stormy swims in his irises, and Taehyung leans closer to whisper against his ear.

“Perhaps I am. I’d enjoy to fuck that disobedience out of you, omega.”

Yoongi hates how his pulse jumps at the words, body shuddering. It doesn’t go unnoticed by the way Taehyung smirks at him above. Yoongi tries to resist but Taehyung’s hold on his wrists is stronger and the alpha tightens his grip on him as if to prove a point.

But before Yoongi can retaliate, Taehyung releases his wrists and stands back up on his feet.

“Let’s go, your Highness. Everyone is waiting for us,” he smiles, and then with a cock of his head adds, “unless you wish to be carried.”

Yoongi rolls his eyes at the alpha’s obvious attempt to rile him up and reluctantly accepts Taehyung’s outstretched hand to pull himself back to his feet.

“We are gathered here today to witness the holy matrimony, the joining of two kingdoms and two clans through their sons– the son of the Alphas, Kim Taehyung, and the son of the Omegas, Min Yoongi, who will be bonded today and be of one heart, soul and body. It is a union of peace and harmony, and we pray to the gods that the royal match is blessed with abundance, with fertility, with joy and bliss.”

Yoongi and Taehyung offer their wrists at the priest’s gesture. The priest, an old wrinkled beta, reads the holy incantation out loud and intertwines a red twine around their wrists, Yoongi’s left and the alpha’s right, that is meant to bind them together for the rest of the night until their joining.

They repeat their own chants, wedding vows of loyalty and respect, of love and health, and slowly but surely their words start to take effect. Yoongi feels an intangible bond tying him to his mate, a heated pull in his stomach, and with the way Taehyung’s hand tightens around his, he’s certain that the alpha feels it too.

The priest finishes the recitation and both of them are given their knives. Yoongi holds the cool
metal in his free hand and presses the sharp edge of the blade against the palm of the hand tied to his mate. The pain stings and swells, Yoongi hisses but holds it in and lets his blood drip into the bowl before them. The alpha prince does the same but his face reveals no trace of pain.

The priest gestures at the bowl and then at them. “Drink from it.”

Taehyung picks the bowl first, cups it between his palms and brings their mixed blood to his lips, taking Yoongi’s joined hand with him as he raises his own. He takes a large gulp, his throat shifting as he drinks from the bowl until it’s half empty. Yoongi watches the dark blood stain his lips, it makes his throat go dry.

Yoongi licks at his lips when Taehyung shifts to face him. His dark eyes meet Yoongi’s.

Taehyung’s fingers come to touch his chin briefly, tilting his head up, and Yoongi obediently parts his lips for the alpha to pour their mixed blood down his tongue.

It’s warm, strong and heady, a mixture of both their scents, and Yoongi feels a pulsating heat in his stomach, throbbing before it rests pleasantly like good alcohol, making him feel a little light in the head. Yoongi’s fingers wrap around Taehyung’s wrist in a feather-light touch and the alpha pulls the bowl from his mouth, lowering it on the ground before them once again.

Lastly, the priest fetches a bowl of uncooked dry rice and guides Taehyung’s hand to it. Taehyung takes a pinch of the rice grains and dips them in the blood. He then lifts his hand, the tips of his fingers smeared red, and holds it in mid-air.

Yoongi leans forward and brings his forehead close enough for Taehyung to stick the rice grains on the skin between Yoongi’s eyebrows, dragging his finger higher and streaking the skin with a line of blood till he reaches Yoongi’s hairline.

Yoongi repeats the process, not looking away from his mate’s eyes, and the action feels intimate, so much so that Yoongi’s fingers tremble at the base of Taehyung’s forehead. It feels absolute, binding, their lives will be irrevocably entwined by the end of the night and Yoongi feels a cold dread churn in his stomach.

Yoongi startles when he feels Taehyung’s fingers interweaving with his own, and squeezing lightly as if in assurance. It serves to remind Yoongi that they’re being watched by a countless number of eyes and he shakily drags his bloodstained fingers up Taehyung’s forehead, marking him and finishing the rites.

The crowd bursts into cheers, and Yoongi stands up from his kneeling position. Taehyung mirrors him and again they stand facing each other.

Yoongi gathers his garments between his fingers and bends into a big bow. The gesture is to be returned but Yoongi cannot see it, his eyes are trained to the ground beneath his feet and his vision blurs from the hot tears that treacherously escape and drip down his eyelashes.

Yoongi didn’t shed a tear when it was announced that he’ll be wed to the Alpha prince, that he’ll be sold off by his own country and denied the throne he was promised since birth. Yoongi never shed a tear.

But now, with his head touching the ground in front of his alpha in full submission, Yoongi cries.
If Taehyung notices his wet lashes, he doesn’t comment on it. They walk towards the open field where the rest of the wedding celebrations continue, this time without them partaking in the events. Yoongi is exhausted from the day’s proceedings, he doesn’t protest when Taehyung threads their fingers together, it’s not as if they have much of a choice with their bound wrists, but it also serves to balance the facade of a happily wed couple they’re meant to be wearing in front of the crowds.

Several people come to congratulate them, it surprises Yoongi how many of them include him as well in their blessings. Yoongi had assumed that the country’s people were cold and unkind like their ruler but he’s proven wrong when numerous women approach him to praise his dance and compliment him on his beauty. Yoongi can’t keep the color from his cheeks as he thanks them, somewhat surprised but sincere. Children gush over his fire dance and Yoongi grins and pats them on the head. Their words somehow manage to lighten the weight on his chest and he finds himself breathing easier, the smile on his face becoming more genuine even as he feels the alpha’s eyes linger on him.

A long table is set up on the elevated platform for the royal family and a number of other court officials and nobles. It’s close enough to watch the festivities in comfort. There are mats on the grounds for the commoners.

The officials rise to greet them, bending at the waist as they do, and Yoongi and Taehyung mirror the gesture and speak their respective greetings before taking their seats at the table.

Yoongi seats himself between Taehyung and an official whom he doesn’t recognise. Taehyung’s older brother, Kim Namjoon, is seated opposite him. Yoongi hasn’t seen the man much other than the first time he’d been brought to the royal court. He’s handsome, Yoongi observes, very much like the rest of the Kim bloodline, but unlike Taehyung, the Crown Prince is of a lighter frame, a scholar as opposed to a warrior from what Yoongi’s heard.

“You certainly know how to leave an impression, Prince Yoongi.” The Crown Prince smiles and Yoongi laughs politely in response.

“I take it you’re impressed then.” Yoongi cocks his head.

“Immensely.” The prince says, offering his hand in Yoongi’s direction. The gesture takes Yoongi by surprise. Shaking hands is more an informal greeting between friends, not very popular among the royalty where everyone’s all too concerned about status and titles. Yoongi glances up at the prince’s face for any sign of mockery but the Crown Prince merely smiles, warm and genuine.

Going along with the unconventional greeting, Yoongi meets Namjoon’s handshake, holding it for a few seconds before retreating his hand. He observes how the two brothers are so unlike each other.

“I hope you’re liking it here. My little brother isn’t giving you too much trouble is he?”

Taehyung snorts at the mention of his name and Yoongi glances to his side to look at the man.

“Clearly I’m the troublemaker between the two of us.” He says, voice flat and sarcastic.

Before Yoongi can retaliate, a woman appears behind Taehyung and smacks him hard on the head. “Ouch” Taehyung cries and twists his neck to glance behind him. “Mother!” He complains, the look of betrayal almost comical on his face.
Yoongi stares wide-eyed at the queen. If not for the amused smile on her lips, Yoongi would’ve mistaken her to be furious. Her face has a daunting appearance, and Yoongi can now see where Taehyung received his beautiful features from— the sharp nose, fiery eyes, slanted elegant eyebrows.

Yoongi immediately straightens when she turns to look at him.

“Set him straight once in a while, will you?” She says, her voice is teasing but even so Yoongi is fairly intimidated. “It ought to be good for him.”

She casts a meaningful look at her son. “Be good to your mate, I thought I raised you better than that.”

It’s like a whiplash, to see Taehyung’s demeanour change so suddenly from arrogant and cocky to downright pouting. “Whose side are you on, again?” He grumbles.

The queen chuckles lightly. “There are no sides, you stupid boy. You are mates, you’re on the same side.” Despite her light tone, there’s a weight to her words as she takes turns to look at each one of them meaningfully.

The queen leaves them to take her own seat at the table, but something about her words lingers in the air. Yoongi meets Taehyung’s eyes and there’s an unspoken tension between them, settling heavily in their bodies.

The attention is thankfully averted by the arrival of the two clan Kings. Everyone at the table rises to greet them.

“For the blessed couple!” The Alpha King announces and raises his drink and everyone at the table save for the two of them lifts their glasses in the air. “Let us drink to them!”

The celebration starts with an array of instruments playing a lively beat. Drinks are served, all of them are foreign to Yoongi but he eventually arbitrarily picks a yellow drink and finds himself enjoying its sweet taste.

There are performances of all kinds, and traditional dances Yoongi’s never had the opportunity to witness. They’re different from the ones in his kingdom, more vibrant and lively, the performers wear ornamented embroidered garments and jewellery that jingles as they spin. It’s mesmerising and Yoongi soon loses himself to the festivities, deaf to the conversations flying around him.

Sometime during the night, Yoongi shivers, goosebumps rising on his bare chest, having forgotten his state of undress. He’s startled when a sudden warmth envelops him in the form of a familiar red robe. Yoongi twists to his right to see Taehyung’s hands on him as he drapes the cloth across Yoongi’s chest.

“You could’ve asked for something warm.” Taehyung says, now dressed in a simpler black hanbok.

Yoongi’s cheeks flush with color. He lowers his gaze and stares at his hands on his lap, mumbles a quiet thank you. He misses the small smile that briefly graces Taehyung’s face.
Yoongi turns around to resume watching a play being enacted, one of a blind warrior’s battles, but he can’t seem to shake off the presence of his mate pressed beside him, their thighs touching and hands entwined. Heat blooms behind his cheeks as he becomes hyperaware of everywhere their skins touch, tingles spreading across his entire body.

The remainder of the night continues with more festivities, young men performing stunts around a large bonfire, a woman singing in foreign tongues and several puppet shadow dances. Food is brought to them repeatedly, all varieties of delicacies that Yoongi’s never eaten before. Taehyung occasionally points at a few for Yoongi to try but Yoongi politely declines, his stomach is gradually twisting into itself as the night progresses. The events of the day had distracted him previously, but now as the dark grows more obscure, and the bond between him and the alpha pulsates in his entire body, Yoongi is reminded of what is to come.

Several officials approach them with gifts. Taehyung smiles at them and introduces them to Yoongi but after a point, Yoongi stops trying to memorise their names. He sips at the one drink he has taken a liking to as Taehyung makes conversation with different army generals. Ordinarily Yoongi would be more alert, more keen on learning about the new kingdom and its traditions, but the looming apprehension keeps him sipping at his sweet drink.

Yoongi knows what awaits them, the final ceremony that will close the marriage. He’s not naive but his nerves betray him nonetheless. His fingers tremble, shaking the colourful liquid in its glass. Yoongi brings it to his lips and takes another mouthful of the drink, keeping up the composed exterior as Taehyung laughs with the guests.

He knows that he holds close to no power from this point forward, the alpha prince could do what he desired to Yoongi’s body and in this foreign land, Yoongi is helpless. But that is his duty, Yoongi grits his teeth as a furious heat blooms behind his lashes, he may not like it but this is his duty to his kingdom. To be taken from behind and bred like a bitch, to carry a child and then be ignored in favour of a younger concubine, thrown away when he’s served his purpose— a sacrifice for the good of the country, so that no more lives are lost in this futile war, it is a noble life, dirty and degrading as it may be. Yoongi drinks some more when his hands begin to tremor noticeably.

“Is this boring you?” Taehyung eventually asks when Yoongi’s been silent for over an hour. He leans a little in Yoongi’s space to be heard over the music and Yoongi is suddenly fascinated by the slight reveal of the alpha’s chest— the garment hanging low enough to reveal a strip of tan unmarked skin.

The drink must’ve contained more alcohol than Yoongi anticipated, his head spins faintly and a different kind of heat bursts in his stomach. Yoongi tips to the right, smile lopsided, feeling lighter than he's felt all night.

“No, you’re quite refreshing to the eyes, your Highness.” He slurs slightly.

Taehyung’s eyes widen, and then snap to the glass in Yoongi’s hand. He pulls the drink from his loose grip and inspects the contents.

“It’s an aphrodisiac.” He curses under his breath, then snaps his eyes up to look at Yoongi. "How much did you drink?” He asks, voice firm.

Yoongi shrinks under the tone, he looks away from Taehyung’s sharp gaze, suddenly feeling cold even under the wraps of Taehyung’s robes.

Taehyung sighs, he places the drink on the table and away from Yoongi’s reach. His voice turns softer as he crouches in front of Yoongi. “Come, let’s retire for the night.”
Yoongi’s thighs immediately close into themselves at the suggestion, and his throat dries when he meets his mate's eyes, feeling all too breathless as the helplessness begins to choke him, reminding him what lies in wait for him.

“You can’t order me around.” He snaps but his words sound weak even to him.

He feels powerless, angry tears in his eyes, he never wanted this, he didn’t ask to be married, at least not like this– in this strange faraway land with this strange faraway man. Yoongi knows how he must appear, eyes watery, body trembling and shrinking into itself. But he clenches his fists and glares at his mate anyway.

Taehyung’s lips pull into a tight line, and he wraps his fingers around Yoongi’s forearm, decisively tugging him forward. Taken by surprise, Yoongi is bonelessly pulled in– their faces are suddenly too close. Yoongi’s lips part on instinct.

“Look at me.” Taehyung says, voice low and commanding, his dark eyes boring into Yoongi's. But a moment later, like he’s had a sudden realisation, Taehyung’s eyes widen and he speaks again, surprise colouring his voice. “You’re nervous.”

Yoongi doesn’t reply, his eyes dart away– the action enough of an answer.

There’s a pause, and Taehyung’s voice is gentler when he speaks again. “Come, let’s go back. You’ll fall ill at this rate.”

Yoongi doesn’t have the strength to refute, the alcohol’s effects finally presenting themselves. His vision tilts to the right and Yoongi weakly pushes Taehyung away.

“Don’t touch me.” He snaps, cheeks flushed.

Taehyung draws away and stands upright. He offers his hand to Yoongi but Yoongi swats it away, feeling petty and wanting to be difficult. He pulls himself to stand upright, but loses his balance and would've fallen to the floor if not for Taehyung’s hand closing around his elbow, steadying him.

He watches Taehyung gesture at one of the servants and soon enough they’re both moving towards a carriage pulled for them. A few of the guests try to approach them when they see them departing but Taehyung waves them away.

Taehyung’s just about carrying his weight by the time they reach the carriage. Yoongi’s last shreds of pride only just keep him from collapsing against Taehyung’s shoulders once they're inside the vehicle. He squeezes his eyes shut, tries to breathe on count and contain the swelling heat in his stomach making him oversensitive to every touch and smell.

He swims in Taehyung’s scent in the closed coach, gasps when the carriage jumps at the bumps in the road. The sensation of the fabric of his dress sliding up his skin is overwhelming. He faintly catches some of Taehyung’s whispered words of comfort, his hand squeezing Yoongi’s.

“We’ve reached.” Taehyung whispers once the car comes to a sharp halt. Yoongi briefly lifts his eyes open and lets himself be pulled out of the carriage. Taehyung dismisses the servants and more or less drags Yoongi through the palace hallways. Yoongi doesn’t think, just lets himself be pressed against Taehyung’s body. The bond sings at the physical contact and Yoongi sighs, softens, buries his nose against Taehyung’s neck.

There’s an audible groan from the alpha, and Yoongi’s omega sings at the reaction. His body melts at the scent infiltrating his nose and a soft whine rises out of his throat unbidden. He feels
Taehyung’s body tense at the sound but his thoughts are evasive, swimming out from under his fingers before he can catch them.

Taehyung wraps a strong hand around him to walk them properly to Taehyung’s bedchambers. There are words, Taehyung ordering the guards outside his chambers to leave, and the authority in his voice has Yoongi’s thighs clenching.

Once inside, Taehyung sharply twists them around and pushes Yoongi against the door. Yoongi whines at the loss of contact, but Taehyung firmly pins him away.

“You’re drunk.” He says, voice flat.

“How does it matter?” Yoongi counters, he tries to focus on the alpha through the haze clouding his mind. The nerves are returning, he feels his cheeks burn as Taehyung watches him with narrow eyes, his bangs low and long enough to hang in front of his eyes— a predator, and Yoongi feels small. “You’re going to take me anyway.”

Taehyung’s expression tightens. “Do you hate it so much?”

His question surprises Yoongi, stilting his thought process. “Why are you asking me this?” He asks bitterly, looking away. “Like I have a choice in the matter.”

Taehyung makes an exasperated sound, releasing Yoongi and taking a step back. “You are so— why are you always so difficult?”

Taehyung’s words sting, and Yoongi curls into himself, presses himself against the door. He knows that he doesn't possess the most desirable omega qualities, he’s never aspired to have them either, and as reluctant as he may have been to be mated to him, he can’t help but feel the alpha’s aggravation pierce through his chest like knives.

They stand in the thick uncomfortable silence and Yoongi tries to swallow the heat blooming behind his eyes.

He startles when Taehyung steps closer, almost apologetic. “I’m sorry,” he mumbles, surprising Yoongi, “but I don’t understand why you keep fighting me.”

His words feel genuine, and Yoongi shrinks into himself even further. “I’m sorry,” he whispers, so soft that he wonders if Taehyung even heard him, and then in a meek admission, “I just– I don’t know how to do this.”

Taehyung blinks and it takes him a moment to understand the meaning behind Yoongi’s words.

“You mean– you’ve never—”

Hot humiliation has him turning away, Yoongi tries to hide but Taehyung’s fingers under his chin force him to meet his eyes. “I apologise if I offended you, I’m simply surprised. The way you always carry yourself, you seem so self-assured, I just assumed– I’m sorry.” He repeats and then in an affectionate manner, grazes his knuckles against Yoongi’s cheek.

Taehyung surprises Yoongi with his next words, they’re slow like Taehyung is picking them carefully. “You know, if the arrangement displeased you to such a great extent, why did you offer yourself on the battlefield that day?”

Yoongi’s body flinches at the reminder of the day that began it all, the battlefield littered with bloody corpses, the numbers in-proportionately tilted in the alphas’ favour, their tents flooding
with more injuries than they could treat, the earth under their feet poisoned with war and cruelty and death. It was that day that the outcome of the war loomed in front of them— a horrific nightmare that they were escalating towards.

Something had to be done, a sacrifice needed to be made.

From the very beginning, it was Yoongi, his little brother had tried to volunteer himself but Yoongi had quickly dismissed the idea. He’d rather succumb himself to death's cruel grip than allow his brother to go through a fate worse than death.

The deal was made in secrecy, no one apart from a chosen few knew of Yoongi’s actions. And at sunset, Yoongi and his father rode into the Alpha territory to make an offer– one of peace, as they disguised it. And Yoongi had taken it all, had carried his clan’s hatred for him in his heart– a traitor, they called him, a coward, a bitch. Yoongi took it all, and he’s asked why.

“It was my duty.” Yoongi answers, meeting Taehyung’s eyes with his own. Taehyung’s expression is unreadable. The pads of his fingers trace Yoongi’s throat, a light fleeting touch, and Yoongi inhales sharply. Taehyung’s fingers are calloused no doubt from the numerous battles, it serves to remind him that his mate is known not for kindness or gentleness, but callousness and ferocity.

Taehyung closes the distance between them with another step, his scent heavy around them like a thick canopy and Yoongi cannot resurface.

“What about now?” The alpha leans closer, his lips brushing against Yoongi’s throat, tantalizingly close to his scent gland. “Is this your duty too?”

He presses their bodies together, hard lines against one another. Yoongi barely swallows the moan that threatens to leave his lips. Taehyung obviously smells the arousal off him. He does it again, pushes Yoongi against the door and thrusts their hips together.

Yoongi’s breathy gasp betrays him.

Taehyung’s fingers come to push his robes off his shoulders and the garment falls to the floor leaving Yoongi’s painted chest naked between them. Taehyung doesn’t touch him, simply looks at him in a way that leaves Yoongi breathless.

“Answer me.” Taehyung demands, his voice low and authoritative.

Yoongi’s body shudders but his pride has him lifting his chin up.

“Yes it is my duty, there’s nothing more to it.” He whispers, surprised to see amusement flicker in Taehyung’s eyes, clearly not believing him.

“I see.” Taehyung replies simply before bending down and kissing his throat, open-mouthed and wet, tongue flicking against his skin right where the mating bite goes. Yoongi shivers, his arms instinctively come to wrap around Taehyung’s neck, a whimper escaping his lips. Taehyung’s hand drops to his waist, gripping him right and pulling him closer. The contact makes him ache and Yoongi feels his body arch in Taehyung’s hold.

Taehyung sucks at his skin relentlessly and Yoongi’s mouth parts on instinct. His knees tremble under him, threatening to give away. Taehyung must notice for he detaches himself from Yoongi’s neck and pulls at the ties binding their wrists. He yanks at them and they immediately break, putting up no resistance.

The red string falls to the floor and Taehyung loops an arm around Yoongi’s knees, effortlessly
picking him up in his arms. Mortification burns his cheeks, Yoongi weakly protests but Taehyung is deaf to his struggles and simply carries him to the giant bed in the middle of his room.

He’s dropped on the soft mattress and when he notices that Taehyung doesn’t follow him, Yoongi looks up to find the alpha ridding himself of his own robes. The sight of his golden skin makes Yoongi’s throat go dry, because while Yoongi’s skin is unmarked, Taehyung’s chest is littered with numerous scars of battle.

The alpha joins him on the bed, naked save for his pants. The sight of him hovering over Yoongi’s body shoots heated pleasure between his legs. He feels excessively hot, a little dizzy, and his heart pounds loud in his chest when he studies how Taehyung’s frame is so much bigger than his own, it almost engulfs him. The knowledge both scares and arouses him. In the confines of the room, Taehyung holds all power over him. The shadows cast by the oil lamps on the nightstand make his features look sharper, his shoulders broader, his presence so much bigger.

Taehyung’s hand comes to cup his cheek, the gesture so in contrast with his previous actions that it throws Yoongi off. His emotions must show on his face because Taehyung gently tilts his head up.

“Are you feeling alright?” He asks, eyebrows knitted in concern, the emotion at odds with their positions.

“I’m fine.” Yoongi looks away, stomach in knots, the night is a jarring juxtaposition with what he’d anticipated. He’d expected to feel pain, to be intruded without thought or care, to be taken once, twice, multiple times till the alpha was satisfied, he hadn’t-- he hadn't expected this. And now he’s caught unaware in the throes of his own foreign pleasures.

Taehyung doesn’t look convinced, his fingers stroke at Yoongi’s cheek, his face solemn like he’s trying to solve a puzzle.

“You’re too tense.” He speaks after a pause, fingers sliding down his face to his chest, tracing the skin lightly. Yoongi tries to relax but his body bucks up in surprise when Taehyung’s fingers brush against his nipple. His mouth parts open but no sound comes out.

Amused at his sensitive reaction, Taehyung presses his thumb against the nipple again, this time firm and deliberate. A moan tears from Yoongi’s throat, unbidden and loud. The sound is high-pitched and Yoongi immediately brings his hand to his mouth out of humiliation, and claps it shut.

“Don’t.” Taehyung’s voice breaks through his haze. He pulls Yoongi’s hand away from his mouth. “It’s okay for it to feel good, even if it may be your duty.”

He pushes his hand against the soft sheets and threads their fingers together as his mouth descends upon his other nipple. He kisses it, flicks his tongue against the bud and Yoongi jerks, arches off the bed into him. The pleasure is too intense, he’s never felt this sensitive and vulnerable.

Taehyung doesn’t stop, his lips close around the hardened bud as he sucks, and Yoongi’s body thrashes underneath. Taehyung’s hand comes to pin his wrists above him, the other holding his hips down. Yoongi can’t bring himself to speak as his body writhes with pleasure. He feels a wetness slide out from underneath him and embarrassingly identifies it as his slick.

Taehyung finally nips at it one last time before releasing the reddened nipple. His mouth moves down to his stomach, kissing and sucking at the expanse of skin as he goes, leaving red marks on Yoongi’s otherwise pale skin. He drags his teeth along the hipbone, deeper into the lines of his pelvis, and Yoongi pants as Taehyung leaves little bites in a line along the skin above his underskirt.
Yoongi is confused when Taehyung suddenly pulls away, his mind too delirious from the pleasure, it takes him a few seconds to understand Taehyung’s heavy questioning gaze on him. He’s asking for permission, Yoongi belatedly realises and silently nods in response.

Taehyung releases his wrists and makes quick work of untying Yoongi’s skirt from around his waist, pulling the garment down his legs in one swift tug. Yoongi closes his legs in embarrassment, feeling vulnerable under Taehyung’s dusky gaze.

His state of undress clears his head of the pleasure and the effects of the aphrodisiac. Humiliation seeps in through his pores and Yoongi twists his head to the side, no longer able to take in the sight of the alpha above him– ready to take him and seal their wedding rites.

Taehyung reaches between his legs, gently prying them apart and Yoongi follows, for resistance at this point of time is futile. Taehyung settles between his legs, and Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut when one of Taehyung’s fingers penetrates him. The intrusion feels foreign but Yoongi’s body laps it up, accommodates and stretches around it. The slick makes the slide easier as Taehyung’s finger stretches him out, spreading his juices around him.

Yoongi tries to keep his breaths even as Taehyung adds another finger, deliberate, unhurried, and Yoongi’s body slowly opens up for the alpha. The entire process is all parts humiliating, being bared open in such an intimate manner, and infuriating because Taehyung takes his time stretching him open and Yoongi just wants him to get done with it.

He’s squeezed his eyes shut and resolutely averted his face from where the alpha continues his ministrations, that the sudden intrusion of something wet jolts him by surprise. Yoongi snaps his eyes open and gasps when he sees Taehyung’s head between his legs.

“You ah–” His words are cut off by a whimper that escapes his lips unbidden as Taehyung’s tongue comes to lick at his walls again. Yoongi fists his fingers into the sheets, unable to comprehend the sensations running up his spine. He’d known how fucking usually takes place, but he’s never heard of this. It feels so dirty but it has him whimpering softly, and Yoongi presses his lips tight to keep the noises from escaping.

He knew he’d be at the alpha’s mercy but to be defiled like this– Taehyung lets out a pleased hum when Yoongi accidentally lets out a loud sob. Taehyung spreads his legs wider, his thumbs opening Yoongi’s entrance wider as he mouths at his hole again, licking deeper and Yoongi’s body betrays him by responding and producing more slick. His cock stands erect, evidence enough.

Taehyung inserts a finger alongside his tongue, crooking it and pushing against Yoongi’s walls. He massages him until there’s a moment when his finger pushes deeper and Yoongi’s body clenches around it in pleasure. His thighs quiver, body overly sensitive, but Taehyung carries on, relentlessly pushing against the very spot and effectively reducing Yoongi to a shuddering and trembling mess under him.

It feels ridiculous, he’s heard of alphas chasing their own pleasure, viciously holding their mates down by the hair and taking them from behind, getting their fill for the night. For Taehyung to please him like this– it doesn’t make sense.

He doesn’t have the time or the sense to contemplate the alpha’s intentions for Taehyung is resurfacing from between Yoongi’s legs. He raises his head, eyes meeting Yoongi’s and mouth parting in a coquettish grin as he laps up what’s left of Yoongi’s slick on his lips.

“Were my services to your satisfaction, your Highness?” He asks, teasing.
Yoongi stares at him, breathless, eyes lidded. “I wouldn’t know, seeing I haven’t yet been satisfied.”

There is a momentary pause before Taehyung lets out a sharp, surprised sort of laugh. “I didn’t know you were capable of jesting.”

Yoongi averts his eyes, the atmosphere feels lighter than before, like their arrangement and their duties to their clans aren’t hanging over them like trembling icicles. It almost feels like they are lovers bantering, and a glance at the alpha makes Yoongi feverishly wonder what it’d be like to be with Taehyung as his lover instead of whatever manufactured arrangement it is that they have.

Yoongi is pulled from his thoughts when he catches sight of Taehyung undoing his pants. The air suddenly stills, and a thick silence seeps into the room through the cracks in the walls. Yoongi takes in a shaky inhale, he feels his chest constrict. This is the vital segment of their act, this is what is required and expected.

Yoongi keeps himself from looking long enough and when he finally does, his eyes widen at the size of Taehyung’s endowment. Alphas are born with thicker penises, he’s aware of the fact. Yoongi hasn’t had to see one other than his own but Taehyung’s cock outmatches his own in every aspect, and to think it’ll further expand in size when Taehyung knots him.

Taehyung takes hold of Yoongi’s knees, lifting them to position himself better against Yoongi’s entrance.

“Is this alright?” Taehyung asks, his voice carrying none of the teasing it previously did.

Yoongi swallows the anxiety that winds up his throat and averts his eyes. “Just– finish it.” He whispers. He cannot make out what expression Taehyung bears, but when Taehyung makes no effort to move, Yoongi glances back at him. The alpha is watching him with a disapproving frown.

“Are you sure that is what you want?” He asks, and Yoongi grits his teeth, surely Taehyung understands that Yoongi has close to no choice in this matter.

“It’s not of matter what I desire, but what is right.” Yoongi speaks.

Taehyung stares at him for a long moment before he finally replies, “if that is what you see fit.” There’s something flat in his voice, but Taehyung doesn’t give him much time to ponder. He shifts again, the tip of his cock coming to press against Yoongi’s entrance.

With one swift push Taehyung is inside of him, and Yoongi’s mouth falls open in a silent gasp, if the previous sensation was overwhelming, this feels almost tenfolds of it. Taehyung’s cock is big inside him, stretching his body even wider than his fingers did. For a moment Taehyung remains still as Yoongi adjusts to the sensation and when the burn subsides, he scrunches his eyes shut and gives a brief nod of acquiesce. Taehyung exhales and begins to move cautiously. Yoongi looks up to see his brows furrowed in concentration, muscles taut with strain as his arms hold Yoongi’s legs up and his hips move to push deeper inside him.

His body slowly gives way to his mate like Yoongi himself never did, it grows wetter and more pliant as it adjusts to the stretch, accommodating Taehyung’s girth inside him. Taehyung pushes deeper with each thrust, his hips meeting Yoongi’s when he pushes all the way in, and it feels like nothing Yoongi’s ever felt before. It’s full and pulsating, a dull ache that bleeds into something more pleasurable.

Somewhere between them, Yoongi feels the bond between them settle like it’s finally sated.
Taehyung’s breaths match his own, loud in the silence, and Yoongi meets the alpha's gaze with his own eyes half-slitted with pleasure.

"Are you alright?” Taehyung breathes, dispelling the quiet between them. Yoongi’s lips part in a silent plea.

His chest trembles, and a heat throbs between his legs, then spreads all the way to his toes. He is close to release, and Yoongi winds his arms around Taehyung’s broad back.

“Move,” he whimpers, legs coming to lock around Taehyung’s waist, wetness trailing down from between his swell, “please” he adds.

The words have Taehyung stilling before he draws back an inch and snaps his hips into Yoongi in a way that has Yoongi choking out a gasp.

He fucks into him again and Yoongi quivers like a leaf. His body yields with each thrust and Taehyung begins to fuck into him harder. The previous burn blooms into dull aching pleasure like a sweet bruise each time Taehyung’s length breaches him, and Yoongi feels the betrayal of his body as a stray tear rolls down his face. His mind wants to resist the drag of the pleasure but his body crumbles and his thighs tremble with the effort to keep himself still. He struggles to accept that he could move from resentment to enjoyment in a matter of minutes, but above him Taehyung doesn't stop moving. And Yoongi can't quite contain the little mewls that escape his lips.

Taehyung raises his legs higher, drawing himself closer, and fucks him at a different angle, closer and deeper. It takes Yoongi by surprise, his lips part instinctively as Taehyung’s cock pushes deeper and hits him at a spot that has Yoongi curling into the alpha. The new position brings their faces closer and Yoongi meets Taehyung's intense gaze, their mouths barely an inch apart that Yoongi breathes in Taehyung's exhales. It feels significantly more intimate.

Neither of them look away as Taehyung fucks him, the drag of his cock seizing Yoongi’s body up with pleasure. It feels so good, Yoongi doesn’t know what to do with himself as Taehyung continues to pound on top of him as he pleases. He holds on to Taehyung’s back, digs nails into his flesh. After all of Taehyung’s earlier ministrations having brought him close to the edge, Yoongi’s body shudders as the pleasure builds inside him to an insurmountable level.

It doesn’t take long before he arches into Taehyung’s chest, fingers sliding up into his hair as he locks up and tenses, clenching around Taehyung and coming with a gasp.

Taehyung adjusts himself when Yoongi collapses beneath him, panting and limp, his skin glistening with sweat, and starts to fuck into him harder than before. His thrusts are no longer controlled as he chases his own relief, hips snapping into Yoongi who’s all too pliant under him. Yoongi’s body jerks with the force of his thrusts, and Taehyung bends over, caging him as he presses their chests together and pants into his neck.

Yoongi’s skin tingles, all too aware as Taehyung licks at the base of his throat. The alpha grabs a fistful of his hair, tilting his head to the side and Yoongi bares his neck to him in submission.

For a long moment it’s only Taehyung’s hot breaths against his skin, but then come the teeth.

Yoongi whimpers as Taehyung marks him with his bite. Their bond blooms like a flower in waiting. Taehyung’s hips snap into him one last time and Yoongi cries from the mix of pain and pleasure. He feels Taehyung lick at the bite to ease the pain flaring underneath the marred skin, and Yoongi sobs when Taehyung finally comes– spasmimg into Yoongi’s body with a curse.
Taehyung gives the wound one last lick, and the pain gradually soothes into a dull ache. Yoongi whines when Taehyung lifts himself off of him, and the alpha bends over and presses a quick kiss against the mating bite in apology. He gently lowers Yoongi’s legs onto the bed, and Yoongi has to dig his nails into the sheets to keep himself from pulling Taehyung back in, his cheeks burn, his body craves his mate’s presence even when they’re essentially strangers.

Yoongi feels the cum drip down his hole when Taehyung slowly pulls out from inside him. The sensation of being empty after so long is strange and disorienting.

Taehyung sits upright, pushing his sweaty hair off his forehead and Yoongi watches him get off the bed, confused until the alpha returns with a wet cloth. It’s strange, the cold touch feels almost foreign against his heated skin as Taehyung cleans the juices off his body.

The mating bite stings as it sits on Yoongi’s throat, it was what was required of them, the physical bond between them and the claim that Yoongi now belonged to Taehyung in every way. It was all that was expected of them, it was all Yoongi expected from his alpha, yet–

Taehyung returns to the bed, a tense silence encompasses them. Yoongi doesn’t know what Taehyung expects from him now, surely they won’t go at it again, Yoongi doesn’t know if his body can take more. The alpha, however, simply lies down on the bed beside Yoongi and Yoongi automatically retreats a little further to widen the distance between them without thinking. Taehyung obviously notices it but he doesn’t comment.

“We have a long day ahead of us, we should sleep.” He says instead and Yoongi nods mutely.

Taehyung extinguishes the lamp on the nightstand and Yoongi rolls away from the alpha, pulling the blankets over himself to cover his nudity which is futile at this point in time.

“Good night.” Taehyung speaks into the dark but the words aren’t returned. Yoongi lets him think he’s fallen asleep but his eyes stay wide open even as Taehyung’s breaths even out.

Sleep doesn’t come to him despite his body being worn to death. Sometime in the middle of the night, he wonders when his body started to feel so empty.

Serve your clan, they told him. Omegas must first make space for their alpha and child inside their body, they said, and then occupy what space is left over.

Yoongi reckons there isn’t much of anything left in his body.
The distance between them remains unchanged, and the morning after is spent in an uncomfortable silence while they wait for the preparations for their departure to finish. The journey to the Omega land takes a good two days. Taehyung watches Yoongi's face for any sign of elation at the thought of returning to his homeland but there is none, the omega’s face is devoid of emotion as usual.

He helps the omega prince step into the carriage once it’s ready. There’s no warmth in between their joined hands and the hold is broken as soon as Yoongi steps inside, the omega moving to take the farthest spot from Taehyung in the coach.

Their carriage is camouflaged among many others departing for the Omega land in order to deceive any robbers and assassins lying in wait for them. Hoseok peeks inside the coach to check on them and at Taehyung’s brief nod, the guard retreats. Not long after the horses pull and their journey begins.

The quiet is excruciating. Taehyung is not a man of impatience but something about his mate’s deliberate silence is insufferable. They’re wed, at least according to Alpha customs, and while Taehyung devoted little time to weaving fantasies of a mate, he cannot deny that he’d hoped to be betrothed to someone more agreeable, if not someone he loved.

Nevertheless, he is not a dreamer, he understands his duty to his kingdom and he would not hold it against Yoongi for abiding by his own. This is an arrangement, more so a compromise for Yoongi for the omega would have inherited the throne if he hadn’t been wed to Taehyung. It begs the question why they didn’t offer the second omega prince for the marriage. It is what puzzles Taehyung the most.

But even he understands that some answers are not to be sought, and Yoongi seems a man of silence with his body covered under layers and layers of cloth like he’s keeping all his secrets under wraps and his daunting eyes that look like they’ll slice you in half if you stepped too close.

His first impression of the omega was that the prince was arrogant, conceited and wilful, but sometime in their night together Taehyung caught a glimpse of something else.

Vulnerable and fearful, Yoongi had laid under him and Taehyung’s thoughts had started to take another shape. His mate is a strange mix of self-will and selflessness, and Taehyung finds himself brimming with a warped kind of curiosity.

His cold front is back up again, and it stirs a wicked desire sleeping in Taehyung’s gut– to watch the egoistic man’s pride crack, to have him pliant under Taehyung’s fingers, to finally break him open.

“Tell me about your kingdom.” He speaks, causing a rip in the strained still between them. He wears a polite smile when Yoongi glances at him from the corner of his eye, still facing the
window as he had ever since their ride began.

“You will have the opportunity to see it for yourself, my lord.” Yoongi answers, words polite but the blunt refusal underneath clear.

“I’d like to hear about it from you.”

Yoongi sighs irritably, but turns to look in Taehyung’s direction anyway. Taehyung grins.

“There’s not much that will interest you.”

Taehyung hums in mock deliberation, then inclines his head, a small smile on his lips.

“Let me decide that for myself, yes?” He takes great delight at the noticeable annoyance on the omega’s face.

Yoongi’s lip curls in irritation but he complies. “The weather is colder than the temperature in your province, but it is pleasant enough to walk in the evenings without furs.”

“Do you do that often?” When Yoongi tilts his head in question, Taehyung expands. “Do you like to take walks in the evenings?”

“If my duties allow me.”

“It must be nice. I used to slip out of the palace when I was young. I used to find it very suffocating.”

There’s a not so subtle snort from Yoongi, and Taehyung raises an amused eyebrow. Yoongi straightens his expression.

“You don’t do that anymore?”

“If my duties allow me.” Taehyung repeats Yoongi’s answer with a smile. He then adds, “I sometimes disguise myself as a travelling merchant and visit the local markets, I’ve discovered your subjects are significantly more likely to be honest in the absence of a prince. I almost gave Hoseok a heart attack the first few times he found me missing.”

Yoongi hums lowly. “Hoseok?”

“The army lieutenant general. He’s my guard– well more precisely, he’s my brother’s guard but he’s accompanying us for the trip.” Taehyung fills in. “You met him yesterday, if you remember that is. You were fairly inebriated.”

Taehyung watches, smile widening with amusement, as color rushes to Yoongi’s cheeks. The omega’s eyes snap up to glower at him.

“I am jesting.” Taehyung finally raises his hands in surrender. “Do you not drink often? You have a rather low tolerance.” He teases.

The omega is still glaring at him. “Unlike you, I actually have plenty duties to carry out in the palace. I don’t have the luxury of sitting around drinking like some good for nothing wastrel.”

Seeing Yoongi so aggravated makes Taehyung bite his lip to keep his smile from stretching. Yoongi narrows his eyes, finally realising Taehyung’s deliberate attempts to rile him up.

“Is there something else you desire, your Highness?” He snaps, carefully setting his features into
his signature blank look. “Or have you derived enough pleasure from disrupting my peace?”

Taehyung chuckles. “I enjoy our conversations. They’re refreshing.” He shrugs simply, smiling. “As few they may be. There are not many people in the palace who speak to me as someone other than the prince of this nation. It’s liberating to converse with someone who deems my status unimportant.”

An odd expression crosses Yoongi’s face, fleeting and replaced as soon as it came. Taehyung wonders if he imagined it.

“I see.” The omega replies, and then no more.

This time when the silence arrives, it isn’t as glacial.

They take a few breaks during which Hoseok comes and updates him on the route. The scouts don’t discover any suspicious activity so they continue along the original path until nightfall.

“We’ll be spending the night at the inn.” Taehyung informs Yoongi when their carriage finally makes a stop for the night. “The owners are trusted people, you need not worry.”

Yoongi gives a silent nod and accepts Taehyung’s hand as he steps down from the carriage. The guards are preparing for the night as well, Taehyung spots Hoseok assigning them their shifts for the night before making his way towards them.

Hoseok’s eyes briefly rest on Yoongi before he curves down in a respectful bow before them.

“The dinner is ready, your Highnesses, I will have your belongings carried to your room.”

Taehyung makes an acceding gesture and they make their way to the inn. The owners are an old couple who immediately bend at the waist when they see them approaching. “It’s an honour to have you with us, your Highness.”

“The honour is truly ours. Thank you for having us.” Taehyung replies kindly.

“We have prepared the finest room for you and your beautiful mate, my Lord.” The old man speaks, and Yoongi voices his gratitude before they are escorted inside.

The men are ecstatic after the long journey and when they're welcomed by the scent of delicious food, everyone immediately breaks into excited whispers and carefree laughter.

Taehyung’s attention is caught by a light touch against his elbow.

“I think I’ll head straight to bed, my lord.” Yoongi whispers.

Taehyung attempts to dissect the expression on his mate's face. He appears uncomfortable amidst the din and loud conversation.

“Would you like me to bring dinner to our room instead?” Taehyung suggests, noting the surprise on Yoongi’s face at his words.

Yoongi blinks a few times. “I– Yes, please.”

“Alright. You should rest. I’ll bring the food to you.” There’s a flicker of something in the omega’s eyes but it disappears before Taehyung’s eyes can rest on it for too long. Yoongi nods in reply and makes his way to their room upstairs.
Taehyung picks up a tray and belatedly realises that he knows nothing of his mate’s tastes.

“Are you not going to join us, your Highness?” One of his men interrupts his thoughts when Taehyung is in the middle of considering his choice between a strawberry and a mango dessert.

“You think he’ll join us when his omega is waiting all alone in the room.” Clearly all sense of propriety is dropped in Yoongi’s absence. Taehyung rolls his eyes.

“And this is exactly why you have yet to find a mate, Sungwoon-ah.” Taehyung teases. There are howls of laughter, and he watches as the rest of his men jump on the man like hyenas.

Pleased to have the attention off of him, Taehyung makes his way to the room he is to share with Yoongi. He knocks twice to alert his mate before entering.

The omega is seated on the bed, feet tucked under his calves, dressed in his ramie underrobes of a yellow so sheer that Taehyung can faintly make out the skin underneath. He brings their food to the bed and seats himself next to his mate.

“You brought so much.” Yoongi comments as he eyes the tray.

“It’s not all for you.” Taehyung replies, a light teasing.

“You chose not to eat with your men?”

Taehyung shrugs in reply. “The kids are always too loud when they get excited.”

Yoongi silently picks up the chopsticks and Taehyung mirrors him. They eat in a peaceful quiet, amicable—Yoongi leaves most of the meaty pieces for him and Taehyung pushes the vegetables towards his side of the plate only to be surprised when Yoongi actually eats them.

They pause when both of them reach for the strawberry dessert. Taehyung had picked both the strawberry and mango not knowing which one Yoongi would prefer.

“It’s alright, you can have it.” Taehyung reaches for the mango only to pause when Yoongi’s fingers gently hold his.

“We can share.” Yoongi speaks softly.

Taehyung pauses, surprised, as Yoongi divides the dessert in half. One of the pieces wobbles threateningly and Taehyung catches it in between his chopsticks.

Yoongi determinedly doesn’t meet his eyes and it pulls a small smile out of Taehyung. He takes small bites of the sweet treat, relishing the fruit as it melts on his tongue. Yoongi’s pleased face reveals that he enjoys it too. Taehyung makes a mental note of his mate’s sweet tooth.

After returning the plates, they prepare for the night. Taehyung senses the usual discomfort in the omega’s stance, the stiffness as they lie on the same bed, a respectable distance between their bodies.

He wishes to ask but decides against it and extinguishes the lamp beside their bed instead.

After several minutes of silence, when it’s obvious none of them are asleep yet, he finds himself turning to face Yoongi. “Are you pleased to return to your clan?”

There’s a dry humourless laugh.
“You said it yourself.” The omega’s voice floats in the dark, wispy and just a little bit bitter. “It’s no longer my clan.”

Taehyung knows when to keep his silence so he does and eventually sleep’s warm fingers pull him under.

A modest entourage is present to welcome them when they arrive. Taehyung notices Yoongi’s face light up a notch. Despite whatever he said last night, his love for his clan is apparent in his eyes.

The kingdom is indeed rather different than what Taehyung is accustomed to. It’s cold like Yoongi said, but the cool breeze is welcomed on his skin after their long journey in the closed coach.

While Taehyung’s land has remarkable military infrastructure— stone masonries, brickyards, barracks and palisades, the Omega kingdom seems to flourish with foliage, there are vast croplands, rice fields and orchards, big granaries, abundant fruits and trees, a busy marketplace. It’s quite a contrast.

The palace itself displays Northern cultural influences, shimmering with gold embossed and cut of intricate designs of gods and humans in various stances of worship. Taehyung’s own palace is a simple affair, large and looming, stone and brick, built with the intention to prevent heists and plunder, but the Omega palace seems to stand as a symbol of pride and cultural richness in the midst of their kingdom.

Servants hoist their luggage and Taehyung helps Yoongi step out of the carriage. He looks as exhausted as Taehyung feels— slightly dizzy from the rocking of the coach and body sore from sitting still for so long.

“Your Highness” One of the men bows before them, and Yoongi brushes the tips of his fingers against the man’s hair.

“Jimin” He says, a sweet smile on his lips.

The man lifts himself slightly, and this time his eyes flicker to Taehyung, there’s something dark in them but it vanishes instantly and the man smiles.

“Welcome back, I pray your journey was pleasant?”

Taehyung inclines his head, amused at how the man stares at him but continues to address Yoongi.

“We didn't face any trouble on the way, but it would be foolish to assume the same for the rest of our stay.”

Taehyung’s eyebrows crinkle at the remark and the man, Jimin, seems to stiffen as well.

“Is there something wrong?” Taehyung asks and Yoongi glances in his direction.

“It would be wise to assume not everyone’s in agreement with the peace. It’s likely we may face some radical behaviour.” He says, but Taehyung has a feeling Yoongi isn’t telling him the complete truth. However, before he can inquire further, he’s interrupted by Jimin.
“Your Highness, we brought you a gift to make sure your stay in the palace is a comfortable one.”
This time Jimin addresses Taehyung and motions behind himself.

Taehyung spots a meek looking girl stumble forward, bent in a curtsy on trembling knees, hands clasped behind her, her feet bare, and a simple white cloth hanging off her frame down to her knees. Submission hangs from the arch of her shoulders.

“She will aid you in whatever you might need for a pleasant stay here.” Jimin smiles at him, there’s something artificial about it.

The words strike him odd and it is with a jarring realisation that he catches the meaning underneath them– what is being insinuated, not said out loud, and Taehyung casts his wide eyes on his mate beside him. Yoongi’s face is crafted blank, not a hint of emotion bare.

He looks back at the girl who is cowering where she's rooted, back curved in a bow, and he feels something bitter crawl up his throat.

“I do not need a sex slave.” Taehyung says bluntly, and the words startle Jimin, even Yoongi turns to look at him in surprise.

Taehyung meets his eyes. “I believe my mate is more than capable of making sure my stay here is a pleasant one.” He raises a challenging brow at Yoongi.

Yoongi’s eyes are wide, a faint red colouring his cheeks, and he immediately looks away from Taehyung.

“We should get going.” Yoongi mumbles. "It is close to lunch." He surprises Taehyung when his fingers brush against Taehyung’s hand before decisively entwining their fingers together.

From the corner of his eye, Taehyung spots the girl bowing to him even lower, something drips on the concrete below her, pooling into a wet puddle of tears before her feet. Yoongi tugs at his hand and Taehyung looks away, walking towards the palace entryway lined with guards on either side, servants following them a few paces behind.

“You should visit the baths, we have a variety of scents and oils to help muscle relaxation.”

Yoongi speaks as they enter a wide spacious hallway and Taehyung takes in the building’s design curiously.

“Hmm sure.” He murmurs distractedly, eyeing the ceiling that is decorated with hanging lanterns and wondering if he should meet the craftsman and persuade him to design something for his own castle.

A sudden thought strikes him and he takes larger steps to walk beside his mate.

“I didn’t know your kind kept slaves.” He says when they’re walking side by side, his voice soft, mindful of the servants accompanying them.

Yoongi’s pace slows a little. “We don’t, but we were trying to abide by your customs. It is common in your kingdom to keep pleasure slaves isn’t it?” His voice is flat, a little cold.

“Many do follow such a custom.” Taehyung concedes. “I don’t, however.”

He catches Yoongi watching him closely, Taehyung can tell that he wants to ask more, but they have company so Taehyung diverts from the route of the conversation.
“The girl you offered to me, she was crying.” He asks and a strange expression of pity crosses Yoongi’s features before he looks away.

“She’ll be executed since you chose not to accept her as your pleasure slave.” Yoongi reveals.

At Taehyung’s confusion, Yoongi explains. “She slept with a noble, and when the wife found out she wanted her executed. The merciful punishment would be to offer her to you as a slave, but if even you didn’t accept her she’d be sentenced to death.”

“She’s not even of age!” Taehyung exclaims, and immediately lowers his volume when several eyes turn to look at him. “And who’s to say she wasn’t forced, she’s just a child!”

“I know that!” Yoongi’s whisper is harsher. “But hasn’t that always been the case?” He turns to look at Taehyung straight in the eye. “To blame the victim of the crime, call her promiscuous and save your own reputation?”

The anger appears to leave right as the words do and Yoongi sighs in defeat. “There’s always something like this going on, it’s hard enough for these girls to live with the blame but then they also lose any opportunity to find work at a decent place.”

“But if you know the truth then why don’t you say something?”

Yoongi lets out a bark of laughter. “My father is not such a man. Would you weigh the interests of a nobleman and a kitchen maid the same, my lord?” He watches Taehyung carefully for a few moments like he’s coming to some sort of a conclusion about him. “You think of omegas as some meek kind-hearted race and that error in perception might cost you.”

Taehyung admits his impression of omegas may be exactly that, but his mate is the most obvious contradiction to the statement. Yoongi is far from the naive and kind image an omega is presumed to keep.

Yoongi speaks before Taehyung can. “Omegas they may be, but the people in this kingdom are humans too, and humans always find a way to segregate between themselves. Those in power rank themselves higher than others, be it with money or land or some twisted tale about divine powers favouring one over another.”

Taehyung considers the words, and finally asks “So are you going to just let her die?”

Yoongi clicks his tongue in irritation. “Of course not, I’ll let news spread about her death but she’ll be brought to the castle and find work here. She’ll live the life of a woman presumably dead, but that’s a small price to pay in comparison.”

Taehyung hums, wanting to say more on the topic but Yoongi comes to an abrupt stop in front of a room. “These would be your chambers, your Highness. I would let you have your privacy.”

Taehyung belatedly realises that the servants have left and they are alone save for Hoseok and Jimin who stand at a respectable distance from them, but within hearing range.

Yoongi bows his head slightly and makes a move to turn but Taehyung catches his wrist lightly.

“Would you not join me?” He inquires.

A teasing smile touches Yoongi’s lips and his eyes glitter with amusement.

“We’re not in your kingdom anymore, your Highness.” He reminds him. “On this land, we are yet
to be wed.”

Yoongi pulls his wrist free from Taehyung’s hold.

“We will meet at dinner.” He says, but Taehyung sees a brief hesitation flicker in his eyes. Before removing himself entirely from Taehyung’s space, Yoongi inclines his head and offers in a softer voice, “I can give you a tour of the castle grounds after dinner, if you wish?”

Taehyung smiles. “I’d indeed enjoy one.”

Dinner is a stiff affair. Taehyung bows to the Omega King but the man simply tilts his head in a brief gesture of acknowledgement before walking to his seat at the head of the table. He doesn’t address him during the entirety of the meal. The second omega prince and Yoongi’s younger brother, Jungkook, sits to the King’s left and smiles at Taehyung politely but doesn’t make any better an attempt at engaging in conversation.

There is an unfamiliar face, Taehyung almost mistakes him for royalty for he is that beautiful, but the man introduces himself as the King’s advisor, Kim Seokjin.

Taehyung sits besides Yoongi who is seated to the King’s right. Yoongi often elaborates on the dishes, points at the ones that he feels might run close to what Taehyung’s accustomed to having at his home. His words are soft and the whole setting is a shocking contrast against Taehyung’s family dinners that are more often than not a loud and busy affair. The Mins instead prefer to eat in silence that is only broken when they are finished and the Omega King rises from his seat.

Taehyung follows him and graciously bends at the waist. “Thank you for the delicious meal.”

The King scrutinises him and nods before turning to Seokjin. “Are the preparations for tomorrow’s ceremony running smoothly?”

“Yes, your Majesty. We’ve tightened the security and only a selected few guests are invited.”

The caution sits strangely with Taehyung. Yoongi had acted in a similar manner upon their arrival. Were they suspecting an attack during the ceremony?

“I bid you all a fair night. Tomorrow is a big day, rest well tonight.” The King speaks, gesturing for the servants to clear the table and motioning for Seokjin to follow him when he turns to leave.

A touch on his elbow distracts him from his thoughts and he twists to his right. Yoongi stands beside him.

“Do you want that tour now?” He cocks his head questioningly.

Taehyung nods and follows Yoongi out of the dining area. He’s yet to familiarise himself with the palace routes and infrastructure, he’s never felt at ease not knowing his precise location but for the moment he lets himself follow Yoongi’s lead.

Yoongi guides him out of the palace’s ornate halls and into the open. Taehyung takes in the abundant gardens surrounding the castle, Yoongi has no trouble maneuvering in and out of them.
“Where is it that you’re taking me?” Taehyung asks, it’s dark out and it is difficult to discern their destination.

“You’ll see.” Yoongi says cryptically.

“Are you sure this isn’t some ploy to dispose of me?”

“Oh my, you caught me.” Yoongi replies, voice so dead and bland that Taehyung bursts into laughter. He catches Yoongi glancing at him from the corner of his eyes.

“You won’t be able to even if you were to try.” Taehyung drawls, but his voice holds too much laughter to come across as dry as he wants it to sound.

As expected, Yoongi’s eyes snap in his direction, sharp and piercing. “I wouldn’t be so presumptuous if I were you.”

“Hmm really? With that tiny body of yours?” He replies teasingly, deliberately letting his eyes roam up and down Yoongi’s body.

The omega’s cheeks colour indignantly, Taehyung can make out the flush even in the dim light.

“You’re in foreign territory, at least have some sense of self-preservation and choose your words carefully.” Yoongi snaps. Taehyung grins.

“Anyhow we’ve reached.” Yoongi walks before Taehyung, leading him into some kind of a clearing.

Taehyung takes in the open space in the midst of trees. A light woody breeze blows past them. There are some targets set at a distance. He approaches one and pulls out an arrow embedded in the target, inspecting it.

“Jungkook and I used to train here.” Yoongi explains, walking towards a ring drawn in the middle of the clearing. Taehyung looks at him, there's something forlorn sitting on his face.

“Is he as good as you?” Taehyung drops the arrow and heads to where Yoongi stands.

“He’s even better than me.” Yoongi says, a fondness in his small smile.

Taehyung looks at the omega’s posture, it bears semblance to someone who is mourning a loss. It feels less like a tour for Taehyung and more like Yoongi wants to visit the few places that hold meaning to him and say a final goodbye.

“I find that hard to believe.” Taehyung finds his voice growing softer for the atmosphere feels strangely solemn. He comes to stand next to Yoongi who lifts his eyes to look at him.

“Was that my imagination or did you just compliment me?” The omega teases.

A cool gust of wind blows and their robes swish around their legs. Yoongi’s hair falls in his eyes, Taehyung finds himself transfixed, Yoongi’s eyes glitter under the starry sky.

Taehyung looks away.

“Take it as you will,” he shrugs.

Yoongi laughs, and Taehyung belatedly thinks it’s the first time he’s heard him laugh so genuinely, one that isn’t sarcastic or dry in any manner. It’s an odd observation.
It is quiet and they stand as the wind hits their cheeks, it’s a comforting calm. The trees seem to sway to a silent melody.

Taehyung thinks that it is a pity his own castle is surrounded by tall walls and stationed with guards at every turn, he is beginning to understand why Yoongi likes the spot. It seems to possess a serene power, like it’ll lull you to sleep regardless of what devils dwell in your mind.

“Spar with me.” Taehyung says when a few moments of silence pass, turning and catching Yoongi’s eyes. Yoongi blinks up at him in surprise, taken aback by his sudden request.

Taehyung holds his gaze confidently.

“You trained here with Jungkook before, didn’t you? Do you have swords close by?”

“I do, actually.” Yoongi answers, his voice still laced with surprise, “however, they’re wooden swords.”

Taehyung simply shrugs to say that it is of little concern and Yoongi leaves to retrieve the swords.

“You were exhausted from the rituals the last time we sparred, I want an equal fight.” Taehyung says when he accepts one of the wooden swords Yoongi holds out to him.

“You don’t know what you’re asking for.” Yoongi grins as he comes to stand across Taehyung, a few feet between them.

Taehyung raises an eyebrow in interest. “Yeah?”

Yoongi smirks but instead of replying, he lunges forward to attack without warning. Taehyung’s sword makes a loud sound against his. Yoongi’s blows are undoubtedly heavier than the last time, and it only serves to excite him further.

Not holding back, Taehyung twists and attempts to land a blow behind him but Yoongi is nimble on his feet and intercepts easily.

They play at it, an intricate dance between them with the sound of their blows acting as melody.

Yoongi bends on his feet and attacks at Taehyung’s knees but Taehyung is now familiar with his stunts and immediately jumps back. His chest is panting and he can feel the prickle of his sweat on his back. Yoongi looks just as jaded and exhilarated.

The adrenaline has him excited like nothing before, it’s been long since he’s got to spar with someone who can match him. Namjoon was never as good with his sword as he was with his pen, and Hoseok only indulged him for so long before he was called for his other duties.

Taehyung sheds his outer robes to allow himself more movement, and then they’re at it again. Taehyung’s still stronger than him, but Yoongi is faster, matching Taehyung's power with his agility and quick footwork.

And half an hour later, they’re trapped in a final lock, wooden swords cutting against each other, with Yoongi’s left foot locked against Taehyung’s right ankle and Taehyung’s left foot trapping Yoongi’s right leg. Neither of them can move and Taehyung has to smile. At this distance he can hear Yoongi’s laboured breaths, can see the trails of sweat travel down his mate’s throat.

“You won’t be able to even if you were to try.” Taehyung repeats his words from earlier, smug.
But the smile is wiped right off his face as soon as it came. Yoongi’s grip on his sword loosens and the sword goes flying out of his hand but Yoongi immediately ducks and comes at Taehyung, wrapping his arms under his armpit and around his neck.

Taehyung tries to pull away but Yoongi is faster, the arm lock around his shoulder tightens and Yoongi immediately pushes his entire weight against Taehyung, kicking his leg back to throw them both on the ground with Yoongi’s body on top of him.

Taehyung pants and struggles but Yoongi holds him in armbar lock, Taehyung's shoulder propped out painfully and Yoongi’s arms effectively locking his body. Taehyung grapples to find a way out of the hold but to no avail, the technique is clever—clearly meant to take down an opponent stronger than you, and Yoongi’s undoubtedly mastered it.

He kicks at his legs and Yoongi eventually releases him, seating himself on top of him and grinning wildly.

Taehyung tosses his sword away and props himself on an elbow to roll his shoulder joint and relieve himself of some of the pain. He falls back with a groan.

“You cheated.” He accuses but Yoongi shrugs carelessly.

“I never said I fight fair.” He looks exhilarated, sweaty hair falling before his eyes, smile wide and revealing his gums. Taehyung can’t help but stare, there’s something so free about his expression.

For the first time, ever since they met, the omega doesn’t look like he’s being choked by a rope of his own loyalty clenching tighter and tighter around his throat. It makes him wonder what it would’ve been like to have met Yoongi under different circumstances, where they weren’t bound to each other by a compromise, when their freedom didn’t come at the stake of an entire nation.

Yoongi notices him staring and soon enough the omega becomes aware of their current positions—Yoongi seated on top of Taehyung’s hips. A faint red travels up his neck, colouring his ears and cheeks a bright crimson.

He makes a move to pull away but Taehyung’s fingers immediately reach out and tighten around Yoongi’s wrist, holding him in place.

Yoongi meets his eyes, and Taehyung stares back. For a long moment, it is silent, the air between them beginning to shift and change form. Taehyung becomes distinctly aware of the bond that pulsates underneath their skin.

Their robes are drenched with sweat and Taehyung’s eyes trail down the column of Yoongi’s neck to the mating bite that peeks out from underneath his clothes.

He reaches out with his fingers and undoes the few ties at the top, baring Yoongi’s pale neck and the mating bite on his throat. It looks pretty in a dark sickening way, cherry reds and violets against his pale milky skin, evidence that he was sealed to Taehyung irrevocably.

Taehyung tugs him down and Yoongi comes easily. Taehyung brushes his lips against the bitten skin and revels in the breathy gasp that escapes his omega’s mouth. Gaining confidence, he releases Yoongi’s wrist and entwines their fingers together instead, winding his other arm around Yoongi’s waist and pulling him closer.

He kisses the bite, this time with added pressure, and he feels the omega’s body tremble against his. He sounds so pretty, Taehyung keeps pressing kisses across his neck and then without a warning, licks a wet stripe across the skin.
Yoongi’s body arches against his and Taehyung has to contain the growl in his throat, push down the urge to ruin his mate right there and then, under the moon, hidden between the trees.

Taehyung pulls away to meet Yoongi’s eyes and he’s surprised to find the omega watching him with his eyes lidded, cheeks flushed.

“Red is a pretty colour on you.” Taehyung whispers, smiles, his hand coming to stroke his thumb against Yoongi’s reddened cheek. The colour intensifies, and Taehyung chuckles throatily. “Are you feeling shy, sweet cheeks?”

As expected, Yoongi’s fingers come to swat at Taehyung’s hand, face burning a deeper scarlet, and Taehyung laughs. He can’t help but lean up and press a kiss to the crimson cheek.

“You blush so pretty.” He murmurs, pulling away and grazing his fingers against Yoongi’s skin, across his jaw and down his neck, touch feather-light as he traces the bitten sensitive skin, and Yoongi all but whimpers.

“So sensitive.” He whispers against his neck. “Should I mark you even better, hm? Big enough you won’t be able to hide it under all of your clothes, and everyone at the wedding will know what you were doing tonight.”

Yoongi glares at him but it holds no heat and Taehyung returns a wicked smile.

“You don’t like that?” He asks, voice flirtatious. “Want me to bite you where no one can see?” His hand on Yoongi’s waist moves down to cup the swell of his behind and Taehyung squeezes it lightly through the clothes. Yoongi lets out a startled gasp.

“What are you doi– ah”

Taehyung smiles and kisses him under the jaw while his hand slowly massages the flesh. He hears Yoongi slowly come undone, letting out little breathy gasps as his fingers fist the material of Taehyung’s robes.

“You don’t seem too averse to the thought.” Taehyung observes, and laughs quietly when Yoongi’s palm smacks his chest hard.

“You’re so fucking noisy.” The omega snarks.

Taehyung is about to tease him some more when sounds of leaves crunching under feet interrupt them, freezing them in their position.

Yoongi’s untangling himself from Taehyung’s hold within seconds and Taehyung stands back on his feet just as Hoseok and Jimin appear from behind the trees.

The two men pause and take in the sight of the two of them, dishevelled and panting, their robes untied and swords at their feet.

Taehyung carefully sets his face into one of nonchalance and coolly strides to where he had shed his outer coat.

“Is something the matter?” He addresses them, raising an eyebrow.

Hoseok’s eyes are wide but he too regains his composure. “You were gone too long, your Highness, we went out to look for you.”
Taehyung’s other eyebrow rises as well as he dusts the garment in his hand, picking up the wooden sword as well. “Forgive me, I forgot I had a babysitter keeping watch on me.”

Hoseok rolls his eyes. “It’s late, and you have a tiring day tomorrow, it’s best to retire for the night.”

From the corner of his eye, Taehyung catches Yoongi fixing his attire and talking to Jimin in hushed tones.

“We were sparring.” He provides an explanation as they make the walk back to the palace. Hoseok clearly doesn’t believe him.

“You were sparring at his hour?” He asks, skeptical.

Taehyung shrugs. “It was as good as any.”

When they’ve reached his quarters, Taehyung pauses outside the doors and turns to look at his friend.

“He defeated me even.” He grins, unable to keep it to himself.

Hoseok looks over at him in surprise, eyebrows rising up to his hairline.

But before he can ask any questions, Taehyung slips into his room and if his smile is significantly wider when he’s inside his private chambers, there’s no one to witness it.

The ceremony begins when the sun’s rays are beginning to recede, painting the skies a light orange and pink. Taehyung’s dressed in the Omega clan colours– a deep peacock blue with silver embroidery. The robes are designed differently, not as traditional as the Alpha ceremonial attire but lighter in weight and airy, allowing more movement, and Taehyung finds himself appreciating the seamstress’ work.

When he walks out into the gardens, the atmosphere is a calm peaceful quiet. There are strings of small lanterns hung across trees, and a soft melody of flutes and bells floats in the air. There are several guests, all noblemen and landlords, seated on chairs lined up on either side of the path leading to the ceremonial gardens.

He doesn’t spot Yoongi, and that is what begins the first trial.

A trial to find his mate. To find Yoongi.

Taehyung walks down the wide staircase, following the lead of a petite omega server towards the several figures kneeling on the grass, faces concealed behind blue veils.

Taehyung stops at a considerable distance from them. There are roughly fifty omegas seated in front of him, faces covered under a sheer misty blue veil. The air is a dense blend of their scents–floral and nymph-like, and maybe if they hadn’t been mated already, Taehyung might have faced hardship distinguishing Yoongi’s scent from the rest.

But as it is, Taehyung has already bitten into Yoongi’s throat, has tasted his scent on his tongue,
and there is no way he can forget it.

He strides forward confidently, his footsteps against concrete resounding in the silence as the onlookers watch him side-step the omegas in the first row, and the second, third and fourth.

Taehyung walks to the last row, smiles when he sees the familiar figure seated on his heels demurely, hands clasped in his lap, wrapped in gossamer silk of a lighter sheer peacock blue, fifth from the left.

Taehyung approaches the omega slowly, coming to a stop before him. The omega stays unmoving even as Taehyung crouches down to his knees before him, and, in one swift move, lifts the veil to reveal the omega’s face underneath.

Yoongi lifts his painted eyes and looks up at Taehyung, a small smile on his lips.

“You found me.” He says softly.

“A shame, I know.” Taehyung grins and stands up, offering his hand to the omega.

Yoongi holds his skirts up and rises to his feet as well, fingers in Taehyung’s hold. The guests cheer and the two of them bow to the crowd before making their way towards the platform where the mating ritual was to take place.

It’s an isolated platform surrounded by fountains around it save for a single narrow path connecting to a staircase that leads into a big open space under a pagoda-like roof.

“Imagine if you didn’t, and had to marry some poor omega girl.” Yoongi muses as they walk silently, hand-in-hand, towards the platform.

Taehyung hums. “That’d be your loss, I guess.”

“You mean your loss.”

“I said what I said.” Taehyung grins at their silly banter.

It feels ridiculous that they are going to be wed for a second time when they’ve known each other for a week, and yet something in their relationship has clearly changed. Perhaps it is a solidarity that none of them had desired it in the first place and that their arrangement had stemmed from duty rather than love and perhaps they don’t have to go through it alone.

They ascend the staircase slowly, a light spray from the fountains hits Taehyung’s face and he admits that he likes the calm tranquility in the air. Their previous wedding had been a spectacle for thousands of eyes, but this feels more private, more intimate.

On the platform lies a long slab of white marble, wide enough for both of them to lie on comfortably with little space between them.

Taehyung first assists Yoongi to lie down, arranging his billowing garments around him before Taehyung lies down beside him on the cool surface.

It is eerily silent for the first few minutes before the priest first ascends the stairs and approaches them. Taehyung’s robes are loose, the lapels of his jacket wide open, and he feels goosebumps rise along the surface of his skin. The sun is beginning to set and the wind is cooler now than it was earlier.
The priest stands over them, and on his signal, Taehyung and Yoongi join their hands once again. The priest makes his preparations, spraying incense and crushing sage leaves, lighting little bowls of oil and placing them equidistant from each other in a circle around them. The thick cloud of incense wafts around them until it is shrouding them under its canopy.

The Omega King is the first to begin the ritual.

He climbs up to the platform and the priest hands him the knife. The King makes a cut across his index finger. Blood comes pooling out of the wound and he presses his finger on the marble floor, dragging it as he walks in a wide circle around where Yoongi and Taehyung lie.

Once the prayer circle is drawn, the second omega prince, Jungkook, is next. The boy— for he looks like a boy, accepts the knife with no sign of hesitation and makes a bold cut across his palm.

He steps inside the blood circle and approaches the slab where Yoongi and Taehyung lie. Pushing aside the lapels of Taehyung’s robe, the prince draws ceremonial runes on his skin— one of the Omega clan, one of their goddess, and one to bless the married couple with harmony and fertility.

With murmured blessings, Jungkook steps out of the circle as well. More follow him but Taehyung’s head starts to grow heavy from the incense that the events start to blur. He hears mumbled blessings, and the blood glyphs on the floor increase until the gigantic prayer circle drawn around them is filled with intricate incantations and symbols, taking its final shape of a blood offering to the gods.

As Taehyung lies on the slab, the skin on his back growing numb from the cold, he wonders how it feels eerily like they're lying in a coffin, being readied for a burial. Strangely there’s a likeliness to their actual circumstances for they’re both being sacrificed for the sake of their countries— lying like this, unmoving, on the marble like they would inside a coffin.

The ritual takes a long time, or maybe that’s just how it feels to him for Taehyung’s eyes feel heavy and his head feels light. His skin feels sensitive, overly aware of his mate’s heat from where their bodies are pressed together and their fingers are interlaced in each other’s.

Finally after what seems like hours, the moon slowly beginning to reveal itself, a cold metal is being pressed into Taehyung’s hand.

Taehyung twists his head to look at Yoongi, and Yoongi’s eyes meet his.

Taehyung doesn’t look away as he brings the knife to his bare neck and slices the thin skin open. Yoongi’s eyes flicker to the blood that seeps out of the cut before meeting his gaze once again.

There’s a moment of stilted silence where both of them don't look away, Taehyung can see the pink of the skies reflected in Yoongi’s eyes, everything feels like it’s come to a trance-like still. The bond flutters in anticipation, Yoongi's fingers squeeze his own.

And then Yoongi is leaning in.

Taehyung closes his eyes.

The bite isn’t painful but it still throbs and Taehyung’s mouth parts on instinct. It’s a warm sensation, Taehyung feels Yoongi’s mouth suck and lick at his blood. A shiver courses through his body, tingles spreading all the way to his toes and the bond flares like a wildfire, setting Taehyung's body ablaze.

Yoongi’s tongue curls against his skin, and Taehyung gradually feels his consciousness slip out.
from the gaps of his fingers, little black tendrils creeping their way into his vision. He tries to blink them away but his eyes feel like they’re made of lead, and he’s only aware of the wetness against his neck and the bond between them strengthening as it gains more threads.

With a misplaced feeling of being sated, and his stomach humming with a tender warmth, Taehyung passes out.

He rouses to the sound of gentle music of flutes and airy bells. There are fingers brushing his hair from his forehead and Taehyung shifts. His body feels tired and worn out.

“Are you awake?” Yoongi whispers and Taehyung finally opens his eyes to the dark. He feels Yoongi’s body next to his and vaguely makes out his torso hovering over Taehyung’s.

“Yes” Taehyung mumbles. His voice is dry, raspy.

His eyes begin to adjust to the dim light and Yoongi’s face comes into focus over his, his hands pressed against Taehyung’s throat and waist.

“You passed out for a while.” Yoongi tells him and Taehyung is finally reminded of the events of the day. They’re still lying on the marble slab, skin painted with blood. Yoongi is pressing his cool fingers to Taehyung’s wound presumably to prevent more blood from spilling. The sky is now dark, well into the night.

“How long has it been?”

“Over an hour, I suppose.” Yoongi says. “They’ve begun the celebration, and we can join them whenever you feel better.”

Taehyung tries to sit up but the movement instantly has his head spinning and Yoongi’s hand on his chest pushes him back down.

“Don’t push it. You lost a lot of blood. Here, drink this.” Yoongi pushes a bowl to his lips and Taehyung drinks the cool water, grateful for it finally soothes his parched throat.

“So have we just been lying here for over an hour?” Taehyung asks.

“Pretty much.” Yoongi laughs. “The incense does that to you. Besides, I am glad to be here than over there.”

The platform they’re on is set apart from the rest of the celebrations. It’s dark under the pagoda-like roof, they’re hidden from the eyes, and it feels more private like this, less like a spectacle.

Taehyung twists his head to look in the direction of the gardens where the celebrations are continuing without them. The clearing is lit up with pretty yellow lights that almost look like fireflies. A soothing melody fills the air and several couples are dancing to it. Taehyung thinks it looks fairly pleasant.

His hand comes to tentatively touch the bite, it’s sensitive and the skin around it throbs, a tangible proof of their mating.
“How are you feeling?” He looks up at Yoongi and Yoongi casts his dark gaze upon him, eyeing him from under his lashes.

“I am feeling alright. It took a heavier toll on you because you are unaccustomed to the incense.”

Taehyung hums and they fall silent for a while. Yoongi is watching the celebrations, his arms wrapped around his knees, chin balanced on his elbow. Taehyung stares at his profile as lights cascade over the omega’s features, making him appear almost other-wordly. Not for the first time, Taehyung is unable to tell what his mate is thinking.

A question buzzes in Taehyung’s mind, and he’s voicing it before he can think twice.

“When we arrived, you spoke of the possibility of an attack.” He watches Yoongi turn to face him. “That not everyone agrees to our marriage, what makes you think that?”

It’s hard to tell in the dark but Taehyung thinks he sees a strange emotion in Yoongi’s eyes.

“It’s just a hunch.” Yoongi shrugs, looks away, and Taehyung narrows his eyes, trying to decipher the omega’s expression.

“You aren’t telling me the truth.” He says after a moment’s deliberation.

Yoongi straightens and cuts his eyes back to look at Taehyung, something in his gaze sharper, the air around him suddenly growing cold and guarded.

“We haven’t known each other long enough for me to indulge your every question, my lord.” Yoongi says.

Taehyung is taken aback by the sudden hostility, his jaw tightens but there is truth in Yoongi’s statement so he doesn’t refute it. He looks away instead, twisting to look at the sky instead as the silence settles between them once again.

It feels like whenever he tries to take a step forward to cover the distance between them, Yoongi simply takes two back.

The silence is uncomfortably close to how it had been between them during the first few days. Taehyung watches the night sky shroud them in black save for the few glittering lights of the stars. They look eerily like holes in the dark blanket of the night sky, and a strange thought briefly crosses his mind– if the deity who put them on this earth also poked those holes in the sky so they would be able to breathe.

There’s an exasperated sigh and after a long pause Yoongi speaks again. “Not everyone agrees with my father and my line of thought.” He reveals.

Taehyung looks back at him, and Yoongi fiddles with the fabric of his robes as he continues speaking. “Not everyone agrees with the arrangement, and I don’t blame them either. These people lost their families in this war and now we’re simply surrendering to the enemy and dishonouring the cause of their deaths.”

If a deity could be so bountiful in its kindness to provide life to all creatures, who were humans to rage wars and take those lives? Taehyung looks back up at the sky and connects the stars like dots in his mind to try and make the shapes Namjoon used to tell him about. Namjoon always liked gazing up at the stars, whereas Taehyung was always too preoccupied with what was happening on the ground to look up and lose himself to a dream.
“You’re not dishonouring their deaths, you’re bringing peace to your land. It’s an honourable act.” He says but when he turns to look at the omega, Yoongi is watching him with an odd indiscernible expression.

“For someone who’s razed countless clans to the ground, you sure love to yak on about peace.”

Taehyung raises a lazy eyebrow. “And for someone who offered themselves in the name of peace, you seem intent on bringing conflict.”

Yoongi eyes on him are like knives. “That is because your peace only benefits you. You make these grandiose statements about your benevolence but it’s plain to anyone with eyes that you alphas are the only ones to gain from the arrangement.”

Taehyung looks at him pointedly “So should we have crushed you in the war then? Is that the course of action you prefer? Do you value your pride over the lives of your entire kingdom?”

Yoongi blinks down at him in surprise, and then laughs, mocking.

“Like you’d know what pride is?” His eyes pierce into Taehyung’s a little sharper, a little deeper. “Have you ever had to sacrifice your own body’s autonomy, been sold by your own country like a rotten commodity? Ever earned a thing without raising your swords? Triumphed without spilling blood? Don’t talk to me about pride when you stink of privilege.”

Taehyung raises himself up on his elbows, feels the resentment climb inside his chest, eating away at his insides like fire, and closes the distance between them till their faces are close enough for Taehyung to feel Yoongi’s breaths fan against his face.

“Maybe you’d know a thing or two about me if you stopped playing the victim for one damned second.” He growls, teeth gritted, rage awakening. “You think you’re the only one who didn’t want this? I wasn’t thrilled about the marriage either.” He spits, sees Yoongi flinch then stare back at him, fury blazing in his eyes. “But I accepted my father’s wishes because I desire peace. I am not a fool blinded by rage and grief, I want this senseless war to come to an end. Is it so impossible for you to accept that?”

For a moment Yoongi continues to glower at him, lips parting to fire back another fiery response but a second passes and his mouth closes, his brows crinkling as if a sudden thought occurs to him.

Taehyung stares at him hard, their faces are too close but Yoongi seems unaware of it. He’s watching Taehyung with a strange expression swimming in his black irises, his jaw tight, mouth pinched as if he’s had a troubling revelation.

Much to Taehyung’s surprise, Yoongi pulls away and puts some distance between them once again. His face is carefully crafted blank, but Taehyung’s seen it too often and by now he can make out the turbulence in his eyes, the conflicting emotions battling for dominance.

Taehyung makes a move to say something, but Yoongi beats him to it.

“I see that you’re feeling better. We should join the celebrations.” He says, voice betraying no emotion as he gathers his clothes to stand.

Taehyung feels like something is being left unsaid. He almost reaches out to stop him but freezes mid-motion, fingers coming out to fist at air. He can feel that there’s something between them and it slips out from right between his fingers very much like the comradery they’d developed over the last few days– fleeting and gone before he could catch hold of it.
Taehyung follows Yoongi down the staircase wordlessly, the air between them grown cold. Finally, Taehyung thinks, they’ve spoken aloud what resided in their hearts, yet somehow it seems like they understand each other even lesser now.

The silence follows them through the night as they make pointless conversations with the guests. They hold hands and wear polite smiles to keep up the necessary pretence of a happily mated couple, although Taehyung feels like they resemble more a clock with two needles walking around each other at different paces, unable to match their strides despite the fact that they are heading in the same direction.

Eventually they are able to break away from the crowds and Taehyung walks straight to where the food is being served. He grabs a shot of soju and downs it in a single go. Next to him, Yoongi picks up a sparkling yellow drink.

“Yoongi”

A voice sounds behind them and Taehyung turns around to take in the sight of an unfamiliar man standing before them.

“Uncle” Yoongi, too, turns around, his shoulder pressed against Taehyung's.

There’s something flat in his voice and when Taehyung glances at him, Yoongi’s lips are curled ever so slightly in disdain, his grip on his drink tight, his shoulders stiff.

“It is a shame.” The man says, eyeing Yoongi distastefully. “To think you’re my sister’s son yet you inherited none of her courage.”

Taehyung narrows his eyes at the man. He is old, but the way he carries himself—straight and rigid, veiny hand around a cane he rests his weight on, leaves Taehyung with the impression that there’s something dangerous about him.

He’s dressed unlike anyone in the gardens. His clothes aren’t extravagant, instead a plain gray cotton robe shrouds his body. He looks nothing like a royal except there’s no mistaking the aura around him, it is intimidating and daunting, he’s able to gather attention without covering himself in jewels. His right arm is bandaged under his robes, and the way he stands with his weight on one foot, Taehyung figures his left leg is disabled as well.

The man continues, his words mocking and intent on humiliating. “She left her legacy to you and what is it that you do? Sell the fate of every omega because you’re too weak to fight?”

“I am my mother’s son.” Yoongi juts his chin out, almost snarling, eyes smouldering. “She would never allow the deaths of innocent lives just because her ego was too big for her to swallow.”

The man takes a step forward, his cane making a loud resounding sound against the stone.

“You are able to speak such foolish words because you have not seen the true horrors of war.” He growls. “My sister died saving your life, she believed you would be the one to carry out what she couldn’t. I thank the Gods she isn’t alive today to see you selling yourself like a bitch to some alpha—"
It is only then that Taehyung steps between them, cutting the man off. He stares down at him stonily, daring him to speak any further.

His fingers briefly brush against the sword hanging against his hip but before he can make a threat, another hand comes to rest on the man’s shoulder. Seokjin steps out from behind him, a serene but threatening smile on his face.

“My lord, I believe you weren’t invited to the wedding.” Seokjin inclines his head, still smiling but his eyes gleam with warning. “I’m going to have to ask you to leave quietly, unless of course you desire an audience.”

Taehyung thinks he’s going to protest but the man simply cuts his gaze to Taehyung, his eyes dripping with contempt.

“You may have thought you’ve won because of this foolish traitor but make no mistake, the goddess is on our side.” He spits.

With those words, the man turns on his heel and limps away. Taehyung watches him disappear and turns to look at Yoongi behind him. Yoongi’s jaw is set tight, eyes steely, but otherwise he remains silent.

“I shall see to it that he is escorted out of the premises before he can cause any more trouble.” Seokjin murmurs, bowing at the waist, eyeing Yoongi with worry.

“What was that?” Taehyung asks when Seokjin too takes off.

“Nothing important.” Yoongi mutters and surprises Taehyung by taking hold of his hand. “I have no wish to talk to anyone else, join me for a dance.”

Yoongi pulls him to where several couples are dancing. The crowd immediately clears when they spot them approaching, leaving a wide circle in the center for them.

Yoongi places his hand on Taehyung’s shoulder and Taehyung affixes his on the omega’s waist. They wordlessly sway to the sweet melody, the silence between them thick and unsettling. Yoongi isn’t looking at him, his eyes pinned into the far distance over his shoulder instead.

Taehyung is aware of the fact that the omega prince’s mother is no longer alive, that she died in the previous war against them, and the man, Yoongi’s uncle and his mother’s brother, is probably one of the people Yoongi mentioned– those who do not agree with the peace.

He called Yoongi a traitor and Taehyung wonders if the sentiment is shared by the rest of the clan. He grits his teeth at the thought, Yoongi’s words from before return to him and he wonders what it feels like– to sacrifice yourself for a clan who scorns you, to be called a traitor when you’re only performing your duty, to be the single sacrifice for peace yet hated by all.

Taehyung realises that he knows nothing of his mate after all.

When the celebrations end, they retire to Yoongi’s chambers for now that they’re wed there’s no need to sleep in separate ones. Yoongi guides him to his personal bath that has been set up for the
very purpose. The water is of a light milky white color, and flowers float on its surface—chamomiles, jasmine and blush pink peonies. Their floral scents waft around them.

Yoongi is the first to shed his robes and they fall on the floor, pooling around his feet. He steps into the pool of water, it comes up to his waist. His skin looks even paler in the pearly water.

Yoongi leans against the ivory stone edge and raises an eyebrow in Taehyung’s direction.

Taehyung undoes his own robe’s elaborate ties and watches how Yoongi eyes him unabashedly from under his lashes. The silence between them feels intimate, even more so with the air in the bathroom doused in aphrodisiac scents.

Taehyung steps into the pool once he’s rid himself of his garments. The water reaches up to his hips, only barely concealing his pelvis, the trail of hairs at his abdomen disappearing into the water. The stone is cold under his feet but it is Yoongi’s feather-light touch against his left hip bone that causes him to shiver.

They stand facing each other in the water, a foot between them, Yoongi’s touch on his skin feels hot.

“How we wash each other?” Taehyung asks. Yoongi nods and begins tracing his wet hand on Taehyung’s hip, across the expanse of his stomach to his chest and stop right above his heart.

The blood glyphs on Taehyung’s skin begin to drip down his chest in streaks of red. Yoongi’s fingers trail up and down his skin, hesitating when they brush over a scar, and Taehyung feels vulnerable like this, defenseless and at the mercy of a stranger. His skin breaks out in goosebumps in the wake of Yoongi’s touch as he cleanses the blood off of him. Taehyung watches the blood mix with the water and color it a light pink.

When he’s finished, Taehyung brings his own touch against Yoongi’s skin. The omega is tense, muscles pulled taut like he’s prepared to pull away at any moment. The ritual is meant to be a display of trust but like this, it is merely a cheap mimicry.

Taehyung lets his wet hands wash the bloody drawings away. Yoongi’s skin is soft and pale— a stark clash against the deep red blood painted on his chest.

He keeps his touch tentative, careful and gentle, but Yoongi flinches when his fingers briefly brush against his nipple that had grown hard in the cold.

Taehyung makes a move to pull away but fingers come to hold his hip, freezing him in place. Taehyung looks up at Yoongi, and Yoongi meets his eyes. He doesn't look away, staring into Taehyung's eyes as he tightens his hold, digging his fingers into Taehyung's skin.

There’s a deliberate change in the air, and Taehyung licks his lips as he places his own hand over Yoongi’s, his touch uncertain.

He knows he what he wants to say but the words don’t come to him easily. He looks away and stares at Yoongi’s hand on his skin instead. Their colors are contrasting, Yoongi’s pale against his golden tan. Taehyung threads their fingers together, his fingers inserted between the gaps of Yoongi’s, and squeezes.

“About what I said to you earlier—” He starts and chances a glance at Yoongi’s face. “It was impolite of me. I was too quick to judge you when there’s so much I don’t know of your situation. It was an error on my part. I want to ask you for your forgiveness.”
Yoongi’s eyes widen in surprise, and for a moment he simply blinks at Taehyung.

“There’s no need to search for what you were looking for. We both made mistakes, and I wish to apologise for that.” Yoongi meets his eyes, there’s a strange blend of softness and remorse in them, “I must admit things aren’t as I had made them out to be in my head.”

The earnestness in his words take Taehyung by surprise. He finds his cheeks warming under Yoongi’s sincere stare. Taehyung brings his knuckles to Yoongi’s cheek, brushes them gently against the skin.

“You aren’t the kind of man I had expected you to be. Like you said, there’s not much we know about each other but this one thing is clear to me.”

The earnestness in his words take Taehyung by surprise. He finds his cheeks warming under Yoongi’s sincere stare. Taehyung brings his knuckles to Yoongi’s cheek, brushes them gently against the skin.

“What kind of a man had you expected?” He asks softly.

Yoongi tilts his head up slightly, watching him from underneath his lashes.

“Callous.” He murmurs and Taehyung takes a step forward and brings their bodies close enough to be almost touching. “Arrogant.”

Taehyung leans down and brings his lips to graze under Yoongi’s jaw. “Revolting. Vile.” Yoongi whispers and his grip on Taehyung’s hip tightens almost painfully.

Taehyung laughs softly and places a fleeting kiss against his throat. Yoongi shivers and Taehyung cups his cheek fully.

“Revolting?” He repeats, bringing their faces impossibly close, Yoongi’s eyes widen. Taehyung grins wickedly. “Now are you sure that’s what you really thought?” He whispers, breathing against Yoongi’s lips.

Yoongi’s lips part in a silent gasp as Taehyung’s hand leaves his own and takes hold of his cock under the water between their bodies.

Breathy gasps escape his lips as Taehyung strokes him to full hardness, brushing his thumb against the slit and taking immense delight in the way Yoongi lets out a sob, body leaning into Taehyung’s.

“Tell me.” Taehyung urges when Yoongi hides his face in Taehyung’s neck, panting as Taehyung massages his balls lightly. “When you saw me, what did you think of me?”

Yoongi’s reply is muffled against Taehyung’s neck and Taehyung tugs at his cock. “What was that?”

Yoongi gasps as he sinks further into Taehyung’s body, arms coming to wrap themselves around Taehyung’s neck as he shudders.

“You—” He stutters when Taehyung gives his cock another squeeze. “You were devastatingly handsome.”
“Ah really?” Taehyung chuckles, and his voice dips low. “You want to know what I thought when I first laid my eyes upon you?”

He feels Yoongi shift in his hold, turning his head and pulling away slightly. “What did you think?” He asks.

Taehyung smiles but instead of replying, he releases Yoongi’s cock and slides his hands to the back of his thighs to lift him up. Yoongi lets out a little yelp of alarm and tightens his hold around Taehyung’s neck as Taehyung carries him to the edge of the bath, lifting him up till he’s seated on the stone.

He grins up at Yoongi, fingers gently stroking his sides, and leans up till his lips brush against the shell of Yoongi’s ear.

“I thought you were beautiful, sweet cheeks.” He whispers, and notices how Yoongi’s cheeks burn a pretty scarlet at the endearment. “The way you sat in the middle of the court looking absolutely murderous, like you were about ready to gut everyone within your sight with your knives.”

He kisses underneath his ear and continues hotly, “but the moment you first turned those furious eyes on me, god, I was damned.” He whispers like sin, and Yoongi’s thighs tighten around him.

Taehyung bites at his earlobe lightly and Yoongi gasps, a pretty sound.

“Look at you, you look so gorgeous, love.” His hands wander up his sides to his chest and pinch at his hardened nipples. Yoongi whimpers, ever so sensitive. “All mine to ruin.”

Taehyung runs his finger in a slow circle around the dark nipple, bending the hardened nub and Yoongi makes an unintelligible sound.

“You’re so ah– you’re so infuriating.” Yoongi pants and digs his nails into Taehyung’s back.

“I thought I was devastatingly handsome?” Taehyung teases and laughs when Yoongi slams his knee against his side in retaliation.

Taehyung pulls away and takes in the delightful sight of his mate, his head thrown back as he breathes heavily, eyes lidded and affixed onto Taehyung, his gaze sultry and ardent. Drops of water trickle down his chest and Taehyung’s fingers come to stroke against his rib.

“What do you want?” He asks, and inclines his head.

“Touch me.” Yoongi gasps, his arms tighten around Taehyung, trying to pull him closer, but Taehyung doesn’t move. He splays his fingers across the pale skin and leans closer.

“I am touching you.” He says teasingly, noting Yoongi’s growing irritation with great delight. His thumbs rub slow circles over Yoongi’s ribs.

Yoongi growls. “You know what I mean.”

Taehyung laughs and leans in to place a kiss against his cheek. “Here?” He asks, feigning ignorance. He tries to contain his laughter when Yoongi makes a frustrated sound.

Taehyung kisses his jaw and moves down to press kisses against the base of his throat. “Where do you want me to touch you, love?” He licks at the mating bite and Yoongi positively mewls, hips bucking and arms tightening their hold around Taehyung’s neck.
He gives the red marked skin one last kiss before dragging his lips further down, scraping his teeth along his collarbones.

“Cease your teasing.” Yoongi chokes out, voice ragged.

Taehyung’s hands wrap around his tiny waist as he presses a kiss to his dusky nipple, flicking his tongue at the bud. Yoongi’s body shivers in his hold.

“I’m going to tease you as long I desire.” He growls, meeting Yoongi’s lidded eyes with his own dark ones. “Besides you sound like you enjoy it an awful lot, don’t you?” He doesn’t break gaze as his mouth closes around the nipple, sucking at it. “It’s only our second time together and look at you– ruined from my touch alone.”

Yoongi’s body bucks into his, a loud moan torn from his throat. Taehyung continues his ministrations, nibbles and kisses as his hands slide down from Yoongi’s tiny waist to his thighs to part them.

“Please–” Yoongi almost sobs as Taehyung assaults his nipple relentlessly before moving to the second. His hips stutter, muscles straining as he writhes but Taehyung’s hands on his thighs keep him in place.

Taehyung finally takes mercy on him, pulling away completely and looking at his mate. Yoongi looks wrecked, tears pricking the corners of his eyes, his chest heaving as he pants.

“What is it that you want?” Taehyung demands, his voice holds none of its previous gentleness. Yoongi leans back, baring his neck.

“Relieve me.” He pleads softly, painting an alluring picture with his flushed skin, wet eyelashes, lips a pretty slick pink, biddable and pliant, begging to be wrecked. Taehyung feels the beginnings of a wicked desire stir inside him.

He growls as he takes hold of Yoongi’s pale thighs, digs his fingers in the flesh and pulls the omega close just as he snaps his hips forward to meet his. Yoongi’s lips part but no sound comes out, and Taehyung leans into him.

“Is this what you want?” He rasps hotly against Yoongi’s ear, rolling his hips down hard. Yoongi whimpers. “You want this? You want my cock?”

“Yes” Yoongi whispers almost tearfully and Taehyung feels something snap inside him.

“Spread your legs.” He orders, and Yoongi follows.

Taehyung reaches out to grab a small jar sitting on the edge of the bath and uncaps it to reveal one of the scented oils used in the preparations for their bath. Holding on to Yoongi’s thigh with one hand, he dips the other in the jar, coating his fingers with the slick oil.

“So wet for me.” He whispers as he reaches behind Yoongi to push his digits past his entrance. Yoongi goes stiff for the first few seconds as Taehyung moves his finger in and out of his warmth, stretching his walls as he goes. Yoongi’s scent starts to cloud around them as Taehyung continues to stretch him out, slick dripping out of his hole unrestrained.

“Gods, look at you.” Taehyung groans as Yoongi looks up at him, eyes lidded and mouth parted open. Yoongi fists his hands in his hair.

“Just–” Yoongi pants, “hurry up.”
Taehyung is three fingers deep in his tightness when Yoongi stills. Taehyung watches him closely as he presses against the spot again. Yoongi lets out a loud unbidden moan, immediately embarrassed at his own reaction.

“Ah, p-please” Yoongi gasps, crying from the stimulation as Taehyung’s fingers fuck him, pushing against the very sensitive spot repeatedly.

Yoongi clenches with pleasure, thighs quivering as Taehyung continues to assault the same spot again and again. His entire body tightens around his fingers, he trembles and tips forward, curling over Taehyung’s chest.

“I– I’m going to–” Yoongi stutters and Taehyung pulls him closer.

“Come for me, love.” He kisses him right above the mating bite as Yoongi seizes up, and then arches into him. His hole clenches tight around Taehyung’s fingers but Taehyung doesn’t stop, instead he relentlessly picks up the pace, fingerprinting him through the orgasm.

Yoongi whimpers right before he comes, shooting his milky release between their stomachs, warm and thick. He collapses against Taehyung’s chest, breathing hard, boneless with Taehyung’s fingers still inside him.

Taehyung kisses his jaw, his cheeks, and lightly pecks his nose.

“You alright?” He murmurs when Yoongi pulls away from him slightly.

“You’re still–” Yoongi starts and flushes when he catches sight of Taehyung’s hard cock peeking out from underneath the water.

Taehyung hums as he leaves absent kisses against the bite on Yoongi’s throat.

“Can you go again?” He whispers into his skin. “Can you be good for me one more time?”

Yoongi breathes into Taehyung’s neck for a moment before he nods and pulls away, shifting further back.

“Fuck me.” Yoongi whispers, not a tremor in his voice and Taehyung’s eyes widen at the bold words.

“By the stars–” Taehyung curses and positions himself in front of him, a hand coming to grip at Yoongi’s hip again, his fingers that have been inside Yoongi start to move against his walls again.

Yoongi whines as Taehyung works him up once more.

“I’m ready– ah” Yoongi grips his biceps tightly. Taehyung scissors his fingers inside him, stretching him out patiently even while Yoongi whines at him to hurry up.

“Where’s the blushing omega I married?” Taehyung presses a chaste kiss against his cheek once again as he pulls his fingers out of Yoongi and holds on to Yoongi’s thigh with one hand, steadying his cock with the other. “Who’d turn a pretty red at the sight of cock. Look at you now, dripping wet and begging to be fucked.”

Yoongi tugs him closer by the shoulders. “You’re so fucking chatty.” Yoongi snarls, cheeks hot from humiliation, as he pushes against Taehyung’s cock impatiently.

“I swear to the gods, Taehyung, if you don’t take me right now–"
His words break off into a moan right as Taehyung presses his tip against his entrance and pushes inside him without a warning.

Taehyung pins him down as he pushes further inside, leaning in until their faces are close, and threading their fingers together.

“Say my name again.” Taehyung whispers against his lips when he pushes all the way inside and Yoongi shudders, eyelashes briefly fluttering shut and face scrunching up at the fullness.

“T-Taehyung” Yoongi stutters, eyes fluttering open and meeting his, his breath on Taehyung’s lips. They’re not kissing but they could be if Taehyung leaned in further just by a centimeter.

Taehyung rolls his hips inside and Yoongi whimpers.

“How’s this? It’s what you wanted, yes?” Taehyung rasps, pulling back and fucking into him so suddenly that Yoongi chokes but before he can recover, Taehyung is thrusting into him once more.

“You wanted to be fucked, right? Wanted my cock inside you?” Taehyung falls into a steady rhythm and Yoongi’s moans turn into cries, eventually becoming an incoherent garble. “Are you finally satisfied, my demanding sweetheart?”

“Taehyung— ah, it’s fuck—” Even the curse sounds pretty coming from his lips as Taehyung fucks him into insensibility.

“So tight and wet— it’s like you were made to take my cock.” Taehyung groans, snapping his hips into Yoongi harder. Yoongi’s body rocks with the force and Taehyung grabs him tight by the hips to hold him still. Yoongi’s legs come to lock themselves around him, pulling him even closer.

“Faster– please– ah ” Yoongi begs and Taehyung feels the pleasure building up inside him. His thrusts begin to lose their smooth tempo as Taehyung chases his pleasure, dragging his cock against Yoongi’s tight walls.

He fucks him at a brutal pace till Yoongi’s crying out with abandon, loud and wanton.

“Gods, you’re shameless.” Taehyung growls by his ear. “Are you going to come again? Untouched?”

Yoongi whimpers his name and Taehyung grunts, tightens his grip on Yoongi till he’s sure he’s going to leave marks. He lifts Yoongi’s hips to aim his cock at a deeper angle and Yoongi almost screams. He stares at Yoongi’s face as he continues to fuck him without letting up. Yoongi meets his gaze but his eyes are unfocused, his face a mess of tears.

“Taehyung” Yoongi sobs and Taehyung feels something inside him come undone.

His thrusts slow down and instead Taehyung rolls his hips deeper, hands sliding up from Yoongi’s hips to hold his face, wiping the tears from his cheeks.

“You’re so good, so good for me, love.” Taehyung pauses just before he pushes his cock tightly against Yoongi’s sensitive spot. He can tell the omega is close.

Taehyung brushes his lips against Yoongi’s faintly. He feels Yoongi gasp, his mouth parting against Taehyung’s.

“Come for me, Yoongi.” He murmurs, breathes into Yoongi’s mouth, voice as hoarse as gravel, and the words have an instant response. Yoongi’s legs tighten around Taehyung and his fingers in
Taehyung’s hair pull harder as his body locks up.

Taehyung’s on edge too, he starts to fuck into Yoongi faster, and within seconds, Yoongi is coming undone, tightening where Taehyung’s cock is buried deep into him. He falls back as his body shudders and his cock spews out another spurt of release. Taehyung’s thrusts don’t cease as he desperately chases his own relief, hips snapping into Yoongi’s pliant body.

It’s a simple whispered “Taehyung” from his mate that has him shivering before he comes too, spasming as he fills Yoongi up with his cum. Taehyung’s hips stutter before he freezes and locks inside Yoongi.

The silence is filled with their heavy pants, Taehyung buries his forehead in Yoongi’s hair as he tries to catch his breath. His cum mixed with Yoongi’s slick dribbles down Yoongi’s thighs and Taehyung mindlessly catches some of it on his fingers and rubs it against his hole.

He hears Yoongi make an unintelligible sound and is suddenly reminded of a particular detail.

“Sweet cheeks,” he rasps teasingly, mirth in his eyes, and observes the red dusting his mate’s cheeks, “do you like it when I call you that?”

Yoongi glowers at him, flushed crimson. “Don’t you dare.”

Taehyung hums and shifts closer, grinning. “It suits you.” He taps a finger against his cheek. “Your cheeks are beautifully red, like lush apples.”

And with a mischievous slant to his lips, his hand moves behind Yoongi to grab the swell of his behind, “and these too.”

He barks out in laughter when the color on Yoongi’s face darkens.

“See you blush so prettily, my sweet cheeks.” He teases and yelps when Yoongi’s fist slams hard against his chest.

Taehyung laughs into Yoongi’s neck. They may be strangers, Taehyung thinks as he presses a kiss against Yoongi’s skin, and perhaps nothing can grow on salted earth—

But rain washes away salts and once the floods recede, you’d be surprised to see a bud blossoming in the soil.

Their departure for the Alpha land begins early next morning as the sun’s first rays paint the skies bright yellow and orange.

Taehyung stands among noblemen and guards, thanking them for their hospitality, as the horses are fed and strapped with the carriage reins. He sees Hoseok sending the scouts ahead of time to check for any signs of an ambush by robbers or mercenaries along the route.

The morning air is warm enough for Taehyung to be dressed in a simpler light hanbok. The same, however, couldn’t be said for his mate who was made to wear thick wraps of traditional clothing, and for that reason is still trapped in the changing rooms with the maidservants.
“We should be ready to depart soon.” Hoseok informs him and Taehyung nods, turning in the direction of the castle where he spots multiple figures approaching them. Taehyung’s eyes are naturally drawn to his mate who is donned in elaborate teal and aegean blue robes. He’s accompanied by his father and younger brother, along with a band of people—Taehyung recognises only a handful of them, including the King’s advisor, Seokjin, and Yoongi’s guard, Jimin.

Yoongi’s eyes meet his and his mate’s lips stretch into a small smile. A tentative friendship had stemsed from their night together, rooted in their apologies about their earlier misgivings, that was gradually budding in this strange unfamiliar air between them.

Yoongi comes to a stand before him with his hands clasped before him, and Taehyung’s eyes flicker to the Omega King.

He bends in a respectful bow before him. “I shall take good care of your son, Your Majesty.” He says out loud, trying to put as much sincerity in his voice as he could.

The King eyes him critically before nodding.

“This peace, as well as the future of the two countries, rests upon the two of you. There is no room for even the smallest of mistakes.”

Taehyung bows again before straightening. “I understand, your Majesty.” He says and turns to look at Yoongi.

Taehyung smiles and holds out his hand for Yoongi to take.

And, it’s like everything comes to an excruciating slow. Like the earth’s rotation slows to a point where Taehyung can feel every moment pass like eternity in a trance-like standstill.

Yoongi lifts his hand to place in Taehyung’s but Taehyung’s eyes dart behind him to catch a flash of silver.

His body moves almost on reflex, arm darting out to grab Yoongi’s wrist and yanking him back as he pushes himself between Yoongi and his attacker.

It’s like a nail is driven through him.

The first sensation Taehyung feels is a numbing cold, his body jerks forward, and then he’s spitting out blood on the concrete.

Almost instantly chaos erupts.

“Taehyung!” Yoongi screams from behind. The attacker tries to pull away but Taehyung is clutching tightly onto his hand that bears the knife impaled in Taehyung’s gut.

The attacker is grabbed by someone—Hoseok or Jungkook, Taehyung cannot tell through the haze of his own pain. It’s like someone is holding a torch to his flesh, it scorches and sears and Taehyung’s body starts to grow heavy, legs quivering under his weight.

He feels warm hands grab him, Taehyung can make out Yoongi’s mouth forming urgent words but the buzzing white noise in his ears drowns out everything else.

Taehyung gasps as the pain flares like a parasite eating away at his insides, he clutches at his wet bloodied robes as his knees give away and he falls forward towards the ground amidst the chaos.
He vaguely makes out the attacker being dragged away kicking and screaming the word “traitor!” , and Yoongi’s anguished face before him, contorted with rage and fear, eyes blown wide.

“Why would you do that?” He makes out Yoongi’s pale lips trembling, mouthing the question.

Taehyung feels his consciousness slipping as more hands grab him. His vision grows darker, he feels his thoughts unravel, and Yoongi’s face before him blurs– he thinks he’s imagining the tears in Yoongi’s eyes.

“I wonder why.” Taehyung whispers before his eyelids close and the shadows pull him under.
The room is sunk in a thick silence yet Yoongi’s skull feels like it might crack open from the cataclysmic havoc raging inside his head. Taehyung lies on the bed in front of him, pale skin, white lips, bandages wrapped around his torso.

The memory of the incident is fragmented in his mind, Yoongi only remembers it in disjointed pieces– one moment Taehyung was in front of him, arm extended towards him, and the next he was wrenching Yoongi out of the assaulter’s reach, positioning himself between Yoongi and the blade.

Yoongi remembers Taehyung’s grip on him go slack, remembers the screams, how Taehyung’s body had trembled against his before he eventually kneeled on the floor, knife buried in his flesh. Warm blood escaped his body and soaked Yoongi’s robes as Yoongi held him, cupped Taehyung’s face in his palms and felt his body grow cold under his touch.

Taehyung had chosen to save Yoongi’s life at the cost of his own.

And Yoongi hasn’t been able to think of much else. His mind is crawling with toxic– thoughts that don’t do much but feed the doubts and fear buried deep in the crevices of his mind. His nails have dug indents on the inside of his palms and yet Taehyung lies still before him, an enigma that Yoongi can’t wrap his head around.

The knife, thankfully, hadn’t been poisoned, it just shows that Yoongi’s death hadn’t been the motive. It was a provocation, a message– we won’t sit still, and Jungkook’s words about having a civil war on their hands seem much more grave now. The upheaval has been gaining momentum faster than Yoongi had ever anticipated. And now that their prince has been injured, it wouldn’t slip past the Alpha clan’s notice. They will certainly try to use the political unrest in the kingdom to their advantage, will instigate the revolt and attempt to dethrone the ruling power.

Yoongi clicks his tongue in irritation, their efforts will all be for naught if they were to lose their foothold at this point in time.

Taehyung makes a distressed sound in his sleep and Yoongi’s eyes snap back to his mate. He looks pained, eyebrows scrunched together in his sleep, and a new flare of guilt bursts open in Yoongi’s stomach.

He gently brushes his fingers against Taehyung’s forehead, combs the damp hair off his forehead, trails his hand down till his fingers are caressing the alpha’s cheek.

“I don’t understand you.” Yoongi murmurs.

Taehyung’s words from their wedding come back to him. I desire peace, he’d said and Yoongi’s frustration grows. His mate’s words and his actions are antithetical. He speaks of goodwill yet acts
as if the marriage between them is something noble and then goes and takes a knife for Yoongi.

Yoongi had expected the Alpha prince to be an obnoxious brute who bore no empathy, who knew not much other than how to raise his sword at anyone who bared their teeth at him.

He hadn’t expected Taehyung, he hadn’t been prepared for him.

Taehyung is a breathing contradiction, if Yoongi’s ever seen one. He’s a warrior, Yoongi could tell as much when they exchanged blows, and he isn’t hesitant to spill blood or take lives by driving his sword into warm flesh. His skin is littered with nasty scars—scars that tell stories of wars fought, stories of death’s fingers grazing past his skin. And Yoongi would’ve thought the alpha’s skin to be akin to a hard shell, for his heart to be a dense rock but from their nights alone, Yoongi knows that to be a fallacy. Taehyung’s touch is tender like his heart, and his grip is firm—unshakable and determined but not callous.

If anything, he’s always treated Yoongi with respect. Yoongi had expected to be taken every night, multiple times until his alpha was satisfied, but Taehyung never touched him without his permission and even then he always made Yoongi’s pleasure a priority before his own. Yoongi has only heard stories of alphas and none of them come close to how Taehyung’s been with him. Yoongi’s thought, under normal circumstances, would be that the whole show is simply a facade and when the curtain is lifted, Taehyung would reveal himself to be just like the alphas in the stories Yoongi’s heard.

But these are no ordinary circumstances. Nothing had prepared Yoongi for what to think if his alpha were to take a knife aimed to drive into Yoongi’s heart.

Perhaps—no, even Taehyung cannot be that cruel.

But the thought lingers, perhaps Taehyung only took the knife for he knew Yoongi’s body held meaning. If Yoongi’s body were to crumble, so would the peace they tried so hard to create.

I desire peace.

The doubt grates at him, digs its nails into the walls of his mind and brings them down in one wailing screech.

He grapples with multiple thoughts, going back and forth between conversations he’s had with the alpha prince but always coming back to the argument they had on their second wedding. It frustrates him to no end and he’s about near tearing the fabric of the robes he has fisted between his fingers when he hears a dry chuckle.

“I’m flattered you look this upset over my health, love.”

Yoongi’s head snaps up to look at Taehyung whose lips are pulled into a crooked smile, eyes only slightly open. Yoongi’s eyes widen and he immediately stands up to hover over the injured alpha.

“How are you feeling?” He asks.

“Stop looking so distressed, I’m not so easy to kill.” Taehyung says, but the fatigue on his face is noticeable.

“You took a knife in the stomach.”

“I’ve had worse.” Taehyung dismisses and tries to sit up but winces. Yoongi immediately pushes him back down into the pillows.
“Do not move if you wish for the stitches not to be ripped open.” He helps Taehyung settle back into the bed. The alpha makes a face but complies under Yoongi’s touch.

“How long have I been here?” He asks.

“Over three days.” Yoongi answers, fixing the furs to cover Taehyung’s body. “The healer said you should be good enough to move in a few weeks, thankfully the blade did not pierce deep enough to damage major blood vessels or organs.”

Taehyung makes a frustrated sound.

“We don’t have a few weeks.” He starts, but they’re interrupted by the door opening. A man who Yoongi recognises to be Taehyung’s guard, Hoseok, enters the room. His eyes widen when he catches sight of Taehyung’s conscious state.

“Taehyung-ah” The man immediately rushes to the bed. Yoongi raises a surprised brow at the drop of honorifics.

“Have more trust in me, Hoseok-hyung.” Taehyung chuckles but the worry doesn’t ease off the guard’s face.

“You wouldn’t be able to say that if the blade was poisoned, you’re reckless without thought.” Hoseok says, a disapproving slant to his lips.

Taehyung’s eyes narrow. “He aimed to kill my mate, I did not move without thought.”

Hoseok’s mouth curls into something bitter, and Yoongi feels uncomfortable knowing that the knife was intended for him and that Taehyung’s guard obviously thinks Taehyung’s actions were unnecessary. Yoongi, on some level of thought, agrees with him.

“Your father doesn’t seem to think so.” Hoseok reveals and Yoongi’s eyes snap up to look up at him.

Taehyung’s face grows somber at the mention of his father.

“He doesn’t deem it safe for you to reside here any longer.” Hoseok says and Taehyung parts his lips to respond but Yoongi beats him to it.

“He is in no state to travel.” He refutes firmly, and Hoseok turns to look at him. There’s a strange emotion swimming in his eyes. “He should stay here while he heals.”

“Your Highness,” Hoseok addresses him, but his voice carries little respect, “pardon my words but you were attacked in your own kingdom, I dare say your words assure very few people.”

Yoongi narrows his eyes, he opens his mouth to reprimand the man but Taehyung speaks before he can.

“Hyung, notify my father that I’ll be home within ten days’ worth of time. While I’m here, you can make sure that no one makes any attempts on my life.”

His voice carries a note of finality and Yoongi can tell that Hoseok isn’t pleased but the guard doesn’t rebuke his words and simply bows before taking his leave.

Yoongi’s still antagonized by the guard’s words but he seats himself on his chair beside Taehyung’s bed.
“Ten days is not sufficient.” He says.

“It’ll have to do. Besides someone tried to kill you, you should be more concerned about yourself. I do not want you to stay here any longer just because I am injured.” Taehyung twists his head to look at him with pinched eyebrows.

His words take Yoongi by surprise, and he immediately looks away.

“He addressed you by your name— your guard that is.” Yoongi diverts when his mind cannot think of a response to the alpha’s words.

“I’ve known Hoseok hyung ever since we were children.” Taehyung answers. “We were friends. He was more of Namjoon hyung’s friend but they let me tag along with them although I am sure I must have been an annoyance.” Taehyung grins at the memory and Yoongi tries to imagine a little version of Taehyung running behind the two older boys.

“I cannot picture you as a child.” Yoongi comments and Taehyung laughs lightly.

“I had too much energy and I was constantly getting into trouble for playing with stray pups. I would get lost in the city alleys and Hoseok hyung would have to come find me.” The fond undertone in his voice is evident.

“Hoseok hyung was initially brought in to the palace as a whipping boy for hyung.” Taehyung explains. “Namjoon hyung was seven and he refused to kill a rabbit he had managed to catch, he refused to kill any animal actually, he was too kind. So father had Hoseok hyung brought in and Namjoon hyung was told that for any mistakes he made, for any commands he refused to follow, Hoseok hyung would be whipped in place of him.”

Yoongi scrunches up his nose in distaste. He’s heard of the ruthless training alphas undergo to kill their weaknesses and emotions in order to prepare themselves for the battlefield, and they always leave a bitter taste in his mouth.

“He could choose to be kind either to the animal or his friend. I think Namjoon hyung has always hated father since then, but it was a necessary move to prepare him for war, and make him choose between lives on the battlefield. Anyway, in return, Hoseok hyung was given the same education and training as hyung and me, and it turned out that he excelled where Namjoon hyung didn't. When they realised Hoseok hyung was proficient with the sword and horse, they trained him to be Namjoon hyung’s guard. But we’ve always been friends before everything.”

It explains why Hoseok had looked so distraught for the past three days.

“Well he was very protective of you, I now understand his dislike towards me.” Yoongi says but Taehyung’s eyes snap in his direction.

“No, he has no reason to blame you.” Taehyung counters, eyes narrowed. “You are my mate and it is my duty to protect you.”

Yoongi is taken aback by the sincerity behind his words.

“I didn’t understand our bond much until then,” Taehyung continues, “but when I sensed danger coming to you it’s like my entire being only cared to protect you, regardless of the fact that I may have to put myself between you and the knife.”

Yoongi’s cheeks burn, and he looks away. A strange sensation thrums under his skin at Taehyung’s unhesitating sincerity.
“Our bond was manufactured for political gain.” Yoongi murmurs, eyes downcast and fingers crumpling the fabric of his garments in between his fists. “We exist not for ourselves but for the nations we represent, and so does our bond. You cared not for me but what my death would entail, what the consequences of my death would entail.”

Taehyung’s gaze on him feels heavy and when his hand comes to rest atop Yoongi’s, Yoongi looks up to meet his eyes in surprise.

“No, I know what I felt. Our bond may have been contrived for whatever greater purpose, but it is you whose blood courses through my veins and mine in yours. The bond binds us together and my wolf only cares for yours; have faith in my words when I say that it was only you on my mind when I let myself be taken by death. And it was only your safety that gave me reason to act on such an impulse.”

Taehyung’s words cause the red underneath Yoongi’s skin to rise to the surface unabashedly. He feels his skin burn scarlet as Taehyung's eyes bore into his, feels the doubts from before ebb away, shying away from the sincerity in Taehyung’s eyes.

“I’d do the same if presented with the circumstances again.” Taehyung says and his irises carry an eerie determination. Yoongi looks away, and bites his tongue to keep unnecessary thoughts from floating up to the surface.

“How do you plan on recovering in under ten days’ worth of time?” He asks instead, abruptly changing the course of the conversation.

Taehyung pauses. Yoongi’s eyes are locked on Taehyung’s fingers on top of his own, he doesn’t know what expression adorns his face.

A moment of silence and Taehyung simply replies, “we’re mates, aren’t we?”

Yoongi blinks at the strange statement and looks up questioningly.

“With your help, the wound should close faster.” Taehyung says.

His words sound odd for a whole of five seconds and Yoongi stares at Taehyung in confusion until Taehyung smirks and raises both his eyebrows.

When the meaning behind his words finally dawns on Yoongi, a wave of warmth floods his entire face.

“I– what?” He flounders, voice unnaturally higher, and Taehyung smiles wide, revealing his teeth, obviously amused as Yoongi navigates around his words.

“Are you averse to the idea?” He asks, mirth clear in his eyes. “Do you not think that it is favourable? My wounds heal faster than most, but with your help it could decrease the time considerably.”

“What I think is that you’re enjoying this too much.” Yoongi snaps, face flushed but even he cannot deny that it is the optimal solution if they are to leave for the Alpha kingdom in a week’s time.

The thought had initially never crossed his mind but it seems obvious now. Mated wolves often heal each other’s wounds but the process is too intimate and it clearly brings Taehyung immense amusement to see Yoongi flustered at the thought of having to lick at his skin for the wound to close.
“Don’t tell me the thought never occurred to you.” Taehyung teases.

“Don’t lump me together with your depraved self.” Yoongi snaps. Taehyung laughs.

“Why did you wish to see me?” Yoongi asks as he enters the gardens and the figure waiting for him turns around to face him.

Seokjin inclines his head, motioning to his right. “Join me for a walk?” He asks.

It’s well into the night but Yoongi falls into step beside Seokjin as they walk at a leisurely pace, shrouded by trees and shrubs, hidden from the sight of anyone who holds sufficient curiosity to watch from the castle windows.

Yoongi’s known Seokjin since they were mere children yet he knows remarkably little about him for the man has a habit of keeping all his cards to himself. Yoongi can never truly tell what goes on inside his head and it irked Yoongi for all of five years before he inevitably gave up trying to read him.

Even so, Seokjin strangely also remains one of the very few people Yoongi can fully entrust his life to.

“How is your prince?” Seokjin asks as he brushes his fingers against a yellow carnation, caressing its petal. He paints a picture any artist would envy, skin white like marble, almost akin to a sculpture with his robes billowing in the wind, standing in the lush green verdure of the orchards. If Yoongi were to pick a flaw, it would be his slightly knobbly fingers but even they give the appearance of an imperfection in a sculpture that enhances the realistic imagery of the artwork in lieu of diminishing it.

“Not dead.” Yoongi tilts his head to look up at the night sky. There aren’t many stars to be seen through the clouds. Their kingdom has always been enshrouded under a cloudy sky, quite like the curse placed upon them, looming over their heads, an omnipresent doom never quite clearing, never lifting.

Seokjin snorts from beside him. “You could try to show more sympathy for someone who saved your life.”

“What did you want to talk to me about?” Yoongi cuts through the mindless chatter for he can tell Seokjin didn’t ask to meet him here in secret to talk about Taehyung’s health. In all the years he’s known him, the man’s been blunt, cunning and straight to the point. It’s the one quality Yoongi appreciates.

Seokjin drops his hand and turns to look at Yoongi in the eye, he is no longer smiling.

“Have you made up your mind?” Seokjin asks.

Yoongi watches him with narrowed eyes.

“I made up my mind a long time back. This is the only choice we have.”
Something dark and unsettling swirls in Seokjin’s eyes as he regards him, blacker than the clouds in the sky above them.

“You’ve always put everything else before yourself.” His lips curl in anger. “But no one here can ask you to throw your life away, you know that right? No one has the right to do that. Once you go through with this, there’s no going back– not for you.” Seokjin’s gaze on him is heavy.

A dry laugh escapes Yoongi’s throat, he doesn’t find it funny.

“My body is a vessel, I’ve known that truth for as long as I remember. Believe me when I say that I’ve never thought of this body as my own.” He speaks, bitter and self-deprecating. “If my sacrifice is what it takes to win this war, then that is my duty towards my clan.”

Seokjin narrows his eyes at him. His mouth twists into something grim.

“Tell me.” He asks, his eyes boring into Yoongi’s. “What is a clan?”

Yoongi narrows his eyes questioningly, not understanding what the man was getting at.

“What do you mean?” He asks.

“It is a simple question.” Seokjin says, voice level, but his words carry weight, something grave. “What clan do you speak of? What duty do you adhere to?”

“*Our* clan.” Yoongi hisses, not understanding what Seokjin was trying to tell him. “Yours, mine. Our family who we strive to protect, whom we seek justice for. What the hell are you playing at?”

There is a pause where Seokjin regards him, and Yoongi hates the look in his eyes– a thick inky blend of pity and remorse swimming in his irises.

“This is why I called you.” Seokjin sighs, briefly closing his eyes shut before looking at him again. “You’ve always been too influenced by our father’s ideals and because you seem bent on tightening this noose around your neck that you call your duty, let me ask you a question.”

Seokjin steps closer till Yoongi’s forced to look up at him.

“What justice do you seek? You plan on betraying your marriage and the peace to stir another war, but at what cost? Do you wish to take more lives? To even out the ground by having the alphas dig enough graves to match our count? Is that the justice you desire?”

Something flares behind Yoongi’s eyes, and he takes a step further in, leaning up to bring his face even closer to Seokjin’s.

“I want a justice that’s *equal* .” He spits angrily. "I want a justice where omegas are not objects bought and sold at someone’s fancy. I don’t wish to inflict more death but you know it just as well as I do, don’t you? If we don’t fight, we’ll never win. And if we lose this war, our clan–”

“Clan...” Seokjin cuts him off, biting and sharp, like the word is acid. He pushes the hair off his forehead, and lets out a dry laugh, “clan...clan, why are you so fixated on this clan?”

Yoongi parts his lips to retaliate but Seokjin cuts him off.

“You constrain yourself within the trappings and obligations to this clan that you refuse to see the true nature of your own actions.” He says sharply. “What is this clan that you’re ready to sell your body for? What is this clan that you’re prepared to start another war? You think your justice is so
important that you can ask people who have no affiliation with your personal beliefs to march to their deaths? Can you truly find it in yourself to ask everyone in this kingdom to suffer from the devastation of yet another war?"

“Then what do you expect me to do?” Yoongi spits back. “Let them do as they please and what, we should roll over and just take it? Their troops will invade our lands under the guise of increasing our military strength. They’ll use the current political unrest in the kingdom to their advantage and ignite the revolts to dethrone the royal family. We’ll lose our sovereignty and return to being their hostages, is that the future you wish to live in?”

There is a long pause, and then Seokjin is speaking again.

“Is that how Taehyung’s treated you? Like a hostage?” Seokjin asks him, eyes narrowed.

Yoongi glares at him.

“You’ve figured it out, haven’t you?” Seokjin says again, gentler.

*I desire peace*

*My wolf only cares for yours*

Yoongi drops his head, stares at the ground, heat flares beneath his skin. His fists tremble and he wants to hit something.

“He doesn’t know.” Yoongi finally whispers, reveals.

A long silence follows.

“Yoongi,” Seokjin says, his tone suddenly tender.

Seokjin steps closer till their bodies are touching and Yoongi looks up to meet his gaze.

“I will support you, whatever your decision may be.” Seokjin says, softer. “But if you aren’t careful, you may lose sight of what is truly important.”

Before Yoongi can question his cryptic words, Seokjin is pulling him into an embrace.

“You are brave, there’s no one who can refute that. But–” Seokjin’s voice dips, becomes gentler, and his grip grows tighter. “You get too caught up in what’s expected of you. It is honorable to carry out your duty but it’s okay– it’s okay to allow yourself to feel what your duty doesn’t demand.”

Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut.

“I know you don’t agree with me, but I don’t think Min Yoongi is someone dispensable. To me his life is unquestionably more important than the entire clan, the entire kingdom.” Yoongi’s body trembles in the embrace, he swallows the heat that blooms behind his eyelids.

Seokjin caresses his back, runs his hand up the curve of his spine and into his hair. “You exist for your own self and being, not for some greater divine purpose, or as a sacrifice or a weapon, you are your own person. Don’t ever forget that.”

Yoongi doesn’t dare speak for he’s sure the stone in his throat wouldn’t let anything past.

Hurried footsteps sound behind them. Yoongi feels Seokjin press something cool into his palm.
“Take care.” Seokjin whispers and pulls back. Yoongi doesn’t know what to make of the expression that sits on Seokjin’s face or the vial now held tightly in his hands.

He wants to say so much but no words can capture the emotions raging a storm in his heart. Before he can speak, Seokjin is already turning around.

“Your Highness!” A guard calls out behind him.

“What is it?” Seokjin asks the man.

“The Alpha prince! He is–”

Yoongi’s eyes snap open.

“Taehyung” Yoongi whispers, eyes wide as he rushes to his mate who’s lying on the floor, balancing himself on his elbows, face scrunched up in pain and frustration, the bandages around his torso soaked red.

“What happened?” He asks, the panic in his voice rising as he holds up most of Taehyung’s weight and carries him back to the bed. Taehyung’s bandages drip blood on the floor and his face is frozen in pain, harsh lines painted of frustration at his helplessness.

He helps Taehyung lie back down on the bed. The wound seems to have reopened, long trails of blood rolling down the flat plains of his abdomen.

“What were you doing?” Yoongi asks.

Taehyung smiles at him even through the pain, grimacing slightly.

“Giving you a chance to put your hands on me.” He teases, trying to play it off, and blatantly avoiding the question but Yoongi can see his face lightly contort with discomfort.

Yoongi unwinds the ruined bandages from around his torso. His eyes grow wider when he sees the naked wound. It looks nasty, deep reds and blues matted into a frightful deep gash that’s reopened at its seams. Yoongi hurries to fetch clean water and a cloth to clean the excessive blood that seeps out of the rip in the flesh. The healer wouldn’t be available at this time of the night, Yoongi briefly wonders if he should call Seokjin for help but the thought of their last conversation leaves an unsettling taste on his tongue.

Yoongi takes to mending the damage himself. He can tell Taehyung is trying not to let the pain show but Yoongi picks up the little tells he isn’t able to control.

After cleaning the blood, he reaches out to pick up the jar of salve from the stand beside Taehyung’s bed but Taehyung’s fingers come to hold his wrist lightly, stopping him mid motion.

“It isn’t going to help, you know it.” He says, watching him with heavy eyes.

Yoongi glances back at the deep gash, wicked and horrifying, and thinks back to how Taehyung had pulled him out of the way without sparing a moment to hesitation.
It’s okay to allow yourself to feel what your duty doesn’t demand.

He meets Taehyung’s heavy gaze on him.

A pit opens up in his belly, thick unsettling emotions swirling inside like lava. Yoongi feels his fingers tremble, he fists them tightly and digs his nails into his palms.

“This isn’t my duty.” Yoongi whispers.

Taehyung’s eyebrows scrunch up in question and Yoongi’s eyes flicker away for a brief moment before meeting his with renewed resolution.

“It isn’t my duty.” He repeats. “Like you said, the bond binds only us together. And my wolf—” he feels a wave of warmth hit his face. Yoongi bites his lip, doesn’t allow himself to look away, whispers, admits, “my wolf, too, cares for yours.”

He watches Taehyung’s eyes widen at his admission.

Not looking away, Yoongi slowly descends and brings his face close enough to give the wound a light lick. Taehyung inhales sharply.

Before the embarrassment can consume him, Yoongi’s moving himself on the bed, legs on either side of Taehyung, hovering over his torso. He licks at the wound’s edge again. There’s no magical recovery, but Taehyung’s body shivers nonetheless and perhaps it is that simple action alone that sends a wave of power surging inside him.

Taehyung is always calm and composed, more often than not he’s teasing Yoongi, reducing him to shivers and flushed cheeks. To have Taehyung stiffening under him gives Yoongi enough confidence to lick further up, brazen in his touch. He looks up and meets Taehyung’s eyes from under his lashes, Taehyung is already watching him, his gaze searing, and something hot swirls in Yoongi’s stomach.

Yoongi doesn’t break his gaze as he trails his tongue over the gash, watching Taehyung’s face for any reaction. To his credit, the alpha’s face bears little expression but there’s no mistaking the storm swimming in his irises, the tightness in his jaw.

The silence is thick, the only sound to be heard is Taehyung’s harsh breathing.

The air around them has a different quality to it, Yoongi reckons it’s not so much fervour as it is a fragile intimacy. It’s the mutual knowledge that what they’re sharing is unlike their previous two times together, something significantly more intimate, something only shared between mates not out of obligation but a more deep-seated emotion underlying the bond tying them together and pulling them closer.

This close, Yoongi can’t smell anything but Taehyung’s dusky scent mixed with his blood, and it’s intoxicating. Yoongi finds it almost heady, feels slightly dizzy as he makes it to the tail end of the laceration.

Taehyung’s hand comes to hold him by his neck, it’s a gentle touch, he runs his fingers through the hair at the nape of Yoongi’s neck, and Yoongi stays where he is. His lips linger at the juncture where the wound ends and meets fresh unmarked golden skin.

The gash isn’t too long, but it’s situated higher up on Taehyung’s stomach. Their faces are close with Yoongi hovering over his chest, his palms holding him up on the mattress and his thighs on either side of Taehyung’s hips.
Yoongi lets his lips linger, presses a soft kiss—chaste and sweet against Taehyung’s skin before moving to shift himself off the bed. However, the very instant he tries to pull away, Taehyung’s grip on his neck becomes tight and Yoongi’s being pulled in sharply.

He catches his balance at the very last moment, falling on his elbows, face impossibly close to Taehyung’s. The alpha looks wrecked, his eyes blown wide and the air around them clouding with the scent of his arousal.

Taehyung’s hand splays out behind his neck, curling around his hair, tugging at it slightly, and Yoongi catches his mate’s eyes darting to his lips and back to his eyes. Yoongi feels his breath catch at the look on Taehyung’s face, in his eyes. It’s deep and dark, all-consuming.

Their lips are close enough to be touching faintly but there is a thick distance neither of them seem to be able to cross. Taehyung’s lips part open against his, breathing him in and a wet heat swims under Yoongi’s skin, swelling and crashing against his body, threatening to spill out of his pores.

He can feel Taehyung’s harshly expelled air on his skin, the silence between them hangs heavy, long and pregnant. Taehyung isn’t pushing a kiss on him, he’s just there, his lips faintly touching Yoongi’s, breathing the same air as him and some part of Yoongi wishes he’d just kiss him already so Yoongi doesn’t have to make the choice.

But Taehyung doesn’t, and they stay like that, foreheads touching, a still between them so heavy that it feels like everything apart from them has stopped existing.

Yoongi’s chest heaves, a million thoughts run through his head but he can’t seem to grasp any of them. He feels a little delirious, inebriated, can’t seem to think straight. His wolf wants nothing more than to simply lean in and taste the man under him, the bond that joins them by a thread seems to grow taut, tightening and pulling them closer than ever, but his body is frozen—unable to draw closer, unable to pull away.

He simply gazes into the caverns of Taehyung’s eyes, believes he may be bewitched, like the tale of the woman who could turn any man who dared to look her in the eye to stone. Yoongi wouldn’t be surprised, Taehyung has always appeared other worldly, ethereal so much so that his beauty should be impossible for a mere mortal. He must be a sorcerer, Yoongi is convinced, or a siren.

Taehyung eventually brings his thumb to caress Yoongi’s face, and then cups his cheek, shifts and presses a barely there kiss against Yoongi’s chin, soft and sweet.

“What you duty doesn’t demand.” He murmurs and gently pushes Yoongi away, making his decision for him. Yoongi dazedly lifts himself off of the alpha and the bed, suddenly feeling cold like he’s been released from a spell.

When he meets Taehyung’s eyes, his mate is watching him, his gaze warm, and Yoongi tries to spot any lingering regret or displeasure in them but there isn’t any. He smiles at Yoongi, genuine and sincere, and Yoongi doesn’t know what to make of it or the tempest rattling his ribcage.

His lips tingle, he feels like his body has gained a mind of his own. Or perhaps Yoongi’s own resolve is crumbling.

Fate truly has a cruel sense of humor.
They prepare for the departure in secret. Deliberate rumors of their departure being scheduled at a later date are circulated inside the castle walls to thwart other assailants. This time only Yoongi, Taehyung, Jimin and Hoseok are to be travelling in a smaller carriage, one that does not bear the royal crest, masking it as any other nobleman’s carriage. The rest of the entourage, primarily consisting of the rest of Taehyung’s guard and the few omega servants that will be moving to the new kingdom alongside Yoongi, will depart in the morning.

Taehyung’s wound may have healed faster but he’s still weak from the blood loss and not in any shape to fight if there be a need. Yoongi has dropped his heavy traditional robes in favor of a lighter warring tunic. His sword hangs around his hips after a long term spent in its absence and a belt sewn with knives is strapped to his thigh, hidden from view.

The four of them depart at night. They don’t make any stops other than the short breaks for the horses. Yoongi cannot bring himself to sleep even when Jimin insists that he does lest he collapses right in front of the Alpha King and Queen.

While the thought is mortifying, the fear of being attacked when they’re so few in number and Taehyung is injured is greater and as a result, Yoongi cannot catch a wink of sleep. Fortunately, their fears are proven false at daybreak when Hoseok announces that they’ve finally entered the Alpha Kingdom.

They’ve stopped for a break while Jimin brings the horses water to drink and Hoseok sends a runner with the word of their arrival to the palace.

“You need not be so worried.” Taehyung says and Yoongi twists to look at him.

He raises an eyebrow at his mate.

“I don’t want to hear that from you. You haven’t relaxed since we began the journey.” As if to prove his point, Yoongi pokes a finger into his shoulder. “Your shoulders are so stiff.”

Taehyung blinks in surprise like he hadn’t noticed his posture until Yoongi pointed it out, and forcibly takes a deep breath to release the stiffness in his back.

After a few moments of silence, Yoongi finds himself asking. “Does it hurt still?”

Taehyung looks at him, shrugs. “Not as much.” And then with a teasing lilt to his voice, he adds, “you know, you shouldn’t baby me too much, I might get used to it.”

Yoongi rolls his eyes in mock annoyance but can’t help a small smile that seeps past his lips. And then, because he hasn’t been able to get rid of the thought, he turns to face Taehyung and hesitantly reaches out for the lapels of Taehyung’s robe, pausing and looking at the alpha for permission.

Taehyung smiles like he’s amused, and makes a gesture with his hand as if to say go ahead.

Yoongi slowly undoes a few ties and pushes back the cloth, revealing Taehyung’s chest and his abdomen marred by the scar.

He brings his finger to trace the raised skin and can’t help the grief that fills him. The gash has closed into itself and a fragile paler skin overlays it. The scar is still visible, very much like the rest of the marks on Taehyung’s skin, a permanent reminder of the incident indented on his flesh.
He brushes the pads of his fingers along the scar, engraving it to his memory. He remembers it still, the screams, the blood, Taehyung’s body slowly growing cold under his touch, and he doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to forget how he’d felt that day—like his wolf was digging his claws into Yoongi’s chest from the inside, threatening to rip it open and claw its way out.

He feels Taehyung’s fingers gently brush his hair, tucking it behind his ear.

“You shouldn’t blame yourself for it.” He says, and brings his fingers to his chin, firmly lifting it. Yoongi meets his warm gaze. “It was my decision, and regardless of your thoughts on our arrangement, it doesn’t change the fact that you are my mate and you are mine to protect.”

He places his hand over Yoongi’s on the scar, and Yoongi looks away.

“Thank you.” He murmurs when he’s hit with the realisation that he never actually said it. Taehyung squeezes his hand before letting go, pulling his robes over his chest and tying the knots once again, hiding the scar from sight.

“You should get some sleep.” He replies, patting his shoulder in invitation. “We won’t reach until evening.”

Yoongi eyes the offered shoulder and snorts lightly, rolling his eyes. Even if it’s just to amuse his mate, he leans in and rests his head against it.

He doesn’t think he’s going to get any sleep but his body betrays him, or perhaps there’s something calming about Taehyung’s scent because before Jimin and Hoseok even return to the coach, Yoongi’s out like a light.

During Yoongi’s previous visit to the Alpha kingdom, he’d been blind with rage. It is only now that he gets to admire the city. The sun shines bright and it takes him a while to get accustomed to it. His own kingdom’s skies are enveloped under the canopy of the ever-looming clouds so the warmth on his skin is refreshing. The city is quite unlike his home, large buildings loom over them and he can see how the Alphas have managed to build their large military prowess. He makes out large masonries and brickyards, smithys and barracks, vast tournament squares where men wrestle under the sun, and a thick palisade surrounding the perimeter.

The palace itself emanates a strength that can frighten attackers and pillagers from it’s sight alone. It stands dark, tall and daunting, thick smooth walls that make scaling it impossible, enormous gates that slam open at their arrival, guards stationed at every turn they make.

A small entourage is present to welcome them and after pleasantries are exchanged, Taehyung guides them through the hallways that now look a little familiar. They stop in front of two twin doors and Taehyung opens them, leading him into a vast spacious unfamiliar room.

“These are the quarters we’ll share. You wouldn’t recognise them since the last chambers you saw were mine. These are bigger for they are meant for two people.”

Yoongi takes in the voluminous room, there’s a spacious bed in the center, it holds plenty of clearance for two dressing chambers separated with wooden screens, a bathroom, and there’s even a long table with writing instruments placed on it, along with two seating cushions. The rest of the
room is decorated with pretty lanterns and vases. It is lavish, grander than the rooms in Yoongi’s palace.

“I had them furnish it with the decor of Northern culture, do you find it to your liking?” Taehyung asks and Yoongi blinks. He hadn’t noticed it prior to Taehyung’s question but now that he sees it—the ornamented bed cover, the wooden carvings on screens, even the embroidery on wall hangings, they all seem to have been crafted by artisans in the Omega province. He is surprised by the thoughtful gesture.

“It’s lovely, thank you.” His answer makes Taehyung smile wide, and Yoongi finds himself noticing how full it is, how carelessly and vividly Taehyung smiles like he’s not holding back, not upholding frivolous customs about maintaining dignified facial expressions.

Now that he thinks about it and collects evidence from his memories, Yoongi notices that Taehyung doesn’t actually bother with most of the customs of royalty. He has little patience for them, Yoongi thinks, and maybe at one time, Yoongi would’ve written him off as a brute lacking manners but he now knows that to be false. Now, Yoongi thinks Taehyung is a man who doesn’t go along with things simply because that is what is considered common or conventional, he’s the kind of man to measure the worth of an action with his own rationale. It is a strange observation, but Yoongi admits that it sits warm in his belly like good alcohol.

“Do you wish to rest?” Taehyung asks. “I could show you around the palace grounds tomorrow so you can familiarise yourself with the directions.”

Yoongi shakes his head. “I rested sufficiently during the ride. I would enjoy seeing the rest of the palace.”

Taehyung smiles at him, and Yoongi looks away, cheeks burning when he remembers how he’d slept leaning against Taehyung’s shoulder for the entirety of the ride.

Taehyung leads him outside again. It’s late evening and somebody has lit the lanterns on the walls, they cast long shadows on the stone beneath them. Taehyung navigates through the various hallways, showing him different sections of the palace with a detailed explanation of the layout and why each wing was built at that particular location—the kitchens, the library, the bathhouse, and any other component he deems important. It serves as an interesting insight into what his mate’s nature is like, how he has a tendency to ramble about the horses in the stable, or the one cake the cook bakes, his disinterest in the pompousness of the courtroom and the vivid delight he takes in the paintings hung on the walls.

Eventually Taehyung leads him outdoors towards the back of the castle and Yoongi sees vast verdurous gardens stretching beyond into the distance.

“You seemed to enjoy walking in the gardens back in your home so I thought you may like to visit these as well.” Taehyung says. “I am not knowledgeable about the plants but I can introduce you to the gardener who works here, he should be able to answer your questions if you have any.”

Before they can continue, they’re interrupted by a call, and both of them twist around to see Hoseok making his way towards them.

“His Majesty wishes to speak with you.” Hoseok says when he is close enough, addressing Taehyung. “There has been some unrest along the western borders while you were away.”

Taehyung’s eyebrows crease with worry.
“Weren’t Chil-soo’s men stationed there to oversee the exchanges?” He asks.

“That is part of the problem, there have been incidents of landlords revolting. They’re asking for their share of the war spoils, they want more land and wouldn’t cooperate until they do.” Hoseok explains. “They’ve blocked off the trade routes.”

Taehyung looks conflicted for a few moments before he turns to face Yoongi apologetically. “Forgive me, I must oversee the matter before it escalates any further. Meanwhile, please explore the grounds with Hoseok-hyung’s assistance. He shall be your guide.”

Yoongi raises an eyebrow at Hoseok who doesn’t hide his displeasure fast enough.

“I shall meet you during dinner.” Taehyung tells him before heading towards the palace, robes swishing behind him, leaving Yoongi alone in the company of the lieutenant general who puts little effort into concealing his dislike for him.

However, whatever grudge Hoseok seems to hold against him, he remains silent. He simply leads Yoongi around the palace grounds, occasionally pointing out things of interest like the stables or the chicken coops.

“You don’t think the prince should’ve saved my life, do you?” Yoongi asks, crouched on the ground and brushing his finger against a baby chicken’s head. The bird chirps and pushes its head against his hand, so Yoongi repeats the motion.

“I heard you are a childhood friend of theirs.” Yoongi twists his head to look at the man behind him. Hoseok is looking at him but his face bears no expression.

“Taehyung’s life is dearer to me than my own.” Hoseok finally answers, clipped and short.

Yoongi hums and muses, “I guess I can understand why you seem to dislike me.” He sees Hoseok’s eyes dart down to meet his own.

“Don’t take it as a personal offence. I bear no emotion towards you, I simply do not trust you.” He says flatly.

“Fair enough.” Yoongi stands up, dusting his garments. “If it’s any worth, I don’t think the prince should’ve saved me either.”

This gets Hoseok to look at him, his eyebrows raised in surprise.

“You’re a good friend and guard.” Yoongi says, walking towards a black mare, reaching out with his hand for the horse to sniff. Once the horse deems his presence amicable, Yoongi gently runs his hand across its neck, and the animal makes a soft neighing sound, happy.

He hears a frustrated sigh behind him before Hoseok speaks.

“Taehyung is– he is different, I’m not saying it because he is someone dear to me.” Yoongi twists to look at Hoseok. The man is petting a baby foal with a pinched expression. “I do not know what your intentions are, but Taehyung seems to respect you. He may be a prince and a warrior, but he is a kind man.”

Hoseok meets his eyes.

“I am certain you have your own motivations and personal ideals and I understand that the circumstances aren’t ideal for you either, but keep in mind that he didn’t cause or wish for it to
happen like this.” There’s a strange emotion, an eerie warning on Hoseok’s face, his eyes narrow and his lips set in a firm line. “Remember that it isn’t he who is the enemy.”

Yoongi is taken aback by his words, they lock eyes for a few moments before Yoongi looks away.

“Yes, I know.” He whispers.

Taehyung isn’t the enemy, Yoongi knows that. But he may unfortunately be caught in the crossfire, Yoongi thinks, when the time comes. And Yoongi doesn’t know if he can prevent that from happening.

The dinner is a quieter affair than the one Yoongi sat through at their wedding. It is only him, Taehyung and the Crown Prince sitting around a table as Taehyung and Namjoon engage in a discussion regarding an internal strife in the kingdom that Yoongi is unaware of.

The two brothers talk wisely, well-read and eloquent, yet their personal philosophies differ. While Namjoon believes in caring for the effect of their new policies on each segment of the society, rich and poor, Taehyung speaks more for the country as one macro unit– their progress and their relations with other surrounding nations. Yoongi tries to listen but he often gets lost in his own musings about everything he’s seen in the day.

He’s pulled from his thoughts when the Crown Prince turns to address him.

“Prince Yoongi, what do you make of this?” He asks. “We are finding it difficult to fill in some of the ranks in the army.”

Yoongi blinks in surprise, he didn’t expect them to ask for his opinion.

“We were discussing whether we should increase the benefits given to soldiers to encourage young men to volunteer, or if we should hire mercenaries for the job instead. What are your thoughts on the matter?” He doesn’t sound condescending, or mocking in the manner most alphas would at the suggestion of inviting an omega in a political discussion.

Yoongi has only heard bits and pieces of their discussion but one thought has remained with him since they began the conversation.

“Personally, I’d be pressed to choose either of those recourses.” He says and watches Namjoon’s eyebrows rise in curiosity.

“Oh? Why would that be?”

Yoongi sees Taehyung incline his head in interest as well.

“It seems to me that, in both those cases, you’re putting a price on a person’s life. By paying benefits to the people who volunteer to join the army, it’s equivalent to telling them that that’s how much their life means to you. The same can be said for mercenaries.” Yoongi says, a little hesitantly for he is uncertain that the princes wouldn't take offence at his bold words.

Instead, he sees how Namjoon leans forward slightly in his direction, a small smile on his lips.
“So what would you suggest?” He asks, and Yoongi feels a little flustered at having both of their undivided attention on him.

The suggestion feels a little silly in his head, but it is the only one he has.

“You could perhaps adopt a randomised process? Like a lottery system.” He says and Namjoon leans back, contemplative.

“We draw random lots.” Namjoon says, meeting his eyes. “And whoever is chosen is drafted in the army. Is that what you’re saying?”

“Essentially, yes. If you offer money or other benefits to people in order to encourage them to join the military, aren’t you fundamentally coercing only the poor to join? The privileged will never volunteer. If this method is adopted, everyone who chooses to live within the borders of this kingdom consents to being chosen as a representative to defend the nation against war, and nobody is coerced into drafting. You’re not putting a monetary value to any person’s life either, instead you’re stating that it is one of their duties as a citizen of this nation.”

Namjoon ponders over his words for a few moments before breaking out in a smile.

“Your suggestion does hold merit.” He compliments and Yoongi flushes.

“It’s simply a thought.” He adds. “It could still fail on many accounts like if the rich find some way to trick the system by bribing court officials, or if the people revolt against the system. You’d need to compile a comprehensive list of able-bodied men in the kingdom, and work out how long the chosen will serve in the military. Perhaps those who’ve previously shown exemplary results in other fields could be exempted from military service.”

“Yes, but your reasoning is impressive. We could explore the thought further and flesh out a more just drafting system.” Namjoon smiles, dimples peeking out from his cheeks. Yoongi flushes under the praise and nods in acceptance.

They finish eating soon enough and Namjoon thanks them for their company before they all retire for the night.

They return to their chambers and Yoongi helps Taehyung undress for the night. He's undoing the elaborate knots of his garments when he addresses Taehyung’s stare on him.

“What is the matter?” He asks, pulling the jacket off the alpha's shoulders.

Taehyung is silent for a long pause until Yoongi’s finished undressing him and he stands in his night robes.

“Your suggestion was indeed very wise.” He says, his fingers coming to undo Yoongi’s robes.

“Thank you.” Yoongi hides the light red that dusts his cheeks at the compliment. Taehyung’s fingers graze against his neck as he pushes the jeogori off his shoulders, leaving Yoongi in his ramie underrobes of a pale blue color.

It is well into the night, when they’re in bed and Taehyung’s soft voice floats in the dark like a wisp of smoke. “It’s a pity.” Taehyung murmurs.

Yoongi is not facing him but he knows Taehyung can tell that he’s awake.

“You’d make a fine king.”
The praise is whispered and Yoongi briefly wonders whether he imagined it. He squeezes his eyes shut as he imagines the words curling against the skin at the back of his neck, cold like the breath of ghosts, and thinks how cruel they are.

It takes Yoongi by surprise when the next day, Taehyung asks him to accompany him to the markets.

“We must make a public appearance. The people have watched our wedding as a spectacle from afar. For the peace to settle, they must see that you’re a person just like them, not a doll swathed in expensive clothes.” Taehyung explains and it’s not as if Yoongi has any choice but to comply.

Yoongi dons himself in robes of the Alpha colors, red and embroidered golden. It is a symbol— that Yoongi belongs to them now, that his loyalty resides within their perimeters.

Their entourage heads towards the markets on foot at Taehyung’s instruction. They should appear no different from the commoner, he said, the purpose was to showcase Yoongi as someone human, not an enemy.

Yoongi does not know if, when the people inside the palace are yet to see him any different, the people outside it would. They have been enemies for longer than most of them have lived. The peace would require much more than a little parade to sink into skin and settle inside the bones. Yoongi knows from experience that hatred isn’t that easy to let go of, it holds on tight, digs its claws deep in your flesh like a parasite that wouldn’t die unless you were prepared to sever your own limb off.

It is not a long journey and the weather is pleasant, Yoongi lets the warmth of the sun hit his skin and settle underneath pleasantly. It is refreshing, although Yoongi does grow uncomfortable in his clothes not long after.

The veil over his face obscures his view but it is necessary for despite the intent of putting on an air of humaneness, Yoongi is, at the end of it all, an omega and royalty. Most of these people have not witnessed a royal figure so closely, much less an omega. Their journey could possibly backfire, their attempt to show Yoongi as a person could very well transform into parading him around as an object for eyes to feast on.

Taehyung walks with him, Yoongi’s hand interlocked in his, and once they reach close enough to see the markets from a distance, it’s like Taehyung’s hold grows eager and his fingers pull Yoongi forwards.

The marketplace is bustling with people and once they catch sight of them, the chatter grows louder as more and more people turn around to look at them in awe. Yoongi instinctively shrinks into himself with so many eyes on him but Taehyung pulls him closer to himself, a steady presence at his side.

Save for the guards, Taehyung ushers most of the servants away, presumably on their assigned chores, and guides Yoongi into one of the shops to his left.

The shop displays various potted plants, and it is not one Yoongi would’ve thought Taehyung to hold an interest in but the alpha moves through various aisles of plants and pots with the ease of
familiarity.

When the owner notices their presence, he curves into a respectful bow.

“Welcome back, your Highness.” He greets, and then motions to a helper behind him who shuffles to the back of the shop and brings out what should be the size of a plant— a small tree, with bright blood crimson leaves, growing out of a beautifully crafted wide porcelain bowl.

“It is just as you desired. An oriental maple with its fiery red leaves, it was repotted only a month ago and it’s been growing like a beauty.” The man says and Taehyung accepts the bowl from the helper’s hands.

“Thank you. It’s truly a beauty, I am certain my brother will appreciate it.” Taehyung bows and one of the servants takes the tree from his hands.

“It requires sun for part of the day, but if exposed for too long the leaf tips will turn green.” The man doles out instructions to the servant. “For the first few months, frequent watering is essential but after the wiring is removed, it can endure periodic dry spells. Be careful to prune it only during summer or else the sap will ooze out of cuts and the tree will weaken and catch disease.”

“Do you see anything you like?” Taehyung turns and asks Yoongi. “They deal in a fascinating practice of cultivating trees in small containers. My brother has been possessed with them. His birth celebration is approaching so I thought I would gift him one of these, he’ll be overjoyed.”

It is rather fascinating, Yoongi has not seen trees being grown in such a manner, but it makes sense. The Alpha kingdom does not spare land for plantation for their province has few sources of water. It had been one of the bigger reasons behind their war with the Omegas for Yoongi’s people enjoyed the benefits of a large lake in the heart of their kingdom.

“They look rather beautiful indeed, but I’m afraid I do not possess sufficient knowledge on the kinds of plants grown in these lands.” Yoongi tells the shop owner. “I’ll be sure to visit again when I have studied and made up my mind. It would kill me to pick one of these trees and have it die on me because of my ignorance.”

The man bows. “As you wish, your Highness. You’re welcome here anytime you decide to visit. If you wish to ask me about any species that stirs your curiosity, it would be my pleasure to be of service to you.”

After the man’s helper has written down detailed instructions on how to care for the tree, they bid their farewell and trudge forward deeper into the market. It grows denser the further they venture, people watch them with unconcealed curiosity and awe, but in the crowd, amidst the cacophony, it’s truly impossible to stop and stare. So most of them go about their business after gawking for a few moments.

Taehyung’s hold on his hand is tight as he presses Yoongi to his side.

“I apologise if it’s uncomfortable.” Taehyung glances over his shoulder at Yoongi apologetically when it becomes apparent that Taehyung is just about dragging Yoongi through the crowd. Most people try to clear out of the way but the street isn’t wide enough. “We’re almost there.” He promises.

And soon enough, Taehyung seems to slow down. Yoongi supposes they’ve reached the second stop Taehyung has planned for their outing.

Taehyung pulls him inside another shop, it’s not as big the previous one but it’s just as interesting
with the glittering metalwork put on display. There are beautifully crafted watches, daggers, birdcages, toys and some ornaments showcased at the front but Taehyung walks right past them. He ventures deeper towards the end of the shop where an old man straightens from his hunched position at his workstation when he spots the prince, and immediately breaks out in a smile.

“Taehyung-ah” He greets, jovial, old wrinkles crinkling out into a pleasant face.

“How are you, halabeoji?” Taehyung asks, smiling and bowing at the waist. The man laughs in response.

“I’ve been good, but never mind me. You’ve gone and gotten married already, I can’t believe a rascal like you has settled down with a mate.” He says and Taehyung gently tugs Yoongi forwards.

“Halabeoji, this is Yoongi, my mate.” Taehyung introduces, a bashful undertone to his voice. Even from the brief interaction, Yoongi can tell the man is someone dear to Taehyung, someone he respects. Out of courtesy, when the man turns to greet him, Yoongi lifts the veil over his face and bows as well.

“It’s a pleasure to get to meet you, your Highness.” The man says, and then turns to Taehyung. “I’m happy for you. All this fighting isn’t good, I’m glad to see things are finally settling down for good.”

His words bring a smile to Taehyung’s lips.

“I’m happy as well.” His mate whispers softly, the smile on his lips genuine.

“Did you come here to simply show off your omega or are you going to buy him something?” The man asks, teasing.

“Ah– I–” Taehyung scratches the back of his neck in embarrassment, a faint bashful red blooming on his cheeks.

“Have you even courted him properly?” The man chastises, but there’s a fond smile underlacing his words that tells Yoongi that he’s just teasing.

“This stupid boy–” He shakes his head, “you have to dig your way into an omega’s heart and earn their devotion. Love is not born from just a bite, it is a seed that will not grow unless you put in effort and care.” The man tuts. ”The war has sucked the sweetness out of you.”

He then turns to address Yoongi. “He was a handful as a kid, couldn’t sit still for a minute. He’d sneak out of the palace every second day, gave everyone a fright. I caught him a few times myself. But it turns out he sneaked out just to feed a litter of newly born kittens behind my shop.”

“Don’t tell him that.” Taehyung complains, looking embarrassed. It amuses Yoongi for he hasn’t seen his mate look anything but confident and unfaltering.

The man doesn’t pay him heed, simply laughs and ruffles Taehyung’s hair with fondness.

“Buy your omega something nice.” He says before disappearing to the back of the shop.

Yoongi turns to look at Taehyung, utterly amused. “You seem very close to him.”

Taehyung ducks his head a little, smiling. “He’s like a grandfather to me, he’s taken care of me since I was a kid so he knows how to put me in my place, I guess. I wanted you to meet him since he couldn’t attend the wedding.”
The man returns from the back of the shop, a wooden case in his hands. Taehyung must be familiar with the contents because his eyes widen in alarm.

“Halabeoji, that’s–” He says, faltering.

The man smiles. “She would’ve wanted your mate to have it.”

He brings the case before Yoongi and snaps it open. Yoongi’s eyes widen at the sight. Inside the wooden case lies a beautiful necklace. A dark blue aquamarine stone sits in its pendant, curved metallic twines curling around the stone gracefully. The stone seems to sparkle, glittering a deep ocean blue and a lighter turquoise. It truly is exquisite.

“It was my wife’s.” The man says, his voice dipping with tenderness, and Yoongi tears his gaze from the stone and looks back up at the man. “She is no longer here but I’m certain she would’ve wanted you to have it. She always did go on about how she wanted this stubborn boy to find a mate.”

Yoongi turns to look at Taehyung who’s already watching him, his eyes brimming with an unspoken emotion.

Taehyung picks up the necklace almost reverently and looks at Yoongi in question. “Would you let me?”

Yoongi nods mutely, unsure of what to say. He pushes his veil back and stands still, stiff as Taehyung steps closer and leans in. His hands brush against Yoongi’s skin as he fastens the necklace at the back of his neck.

The stone sits cool against his chest, and Yoongi stares at the dark shimmering blue as it changes color under the light of the sun. When he looks up, he meets Taehyung’s eyes.

“It suits you.” Taehyung says, voice low, there's something in his eyes that Yoongi cannot decipher. “It is your birthstone, isn’t it?”

Yoongi blinks, surprised that Taehyung knew, and nods.

“It’s beautiful.” Yoongi tears his gaze from Taehyung's, and turns to the man. “Thank you.” He says, hoping that the overwhelming gratitude he feels can be felt in his words.

The man regards him, a wistful look on his eyes. “It symbolises hope and health, it makes a good gift for new marriages.” He smiles. “It must be hard, no I’m certain it is, but I hope you can build a new home in this kingdom.”

Yoongi feels a little choked at the sincere words and bows fully at the waist to express his gratitude.

“Halabeoji, I can’t pay you for this. I wouldn’t know–” Taehyung starts to speak from beside him but the man cuts him off.

“It is a gift that she would’ve wanted you to have.”

“But I can’t just–”

“If you want to give me something, then just take care of your omega.” He says seriously, eyes carrying the wisdom and sadness of several long years. “Don’t let these senseless wars wreck your marriage.”
Taehyung nods. The man ruffles his hair in fondness.

“T’m truly happy for you, child.”

Yoongi feels the imprint of the stone against his skin like a brand of hot iron, the resolve that had frozen over his heart like a thin layer of frost beginning to crack under its warmth.

They thank the man once again and Yoongi pulls the veil back over his face as Taehyung leads them through the rest of the market.

He’d occasionally stop to slip a few coins into the hands of the owners manning smaller shops, or to pet stray pups who’d excitedly bark and wag their tails when he approaches them. It makes Yoongi smile, Taehyung seems to have named a few of the pups, has even carried treats with him that he teases them with. The guards behind them don’t look surprised and that tells Yoongi that it is a regular sight. The knowledge spreads a gentle warmth inside of him, and the thought of little Taehyung sneaking out of the palace to feed kittens doesn’t seem so strange now.

Taehyung turns to him, a wild grin on his face. It’s the first time Yoongi’s seen him look so carefree. He gestures at Yoongi to come closer to where he’s sitting on his haunches and playing with a dog who doesn’t seem to be aware that it isn’t a pup anymore.

Yoongi crouches down beside them and lets Taehyung guide his hand gently to the dog’s fur, caressing it. The dog lets out happy barks and it makes Yoongi smile.

“He’s very gentle.” Taehyung says, rubbing at its belly. “I’d take them all back to the palace if I could.” Taehyung laughs. “But they like it here.” He fishes out a few more treats and slips them into the dog’s mouth.

Taehyung’s fingers run through the dog's fur, grazing against Yoongi’s hand that sits still on the dog’s warm belly. Yoongi looks up to see Taehyung watching the pup with a brimming amount of affection. He looks so different from the first time Yoongi met his eyes across the court. They had been cold and calculative then, yet at this moment Yoongi sees nothing but warmth in them, melted honey and amber. He loses himself in his thoughts that when Taehyung looks up and meets his gaze questioningly, an eyebrow raised, Yoongi immediately looks away, embarrassed.

They eventually head back the way they came. Taehyung tells him to look out for anything that catches his eye but Yoongi feels too hot in his clothes to want to make any more stops.

They’re passing a shop that has a wide array of fruits on display and a quick movement catches Yoongi’s eye. He watches a deft hand steal one of the mangoes kept on display before a thin skinny boy squeezes himself out from under the table and runs in the opposite direction. He isn’t fast enough because like Yoongi, the owner catches on and lets out a loud shout before swiftly chasing the boy, catching him by the collar of his jacket and dragging him back.

The boy tries to grapple out of the man’s grip but he is a skinny little thing and the man is already bringing down a heavy blow to the back of his head and wringing one of his arms painfully. Yoongi’s eyes widen as he watches the boy struggle and scream. The bystanders don’t interrupt, seemingly accustomed to the cruel sight, and Yoongi makes a quick decision.

Freeing his hand out of Taehyung’s hold, he quickly rushes to the scene and immediately grasps the man's wrist before he can hit the boy again.

“Please pardon him for his offence.” He requests, and the man’s grip on the boy goes slack, presumably out of surprise. The boy frees himself and ducks behind Yoongi’s figure.
Yoongi releases the man’s wrist and pulls out a handful of coins from his robes and drops them into the man’s palm.

“I’ll pay for the mangoes he cost you.”

The man’s eyes understandably widen at the amount of money he’s offered.

“Your Highness.” He stutters out and glances at the trembling boy peeking out from behind Yoongi’s robes before bowing to Yoongi. “Can I be of any service to you?”

“Your forgiveness is enough.” Yoongi waves him off with a smile and turns to look at the boy behind him. “It isn’t right to steal from someone else’s fruit of labour.”

His glance falls to the fallen mango on the street, now crushed under feet, and he turns to the fruit seller once more.

“Actually could you give this boy a fresh mango please?” The fruit seller immediately bows and retrieves a mango for the boy who immediately snatches it like it’s going to be taken away from him any second and hides behind Yoongi again.

Yoongi startles when he feels Taehyung come to stand beside him. Taehyung smiles at him before turning to the fruit seller and fetching a few coins himself.

“I’d like to buy a few of those mangoes as well.” The man’s eyes almost bulge out of his sockets and he hurriedly picks out a dozen of his biggest mangoes.

“You haven’t tried the mangoes here, have you?” He asks and Yoongi shakes his head, his province is too cold for mangoes to grow. The few that do mature aren’t very sweet.

“You’d like them.” Taehyung says like he is certain of the fact and Yoongi takes his word for it. One of the servants carries the fruit and they begin to head back to the palace when Yoongi feels a tug on his robes.

He twists around to see the boy from before stand before him, meek and hunched over.

“T-thank you, your Highness.” He stutters and curves into a clumsy bow.

Yoongi is about to respond but Taehyung speaks before him.

“Who is your father?” He asks, and the boy's head snaps up in alarm, eyes wide. His lips tremble but no words come out.

One of the guards steps forward and murmurs in the alpha prince’s ear. “He is an orphan, your Highness.”

Yoongi regards the boy and feels sympathy surge inside him, he knows the pain of losing a parent but to lose both of them at such a young age has to be crushing.

“Take him to the palace.” Taehyung instructs the guard. “Give him food and fresh clothes and have him work in the stables but keep an eye out that he doesn’t steal.”

The boy’s eyes widen at the prince’s words and Yoongi smiles. A strange feeling of contentment stirs within him.

They make their way back to the palace, and sometime in the middle of the journey, Yoongi reaches out and interweaves his fingers with Taehyung’s, tugging his mate closer.
He brings his face close to whisper in Taehyung’s ear, repeating the words Taehyung had spoken into the dark confines of their room.

“You’d make a fine king.”

The words had felt cruel then, but now as he watches Taehyung’s eyes widen in surprise, Yoongi thinks they don’t have to.

In the next few days, Yoongi spends his time exploring his new home. He often finds himself spending hours in the library, familiarising himself with the rows and rows of archaic records and historic texts.

The alpha literature is filled with heroic battles, tragic deaths, families being torn apart and lovers colliding against all odds. Yoongi digs through the kingdom’s written records of previous kings and battles, he’s surprised to find them written in meticulous detail and organised by the names of the authors who scribed them.

He begins with what little knowledge he has, reading up on the few historical accounts he’s heard of. Gradually he expands his mental repository and begins reading about the other smaller events in their history that he wasn't aware of, making mental notes of the few cultural distinctions he finds odd so that he can question Taehyung about them later at night. His mate teases him that he may as well sleep in the library given how much time he spends there, but there is little to do when Taehyung’s disappears to do his other duties and Yoongi finds himself gravitating to the library in search of the unlimited knowledge it seems to hold.

Yoongi initially sticks to historical accounts and geographical studies, he remembers reading about the topography when they were strategizing for the war, remembers studying the soils and the movement of winds. It feels so far away, a plethora of knowledge that he'd hammered into his head but was now rendered useless for they'd lost anyway.

Fiction had never held much of Yoongi’s interest, he'd never had much use for it, but now he finds himself paging through the mythological tales in an attempt to better understand the kingdom’s culture and traditions.

His fingers, however, freeze when he turns a page and spots an illustration so distinctly similar to what he’s seen etched on the gold walls of the Omega temples for it to be anything else.

Yoongi stares at the illustration with wide eyes, dread slowly trickling down his spine as the monster inked on the page stares back at him.

Its eyes are hollow, ominous black orbs devoid of light, Yoongi feels like he's staring straight into death. Its jaw wide open and blood dripping down its canines, the demon is snarling, its claws long and sharp and feet closer to talons than paws. Nine tails splay out from behind it, flaring out like a halo.

Yoongi traces his finger across the drawing. There’s something so sinister and ghastly about it but Yoongi can't take his eyes off it.

He reads the author’s note below the illustration, the nine-tailed wolf, often called the Kumiho.
demon, it says, known to be immortal, born out of hatred and spite for humans.

Yoongi’s fingers tremble as he stares at the image for too long. The text ends there and he flips through the rest of the manuscript frantically but the author hasn’t written of the creature again.

With a frenzied kind of urgency, Yoongi rushes to the shelves and pulls out every other record written by the same author. He leafs through them all but finds no mention of the creature. He doesn’t give up and looks for other authors, pulling out anything he thinks may be relevant.

He reads accounts of ancient wars, but they all include fleeting and vague descriptions. *The Kumiho appeared on the battlefield, killing every soldier in its sight. Little is known of its origin.*

*The one wolf was stronger than an entire army, it would be a stretch to call it a wolf for it was a monster if there’s been one. Humans fought it for days and nights on end, they say the battle raged on for seven months before the monster was finally sealed away for good.*

“I see that you’ve taken a liking to the library.” A familiar voice pulls Yoongi from his thoughts and he looks up to see Namjoon smiling at him. But then Namjoon’s eyes travel to the book in Yoongi’s hands, to the open illustration. Yoongi watches his eyes harden, his lips stiffen, he’s still smiling but it is stilted.

“The kumiho.” Namjoon murmurs, and takes a seat opposite Yoongi, fingers tracing the inked drawing. “You’d know the stories better than anything these books can tell you.”

Yoongi stares at the black beady eyes gazing back at him.

“There are no written records in our kingdom.” He says. "I’ve only heard the stories that are passed down by word of mouth."

Namjoon nods in understanding, there’s a faraway look in his eyes as he caresses the corner of the open page.

“It’s impossible to know the complete truth.” He says. “The storytellers tell the history as they see fit, as it benefits them. Your clan worships the kumiho, we fear it.”

Yoongi thinks about how the omega priests pray to the goddess, how they present offerings to the snarling wolf made of marble and gold in exchange for safety. Yet here the books paint it as a sinisterous beast to be slain in order to achieve safety.

He’s consumed in his own thoughts when Namjoon’s abrupt words wrench him back to the present.

“You’re a kind person.” Namjoon says after a pause, meeting Yoongi’s eyes. “I don’t know if I would have been able to stand in your place and make the decision you’ve made.”

“It is hardly a decision when there’s no other choice.” Yoongi says, a bitter curl to his lips.

Namjoon regards him with a strange contemplative expression, like he’s trying to pick him apart. “I can tell that you consider your duty to be the most important, that your clan is dear to you. And I respect you for that. But is that what you truly desire?”

His eyes bore into Yoongi like he’s peeling the layers that make up the onion that is him and Yoongi finds himself wondering just how much Namjoon knows, just how deep can he see inside of him.
“My desires, and my feelings on the matter are of little importance.” Yoongi answers. “My clan people’s lives depend on my actions, it is not within my nature to treat that lightly. I have known since my birth that free will is not something written in my stars.”

There’s something grave in the expression that sits on the Crown Prince’s face. His eyes are steely, and for the first time, Yoongi thinks he may have erred in his perception of him. When he’d first the man, he’d thought him to be the kinder of the two brothers, but now as he sits across him, Yoongi feels an intuition that he may have been wrong in his observation.

“And I think that is noble,” the Crown Prince says, “but does your sympathy only extend as far as your clan? Do your actions not affect those outside of your kin?” The way he's eyeing Yoongi makes his skin prickle.

“Don’t yours?” Yoongi narrows his eyes. “But have you felt a shred of sympathy for the omegas degraded, slaughtered, raped by your men?”

“Please do not instruct me in morals, your Highness,” Yoongi drawls, cold and unforgiving, “when we’ve never once stood on equal footing, not then and certainly not now.”

Namjoon stares at him hard.

“Is that all you care about?” He asks. “Which clan is winning, which is losing?”

He doesn’t let Yoongi respond, speaks over him, his voice flat. “You are so fixated on the trappings of clans and duties that you’ve lost sight of what’s truly important.”

Yoongi raises an eyebrow.

“And what is truly important?” He asks, mocking.

A pause and then--

“Revolution.”

Namjoon says it simply but the one word hits Yoongi hard, right in his chest. His eyes widen slightly.

“You seek change.” Namjoon says, his gaze piercing. “But true change cannot be achieved if you are stuck within the regulations of restrictions, and constrained predictions and imagination.”

“And you’re going to bring this true change?” Yoongi asks, disbelievingly, condescending. He wants to laugh at his face, but something is squeezing his chest tight and he’s finding it hard to breathe.

“Yes” The Crown Prince says, not a shred of doubt on his face, nor a grain of insincerity in his voice.

Yoongi falls silent.

“But it would not come to fruition if you continue fixating on clans, if you keep thinking us your enemy, keep constraining yourself to the thought that your alliance has to lie with one or another.”

Yoongi pinches his eyebrows together, digs his nails into his palm.

"If not enemies, what are we?” He asks.
Namjoon smiles, cocks his head to the side.

“We share the same dream, don't we?”

When Yoongi looks wary, Namjoon leans in closer, there's a resolve there and Yoongi finds himself thinking that he definitely erred in his perception of him. There is a ferocity in Namjoon's eyes that speaks of hunger, of an unbreakable determination that makes Yoongi think that he'll stop at nothing to reach his goal. Even if took sacrifices.

"We both want peace, so that makes us comrades." Namjoon says.

Yoongi’s heart beats, stutters, thinks back to Taehyung and finally comes to a calm. Perhaps, he thinks as he stares into Namjoon's eyes, perhaps there is a way out of this.

Taehyung finds him sitting on the patio, looking out in the distance, a book in his lap and Namjoon’s words still ringing in his ears.

“Is there something troubling you?” Taehyung’s voice pulls him out of the whirlpool of thoughts swirling in his mind and Yoongi looks up to see the alpha lowering himself to sit beside him on the patio. He’s holding a bowl of fruit that he places on the wooden floorboard between them.

Ripe yellow mango slices sit in the bowl and Taehyung pushes it towards him. Yoongi picks up one of the pieces and turns to face Taehyung who is crossing his legs to sit more comfortably.

Yoongi brings the fruit to his mouth and takes a cautious bite. He is pleasantly surprised when the sweetness of the juice hits his tongue.

“Do you like it?” Taehyung asks, smiling.

Yoongi nods and wipes away some of the juice from his lips. “It is delicious. Thank you.”

Taehyung seems satisfied and picks up a slice for himself. He hums as he bites into the pulp.

A comfortable silence weaves itself between them, occasionally broken by the cicadas in the gardens. The silence is familiar now that they’ve grown accustomed to each other’s presence in the past several weeks. The bond is now a faint flutter deep seated under their skin, not loud enough to be troubling but just undeniably there.

The evening orange sky is giving way to the deeper blue of the night, and Yoongi is able to make out a few stars that are now visible in the receding daylight. There’s something so calm about the sight. He can see the appeal of star gazing, even though it was usually Jungkook who liked to lie flat on the grass and gleefully give each star a ridiculous name, sometimes dragging Yoongi into joining him in his idiosyncrasies.

The stars make you feel inconsequential, that you are of little importance, and the crown on your head feels lighter, the weight of your actions unsubstantial. It certainly puts everything into perspective, your mistakes don’t feel as grave—whatever you may end up doing, whatever life you may end up living, the earth is always going to turn like it does, the ways of the cosmos will remain unchanged. The universe existed before you and it will continue to exist after you, and the
knowledge that in the grand scheme of things your life holds little weight feels almost gratifying.

Lost in his thoughts, Yoongi doesn’t notice the juice slip past his lips and dribble down to his chin until there is a quiet touch and Yoongi feels Taehyung’s thumb wipe the sticky liquid off his chin.

Yoongi blinks a few times in surprise. Taehyung’s fingers disappear but the teasing follows in their wake.

“You’re making a mess, your Highness.” He says, Yoongi can hear the amusement in his voice. “Perhaps I should feed you instead.” Taehyung teases.

Yoongi twists his face to the right to see Taehyung’s lips quirked up in a teasing grin, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

Yoongi feels his cheeks burn but he lifts his chin up anyway.

“Perhaps you should.” He retorts, trying to appear unaffected as he watches Taehyung from under his lashes. The red on his cheeks darkens.

For someone who proposed the very idea, Taehyung blinks in surprise, taken aback by Yoongi’s response. He’d obviously not expected Yoongi to follow through. Yoongi’s noticed that Taehyung is confident when he’s teasing, flirtatious when he’s in control, but is often blindsided when his forwardness is tossed back at him in equal measure.

Taehyung recovers after a moment, and he stares at Yoongi like he’s trying to uncover his secrets. His eyes bore into Yoongi’s, and Yoongi tries to keep himself still. He wills his heart to stop racing under Taehyung’s dusky gaze.

After a long pregnant pause, shrouded under the thick canopy of silence, Taehyung reaches out towards the bowl and picks a piece of the fruit. He holds it in between two fingers and a thumb as he extends his hand towards Yoongi.

Yoongi meets his gaze and parts his lips obediently for Taehyung to feed him the sweet yellow mango.

Taehyung’s gaze is dark, his eyes lidded– they leave his and flicker to his lips as he slips the mango into his mouth, fingers brushing against his lips fleetingly. Yoongi closes his mouth, chews at the pulp, but Taehyung’s fingers linger, hovering just above his lips.

Yoongi’s heart thuds painfully in his chest, he feels it ringing in his ears and wonders if Taehyung can hear it too as it pounds against his chest powerfully, like the treacherous thing is trying to tip Yoongi forward.

A droplet of the sticky liquid trickles its way to the corner of his mouth, and Yoongi feels Taehyung’s searing gaze on it.

Want bubbles up inside of him, his wolf whines but there is that distance again– it’s so little, a hair’s breadth, but it is decisive, it’s what divides duty and will.

Taehyung’s eyes meet his, and Yoongi sees the question in them, sees the doubt reflected in his irises, blended in the thick pools of desire and want. His alpha sits before him, he’s his mate, he has taken him twice already. A kiss is nothing in comparison, but Taehyung remains where he is, still and unmoving, deliberate in his hesitation.

And the taut wire holding Yoongi back snaps in half, he’s tired of pretending when he wants so
It’s almost instinctive— the way Yoongi arches into his touch, the way he tilts his head up, baring his neck and meeting Taehyung’s touch, the pads of his fingers on Yoongi’s lips.

“Please” He breathes against Taehyung’s sticky fingers, soft, barely audible but Taehyung hears him and inhales sharply. His eyes cloud over, overshadowed by something darker, more ardent and predatory.

Taehyung’s thumb caresses his skin, he wipes the juice and spreads it along Yoongi’s lower lip. Yoongi’s mouth parts open and he doesn’t think before he gives the thumb a shy lick.

Yoongi doesn’t get time to react. Within the span of a moment, Taehyung pushes the bowl of fruit away and pulls himself closer, closing the distance between them and leaning in till they’re pressed together. His other hand holds Yoongi by the waist, grip strong as he pulls Yoongi towards himself.

“So messy.” Taehyung murmurs, chides. Their faces are close enough for Yoongi to feel Taehyung’s expelled air against his skin.

Yoongi gasps out when Taehyung leans in and presses his lips to the corner of his mouth. “It’s your ah– it’s your fault, my lord.”

Taehyung pulls away and twists to look at him. Yoongi meets his heavy searching gaze.

“Call me by my name.” Taehyung says after a pause and Yoongi blinks in surprise.

“You’re my mate.” Taehyung continues when Yoongi doesn’t respond. “Titles are unnecessary.”

Taehyung looks sincere, and that only serves to make it worse. Yoongi has said it before he knows, but it hadn’t felt strange when he was caught in the throes of their joint pleasure. He remembers his mate’s instantaneous response, how he’d trembled and spasmed inside of him right after Yoongi uttered his name like it was a prayer.

It’s strange now to speak it into the silence of the night with Taehyung’s lips hovering over his, there’s no excuse now. It feels intimate, discordant against the backdrop of their manufactured arrangement and their duties towards their kingdoms. When everything between them has held some sort of motive, their wedding rites or the constraints of time, this is wholly unnecessary.

My wolf only cares for yours

The memory of Taehyung pushing himself between Yoongi and the knife flashes in his mind. He’s always done that, Yoongi thinks as another memory returns to him– Yoongi sitting on his knees before the entire court and Taehyung striding towards him, pushing the alpha off him and wrapping his own robes around Yoongi’s trembling body, putting himself between Yoongi and the hundreds of the lecherous eyes on him.

It was only you on my mind when I let myself be taken by death

Yoongi bites his lip and tries to fight the warmth the words bring to his cheeks.

“Call me by my name, Yoongi.” Taehyung speaks again, low and authoritative, and to hear him say his name so deliberately sends tingles up Yoongi’s spine.

Taehyung’s gaze is searing, and his hand at the back of Yoongi’s waist burns. Yoongi takes in a
shaky breath, wets his lips, briefly looks away before his eyes flutter back to his mate. An enigma, Yoongi thinks, a hurricane and Yoongi’s right in the heart of it, so so reckless, there’s no chance he can make it out unscathed. But he wants it so much.

A pause, nothing’s ever been as still.

“Taehyung” Yoongi whispers into the wind like a secret.

And the world tilts, shifts so fast that he doesn’t get to see the expression that crosses Taehyung’s face for the alpha immediately pulls him closer and captures Yoongi’s lips with his own.

Yoongi’s body trembles but Taehyung presses closer, wraps his arm around Yoongi’s waist tighter, and cups his cheek as he kisses him. It’s a simple press of lips, and Yoongi feels his eyes flutter close as he brings his palms to rest against Taehyung’s broad chest.

Despite the air weighing thick with their arousal, the kiss is chaste. It carries none of the crude vulgarity Yoongi’s heard from the mouths of other omegas when they described their escapades.

Taehyung pulls away and their eyes meet. Taehyung smiles and leans in again, pressing soft fleeting butterfly kisses against his lips. The action feels too sweet, more intimate than anything they’ve shared, and a bright scarlet crawls up to Yoongi’s cheeks.

“There you are.” Taehyung laughs quietly, thumb caressing his cheek. “I was wondering where my sweet cheeks went.”

Yoongi immediately pulls a smiling Taehyung into another kiss, effectively silencing him.

They continue kissing for what feels like minutes or hours, Yoongi can’t tell. He feels like he’s in a trance, enchanted by the soft mouth on his own. His head feels dizzy, his breath quickening as he pants and Taehyung pulls away to press kisses against his cheeks, his chin, his jaw. A soft whimpering gasp escapes him when Taehyung kisses the mating bite that sits on his neck.

Taehyung captures his lips once again, slanting his head to the side, and slotting their mouths together at a different angle to kiss him deeper. Yoongi’s fingers close around the fabric of Taehyung’s robes, trying to pull him closer.

Eventually Taehyung pulls away, and for some time only the sounds of their breathing can be heard in the quiet. Yoongi presses their foreheads together, trails his hands up to Taehyung’s neck. His lips taste of mango and a taste he’s come to identify as uniquely Taehyung’s, a mild sweet with a twinge of sour like a ripe strawberry.

“Can I take you somewhere?” Taehyung murmurs against his lips.

Pulled out of his reverie, Yoongi blinks and nods dazedly even though the thought of removing himself out of Taehyung’s embrace feels like sin.

Taehyung pulls away and Yoongi gathers his garments in his fists to stand. He staggers as he takes the first few steps, like his knees have forgotten how to function, like Taehyung’s lips have made him lose all mobility. Just the knowledge that they’d been kissing a few seconds prior makes him almost lose his balance, and he feels the heat returning to his cheeks once again when he remembers the sensation of Taehyung’s lips against his own. Fortunately the hallways are dark enough to conceal his burning cheeks, and Taehyung’s hand in his is sure as he navigates them through an unfamiliar portion of the castle.

The stone of the walls looks older and the sounds of their footsteps resound in the dark. It almost
looks abandoned, there aren’t any torches lit in the hallway, and Yoongi feels slightly concerned but Taehyung comes to a stop before a long spiraling staircase.

“No one comes here anymore.” Taehyung tells him and Yoongi tries to not step on his robes as he climbs up the staircase after the alpha. “I visit sometimes when I need the quiet.”

It’s a long climb but Taehyung eventually stops and pushes at a heavy wooden door. The unused rusty hinges give away and the door opens, revealing the wide rooftop of a tower.

“It is the old observatory tower.” Taehyung explains as he steps inside and Yoongi follows him.

The wind is strong and chilly up here, his robes billow with the gust and he tries to keep his hair from falling into his eyes. Taehyung tugs him forward.

“Come take a look.” He pulls at their joint hands and Yoongi steps after him only to stop dead in surprise when he catches the view over the stone walls.

The gardens sprawl out beneath him, the previous verdant lush green now looks dark in the night and the lanterns lit in the castle sparkle like stars on the ground.

It’s beautiful, he thinks and he must have said the thought out loud for he feels Taehyung’s knowing grin on him. The tower is high up enough for Yoongi to let his eyes roam across the wide expanse of the grounds. It really is magnificent.

Taehyung’s hand in his feels warm and standing like this, seeing the world sprawled out beneath him– there are no words that can capture the fluttering feeling in his chest, how it spreads its wings and Yoongi feels so light like he dropped all his worries on the staircase, heavy weights that were holding him down relinquished at each step.

“My grandmother used to bring me and hyung here at nights.” Taehyung reveals and Yoongi turns to look at him. Taehyung is watching the stars in the night sky with a forlorn look in his eyes.

“Grandmother?” Yoongi asks for he hadn’t heard of her.

“Yeah,” Taehyung whispers and then faces Yoongi. “She passed away a few years ago.”

“Were you close to her?” He asks, he himself has never known his grandparents.

“Very, even more so than my parents.” Taehyung replies and the answer surprises Yoongi.

“Oh.” Yoongi doesn’t know how to respond to that.

“You looked like something was troubling you. You don’t have to tell me about it, I just wanted to bring you here.” He says, a gentle undertone to his voice. “I visit every so often when I desire the quiet, I thought you too may be in need of it sometimes.”

Yoongi bites his lip, looks away but squeezes Taehyung’s hand in his before letting go.

“Thank you.” He says.

They stand like that for a while, the wind against their cheeks feels pleasant. He gazes at the stars, there are more of them visible here than his kingdom. Jungkook would like it here, Yoongi thinks wistfully, a little bitterly.

Under the blanket of the dark night and glittering stars, Yoongi thinks how the stars from here appear pretty, even romantic, when they’re really just big balls of fire and gas. Even if a star were
to explode, people on earth wouldn’t see anything, it would take years for the light to even reach them.

It is quite like how life is. You can never know a person, you can only see them from afar without ever knowing what storms rage inside their hearts, and it is only after they combust, blazing bright and blind into the evanescence, years after their death do you learn of their life, their truths and see their nature for who they truly were.

Yoongi watches a star in the south sky, it burns brilliantly, brighter than its neighbours, and thinks back to his mother’s story. He’d never been keen on learning of the stars, but his mother liked them and his little brother’s eyes would always get so big with fascination whenever she told them the myths behind their names.

Yoongi never quite paid attention to the myths but there’s one star, there is just one star that Yoongi finds his eyes gravitating towards.

“Have you heard of the story behind Andromeda?” He asks Taehyung and the prince follows Yoongi’s finger in the direction of the constellation.

Tagging hums in thought. “She was a princess, right? The wife of Perseus? I do not know the entire myth.”

“I never liked the tale, but it is the only one that stuck with me.” Yoongi eyes the star bitterly.

Taehyung hums in question. "Would you like to tell me?" He asks, glancing at Yoongi from the corner of his eye.

Yoongi takes in a tremulous breath, feeling something wither inside his chest, before he begins to narrate the myth for Taehyung.

“Andromeda was beautiful, so much so that her mother, Queen Cassiopeia boasted that her daughter was more beautiful than even the sea nymphs.” Yoongi says, tilts his head back, clasps his fingers together behind his back, trembling slightly in the cold. “Her words angered the nymphs who asked the sea god Poseidon to punish the queen for her insolence.

"Poseidon unleashed a flood in their kingdom and threatened to release a monster Cetus to the land. To save the kingdom, the King sacrificed his daughter to the monster– chained her to the rock and let her be eaten by the beast. She was later saved by Perseus who killed the monster and then married her. After her death, the goddess Athena put her among the stars."

Yoongi points in the general direction of the cluster of stars. “That’s Andromeda, next to her is Perseus and her mother who was punished to be hung upside down on her throne.”

Taehyung doesn’t speak when Yoongi’s finished retelling the tale, instead his hand finds Yoongi’s and he threads their fingers together.

“Everyone likes to talk of the heroic Perseus.” Yoongi laughs bitterly. “No one talks of Andromeda’s misery– betrayed by her own family’s vanity, targeted because of someone else’s senseless jealousy, sold off by her kingdom at the brink of desperation and finally rescued and married off to a stranger, always traded off and bought at someone else’s fancy.”

The implication behind Yoongi’s words isn’t lost on Taehyung.

“But I’d like to think that she may have found happiness still.” Taehyung brings his fingers under Yoongi’s chin and tilts his head up to meet Taehyung’s gaze.
“After all no one talks of the aftermath of tragedies, it is possible she may have found love even in the wake of disaster. We romanticise tragic stories but our lives do not end there, our lives don’t simply consist of sorrows.” And then, as if Taehyung’s eyes can peer into his soul. “You are more than your misery.”

When Yoongi tries to pull away, Taehyung’s hold on his chin only becomes tighter and he speaks with so much candour that Yoongi can’t look away, can only stare.

“You are more than what people think of you, more than what your kingdom demands, more than a political tool. You are your own self, your own thoughts and preferences, your own life experiences and ideals. More than just a prince, an omega, or my mate. You are your own person.”

The sincerity in Taehyung’s eyes is overwhelming, and Yoongi’s eyes flutter in an attempt to keep the heat behind his lashes from spilling out.

Taehyung smiles gently, caresses his thumb across Yoongi’s cheek.

“I know our marriage was built on political agreements, that the circumstances were less than ideal, but it doesn’t have to end here.” Taehyung’s hand cups his cheek. “It is up to us what we make of it, isn’t that right?”

Yoongi meets Taehyung’s unblinking gaze. He doesn’t know what to say, doesn’t know how he could put the emotions seeping out of the gaps in his ribcage into words.

His mate is beautiful, Yoongi thinks, or allows himself to conceive the thought for the first time. Taehyung’s eyes, the emotion swimming in them, Taehyung’s chest that thrums rhythmically with Yoongi’s own heart, Taehyung’s touch that feels so gentle against Yoongi’s skin— Yoongi realises that his mate is beautiful, undeniably so, and it is cruel, fate’s nails are cruel.

Taehyung, the sweetest lover and the most caring mate that Yoongi didn’t dare hope for, the man whose heart is too big for his body and seems to spill out of him through the warmth in his eyes and the gentleness in his fingertips, this Taehyung doesn’t deserve to be dragged into the abyssal fate Yoongi is cursed with.

For the first time Yoongi thinks that perhaps it is not Yoongi but Taehyung who is on the receiving end of fate’s cruel joke— for it really is a joke. A joke on both of them.

He feels Taehyung thumb stroke at his cheek when Yoongi remains silent for a long pause.

“You’re shivering.” He says and it’s only when he mentions it that Yoongi notices his body trembling in the chilly wind.

“Should we head back?” Taehyung asks but Yoongi’s fingers instantly reach out and wrap around his bicep. He bites his lip, looks away when Taehyung’s eyes find his in question, unable to express the inexplicable need inside of him.

It feels like a dream, like they’re suspended in their own fantasy realm and he doesn’t want to go back just yet.

“I wish to remain here. Just a little longer, please.” He says, but the very moment the words leave his tongue, his body shivers under the thin robes.

“You’ll fall sick.” Taehyung says, softer, but Yoongi makes a quick decision and gathers his courage. He doesn’t know when the urge crept up inside of him, doesn’t know why he feels like he has little time left, like it’s slipping past his fingers. There’s an urgent desire overwhelming him,
the need to get closer to his mate, to tell him with his touch what he cannot with his words.

Yoongi takes a decisive step forward and presses their chests together. Not looking away, he leans up and places a hand on Taehyung’s chest, watches the realisation slowly bleed into his mate’s eyes and feels Taehyung’s heart give a loud thump.

With a sharp burst of confidence, Yoongi leans in and buries his face in the crook of the alpha’s neck against his scent gland.

“You can keep me warm.” Yoongi whispers against his neck.

He feels Taehyung’s hands come to hold his waist instinctively, his long fingers almost encircling it. Yoongi takes in a long inhale and feels Taehyung’s scent flood his senses, thick and intoxicating.

“Yoongi” Taehyung whispers, he sounds ragged, and it spurs him to press even closer and touch his lips to the tan skin in a brief kiss.

“Scent me.” He murmurs into Taehyung’s skin, kissing the mating bite that sits there, brazen in his touch. “I am your mate. I ought to carry your scent.”

Taehyung doesn’t need more encouragement, he’s immediately leaning down and pressing his own face into the crook of Yoongi’s neck. Yoongi lets out a soft gasp and arches into Taehyung’s embrace.

Taehyung breathes against Yoongi’s neck and the feeling shoots heated pleasure to Yoongi’s very core. His scent is stronger than ever, it wafts around them, whirling and colliding with Yoongi’s until they’re both a thick delightful mixture that makes Yoongi weak in the knees. The world around him seems to spin in the whirlpool of their scents.

He didn’t know how much he desired it till now, the last time he’d been scented was when he and Jungkook were pups and it was nothing even remotely similar to this.

Taehyung noses the soft skin behind his ears all the way down to his collarbones, leaving fluttering kisses as he does, and Yoongi feels their bond blossom, expand and burst open like a bud during springtime. He holds onto Taehyung like a lifeline, breathing into his scent, for he is sure his knees will give away if he lets go.

Sometime in the middle of the night as they wrap each other in their scents, Yoongi feels the loneliness that had dug its claws into his heart like a parasite loosen its grip, feels it shrink away from the warmth radiating from Taehyung’s touch that wraps itself around Yoongi’s body and pulls him closer.

And Yoongi doesn’t want Taehyung to let go– not yet, or maybe not ever.

Yoongi wakes up to a wetness between his thighs and his mind immediately blanks in shock. He jerks upright, the other side of the bed is thankfully vacant, and throws the covers off him.

He feels slightly dizzy and nauseous, but the symptoms are mild enough for Yoongi to conclude
that he has a few hours before he goes into heat and that is sufficient time to make preparations.

Last night’s memories resurface to his mind and mortification immediately consumes him. He should’ve surmised that he was in pre-heat with the way he was acting so needy and throwing himself at Taehyung and his scent.

He only gives himself a minute to drown in humiliation before he picks himself up, orders the servants to change the bed covers and throws himself inside the bath.

The cool water helps the heat to subside, and he wraps himself in the scents of the bathing oils to mask his own even if he is loath to wash Taehyung’s scent off his body.

When he is finished dressing himself, he searches for Jimin amongst the guards but Jimin is nowhere to be seen. Yoongi curses his friend and asks a guard to pass a message to Jimin to meet him in his quarters immediately.

There are too many servants in the castle. He doubts he will have much time before the news is flying around the household, whispered among servants and gossiped between maids before it ultimately reaches the royal family.

Yoongi rushes to one of the wooden cases in his trunk that is disguised as a private jewellery box, but Yoongi holds no interest in the gold earrings and amulets and necklaces. He reaches for the base of the box, pulls open the false bottom and reaches for the cold vial Seokjin had slipped to him secretly.

Yoongi locks himself inside the bathroom and uncorks the vial. It isn’t much but it should last him for a heat. He slips the crushed berry juice past his lips, tries not to gag at the bitter taste as it swims down the column of his throat.

The moonberry, or mostly known as the witch’s fruit, is a fruit grown by omegas that serves to prevent childbirth. It is a common item that can be purchased in the Omega province but is unheard of in the Alpha kingdom for obvious reasons. If anyone were to learn that Yoongi was deliberately sabotaging the political peace between the two nations, Yoongi would be sentenced to death without a single moment wasted on a trial and Jungkook would be pushed into his role, married to Taehyung and bearing his children.

The thought of his mate makes him pause. Would Taehyung be resentful when he finds out that Yoongi cheated him out of giving him his pups? It’s natural that he would, he would want heirs and what use is Yoongi as a mate if he doesn’t even bear his pups. But the feeling of Taehyung’s arms around him returns and Yoongi hesitates, his mate has surprised him every time Yoongi thought ill of him.

But Yoongi has no choice, this is not something he can control. This isn’t something Yoongi can give him, even if Yoongi wanted to. He had made his decision a long time back.

With the renewed determination, Yoongi empties the bottle and makes a face but doesn’t linger. He rushes back to the room and hides the empty vial in between his robes.

Jimin still isn’t here and Yoongi waits for five whole minutes before losing his patience and setting out to look for him himself.

The palace corridors are familiar now that Yoongi has had enough time to explore them, and he first heads to Jimin’s quarters only to find that his friend is not in his chambers. He looks for him in the kitchens, the stables and even the bathhouse but Jimin is nowhere to be found.
The heat in the pit of his belly is growing steadily, he knows he has a little more time but it doesn't stop the fear from crawling inside and taking up residence in his stomach, making his gut knot in itself tighter with each passing second.

He’s just exited the palace gardens after finding no sign of Jimin there either when Yoongi hears loud cheers and whistles. He peers into the distance towards the source of the sound, it isn’t an area he’s very familiar with but he briefly recalls Hoseok waving in the general direction and mentioning the royal tournament square.

Yoongi approaches the wide circle of cheering alphas, and when he gets close enough he can make out his mate’s scent mixed with others. Heady and intense, it infiltrates his nose almost immediately and Yoongi stiffens.

But he then recognises another scent, the one he’d been searching for the entirety of his morning.

Yoongi quickens his pace, he sees some of the nearer alphas turn around to look at him. Their eyes widen when they see him approaching and Yoongi hopes the bathing oils are sufficient to mask the scent of his pre-heat.

There is a lot of whispering and now the majority of the crowd is watching him, but Yoongi pays them no mind. He looks around frantically and finally spots a familiar figure.

“What is going on?” Yoongi runs to Hoseok’s side. The man is standing closer to the ring, seemingly overseeing the match.

Hoseok watches him approach with an eyebrow raised, eyeing the confusion on Yoongi’s face.

“Every year or so, we propose an offer where confident swordsmen can challenge the second prince to a duel.” He explains. “If they can beat him, they win a generous reward and a prestigious rank in the army.”

Taehyung and Jimin stand on opposite ends of the circle, both having shed their shirts, their bare chests heaving under the sun as they face each other with their swords raised.

“And Jimin challenged Taehyung to a duel?” Yoongi asks, disbelievingly.

“I doubt he did it for the reward. I was not present but from what I gathered, they got into some kind of an argument and then Jimin challenged him to a fight.”

Yoongi looks back at the match. The sight makes the hair at the back of his neck raise in apprehension. His best friend and his mate, he’s fought them both and it’s almost impossible for him to venture a guess as to who’ll win between the two of them.

With his torso bare, Yoongi can see the scar on Taehyung’s skin. The wound has fully healed but Yoongi’s heart pounds in his chest anyway. Jimin is not a weak opponent, Yoongi knows this from experience.

Jimin's looks are deceiving. He may appear dainty with his delicate features and short stature, but Jimin wields more strength than Yoongi. Under the pretense of being his manservant, Jimin is a trained assassin which was all the more reason he was chosen to accompany Yoongi to the Alpha province. But Yoongi never expected to see him go against Taehyung.

Their fighting styles couldn’t be more different. Where Taehyung is powerful and thunderous, Jimin is nimble and silent. Taehyung is a warrior who kills amidst the wails and screams on the battlefield while Jimin is an executioner, silent as the night and quick as death, gone as fast as he
Their swords clash again, the loud sound sending Yoongi’s heart racing. The alphas around him cheer, loud and whooping, and the two keep meeting, striking the edges of their blades against each other. From what Yoongi can tell, they’re evenly matched.

The sun shines off their blades, and Yoongi can’t help the way his eyes trail the glistening sweat rolling down the hard planes of Taehyung’s back as his muscles shift and flex with the harsh movements.

Taehyung shifts on his foot, pivots and twists and Yoongi watches the jagged ridges carved on his abdomen, the muscles rippling under the skin of his back, his skin tanned and sun-kissed, beautiful against his dusky nipples.

Yoongi’s heart flutters in its ribcage like it's grown wings. So lost in the sight before him, Yoongi notices too late.

Thick wet slick dribbles down the curve of his behind and rolls down the inside of his thighs. His entire body stiffens, he can feel the way Hoseok’s head comically turns to stare at him with wide eyes.

It’s too late, his wolf has resurfaced and its eyes are trained onto the one alpha before him.

Yoongi takes a deliberate step forward, dragging his eyes across Taehyung’s figure. The heat in his body blossoms, he can smell his scent thicken and waft in the air, permeating around him.

He’s walked right to the very edge of the ring when he sees the way Jimin and Taehyung jump back simultaneously and twist their heads in his direction, having caught a whiff of his scent.

Taehyung’s eyes meet his in alarm, and Yoongi can feel the murmurs around him get louder, he hears Hoseok curse under his breath behind him. Yoongi watches Taehyung’s eyes roam across his body before settling back on Yoongi’s face, watches the tendons protrude out of his neck as Taehyung pants.

Yoongi’s run out of time. The wolf in him is snarling at the sight of his mate, threatening to break free but Yoongi reigns it back in.

“You’re going into heat.” Jimin gasps out, eyes wide, as he jogs up to Yoongi.

Yoongi sees Taehyung shrug on his robes as he makes his way towards them, and he snaps his eyes back to his friend.

“You know what to do.” Yoongi murmurs.

He watches a number of emotions flicker across Jimin’s face before his friend nods, carefully setting his face blank. Jimin hesitates, as if struggling to find the right words, but in the end Taehyung walks up to them and Jimin simply places an assuring hand on his shoulder and sets off in the opposite direction.

Yoongi watches his friend retreat before he turns back to face Taehyung who is watching him with his eyes narrowed, something dark sits in his gaze.
But before Yoongi can get any words out, Taehyung is grabbing his wrist and pulling at it, tugging him away from the tournament square and towards the castle.

Yoongi struggles to match Taehyung's large strides, he requests him to slow down but Taehyung is deaf to his words.

“Why were you out here?” The alpha growls out instead, twisting to look back at him and Yoongi flinches in response. He’s never seen his mate like this. Taehyung looks absolutely furious, his irises charred black and his fingers around Yoongi's wrist tight enough to bruise.

“You should have told me you were going to go into heat.”

Taehyung just about drags him back to the castle. Yoongi trembles in Taehyung’s painful grip as he manhandles him and, when they reach the arched doorway to the castle hallways, twists them around and pushes him against the back of the pillar, hidden from sight.

“Why did you not stay in the chambers, why did you venture out alone like this when you– when you smell like this?” Taehyung’s voice is ragged and his grip on Yoongi’s forearms is almost crushing.

“I– I thought I had more time.” Yoongi gasps out when Taehyung presses closer and buries his nose against Yoongi’s neck. Yoongi whimpers, he can smell Taehyung like this, the way the scent of his arousal clings onto his skin tantalizingly, the way his hardness presses against Yoongi’s stomach.

“And what happened? You enjoyed the view so much that you started dripping on the spot, is that it?” Taehyung’s words against his skin are humiliating, hot, and Yoongi’s body has a mind of its own, he’s sure of it, for he’s arching into Taehyung even as his cheeks flush at the dirty words.

“Ah” Yoongi moans softly when Taehyung presses their hips together. He can feel it now, the wetness between his thighs, the scent of his slick clouding around them.

Taehyung’s caged him against the wall, pinned his arms to the wall, and in any other circumstances Yoongi would’ve snarled like a cornered animal, but right now he feels excessively hot. Taehyung’s body is big against Yoongi’s, he just about looms over him, all hard lines and muscles rippling under his skin as he bends over and sucks red roses at Yoongi’s throat.

“So fucking pretty.” Taehyung murmurs, some of the earlier aggression fading, and it’s only then that his mate’s words click in Yoongi’s mind.

“Wait, were you– were you jealous?” Yoongi asks, almost disbelieving.

Taehyung pulls away a little to meet his eyes, lips curled in distaste. “Have you no idea how many alphas were undressing you with their eyes alone?”

The words make Yoongi flush and he parts his mouth to retaliate but no words come to him.

Taehyung must see his surprise for he rolls his eyes and leans back in again, pressing kisses against his jaw.

“You are clueless at the most crucial of times.” He murmurs, releasing Yoongi’s arms from his tight grip and sliding his palms down the length of his arms to thread their fingers together.

Yoongi huffs and pulls him closer by their joined hands, tilts his head up and meets his eyes.
“Kiss me.” He whispers, and there is a brief flicker of surprise in Taehyung’s eyes before it settles into a pleasant smile.

“So demanding.” Taehyung teases before pressing their lips together, smiling into the kiss. He kisses him like he teases him, light and warm and fleeting.

And Yoongi thinks he likes this Taehyung the best. Even though his body had shivered under Taehyung’s authoritative words and harsh touches, it is this Taehyung who he likes the most, the Taehyung with warm eyes and smiles and sweet touches.

Yoongi stands on his toes to press against Taehyung’s mouth harder, but Taehyung pulls back– an inch, and Yoongi sees the question in his eyes but he chooses to press closer.

“Taehyung– kiss me.” He begs.

“I have been kissing you.” Taehyung says, smiling, and his hands leave Yoongi’s to trail up to his waist, encircling it. “Have I not?”

Yoongi glares at him. “Kiss me properly. Or I’ll march right over to one of the other alphas there, I’m certain they’ll do a better–”

He doesn’t get to finish the sentence for he’s being pushed against the wall once again and a pair of lips capture his own. There’s nothing gentle about this kiss, it’s every bit as messy as Yoongi’s heard being described in vulgar gossip.

Taehyung’s lips move against his, and Yoongi can’t respond, doesn’t know how to, but it doesn’t stop Taehyung. The alpha’s mouth is hot and insistent, and Yoongi’s eyes flutter shut at the sensation. His fingers come to hold at Taehyung’s robes, pulling him closer if even possible.

He feels a strange wetness, and Yoongi belatedly recognises it to be Taehyung’s tongue as he licks at Yoongi’s bottom lip. Yoongi shudders and parts his lips to allow it to lick inside his mouth. It’s strange but oh so good, and Yoongi moves his lips shyly in response, trying to mimic Taehyung’s movements.

Taehyung gasps inside their joint mouths, licks up the roof of Yoongi’s mouth and Yoongi melts, feels his knees tremble.

Taehyung must notice it for his hands trail down Yoongi’s waist, squeeze his curved behind, and his fingers wrap around Yoongi’s thighs. Taehyung pulls away from the kiss, breathes through his mouth at the effort as he hoists Yoongi up, pinning him further up the wall.

Yoongi’s breath hitches when Taehyung snaps their hips together. The pleasure shoots straight to the heat between his legs and he can feel the slick begin to trickle down his thighs again, soaking his robes and making Taehyung’s fingers wet.

Taehyung presses their lips together again, harder, dirtier. Yoongi moans into Taehyung’s mouth and Taehyung’s grip on his thighs tightens, almost bruising.

“Still want one of those alphas to fuck you?” Taehyung breathes into Yoongi’s lips, then traces his lips down to his neck, pressing open-mouthed kisses against his skin.

Yoongi’s mouth falls open as Taehyung flicks his tongue against his bite, the heat between his legs throbs, pulsates and aches. He brings his hands to the back of Taehyung’s head and threads his fingers in his hair as Taehyung continues to leave little bites against his throat.
Yoongi pants, he pulls at Taehyung’s hair till Taehyung resurfaces from his neck and meets Taehyung’s dark lustful eyes with his own lidded ones.

“No” Yoongi whispers. He presses their lips together in a brief kiss, and murmurs as the cloud of arousal begins to fog his mind. “Only you.”

Taehyung’s groan is animalistic.

“Fuck, Yoongi.” He gasps and presses their foreheads together. “You want that? You want me to fuck you?”

Taehyung’s hardness presses into the cleft of his behind. Another wave of slick dribbles down Yoongi’s legs, its scent wafting in the air, thick and palpable.

He looks up at his mate from under his lashes, and nods feverishly.

“Take me.” Yoongi whispers, sees the growing swell of Taehyung’s eyes. “Make me yours.”

However, by the time they reach their chambers, the urgent need to mate slowly ebbs away. Yoongi presses his nose to Taehyung’s throat, whining when Taehyung gently drops him into their shared bed.

In the confines of their room, the haze of arousal slowly clears, leaving Yoongi mostly tired. Their mixed scent makes him feel warm and sated, and when Taehyung crawls into the bed after him, Yoongi pulls him into an embrace.

He nuzzles into Taehyung’s neck, drowsy, feeling the gentle pull of sleep’s fingers now that he’s got his alpha close to him. Yoongi’s eyes start to feel heavier, his heartbeat slowing down to a more peaceful thrum.

Taehyung chuckles and pets his hair.

“You were begging me to take you just now.” He says but wraps his arms around Yoongi’s body anyway.

The words make the color on his cheeks darken and he hides his face in the crook of Taehyung’s neck. It’s a common misconception that omegas only want to be bred during their heat, and while he does desire sexual intimacy, he mostly craves for any kind of intimacy and comfort.

Just being held in Taehyung’s arms makes the heat inside is belly curl up in contentment.

“This is nice too.” Yoongi mumbles, eyes falling shut. Taehyung hums and resumes petting Yoongi’s hair.

They lie like that for a while, and Taehyung’s scent wraps itself around them. Yoongi lets himself drown in it. He eventually drifts off, warm and content, to the rhythmic sound of Taehyung’s heartbeat.
Except, only an hour later, Yoongi wakes up hot and sweating from the heat in his body, a moan caught in his throat. He whimpers, his cock is hard under his clothes and there is a wet patch growing underneath him, slick dripping out of his hole unconstrained.

His mind is still foggy with sleep, and his movements are clumsy as he unties the intricate knots and kicks his garments off his body till he’s only wearing his thin pale yellow underrobes. Yoongi blearily reaches behind him to the cleft of his swell where the slick is slowly pooling out under him.

The first finger slides in smoothly and Yoongi lets out a broken moan as he repeatedly pushes his finger in and out of his entrance, the squelching sounds loud in the silent room.

Yoongi twists his head to his right to see Taehyung asleep next to him, his arm thrown over Yoongi, eyes blissfully shut and mouth slightly parted open. Yoongi drags his eyes across his face, from the long eyelashes fanning over his cheeks and across the wicked slope of his nose to his red bitten lips, his angular jaw, the wide expanse of his throat, and the indentation of Yoongi’s teeth on his neck—crimson and dark blue against the tan skin, evidence that he belonged to Yoongi for the entirety of his life.

Gods, Yoongi curses, his mate is beautiful.

Yoongi inhales a harsh breath as he adds another finger and imagines it to be Taehyung’s. Feverishly, he fantasies Taehyung fucking him with his large hands, knuckles buried deep into Yoongi’s tightness as he rubs Yoongi’s juices across his walls, gathers the messy slick and pushes it inside Yoongi’s mouth, ordering him to suck at it.

Yoongi’s mouth falls open, breaths loud and heavy, as he watches Taehyung and imagines his mate fucking him open first with his fingers, and then his cock—thick and long inside Yoongi’s wetness, pounding inside him and dragging against his walls, in and out till Yoongi screams and begs, filling him up with his cum, so much so that it spills out of him and makes a mess.

He’s almost crying, three fingers deep, when Yoongi sees Taehyung’s face shift. His nose scrunches up at the thick air of arousal hanging over them, and after a moment his eyes snap open.

It’s lewd, Yoongi thinks, how he fucks himself open right beside his mate, thinks of him filthy while he sleeps, but the thought spurs him on even further and Yoongi moans, loud in the dim quiet of the room.

“Taehyung” He cries, begs, and Taehyung’s eyes immediately widen. He takes in the sight of Yoongi with his skirt collected around his thighs, fingers buried deep inside of him, lips parted and eyes boring into his with obvious lust and want.

Taehyung swears, and Yoongi watches him collect himself for a moment before he twists back to look at Yoongi, eyes thick pools of desire.

A shiver spreads up Yoongi’s spine and he arches over the bed, meets Taehyung’s dark gaze as he whimpers.

Taehyung’s eyes cloud over and he immediately moves, shifts till he’s hovering over him, his broad frame covering Yoongi’s entirely. He holds himself up on his palms, his knees on either side of Yoongi’s hips, caging him in, but he doesn’t touch him. Yoongi looks up at him and sees the
want reflected in Taehyung’s eyes, desire so raw Yoongi feels branded by the heat of it.

“Did you think of me, pretty?” Taehyung asks, voice low and seemingly sweet, but his face is nothing but. His eyes are narrow, lips pressed into a harsh firm line, he looks merciless and unforgiving.

“Did you fuck yourself thinking of me, hm?” Taehyung leans closer and whispers the words right in Yoongi’s ear and the reaction is immediate. Yoongi bucks up and gasps, wanting to push his hips against Taehyung’s hard cock evident through the fabric of his pants, but Taehyung’s hand grasps him by the jut of his hip and pushes him back down.

“Fucked your fingers in your tight little hole because you wanted to be filled so bad?” Taehyung whispers hotly, and Yoongi doesn’t want to make a sound but his lips part instinctively and a breathless moan breaks free in the hot humid air between them. Taehyung smiles against his ear, gives it a little kiss before he’s pulling away again, and Yoongi almost begs for him to come back.

“Touch yourself.” Taehyung instructs and Yoongi’s hand that had frozen inside of him, hesitantly moves again. “Fuck yourself like you want me to fuck you.”

Yoongi whimpers, helpless, feels his body tremble with pleasure as he stretches himself open little by little.

“I’d lick you too,” Taehyung says, eyes traveling up to Yoongi’s flushed face, and Yoongi meets his gaze. Taehyung is watching him with an unconcealed hunger, carnal and abyssal, there's a dark promise that lurks underneath it.

“I’ll lick your pretty wet hole, fuck you with my tongue till you’re begging for my cock– till you’re screaming for it.”

Taehyung’s words shoot straight to heat between his legs, and Yoongi feels a tear escape his eye and roll down his cheek. His fingers stutter in their movement, and he hesitates for a second before he adds in the fourth finger, mouth parting in a loud gasp at the new stretch.

He instinctively brings his other hand to cup his mouth close but he feels fingers wrap around his wrist and pin it back to the bed.

“I told you before, didn’t I?” Taehyung says, his voice softer. “It’s okay for it to feel good. I want to hear how good you feel.”

His hand retreats, and Yoongi watches him blearily through unshed tears, he likes the way Taehyung looks at him, like he’d rather look only at him for the rest of his life. Yoongi wishes he’d do that too, that he’d look only at Yoongi for the rest of their lives.

The pleasure steadily builds up until Yoongi’s hips start bucking up on their own, chasing the tantalizing promise of contact for even the slightest taste of it, and little mewls leave his throat.

“Taehyung” He whimpers. “Taehyung”

“I’m right here, love. You look so pretty.” He praises. "You'd look even prettier with my cock inside you."

Yoongi’s hips jerk up higher at the filthy praise, and Taehyung crawls further up the bed, his face hovering just above Yoongi’s, but he still wouldn’t touch him.

“Would you like that? You look like you do.” He teases and Yoongi parts his lips, pants.
“I’m so lucky.” Taehyung whispers, bending down on his elbows till his lips hover above Yoongi’s tantalizingly. “To be able to call you mine. Out of everyone in the world, you came to be mine, how could I have gotten so fortunate?”

Taehyung leaves a soft kiss on the dip of his lip before drawing away again, smiling.

“If there’s one good thing this war has brought to me, it’d be you, sweetheart.”

Yoongi gasps, his hips stutter, and suddenly he’s not of a mind to wait any longer. He pushes himself up on an elbow and presses a bruising kiss against Taehyung’s mouth.

Taehyung kisses him back with equal measure. He moves his lips smoothly against Yoongi’s, and when Yoongi gasps at the overwhelming sensation, Taehyung slides his tongue inside his mouth.

Yoongi tries to keep up, he brushes his own tongue against Taehyung’s and revels in the sound of his mate groaning in response. Taehyung drags his tongue against the roof of his mouth and Yoongi trembles, falls back on the bed and pulls Taehyung with him.

They kiss until they run out of breath. Taehyung pulls away and they both gasp for air. He doesn’t notice Taehyung’s movement until his mate’s hand comes to hold Yoongi’s fingers that have stilled inside of him.

Taehyung pulls his fingers out, they’re drenched in his slick, and brings them to his mouth. Yoongi’s eyes widen as Taehyung closes his lips around Yoongi’s fingers without hesitation, dragging his tongue between the gaps and sucking them clean. Yoongi feels the fire in his stomach flare up again as if someone poured oil on it.

He yanks Taehyung in once again and kisses him hungrily, tasting his own slick on Taehyung’s tongue.

“Please–” He breathes against Taehyung’s mouth, unsteady but wanting. He doesn’t know what he’s asking for but he knows it isn’t enough. The wave of pleasure inside him swells but it’s not enough to tip him over.

“You played with yourself, was that not enough?” Taehyung asks, kissing the corner of his mouth.

“It wasn’t– it isn’t.” Yoongi gasps, he holds on to Taehyung’s shoulders and tries to rut up into him.

“What do you want, love?” Taehyung murmurs.

“You” Yoongi answers without hesitation, rolls his hips up into Taehyung and the sensation of Taehyung’s clothed dick against his own feels so good. “I want you.” He breathes.

He whines when Taehyung pulls away, craning to chase after him. The alpha draws back and reaches down to the back of Yoongi’s knees, pulling them up and over his thighs. Yoongi squeaks as he is sharply tugged down, positioned so Taehyung’s pelvis is right under the cleft of his behind.

Taehyung holds him by his hips, pulls him down just as he rolls his own up. His clothed cock brushes against Yoongi’s entrance and draws a broken moan from his lips. The pleasure builds up so quickly, and Yoongi’s eyes roll to the back of his head.

“Is this finally enough for you, sweetheart?” Taehyung asks, voice low and mocking, but Yoongi is too delirious from the delicious drag of Taehyung’s bulge against him to care.
Taehyung ruts his hip into him and Yoongi arches back against him, he can feel Taehyung’s pants soaked wet from Yoongi’s slick.

His lips part in weak protest when Taehyung pulls Yoongi’s skirt further up to reveal his erect cock, precome glistening at the tip.

“Even your cock is so pretty.” Taehyung mumbles, low enough that Yoongi doesn’t think it was meant for him to hear. Yoongi flushes under Taehyung’s intent gaze, he tries to pull away but Taehyung’s grip on him is tight.

And then, without a warning, Taehyung bends down and licks a long stripe along the length of his cock. Yoongi’s breath catches, his body trembles and his head falls back as he arches up on the bed when Taehyung does it again.

Yoongi’s eyes flutter shut and he tries to catch his breath. It’s a relentless cycle—Taehyung’s touch sends his body into an uncontainable frenzy, yet when it retreats, he feels like a desert, his skin tingling in anticipation, craving Taehyung’s touch like water to soothe his parched body.

But if Yoongi thought everything before was overwhelming, it is nothing compared to how he feels when Taehyung takes in almost the entirety of his dick in his mouth and gives it a suck right as he rolls his cock into Yoongi’s swell.

Yoongi can’t keep quiet, can’t stop from arching into Taehyung’s persuasive mouth. Taehyung doesn’t let up, he’s relentless as he builds up the pleasure without a pause, licking at him repeatedly, no longer teasing, and Yoongi’s fingers curl into Taehyung’s hair. He whimpers, toes curling and thighs locking around Taehyung’s head as Taehyung mercilessly keeps going.

Yoongi can’t think straight, he writhes, unable to keep still. The pleasure is overwhelming and he can hear his own sounds, loud in the confines of their chambers. He deliriously wonders if the guards stationed outside the door can hear his helpless cries, and the thought makes him tremble in shame, humiliation bringing him even closer to the edge.

Eventually Taehyung slams his hips up hard and with purpose and Yoongi sobs from the stimulation. He feels the pleasure mount up inside of him till it threateningly wobbles—teetering, impending crash at any moment.

Yoongi opens his mouth to warn Taehyung.

“I’m close—ah” He gasps and his fingers tug at Taehyung’s hair but Taehyung simply moves in further to slide his mouth over the rest of Yoongi’s cock. The soft coaxing pressure of his mouth is too much, the pleasure so searing Yoongi can only bear the burn of it.

Yoongi cries when he comes, the pleasure crashing into him like a tidal wave. He stutters and trembles as he shoots his release into Taehyung’s mouth who pulls back by an inch and strokes his cock to ride him through the orgasm.

Yoongi falls back against the bed when he’s finished, chest heaving, pliant and boneless. Taehyung resurfaces with a smile, licking at his lips as he presses sweet murmurs and kisses into the skin of his thighs before lowering them onto the bed.

He lies down beside him, and leans over to brush Yoongi’s matted hair from his forehead.

“Do you feel better now?” He asks.

Yoongi nods, tired. The heat has subsided for the time being, but he is aware of the bulge in
Taehyung’s pants. He pulls himself up on his elbows to show the same courtesy to the alpha but Taehyung wraps his fingers tight around Yoongi’s bicep and pushes him back down to the bed.

“You’re still–” Yoongi tries to say but Taehyung hushes him.

“This isn’t about me.” He says and when Yoongi looks like he’s about to argue, cuts him off. “Get some sleep while you can. The heat will return soon, and you should preserve your strength lest you injure yourself or fall sick.”

Taehyung doesn’t look like he’ll accept any arguments so Yoongi lies back down. The alpha throws an arm over him, pulling him in and tucking him close to his chest.

“Get some rest. I mean it.”

And like Taehyung predicts, just a few minutes in, Yoongi’s eyes fall shut and he succumbs to sleep’s pull, letting it tug him into a dark limbo.

The next time Yoongi comes to, he’s already seated on Taehyung's hips, rutting against Taehyung’s clothed dick carelessly. The alpha is awake this time round, and Yoongi’s eyes widen when they meet his, the deepest red flooding his cheeks in mortification.

He stills, and an apology sits on the tip of his tongue but he pauses when he catches the look on Taehyung’s face. The alpha looks wrecked, he’s breathing through his mouth, his hands are clenched into fists by his sides, resolutely not touching Yoongi.

“Are you finally awake?” Taehyung breathes.

Yoongi nods jerkily.

“Good” is all Taehyung says before he rolls his hips up into Yoongi’s, groaning as he does. Yoongi breathes in sharply, he can feel himself getting wet again. Taehyung is hard and so big, Yoongi’s lips part when Taehyung’s hands come to hold him by the waist before he ruts up into him again.

Yoongi falls forward, catching himself on Taehyung’s chest. The alpha pulls him by the neck and kisses him hungrily. The kiss is dirty and loud, Taehyung sucks on his tongue and Yoongi breathes out a moan. Saliva connects their lips when Taehyung pulls away.

“I want to fuck you.” He breathes and electrifying tingles spread all over Yoongi’s body. “Can I fuck you, sweetheart?” He asks, the rasp of his voice delicious, and Yoongi crushes their mouths together again.

He feels Taehyung grab the flesh of his behind, squeezing it hard, tight and unforgiving, and massaging it as he licks into Yoongi’s mouth and tangles their tongues together.

Yoongi feels the heat building up inside him, feels the familiar ache again— the want to be filled. The hot brand of Taehyung’s cock hard with ardor, because of him, makes the ache between his legs throb pleasantly and Yoongi involuntarily rolls down on it, revels in the sound Taehyung makes against his lips.
Yoongi grabs fistfuls of Taehyung’s clothes and pulls himself away, meeting Taehyung’s gaze. He feels breathless just by looking into the deep trenches of desire in Taehyung’s eyes.

“Yes– yes, fuck me.” He breathes out.

Taehyung draws in a ragged inhale before he pulls Yoongi back in by the neck to kiss him again. This is a gentle kiss, perhaps gentler than any other kiss they’ve shared. It's deep and unhurried, their mouths moving against each other with familiarity.

Until eventually Taehyung pulls away and watches him with an expression so fond, Yoongi feels flushed just looking at him but he can't bring himself to look away either.

“I’ll make you feel so good.” Taehyung whispers, promises. “Do you want to be on top this time?” He asks and Yoongi blinks back at him in surprise.

Taehyung’s hands grip his hips tight and Yoongi imagines how his cock will feel inside of him like this. The thought makes him flush. He wants it, he realises, he wants him inside, wants Taehyung in every way he can get him. But he is inexperienced outside of the two times he’s been with him, and both of those times Taehyung had been the one who’d taken the lead.

For Yoongi to be on top, he can imagine what he has to do. He’ll be in control and while that sends tingling thrills up his spine– to be the one sinking down on top of Taehyung, wanton and shameless in his pleasure, he also feels uncertain.

“I–” He starts, then trails off for he does not know the words for it, does not know how to tell Taehyung that he is unsure if he’ll be as good, if he can make Taehyung feel as good as he makes him feel.

“Are you scared?” Taehyung asks, pulling himself up on his elbows and closer so that he can reach Yoongi.

Yoongi nods hesitatingly and feels Taehyung’s fingers cup his cheek, gentle and tender.

“It’ll feel good, I promise. I’ll take care of you.” Taehyung murmurs and kisses the tip of his nose. “Do you trust me?” He asks.

Yoongi stills and looks up at Taehyung, meets his sincere gaze.

That’s the crucial question, isn’t it? They were enemies only a few months ago, both thrown into this, angry, hurt and wary of each other, mated yet strangers. Does Yoongi trust him? It is an odd question to ask a person in his position.

But odder is the answer that resonates inside of Yoongi, so loud that it rings and echoes against the walls of his mind, it’s so clear, yet so strange. In this unfamiliar land, mated to this strange alpha, Yoongi had expected to be sent to his guillotine, for his fate to be one of a bedwarmer, a hole to be fucked mercilessly every night– yet, yet here he is, staring into his mate’s eyes and finding not cruelty, but a chasmic sincerity, a warm gentleness that has gradually melted the frost around Yoongi’s heart.

It’s as if the air around them has frozen, stilled like the entire world is waiting for Yoongi’s reply. There is only one answer he can give.

“Yes I do.” He whispers, and it’s as if those three words cause Taehyung’s entire face to bloom into a wide smile. The alpha kisses his forehead and then both his cheeks, smiles as he presses one
against his lips.

“Then there’s nothing for you to fear.” He says. “I’ll take care of you.”

Yoongi rises and kneels on his knees while Taehyung settles down beneath him, untying the knots of his pants before he pulls it off. Yoongi shivers in anticipation, eyeing Taehyung’s cock as it stands long and erect against his belly. It’s going to be inside of him, the thought makes him tremble and another wave of slick washes down his body.

Taehyung shifts and grabs his cock, steadying it and positioning it underneath Yoongi’s entrance. He grasps Yoongi’s hip with his other hand and Yoongi begins lowering himself, hands trembling where they’re splayed across Taehyung’s chest to hold him up.

“Slowly” Taehyung murmurs, and Yoongi’s hips stutter, his nerves betraying him.

Taehyung has to adjust his cock slightly and Yoongi shivers when it makes contact with his entrance that’s beginning to drip in anticipation. He forces himself to relax but when the tip of Taehyung’s cock slides inside, it takes all of his control not to just sink into it fully.

“You’re doing so good.” Taehyung praises, rubbing his hands along Yoongi’s sides in encouragement.

Yoongi’s mouth falls open as he gradually sinks in further. The stretch is wider than his fingers and Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut at the sensation.

It’s deeper this way and Yoongi gasps when he finally bottoms out, filled in the way he’s been aching for. He’s never felt quite like this– cleaved open with Taehyung’s thickness fully resting inside him, inescapable as it reaches parts of him it never has before. Yoongi falls forward, panting, and Taehyung catches him, one large hand wrapped around the curve of his waist and the other cupping his cheek.

“You’re perfect.” Taehyung kisses him breathlessly, looking as wrecked as Yoongi feels. “You’re perfect, sweetheart.”

“Taehyung” Yoongi moans, trying to adjust to the fullness, trying to find some semblance of control as Taehyung moves their lips together.

He can tell Taehyung is keeping himself from moving, his grip on Yoongi’s waist is almost bruising.

Yoongi leans back and lifts his hips experimentally. He gasps when he feels the delicious drag of Taehyung’s cock against his walls. Taehyung groans and Yoongi does it again, feeling surer of his movements.

Taehyung’s hands come to hold his behind, fingers digging into flesh, and Yoongi keeps moving as he builds a steady rhythm, ache mixing with pleasure in a way that makes his toes curl.

“Does it feel good?” He pants and looks down at Taehyung, breathless and desperate for Taehyung to like it as well.

“My god, sweetheart.” Taehyung groans, his eyes tracing Yoongi’s body like he cannot quite believe him to exist. “You have no idea, you have not one idea.” Yoongi cannot fight the shiver that rips through him at the way Taehyung eyes him, his gaze dark and searing, focused on where their bodies are joined.
He tests different angles as he gains more confidence, his body seeking to soothe the deep throbbing ache building low between his hips. And when he hits the spot that nearly makes him scream, Yoongi stills and arches into Taehyung before snapping his hips down harder at the very angle.

Yoongi feels his eyes roll to the back of his head as he continues to chase the aching pleasure, pulling his hips up and bringing them down against the sweet bruise. With each roll his muscles clench around Taehyung, sucking the tip in and pushing against the abused spot again and again.

“Tae– Taehyung” He gasps, his mind clouded with a feverish pleasure. “Feels so–”

“Is this what you dreamt of?” Taehyung rasps, looking at Yoongi like he wants to devour him whole. “When you were sleeping and rutting against my cock?”

Yoongi whimpers with shame, but his hips keep moving, no longer the steady rhythm he’d built but erratic and desperate for release. His arms lose their strength, fingers slipping on Taehyung’s skin, and he falls on his elbows.

“Please– I’m close, Taehyung– “ He cries as his hips stutter.

Taehyung growls in a way Yoongi’s never heard before, the intensity of his gaze making the heat in Yoongi’s stomach burn bright, and his grip on Yoongi’s hips tightens painfully.

A strangled cry leaves him when Taehyung thrusts into him hard, without warning, and Yoongi loses all sense of balance as he falls against Taehyung’s chest.

Taehyung’s hips work into him, deep and forceful, leashed strength in every line of him. Yoongi’s hands grab onto Taehyung’s neck, his body pliant as it jerks up with each of Taehyung’s thrusts.

“How’s this?” Taehyung leans in and whispers hotly in his ear. “Is this what you wanted?”

Taehyung’s hips pick up speed, merciless as they slam into Yoongi with abandon. The pleasure travels up the length of his spine like an electric shock, and Yoongi arches back into him instinctively.

He nods deliriously. “Yes” Yoongi keens. “Yes, please.”

It is overwhelming, the roll of Taehyung's hips into him, pronounced like an oceanic wave of muscle, inescapable in its pleasure and leaving him breathless. Taehyung pants as he whispers mindless praises into his hair, and Yoongi tries to contain the little mewls that threaten to leave his lips.

Yoongi can feel the orgasm approaching, and he grabs at Taehyung's shoulders as he pushes back against his cock, craving more– more of his cock, more of his touch, his skin, his praises– his everything. He brings his hips down just as Taehyung grinds up into him. He hears Taehyung grunt and does it again, matching his pace with Taehyung’s, each egress deeper.

“Taehyung, I need you–” He pleads. “I need–”

Taehyung presses a kiss into his hair. “I know, love.”

One of Taehyung’s hands cups his behind and presses their lower bodies even closer, tighter. His other hand slips into the hair at the nape of Yoongi’s neck, tugging at it gently.

Yoongi resurfaces from Taehyung’s neck and Taehyung captures his lips in a deep kiss. It’s slow
and intimate and Yoongi’s eyes flutter shut at the soft coaxing pressure of Taehyung’s mouth on his.

Yoongi feels his body tremble, the pleasure building and building upon itself as Taehyung’s hips piston inside him repeatedly, pressing against the swollen spot relentlessly. And it takes only a moment before Yoongi locks up around Taehyung.

Yoongi’s breathless whimpers are swallowed inside Taehyung’s mouth as he shudders and gasps wordlessly, body awash in a pleasure so intense it teeters on the edge of painful. Yoongi comes with a loud high-pitched cry, spilling between their bodies, and Taehyung's hips slow down into something sweeter as he rides him through the waves of the orgasm. The oversensitivity makes him sob and Yoongi curls into Taehyung, whimpering into his neck helplessly.

Taehyung finally stills as Yoongi catches his breath. He drops a kiss on his jaw before making a move to pull out but Yoongi whines before he even realizes that he's made a sound, his hands coming up of their own volition and gripping Taehyung's shoulders to keep him near.

Taehyung stops and a sweet smile tugs at the corners of his lips before he brings his finger to Yoongi's chin, lifting it to make Yoongi face him.

Yoongi shifts instinctively into Taehyung's hands. They kiss again, sweet and slow, the sounds louder now that the room has grown silent again. Yoongi slides his tongue over Taehyung’s lip and swallows Taehyung’s noise of surprise. He feels bold, and he wants to keep making Taehyung feel good. They kiss for long, part to catch their breath and then again. Yoongi feels like he’s under the influence of alcohol, he feels inebriated, shyness fading as he grows more brazen with his touch.

“Take me again.” He whispers against swollen lips and catches Taehyung’s surprise.

“Sweetheart, you’ll be sore.” Taehyung murmurs against his lips but Yoongi can feel his cock stir inside him and the heat of the movement lights him up again like a lick of fire.

“I want you to come inside me.” He says and sees Taehyung’s eyes widen, watches him swallow.

“Are you certain?” Taehyung asks.

Yoongi nods, he is exhausted and his body aches but the thought of Taehyung fucking him already has the beginnings of arousal stirring in his belly again.

Taehyung doesn't reply, he wraps his arms tight around Yoongi's waist and flips them over. Yoongi whines at the feeling of his cock shifting inside of him, a sharp sting of oversensitivity, and Taehyung presses a sweet kiss against his cheek in apology.

“Turn over.” He murmurs.

Yoongi quickly follows and holds himself up on his fours weakly. Taehyung adjusts his hips and presses a hand on his back, pushing him down into the soft mattress till he’s leaning on his elbows and presenting his behind in the air. The position is humiliating but little tendrils of desire curl up in his belly in breathless anticipation.

He feels the feather touch of Taehyung’s fingers as they run along his spine, drawing a shiver from him. Taehyung bends down and presses a kiss at the base of his spine.

“You look so gorgeous, my love.” He says, rubbing a palm along the curve of his swell. “My pretty red sweet cheeks.”
The endearment makes Yoongi flush, and another rush of slick pours out of his hole unbidden. He can feel Taehyung’s searing gaze on it, and a moment later, he feels Taehyung lathering up the wet slick on his fingers.

“So fucking wet.” He mocks and Yoongi whimpers, hiding his face in his arms. “I should’ve known. Always so eager for my cock.”

The humiliation burns his cheeks. The him of yesterday would have been scandalised to see him like this, begging to be wrecked, to be railed again and again, but the him of yesterday couldn’t know how good it feels, how good Taehyung feels.

He’s taken by surprise when he feels something wet against his mouth, coaxing it open. He parts his eyes slightly and then snaps them wide open when he sees Taehyung’s fingers coated with his slick against his lips.

“Come on, love, taste yourself.” Taehyung brings his fingers to the seam of Yoongi’s lips and Yoongi parts them just enough for his tongue to dart out and taste. It’s a little salty, with a twinge of sweetness. He opens his mouth wider and wraps his lips around Taehyung’s fingers.

He hears Taehyung groan and his mate rocks his hips deeper into him. Yoongi moans around Taehyung’s fingers, laving his tongue around them to lick them clean.

Taehyung curses as he withdraws his fingers from Yoongi’s mouth and pulls out of him until only the tip of his cock remains inside. But before Yoongi can adjust to the change, Taehyung rolls his hips into him hard and Yoongi is slammed into the bed, and before he can gather himself, Taehyung’s doing it again.

“So tight.” Taehyung groans, and Yoongi’s fingers scrunch up the sheets to find purchase as Taehyung rams into him again, grunting from the force.

“Taehyung” Yoongi sobs from the wretched pleasure, crying with each powerful thrust into his abused hole.

Taehyung bends down and presses his chest to Yoongi's back, his weight pinning him to the bed, before he starts to fuck into him at a brutal pace, nothing like before. It has Yoongi crying, his throat rubbed raw and hot tears dripping down his lashes as he holds on to the bed frame, his body rocking back and forth mercilessly.

“You feel so good, my tight darling.” Taehyung growls by his ear, voice raw and exhaling a dark hunger.

Yoongi shudders, trembles as the pleasure grabs him in its claws, threatening to devour him and it feels so good. He’s so sensitive already, he doesn’t know if he wants to urge Taehyung to continue or to beg him to stop but it doesn’t seem like he has a choice with Taehyung fucking into him without letting up, slamming his hips into him in harsh forceful snaps.

It’s all too much and not enough at all, every drag of Taehyung’s cock inside him is a step closer to the burning peak and he’s standing on the edge of the cliff right before the drop, he can taste the pleasure on his tongue. But Taehyung’s movements gradually slow down before coming to an agonizing halt, pulling him right back, and Yoongi whines.

“Yoongi” Taehyung pants, his voice a wreck of hoarse syllables. “I’m going to–”

Yoongi doesn’t understand until he feels Taehyung’s cock swell inside of him. It scares him to think how much bigger Taehyung’s going to get now.
He feels Taehyung make a move to pull out, but Yoongi’s hand flies out and immediately digs nails into Taehyung’s hip.

“No” He cries out, and Taehyung stills.

Taehyung is silent for a moment before he repeats like he believes Yoongi didn’t understand.

“Yoongi,” Taehyung gasps into his ear, “my love, I’ll hurt you.”

Yoongi pushes back against the growing swell of Taehyung’s cock.

"I told you–” He gasps, voice scratching against his throat. ”I want you to come inside me.”

The air around them grows thicker, and Yoongi twists around to face his mate.

“Taehyung” He mewls, and watches Taehyung’s eyes darken, a heated hunger twisting his beautiful features into something dangerous and predatory. Yoongi reaches out for his mate’s hand and threads their fingers together, squeezes them, and whispers. “Knot me.”

Taehyung immediately straightens till he is kneeling, a feral growl sounds from deep inside his chest and Yoongi finds both his hands pinned above his head, his shoulders pushed down to the mattress.

“It’s going to hurt.” Taehyung grunts.

And he pulls out to the tip before thrusting into him deeper and harder. Yoongi’s mouth falls open. The girth of his cock grows steadily, snagging against his rim as Taehyung fucks his knot into him. Yoongi pants into the sheets, unable to move, unable to speak, his wet sobs resounding in the room along with the loud slapping of skin against skin.

Yoongi’s body rocks with the thrusts, he’s never felt humiliation this intense, never felt shame brimming inside of him till it burns through his blood like wildfire. The sounds of his crying are loud in the room, his tears and drool soaking the sheets under his face. But the worst part, the worst part is that Yoongi doesn’t want him to stop, wants Taehyung to fuck him till his hole is indented and rubbed raw with Taehyung’s knot, till his throat burns with his cries and screams of Taehyung’s name.

“Please– Taehyung– please ah ” He’s shamelessly begging but he doesn’t find it in himself to care.

Taehyung doesn’t stop, he is relentless in the way he shoves his knot into him, rams into him harder with every thrust. But Taehyung’s on edge too, he can feel it, the way his thrusts are no longer smooth but desperate, chasing relief.

The pleasure builds till it hurts, and then it's upon him. Yoongi comes with Taehyung’s knot inside of him, shuddering through another orgasm, except it’s dry. Taehyung’s hips snap desperately, continually fucking him even as he squeezes around him, oversensitive and spent beyond relief. His legs tremor, shake with the force of Taehyung pounding into him and he feels Taehyung wrapping an arm around his stomach, holding him steady as he chases the tail end of his relief.

“Taehyung” Yoongi sobs, winces, he doesn’t know if he can take any more. His body is shaking and Taehyung leans over him, presses his chest against Yoongi’s arched back till he’s enveloping him completely.

“Isn’t this what you asked for, sweetheart? For me to use your hole till I finished?” He pants into his ear.
“Y-yes” Yoongi whimpers. Taehyung pulls him up against his chest tighter. “I want you to \textit{ah} – I want you to come inside me.” Yoongi breathes.

Taehyung groans as he thrusts into him once last time, a tremor coursing through his body as he finally stills and reaches his climax.

Taehyung pants into his ear, his knot still buried in Yoongi, and the harsh exhales send tingles across Yoongi’s body.

They stay like that for a good minute, trying to catch their breath, until Taehyung finally lowers them onto the mattress, careful not to jostle the knot inside Yoongi too much.

Taehyung presses his lips below Yoongi’s ear.

“You’re unbelievable, you know that?” He whispers.

Yoongi makes a displeased noise, uncomfortable in the position with Taehyung’s weight pressing on top of him, and Taehyung chuckles before wrapping both his arms around Yoongi’s waist and shifting them till they’re laying on their side with Yoongi enveloped in Taehyung’s embrace.

Taehyung leaves soft kisses along the line of his neck where the mating bite rests.

“No one’s ever been this perfect, no one’s ever felt this good. No one but you, love.” Taehyung murmurs into his skin and the itch Yoongi had felt, the little spark of jealousy he’d felt in the beginning that Taehyung had had partners before him, that Taehyung may find more partners after him, finally settles and Yoongi finds himself melting in Taehyung’s embrace.

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?” Taehyung asks after a pause, pulling away until Yoongi whines and he returns.

“I am fine.” Yoongi whispers, voice hoarse. “It was– it was good.” He admits, it is unnecessary seeing how he’d begged for Taehyung to fuck him just a few minutes prior, but Taehyung’s smile pressed against his neck makes it worth it.

Yoongi can feel the knot begin to recede inside him, loosening up and releasing Taehyung’s cum into him, and Yoongi shouldn’t like the sensation as much as he does. Gradually he feels his body grow boneless, weighing down with exhaustion, and his lashes begin to lower themselves as the dark begins to consume his sight.

He’s almost lulled to sleep with Taehyung’s arms wrapped snug around him and his lips pressing chaste kisses against any arbitrary spot on Yoongi's neck that catches his attention.

He doesn’t know how long they stay like that, with Yoongi teetering the line of sleep and reality and his mind hazy with senseless thoughts floating in his head, before he feels Taehyung stir behind him.

“You know,” he hears Taehyung tentatively whisper against his shoulder. His voice is soft, it holds an eerie fragility to it. Yoongi’s eyes are closed and the knot is still buried inside of him so he reckons not much time has passed.

“You may not believe me,” Taehyung murmurs, "but I do not actually regret our marriage.”

A moment passes, a silent still.

Yoongi’s eyes fly open, and he knows Taehyung can feel the way his body suddenly stiffens in his
A heavy silence follows in the wake of Taehyung’s words. His knot inside Yoongi suddenly begins to feel more and more like a trap holding Yoongi in place.

Yoongi remains silent, as does Taehyung. He wonders if Taehyung regrets his words now that he’s released them into the open. Yoongi feels himself slowly losing breath, like there is a hemlock thriving inside his chest, with its roots lodged and buried in his lungs, that is suffocating him from the inside. He finds comfort in the single thought that he’s not facing Taehyung and the alpha cannot see the growing dread on his face.

The quiet grows thicker with every passing second, Yoongi half expects Taehyung to retract his arms from around his waist but he doesn’t and they resolutely stay there, caging them together in the loud silence.

“Did you enjoy fucking me that much, your Highness?” Yoongi jests, vulgar and crude, and it sits odd against his mouth, flat and discordant in the silence between them. He wants to pull the words back the moment they leave his tongue.

He can feel Taehyung’s lips curl into something bitter against his skin and he immediately wants to apologise but stubbornly, he stays silent.

“I did not expect you to return my affections, but I had hoped you would take me a little more seriously than that.” He says, and Yoongi curls his fingers into the sheets.

“Why then?” Yoongi asks, and then because he doesn’t actually want to hear the answer to that question, doesn’t think he can, he’s speaking again. “Please do not insult the both of us by saying I have brought you much joy. I came here against my will, I was simply abiding by my duty, just as you were. Neither of us wanted this, so why?”

“If I was ever unhappy, it was because I knew you did not come here of your volition, because you were held down by the neck by your kingdom. That you were more of a sacrificial lamb than my mate.”

“You wanted a lover.” Yoongi concludes, there’s something spiteful in his tone. “It is not as if I am holding you back, you have fulfilled your marital duties to me, you can frolic around with as many concubines as you desire–”

Yoongi is abruptly twisted around and he suddenly comes face to face with Taehyung who is watching him with his lips pressed into a thin firm line. Yoongi winces a little at the movement, the knot inside him snagging at the rim. Taehyung’s grip on his forearms is tight, but it is his eyes piercing into Yoongi’s that hold Yoongi in place.

“I said it before, didn’t I?” Taehyung says, sounding almost angry. “That it is up to us what we make of it. We may have entered into this marriage under less than ideal circumstances, but must we really carry our miseries with us till the end of time?”

Yoongi grits his teeth and finds himself feeling strangely defensive. “And? Do you hold other fanciful impressions? Did you believe I’d magically fall in love with you too?” He asks, mocking.

He feels like he's tearing apart at the seams, spilling out all his hurt, thorns and everything, in a wet bloody mess of his own vulnerabilities.

He doesn’t miss the flicker of hurt that flashes in Taehyung’s eyes before they quickly harden. Yoongi’s chest aches, trembles in the worst possible way.
“I do not ask for your love or devotion.” Taehyung says, his jaw clenched, there’s something obstinate about it, like he’s stubbornly not letting Yoongi’s harsh words get to him. “But is it so impossible for you to accept my goodwill?”

Yoongi’s temper flares, the tempest in his chest rages on.

“I was sold by my own country.” He hisses as he pushes himself up to meet Taehyung’s eyes, their breaths mingling. “And you bought me! You bought me in exchange for sparing the lives of my countrymen. That is the truth.”

A **transaction**, he thinks bitterly, for that is the truth of the matter, and it would be foolish for either of them to ever allow themselves to believe it is anything more than that.

Yoongi breathes harshly, his chest finally caving in.

The humid air between them sits heavily. Taehyung stares at him for a long moment, eyes searching his, and Yoongi holds his breath. The bitter aftertaste of his cruel words sits in his mouth, acidic, burning away the flesh of his tongue, and Yoongi’s fists tremble at his sides. The evidence of their joining rests inside of him, a mocking reminder of the time they spent together.

The moment passes, Taehyung looks away and Yoongi watches the defeated curve of his shoulders. A part of him wants Taehyung to fight, to argue that there **is** something to them, something more than doctrine.

But nothing follows, and Yoongi watches with a growing sense of foreboding as Taehyung's entire frame seems to tremble before he draws in a shaky breath and straightens his shoulders.

“I see.” Taehyung says, not meeting his gaze, and gently lowers the both of them to the bed, head hung low enough that his eyes are hidden behind his hair as he raises Yoongi’s thighs just enough to pull out of him.

Yoongi’s breath catches and his lips part, a feeble quiver courses through him as his body clenches around the sudden emptiness. It feels like, in that moment, he loses something much bigger.

“You should get some rest.” Taehyung murmurs before he’s raising himself off of him and the bed, pulling his robes over his shoulders. Yoongi wants to draw him back in but despair clutches at his wrists, pinning his body to the bed.

A little shaken, a little fearful, Yoongi watches as Taehyung dons his garments on. A sense of urgency suddenly grips him tight, squeezes.

“Where are you going?” He asks, frantic, cursing himself when Taehyung freezes and meets his eyes across the room. There is something empty in them, they are bare of the warmth Yoongi’s grown accustomed to.

“I need some quiet.” Taehyung answers, face blank. **Away from you**, he doesn’t say it but the words hang in the air anyway. Yoongi’s lungs burn, each breath he takes makes his frame tremble.

Taehyung walks out of their rooms and Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut, tries to swallow the tears that gather behind his lashes.

In the still of the night the hemlock in his chest blooms, and Yoongi curls into the blankets and cries.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

the graphic depiction of violence warning starts being valid from hereon, there is a lot of physical brutality experienced by the main characters. there is also excessive and explicit murder of unimportant characters. please take note of the added tags.

and, unsurprisingly, all my love goes to ella

There never really is one truth, there is no singular solitary truth.

Rather, there are multiple miniscule fragments of it– each carrying its grain of veracity, each constrained within its frame of reference. Each person has their own account of the experience, their own brand of the narration of how the events unfolded.

It is safe to say that there is no truth, only stories.

And the story that wins the most ballots is crowned the truth. Either that or whatever story those with crowns decorating their heads cook up is made the truth.

It would be convenient if the story remained intact as it was told through time, but very much like the game of whispers that children play, the story becomes twisted as it is passed from one set of lips to another. It is tailored as the storyteller sees fit, and nothing much enraptures people like stories do. A man tells a band of people a tale of a god, and in a different city another man tells a group of people the same tale but says that it is not a god, but a demon disguised as one. And one fine day, those two groups collide and you have a war on your hands.

Anyone can be a god or a demon. There is no such thing as an absolute truth. As long as enough people believe in a story, it is given credence.

Someone had the profound idea of inking their brand of the story onto paper to stretch its longevity. But the idea, while inventive, was quickly exploited for no scribe would conceive the thought of disobeying with a sword dangling above his neck.

Storytelling is an art, and it is quite clever you see, to be able to impinge upon minds and justify murder, slavery, and even genocide simply by telling tales of gallantry and noble sacrifice.

A man may be intelligent on his own, but put him in a crowd and he's about as smart as a headless chicken. The average intelligence of a crowd decreases with the addition of each member. It is easy to sway a mob to their deaths– all you really require is a narrative of a hero dauntlessly charging at his enemy against all odds, a promise of a lover waiting at home, promises of glory and chivalry and status, and you have an army of fools marching to their deaths.

And so, as kingdoms are erected on their own telling of history, their own brand of nationalist ideals, manipulating their countrymen to lay down their lives as their duty to a set of carefully constructed misdirected beliefs, you get wars– where men fool themselves into thinking their deaths hold more meaning than they actually do.

There are some wars that are fought to gain justice– to pull it out from between the oppressor's
teeth, some wars that are fought to gain freedom, or to retain sovereignty. But more often than not, you get wars that have no basis in rationale, you get wars that are raged over bruised egos and a blinding greed for power.

Whatever the reason may be, you get wars— you get a bloody battlefield filled with wide-eyed corpses, you hear their loud guttural screams as death digs its nails into their flesh and lugs the last of the bodies into its carriage, you hear their ghosts wailing in the distance.

You see men with their duties coiled around their necks like chains as they collectively try to pull their kingdom across the sea of dead bodies, the promise of glory burnt behind their eyelids.

One of them falls, crumbles under the weight, and is trampled under the feet of the men behind him, crushed together with the mass of groaning carcasses on the floor— those who fell before him— and the stench of rot.

Once upon a time there lived a woman, or so this particular story goes, an omega by nature, who was pushed to the brink of desperation by the sounds of heavy boots outside her room, the sounds of cruel laughter, the sounds of fabric being torn and the screams of her handmaidens.

They say there’s nothing more dangerous than a cornered animal— a human trying to save their dignity, or their life, and in the case of the omegas, most often it’s both.

The woman ran out of her rooms frightened that she’ll be picked up and thrown over a soldier’s shoulder, fucked and bred till she bled. She ran and ran till she stood on a hill overlooking the sea that engulfed the south border.

Their town, as it happened, was built right on the fringes of the nation and was often on the receiving end of the gifts sent by neighbouring nations. In the midst of war, these gifts frequently came in the form of soldiers on horseback burning down their houses, capturing the omegas, and leaving ashes and salted earth in their wake.

Over the hill stood a magnificent tree, the forbidden tree as they called it for no one was to pluck its fruit and no one was to eat it. Locals spun fanciful tales about its origin but no one had seen the tree grow or age, it simply stood the way it was for years, never showing any signs of wear or age. And like most stories do, the tree’s story also faded amidst the background chatter, presumed to be fiction told by old wives who had not much to do in their day.

But humans on the brink of desperation cling onto any hope they could grab in their fists, and so the woman reached out and plucked its fruit, small as a peach, a pale sickly yellow in color, and bit into it.

The fruit gave its devourer unparalleled power, or so the story goes.

But power is nothing if there's no will to fuel it and from what is understood, the tree was the source of all life form and when met with the deep sweltering desire for vengeance locked inside the woman's heart, its power latched onto the woman's will for destruction.

One bite of the fruit, and nothing in the world was ever the same again.
The story goes that the woman slaughtered an entire army—she snapped men’s necks in half in her jaws, impaled her claws in their chests and crushed their hearts in her fists, ripped their flesh open till they bled to death begging for her mercy.

They called her the *kumiho* for nine tails splayed out behind her like a halo, a demon or a goddess depending on who tells the story, born out of vengeance for the centuries long oppression.

The earth was plagued with blood of men, it seeped into soils and stained rivers deep red, it left corpses in its wake, piled on top of each other, rotted and picked apart by scavengers.

The battle lasted for nine months, the story goes.

Every month, humans managed to cut a tail off her body, weakening her. And by the end of the ninth month, the *kumiho* was worn enough for the humans to seal her inside the body of her own child.

As long as the monster was chained inside a human's body, its power could be harnessed. However, the story warns, these humans could only be descendants of the woman.

And thereon began the curse of the omega bloodline.

In the next coming centuries, the woman's descendants were bred and slain and used as hosts for the demon—traded and stolen and bought between countries as war bounty and peace offerings.

And like many before him, the omega prince knew what his role was to be, he knew it and he accepted it for it was his duty to his nation and his clan.

He was to be a vessel, and it didn’t matter what he thought of it, he was a vessel, and there was no room for hate or remorse inside his heart.

He was a vessel and vessels were meant to be carved and clawed and picked hollow.

Two sharp knocks sound against the wood and Yoongi’s heart briefly flutters with hope that is quickly crushed when instead of his mate, he comes face to face with two of the King’s guards behind the door, stony-faced and rigid.

He’s not surprised by their arrival but he’d let himself wistfully hope that he had more time, perhaps just enough to talk to Taehyung before it came to this. But it is as it is, and Yoongi resigns himself to his fate.

He doesn't put up a fight, he simply surrenders his arms, for struggling at this point of time is futile. The guards lock shackles around his wrists and Yoongi silently staggers after them as they pull at the chains, dragging him out of his chambers and into the dark hallways.

It had been hard to tell the passage of time from the confines of his room but now when he catches sight of the dark evening sky, Yoongi realises a whole day had passed while he waited for Taehyung to return. He himself hadn’t possessed the strength to move for his heat had returned, albeit weaker this time, forcing him to spend the entire day in a daze of fever and regret.
His heat had finally broken an hour ago, but it left him incapacitated—helpless and acquiescent to their demands. His legs quiver, brittle and weak and wet with his slick, as he stumbles after the guards who don't slow their pace but instead yank at the chains when Yoongi falls behind, dragging him behind them.

The stone is cold under his bare feet as are the metal braces binding his wrists. Struggling isn’t an option, not that it ever was. This was the agreement from the very beginning— the day he was offered as a sacrifice and host for the demon, in exchange for the lives of his countrymen.

On the brink of desperation, Yoongi had knelt before the Alpha King in his tent, his body trembling and his heart in his throat, fearful whether the enemy would accept the peace offering instead of simply slicing his neck where he sat with his spine curved on the floor before them.

Yoongi remembers— the cold touch of steel as the King traced the tip of his sword along the length of his spine. And after what felt like an eternity, to Yoongi's relief and equal parts horror, the King released his grip on the sword and it clattered onto the floor beside him.

"Get up. I accept your offering." He said, and when Yoongi looked up, he was met with the wicked slant of the King’s mouth as he added another condition to the agreement.

Yoongi was to marry his son, he said.

"If you accept that, we'll call off the troops and spare the lives of your countrymen."

And Yoongi had seethed from where he was bent over the floor. He was certain that the Alpha prince had had a hand in devising the vile bargain, that he had been ready, even eager, to take Yoongi and breed him with his pups.

He had been prepared to hate his alpha, had been prepared to gut him in the stomach the moment an opportunity showed itself.

But never in his wildest dreams did he imagine that Taehyung wouldn’t know.

That Taehyung would be entering this marriage even more of a puppet than Yoongi.

Yoongi hadn’t caught onto it until much later, until their argument during their second wedding. He didn’t fully understand what Taehyung was saying until all of a sudden it clicked and all the pieces of the puzzle fell in place.

His mate talked of their marriage as if it were a peace offering for the good and not a revolting scheme to seal a monster inside Yoongi’s body, to chain him to an irrevocable fate far worse than death.

Taehyung, Yoongi gradually began to realise, genuinely wanted the wars to end, and in his mind he really was doing that by giving himself to their marriage so fully and earnestly.

But the truth is irrefutable— their marriage was still a facade, a cheap stained glass that hides the horrific monster lurking behind it.

Yet Yoongi, for some unspeakable reason, couldn’t tell him. He couldn’t bring himself to.

Taehyung was like a fever dream, a fantasy, but like every dream, this one came to an end too and Yoongi again woke up to the nightmare of his reality. The truth of his existence and the purpose of his body— his duty wound around his neck like a tightening noose.
The remorse swirls deep in his belly, thick and foul, unforgiving in the way it burns as it climbs up the column of his throat, a bile that he has to swallow back down as the guards’ footsteps slow down and Yoongi realises that they’ve arrived.

It’s a clearing; it looks ominous in the dark with a lone wooden post dug into the ground in the center. There is a small crowd gathered— a circle of priests around the post, several guards, and the Alpha King who stands facing him, his face stony and all appearances dropped, after all there’s no need for pretenses any longer.

The guards pull at the chains once again but Yoongi’s knees are trembling and he falls on the concrete with a loud hiss, the skin of his palms chafing against gravel and a sharp sting of pain flares up underneath the inflamed flesh.

But they don’t wait for him and impatiently tug at the chains again. Yoongi lets out a sharp cry of pain as he’s dragged along the ground, the skin on his knees scraping against the concrete through the thin fabric of his dress. He hastily stands back on his feet and tries to keep the tears gathering behind his lashes from falling as he limps behind the guards on bloody knees.

It is a quiet affair; Yoongi steps up on the stone and they tie his ankles to the post. His arms are bound around the wood’s curvature behind him, the chains of his shackles tied to weights dug into the ground.

His clothes are next and Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut as his garments are ripped apart. They don’t bother with the knots, simply tearing his robes open with their fists till the fabric is all torn to shreds and the disjointed tatters fall at his bare feet.

His underskirt is pulled down quickly after and Yoongi feels tears of humiliation prickle the corner of his eyes as the wind hits his bare skin, his nudity up for display for all to see.

Yoongi stands stiff, unable to move in his binds even as he feels lecherous eyes rake over his body from top to bottom, lingering at the dried semen and slick on the inside of his thighs. He feels his entire frame tremble in the cold. He’s too humiliated to think of his mate, the one to whom he’d given himself wholly and fully, to whom he’d given his heart to hold in his tender palms, to think of Taehyung seeing him like this, naked for all to see, stripped of every grain of respect and mounted on a pole— a befitting position, for this is the price of a war lost, this is the price of their contrived peace.

The sacrifice for this war is a single person.

One of the priests breaks the circle. He’s holding a bowl in his palms and once he stands before Yoongi, he dips a thumb in the bowl.

Pulling it out once it’s coated in a deep blood red, the man presses his thumb to Yoongi’s navel and drags his thumb in a circle around it.

Yoongi remains unmoving other than the occasional shivers that course through his body as more priests approach him and draw the symbols for the sealing ritual onto his skin, marking his naked body with blood glyphs. They light candles around him in a circle, thin wisps of smoke rise from the ground and a rotten smell wafts around him.

Another priest approaches him with a long object in his hands, but Yoongi’s sight is blurred by unshed tears on his lashes. He only somewhat makes out an orange glow emanating from the tip of the rod.
It is only when the priest draws nearer, close enough to press the metal to Yoongi’s skin, does he scream, loud and wet, as the man burns his flesh with the hot iron.

Yoongi screams till his throat bleeds, writhes but the binds won’t allow it. He cries and begs the man to stop—please, stop it, please, please—but the priest mercilessly drives the scalding metal deeper into his flesh. Agony eats away at his entire body, he feels like his eyelids will sear off as he screams into the dark night, raw and wet, until after what feels like an eternity, the man finally draws the iron away.

Yoongi takes in ragged breaths and collapses against his binds, sobs wracking his entire frame. The wind on his tear stricken face feels cold but his torso, caked with dried blood, is now charred an angry dark vermillion—a swirled symbol he’s seen too often engraved on the temple walls, etched in manuscripts and statues, and now burnt onto his chest like a wicked bedevilled crest.

He would have fallen to the stone below, would have liked to crack his skull open and taken his life but the shackles chaining him to the wooden post keep him hanging on, mercilessly securing him in his position, ready for whatever torture that was to come next.

He’d have liked to think that the iron fried his nerves into non-existence, that perhaps he wouldn’t be capable of feeling pain, that his brain would shut down and he could pass into oblivion at some point, but Yoongi must have been born on this earth as someone’s idea of a cruel joke because his eyes don’t close, the pain doesn’t pass, and for what seems like an hour he screams, begs, writhes in agony as they continue to sear symbols across his flesh.

At some point his voice would give away, his throat would tear itself open, the heat would crawl its way into his heart and scald the tireless muscle, mercifully stilling the ever-beating organ in his chest. But no, the treacherous thing beats on as the night drags itself along, and his flesh slowly burns away—giving way to the gruesome glyphs that settle onto his skin in permanence.

He is unsure of how much time passes, he deliriously keeps count of every time the agony comes and he’s thrown into a frenzy of insanity, broken sobs raking his thin weak body, a shrill voice screaming in his mind—let me die, please, just kill me kill me kill me kill me kill me—and every time the metal is pulled away and he’s given a few minutes of reprieve wherein he thinks of death, thinks of biting his own tongue off, and wonders what would have happened if he’d really told Taehyung the truth like he’d planned to, if they hadn’t fought the night before, if in another universe Yoongi could have allowed himself to tell his alpha how he really felt, if if if—

Perhaps the merciful course of action would be to burn him till he was charred black, till his heart inevitably gave away and he was a dead piece of meat hanging off the wood, but of course, that could never be his fate.

The priest eventually retreats and the rod is dropped into a pail of water where it hisses angrily. There are some whispers but Yoongi cannot catch any of it, his own frayed breaths loud in his ears. He’s barely conscious of what is happening outside of his own body. The Alpha King is pointing at him, harshly giving out further orders, and it seems like they come to a decision for the priests are approaching him once again.

Yoongi eyes them, uncaring yet fearful at the same time, and this time they stand encircling him. A blood circle is drawn around him, and Yoongi can smell the scent of sage as they sprinkle some on their bodies to protect themselves from being cursed in the midst of the ritual.

Murmured incantations begin, it is an ancient tongue that Yoongi bears very little knowledge of. However, right as the words leave the priests’ mouths, Yoongi feels a chill beginning to settle in the air, heavy and ominous.
An eerie foreboding sensation slithers up his spine, making the hairs on the back of his neck stand up in fright. He holds his breath as the earth beneath his feet begins to vibrate with faint tremors.

Something is coming.

It hangs in the air above them, something sinister, something so wrong, like it shouldn’t exist on this plane of earth but as the chanting grows louder, the presence becomes stronger, pulsating with every chant.

The sky rumbles, it’s a whirlpool of dark clouds, a storm is approaching. Yoongi feels like it’s the beginning of a nightmare. Or the end of the world.

Yoongi swallows the bile that rises up to his throat, and bites his tongue hard enough to keep himself from making any noise. He can taste the blood flooding his mouth, a bitter mix of iron, acid and horror.

The whistling of the wind grows louder, there’s a shriek in the distance, and Yoongi’s eyes fly open.

It sounds muffled, faraway, and Yoongi trembles where he stands, naked and bloody in the cold, dread dripping down inside of him like an icicle, freezing the blood in his veins and making his bones quiver in the chill.

One of the priests from the left breaks the circle and approaches him again. Yoongi watches him with wide, terrified eyes as he retrieves a silver dagger from the folds of his robes.

Yoongi screams and tries to pull away, rattling the chains with him, but the man grabs his waist and holds him in place. He presses the tip of the blade against his skin, right where a glyph is inked over his navel, and in one quick movement he slices it straight across his stomach.

Yoongi cries as his body convulses in pain, dark red blood dripping from the flesh ripped open and spilling down his legs onto the stone below. The blood hisses the moment it comes into contact with the quivering earth, and vaporises—sucked underneath.

The ground is shaking now, violent like there’s something beneath it trying to break through. Like it tasted a lick of his blood and is now thirsty for more. Yoongi takes in laboured breaths as the grass below him is uprooted, tiny cracks appearing in the soil.

The moon shines bright, casting a long shadow before him and coating everything else under its pale light. The scene looks like it came right out of one of Yoongi’s nightmares, eerie and ominous, a warning, or an omen. Run, the moon seems to say, don’t invite the dead.

Another shriek, a shrill bloody sound, and Yoongi realises with a chilling terror that it’s coming from under the ground.

A loud thump. A crack in the floor. The wooden post shakes and the chains bounding Yoongi to the post clank along with it.

Even his body protests, tightening into itself painfully out of terror, and Yoongi throws up, spitting out blood and something vile. His chest heaves as the sky creaks, loud and deafening, like it’s going to come hurtling down and Yoongi deliriously hopes that the sky and the earth would crash into each other and crush Yoongi between them.

The chanting grows louder and Yoongi cries as he thrashes against his binds. It's of no use.
Something pounds against the ground again, and shakes the entire floor bed. Once. Twice. Thrice. Like whatever is under it is growing impatient.

The blood glyphs on Yoongi’s skin begin to burn and the candle lights flicker, hiss, and spit, sizzling like water dumped in hot oil, and turn a blood red. The chanting grows even louder, it rings in Yoongi’s ears and the thing howls, it screeches and it sounds like nails scraping against stone.

The floor is crumbling, quaking as whatever is underneath it pushes and pushes relentlessly. The wooden post tips forward and Yoongi falls against his binds, body slanted forward, teetering threateningly as he now faces the ground below him. He wants to look away, wants to squeeze his eyes shut but they remain resolutely open as if even his eyelids are frozen stiff in horror.

A shaky exhale, the air seems to breathe in the awareness of its presence, and the earth beneath him gives one final defeated groan as it strains and caves in. In one swift moment, the ground is ripped open in a long wide fracture, and whatever it had been caging underneath it breaks free.

If Yoongi thought the pain from before was unbearable, this feels possibly tenfolds of it as his body shakes violently, rattling the chains tying him to the post. Every symbol seared into his flesh burns a bright crimson.

The slit in his stomach grows wider as if his flesh is being torn at the seams, like something is crawling its way inside.

Yoongi screams and screams, he feels like it is trying to eat him alive from the inside. There’s a burning right up to the column of his throat, and his eyes scald red and hot, incinerating.

His lungs are turning to ashes, there’s something inside him, pushing and pushing, burning him away and scorching his insides to make space for itself, and Yoongi feels his body convulse forcefully as his bones shift underneath his skin– his jaw widening, ribs curving outward, claws elongating, his eyes rolling back up into their sockets. Yoongi’s head is snapped back, his jaw hinges open unnaturally as if something is forcing his mouth open with its claws.

They’re fighting for dominance. His body fights the intrusion. It feels like he’s being ripped apart at the seams, his wounds being torn right open as the demon sinks its claws into his flesh and worms its way inside of him inch by inch, and Yoongi screams and screams and screams till he feels his throat bleed.

He’d squeezed his eyes shut in pain but when he feels the cold of steel wrapping itself around his torso, he snaps his eyes back open to see the priests tightening more chains around him. Each one of them holds one chain, and together the five of them walk around him, tightening the tethers with every wrap, binding him in place, unable to resist.

Yoongi howls as the chains tighten, forcefully caging the demon inside of him. He gasps when the demon finally pushes all the way in. Yoongi feels his skin straining from the stretch, he’s certain it’s going to rupture.

Claws squeeze his beating heart, and palms shove against his chest, pushing and pushing till all air is forced out of his lungs and his heart gives one last thump before it stills.

And just like that it all quietens.

The chants cease. The chains jingle. Yoongi’s body stills, his screams echoing in the clearing before they ever so slowly fade away.

The wind stops. The only sounds to be heard are Yoongi’s feeble breaths in the quiet of the dark.
The silence trembles, a fragile thing hanging in the air.

And then Yoongi feels it— an unbearable heat crawling all the way to his fingertips, a vitriol so sweltering that he feels like his skin will melt right off his bones, but within it courses an eerie ancient power.

Yoongi’s blood boils with it, a power so foreign yet so familiar, as it flows through his veins, now one with him. His eyes are closed, and for a moment, Yoongi remains unmoving. The chains hold him in place.

The glyphs on his skin hum, brimming with an archaic magic, and he feels his skin stretching as his wounds begin to stitch back into themselves.

A still, as if time itself is suspended, and then—

Yoongi’s eyes fly open.

He snaps his wrists and the iron shackles break, clanking on the stone beneath his feet. He yanks at the chains binding his ankles to the wood and the metal snaps as if it were a mere thread, the sound loud in the quiet.

Once he’s freed himself from the post, Yoongi takes a step forward and stands under the pale moonlight— illuminating the dried blood and scars that mar his bare skin.

Yoongi cocks his head to the right as he regards the crowd before him. Complete silence settles over the clearing, a pregnant pause as if a predator eyeing its prey.

He can taste the fear in the air, and suddenly Yoongi feels an urge to laugh— so he does.

Yoongi laughs, the sound so shrill and scathing that it rips right through the quiet of the clearing. It isn’t his voice, it’s colder, deeper, darker— no it’s just everything wrong.

“Have you been waiting for me?” He smiles, looking straight at the King as he does. An eerie hush follows, so still as if his voice silences everything else. He stands there, outlined against the moon, blood under his nails, as shadows creep up to his ankles and curl their tendrils against his skin.

His voice sounds ancient and morbid, arrogant as he drawls. “What an honor.”

And then mockingly, Yoongi bows just a little– a tilt of his head.

“If you would please accept my heartfelt gratitude.” He says. “I’ve kept you waiting far too long.”

Yoongi wraps his raw-boned fingers around one of the chains held by the priest who’d mercilessly pressed the iron to his flesh. And as quick as a snap of fingers, he yanks at the chain with such force that the man holding it is pulled in as well.

It’s ridiculous how it easy it is, how the man comes almost flying into Yoongi’s outstretched arm, how quickly Yoongi’s claws drive straight through his chest and crush his beating heart in his fist.

He wonders if he should’ve perhaps pulled his life out of his skin inch by inch, returned the pain he gave him, tens and thousands of times worse.

Well there are more, he thinks as he retreats his bloody hand and drops the man’s wide-eyed corpse at his feet, he could play with those.

Yoongi cracks his neck left and right in quick succession, and eyes the scene before him. In a flick
of a second he pulls out the thick wooden log dug into the ground and hurls it across the field. It hits one of the priests right in the stomach and a loud crack resounds in the silent clearing before the man crumples to the floor.

And just like that everyone is pulled out of their trance-like still. There is havoc and chaos as the King orders his men to capture Yoongi. Yoongi sees them pull out their swords like those spindly things could do him any damage.

Yoongi snaps his eyes towards one of the priests to his left and when their eyes meet, he sees the exact moment terror capsizes the man’s sense of duty and he drops the chain in his hands before he turns to flee. Yoongi grins, feral and gleeful, a wicked thrill coursing through his entire body. He pulls at the tethers around his torso, breaks free of the futile chains that put up no resistance, and gives chase.

It’s humorous just how easily a predator can become prey, Yoongi thinks, as he grabs the man by the throat and throws him to the ground. The priest attempts to crawl away out of desperation and Yoongi watches him for a few moments, amused, before he rams his foot in the back of the man's knee. There's a loud sound of a bone splintering, and the man lets out a guttural scream.

Yoongi smiles as he sits on his haunches and grabs a hold of the man's hair, yanking his head up. He muses on how he should play with him, but finds his amusement quickly fading as the priest struggles in his hold, crying and begging for mercy.

Yoongi snorts, he wants to call out on the irony but feels too exhausted to.

He talks too much, Yoongi thinks and opens his jaw wide, teeth glinting in the moonlight, as he bends down and bites off a chunk of the man's throat. The priest garbles incoherently, choking on his own blood, and Yoongi feels his irritation growing. With a casual kind of apathy, Yoongi snaps his neck in half, putting an end to his misery.

He’s about to stand up and chase the rest of his tormentors when he hears hurried footsteps and heavy pants. Yoongi glances up to welcome another fool to his death and– freezes.

That face– the man–

Taehyung

Something inside Yoongi’s chest gives a loud lurching thump.

“Youngi” Taehyung gasps out, his eyes blown wide with horror. Dried tear tracks glisten on his face. He’s struggling against Namjoon who’s keeping him from getting any closer to Yoongi.

Yoongi looks at the corpse in his hands, runs his tongue along the blood on his teeth, briefly meets Namjoon’s piercing gaze, and looks back at his mate standing before him.

A part of him wants to kill Taehyung too, but the bigger part of him– the Yoongi in his body digs his nails into the monster and fights for dominance, forcefully wrenching it back and obtaining control of his own skin, his own body.

There’s that thump again that pushes against his chest, like his heart is coming back to life. A tremor passes through him and his hands quiver.

Yoongi shakily stands back up on his feet, arms weighing heavily down his sides. The demon is snarling and snapping its teeth at him, trying to break free, and Yoongi feels his consciousness tear at the seams, bleeding between a red roaring fury to kill, kill, kill, kill, kill and the urgency to get
closer to his mate, to touch him, to know if he’s really there, to say all the things he couldn’t before.

He meets Taehyung's gaze and sees a violent frantic desperation in them. Taehyung writhes in Namjoon’s grip, digging his nails in the flesh of Namjoon’s arms.

Yoongi staggers forward, chest heaving with laboured shallow breaths. He tries to hang on to the last thin thread of sanity he has, even as his body revolts and his stomach twists. He almost succumbs to the torn ragged scream lodged in his throat, and his body begs for him to give in. The demon digs its claws into the walls of his body, trying to crawl its way out, and Yoongi clenches his hands into fists to keep himself from tearing at the seams.

Yoongi takes another step forward but his body lurches forward unsteadily, breaths heavy and vision blurry. He feels his body swaying, threatening to fall, but right as he tips forward he feels strong arms winding around his waist to hold him up.

Yoongi looks up at Taehyung, at his glistening eyes and wet lashes, and then at Namjoon behind him whose hands fall back to his sides in defeat, his stony expression slowly chipping away to reveal a painful remorse.

“Yoongi” Taehyung’s voice is wet, his touch fragile, and something inside Yoongi finally comes to a rest. Even through the pain, Taehyung’s touch feels like spring, a gentle warm glow and Yoongi feels the demon shrinking away and receding into the shadows. Yoongi curls his fingers around Taehyung’s robes and pulls himself closer.

He parts his lips, there’s so much he wants to say, so very much, the truth from the very beginning, how he feels– how he truly feels.

But there’s only one thing that makes it past his lips. A whisper, hoarse and wrecked.

“I’m sorry.” Yoongi's lips tremble.

He watches Taehyung’s face crumple and even with anguish washing over him, Yoongi thinks he looks beautiful. “God, no–”

“Forgive me.” Yoongi is saying again, his voice a bare rasp and his throat rubbed raw. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry for everything–”

“No” Taehyung says, the word wrenched out of his throat with such force that Yoongi is silenced. Yoongi watches how Taehyung’s entire frame seems to quiver, how his hold on Yoongi grows tighter. “I’m the one who failed, I failed to protect–”

A chain is coiled around Yoongi’s throat and Yoongi stumbles back with the force.

“Yoongi”

Taehyung tries to reach out for him again but there are men on him. They hold him down as Yoongi is dragged back, kicking and clawing at his throat.

The binds against his throat burn, the metal scalding against his skin, but Yoongi fixes his eyes on his mate and lodges his heels in the mud. He musters all his strength as he pulls against the binds and trudges forward. He has to tell him. Just one thing. He has to tell him.

Yoongi takes in harsh breaths and pulls and pulls and pulls, he feels like his windpipe will be seared off.
“Taehyung” Yoongi rasps through the burn. He can hear the Alpha King shouting in the distance, and the chains pull at him with an even greater force. The demon inside him wails, thrashing to break free, threatening to claw out of his chest, but Yoongi holds it down.

He can feel the dark bleeding through his vision, but Yoongi stubbornly grasps on to the one thread of consciousness left.

He sees Taehyung throw the men off him, roaring as he hurls them across the field. And then Taehyung is standing before him, trying desperately to pull the chains off of him.

"Tae– Taehyung" Yoongi forces past the chain that threatens to throttle him, but Taehyung isn't listening to him, his eyes are a furious crimson and he's yanking at the metal against Yoongi's throat.

"Taehyung" Yoongi says again, louder, and forcefully grasps at Taehyung's wrists, stopping him. This gets the alpha to look up at him, and Yoongi forcibly loosens Taehyung's hold and interlaces their fingers together instead. "Stop. You've done enough."

He can see Taehyung wants to argue, but perhaps even Taehyung can tell that this is really the end. Yoongi holds his hands tighter.

The chains around Yoongi's neck pull him back, his flesh blistering against the sweltering iron, but Yoongi lodges his feet into the ground and holds onto Taehyung.

He smiles through the heat behind his eyes and feels the tears fall.

Black tendrils creep in from the periphery of his vision. Yoongi's eyelids grow heavy, he can feel his consciousness unraveling, but he forces them open and touches his forehead against Taehyung's.

Yoongi takes in a shaky breath, he feels his throat constricting and tries to get the words out.

The hot metal pulls tighter. Yoongi's lips brush against Taehyung's.

"I'm glad it was you." Yoongi finally whispers, breathes against Taehyung's lips. “You really are a kind man.”

Taehyung looks stricken, face contorted in anguish and red-rimmed eyes wide with horror. Yoongi gives his hands one gentle squeeze before releasing them and taking a step back.

He sees Taehyung reach out for him, his fingers coming to pull him back but more chains wind around his torso, and Yoongi is wrenched back fully.

Taehyung screams, he sounds shattered.

Yoongi falls to the ground and not a moment later, someone yanks at his hands, placing them on top of each other before hammering a nail into them– pinning him to the floor like an animal to be butchered.

From between his half-slitted eyes, he sees Namjoon stepping forward to pull Taehyung back.

Spindly shadowy fingers tug at his eyelashes, finally pulling his eyelids close, and Yoongi only briefly senses his body being dragged through the mud and a broken voice calling out his name before he collapses into the dark merciful trenches of oblivion.
In the cold of the prison, wet stone beneath his feet, dark save for a stray of light peeking in from beyond the bars and the only sound to be heard being his own ragged breaths, there is only time to think.

And Taehyung forces his body still, even with the fury slithering underneath his skin like a venomous snake seeking vengeance. The memory of Yoongi hung on the post, skinned like an animal to be butchered, being burnt alive—it is seared to the back of his eyelids. There's no way to make the memory go away, and he wants to claw it out, wants to pick at his eyes with a curved beak till he can no longer see it.

He thinks of the story of Andromeda, thinks back to every word ever spoken by Yoongi, thinks back to—

I’m glad it was you.

Taehyung squeezes his eyes shut.

In the cold trembling quiet, Taehyung inhales deeply, remembers his father’s words. *Take him to the dungeons,* he’d said to the guards, *it should teach my foolish son some discipline.* Taehyung had not made a move to refute, he's simply let his men carry him to his prison, a small tiny thing that provides more of a reprieve than anything else. The enclosure gives him time to collect his thoughts, to make sense of everything that he’d witnessed, for he’s sure that if he’s let out of these bars, someone is going to be made fresh to death.

He hears the sound of footsteps echoing in the empty passageways and Taehyung looks up as they gradually slow down and stop once Namjoon stands before the gate of Taehyung’s prison.

Taehyung remains silent, the blistering fury simmering down to his fingertips. He resolutely keeps his quiet and stares at his brother who looks more like a stranger past the prison bars. Gone is his smile, the shadows weigh down heavy under his eyes and his hair is unruly like he’s been running his hand through it in frustration.

Namjoon sighs.

“I know you resent me, and you have good reason to.” He speaks slowly, his voice a low murmur.

Taehyung stares at him pointedly.

Namjoon must see his skeptical expression for he continues, “I’m not here to ask for your forgiveness, I have no idea how to begin doing that.”

Taehyung curls his lip in anger, fingers clenching into fists. “You could start by telling me the truth for one.”

Namjoon stares at him for a long moment before sighing and pushing his hair back from his forehead. He grabs the iron bars and rests his head against them, holding Taehyung’s gaze.

“What do you know of the kumiho?” Namjoon whispers.
For a second, Taehyung blinks, taken aback by the abrupt question, and then slowly his eyes widen.

A chilling dread crawls up his chest and Taehyung looks at his brother in alarm.

“It is a myth.” Taehyung whispers, voice cracking midway. When Namjoon doesn’t respond, Taehyung repeats, desperately. “It is a myth.” He curls his fingers around the bars and pulls himself closer to Namjoon.

He watches Namjoon with wide frantic eyes. Namjoon stares back at him, an indecipherable emotion swimming in his eyes.

“You saw it for yourself.” Namjoon says after a long pause.

A horrifying realization suddenly dawns on him like a violent wave, crashing down on him and taking him under– and Taehyung can’t breathe.

He did see it. He can’t see anything but it.

Taehyung lets go of the prison bars and stumbles back, arms falling back to his sides heavy and defeated. His chest heaves with labored breaths, a chilling frost crawling up his lungs. He retches, chokes, then gasps for air.

That was his mate, that was Yoongi hung on the wooden post, bound in chains. Taehyung casts his disbelieving eyes on the ground.

And then there was the Yoongi he’d seen after.

No— that thing wasn’t Yoongi.

The person he’d seen laughing and gleefully slaughtering his men like it was a game to him, like he was enjoying it, no that wasn’t his Yoongi.

Taehyung takes in a tremulous breath, something strangled and thick. He doesn’t want to look at Namjoon, the horror has frozen his body stiff. He swallows the bile that rises to his throat and asks the one question he now knows the answer to, but–

He needs to hear it.

“Yoongi was brought here for–”

He can’t say it, his throat constricts and his words get stuck in his throat, only a ragged sob escapes. He feels like he’s not seeing anything, the memory of Yoongi being dragged through the mud is burnt into his irises.

You really are a kind man.

“That was the agreement.” Namjoon concedes, there’s a faint hint of remorse in his voice. And Taehyung thinks the man before him isn’t his brother. It is a nightmare, Taehyung is convinced. It cannot be real. His fingers are bending into claws, he wants to kill something, someone.

There is a block of ice in his chest, it rattles against his ribcage every time Taehyung takes a breath.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Taehyung whispers.
Namjoon sighs, almost defeated. “I couldn’t.” He admits.

When Taehyung snaps up his head to stare at him in disbelief, his brother expands, “I was forbidden to.”

“By who?” Taehyung steps forward and grasps the prison bars again. He leans forward, eyes narrowed into red slits.

Namjoon sighs again, rubs his palm against his face. “You must first hear the entire story.”

Taehyung remains silent and Namjoon licks his lips, hesitating like he’s unsure of where to even begin.

“For centuries, the kumiho has been used by nations as a weapon during wars. As long as the monster is sealed inside a host, its power can be harnessed as a weapon. The demon has always been sealed inside omegas of the royal bloodline who are the direct descendents of the first woman.”

Namjoon stares at Taehyung, eyes piercing into him. "There are only two remaining omegas whose bodies can cage the demon, I’m certain you can guess who they are."

Taehyung squeezes his eyes shut and swallows. “Yoongi and Jungkook” He whispers, his words are a bare rasp.

Namjoon gives a brief nod. “Their clan has kept the demon within their walls to protect their kingdom from being attacked, they worship her as their goddess. But in the previous war, we managed to capture the demon.”

There is a pause and Taehyung opens his eyes. Namjoon’s face is pinched, and Taehyung can tell that the story isn’t going to take a pleasant route.

“Yoongi’s mother, the Queen, took her own life before she could be captured. With no one to seal the demon in, our grandfather locked the demon inside his mate.”

A breath gets caught in Taehyung's throat.

His eyes widen in horror, he parts his mouth to interrupt but Namjoon is speaking before he can.

“Halmeoni wasn’t an omega of the royal bloodline, but she was strong enough to cage the demon inside her. However, after grandfather passed away, the seal weakened and her body began deteriorating until it could no longer keep the demon away. She had only a few years left to live, and she forbade everyone from telling you.”

“Why?” Taehyung asks, voice wet and frantic. “Why did she hide it from me?”

A pause, and Namjoon’s lips stretch into a rueful smile. “She loved you too much, I suppose.”

There's a roaring white noise in the inside of his ears.

“Halmeoni” Taehyung croaks.

“And she knew how you’d feel when you learnt the truth.” Namjoon says, and Taehyung feels like someone's dunked his head under ice-cold water. Namjoon’s hands wrap over his. “This was her way of shielding you from the pain.” He murmurs softly.

Taehyung’s chest heaves as he tries to process what he’s been told. His grandmother’s death was no
accident, it was deliberately caused. She was set to die, all for the sake of some–

“And I believe that she just wanted someone to remember her as a person, something other than a monster.” Namjoon adds. The words hit him right across his chest.

Taehyung feels something distinctly crack inside him.

Presumably sensing his emotions, Namjoon continues the story. “But then two years ago, this war broke out. And without their strongest weapon, the Omega forces were significantly weaker. Their entire clan was on the verge of annihilation, and to prevent the worst possible outcome–”

“Yoongi was sold by his country as the host for the demon.” Taehyung finishes, acid on his tongue as he remembers the story Yoongi had told him under the stars.

“That was the peace offering, yes.” Namjoon at least looks a little remorseful.

The sacrifice for this war is a single person.

There is a long pause. Taehyung tightens his fists around the metal before looking back at his brother, despair heavy in his chest.

And then, Taehyung spills the words that have been resting at the tip of his tongue, a lick of poison that he knows will only end up burning him, but he has to know, he has to–

“Why was he married to me then?” Taehyung whispers.

Namjoon winces.

“To produce an heir.” He says. "After Yoongi’s death, the demon would be sealed inside the child.”

The ice inside Taehyung’s chest cracks, splinters under the weight of despair, and it feels like Taehyung’s submerged to the throat in the frozen water. It floods his lungs.

Taehyung’s entire frame seems to shake in a hurricane of wrath and shame.

“You knew all this.” He says, voice flat– a quiet rage, not a question.

“Yes.”

“And you let it happen.”

“Yes.”

In a fraction of a second, Taehyung’s arm flies out and he fists his fingers in Namjoon’s robes, pulling him against the metal bars with a rage he hopes is as palpable as the stench of rot on the prison walls.

“You used me.” Taehyung snarls. “All that talk of peace and– I–”

His voice cracks, and anguish dribbles out of the gaps.

"He was my mate. And you–" Taehyung grits his teeth as heat blooms behind his lashes. His fist trembles.

Namjoon meets his eyes, he doesn’t look surprised by the outburst, just defeated.
“It wasn’t something I could control.” He says, and Taehyung twists his fist further into Namjoon clothes. “Yoongi was aware of it. He didn’t walk in here blind. He knew this was to be his fate.”

Grief bleeds into his breaths, a phantom weight choking around his throat and the sound that works its way out of Taehyung's lips is strangled, weak and pathetic. He releases Namjoon and his hand falls back to his side, trembling.

All of Yoongi’s words crash into him like a tidal wave.

*You bought me!* Yoongi's red rimmed eyes had pierced into his. *You bought me in exchange for sparing the lives of my countrymen.*

Taehyung staggers back from the weight of it. All this while–

The steam of rage trickles out of the pores of his skin. In its place crawls in anguish. Yoongi's screams ring in his ears over and over again.

Then there's the quiet. Taehyung feels like someone shoved their hand right through his chest and squeezed his heart tight.

"And me?" Taehyung finally breaks the silence, breathes through something sharp and jagged. "You never thought to tell me?"

Namjoon is quiet for a moment before he speaks.

"Father believed things would proceed a lot smoother if you were kept in the dark."

Helplessness sinks down his body like a brick of ice, a cold paralysis crawling all the way to the tips of his fingers.

"So why are you here now?" Taehyung crumples, trembles as he takes in gulps of air through his mouth, sags as his forehead hits the prison bars. "Why are you telling me this now?"

Namjoon doesn't answer.

Taehyung thinks that if he listens carefully, he can hear it in his silence. *You've served your purpose.*

"If it means anything— " Namjoon starts.

Loud hurried footsteps interrupt him, and Taehyung snaps his head to his left to see Hoseok approaching them. His eyes widen when he catches sight of a large splatter of blood on the front of the man's robes. Hoseok’s face is a cautious blank and Taehyung immediately senses bad news.

Hoseok comes to a stop before Namjoon, his eyes flicker towards Taehyung for a brief second before he looks back at Namjoon.

“It’s the King.” Hoseok says, face of steel. “He was found stabbed in his chambers.”

Yoongi arouses to the sound of a muffled curse.
It takes him a few moments to come to himself, for his consciousness to stitch itself back together. His mind grapples to rearrange his memories, separating dreams from reality, and Yoongi gradually begins to sense his surroundings.

At first he cannot see a thing and he blearily wonders if he's being kept in pitch black before he senses the blindfold before his eyes. An acidic taste floods his mouth from the gag they've shoved between his teeth.

His body is kept immobilized with nails hammered through the flesh of his palms and into the wall, and braces around his wrists and feet that chain him to the floor. Something wet slithers down his back, the rotting stench of blood and piss.

His head snaps up when he hears the jingling of metal and the creaking of the cell door as it's pushed open. He reckons it is a guard, but the wet gasp gives it away.

The sounds of breathing that Yoongi’s memorised just as well as his voice.

A whisper–

"I'm going to fucking maul them."

There are hurried steps and then Yoongi feels fingers on his jaw, tender and gentle as they slide to the back of his head and untie the gag, pulling out the bitter cloth from his mouth.

"Jimin-ah" Yoongi whispers, his voice a feeble rasp that he has to force out of his throat. He feels his tears trickle down the blindfold as Jimin's hands cup his face.

"Hyung" Jimin whispers, his voice is soft yet there's a careful sweltering fury lurking underneath it that carries a dark promise. His hands quiver against Yoongi’s skin, caressing his cheek. "Hyung, I'm going to get you out."

His fingers are rapid with purpose as Jimin unwraps the blindfold and throws the dirty cloth away before moving to the shackles at his wrists, keys clinking in the chilling silence.

Yoongi's eyes flutter as the dark clears from his vision and he blinks at the grimy walls of the prison he'd been caged in. A ray of moonlight strays in from a small window up on the wall behind him, and it illuminates the two crumpled corpses, presumably his guards, lying before the cell gate.

"Did you do it?" Yoongi asks, his voice tremulous, while Jimin unlocks the binds around his left wrist.

Jimm meets his eyes before he nods stiffly. There's a shared silence between them, solemn because they know that there's no going back now. The war has begun.

Yoongi nods back and grinds his teeth as Jimin pulls the rusted nail out of his flesh. He sees Jimin's eyes harden, illuminated in the moonlight, as Yoongi’s blood trickles down to the floor tiles, like his friend is making a silent resolution to himself.

Jimm unlocks his other wrist. There's an unspoken hurry as Yoongi pulls out the second nail as well. His skin begins to sew itself back in straight away. Jimin moves to untie his ankles but Yoongi waves him off and simply yanks at the metal binds around his ankles with his hands. The chains immediately give away, clanking loudly as they fall onto the tiles in defeat.

Jimm helps him stand back up, supporting most of Yoongi's weight on his shoulders. Yoongi's legs are weak and they tremble under his weight.
"We have little time." Jimin says. "They'll discover his body soon enough. The preparations are complete, we'll take the route through the servants’ quarters and then past the gates and into the forest."

Yoongi leans against the prison wall, chest heaving as he forcefully clings on to his sanity, digs his nails into it and doesn't let go. He can feel the heat swim under his skin when he brings his palm to his stomach, right where a red scar is seared on top of his navel.

Jimin undresses the guards and wraps one of the woollen cloaks around Yoongi's naked form, clasping the front shut.

"I sent out a message to Seokjin, we'll meet with our troops at the edge of the forest." Jimin murmurs. He casts a concerned look at Yoongi. "Can you make it till there?"

Yoongi takes in a tremulous breath before opening his eyes again. He stares long and hard at Jimin as he grits his teeth and digs his nails into the skin of his stomach.

"I have to." Yoongi whispers but when Jimin still looks anxious, he brings their hands together and interlaces their fingers. "Come on. We don't have time to waste."

Yoongi squeezes their joined hands, not sure if he’s reassuring Jimin or himself. Once again he feels his body quiver, trembling at the duress of trying to keep the demon chained inside of him and threatening to give away, but he reminds himself of his duty and his purpose and straightens his body.

There is no time to hesitate.

They step over the trail of dead bodies Jimin had left on his way to Yoongi. There’s no use in trying to be covert anymore. Jimin has assassinated the Alpha King and their troops will be on their trail in a matter of minutes. They just have to make it out of the city with the advantage of the little headstart they have.

Jimin knows the guard rotations and they’re able to quickly cross the dark hallways. Jimin would press Yoongi against the wall and when a guard would reach the corner, Jimin would yank him in, cover his mouth before the man could make a sound and expeditiously slit his throat, all before the guard could even conceive the thought of struggling.

From a line of silent killers, Jimin has sworn to protect Yoongi with his life, he’s been raised for the very purpose. Yoongi’s name is etched onto his chest right above his heart. If Yoongi were to die, Jimin would take his own life too for that is the tradition of his bloodline.

Yoongi has known since his birth that his life is not his own, that his heart bears the weight of countless lives.

It's not just Jimin, the lifeline of his entire kingdom is deeply woven into the thread of his own.

Yet– there's only one person on his mind.

The streets are empty in the departing drags of the night but Yoongi makes sure to hide his face under the hood of the cloak. Jimin keeps his pace slow enough for Yoongi to follow on his weak legs but even then each step is laborious and Yoongi's chest heaves, hard and heavy. Any moment the warning bells will ring, any moment they'll discover the body of their assassinated king, any moment now– Taehyung will learn of his betrayal.

Of all the things, it is that particular knowledge that makes his heart sink.
Jimin’s fingers often find his elbow, his fingertips or the nape of his neck, his touch fleeting like he cannot believe him to be alive. In the thick swallowing tension, Yoongi holds onto that little source of warmth. He tries not to think about how with every step he takes, he feels a little more like giving up and falling to his knees, how with each step, his heart grows wearier with the thought of what he’s leaving behind— who he’s leaving behind.

It is not a very long walk but it feels like it, with every passing second Yoongi expects guards to storm out of the palace and follow the trail of corpses Jimin left in their wake.

The city routes are unfamiliar since Yoongi only ventured to the markets alongside Taehyung. Jimin, however, deftly guides him in and out of narrow alleys till they enter a wider desolate street and Yoongi spots a brown seemingly ordinary bandwagon attached to a horse.

When they approach the wagon, a small petite lady emerges from the shadows. Yoongi recognises her as one of his maidservants who had accompanied him to the Alpha kingdom. She bends into a respectful bow before him and then swiftly climbs up on the horse to take the reigns. Jimin jumps on the wagon as well, pulling Yoongi up after.

There is a strange assortment of goods and barrels inside the vehicle, and Jimin pulls out a thick sheet sewn from jute from one of the trunks that he drapes over them, hiding them from view. The horses make a soft neighing sound and the wagon begins moving. It is not as fast as Yoongi desires but they cannot gather attention to themselves, not until they’ve made it out of the gates.

Yoongi feels Jimin's arms come to wrap around Yoongi’s body.

“I’ve got you.” Jimin whispers in his ear and Yoongi realises his body has been shivering, unable to hide the trepidation he feels.

“You're safe. No one can hurt you now.” Jimin murmurs against his neck, his voice slightly wet. “I’ve got you.”

Eventually the wagon slows down to a trot and Yoongi hears voices coming from a distance. He feels Jimin stiffen around him.

Jimin releases his hold on him and Yoongi sees him fetch his dagger from the belt tied to his waist. Yoongi digs his nails into the fabric of the cloak to keep them from shaking as he lies amidst the cargo, silent as death, his body frozen stiff in fright.

The voices grow louder, there's two of them, authoritative and supercilious— guards asking the woman the purpose of her travel.

“Oh um, my father is a merchant.” Yoongi hears the woman speak, there’s a deliberate tone in her voice— a tilt of delicacy, the voice of a timid unsure omega. “He travelled to a nearby city to sell his goods, but a customer was willing to buy more and he was falling short of supply so I am making my way to the city as well, but I am so scared to travel alone at night.”

Yoongi cannot make out what is happening but after a brief moment, one of the guards speaks.

“It is quite unsafe for a maiden like you to be travelling this late at night with thieves and bandits lying in wait for their prey.” The guards says, his voice gruff.

“Yes, but I must go. Perhaps— um perhaps one of you gentlemen could help me.” There is an
obvious pause, a blatant proposition, and even though it had been dark, Yoongi could tell the lady has a pretty face, pretty enough for the guards to lose their original train of thought.

The woman giggles, shy. “I’m sorry, I’m asking for too much, aren’t I?” When the guards stumble over each other to deny the statement, she continues. “No, I couldn't cause you so much trouble, you have such an important job of securing the city. I am being too selfish.”

“Oh pretty, no. Our jobs are very important, of course, but we must also ensure the safety of the citizens, especially a pretty lady like you.” The girl giggles on cue. “Where is it that you need to go?”

“Oh it’s not too far, I need to meet with my father at the Yeondong bridge. But I’m awful at navigating in the dark. Having one of you by my side would really reassure me.” She says, and there are affirmative grunts from the men.

"It's a good thing that we are here then." One of them says.

“However, we first need to confirm what you’re carrying in the cart. It's protocol.” The second guard says and Yoongi stiffens, curling a little into himself. He sees Jimin lean closer to the edge, holding his dagger in his fist before him.

"Of course." The girl complies.

The guard slowly walks around the wagon, each footstep sounding like the clock ticking down to their doom. Jimin leans forward. Yoongi holds his breath in the dark.

The silence hangs, time suspended.

The footsteps come to a halt.

Yoongi's stomach twists into himself.

And then the guard is pulling the sheet off them, lifting it into the air. And in the fraction of a second it takes for his eyes to widen, Jimin’s lashing out and slicing the man’s throat before the scream can escape him.

The man's lips tremble, dark blood seeping out of the slit unconstrained, and he sways for one precarious moment before his body crumples. Jimin catches him before he can collapse and he immediately lugs the lifeless body into the cart.

A second passes and Yoongi doesn't dare breathe. He hears the other guard speak.

“Hey, what is taking you so long--” His voice abruptly cuts off.

Yoongi feels the thud before he sees the second corpse that the woman tosses into the wagon.

The horses neigh and kick their legs up before they break into a run. The wagon jumps on the bumps in the road and Yoongi hugs his knees as he stares into the wide eyes of the corpse that lies next to him.

They pass the gates with ease and a few meters ahead, Jimin hauls the carcasses up and throws them into a bush.

A silent hush follows.

Yoongi urgently tugs Jimin down and Jimin easily wraps his arms around him again, pulling him
to his chest. Yoongi breathes into his neck, wet and terrified. His body shivers.

“I told you.” Jimin whispers. “I’ve got you.” He runs a comforting palm down the length of Yoongi’s spine.

It becomes difficult to breathe as panic seeps into his lungs unconstrained, thick and palpable, and Yoongi digs his nails into Jimin’s robes. He feels tears streak down his cheeks.

Jimin murmurs words of comfort into his ear and for a few moments Yoongi’s body remains locked in a panic stricken paralysis before he slowly begins to breathe on Jimin’s count. Cool air fills up his lungs. Yoongi loosens his grip on Jimin and lets his body unfurl.

The exhaustion crawls in slowly.

Yoongi sags against Jimin’s frame and rests his head on his shoulder.

"What am I doing, Jimin?” He whispers finally.

Jimin's hand in his hair stills.

"I– I was certain I was making the right choice.” His voice cracks towards the end.

"And why do you now think that you're not?” Jimin asks as he resumes combing through his hair. There's no malice or judgement in his voice, it's just tender and careful.

"I don't know.” Yoongi sobs. "I just– I just don't know anymore.” His frustration bleeds through the cracks in his voice. He’s just barely keeping his consciousness from being ripped apart, and his body weighs him down— it feels like he's drowning, sinking in quicksand, powerless and disabled.

“‘There is no way of knowing whether your choice is the right one or not,” Jimin says, “not until you’ve made it. All you can do is trust yourself and make the decision you’ll regret the least.”

A beat of silence.

"There is going to be another war.” Yoongi whispers, and the words weigh heavy. The air seems to sink with them, thick and silent as if death itself is listening in, looming over them in anticipation. Yoongi takes in a strangled breath.

His kingdom is preparing for the war at this moment, has been preparing for it for the past four months.

Yoongi was a decoy after all.

In just a few hours they'll be in the thick of it and Yoongi will be with his men, strategizing battle plans to overthrow the Alpha empire and restore his clan's sovereignty. It is a pivotal moment, triumph is just within the reach of his fingertips.

But–

What is a clan? Seokjin's voice echoes in his mind.

The noose around his neck is pulling tighter and tighter– an entire kingdom, he's trying to pull an entire kingdom across.

What is this clan that you’re prepared to start another war for?
Can you truly find it in yourself to ask everyone in this kingdom to suffer from the devastation of yet another war?

"Do you wish for another war?" Jimin softly asks, interrupting his thoughts.

Like Yoongi has a choice. Jimin asks him so simply like they can just stop if Yoongi says no. But god–

_I do not actually regret our marriage._

Nausea brews low in his stomach at the weight of the noose around his neck. Yoongi's body trembles, he squeezes his eyes shut and hangs his head between his knees. His duty coils around his throat even tighter, it burns and asphyxiates, and Yoongi's windpipe constricts–

Something in him breaks, his trachea or his will, and the coil of duty around his neck loosens a little, just enough to–

"No" Yoongi whispers, strangled and coarse.

A moment passes, then another.

Jimin pulls away from the embrace and with a knuckle under Yoongi's chin, nudges his face up. Yoongi lifts his wet lashes and meets Jimin's eyes.

"I don't wish for another war." Yoongi breathes out finally, and something unfurls in his chest—something like years of tightly coiled dogma twisted and driven through his flesh, in between two ribs, and straight into his heart. It unfolds and Yoongi feels like he breathes a little easier.

Jimin remains silent, but the way he's watching Yoongi with so much tenderness makes the words tumble out of Yoongi's mouth, stilted and rushed.

"We have to call off the attack." Yoongi spills out, and finally, finally, the ache in his chest eases. "We have to stop this war before it begins."

Outside the wind howls, uncaring. Inside, the demon rattles against its cage.

Jimin takes hold of his hand and places it palm down upon his own chest, and Yoongi feels the incessant _thud thud_ of his heart underneath his fingertips. For some reason, it grounds Yoongi. The warmth reminds him of everything he could lose to this war, everything he must protect.

"If that is your choice," Jimin's lips stretch into a smile, his fingers curling into the gaps of Yoongi's, "then my life's yours, my prince."

Various thin trails of blood trickle down the marble floor, and in the middle of the chambers lies his father's corpse, his head snapped back unnaturally, jaw slack and wide bloodshot eyes boring into Taehyung's. His robes are drenched dark, his arms fallen heavy at his sides and his fingers curled like he'd been trying to claw out the eyes of his assailant even in his last moments. The thick stench of blood has settled in the room and Taehyung retches, gags like death's stale hands are closing around his throat.
“The blood is still warm, it hasn’t been too long.” Namjoon says as he sits on his haunches and inspects the body, mouth twisted into something undecipherable. He doesn’t look very surprised, and Hoseok is strangely silent.

Taehyung coughs out the bile and digs his fingers into his stomach, steeling himself before he turns around and joins the two of them where they’re standing over the King’s carcass.

The cause of death is obviously the thin blade of steel impaled through his stomach that’s dripping blood onto the white marble below. A hollow silence envelopes them. The King of their nation is dead, there’s dried blood on his beard that had dribbled out of his mouth, and the executioner’s intent is mockingly clear— *I got your king, and I’m coming for you all next.*

He should be furious, Taehyung thinks, but he doesn't know if it is anger that he feels as he gazes at his father's body, or if it's a cold growing dread that weighs heavy in his bones. There's a chill in the air and something moist sticks to his skin, like his father's ghost is breathing down his neck.

Taehyung knows they are all thinking of the implications, and he casts his eyes on his brother. With their father dead, even before the coronation, Namjoon holds the authority of the King. Family killing isn’t new in their clan— sons killing their fathers, brothers slaughtering each other in a wicked game of survival of the fittest, blind in the frenzy of power. Namjoon would be the obvious suspect, except everybody knows Namjoon has never been one to pursue power. But Taehyung doesn't even recognize his own brother anymore.

"Word of this cannot get out." Namjoon speaks, and twists around to stare at the two of them. "The culprit wants to cause an uproar, we cannot let that happen."

There's a tense silence and then–

“It’s the omega.” Hoseok speaks for the first time, and Taehyung snaps his head to look at him.

Hoseok is watching Taehyung, something hard sits in his gaze.

“You fought his guard before, that’s his sword.” Hoseok says, there’s a concealed fury there as he points at the blade, and Taehyung takes in the sword again. The blade is coated in blood but now that Taehyung knows what to look for, the emblem is right there, undeniable in its identity— that is Jimin’s sword.

“You both know what this means— ” Hoseok starts, but right as he does, three sharp knocks resound in the room.

All three of them snap their heads towards the entrance. The knocks come again, this time louder, sharper, urgency clear.

Namjoon looks at Hoseok and then at Taehyung before he calls out. “Come in.”

A frantic guard stumbles inside the chambers. He moves to speak but his eyes catch the twisted corpse in the middle of the room. His body freezes, eyes threatening to bulge out of their sockets.

“What is it?” Hoseok snaps and the guard immediately straightens.

“It’s the omega prince— he’s escaped.” The man stutters out. “All the guards stationed outside the prison had their throats slit open.”

For a moment there’s a still, the foreboding calm before a cataclysm. Nausea crawls its way up his throat, and for a second, Taehyung’s hands tremble like his body wants to give up and fall to its
knees.

But he curls his fingers into fists and forcefully straightens his shoulders. He glances at his father's bloody body and then without sparing a moment, Taehyung strides out of the room.

"*Taehyung*"

His brother calls after him but Taehyung doesn’t stop. He takes large strides out of the King’s chambers, brushing past the terrified guard who jumps out of his way, intending to march right out of the palace and salvage whatever damage he can before all hell eventually breaks loose.

Footsteps sound behind him and Taehyung’s wrist is yanked back, fingers forcefully twisting him around to face his brother.

“What?” Taehyung barks. “We don’t have time to waste.”

“You are not thinking with your head.” Namjoon says.

“What is there to think?” Taehyung shouts, his eyes wide, chest heaving. “We have to notify the guards to close the gates.”

“No” Namjoon refuses and Taehyung’s eyes grow wide in incredulity. “No, what do you think will happen if we spread the news of the King’s death?”

“You’re going to just let them escape?” Taehyung attempts to free his wrist from his brother’s grasp.

“I didn’t say that.” Namjoon’s grip on Taehyung’s wrist tightens. There's a pause before he speaks next, his voice dipped low. “I’ll be honest with you, I knew this would happen.”

Taehyung starts to speak but Namjoon makes a gesture for him to stay silent. There are sounds of footsteps approaching them and Namjoon pulls him out of the corridor and into a cranny behind the wall.

When Namjoon looks at him again, Taehyung sees a hint of desperation in them.

“What do you think will happen if we spread the news of the King's death and the prince's escape?” He says again.

Taehyung narrows his eyes.

Namjoon doesn’t wait for his reply. "We'll have a war on our hands. The warlords want a reason to attack, they’ve never agreed to the peace, and we'll just be giving it to them." Namjoon says. "The peace you and Yoongi built, it'll be crushed within moments."

Taehyung flinches at the name of his mate. His heart pounds in his chest, loud and treacherous.

"They’ve assassinated the King and escaped." Taehyung hisses. "That ship sailed long past."

"There’s still a way." Namjoon stares at him, his eyes grave. "Bring Yoongi back. I'll hold the fort until then. Bring him back, and stop this war before it can begin."

Taehyung grits his teeth. "And what makes you think he'll listen to me?" His stomach twists, there’s a persisting bitterness that gnaws at his insides like a wolf at a bloody bone. "He already made his choice."
The words are like thorns to his throat.

There’s something tight and dark and ugly in his chest, something that sits and ferments in his lungs, something that feels a lot like betrayal.

Namjoon is silent for a few seconds, his gaze incinerating.

"Why do you think Yoongi never told you?" He asks suddenly.

"He obviously realised that you weren’t made aware of the truth, why do you think he never told you?"

Taehyung makes a move to pull his wrist free of Namjoon’s grasp but Namjoon holds on tight and pushes him against the wall. And something in Taehyung is shaking, something that wants to shrink away from the way Namjoon looks at him and sets his jaw and says everything Taehyung doesn’t want to think about. “You know it as well, don’t you?” Namjoon says, and Taehyung tries to swallow the needles in his throat.

“I do not know what you expect of me.” Taehyung hisses out of frustration and stops fighting Namjoon’s grip, sagging against the wall in resignation. He glares at his brother. “What do you want from me? You made your trust in me very clear, and I’m tired of trying to decipher your intent, tell it straight to me.”

Namjoon appraises him and Taehyung meets his gaze with an obstinate fervor.

“You love him.” Namjoon says plainly.

Taehyung goes very still, but Namjoon either doesn’t notice or he doesn’t care for he’s ploughing on with eyes that pierce right through him. “Yoongi’s body is fighting the demon right now, and there’s not much time left before the demon’s hatred consumes his heart. He’s dying as we speak.”

Taehyung’s heart comes to a loud lurching halt. A shudder, a recoil, and Taehyung’s eyes widen as he watches Namjoon with irises drenched in horror.

“You’re the only one who can save him, you’re the only one who can wash away all that hatred.” Namjoon says, his voice tender. He releases his wrist and Taehyung’s hand falls to his side, heavy and helpless.

I’m glad it was you.

“What do you mean?” Taehyung whispers through numb lips, trying not to choke on the terror seeping into his lungs.

Namjoon’s face softens with sympathy, and Taehyung can’t bear to look at him, can’t bear to look away.

"Amidst this chaos you were the only one who didn’t see him as a tool or a weapon. You respected him, you sparred with him as an equal. Do you really not realise why Yoongi didn’t tell you?" Namjoon grabs him by the shoulders, and Taehyung stares up at him, devoid of sensation. "He wanted to be seen as a person, and you were the only one who did that and more. You loved him, and Yoongi knew that.”

You really are a kind man.

Something inside Taehyung’s chest twists, tightens, splinters– and breaks.
“You’re the only one who can save him.” Namjoon’s voice dips with tenderness. “He didn’t choose to betray you, you know that too, he’s convinced that it is his duty.”

Taehyung doesn’t dare breathe lest the splinters embedded in his chest pierce his lungs.

“The only way to win a war is to prevent it. And only the two of you can do that.” Namjoon releases him. “Bring him back before it’s too late.”

The silence hangs every bit as heavy as his heart. He closes his eyes, the faint memory of Yoongi’s fiery eyes as he dared the courtiers to tear his clothes off him flashes behind his eyelids, and Taehyung tries to gather even a fraction of courage Yoongi possessed.

“I’ll save him.” He whispers and as if the words carry power, the mating bond tying him to Yoongi that had been a loose frayed rope, barely holding on, seems to straighten with a renewed fervor. Taehyung feels strength seeping into his bones and he straightens his spine. “I’ll bring him back.”

The sounds of footsteps echo in the corridor and Hoseok’s voice interjects.

“I’m coming with you.”

Taehyung turns around to see Hoseok’s jaw set with determination, his lips pulled tight into something grim. He’s gripping the hilt of the sword at his hip, knuckles white.

Namjoon steps out of the cranny and into the moonlight.

“I’ll cover for you.”

And then with a meaningful glance at the two of them, he says, voice grave. “This may be our only chance.”

Taehyung curls his fingers into fists, briefly shuts his eyes before opening them again and meeting Namjoon’s desperate eyes.

“Please don’t die.”

They travel all night. At some point Yoongi’s body begins to shiver violently despite the blankets Jimin shrouds him in. Jimin lays him down on the floor of the wagon and Yoongi curls into himself, taking in terrifyingly shallow rasps of breaths, his chest trembling with the effort.

“Jimin” Yoongi rasps out and blindly reaches out for Jimin’s hand, grasping it and locking their fingers together, bruise-tight. “Jimin-ah, I can’t–I need–”

Jimin hovers over him, murmuring whispers of comfort that are drowned under the roaring of the monster that is threatening to rip out of the seams of Yoongi’s flesh.

Yoongi fights it, claws and teeth, but his body is caving in– a fragile thing, it spasms in the violent quiet broken by his wet gasps. Yoongi curls his fingers into the front of Jimin’s robes and forces himself to focus on the insistent drumming of Jimin’s heart in his chest, reminding himself of everything he has to protect.
It’s a tug of war, between him and the devil, and Yoongi doesn’t dare look back to see how little of the rope he has left.

Dawn comes crawling in, and after what feels like an eternity of torment Yoongi peeks his eyes open to see the morning light filtering in through the canopy. The trees have thinned, they’re not far from their destination, and it pushes him one last time. Yoongi holds on and grits his teeth, trying to find strength in the depths of his bones.

The scent of pine and the cool air penetrates his lungs as Yoongi takes in shallow breaths and gulps down the water Jimin presses against his lips. He can smell it in the air—the scent of home, the persistent weight of forested humidity, and Yoongi is reminded of the times he ran between the trees of the forest, laughing as Jungkook whined at him from behind to slow down, hyung and their mother chuckled at their antics and then gently scolded them when they returned to her, covered in mud and laughter.

The memory helps him hold out despite being sunk to his chest in a quicksand that is slowly sucking him into its void, it helps him remember that he's still warm, and only corpses grow cold, and he's still warm, still breathing, and maybe, just maybe. All is not lost.

Soon enough he hears voices, distant but unmistakable, and Yoongi holds the edge of the cart to lift himself off the floor of the wagon. The horses are beginning to slow down and the voices become louder.

“We’ve reached.” Jimin murmurs and it takes Yoongi a few breaths to pull himself together, to string himself back together like a puppet with its limbs strewn around.

The wagon comes to a halt and Yoongi hears the sound of footsteps, armor clinking and soldiers rushing to them. Jimin leaps out of the vehicle and offers his palm to Yoongi. Yoongi grasps his hand and jumps down as well.

His feet hit the ground and for a moment Yoongi imagines his knees buckling and his body crumbling to the ground, but he labors for breath and pulls himself straight, shoulders squared back.

There’s a moment of silence and he feels everyone's stares on him.

Yoongi turns to face the crowd of soldiers and with an ease that only comes after years of practice, crafts his face into one of blankness that betrays none of the trepidation he feels. A prince, he thinks and raises his chin, a traitor, a goat, and a monster.

“There is no time to waste, I need to meet the King.” He says with a confidence he does not feel. His words ripple through the soldiers and there are some hard faces and tense jaws but they’re smart enough not to question his authority, and soon enough Yoongi is being escorted inside the palace without a word.

The walk through the palace corridors is nothing like anything he’s felt before. Every step he takes is loud, followed by a hush that seems to follow in his wake. He can feel their gaze linger on the blood on his face and the bare skin visible from between the slit in his cloak. Traitor, he hears a few of them whisper, and his lips tug into a rueful smile, there is more truth to that statement than there ever was.

But any amusement he wears vanishes as he walks deeper into the castle. He attempts to see it as his home of twenty six years and even though everything appears to be the same as he remembers, it is as if a thin film is pulled off his irises, as if he's finally looking past the deceiving glass and
staring straight into the eyes of the true horrors that lurk underneath.

The place he called home begins to feel more and more like a slaughterhouse, and he a goat. They fed him under the pretense of care, but he can now see that they simply intended to fatten him up before bringing down the final fatal blow.

Yoongi feels the hysteria bubble up his throat. He wants to laugh maniacally, he wants to grab every person he sees by the throat, shake them and ask—was it amusing to watch me, did you enjoy it?

But the fight leaves him as soon as it came, and his body feels heavier with every step he takes. There's no use in soaking himself in the injustice of the ways of the world. If he continues to look behind him, he won't be able to reach any further. His only choice is to trudge forward regardless of who stabs him in the back.

But however frantic Yoongi feels, he cannot enter the royal court dressed the way he is, coated in his blood and burnt red scars. There are hushed instructions passed between the guards and servants. Yoongi does not care to hear what they think, word of his arrival will reach all ears eventually.

Maids rush him to the bath, the very bath where he and Teahyung completed their final rites. Yoongi wants to laugh, he wants to cry, he wants to shake and scream and be swallowed whole. It’s only been two days, just two nights ago he’d been curled in Taehyung’s embrace, unknowing of the horrors that lay in wait for him. It feels like it’s been weeks since.

Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut as he’s lowered into the hot bath and the blood on his skin begins to bleed into the water, staining it a deep red. The girl washing him looks terrified, her hands trembling when they approach the scars on his body. Yoongi feels her stares boring into his flesh but he doesn’t open his eyes. The steaming rage rests heavy on his chest and Yoongi sits quiet, shoulders pulled tight, as he tries to will the frantic pace of his heart.

He’s scrubbed and rinsed, then doused in oils, before he steps out of the wet stone. Yoongi lets his eyes rest on the ceiling, detached and unfeeling, as he’s wrapped in silk and gauze. It’s useless, he thinks, he may as well be dressed in chains.

He’s dressed when the doors to his chambers are opened.

“Jimin” He breathes when he catches sight of his friend. The maids leave his rooms in a relieved hurry like they cannot spend a moment longer. Once he’s sure they’re free from prying eyes, he pulls Jimin in.

And for a moment Yoongi simply lets himself breathe into the embrace. It’s both reassuring and heartbreaking.

“Are you ready?” Jimin murmurs, Yoongi can feel the warmth of his exhales.

Yoongi meets Jimin’s eyes, and Jimin’s hands wordlessly find his.

They might fail. They might not live long enough to see the moon, treason bears a heavy price and his father is not a forgiving man.

Or they might succeed, and live.

“No” Yoongi whispers, squeezing Jimin’s palms as he tries to soak all its warmth to memory. There’s too much to lose but the knowledge only straightens his shoulders in resolve, there’s too
much to lose, so he can’t.

Yoongi imagines Jimin’s corpse hanging from the walls of the castle, for that is the fate of traitors, and his blood boils with a fury he didn’t know resided inside him, and perhaps it didn’t. Perhaps it wormed its way in through his stomach, and Yoongi’s hand twitches to feel the marring on the thin skin of his abdomen. How much of him remains in his body, he wonders, but immediately discards it as a worthless inquiry for there is no sense in breeding what will only bear agony.

“Jimin” He says again, the flesh of his tongue burns with the acid of the words he’s about to release.

“If we fail—” He takes in a strangled inhale, “if we fail, you must take my life.”

Jimin’s body stiffens. Yoongi imagines them surrounded by his father’s men– Jimin’s forehead pressed against his own and the edge of Jimin’s dagger to his throat, sharp and cold against the warmth of Yoongi’s blood spilling down their bodies.

Yoongi knows what he’s asking of him, knows that it is cruel, knows that there is something in Jimin’s oaths that promises unforgiving consequences for even a moment spent with Yoongi’s blood on his hands, but it is the only course of action he can conceive. If they fail in stopping his father, the least Yoongi can do is drag the demon down to the pits of hell with him. He will not be used as a weapon of massacre, he will not be used to stir another bloodbath.

The silence rings between them like the toiling of funeral bells.

“I won’t do that.” Jimin says.

“No” Jimin refuses, and Yoongi’s eyes widen when he sees a tear drip down his friend’s cheek, followed by another.

“I will not kill you.” Jimin wipes the tears and looks back at him with red rimmed eyes and an obstinate resolve. “If we win, we live. If we lose, we die. And if we don’t fight, then we can’t win.”

Jimin’s nails dig into his palms, there’s a desperation there. “Fight with me to end this war.”

Sharp knocks sound in the room before Yoongi can argue and one of the King’s guards opens the doors.

“It is time.” The guard says and Jimin lets go of his hands. Live, he mouths with trembling lips before taking a step back.

The guard approaches Yoongi and he allows himself one last glance at Jimin before forcing himself to look away. He follows the guard and steps out of his rooms and into the halls.

The guards escort him to the courtroom and Yoongi keeps his chin up and clings to the last drags of pride even as his nails dig into the threads of the blue silk of his robes. The pretence of it all, the artifice, chokes him of every inch of his dignity. Here he is– walking to the doors that bar entrance to the royal court, he looks every bit a prince but he’s nothing more than a goat being marched to its slaughterhouse.

He thinks of making a run for it, thinks of elbowing one guard and unsheathing his sword to spar the other. He could do it, nausea climbs up his throat, giving up feels easy but, but— that’s not it.
He reminds himself that this is for Jimin, for Jungkook, for Taehyung and for their kingdoms more than it could ever be about him. He is just someone caught in the tides of war, water in his lungs, the devil’s claws around his ankles and an ocean bed of corpses lying in wait for him. There is no going back, not for him.

The courtroom appears every bit the same as he remembers, it has been four months since he last set foot inside the hall, yet when all eyes turn to look at him he’s again reminded that no, it is nothing like what he remembers.

His father is the first to stand up, and Yoongi loathes to look at him. The noose around his neck tightens and as if he’s being dragged in by the rope, Yoongi’s feet stumble forward even though the rest of his body is frozen stiff with terror.

He walks to the center of the court, marble under his feet and the sound of his footsteps resounding in the hall. The court is engulfed in hushed whispers, all eyes roaming across the silk of his robes and the gauze of his veil, and Yoongi feels his skin prickle under their gaze.

Yoongi comes to a halt before his father and lifts the veil. The whispers grow louder.

His father’s face is a picture of pride.

“My son.” He announces, arms wide as he stands before his throne, and on cue the hall is filled with forced claps of the courtiers. Some appear confused while others openly jeer at him, derision painting the cruel twists of their mouths.

Seokjin is standing behind the King’s looming figure, his face carefully crafted into blankness.

Yoongi’s eyes flicker to meet his brother’s wide ones. Jungkook stands stiff beside his father and even though his features don’t betray it, Yoongi recognises the devastation in his eyes, he sees the faint trembling of his brother’s fists and the quiet rage the sits between his taut shoulders.

Yoongi attempts a small smile to reassure him, but Jungkook’s face crumples at the sight. It’s a fraction of a second but Yoongi sees the flash of pure agony that strikes and mars his face before it disappears behind the practiced flat mask. Yoongi forces himself to look away.

“My son has returned from the depths of hell itself.” The King bellows and Yoongi’s eyes snap back to his father who stands on the platform, arms spread wide. He’s always loved the dramatic flair of it, Yoongi thinks, always loved the eyes on him.

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“You all must be surprised, so many of you, my dearest brother, you too--” His father twists and looks straight at his uncle, “you were all blinded by your near-sightedness. You were driven by your emotions and you let them cloud your judgement.” His father laughs, loud and booming. “Fools”

He then turns to look at Yoongi and Yoongi forces himself to remain still, willing his knees to not give away as his father pins him with his eyes alone. The King smiles, then gestures at him with an open palm, rubies glinting under the light.

“Tell us the outcome of your mission.”

Anxiety winds up his throat like tightly coiled tension. Yoongi gathers his skirts and drops himself on one knee and then the other. He’s shaking as he curves his back into a bow.

“The mission was a success, your Majesty.” Yoongi’s voice is soft yet it echoes in the silent hall. “I carry the kumiho inside me.”
His words are met with sudden chaos. There are gasps of shock, courtiers immediately whispering amongst themselves. Yoongi glances up to see his father’s smile widening. Behind him, Seokjin’s indifferent mask is cracking.

“You all wanted to rage into war, you wanted to march to your deaths.” His father mocks the court, a sneer on his lips, intent on humiliating, “you spoke of courage, of valor, didn’t you, my foolish brother?”

His uncle sits on a seat to the far left, his knuckles white against the armrest, seething.

“You know nothing, this is how you win a war.”

Yoongi trembles with the force of repressing his anger, hot tears prickling the back of his eyes as he forces himself to remain still in his bent position before the court.

“Get up, son.” His father announces.

Yoongi’s chest heaves and he squeezes his eyes shut, the coil of his duty pulls at him but Yoongi forces himself still. He remains where he is, bowing before his father, even as every fibre of his muscle screeches at him to stand up, and the rope chafes against his skin, tightening, pulling, yanking at him to obey.

But Yoongi doesn’t move. Bent over, body trembling, and tension coiling down the ridge of his spine, he remains unmoving.

An unsettling still, the hall quietens as the crowd begins to realize something is strange in the room.

“Get up.” His father’s voice comes again, sharper, piercing. It strikes him right down the length of his spine.

He can feel all eyes on him, and slowly, achingly, Yoongi lifts his head and opens his eyes.

“Father,” he says in the thick silence, throat tight with fear. His father’s eyes narrow and Yoongi meets Seokjin’s heavy gaze. Yoongi’s lips tremble, his gut twists like panic is wringing it tight, and once again he wonders if he’s making the right choice.

_I desire peace_, Taehyung had said on the night of their wedding. A part of Yoongi wants to laugh.

Peace feels like a fever dream, but with his body crumpled before the entire court, head touching the ground before his father, his stomach cut open and a furious beast trying to claw its way out of his chest, Yoongi wonders what is left for him to lose.

“You cannot declare another war.” He tips his head up and says, his voice betrays none of his trepidation. And the words are like knives to the silence, instantly slashing it apart.

The crowd erupts into noise, some of them whisper amongst themselves, others openly jeer at him. Yoongi catches Jimin’s figure hidden in the shadows, his hand at his sword as he takes a step forward. But the King waves a hand and the room plunges into silence once again.

Yoongi stares at his father as the silence stretches out taut, his shoulders threaten to splinter under the strain yet he stays bent over, arms pressed to his chest– a goat pleading before a guillotine.

“You must call off the attack.” Yoongi says again, hard-edged and insistent, and his father’s face twists ugly with disdain. “Please” he pleads, “you cannot lead our men into another war.”
Yoongi remains bent over, the silence in the room is so thick he feels like he's choking on it.

The quiet breathes, once, twice, and then–

“Is that all you have to say?” The King asks, his voice flat, and Yoongi falls silent. “You came all the way here to just say that?”

Yoongi doesn’t answer.

The King leans forward and it’s as if the entire court flinches.

From the corner of his eye, Yoongi sees Jungkook and Seokjin frozen stiff where they stand. Jimin looks ready to jump out of the shadows, and Yoongi forces his body to stop shaking with tremors.

The nausea climbs up his throat, bitter and unforgiving.

“You could’ve saved yourself the trouble of travelling here. If you wished to be a traitor then you could’ve died along with them.”

His father’s face bears no expression, he looks unbothered, as if he’s being forced to deal with something tedious. Yoongi watches him gesture at a servant to fill his goblet with wine.

Yoongi sets his jaw tight and clenches his fingers till nails dig into the flesh of his palms. On his knees before the entire court, it’s becoming a familiar position for him.

The only sound to be heard is the sound of liquid sloshing as the servant tips the pitcher into the King’s cup. The court gingerly resumes its chatter, no longer looking at Yoongi bent over on the floor.

He squeezes his eyes shut as he feels his skin being stretched tight, the chains holding the demon back rattling in anticipation. He feels the monster’s stale breath against his neck, the stench of death and hunger.

Let me out, it seems to whisper against his ear, let me have a taste of him.

Yoongi snaps his eyes open, he doesn’t look at Seokjin or Jimin. The fear slowly seeps out of the pores of his skin and Yoongi feels a cold rage trickling in to occupy its place. He unfurls his arms and places his palms on the marble, lifting himself till he’s sitting on his calves.

Yoongi waits until his father turns around, every breath a stabbing pain in his lungs. He doesn’t have long, he knows it, the rope is slipping past his grip and from what he can see, the demon holds most of it on its side. The tug of war is approaching its end.

The servant retreats and his father turns back around to face him. Yoongi tips his chin up and looks at him straight in the eye so that everyone knows it is no longer a plea.

“You cannot win this war without me.” He says, loud and clear. It is a threat.

The noise drops again, Yoongi feels Seokjin's intent gaze on him. His father cocks his head, looking at him with renewed interest, an eyebrow raised as he appraises him, and Yoongi feels his blood curdle but doesn’t show it.

“You need me if you hold any hopes of triumph.” He states again with a practiced flatness. "You cannot possibly win without the kumiho ."

A beat of silence, and the King smiles as if amused, a sick twist to his mouth. He puts his drink aside and stands once again.
“Is that it?” He asks, there’s yet no sign of displeasure on his face, nothing that hints he even considers Yoongi a threat.

Yoongi feels the demon’s cold fingers come to wrap around his heart and then ever so slowly, begin to squeeze.

When Yoongi remains silent, the King laughs, crass and loud, and he strides forward till they’re only a few feet apart. He leans down to where Yoongi sits on the floor, and Yoongi has to claw his nails in his thighs to keep from flinching.

“Isn’t that right?” His father smiles, wine stained lips revealing the teeth of a predator. “This is the extent of your plan, is it not? You come begging to me not to declare war, and this is all you have?”

Yoongi glares at him but bites his tongue to remain silent.

His father's voice lowers, frightening and horrifying, and it makes the hair at the back of his neck raise in fear.

“Did you honestly believe an insipid threat like that would work against me?” He hisses, smile gone and eyes narrowed in distaste.

The King draws back and turns around, climbing up the dais.

“You are forgetting one crucial detail, my foolish son.” He declares and twists around to face him, lips set in a cold sneer. “You are not as important as you deem yourself to be.”

His father takes long slow strides till he’s standing beside Jungkook, and Yoongi’s eyes widen as an ice cold dread begins to climb its way up to his throat.

The King lifts his hand and rests it on Jungkook’s shoulder, wrapping his thick-boned fingers over the curve of it.

“You are not the last remaining heir, nor am I dying to have you.” His father says, monotonous, but there's a sinister gleam in his eyes.

The devil’s hands around his heart squeeze tighter and Yoongi's breaths become strained. He has to press down on his legs, claws into his thighs, to keep himself from moving.

His father's grip on Jungkook tightens mockingly, as if he's challenging Yoongi to come and do something about it. And Yoongi’s body tremors with a sweltering rage, the demon leaning forward in gleeful anticipation.

Nails dig into flesh, Jungkook flinches in pain, and a white hot rage bursts behind Yoongi's irises, blinding him.

Yoongi jerks forward and snarls, raw red and frenzied. His claws tear through the thin fabric of his robes and pierce through the flesh of his thighs, drawing blood.

His father seems pleased with the reaction he’s provoked, a victorious smile tugging at the hard edge of his lips as he retreats his hand.

Yoongi breathes hard, eyes fixed on the curved red crescent moons indented into Jungkook's shoulder, and the dried blood under his father's fingernails.
The silence sits loud, no one moves as his father walks back to the throne and seats himself on it. A satisfied smirk and a cruel mirth in his eyes, he wraps his fingers around the bejeweled goblet, lazy as he sits sprawled on his throne, sipping on wine, like a predator who knows his power.

“If you do not cooperate, well then.” His father tilts his head in mock sympathy as if Yoongi is leaving him with no other choice, like Yoongi is nothing but a petulant child who needs to be set straight. Yoongi seethes, chest heaving, lips pressed tight to keep the rage from spilling out.

“I will have the *kumiho* sealed inside Jungkook.” His father says. Casual like he wouldn’t care either way. “Now—”

He leans forward just a little and smiles, it’s cruel in every sense, it’s assured and complacent— a predator going in for the kill.

“I’ll ask you again, Yoongi, and choose very carefully.”

He takes a long sip from the goblet, and fixes Yoongi with a stare. “Do you still wish to resist?”

Yoongi’s eyes spell an unforgiving wrath and he breathes through the rage, ragged and forced, jaw tense with the silence he holds between his teeth.

He feels the demon's claws close tighter around his heart, till they puncture it, and blood seeps out. His heart trembles and quivers, frantic, and Yoongi feels its last remaining strained thumps pulsate in his chest.

*One*

The silence is deafening. The King shifts and tilts his head, the joviality vanished as he raises his eyebrow in impatience.

“Nothing to say?” He asks, mocking.

Yoongi glares at him but holds his silence.

It’s imperceptible, a quick jerk of his head that Yoongi would’ve missed if he hadn’t been staring at him, and from the corner of his eye Yoongi spots one of the war generals rise from his seat. The man walks around him and out of his field of vision, and Yoongi hears the heavy movement and loud footsteps grow closer till they come to a halt right behind him.

A hand tangles into his hair, yanks at it, and Yoongi presses his lips shut tight to keep the scream from breaking free. He lets the hand push him down till his forehead touches the floor.

“I asked you.” The King repeats, cruel and unrelenting and all too pleased with himself. “Do you still wish to resist?”

When Yoongi doesn’t respond, the man wrenches his head back before slamming his face into the marble once again. There’s an unmistakable sound of a sob that Yoongi recognises to be Jungkook’s. He hisses as he tastes his own blood against his tongue.

*Two*

“Still got some fight left in you, I see.” The King murmurs. “You always were stubborn.”

An elbow rams into his spine and Yoongi grits his teeth, breaths loud and laboured. The court titters and Yoongi hears someone laugh, the echo of it curdles in his gut.
For a brief moment Yoongi feels the warm exhales of the soldier bent over him against his neck, and then the man is lifting himself before ramming his shoulder against Yoongi's.

A loud distinct crack resounds in the hall and his shoulder shifts unnaturally, bone pushed to the ground, dislocated from the joint. A scream lodges itself inside his throat, and Yoongi bites his tongue to keep it from escaping. Hot tears stream down his face and mix into the pool of blood collecting under his face.

Three

The laughter grows louder, and Yoongi feels the strain of the chains holding the demon back.

“If you won’t speak, perhaps you’ll listen.” His father says.

The man yanks at his hair and Yoongi lets himself be dragged upright, sagging against the cruel grip. He meets his father’s eyes even as he feels a trickle of thick blood make its way down the slope of his nose and drip onto the white marble below. He lifts his chin up, won’t allow them the pleasure of breaking him.

“Did you truly believe the war can be stopped like this?” His father snorts.

“You killed their King.” He says and narrows his eyes. "The war has already begun. Don’t be a fool, if you don’t have a deathwish then your only choice is to join us.”

Four

Yoongi’s chest heaves, breaths rattling wet in the deafening echo of the hall. Yet his lips curl up in a sneer, revealing teeth lined dark crimson.

“Like hell.” He spits blood at the King’s feet, and Yoongi’s face is slammed against the stained marble once again.

He’s kicked in the ribs and Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut tight, curls into himself as another one follows. He exhales, wet, and retches when the stench of his own blood sits heavy in his lungs.

Five

A boot rams against the bone between his shoulders, and one of the chains snaps and breaks.

The seal loosens and gives way, just a little. The demon bares its teeth in anticipation, do it, it whispers in a manic glee, a cold moist breath against his neck, let me out.

Yoongi chokes out a mangled laugh, bloody teeth and throat rubbed raw.

“Chain him.” His father orders.

Six , Yoongi counts.

“ No ” He hears Jungkook shout, but the King continues as if uninterrupted. “Do it. Take him to the dungeons, and prepare for the ritual.” He orders the guards.

" Stop it! " Yoongi hears Jungkook scream.

Seven

Eight
One by one, the chains snap under the strain, and the demon opens its jaw wide and grabs the final chain between its teeth.

“You won’t lay a finger on Jungkook.” Yoongi rasps. He snaps his eyes wide open and stares straight at his father, dried blood on his lashes. The soldier grinds his face further into the floor.

His father raises an unamused brow, crossing a leg over the other as he leans back in his throne.

“And pray tell why wouldn’t I?” He drawls, bringing the goblet to his lips again. “I’ve been patient with you. I gave you a choice, Yoongi, but you’re far too stubborn for your own good.”

His father waves a dismissive hand, gesturing to the soldier to drag Yoongi out of the courtroom, but Yoongi’s hand flies out.

The demon yanks at the last chain, it breaks and the tail end of rope slips past Yoongi’s fingers.

The tug of war finally comes to an end.

Yoongi grabs the soldier’s wrist tight, and wrings his arm till he hears the bone splinter. The man screams, and Yoongi twists his torso, snatching his other wrist as the man struggles in his hold.

His heart gives one last stutter before it crumples.

And the demon roars as it finally breaks free.

Yoongi surges forward and sinks his teeth into the man's throat, he tastes blood and bites harder till he crushes the windpipe.

The hall is frightenningly silent, only the frantic croaks and broken incoherent wails of the man to be heard until eventually even he goes limp, and Yoongi runs his tongue along the back of his teeth, tasting the blood before twisting his head and spitting it to the side.

He throws the body off him and pushes an elbow against the floor to stand back up on his feet.

A horrifying quiet settles in the court undisturbed, no one makes a sound as Yoongi stands, blood trickling down his face to his chin before it drips onto the floor.

Now, Yoongi thinks as he stretches his neck and rolls his shoulder back into place, it is their turn to get down on their knees. He looks at the terrified faces around him, and then at the corpse on the floor.

Yoongi inclines his head and stares at the warlord. There was a story he once heard about a man who claimed that wars between humans would come to an end once a common enemy appeared. An enemy bigger than them, a monster, a demon.

Yoongi raises his foot and slams it into the dead man's face, a sadistic glee curling his lips into a smile when he hears the unmistakable sound of bone crunching. He raises his foot and brings it down again and again, feels the court flinch and laughs. His laughter cuts right through the silence of the court.

He's long since learnt that it is nothing but a pipe dream. No common enemy can unite humans, because humankind's biggest enemy is no monster, but humans themselves.
Yoongi retreats his foot, the corpse is unrecognisable—flesh and bone crushed into a horrific mangled sight, and Yoongi gives it one last perfunctory glance before slowly turning to face the King. He cocks his head in amusement when he observes the agitation that sits heavy on his father's face, his grip slack and wine pooling at his feet where the goblet presumably fell.

"I, too, gave you a choice." Yoongi says, deeper, morbid, and unforgiving. He feels the echo of it resound in the hall struck silent with fear.

He takes a step forward and watches the court flinch as if bracing for impact.

"You should've surrendered when I asked you to. But instead—" Yoongi smiles, gleeful as he bares his bloodstained teeth to the court, "you chose death."

He sees his father's eyes widen. The light filtering in through the stained glass paints the scene in vivid splashes of reds and violets, causing it to resemble a slaughterhouse. It isn't far from Yoongi's own intention.

Yoongi bends and grabs the limp body by the hair, lugging it behind him on the marble carpeted with thick blood like a butcher dragging dead meat. He walks the few steps to the dais where his father sits staring at him, his face stony and his jaw set tight.

"Look carefully." Yoongi says, then hurls the dead body at the King's feet. The corpse lies crumpled below the throne, neck twisted back unnaturally, eyes wide open and blood dribbling out of its mouth.

"Death to you is of no matter when it is that of a commoner, of a soldier, of a farmer or a blacksmith. You think that you are above them, that your life is worth more than theirs, that you have some inherent right to be dictating men to their deaths as you please.” He eyes his father, cool and sharp like a knife against thin skin. “But you forget that you are made of the same flesh and bones and mortar, that your life is no different from theirs.”

Yoongi takes a threatening step forward, smile widening as he feels his claws tear through his skin and elongate, curving into something wicked. “And you, father, you’ve lived a long life, haven’t you?”

The King snarls, and for the first time Yoongi spots something close to fear flicker in his eyes.

“Chain him!” He barks, a raging roar, lips curling into a snarl and revealing teeth and ugly indignation. “What are you all waiting for?”

Immediately there are loud footsteps behind him, soldiers rushing to follow the command but Yoongi hears their hesitation, the fear— it sits loud in their bones, the uncertainty as they weigh the worth of their lives against the consequences of non-compliance. After all, there’s only so far you can push men using fear.

Yoongi smiles when he catches a flash of movement from his left.

Jimin jumps in between him and the guards, his sword meeting their spears with a loud metallic clash as he pushes them away and presses his back to Yoongi’s.

More soldiers come, and Yoongi sees a few of the warlords rising from their thrones as they unsheath their weapons in an attempt to curb the insurrection. But Jungkook and Seokjin draw their swords simultaneously.

Seokjin stands before the courtiers waringly, a dangerous glint in his eye, daring them to take a
step forward, while Jungkook pushes the soldiers around Yoongi and Jimin into a corner with the force of a bow strung too tight for too long and finally snapping under the strain and fury.

And in the midst of it all, Yoongi meets the King’s eyes and raises an eyebrow in question.

"Do you still wish to resist?" Yoongi echoes.

He expects perhaps more shouting and aggravation, but instead his father laughs. Derision paints his face and twists it into something ugly and cruel.

“You’d go this far to be a traitor to your country?” He sneers. “Is this vengeance? Because you were sold off to an alpha, to a monster, you've now come back to raze your own kingdom to the ground. Isn’t that right?”

“No” Yoongi says, his voice is flat, blunt. “It is the beginning of a revolution.” His father’s eyes narrow. “I am bringing peace to this land that is exhausted of wars.”

It feels strange— to feel so detached, to feel so cold like the warmth is leaving him and a layer of frost is crawling up under his skin and gradually consuming him from the inside.

His father snorts. “You seek peace?” He gestures at the corpse beneath him, then spreads his hands to indicate the slaughterhouse of a throne room they stand in. “You speak of peace yet you spill blood, how is that any different from what I am doing?”

He stands up, eyes on Yoongi as he speaks. “War and peace are nothing but words, they’re two sides of the same coin. To protect something, another must be sacrificed.” He raises his hands in a grandiose gesture. “And I chose to trade your life, in exchange for saving this kingdom.”

Yoongi’s fingers flinch as if to touch the skin on his throat where the rope of duty had first coiled, scalding and tight around his windpipe. Now only the scars sit pretty in its place, unforgiving in the way they serve to remind Yoongi how he'd been sold off like cattle, duty branded on his flank with hot iron.

“No,” Yoongi says again, “you sacrificed my life so you could keep sitting on that throne. You’re so quick to throw people to their deaths, be it your people or me or Jungkook. Tell me the truth.” Yoongi takes another step forward and stares at his father through the rage sitting in his lungs.

“Did you ever see us as your sons?” Yoongi draws in a harsh breath through his teeth, jaw clenched and claws curled tight by his sides.

“No, you sacrificed my life so you could keep sitting on that throne. You’re so quick to throw people to their deaths, be it your people or me or Jungkook. Tell me the truth.” Yoongi takes another step forward and stares at his father through the rage sitting in his lungs.

“Or were we simply tools at your disposal?”

Anger mars his face, a glaze of umbrage shades his eyes, and his father grits his teeth, indignant.

“You’re naive!” He shouts. “Only a fool would think that they’re entitled to free will. We’re all bound by our duties, duties to our families, our clan, our nation. Your duty was to lead this kingdom to victory, but look at you!”

His father eyes him, livid, disdain deforming his face.

“You’re a disgrace to this clan, to this nation, and to me!” He spits the words like they're acid. “You are no son of mine.”

Yoongi lets out a quiet exhale. He closes his eyes for a second longer than he should allow, and the way mud rises to the surface when a stone is thrown into the quiet still of a pond, Taehyung’s
words float to the surface of his memory.

You are more than what people think of you, more than what your kingdom demands, more than a political tool. You are your own self, your own thoughts and preferences, your own life experiences and ideals.

Yoongi grits his teeth, clenches his fists till he draws blood, what use is remembering that now.

More than just a prince, an omega, or my mate.

Taehyung's voice is low, his words sharp with emphasis and they cut through Yoongi's chest like knives through his ribs.

You are your own person.

He's not. He's not a person. His body is being eaten from the inside, how much of him remains—Yoongi cannot imagine, if he were to weigh himself on a scale, he'd even weigh as much as a pound. If Yoongi closes his eyes, he can almost see the weary remains of himself, tattered and fragile, being blown away by the wind like a pale withered petal.

As an omega, Yoongi had learnt a long time ago that he'd have to give portions of his body to others. He'd have to make space inside his body, first for his alpha and then his child. He'd be carved open and made hollow for that is the purpose of a vessel, it is of no use unless something is stored in it.

And inside Yoongi resides nothing but eons and eons of caged hatred birthed into a vicious monster.

He's not a person, he thinks and bites the inside of his mouth, he's not a person, he repeats till the words taste like truth.

The resolve settles firm in between his shoulders and down the length of his spine.

Yoongi snaps his eyes open.

“You know,” he says slowly, his voice growing colder and foreboding, each word spoken to force obedience. “Somebody once said to me that if anyone were to wish for true change, they should be willing to abandon everything.”

He meets his father’s cold eyes as he bends down to pick up a sword from the thick pool of blood. “That they must be prepared to lose their humanity, if there be need.”

Yoongi grasps the bloody sword and slowly climbs up the dais.

“But you, father, you— you so desperately cling to your throne, to that crown, to that clan, you who resists the tides of change, who digs their nails into war, do you know what happens to people like you?”

His father takes a step back, and Yoongi looks at the man he’d always had to look up at. For years his father stood before the throne, daunting and foreboding, a crown on his head and the highest power of command on the tip of his tongue. He always appeared so big, yet when Yoongi stares at him now— there’s not much to him, Yoongi thinks, he looks almost small and there's a glaze of panic that sits before his eyes.

A sickening glee crawls up to Yoongi’s fingers wrapped around the hilt of the blade.
“You have only two choices— you either swim with the fickle tides of change.” Yoongi speaks as he slowly raises the sword in the air.

“Or you sink.”

Yoongi presses the edge of the blade to his father’s chest, right over his heart, and watches the breath catch in his father’s throat.

There’s a horrifying stillness, like death is looming over them in anticipation, and Yoongi takes a step forward, forcing his father to take a step back and fall onto his throne.

When a child, Yoongi used to be scared of the hits from the back of his hand, how they burned his cheek red and flaming hot, and how sometimes his father deliberately wore thick gold rings on his fingers and Yoongi cowered from the sight alone like a beast trained to expect pain.

Now Yoongi looks down at him and sees nothing but a cornered animal with a crown on its head.

“You’re going to kill me?” His father sneers, mocking, like he's trying to get a rise out of him.

When Yoongi doesn't retaliate, the scorn on his father's face soothes into a sick little delightful curl of his lips. “It fits a monster like you.” He spits as he leans back into his throne.

Yoongi presses the blade harder, the edge of it nicks skin and a trickle of blood rolls down his father's chest.

“Do it.” His father slurs with rage.

And Yoongi’s fingers tighten around the hilt. He struggles not to just surge forward and drive the blade inside his mouth, to hear the smooth voice crush into a scream of pain as Yoongi hacks at him from the inside.

You are your own person, Taehyung’s voice whispers in his ear, its soft tendrils wrapping themselves around his fingers as if to pull his arm back.

You are more than your misery. You are your own person.

For a moment, Yoongi imagines that he can feel the gentle touch of his mother's palm on his back, that he can hear the tinkling of Jungkook's laughter against his ear, can feel the sensation of Seokjin's fingers in his hair, Jimin's forehead against his, and Taehyung's arms around his waist. For a moment, Yoongi thinks back to the times when he didn't feel like a prince, an omega, a traitor, a vessel, a mate, or a goat, when he could just be.

Yoongi feels himself losing breath, like a blunt knife is pressed to his throat.

He looks up at his father, from the wine soaking the underside of his feet to the sword against the desperate flutter of his heart, and he can't bring himself to move. His arm feels like lead, and the sword in his hand heavy.

And then his father is laughing, hysterical and manic. “All that talk, you really fooled me, Yoongi-ah.” He sneers. “You’re going to bring change? You’ve lost your humanity?”

He'd been prepared, Yoongi was sure he'd been prepared to kill, yet the blade in his hand shakes with uncertainty. This is the right choice, he tells himself, he's making the right choice yet the echo of Taehyung's words rings in the fringes of his mind.
This isn't about him, he knows that, this is bigger than him, yet--

You are your own person.

“Prove it to me. Stick that blade into me.” His father rages, taunting.

“Take my life, do it.” He spits.

The King stares at him as his fingers come to wrap themselves around the blade, curled tight enough the edge cuts through skin and blood drips down the length of his forearm to the peak of his elbow, and he yanks it out of Yoongi's grip before tossing it to the side where the sword clatters against marble.

“Do it before I get to you first.” He hisses, and Yoongi watches him pull out a dagger from behind his back.

Yoongi takes a faltering step back and watches his father lunge forward, the silver glinting in the light, wicked and sinister.

But before the blade can reach him, Yoongi is being pushed down.

Arms wrap themselves tight around his torso, and together they fall down the dais. Yoongi's shoulder bears the brunt of the fall and he gasps out a strangled cry. They roll on the floor till Yoongi is pressed under the weight and his chest heaves for breath.

And for one trembling moment Yoongi remains unmoving, then slowly, achingly, he looks up and meets Jungkook’s face.

Jungkook’s eyes are screwed shut and his breaths come out short and frantic, but his arms wound around Yoongi remain tight. Yoongi parts his lips to speak but suddenly, horrifyingly, he feels something wet drip onto his stomach.

It freezes him where he lies.

Dread sinks down his body and grows roots into the floor, rendering him immobile and wide-eyed, as limp as the dead.

And suddenly Jungkook is coughing, he unwinds his arms from around Yoongi and tries to lift himself on his palms.

Yoongi catches sight of the wicked silver.

“Jungkook-ah” Yoongi whispers, his voice so brittle, he fears the wind will break it.

Jungkook opens his eyes, “hyung” he rasps but immediately breaks into another fit of painful coughs that wrack his quivering body.

Blood dribbles down his mouth to his chin, some of it splattering on Yoongi’s cheek.

Yoongi watches Jungkook's face, a sickly pale against the bright red that stains his lips. The blade rests in his flesh, draining him of his life, the blade that was aimed at Yoongi, yet– once again.

“Why?” Yoongi holds Jungkook’s face in his palms, tender and guilty and fearful. “Why would you–” He chokes out, strangled, the words constricting in his throat.

“I– I could ask you the same– ah question.” Jungkook’s words become less coherent with his lips
trembling to keep the blood from spilling, and his eyes flutter. “You do so much, hyung. Watching you like this– I–” He lets out a sob, it's a thick wretched thing.

His arms shake where he's trying to hold himself up, and he hisses when they give up and Jungkook falls on his elbows. Yoongi grabs him at the waist, fingers digging desperately into his skin.

“I’m sorry.” Jungkook is speaking again, and Yoongi watches with a growing horror as his eyelids begin to lower as if struggling to stay open.

“Jungkook– no ” Yoongi whispers hoarse, fingers tightening around Jungkook’s body. “No, look at me.” Jungkook’s eyes flutter open again, they are glassy and unfocused.

“Look at me.” Yoongi screams again, frantic. Jungkook’s body is growing limp and Yoongi forcefully pulls him up higher.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t do much. I couldn't even–” Jungkook sobs again, but then his arms give away and he falls atop Yoongi.

His eyes fall shut. “But– I was glad–” He coughs, his voice a strained rasp, his breaths frantic. “Even if it's like this, I’m glad that– I’m glad that I could do something.”

“No, please, no, no, no, no ” Yoongi pleads, his voice trembling with a frenzied urgency. “Stay with me, Kook-ah, please, look at me, please .”

Jungkook takes a tremulous breath through the silver impaled in his stomach, and then no more.

Yoongi waits a beat, and two. But Jungkook remains still and heavy, warm blood seeping out of his wound and staining Yoongi.

And Yoongi closes his eyes, he swallows the dry knot in his throat that begs him to scream. Behind his eyelids, he can feel the white hot sting of tears as they pool under his lashes and drip down his face.

There is laughter, wicked and hollow, and he feels the demon's breath against his ear.

Are you done playing the hero? It asks.

The stench of death grows and the demon's nails, thin and spindly, faintly graze his cheek. You want revenge, it croons, sickeningly sweet.

Yoongi's fingers tremble as he traces the lines of Jungkook's lifeless body and then the hilt of the dagger buried into him.

You know what to do , it smiles against his skin, coaxing and goading.

And for a long deathly still, Yoongi lies on the bloody marble, a corpse wrapped tight in his arms, his brother's warmth leaving with every passing second, and Yoongi feels like he's sunk up to his chin in thick black muddy water. For so long he's been struggling to stay afloat, but for what, he wonders as his arms begin to lose their strength and Yoongi loses his will to stay above water.

The demon's nails dig into his face, holding it tight and twisting it so Yoongi meets its gaze.

Let me out

The command is absolute. Yoongi stares into the black abyssal pits of the demon's eyes,
unblinking, and as if there's a string attached to it– his arm lifts off the floor of its own accord.

His palm comes to hover above his stomach, fingers trembling before he grits his teeth and curls them in, fisting the bloodied fabric. His nails tear the garment from its threads, revealing the seal scorched onto his stomach.

The seal is a swirled scar, a red wicked vermilion snake coiled around his navel, and Yoongi briefly traces the raised skin before he splays his fingers wide, bends them and pierces his claws into the flesh.

Nails puncture thin skin, dark red blood oozing out and streaking his skin along the curve of his waist, and Yoongi hisses as he curls his fingers, bends them, pushes them deeper, and twists the seal in the opposite direction of the coil.

An agonizing slow, the seal– a snake circling itself and eating its own tail– twists and unfurls, giving way as the snake's jaw widens and Yoongi feels a sharp tug at his ankle, cold hands pulling him under the muddy water.

He feels his breath escape his chest, the water infiltrating his mouth, his nose and his eyes and suddenly he's drowning, and he tries to speak but– he can't.

The snake consumes itself and the seal gives away.

Yoongi's eyes burn red, the demon pushes the gates open, crawling its way out, and the last of Yoongi's consciousness is torn apart with a long loud rip.

The symbols on his body burn bright crimson and Yoongi lies on the ground, his body spasming and his throat bleeding as his windpipe constricts, he tries to take a breath but it burns, burns, burns and tears stream down his face in silent agony.

His body convulses on the floor, bones cracking and neck snapping back unnaturally. He feels his skin stretch at the seams as his skeleton shifts underneath, his fingers bending and his jaw widening, ribs curving forward and threatening to tear his chest open.

And suddenly his torso abruptly lifts off the floor as if he's a puppet, eyes rolled back into their sockets.

The hall watches in a quiet distraught horror as Yoongi snaps his head back up and slowly brings his arms up to hold onto Jungkook's body that was threatening to careen to the floor.

He tightens his hold on Jungkook's waist as he lifts him up and off himself before gently lowering him back to the ground to his left.

He then stands back up on his feet, the movement loud in the eerie hush that seems to have settled in the room as everyone watches him.

"Father" Yoongi murmurs quietly and his eyes snap open.

There's a cold fragile still in the air, like trembling icicles– the calm before a tempest, and Yoongi sees his father staring at him, eyes wide. Something colder than hate chills every nerve in his body.

"Die"

And Yoongi is running. In a fraction of a second he has his claws wrapped tight around the King's throat, digging unforgivingly into tender muscle.
Where he should find the root of hatred lodging itself in his heart, he finds nothing. No remorse, no empathy—no hatred. His heart sags cold and dead in his chest.

He feels nothing, he looks at the trembling man thrashing in his hold and feels nothing. Yoongi tightens his grip and his father chokes, ugly and crimson.

He could kill him, he could kill him, he's going to kill him, but Yoongi feels no relief from the thought. He doesn't want to give him death. Ugly strangled croaks fill the stale air of the hall, it's pitiful.

Yoongi wants to keep him alive, he wants to tear him apart and stitch his seams just to do it again, he wants to chain him and walk him like a dog on a leash on the streets of his kingdom. He wants to strip him naked and brand him with hot iron for all men to see, he wants to drag him to his mother's grave and wrench his eyelids open to make him see the lives he's taken with his bloody hands. He wants to take a dagger, the very one embedded in Jungkook's flesh, and crave poetry onto his skin with the blade.

Yoongi tightens his hold and feels the sickening distaste flood his mouth when thick blood seeps out of his father's throat and dribbles down Yoongi's claws. He's stopped resisting, his windpipe closing in and his eyes slitted, unshed tears gathered behind his lashes.

Yoongi wants to feel pleasure, wants to soothe the unyielding deranged thirst for carnage that eats at him from the inside. But it's as if he's cursed with an unending starvation, because there's nothing. It's empty.

It is empty save for the demon's gleeful laughter that echoes in the fringes of his mind. Empty save for the pulse battling against his fist and fluttering into something frantic, something desperate as his father pathetically clings onto his life.

"Yoongi"

It's a horrified whisper, spoken so soft yet it sits in the hall as loud as the toiling of funeral bells.

Yoongi twists around to see Taehyung and Hoseok panting at the doors of the throne room, eyes wide as they take in the sight of it.

And as if caught in a trance, Taehyung takes a step forward, eyes fixed on to Yoongi. He then halts for a brief hesitating moment, but his desperation must outlive his caution because the next second he's hastily stumbling towards him.

"Yoongi" Taehyung whispers again when he stands a few feet from him, chest heaving and desperation hanging off the tips of his fingers where they tremble by his sides. His eyes rake across Yoongi's body frantically as if he's searching for something.

Yoongi watches him with no real interest, he'd expected to feel something at the sight of him, compassion or guilt or anything besides the blunt indifference that he does—but he doesn't.

He’s still as empty as before. Like all emotion seeped out of his veins when they carved him hollow. A vessel, he thinks, perhaps he really became one.

Yoongi releases his grip on his father who falls to the floor and crumples, and turns to face Taehyung. Taehyung's eyes briefly dart to look at the fallen figure, they widen slightly, and then they're back on Yoongi.
"You're not Yoongi." He says, a horrid devastation in his eyes when he comes to the realization. "You're not him."

And Yoongi—

laughs.

It's scathing and bitter, and he watches with sick satisfaction as the shock slowly seeps into Taehyung's features and sits there.

"You're right." Yoongi says, smile blooming on his lips, a crimson cruelty. "I'm not."

Taehyung's face stutters for a brief second, and Yoongi likes the way his words pierce like barbed wire. Taehyung begins to take a step back but Yoongi's hand flies out and grabs him by the throat.

"Perhaps I should play with you instead." He muses as he grazes his thumb against Taehyung's jaw, inspecting him like one would assess merchandise.

And the way Taehyung's mouth parts, in disbelief and in horror as he gasps for breath, Yoongi feels the slightest lick of satisfaction curl around the tip of his tongue.

Taehyung's eyes flicker to the King's fallen body, and Yoongi raises a brow in amusement.

"Would you like to take his place?" He asks graciously, fingers digging into muscle and tightening their hold on Taehyung's throat. Taehyung chokes and Yoongi finally feels something.

Distantly he can hear screams, and Yoongi hasn't been paying attention to much else happening in the room. His eyes flicker across the court, and he makes out the clash of swords—Seokjin engaged in a fight with one of the war generals— and Hoseok struggling against Jimin's hold as he tries to come to Taehyung's aid.

Yoongi meets their eyes briefly, dismissively. He catches the agonized tightness on Jimin's face, the raw rage in Hoseok's that promises vicious death, and the way Seokjin glances at him from where he has locked blades with the general—disbelief, yet at the same time a resigned acceptance. He doesn't look at Jungkook.

Yoongi snaps his eyes back to Taehyung and there's something defeated in the way he simply hangs limp in Yoongi's hold, unmoving and still and biddable, like he's ready for Yoongi to have his way with him.

Like he's ready for Yoongi to sink his claws and maul him till he's a rotten carcass.

Yoongi narrows his eyes, instead of the initial enjoyment, a strange kind of aggravation begins to crawl up the length of his fingers.

"I'll kill you." He iterates, voice ringing sharp and claws further digging into the tender muscle. Yoongi watches how Taehyung's body gasps to escape the burn of the strangulation but his cruelty meets no resistance. Taehyung's arms hang loosely by his side and his head lolls back, limp.

Yoongi had entertained the most brutal of fantasies, he'd dreamt of killing Taehyung in his sleep on the night of their wedding, of slitting his throat and letting him bleed their sheets crimson. He'd thought long and hard about slaughtering each and every one of their soldiers, all sat in a line with their heads bowed to the ground as Yoongi sliced them off their necks. He'd been prepared to fight and to kill, to be bathed in blood and slash his way to the end of this war, but now one of them hangs off his fist, ready to die at Yoongi's will.
"It infuriates him."

"Why did you come here?" Yoongi asks, agitated when Taehyung doesn't respond. "I had your father killed." He says again, and then. "Why did you not send your men after me? Why did you just let us escape like that?"

Yoongi thinks back to how his heart had pounded in his chest during the entire ride back, ears open for any sound of a chase, any sound of troops or a search party. There had been none. It was almost as if they'd been granted easy passage.

Taehyung watches him through wet lashes, eyes glistening with unshed tears. And an aggravation eats away at his insides.

It makes him want to take a blade and carve Taehyung open and claw out his insides, to chain him and cuff him and pin him to a wooden post, drag him to the streets, hold a sale and sell him off to the highest bidder. It makes him want to take away everything till he's not human but a rotten commodity, bought and sold without thought or care.

There's water in lungs, thick and muddy and unforgiving as it burns every time he draws a breath.

"Why– are you here, Taehyung?" He wants to sound sharp, but his voice cracks and comes out strangled and thick and pathetic.

Yoongi releases his hold and Taehyung falls to the floor, gasping for air as his body wracks with wretched sobs. He lies there as he catches his breath, shaking like a leaf, withered lungs frantically flaring then falling, and Yoongi's fingers bend with an unreasonable fury.

"Is it not obvious?" Taehyung coughs out, his voice scratching against his burnt throat and his fingers trembling against the inflamed skin.

Taehyung meets his eyes and despite lying shrivelled on the floor, there's a tenacious sincerity in them that doesn't waver, that remains fixed onto Yoongi.

"I came to save you." He says, low and steady, lips curled tight with determination.

"Save me?" Yoongi laughs, even though there's something inside his chest that's being squeezed impossibly tight. "Save me from what exactly?" He spits. There's a vicious urge that shoots down his arms up till the tips of his claws that wants to hurt, that wants to wring him crooked, wants to break him and watch his blood spill on the floor so Yoongi can finally peer inside and see what kind of patience resides within him.

"Save you from your hatred."

The way Taehyung says it– so plain and blunt, Yoongi's smile disappears.

Taehyung pushes his palms against the floor, carefully lifting himself off the marble. He staggers upright, and he doesn't break gaze.

"You know it too, don't you, Yoongi?" Taehyung takes a step closer, and Yoongi clenches his fists by his side. "Only I can do it."

He's hardly threatening, with the way his body curls into itself and dried blood sits wicked on his throat, yet Yoongi's body wants to take a step back, can't stand him so close. It infuriates him, how Taehyung seems to intimidate him, and there's something tight and horrible and ugly in Yoongi's chest, something that makes his fists tremble at his sides.
"I'm the only one who can take away all that hatred inside you." Taehyung takes another step forward, closing the gap between them. So close that Yoongi has to tilt his head up to meet his gaze.

Taehyung's eyes are resolute, a touch angry even, but most of all he looks pained. His hand grabs Yoongi's and he yanks it till Yoongi's claws dig into his stomach.

"Kill me if you want to." Taehyung whispers the words into the humid air between them, body sagging and leaning forward.

Yoongi's eyes widen, Taehyung's grip around his wrist tightens.

Looking at him like this, even as he asks for death, Yoongi cannot spot a drop of hatred or malice in him. Nothing but a chasmic sincerity.

"If that is the justice you seek then I'll accept whatever you give me." Taehyung murmurs and together they stand in a standstill, staring at each other like they're standing at the edge of something, like they're standing at the edge of an abyss, like they've been inching towards it for the last four months and now Taehyung is asking Yoongi to push him over.

And Yoongi wonders whether this is the end, if this is the end Taehyung spoke of.

*It is up to us what we make of it*. The bond that ties them together as mates, they'd pushed and pulled it and coiled it around each other's necks and Yoongi wonders if this is how it'll go out, if everything had been leading up to this point—where one of them lights it aflame and lets the rope burn its way to either end and choose its victor.

"Why are you doing this?" Yoongi forces out, a strangled whisper weak in its stab, rubbed raw at the edges. "Why do you always—" His voice cracks, wavering off into silence as he looks helplessly at the bloody bruises around Taehyung's neck. *Why do you care?* He wants to ask. *Why do you go so far? Why did you come back? Why— why*

He hears the sound of his own ragged breathing, sick and painful, how it rings hollow inside him like a blunt knife has hacked at him from the inside out for weeks and months on end until all that's left is a gaping hole and a crippling kind of helplessness.

"Because it hurts me." Taehyung answers, soft, his other hand coming to brush against Yoongi's cheek, a thumb tracing the skin lightly. "Whenever I see you carrying all that weight, all that pain and hatred all by yourself, it hurts me." He whispers.

"Even now—" Taehyung meets his eyes, "you're hurting, I can feel it, and it— it"  
Taehyung's hand releases Yoongi's wrist and comes to clutch at his own chest right over his heart. His voice dips, curves and sags heavy and wet with emotion when he speaks, choking around the words. "It hurts me too— right here, it hurts so much."

A breath catches in his throat and lodges itself there. Yoongi's eyes widen before he forces himself to look away. He grits his teeth, jaw tight, he's not a person.

"I killed your father." Yoongi says, sharp and cutting, he feels like every word he releases grates at his skin and leaves him a little more vulnerable, a little more exposed. "And I betrayed you."

*Why do you not hate me? Why?*

"Even now— we are enemies, I—"
He takes in a breath, the water rises up to his throat. He tastes bile and salt and iron and swallows it back down.

There's a tightness inside Yoongi's chest.

"I could kill you." Yoongi grows agitated and he jerks his head up. His claws push into Taehyung's abdomen with emphasis. "I could kill you." He hisses with a hint of desperation.

Why does he feel like crumbling apart? Like his tongue is corroding and he can't get his words out fast enough.

"I have your blood on my hands, I have the blood of your men on my hands, why– why do you not hate me? Why do you still–?"

"I don't." Taehyung cuts him off, it's so soft.

Yoongi's eyes meet his, and Taehyung leans forward just a little. It's terrifying, to be so close, Yoongi feels like he's been rubbed raw and sore and vulnerable that even the touch of Taehyung's gaze will set him on fire.

"I don't hate you." Taehyung says again. "Whatever choice you make, whatever you do, even if you choose to kill me, I will accept your decision."

"Why?" Yoongi breathes, wet and desperate.

There's a tightness inside Yoongi's chest.

For a long moment, Taehyung doesn't reply. He stares at him, a tender but stony resolve in his eyes. And Yoongi wants to look away, wants to look away, but he can't. Taehyung's fingers come to hold his jaw, firm yet gentle.

"Because you're my mate." He says simply.

And Yoongi goes still.

Taehyung's hand travels to the back of Yoongi's head, his fingers tangling in his hair as he gently pulls him closer. And Yoongi's hand that was pressed to Taehyung's stomach falls and hangs heavy at his side.

He can feel himself crumbling, every sinew coming loose and his knees threatening to collapse and fall to the floor.

Behind his eyelashes he sees the bond tying them together, how it grows threads, becomes thicker, and pulls at them, taut and strong, till they're pressed chest to chest.

"And no matter what you decide to do from hereon—" Taehyung leans close enough to press his forehead against Yoongi's, his next words a breath against Yoongi's lips. "Whatever choice you make, know that it wouldn't change the fact that I love you."

There's a tightness inside Yoongi's chest—

Then, slow and deliberate, Taehyung's eyes hold his own.

"And that I will always love you."

— and it twists and splinters and explodes into a million fragments that embed themselves in his
Yoongi watches him with wide eyes, watches the unending warmth spill from Taehyung's eyes, watches the blotchy scars sitting tight around his throat like a bloody noose— and suddenly he can't breathe.

Yoongi's fingers tremble and he takes in a shaky breath, it rattles in his chest and he feels it choke him like phantom fingers around his throat. His vision blurs, but when Yoongi blinks to clear it he feels the hot spill of tears over his cheeks.

"Yoongi" Taehyung calls out to him softly, but Yoongi cannot look at him. He takes a staggering step back, then another before his knees hit the floor.

His entire body is shaking and Yoongi curls into himself as he cries for reasons he cannot speak. His heart gives a loud jerking recoil that sends his body careening forwards. It pounds high in his throat, a suffocating tightness throttling any inch of rational thought.

The bond between them, Yoongi feels it elongate and wind around the demon's throat. The demon roars in fury, resisting the tight coil of the thick rope. And Yoongi loses himself to the force of his tears, how he trembles, bent over the floor, eyes squeezed shut, as he tries to keep himself from being torn open and spilling all over the marble in a red wailing wave of blood, tears and years of ache.

"Yoongi" Taehyung repeats. Yoongi's crying so hard now that he doesn't see it when Taehyung reaches out with his fingers. He flinches at the touch but Taehyung doesn't retreat.

His body heaves with uncontrollable sobs, and Yoongi retches. He feels the water in his lungs recede and a breath of cold air sweep in, making him gasp from the chill of it.

The demon is dragged back, raging and snapping its teeth against the rope as it is forced back into its cage.

Yoongi's body shivers violently and distantly he feels Taehyung's fingers slotting in the gaps of his own, his soft voice whispering words of comfort. And Yoongi falls forward, blindly chasing the warmth that Taehyung's arms provide as they wrap themselves around him.

There are a lot of questions he needs to ask but they remain lodged in his throat, heavy and waiting to be spoken.

And for a long quiet, he remains.

For a long quiet, he breathes and feels it sting like needles in his lungs.

There is a sickness brewing deep in his gut. The shift between them— it's inescapable now that the imprint of Yoongi's fingers sits encircled around Taehyung's neck. It's always been like this, ever since Yoongi was sold off to him— the tail end of his leash held in Taehyung's fist except Taehyung never pulled, except Taehyung let it go and interlaced their fingers together instead.

They'd never stood on equal ground, not once, not when Yoongi sat before him, goading men to tear the clothes off his body, not when Yoongi lay trapped underneath him on their bed, bleeding from his bite, not when Taehyung pushed himself between him and the knife, not even when Taehyung hung slumped against Yoongi's fist, welcoming his cruelty with a smile on his face, not then, not once, not ever.

And sat on the floor like this, Yoongi wonders if they'll ever meet halfway without the leash of
their duties pulling them to one another, if either of them will be able to stand on equal ground and not be held down by the throat by their kingdoms, the cold steel of a butcher’s knife nicking the back of their necks.

It is almost impossible to open his eyes again.

There are sounds of choked breaths and something wet sliding against marble. Yoongi trembles and holds on to Taehyung like it's the only thing that might save him, and finally gradually lifts his lids open.

The sight that greets him makes vomit creep up to his throat.

Yoongi watches his father lift himself off the floor and up on his elbows, thick blood dripping down the punctured holes in his throat as he attempts to crawl forward.

His mouth parts, trying to form words through a clogged windpipe. There's something sickening and ugly in the way Yoongi can watch him and feel nothing inside, the way he sees blood dribble down his mouth pathetically and feel no remorse or pity in his heart.

His father blabbers incoherently, body wracking with coughs as he gestures at Yoongi, frantic, his hand outstretched and fingers shaking with tremors.

Distantly, Yoongi remembers how his mother had died choking on her blood, body trembling and breaths frantic as she tried to pass on the last of her blessings to Yoongi and a crying Jungkook in the distance, the King's dagger impaled in her abdomen.

Mercy, he'd said, he'd killed his wife out of mercy to prevent her from suffering a worse fate of being captured by the enemy.

Yoongi had been six, and Jungkook four.

Mercy, he thinks now twenty years later, as he stares into his father's eyes. His father's lips tremble, blood and desperation spilling on the floor as he tries to speak.

Yoongi doesn't get to know what he says, because immediately after there's a slice of a blade and Hoseok stands over his father's body, his boot digging into the back of his throat and his sword twisting as he digs it deeper into his flesh.

Mercy, Yoongi thinks as his father chokes on his last breath, and wonders whether his father deserved it. Whether he himself deserves it.

The King falls and as the last of his croaks fades, Hoseok's eyes find his own.

There's something cold there, something dark and unforgiving, the haunt of the promise Yoongi had seen when his claws had closed around Taehyung's throat.

From the corner of his eye, Yoongi sees the crown sliding off his father's head and rolling on the floor till it lands right in front of him, the rim of it stained crimson.

He knows for certain that Hoseok will kill him without an ounce of hesitation, and Yoongi imagines the sting of cold steel against his throat, the warmth of his blood streaming down Taehyung's forearms—and there's an ache in Yoongi's body that welcomes it. That will sit motionless and lift his head and let Hoseok slash at him.

There's a thick still silence, and Yoongi almost braces for it, anticipates it, but suddenly the arms
around his waist tighten.

He watches Hoseok's eyes flicker to Taehyung instead and narrow in warning.

For a long moment, none of them speak. Taehyung doesn't make a move to retreat, and they remain in a standstill with Hoseok and Taehyung staring each other down.

It is only broken by a sharp sting of a sob.

Yoongi snaps his head in the direction of where Seokjin and Jimin are bent over Jungkook's body, and feels his heart come to a loud lurching stop.

Yoongi remains frozen for a just a fraction of a moment, and then he's moving with a panic-stricken urgency. He unwinds Taehyung's arms from around him, doesn't spare a glance at Hoseok, and pushes his palms against the marble to pull himself up on his feet.

He grits his teeth at the stinging pain that flares up in his entire body, how it creaks and aches and holds him up like he's whipped it to.

Yoongi drags himself in their direction, but halfway across the hall when he finally catches the sight of him, Yoongi's feet stop dead as if chilled into paralysis.

There's blood, there's so much blood, and Yoongi's mouth parts to draw in a shaky inhale. He feels the pull of gravity grow stronger. Feels its hands grab him at the knees, and Yoongi's legs threaten to give away at the sight of Jungkook, pale and ashen, lying in a pool of his own blood.

He feels an urge to scream, he feels the shame grip his throat, hot and scalding, and squeeze. Just as he's about to sink to his knees, Yoongi hears the reverberation of a familiar voice, archaic and heavy– how its echo quakes in his bones.

_Take me to the boy_, the voice resonates, and Yoongi's eyes widen. He feels the demon watching him from past the shadows of its cage.

Yoongi stares into its hollow eyes, a black so dark that it'll consume any light that enters it. Even bound at the neck, the sight of the demon alone sends a surge of cold dread down his spine.

When Yoongi doesn't move, the demon speaks again. _Take me to the boy if you want him to live. He has not much time remaining._

And Yoongi stumbles forward on aching knees. He collapses when he reaches him, knees hitting the marble floor hard.

He sees Seokjin's bloody hands pressed over the gash in a desperate attempt to keep the blood from escaping as Jimin frantically pinches Jungkook's nose shut and blows air into his mouth.

Yoongi gently wraps his fingers around Seokjin's wrists, moving them to the side and carefully avoiding Seokjin's gaze. Desperate and shaking, Yoongi places his fingers over Jungkook's ripped skin.

He expects it to burn him, for Jungkook's blood to be a stinging shameful reminder as it stains his skin and never washes out, he almost wishes it would burn him. But there's nothing but a faint warmth and a sickly desperation.

It's different from when he'd felt his own skin stitch into itself, he hadn't put conscious thought into
it then. Yoongi traces the edges of Jungkook's flesh, feeling the demon's gaze on him and a familiar tingling heat in his fingers as the skin sews back into itself, regenerating and threading into each other as if it had never been torn.

Yoongi retreats his hands when no evidence of the wound remains but the copious amount of blood on their hands. He feels Seokjin's searing gaze on him but before Seokjin can speak, Jimin does.

"It's there." Jimin whispers from where he's pressed his ear to Jungkook's chest, his fingers holding Jungkook's wrist, trembling and fearful. "I can feel it."

And then a choked wet gasp, "He's alive."

Yoongi can't help but look at Jungkook's face, a ghastly grey like death had brushed the tips of its fingers across his cheek. Yoongi stares at him until he can't see him anymore, until shame seeps into his vision and paints it a dark copper red. Yoongi blinks and breathes through the nauseating guilt that surges through his gut and threatens to drown him.

He stands up on his feet against everything in his body that screams and threatens to collapse under him, he holds himself up because he doesn't know if he'll be able to pick himself up if he falls now, if he succumbs to the pain and the exhaustion and the fibres of his muscles that wail and beg for him to show mercy to his own body.

Yoongi breathes and feels the sting of the thousands of needles embedded in his chest, Yoongi breathes like his lungs ache for release, Yoongi breathes and breathes until he can speak without screaming.

He turns to Seokjin, tries to convey with his eyes what he cannot with his words.

"Gather the council--" he rasps then turns to look at the room, lifts his head and makes sure that his eyes brand every gaze and his voice stings every ear "or whatever is left of it."

The sound of heavy footsteps gradually grow louder and for Yoongi, almost impossible to ignore with the way it thunders between his temples.

He blinks to swallow down the hot panic flaring behind his eyelids and clenches his fists in his robes to stop them from trembling. His clothes are soaked heavy in blood and slashed away at his stomach, leaving the marred skin on his navel– burnt imprints of hot iron and ugly crescent scabs carved by his own claws– in plain sight for everyone to see, enough evidence in itself to tell the story of the events that unfolded.

He stands in the center of the hall with his back to the throne, when the clamor of disgruntled voices reaches him from the open entryway into the courtroom.

He watches them as they step inside the room, irritated and indignant for the Elders aren't ordinarily summoned to the court. They deem themselves above political warfare and only pass judgement in the name of the goddess. And their judgement overrules even that of the war generals.
Yoongi’s father had given them enough land and titles to appease and purposely kept them from interrupting in the matters of the administration.

There are six of them—fat and balding, dressed in silk robes and gold that shimmers on their necks and their fingers, and Yoongi sees the moment they break away from their chatter and turn to face him, the moment recognition flashes in their eyes and their feet falter mid-step.

Yoongi thinks of the picture they make—Yoongi standing in the center of a slaughterhouse weighed down by his bloody robes, Taehyung and Seokjin stood beside him, and the courtiers on their knees with the tips of Jimin and Hoseok's swords breathing down the back of their necks.

For a moment, there is stunned silence. There is confusion, and then dawning realization. Yoongi sees their eyes flicker to take in the blood on the floor, the vacant throne, and finally dart between Yoongi and Taehyung.

One of them straightens, Yoongi watches the rage split his face, sees the mockery set in and braces for it.

"We were told we were summoned by the King." He shouts, indignant and derisive.

Instead of replying, Yoongi simply steps to the side and lets them see the answer for themselves.

He watches the condescendence slip off their faces, replaced by shock and then slowly horror as they take in the sight of the King's ugly corpse seeping blood into the carpet.

"You're no king of mine." Another one of them jerks his head up and sneers. There is a sound of disdainful agreement from the rest.

Yoongi smiles.

"I'm not." He agrees, before his smile drops to something cold and sharp. "However, I hold the highest command in His Majesty's absence." He snaps and lets the words sink in.

He thinks of Jungkook lying in his bed, cold and white as the dead save for the faintest flutter of his heart keeping him hanging on. Behind his eyelids he sees the knife being driven into Jungkook's flesh over and over again like his mind wishes to take vengeance on him, and he only jerks out of the thought when Taehyung's palm presses warm against the dip of his spine, bringing him back to the present with a visible recoil.

He blinks and takes in a strangled breath, willing the stone in his throat to go down.

He tries to find his voice, from somewhere in the caverns of his body, something that doesn't sound broken or ring hollow in the emptiness, a vessel, he thinks, and finally parts his palms and lets the word fall down into the pit of oblivion, the echo of it ringing in his ears, never to be heard again.

"Approach." He commands, his voice ringing heavy like a gong in the silent hall.

There are tense jaws and lips pressed tight with indignation, and Yoongi watches the war on their face, how the conflict rests between their brows, rage and caution battling for dominance.

When none of them make a move to comply, Yoongi raises his hand in Jimin's direction.

He sees the Elders' eyes flicker to where Jimin approaches them, sword dripping a trail of blood on the floor as he walks, the threat clear on his face.
Immediately, as if branded by hot iron, they shuffle forward, feet unsteady in their haste. Donned in silk and robes, they stand before him and Yoongi can see the wealth almost drip down the tips of their fattened fingers like melted gold. These are the men who sent not just him but countless others before him to their deaths under the guise of duty, who enslaved their bloodline and sold them off to be impregnated by royalty, who smuggled children to neighboring clans only to fatten their own pockets, all the while sitting back carefree, yacking on about the goddess and her chosen ones, in the way only those with their status and privilege could.

He feels a hate so cold, it chills his veins. Bringing his hand to his stomach, with a light teasing finger, Yoongi traces the burns around his navel in a slow soothing circle.

He sees their eyes fixate on the movement.

His finger comes to a halt. And, sickeningly sweet, Yoongi speaks. "Will you not bow to your goddess?" He tilts his head and smiles, expecting and cruel.

Their spines stiffen. Yoongi watches the rage take root, deforming their faces.

"You won't see me bow to a traitor." One of them spits, and Yoongi isn't surprised. He simply flicks his eyes to Jimin and gives a brief terse nod.

There's a loud clatter of metal as Jimin's sword falls to the floor and he steps forward towards the six of them. He watches them take a step back but Jimin reaches out and grabs the one who spoke by the back of his neck. Jimin twists him around and slams a knee into his spine before forcing him down on the floor into an undignified bow till his forehead meets the floor.

The man screams and curses, thrashing against Jimin's hold. And Yoongi watches as the fright finally slips into the crevices of the others' faces, how it trickles down and settles in thick and cemented.

Yoongi raises an eyebrow at them in a silent question.

One by one, they drop to their knees and Yoongi hates the way satisfaction sticks to the roof of his mouth and how his tongue curls around it, pleased.

There's an urge that sits on the tip of his tongue that begs to order their heads off their necks, but Yoongi shuts his eyes and swallows the thought and puts it to rest.

When he opens them again, he lets himself draw delight in the curve of their spines as the priests cower beneath him.

"For so long," Yoongi says and crushes the way his voice threatens to waver, smoothing it into precise neutrality. He has no room left in his heart for pity or mercy or hesitation. "For so long, you've worshipped the goddess and raised children like cattle only to send them off like pigs to their slaughter."

A silence— it trembles, and Yoongi allows himself a breath.

"Duty" he spits, and now, now, the anger trickles in, sharpening his voice into something cold, something terrifying and chilling. "You claim it to be their duty. You glorify war, you glorify sacrifice, yet you hide behind your titles and your positions." Yoongi snarls, and takes a step forward.

He feels Taehyung's hand on his back fall and he takes deliberate measured steps until he stands before the men bent over the floor, tension locking their spines into place.
He crouches to his knees and Jimin yanks the man up by his hair till he can look nowhere but into the wrath in Yoongi's eyes.

"You don't care how many die as long as you get to hoard your wealth." Yoongi spits. "And you dare to say that it is my duty to be sold off like fruit about to rot?"

He grabs the man by the face, and carves crimson crescents into flesh.

"Seokjin" He calls out, not looking away. The name feels wrong against the cold timbre of his voice.

"Your Highness" he hears the perfect flatness of Seokjin's voice followed by a light tread of footsteps.

Yoongi digs his nails deeper and smiles when the man flinches and trembles. "Strip them of their lands, their property, status and titles. Have the guards escort them to the dungeons till a better suited occupation is decided for them." He says, releasing his hold, and the man crumples to the floor.

Yoongi watches them cower and feels the nauseating sickness return, how it churns and ferments in his gut.

You are your own person, he thinks, one last time, before folding the thought like one would a paper crane, and letting it fly.

Guards shuffle forward at Seokjin’s command, binding the Elders’ wrists in shackles before hauling them up to their feet. There are wide indignant eyes lit up with fury, loud threats and promises resounding in the air, but at the wave of Seokjin’s hand the Elders’ are shoved from behind, twisted around and escorted out of the hall.

Once the hall plunges into silence again, Yoongi stands up and eyes every person in the room, daring them to refute his next words.

"Make preparations to call off the attack. The war is over." He instructs the generals.

One of the warlords makes a sound of dissent and Yoongi snaps his head to look at him, eyes flashing. "The war is over. And if you cannot accept it, you may walk out of this room. His Majesty has no use for those who cannot accept change."

The hall quietens again, and Yoongi feels like he's trying to bend the world to his will, and he wonders when it'll snap and break.

He turns to look at Seokjin and tries to keep his voice from wavering, his knees from shaking and falling and begging for someone to take his place, someone else– anyone, because he can feel the way his body screams and aches, brittle and waiting for the slightest push of the wind to knock it down. And Seokjin’s gaze is so warm and tender and fierce, and Yoongi doesn’t understand because all he can see branded behind his eyelids are his claws around Taehyung and the dagger driven inside Jungkook.

"Inform all officials and nobility that there's to be a change of regime.” He gives the order, feeling a lot like a child playing king– less king and more a tyrant. “All land and titles will be redistributed. Also–"

Yoongi takes in a rattle of a breath.
"Notify the kingdom that the temple is to be destroyed, along with all manuscripts and evidence suggesting the kumiho’s existence."

Yoongi raises his fingers to trace the hollow of his throat, the skin is unmarked but there is the slightest tug— a phantom rope that pulls, that tightens and constricts in an attempt to keep his next words from spilling out.

"There shall be no more sacrifices. The curse of this bloodline—"

Yoongi straightens and takes a long moment to look at the ceiling, he feels his breath hitch, feels the thousands of shards embedded in his lungs and–

_I will always love you_

"will die with me."

The words leave his lips like a delicate wisp of smoke.

And immediately after, his vision whitens and Yoongi feels his body flinch then crumple and fall like someone cut the strings to his limbs.

Arms wrap around him, catching him before he collapses, warm and familiar in their heat. Yoongi makes out Taehyung’s voice, the tremble in it, and briefly he wonders if he’s dying.

And then for a fraction of a moment, he wishes that he does. But like a curse, he keeps breathing.

End Notes

for the curious, if any,

_yoongi’s character was modelled after sasuke, and taehyung’s after naruto. the fic was inspired by the sasuke redemption arc, with naruto saving sasuke from the darkness narrative, but these two pretty much took off on their own. seokjin & namjoon both quote itachi at one point, god bless you if you caught that._

please share what you liked! it truly makes me the happiest! and if you love sasuke please mention that too! thank you and have a nice day!

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