you make my heart beat (faster)

by roommate

Summary

Everything's going too fast. One step forward, and Seokjin's tendering his resignation from a company he's been servicing for eight years. Two steps, and he's going out for interviews, reviewing a job offer, signing a contract, on the first bus to Sallim-dong. Three steps, and he finds himself trapped in an elevator with an ex who ran away from him years ago and with his faith in humanity in tow.

Enter the agency's Chief Creative Officer, and everything slows the fuck down.

(Warning: mentions of alcohol consumption and minor characters making out under the influence (completely consensual, though), mentions of minor character death, mentions of family issues and self-destructive tendencies in the past. Please take these warnings seriously.)

Notes

hi nini! so initially, i was hoping to make this fic a combination of around 3-4 of the first meeting prompts, but somewhere between me plotting things out and crying over yoonjin, i... sorta... got carried away with one of the first meeting prompts. haha ;; that said, i really hope you enjoy this! i recommend keeping a box of tissues on standby because some parts may be hella #relatable. i tried not to be obvious, but oh well.
also, despite all the warnings, rest assured that 1) 95% of the fic is fun and games; and 2) the fic ends happily!

as always, thank you to the gang for always cheering me on, for the support, for lending an ear whenever i needed someone to work out plot points with. to c, for the beta work and consults and for generally being such great support, thank you so much! lastly, many thanks to z and s for letting me throw chunks of this fic at them on the regular. your squeals and screams are my delight. i love you ♥

side pairings include: seokjin/jeongguk, taehyung/jimin, blink-and-you'll-miss-it namjoon/joonmyun, yoongi/pantry table, seokjin/work
I love people, Seokjin reminds himself for the nth time that day and coaxes the corners of his mouth to pull up into a bigger smile. To anyone who doesn't know him, he probably looks like some overeager kid wanting to be friends with everyone and every single organism that breathes in this agency, but to people who can read him faster than they can say I'm gonna kick these fucking clients in the balls, he's pretty sure that it's obvious the last thing he wants right now is to have to present himself to another group of people, much more the creatives. After all, the lot's notorious for making the lives of people in accounts a living hell. He's had his fair share of bad experiences with the artists and designers back in his old company and even those he has worked with as a third-party supplier, has had to put up with the sickening attitude for nearly a decade; he can only imagine how the 'traditional creatives' – as Yoochun, his former boss, had lovingly put it – act around accounts people like him.

And it's almost one in the afternoon. The last meal he had was at seven in the morning because someone decided to get extra paranoid with arriving at work late on his first day (and he's always paranoid that he'll punch in late at work by just a few minutes even if he leaves his house at least an hour and a half before starting time). He had been trapped in a meeting room for close to two hours, strapped to his seat as he listened to the Human Resource Manager ramble about company policies that were supposed to be a no-brainer already. Then he was summoned to the Finance Director's office for another orientation on finance policies, on how to properly file his timesheet and the repercussions of failing to submit it on time. He felt a lot like a kid being lectured by grown-ups on 'adult things'. It felt a lot like being strangled into submission. And now, he's being 'routed' in the office like an envelope being passed from one person to another to collect money for a big celebration. So it's warranted, right, his burning desire to just hide someplace else and curl up in a corner? It's normal to want to raise his arms in the air and cry out in a loud, deafening voice, Make them stop, right? Doesn't he have every right to want to throw in the towel and give up this early? He isn't the type of person who will just sink to his knees in defeat on a normal day, but he's cold and hungry and tired of grinning ear-to-ear. He's just about done with introducing himself to every single person in this agency. He just wants to breathe.

His stomach grumbles. It feels like taking a hundred punches to the gut. And he's always been told to trust what his gut tells him.

"Hey–hey. Back off. All of you. Especially you," Joonmyun says, cocking an eyebrow in the direction of the guy to his right. The one with bright pink hair. One of them, anyway; there's at least three of them in the creative department. Seokjin's afraid he'll have to stop calling them 'Pink Guy #1 to 3' at the back of his mind sometime soon, or at least until he starts working with one of them.
"Why do you guys–" Joonmyun heaves a sigh, loud and resounding. He isn't much older than Seokjin, but the dark circles under his eyes and the way his eyebrows automatically meet at the middle in a sad little crease make him look at least a decade older. That's agency life for you, Seokjin tells himself. That's the life you've chosen to live for the next few years. "You have to stop scaring the fresh blood. At this rate, I'll be losing people every month."

"Not before we drive them insane, hyung," Seokjin mutters, then offers Joonmyun a tight-lipped smile. Joonmyun widens his eyes, a peculiar glimmer lighting up at the corners, then he's laughing in soft, hiccuped giggles. Letting some of the fatigue that had pulled at his features earlier lift to tease the corners of his eyes into a soft crinkle. To the rest of the pool of creatives who wear their hair in all shades of colors in Revlon's color palette – Seokjin would like to think they're all using Revlon to
boost their client's sales – Seokjin says, "Kim Seokjin, accounts supervisor. Nice to meet you." He gives them all a careful, scrutinizing gaze, but remembers to keep his eyes bright, shining, more accepting than discerning. Good cop, bad cop. It's an age-old technique that hasn't failed him yet. "And I'm excited to work with all of you, as well."

Pink Guy #1 snorts and laughs a little. He looks like he's seconds away from saying something, lips parted and poised to speak, but he doesn't. Instead, he shakes his head and slumps back in his seat, puts on his earphones, and begins to type on his computer.

"You're gonna be their favorite, I just know it," Joonmyun whispers in his ear later, chuckling. Seokjin tilts his head, ready to question, but soon Joonmyun's whisking him away to the production area, then the broadcast department, then to another area Seokjin can't even remember anymore, making him introduce himself even to the cups neatly arranged on the dish rack and the coffee maker in the hidden nook on the first floor. "Now this will be your best friend. Protip: always use the standard extract– Oh hey, Sunyoung! My new kid here wants to meet you! Jin, introduce yourself–"

Seokjin's supply of enthusiasm runs dry about half an hour after, closer to two in the afternoon now than 'lunch time'. There are still a lot of people in the pantry, though, all bundled in little clusters depending on their department. The ones who keep shuffling in and out of the smoking area with tens and thousands of scratch papers are probably the copywriters, one half of the creatives. The ones trading magic cards over rolls of kimbap and too much kimchi are from production, people in charge of making sure that users of applications and websites have the best possible experience ever. The ones staring at nothing in particular and spilling coffee all over their jjigae once they come back to life should be the art directors, if he remembers correctly – he distinctly recalls hearing Joonmyun and Jimin talk about a 'Kim Taehyung' submitting a rough sketch of a banner design on table napkin freckled with red and brown dots. Taehyung called it 'art', then turned it into real design hours after he'd given Jimin a preview of it. Then the tragic ones still talking about work during lunch are from accounts. Seokjin should know. He was one of those unfortunate souls back in his old job.

He snorts to himself. And he's going to be one of those people again. There's no escaping the curse; there's only finding a workaround for it.

"Well, I guess we can eat in our station. Everywhere else is packed," Jimin mumbles. He tugs at Seokjin's sleeve and pulls him away from the growing noise, from the mix of discussions fast turning into a blur of sounds filling Seokjin's ears. They bump into a few people along the way, most of them looking like they need more sleep than food, and quickly make their descent back to the second floor. Only then does Seokjin realize the stark difference between the chaos in the pantry, the brewing war in the creatives area, and the sweet, sweet silence in the accounts area when everyone else is having lunch. And only then, at that exact moment, does Seokjin feel the need to say, shit, he's actually thankful he's in accounts and not elsewhere. He's glad he's not part of the mess that is the creative team. "I don't get it. You have a company with close to two hundred people and you still don't want to expand your pantry? You have people... having lunch in their work area, and you still think it's okay to just pack everyone in a tiny, tiny room during eating time? It doesn't make sense!"

"Maybe the bosses just want people to eat faster?" Seokjin sets his lunch box down on his table, then reaches over to arrange Jimin's things that have spilled onto his part of the long table in neat piles. He stuffs the pens in a paper cup – in hindsight, maybe he should've asked Jimin first if the cup was his – and throws the hump of crumpled paper on Jimin's desk into the waste basket. Even wipes a small portion of Jimin's desk because how can Jimin even work with the chaos all around him? Seokjin would pass out just trying to concentrate in such an untidy fraction of space. "Make them return to work sooner and have them get more things done? I don't know. That's the only reason I can come up with."
Jimin blinks twice – at Seokjin's reasoning or at the sudden clearing in his work station, Seokjin can't tell yet. All he knows is that Jimin's calmed down considerably, eyebrows no longer furrowed but one of them cocked at him. And if all his years of honing his skill at reading people are anything to go by then he's pretty sure this means, I hate to say this, but you're right. Alternatively, how the hell did you even come up with that conclusion just hours into being in this company?

"Well, that makes a lot of sense." Jimin's shoulders fall forward at the same time that he peels the lid of his lunch box off of the snug fit. It comes off with a light pop, just enough to make Seokjin shiver, but he doesn't miss Jimin's loud and heavy sigh. "My point is, shouldn't they be promoting work-life balance or something? That during lunch time, you should just... I dunno, be enjoying the company of your officemates instead of actually working? That you shouldn't even be thinking of work at all? Why isn't that a thing?"

Seokjin snorts. There are a number of ways that he can answer that: the advertising industry is inherently filled with crazy people who work hard and party even harder. Koreans are workaholics by nature. Business owners simply don't care about the mental and physical health of their workers because, at the end of the day, they're still operating a business. It's all about money, not the workers. It's about the won that comes flooding in year on year, with every new business win that they get. And what better way to keep money coming in than by rewarding people who stay in the office long after they've completed the required eight hours of daily work, right? What better way than to keep the cash flow healthy than by recruiting people who won't stop honing their craft until they deem it perfect? What better way to keep the business alive than by keeping their pantry small and subtly planting seeds of listlessness in people's brains and whispering in their ear, if you spend more than thirty minutes trying to relax, then shame on you, human. Shame on you for knowing that 'rest' is a necessity. Shame on you for wanting something that should be more of a right and not a privilege. "Because we're in the advertising industry?"

"Thanks, hyung. Very helpful," Jimin groans. He pops a slice of yellow radish in his mouth, then breathes out a heavy sigh. "I'm glad you're here now, though. I can never talk to the oldies about this. They all give me weird looks whenever I start talking about insane work hours and--"

Seokjin stops halfway through setting his cupcake down on the lid of his lunch box. He hasn't started eating yet, hasn't even pulled his chopsticks out of their container or touched any of his food, and yet Jimin's looking at him like he needs to be saved. Like he's digging his own grave for the millionth time that day just by making sure his lunch area is neat and all set before actually digging into his food. I'm sorry I have strange eating habits? he's tempted to argue, but soon Jimin's setting his own chopsticks down on his lunch box and looking around, eyes narrowed and lips pursed. "What are you doing?"

"Making sure nobody steals your cupcake," Jimin mutters. That's stupid; nobody would steal my cupcake, Seokjin mumbles at the back of his mind, but Jimin looks pretty serious about this whole cupcake theft thing, it's almost hilarious. He looks like some secret agent on a covert mission, Seokjin muses, even more when Jimin puts up a shield around the cupcake Seokjin had just set down on the table. Half of Seokjin wants to join in on the fun and play cupcake cop just for kicks; half of him feels weird having to watch Jimin get protective over a little treat that's hardly the most harmful thing in the world. "Rule number one: never bring cupcakes to work. Everybody here loves cupcakes and I'm pretty sure someone will want to ask for a bite if and when you do start eating that out in the open. Rule number two: if you absolutely have to bring cupcakes to work because, I dunno, you just love 'em that much, make sure you bring enough to fill the tummies of all the creatives. Yes, all of them."
Seokjin snorts. "No big deal. I can bake a lot of cupcakes. It's not the first time I'll be baking for a lot of people, anyway." He shrugs, snatches the cupcake from Jimin, and gently peels the table napkin that had stuck to the base. Maybe he should have packed the cupcake in a little box. He still has some leftover from when he had to make cookies for Christmas. For a team of twenty people. And for those who ordered cookies from him. Baking took over his life then and, at that moment, he wanted nothing but to bake forever. Screw working in an established digital publishing agency. Cookies made him happy. *Eat slugs.* "Seriously, that's better than having to cook kimbap and jjajangmyun for the entire office. I had to do that a couple of times before, in my old job--"

"You don't understand, hyung: they're suckers for sweets. They're... *cookie monsters."

Seokjin feels his chest tighten a little, but he shrugs that off with a chuckle. It's *all in the past* now, he tells himself, again and again until the quickening pulse at the base of his throat relaxes. It's *all in the past.* "Relax. It's just a cupcake. If they ask, I can make--"

"Oh, fresh blood makes cupcakes?"

"Fuck." Jimin widens his eyes and gives Seokjin a stern look. *Seriously, all for a cupcake?* Seokjin almost blurts out, almost laughs, bright and raucous, but soon he's hearing a chorus of 'ooh, cupcakes' in the distance, like the mere mention of the treat is an invitation to hell. And it might as well be because the next thing he knows, he's seeing the creatives pop in one by one, eyes wide and glimmering even with the dim lighting in the area. There's got to be at least five of them now gathering just a few feet away from the foot of the staircase, at least five of them eyeing his little cupcake with so much interest that he almost feels his dessert's in danger. So maybe he should have had the foresight to bring to work the entire tray of cupcakes he'd baked for himself the night before. Handing out cupcakes is a good way to make friends. Maybe he should have taken Jimin's warning a bit more seriously. Maybe he should be hiding the cupcake from everyone else now or trying to find a way to divide the poor little cupcake among all the creatives passing by their area, closing in on them, caging them in. Maybe--

*Maybe it isn't so bad, stuffing the whole thing in my mouth?* he muses as he sucks in a deep, violent breath, and picks up the treat from where it's resting peacefully on the lid. He shoves the cupcake in his mouth all in one go, lips stretching to their fullest and wrapping around the base of the cupcake, teeth raking against it before leaving marks on the surface. The stretch feels a bit weird, hurts a little when he tries to chomp down on the dessert and push it further inside his mouth, but it isn't anything he can't manage. For the most part, he's more concerned he'll get icing on the tip of his nose and, if he's *that* unlucky, on the crisp white polo he'd prepared especially for his first day at work. Never mind that he probably looks silly bordering on *crazy* in front of people he'll be working with for the next few years; at least he has saved his poor little cupcake's life. At least he did something instead of just sitting there and watching other people devour the treat he'd prepared for himself the night before.

Someone laughs. It isn't too shrill or bright, not even enough to break thick walls of silence, but it's loud enough to cut through the collective *whoa's* of the pool of creatives that have gathered at the foot of the stairs. Seokjin lets his eyes wander, then, looking around in search for the source of the voice, and spots a figure in the distance, just a few steps away from where the creatives are. The stranger's features are blurred by the harsh shadow slanted across his face, drawn by the hat he's wearing, the same hat trapping bright blond hair beneath the brim but peeking from behind the man's ears, and yet Seokjin can very well see the gentle upward curl at the corners of the man's mouth, the faint glimmer in the man's eyes, the way the man's shoulders shake a little when Seokjin almost chokes on the cupcake but manages to bite down on a portion of it and swallow it down.

The first thought that occurs to Seokjin is, *how the hell did you even get past these people?*. The
second, what's so funny about a guy almost choking on a cupcake, huh?

The man widens his eyes then sucks in his bottom lip. It looks a lot like a response, a soft 'a lot of things' between bouts of laughter spilling from the man's lips, but Seokjin takes that as a twisted invitation to keep munching on his dessert. He takes big bites of the treat until he's broken it down into little portions, swallows the chunks when he feels the tight knots in his throat ease a little. You can stop laughing now, Seokjin wants to say, wants to scream out loud, but he can't feel his throat around the thick lump of cupcake lodged in the middle. He can't even feel his mouth anymore; all his mind can register is the dull burn at the corners of his mouth and a simmering pain in his jaw, spilling onto the base of his throat where the damned cupcake still is.

And then there's the way the man presses the back of his hand to his mouth, the way the man tilts his head just a little, revealing the crinkles at the corners of his eyes and the laughter still dancing in them. The way Seokjin's insides lurch and the way his chest grows tighter when their gazes meet. Seokjin swallows hard, pushing the rest of the dessert and all the what's and why's swimming at the back of his teeth down his throat. Then the man's shaking his head and turning on his heel, making his ascent to the third floor, disappearing from Seokjin's line of sight.

"Well, that was scary," Jimin comments, then sinks back in his seat. Only then does Seokjin realize that the rest of the creatives have gone on their merry way, that he has icing on the corners of his mouth. That Jimin's looking at him with the most curious gaze like he's just witnessed the strangest thing ever – the impossible. "He never giggles."

In Seokjin's honest opinion, transitioning from publishing to advertising isn't so much of a challenge. In essence, he's still doing the same thing – managing client expectations and the temperament of the art director and copywriter for his assigned brand, wrangling extensions from clients so he can somehow make sense of his creatives' tasks for the day, and attempting to keep himself sane but failing miserably in the very end. Workload is still unpredictable because clients will never wean themselves off of the habit of demanding designs and materials at five in the afternoon and expecting to see them in their inboxes by six. Miracles are so last millennium, and advertising is all about leveraging on what's new and what's in. Seokjin has long given up on hoping clients will understand the simple concept of 'timelines' and 'being good and understanding humans'. Heck, he's probably already given up on believing clients are actually humans like them and not evil creatures sent to make a living hell out of their lives.

And, well, work hours are still insane. Not that he's actually surprised, but part of him sort of… held onto this tiny vessel of hope that life would cut him some slack. Granted, he was able to clock out before seven in the evening the first two days, but everything has gone downhill since his third day at work. Ten in the morning on Wednesday that week, Joonmyun briefed him on a brand he was set to handle for the next few months, maybe even the entire year. Right after that, Joonmyun had dropped the big bomb and told Seokjin he had to come up with a rebranding strategy for a presentation that was fast approaching. "Nothing too intricate. Just give me top line ideas, then we can flesh things out for your deck creation later." Then Seokjin and Joonmyun had to present the polished ideas to the Chief Creative Officer the following day, three in the afternoon. Or at least that was the plan. The guy didn't turn up even if Joonmyun made sure to set an appointment with him through email and text. He didn't even acknowledge Joonmyun's messages at all.

"Oh well. He's a busy guy. Always hopping from one client to another just to get more businesses,
but eh." Joonmyun had shrugged, leaned against the glass door, then scribbled a quick note, saying, *You owe me coffee and three hours of your time for my preso, loser,* on one of the sticky notes lying around. "We'll catch him within the week, I'm pretty sure. If not this week, then early next week. Definitely before Wednesday, otherwise I'll strap him to his seat– But anyway, this buys us more time to flesh out ideas, right?" Then Joonmyun gave Seokjin a pat on the back, gave his arm a gentle squeeze, made the corners of his eyes crinkle in a way that told Seokjin he was probably in trouble on his third day at work. "So, can I expect something in my inbox by... five? Then we can try to shoot them down again just to see if they're the best possible ideas we can come up with, finalize stuff for deck creation, then... can I see deck by the end of the day?"

Seokjin glanced at his watch. Joonmyun was asking him to come up with fresh ideas in an hour. If anything was ever going to end today, Seokjin was pretty sure it was going to be his life. *"You mean 6 p.m.?"*

Joonmyun snorted. *"The party starts at 6 in these parts, kid. End of day means 11 p.m.."* A bright smile, then, *"And then tomorrow, we can do a test run before presenting to Yoongi. Make sure we have all the kinks ironed out before we get the ideas butchered. How does that sound?"

"Ridiculous," Seokjin confessed. A heartbeat, then, *"You're not serious, right? I mean– Hyung, back when we were in publishing, you weren't–"*

"Time changes people," Joonmyun murmured, then took a deep breath. His eyes looked like barricaded doors, hooded, dark, but soon he was shaking it off and looking up at Seokjin again. The corners of his mouth pulled up at the corners in a tight, tight smile. *"So yeah, how does that sound? Good?"

Well, for starters, you sound like a complete asshole, Seokjin had been tempted to say, but he knew better than to push Joonmyun's buttons at a time like this. So instead, he replied with nervous laughter, a small smile. Went straight to work and cocooned himself in music and the sheer determination to finish 'early', letting those fuel him until he was done with his tasks. He managed to get the ideas cleared by Joonmyun by eight in the evening, sent the deck by ten, received applause and a tight hug from Joonmyun by half past eleven. Got kicked out from the office by twelve because you still have to get up early tomorrow, fresh blood! Take care on your way home! The following day, he found canned coffee on his table and weird scribbles scrawled all over the body of the can. He couldn't make out the words that much, but he could see the cute little smiley and the ellipsis resting just beside it.

"Looks ominous," Jimin had said, then raised his hands in front of him when Seokjin shot him a stern look. *"I'm just saying, the only time Joonmyun-hyung does that is when–"

"He's plotting my death, I just know it," Seokjin mutters under his breath when Joonmyun's emails come rushing in at six in the evening. On a normal day, Joonmyun would approach him first, talk to him about the task at hand before finalizing everything through email, but the poor guy's been trapped in too many meetings the whole day. And Seokjin, for all of his hatred for staying in the office late and having to sacrifice eating time for more time to work on his projects, doesn't have the heart to just shrug off Joonmyun's requests. They're not even little favors – Joonmyun's asking him to take a crack at working on a credentials deck, something they have to present the following week. Joonmyun's telling him to make sure Jimin doesn't combust while working on his own deck that he has to present through a video conference in less than twenty-four hours, *on a Saturday.* And Joonmyun's asking him to keep it together, to not lose his cool, to just take deep, shaky breaths as he powers through the long to-do list Joonmyun had attached to his email. So maybe Joonmyun isn't planning how to kill him; Joonmyun is just thinking of ways to con Seokjin into submission and sell his soul to the overtime work gods. "And Jimin, why do you have a video conference on a
weekend?"

Jimin snorts. "Client has no concept of a 'weekend'."

"Well, educate him on it."

"Wish I could, hyung, but you know we operate around these parts." Jimin lets his face fall forward, forehead landing just a few centimeters shy of his keyboard. His hair falls on the keys, though, slipping between the gaps and making a home for themselves there. Just surrendering without putting up a fight, unlike how Jimin would normally push back his bangs in an effort to keep them from sticking to his skin, from getting in the way. Seokjin gets it, though, Jimin not bothering with appearances at such an hour even if training has taught them to always look good and presentable.

Jimin hasn't had time to breathe since that well-deserved lunch break at their work stations Monday of that week. He hasn't had time to actually make sure it isn't Wednesday anymore since Joonmyun has bombarded him with tasks two days ago. Both of them are tired, restless, listless. It's a Friday night. Even account executives like them deserve to rest and breathe. And yet here they are, tucked in their work stations at six in the evening the day just before the weekend, tasks piling up on them like the day isn't about to come to a close yet. "Client is king, not content. Whoever wrote the bullshit code on employee's rights totally forgot to say that clients must never act like assholes. There's no convincing them to understand us, hyung. There's no winning against those assholes."

True, Seokjin muses. In the eight years he's spent in publishing, there was no day that he didn't spend wishing clients would treat them differently. "It's not the actual workload that makes life hell," he calls one of his creatives saying then. "It's the clients. So even if you promote me or whatever, as long as we're still servicing the same bunch of assholes--"

"I get it, they're asses," Seokjin had said in response, then massaged his creative's shoulders. The man leaned into his touch, breath spilling from his lips in a fluttery sigh, and all of a sudden Seokjin felt as if he shouldn't be there. That he should be dropping his hands to his sides in an instant, pulling away, not giving in. Yet the man groaned when Seokjin eased the pressure on his muscles, kept him right in place even if Seokjin was ten seconds away from stuffing his hands in his pockets and erasing what he had just done from his memory. So in an effort to rid himself of his awkwardness, he said, "But that doesn't mean we can't try to save them or something. Someone has to stand up against them. Someone has to try."

"Sometimes, these people have be reminded that we're actually people, as well." Seokjin offers Jimin a small smile when the latter risks a glance at him, eyebrows meeting in the middle in a nasty little furrow. There's none of the Jimin who greeted him with a bright, bright grin at the start of the week, none of the man who had welcomed him to the department with open arms and free chocolate nuggets. All he can see now is a boy who wants to go home, get some rest, regain a sense of living.

All he can see is a Jimin who needs someone and is just about done getting through life alone. Still, he looks around for an audience before inching closer, as if asking Jimin, Do you let people baby you often? Are you comfortable not looking strong all the time? Am I even allowed to let you know that I've figured you out, or would you rather I shut up now and not do a thing? "I mean, yeah, thanks for thinking we're capable of doing all these things, client, but no thanks for turning us into machines? You'll be surprised how many of these clients forget we have limits. So someone really has to tell them. And tell them off."

Jimin snorts. He blinks a few times as if in an effort to push the fatigue to the back of his eyes again. "And it has to be me."

"Stop that. You don't have to do everything on your own." Seokjin reaches out, threading his fingers through Jimin's hair, and gives it a light ruffle. "It has to start with someone, that's for sure, but it
They end up getting the presentation decks done, anyway, along with a few more things on Joonmyun's list of favors. Jimin finishes just before eleven in the evening but doesn't leave until another half hour after, once Joonmyun has given him two thumbs up for the deck that he and Seokjin had put together. He even insists to stay, saying he'll wait for Seokjin to finish, "I can't just leave you here when you actually made time for me, hyung," but Seokjin only waves Jimin off and tells him he has to sleep or else he won't get any taller anytime soon. Teases Jimin by humming, "Then I won't be able to fight the urge to call you tiny forever and--" Then Jimin's storming out of the accounts area, groaning his goodbye but shooting Seokjin a bright smile just before disappearing around the corner.

"Don't strain yourself!" Jimin calls out as a goodbye, then waves over his shoulder.

"I'll try?" Seokjin says in response, laughing. Doesn't confess, too late; I'm already strained as hell. It takes him another hour to wrap up everything he needs to accomplish before the start of his 'real' weekend. "At least you won't have to worry about anything for the next few days anymore," he whispers to himself as he looks around, surveying the area for any sign of life beyond the low humming of the air conditioning, and heaves a sigh when he finds nobody else on the floor. It's already a Saturday and most people have lives outside of work on the last day of the work week so really, what is he expecting? For someone to join him in his suffering and sympathize with him? For Jimin to return from his peaceful slumber upon realizing that bullshit, Seokjin was lying earlier when he said he was okay and didn't need any help with his tasks anymore, that Seokjin was a fucking hypocrite for giving him a lecture on knowing when to say 'no' and when to stop when he was obviously practicing the exact opposite? Seokjin scoffs. "Being amazing sucks sometimes."

Someone laughs. Seokjin's pretty sure he isn't imagining things – there's nothing in the silence of the entire area to mess with his hearing or his ability to discern what's real from what isn't. There's only the faint crackling of the lights, the machine sounds of his laptop fast fading into white noise as it shuts down once and for all, the rustling of his clothes chopping up the laughter still hanging awkwardly in the air. He shifts his gaze, then, looking up from where he'd been watching the display of his laptop dissolve into a thick black, and finds the same guy who'd giggled at him at the start of the week looking at him with furrowed eyebrows, a squinted gaze, head gently tilted to the side as his lips curled up into a smile just small enough to peel a few layers of fatigue off his features. "Yeah, it does. It sucks all the time."

"I was trying to be a bit... conservative," Seokjin reasons, then slips his laptop into its case. For a second, he considers bringing his laptop home and introducing it to the rest of his family of gadgets, but then the man's cocking an eyebrow at him like it's unusual for 'fresh blood' like him to be tucking work in his office bag and taking it with him on the first ride home. "Is it... against company policy to bring home our office laptop? Because the last time I checked--"

Giggling Guy chuckles. Introduce yourself, stranger, a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind says. Maybe, on another day, he'll entertain the small voice, but right now he's much too tired to even consider enunciating his words properly. So he waits with bated breath as the man twists his lips, gives him a once over, and adjusts the strap of his bag on his shoulder. "No, not really. Why would you bring home work, though? It's Saturday. We don't get paid on Saturdays."

"Because nobody likes filing for reimbursements." Still, Seokjin unlocks his drawer and stores his laptop there, then shoves the rest of the papers still scattered on his desk inside the caddy. "Or for overtime work, at least. Paperwork's the toughest work to accomplish, really. I'd pick filling out my timesheet over that every single day."
Giggling Guy doesn't say a word, doesn't even make a sound, but he *does* stay dangerously still. He has one foot resting firmly on the steps of the stairs and the other just barely touching the ground, as if Seokjin had somehow suspended him midway through his descent from the third floor. And maybe Seokjin *has*. The guy's tapping one foot on the ground, as if counting down to the seconds Seokjin finally meets him at the foot of the stairs to the second floor so they can make their journey to the lobby together, the soft shuffling of their feet falling into step, into a familiar enough rhythm Giggling Guy can hum to. Part of Seokjin wants to say, *Look, I didn't force you to wait for me*, but at the same time he doesn't mind the company. He doesn't mind the little crackles of music spilling from the man's lips. He doesn't mind the thick blanket of silence that had been draped on his shoulder slipping and falling to the ground at all.

"Nobody should ever work on a Saturday," the man says when they reach the ground floor, his voice warm and velvety despite the impending cold outside, despite the whipping winds knocking on the glass doors of the company from the other side. He wraps his fingers around the handle of the door and steals one last glance at Seokjin, meeting Seokjin's eyes in a careful, scrutinizing gaze, smiling at him. Soon, Giggling Guy is swinging the door forward, letting air in, setting Seokjin free. Disappearing into the night like one of those caped crusaders Seokjin used to read about back in college, when he still had time to read manhwa and other comics. It feels a lot like a scene in one of Seokjin's favorite anime, but—*nah*. He's probably just tired and drained and sleepy. He's just imagining things. It's closer to one in the morning now than twelve and Seokjin gets nothing but bad ideas past twelve midnight. So he shakes his head, slips on his beanie, then shuts the door behind him closed, wrapping up his first week in a soft click of the lock.

And he pushes the memory of the man's soft humming as they made their descent to the lobby, the small, peculiar smile on the man's lips when they locked gazes for a few seconds before pulling away and giving way to each other at the door, the way the cool evening air tousled the man's pale gold hair, softened the hard angles of his cheeks as he walked away from the office building, and made Seokjin's insides turn, to the very back of his head, far away from the thundering pulse at the base of his throat, the heavy thumping in his chest.

It's not that Seokjin ever *believed* his schedule would ease up in the weeks to come. If anything, he'd been expecting it to get more loaded with tasks, meetings, brainstormings, and the reality was that he didn't mind. He liked being busy. He liked seeing every single item in his to-do list crossed off (then getting an email with new tasks for him broken down in nice little bullets). He liked not having enough quiet time to think about a lot of things he would otherwise have time to contemplate on had he not been caught between Joonmyun to his right and an enraged client to his left. So he's fine. He's breathing. He's alive, for the most part, and running from across the street straight to the entrance of the office building, trying to catch an internal meeting he should have been in ten minutes ago. He's alright.

"Fuck alignments. Stars never fucking align," he grumbles under his breath at the same time that he shoots the security a curt smile. The security gives him a wary look at first but greets him 'good afternoon', just the same, tells him that a 'Baekhyun' had been scouring the accounts area for him for the past few minutes and asking if anyone's hiding him, "Give me fresh blood and we'll get your materials done way before deadline. *I said, give--me--fresh blood--*" "Hello. Who is-- Ah, Baekhyun, yes. Sorry, I just came from a client meet-- Yeah, the guards actually told me you've been looking--"
"For me", Seokjin means to say, but the rest of his words fade into thin air when he catches sight of a familiar face. A familiar smile, even, one so vivid that it makes him shiver all over and makes his voice crack when he says into the receiver, "I'll be right there. Gotta pee first." It's been years since he has last seen her, though. She's wearing her hair short now, no longer past her shoulders. The strands scream at him in a bright golden yellow, but it sort of lightens her features, lifts the fatigue and the years written in the little wrinkles on her face. And the smile that once simply gave the corners of her lips a gentle upward curl has now bloomed into a grin that reaches the corners of her eyes and makes them crinkle. She's beautiful, in every sense, but Seokjin can't say the memories he's had with her are pretty. Heck, he can't even bring himself to talk about those years at all.

"Jin?" she whispers. She furrows her eyebrows, squints, and ah, there it is, the habit she has of sucking in her bottom lip when she's more sure than uncertain of what she's seeing, what she's realizing. It has been at least a decade since Seokjin has last seen her in the flesh, the first time in years that he's had to develop a knee-jerk reaction to her that isn't sinking to the depths of the ocean or swimming so far away from coast, deeper into the sea, yet damn, do the memories come flooding in like angry waves rushing to shore. All of a sudden, he's seeing flashes of that night, their thighs pressed so close to each other, fingers laced but not tied in a tight knot.

A blink, then he's seeing the shy look on her features when she broaches the topic of 'forever', of taking their relationship a step further, of marriage and building a family and building their lives around each other.

Another blink, then he's seeing the panicked expression on his face, the way his lips tremble, the stutter in his speech when he says, "I don't now. Isn't it-- Isn't it a bit too early to think of that? To imagine that right now? I just-- I want to focus on the present, Ahreum. Get through college, land a good job, save up, then--"

"Then build a future with me?"

Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath now as he watches Ahreum inch closer, one for every step back that he takes until he feels the back of his legs bumping into something solid – a chair, a table, a box, he can't tell at the moment. He can't even be bothered to look so he can find out. Every fiber in his body can recognize the slightest shift in her muscles, in her expression, in the way she slows in her steps when people pass between them and the way she speeds up her pace when they're well out of sight.

"We shouldn't rush things, Ahreum-ah," he recalls saying that time, reasoning with her in the best way he knew how. Ahreum had leaned back slowly, tentatively, the cold pads of her fingers leaving goosepimples on Seokjin's skin when she dropped her hands to her sides. And Seokjin had felt so bad for having to shove reality in her face back then, but at the same time he didn't want to make her believe that the end of their short-lived 'forever' wasn't going to end anytime soon. They weren't kids anymore. They shouldn't be playing games. They were approaching senior year already and the last thing Seokjin wanted was to make bad decisions on his final year in college. So he whispered into the growing space between them, "We're young and maybe we'll end up liking different things in a year or two and it's just--"

He had heaved a sigh, then hung his head low. Bit down hard on his lower lip for fear of blurting out a confession: I can imagine it, just not with you. When he had felt the tightness in his throat ease, he met her in the eye again, cleared his throat of any chains wrapped around it then added, "It's just... too soon. I don't want to screw things up."

Too late, kid. You already did, he tells himself now, as Ahreum's shoulders lift before she breathes out a shaky sigh. "Kim Seokjin. It's... been a while," she says, pausing only to give him a once over.
It feels like being put to the test again, being given another chance. It feels like reliving his college days in the worst way possible. "I didn't expect to see you here."

And I certainly didn't expect you to stay because the last time this happened, you ran away and erased 'us' from your life, Seokjin almost cries out, but he manages to bite the inside of his cheek to keep himself from saying something stupid. He's good with words and dealing with people on most days, but he's just come from a three-hour meeting that seemed more like trying to wrestle with the client and convince him that it wasn't possible to pool the creatives in one place on such short notice and make them create a content plan in less than a day. Only halfway through the day and he already feels drained; seeing Ahreum in the flesh, rising from the ashes of his past... feels a lot like being run over by a truck. Twice. Then being tossed into a dump site and set aflame. "I work here."

Ahreum laughs a little. She still carries that weird, hiccuped giggle of hers even after all these years. It makes Seokjin's insides turn a little. "Yeah, I figured. I mean, they didn't ask for your I.D.–"

"Why are you here?"

"And they didn't stop you and you just marched all the way to--" She widens her eyes, grits her teeth, but picks up from where she'd left off, anyway. "–to where we are right now, where you keep moving away from me. Can you just stand still for a second?"

Seokjin snorts. It isn't easy telling his body to not follow the flight plan he's developed for every sticky situation he's been in and he's bound to find himself tangled in, but it shouldn't be too difficult to tell his system to calm down, either. He can stay rooted in a spot for hours if he wanted to, so what's a few more seconds, minutes? What's another wasted breath? But that's the thing – he doesn't want this confrontation. If he did then he would have looked for her years ago, when the wounds of the break up were still fresh and he still felt every fiber of his being scream her name, asking her why? If he did, then he would have spent every free second, every packet of time he could spare trying to figure the whole 'break up' out instead of dining with Hoseok, making up to his best friend all the lost time that Ahreum had snatched away from them, welcoming new people into his life and trying to know more about this junior who shared his passion and enthusiasm for Japanese animation. If he did, then the first thing he would have asked her a few minutes ago wasn't 'why are you here' but, instead, 'what took you so long to get here?'

So he doesn't stay still. He moves, shakes a little, steps to his side and makes his way to the service elevator just a few feet away. He'd take the stairs but it's easier to shut literal doors on people than to drop figurative walls between them. And right now, juggling the weight of his tasks and the heavy feeling in his chest, he'll go with the easiest way out, the quickest escape route. "I'm sorry, I'm late for a meeting," he manages to mutter as he walks away. "Maybe we can catch up some other time? Coffee, maybe? A quick snack? I don't know. Sorry, Ahreum, I'm just really–"

The lift gives off a soft 'ding', and Seokjin slips between the doors faster than he can exclaim 'yes!' at the back of his mind. Ahreum is quick, though, fast catching up and stopping the doors from sliding closed right in front of her. There's a blur of movement behind her, a twisted mix of black, white, and yellow, and for a second Seokjin's worried that shit, what if the elevator moved all of a sudden and dragged Ahreum along the narrow tunnel going up? What if they just got 'Final Destination-ed' or something? What if he's fucking things up again–

"Excuse me– Thank you," mutters a rough voice just behind Ahreum. Seokjin allows himself to tear his gaze from Ahreum's strained expression and widens his eyes when he finds Giggling Guy strutting right into the elevator. The brim of Giggling Guy's hat is the size of Asia on the world map on Joonmyun's desk. Or maybe even bigger, wider, but Seokjin doesn't care much about exact figures anymore. And part of him is thankful for the hat shielding more than half of the man's features
from his view because who knows what kind of look the man's giving him right now? The first time their gazes met, the man giggled at him while watching him shove an entire cupcake in his mouth. The second time, the man laughed at him for even considering bringing home his work laptop and accomplishing pending tasks over the weekend. Not that he can't hear the soft lilts in the man's voice, though; Seokjin can practically hear the man laughing, making fun of him when he says, "Third, please. Unless you two are going to the second floor but are just too lazy to take the stairs--"

Seokjin punches the damned button. He means to just give it a gentle push, but \textit{eh}. Control isn't one of his strongest suits when he's fresh from a draining meeting and is suddenly faced with an ex-girlfriend from too many summers ago. In fact, control's that crazy friend of his who keeps breathing down his neck and yelling in his ear, \textit{don't do anything you'll regret, Seokjin. You're thirty-three, for fuck's sake! If you ever try to do something stupid again, I swear to God--}

He might break a thing or two. Worse, he might break Ahreum's heart again, and this time he won't feel blisters on his fingers from crushing her heart in his hands anymore. He won't feel a thing.

"You still haven't moved on, have you?" Ahreum whispers. It starts out as a faint crackling noise, her syllables muffled in the hesitation in her voice, so she clears her throat and repeats, "You've never seen anyone else after that thing and now that we're bumping into each other after, what, \textit{decades? Eons?} Now that we're running into each other again in your office, you're suddenly forced to face that reality again, aren't you?" Ahreum's laughing now, low and rough like sandpaper against every part of Seokjin that is still too sensitive from too many days of rendering overtime work. \textit{This sounds foreign.} It's almost as if Ahreum has honed it in all the years that they had been apart. Seokjin can't blame her, though -- the reflex of pushing people away the second they get too close and too soon, he developed on his first week of 'being alone'. He got better at the whole maintaining safe distances from people thing as time passed by, and he'd perfected the art and science of knowing who to let into his life somewhere along the way. "And now you're thinking of running away and--"

"This is \textit{not} the time to be having this conversation."

"This is \textit{not} the time for you to run away again, Jin."

Seokjin scoffs. \textit{I'm the one who's been running away?} he's tempted to say, to lash out, but he should know better than to add fuel to the simmering flames of their argument already flaring up. He's an accounts supervisor -- surely, the last thing on his to-do list should be to lose his composure and explode in the face of people other than himself, right? But he's done keeping mum about every single thing thrown haphazardly at him. He's done playing victim, playing the part of the misunderstood villain who gains sympathy from people only after they're read the entire book at least three times. The first few weeks after the break-up, he had to live with Ahreum's friends shooting him weird, piercing glances. Only months after was he able to find the courage to look at them in the eye and tell them straight up, \textit{Look: if there's anyone you want to pin to the ground with those rude stares of yours, it should be your friend. She was the one who left without another word. She was the one who ran away.}

So Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath, gulps down hard before saying, "I'm not. I never did. And I never will." He curls his hands into tight fists in an effort to keep himself in check, to puncture the shell where he keeps all of his safest words, the ones he uses only when he absolutely needs to. When he's desperate and control would become all but a foreign concept had it not been for his bank of well-crafted, double-edged words. "Now, if you really want to talk about this then \textit{wait for me} after my meeting and we'll get things sorted out--"

"I don't care about your meeting, okay? You always put everything else before me, \textit{always}. You put your bloody academics before me. You put your stupid anime \textit{whatever} club before me and spend so
much time with that junior of yours. You even put Hoseok before me sometimes and—" Ahreum scoffs. "You always put me last, even when we were still—" She lets out a loud, shrill scream, frustration spilling from the corners of her mouth only to grip tight around her neck, choking her words. Her eyebrows meet in the middle in a deep, deep groove, and the rest of her features scrunch up. She shivers all over, body shaking as she takes deep, shaky breaths. Seokjin kind of wants to reach out and smooth the wrinkles on her face, wants to hold her close and to still her trembling body. He kind of wants to tell her, _Hey, no need to get mad. We can talk. Talking is good. Getting mad is draining. And you know what happens to people who are drained, right?_ "I left my team down there, put you before anything and everything else thinking you'd at least spare me a couple of minutes so we could talk, but—"

"Do I drain you?" Seokjin recalls Ahreum asking him just a few weeks before the break-up. He'd laughed at her, smiled, then shook his head before burying his nose in the crown of Ahreum's hair. "No, seriously, Jin. Do I drain you? Because if I do then tell me so we can try to work things out—"

"Stop."

Seokjin gulps hard. "Excuse me?" he catches Ahreum say, catches the little cracks in Ahreum's voice as she chuckles, snorts, scoffs at Giggling Guy. And Seokjin would, too, had he been the one rudely interrupted in his speech, but _wow_, he muses. The man's lips are pursed, tight at the corners, and his eyebrows are furrowed. His eyes are sharp, piercing, yet not too cold that Seokjin feels the need to shiver. And the man inches closer to where they are, stopping just a few inches away Seokjin, until the tips of his shoes brush against the sides of Seokjin's own. "Did you say—"

"I said _stop,_" Giggling Guy repeats, this time louder, clearer. Part of Seokjin wants to laugh out loud just so he can break the thickening walls of tension all around them, break the ice, but he can't even feel his tongue anymore. His throat is too tight and dry and his chest is heavy and his stomach is lurching in several different directions. And the pads of his fingers are cold. He isn't scared; he's uneasy. He's never had any experience with making a scene and having someone blow up the entire thing his whole life. This—this isn't something he's prepared for. And he hates being unprepared. "You're screaming. In an elevator. That's never any good. And _geez_, can you calm down for a second? You keep—"

Ahreum seethes. "You don't know _anything_ about us."

"And I don't need to know _shit_ to figure out that you're forcing yourself on him and shoving your precious beliefs down his throat," Giggling Guy answers, lips curling up into a tight smile as he finishes. He moves even closer, just another step forward to the tentative step back that Seokjin takes, then another when Seokjin inches further away. Seokjin has no qualms with cramped spaces but _at least give me room for breathing,_ he wants to scream out loud. _At least let me collect myself and try to fix things again. Then let me fight my own battle. Let me take care of this like any good accounts person or any person who can handle his shit, for that matter, would._ "He said he'll talk to you after his meeting, so wait. Wait 'til it's done. If you can't, well—" Giggling Guy shrugs, scoffs. Blows air into his bangs just before his lips tug up in a small, lazy smile. Seokjin's seconds away from waging his hands in front of the man, _between the man and Ahreum_ in an effort to make them stop arguing, but soon Giggling Guy is saying, "_Sorry, ma'am, but in case you're forgetting, you're in his workplace. And when he's here, work is his top priority, not non-work relationships or... or whatever. Personal life takes the backseat in the workplace so please—just please—_"

Seokjin looks to his side and meets the man's eyes with a careful, careful gaze. _Please stop talking. Please let me take care of my own shit. Please just leave and pretend you never saw this_ are the words ringing in his ears right now, threatening to spill from his lips, but he manages to push them further down until he feels his insides turn. "I'll take it from here," he whispers in Giggling Guy's
direction, voice so soft he could have just been breathing. When he sees them man cock an eyebrow
at him, nothing but a gentle lift of his eyebrow instead of a pronounced tilt of the head, he gives the
man's arm a shy, gentle grip for insurance. To Ahreum, he says, "Ahreum, later. Give me an hour,
then we'll talk for as long as you want. I'll listen and let you talk; just let me get to my meeting now
and I promise I'll come back for you--"

Ahreum scoffs. "'Later' is a cowardly way of saying 'never'."

From a corner of Seokjin's eye, he sees the look of surprise on Giggling Guy's features ease into
something... unreadable. Not that he's spent an ample amount of time studying the man's features,
quirks, habits, but he's had enough experience trying to dissect and understand facial expressions and
body language that he knows with every fiber of his being that he's supposed to know what this
means. Huffing, crossing arms over his chest, a stuttered step forward then leaning back-- Trouble,
Seokjin registers in his mind. For a split second, he hesitates, thinks of calling it a twisted form of
concern, but nah. They don't know each other well. There's no reason for the man to feel the tiniest
bit worried about his ears aching from all the screeching that Ahreum has been doing, or how pale
his face might be because the man hasn't stopped inching close, close, closer. There's no reason for
the man to huff, shake his head, roll his eyes before holding up one hand in front of Ahreum and
saying, "Okay, that's it. I've had enough."

Seokjin's grip on the man's arm tightens. His heart feels like it's dropped fifty storeys down, like it's
burrowing its way through the ground and digging a hole for itself, but he can't even utter a thing.
"C'mon, Jin, you can do better," he hears a voice at the back of his mind say, but what can he do at a
time like this? His ex-girlfriend is looking at him with wide, wide eyes and trembling eyebrows. The
man's eyeing him with a careful, peculiar gaze. He can feel the pulse in his hand quicken against the
man skin and the way the man's senses kick in in thoughtless response, goosepimples crawling up his
arm and pooling around the expanse of flesh where Seokjin is holding the man tightly. "Screech in
the elevator all you want and smash things, I don't give a flying fuck. But say another word against
him and I won't hesitate to throw you out."

"Stop harassing my boyfriend," Giggling Guy says, pausing only to take a deep shaky breath. He
tilts his head back a little, the dim lights in the elevator setting his features aglow, and shit, that's some
solid acting going on, Seokjin muses. The man's lips are pressed into a thin, thin line, and his eyes
are are sharp and merciless. "Back off."

"Wow, Seokjin blarts out at the back of his mind faster than he can replay every single word that had
spilled from Giggling Guy's lips. There must be a hundred – no, a thousand ways he can be averting
the crisis right now and getting himself out of the sticky situation, but instead he mutters, "You're...
my boyfriend?" 'Best friend' sounds easier to say. Heck, 'friend' and 'officemate' roll off the tongue
just as nicely but are much less complicated, and yet the man is mouthing the same word at him again
and again, the movement of his lips just a tad hypnotizing. Giggling Guy could be saying something
completely different right now, could be telling him, Keep up, kid. If you want to get out of this mess
then you better do your part but-- "You're my boyfriend?" Seokjin repeats, voice cracking just before
the last syllable, then his shoulders are trembling, shaking, moving to the beat of the soft laughter that
spills from his lips. "Since when--"

Giggling Guy heaves a sigh. His eyes are wide open, though, focused, the corners crinkling a little as
if hoping, hoping, hoping Seokjin would take a hint and understand what he's trying to say. Since the
moment my ex looked like she was ready to smash every button in this elevator available when I
asked her to wait is the first thought that crosses Seokjin's mind; the second, when the man parts his
lips, jaw falling open to reveal a strange little smile lighting the corners of his mouth, almost as if
surrendering to the urge to laugh, or since the moment she had started yelling in the elevator and
shattered your ear drums, probably. Right. None of these last for more than a few seconds, but
Seokjin feels as if he's just spent his next lifetime trying to figure out how to save himself from the
shit he'd just gotten himself in.

Luckily, Giggling Guy makes it just a tad easier for him, drops him a hint when the man says, "It
sounds weird. Very weird. The weirdest thing ever. And I'd understand if, by now, you don't
want--this, don't want us, if you don't want me anymore, because you've been nothing but patient and
I've been shit at this whole 'commitment thing' but--"

"You're crazy."

Giggling Guy chuckles, little bubbles of laughter bursting on his lower lip even before he can say a
word. He kicks Seokjin in the foot, and Seokjin tries his hardest to not yelp in response. After a
while, the man replies, "Tell me something I don't know."

A name. Right. Seokjin hasn't been in the company for too long; someone bound to not know him or
to have forgotten his name. Catching up, then, he answers, "Seokjin. Kim Seokjin." Drops his gaze
to his feet before meeting the man's eyes again, this time slipping right into his role, fulfilling his end
of the deal. For all he knows, Ahreum might have already caught on, but there's no harm in trying,
right? If this is what it will take to convince Ahreum to wait for him, to spare him an hour of her time
so he can return it tenfold, then he'll take a leap of faith with Giggling Guy. He'll do
the unimaginable and somehow make magic happen. And he'll put on a bloody awesome show and
maybe fulfill his childhood dream – one of them, anyway – of becoming the next big movie star.
"Come on, call me by my name! You can't keep... dissociating your feelings from me by using silly
pet names--"

"I thought 'cupcake' was cute. It suits you."

Seokjin narrows his eyes and presses his lips together thinly, but there's no denying the small smile
pulling up at the corners of his lips in soft, gentle tugs. I thought you were on my side, he's tempted to
say, but must keep up the act. They've worked hard to get to this point where Ahreum isn't glaring at
either of them anymore. They can't throw their effort to waste. "In the same way that 'sunshine' suits
you. Or 'giggles'. You giggle a lot," he tries to grumble, tries to sound the least bit amused, but if
anything he sounds like a llama drowning in laughter. Or Hoseok trying his hardest to keep himself
from laughing. Then again, both sound exactly the same. "So, we'll just stick with the pet names
forever? Sunshine and Cupcake or Pancake and Cupcake--"

"Or Yoongi and Seokin," Giggling Guy – Yoongi. Yoongi? Where has he heard that name before?
– suggests, then nibbles on his lower lip a little. Seokjin resists the urge to drop his gaze to where
Yoongi has been worrying his lips for a while now, focusing on nothing else but the way Yoongi's
eyes crinkle at the corners. Pushes the snarl that has been threatening to slip from the corners of his
mouth to the back of his teeth again so he can chomp down on it, break it down, forget it even exists.
But Yoongi hasn't stopped smiling and thinning his lips into a rather wobbly line in intervals. It's
almost as if Yoongi's enjoying the whole act even if, just seconds ago, he looked like he was just a
hitch of the breath away from actually throwing Ahreum out and banning her from even coming
within a five-meter diameter of the office building for shattering his eardrums with her screams about
a failed relationship. "That sounds better, doesn't it? Yoongi and Jin?"

Jin. Seokjin sucks in a violent breath. He hasn't heard anyone call him that in a while. Granted,
Ahreum had used it just a while ago, Hoseok uses an array of nicknames whose etymology he can't
keep track of anymore, and maybe Hoseok had accidentally-on-purpose dropped many different
ways of saying 'Jin' a few times in the past week, but still – Seokjin can detach himself from a lot of
things, memories, people, but 'Jin' and college romance suffering an eventual death are two things he
simply cannot unwrap his trembling fingers from.

"You're crazy."

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Seokjin narrows his eyes and presses his lips together thinly, but there's no denying the small smile
pulling up at the corners of his lips in soft, gentle tugs. I thought you were on my side, he's tempted to
say, but must keep up the act. They've worked hard to get to this point where Ahreum isn't glaring at
either of them anymore. They can't throw their effort to waste. "In the same way that 'sunshine' suits
you. Or 'giggles'. You giggle a lot," he tries to grumble, tries to sound the least bit amused, but if
anything he sounds like a llama drowning in laughter. Or Hoseok trying his hardest to keep himself
from laughing. Then again, both sound exactly the same. "So, we'll just stick with the pet names
forever? Sunshine and Cupcake or Pancake and Cupcake--"

"Or Yoongi and Seokin," Giggling Guy – Yoongi. Yoongi? Where has he heard that name before?
– suggests, then nibbles on his lower lip a little. Seokjin resists the urge to drop his gaze to where
Yoongi has been worrying his lips for a while now, focusing on nothing else but the way Yoongi's
eyes crinkle at the corners. Pushes the snarl that has been threatening to slip from the corners of his
mouth to the back of his teeth again so he can chomp down on it, break it down, forget it even exists.
But Yoongi hasn't stopped smiling and thinning his lips into a rather wobbly line in intervals. It's
almost as if Yoongi's enjoying the whole act even if, just seconds ago, he looked like he was just a
hitch of the breath away from actually throwing Ahreum out and banning her from even coming
within a five-meter diameter of the office building for shattering his eardrums with her screams about
a failed relationship. "That sounds better, doesn't it? Yoongi and Jin?"

Jin. Seokjin sucks in a violent breath. He hasn't heard anyone call him that in a while. Granted,
Ahreum had used it just a while ago, Hoseok uses an array of nicknames whose etymology he can't
keep track of anymore, and maybe Hoseok had accidentally-on-purpose dropped many different
ways of saying 'Jin' a few times in the past week, but still – Seokjin can detach himself from a lot of
things, memories, people, but 'Jin' and college romance suffering an eventual death are two things he
simply cannot unwrap his trembling fingers from.
"Stay with me," Yoongi whispers, then curls his fingers around Seokjin's wrists as he does so. Seokjin's body gives a powerful jerk, just enough to jolt him back to reality, to this moment, to where he's standing so dangerously close to Yoongi but still seeing a fraction of Ahreum's strained, pained features. He'd reach out for her and try to wipe that look off her face more out of habit than anything else, but Yoongi makes it so easy to forget there's someone else in the room, what with his intense gaze pinning Seokjin in place. And they're close, enough that Seokjin can make out the little freckles of red on Yoongi's cheeks, the length of Yoongi's eyelashes, the almost indiscernible mole on the bridge of Yoongi's nose, on his cheek, the area just before his jaw dips into the slope of his neck. The bright red skin of Yoongi's lips glaring at him, taunting him, reeling him in. The way Yoongi drags his tongue along the stretch of his lower lip while keeping his eyes locked onto Seokjin's own, and the way the corners of his eyes crinkle when Seokjin lets out a faint hiccup. Don't you dare call me 'cupcake' this time, Seokjin nearly blurts out, but Yoongi keeps him focused with a deep breath, shoulders lifting, the grip Seokjin doesn't realize is keeping him afloat tightening on his hips even more. Yoongi flushes a violent breath of life into his lungs with blunt words and nails digging into his skin, sharp, almost needy.

"I'm not about to— I can't lose you again. I've been afraid of a shitton of things for the longest time but I'm... I'm not scared anymore. I don't care about what other people can and will say. They can think whatever the fuck they want about Min Yoongi; I don't care. I want this, Jin. I want you."

Yoongi looks around for an audience. It's a bit silly, Seokjin muses, to feel the need to make sure no one else is watching when Yoongi knows there's only the three of them here, but Seokjin sort of gets it, the weird feeling of something foreign draping over their shoulders, breathing down their necks. He sort of gets the same lurching sensation mirrored in the little scrunch of Yoongi's features when Yoongi confesses, "And I sure hope you still want me."

Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath. He curls his fingers into loose fists – or he would have, if only he could feel them. His limbs feel strangely like jelly and heavy metal at the same time. His chest is too tight. And the thrumming pulse at the base of his throat only grows stronger, louder, faster with each passing second, with every ounce of space Yoongi crosses until the tips of their noses touch. Half of him is concerned that they're taking too much time in the elevator, that someone might need to use it, that he's late for his meeting, but the other half of him that simply can't peel itself off of Yoongi's focused gaze keeps whispering in his ear, If you want to save yourself then go, Jin. Move, and move closer—

Yoongi chuckles. Slowly, he slides one hand up Seokjin's back, all the way to Seokjin's nape, cold fingers leaving tiny bubbles of shivers on Seokjin's skin. What the hell are you doing, Seokjin would say, but it's becoming increasingly difficult to think of anything with the way Yoongi hasn't stopped looking, staring at him like he's the most interesting person in the world. It almost feels like he's being unraveled, all of his layers falling to the ground one by one. He feels too exposed and vulnerable, and he doesn't like it.

What he does like is the way Yoongi's voice drops to a whisper as he asks, "Can I kiss you?"

"What?"

"I said," Yoongi begins, pausing to curl his shaking fingers on the base of Seokjin's nape, cold fingers leaving tiny bubbles of shivers on Seokjin's skin. What the hell are you doing, Seokjin would say, but it's becoming increasingly difficult to think of anything with the way Yoongi hasn't stopped looking, staring at him like he's the most interesting person in the world. It almost feels like he's being unraveled, all of his layers falling to the ground one by one. He feels too exposed and vulnerable, and he doesn't like it.

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"What?"

"I said," Yoongi begins, pausing to curl his shaking fingers on the base of Seokjin's nape. Seokjin shudders at first, shivers when Yoongi starts caressing the soft skin there, then Yoongi's leaning even closer, enough that Seokjin can hear the sound of Yoongi's heavy breathing and feel the heavy thumping in chest, as well. "Can I kiss you?" he asks again, this time in a fainter, smaller voice, like he'd just realized what he'd just suggested, that he's breathing in too much air and too little of Seokjin, that Ahreum is merely less than a foot away and if she hears them, well, game over. "Your ex doesn't seem to be convinced and I think she needs proof," Yoongi adds, lips pressing together
into a thin, thin line, and Seokjin finds himself dropping his gaze to where Yoongi has just stopped nibbling on his lower lip, wondering if it would taste like blood and regrets and a thousand other things he isn't even aware of at the moment. "Solid proof. The type you shove in someone's face—"

The first thought that occurs to Seokjin is this is crazy; the second, but then, why the hell not? "Do it."

Yoongi widens his eyes and breathes out a small, small smile. "Okay."

Yoongi... doesn't kiss Seokjin yet. Instead, he rubs his thumb just behind Seokjin's ear until Seokjin's leaning into the touch, shivering a little, giving in. Just do it already, Seokjin wants to say, but part of him wants this, likes how Yoongi's shifting gears, slowing down, and gently stepping on the brakes. Only a few weeks into being in BBDO and Seokjin already feels as if he's been with the company for years, trying to appease problematic clients for decades, centuries, eons. He's tired and he's drained and Yoongi's touch feels a lot like snuggling in his comforters, turning in early, dreaming of the sweetest dreams. Yoongi's fingers are warm against his skin, the sharp angles of his jaw, his cheeks, the jut of his lower lip just before Yoongi rests his thumb and index finger on Seokjin's chin, guiding him forward, leaning in.

"Okay?"

Seokjin closes his eyes. The image of Yoongi's gaze fixed on the gentle swell his mouth burns at the back of his eyelids. "Okay."

Yoongi kisses him. It isn't wet or sloppy or wild; it's soft, tentative, a simple brush of the lips, puffs of hot breath spilling from the little gaps at the seams. Yoongi drops his hand to Seokjin's chest, and Seokjin laughs a little when he feels the pricking cold that has gathered at the pads of Yoongi's fingers seep into his skin, when Yoongi curls his fingers into a tight fist in Seokjin's shirt and mumbles something that sounds a lot like, This is a fucking awkward angle, dammit. C'mere, come closer– They're not aiming for perfection, not even gunning for the best possible take, but Ahreum hasn't moved yet, hasn't stopped watching them, hasn't looked away. And the slow, simmering heat at the pit of Seokjin's stomach doesn't seem like it would come to a gradual standstill anytime soon. So he tilts his head a little, bends his knees, leans in even more and rests his hands on Yoongi's hips. Digs his nails into them when Yoongi bites on his lower lip a bit too hard and apologizes with a gentle swipe of his tongue where the sting hurts the most. Seokjin lets out a breathy sigh, shoulders shaking, thighs trembling, and all of a sudden he's parting his lips, tilting his head back a little, letting Yoongi in. Wrapping his arms around Yoongi's slim waist and letting Yoongi press tiny kisses on the corners of his mouth, suck on his bottom lip, lick the back of his teeth with warm swipes of his tongue. He can taste hints of coffee and something sweet on Yoongi's tongue when he sucks hard on it, again and again until he's hearing Yoongi let out a soft gasp, a faint moan. He can feel the loud thumping in Yoongi's chest mirror his own, maybe even louder – or is that the chorus of their heartbeats? It's hard to tell with the way every part of Seokjin's body shakes and shivers at the prompt of Yoongi's slightest touch. And Seokjin can hear the elevator give off a soft 'ding' already, can hear Ahreum taking slow steps out of the lift until the doors shut closed at her departure, but he can't bring himself to pull away. Yoongi keeps reeling him in with soft, chaste kisses, like Seokjin's stolen all the breath in his lungs and Yoongi's doing this to avenge his sad fate, to make things right, to take back what's his.

The elevator gives a violent shake. Somewhere between Seokjin sinking his teeth a bit too hard in Yoongi's lower lip and Yoongi letting out a low scowl that he flushes back down Seokjin's throat with another kiss, Yoongi has managed to punch the button for the third floor again, lifting them up, buying them more time – Seokjin doesn't have much time to spare. It would be easier if they pulled away now. It would be better if they put some distance between each other and let each other breathe
instead of getting their limbs tangled even more. And Seokjin isn't sure how appropriate it is to be kissing a relative stranger again and again long after the person he's been trying to push away has stepped out of the elevator, especially since the closest he and Yoongi have had to an interaction was Yoongi whispering to him at one in the morning, "Nobody should ever work on a Saturday," but it's been so long since he's had this. It's been close to a decade since he's last been held like a piece of treasure, the ultimate prize. It's been forever since he's last been kissed. And Yoongi's mouth is warm and sweet and feels good against his. Yoongi is warm. Yoongi chases after his lips one last time when the elevator gives off a final 'ding' – the doors not closing on them this time, now exposing them to the world – Seokjin's entire body giving a jerk violent enough to break the link of their limbs.

Yoongi hums. His cheeks are flushed and his eyelashes are drooped low over little, mischievous eyes. He hasn't stopped worrying his lower lip yet and licking it in intervals. His silly hat is on the ground and his bright blond hair is a mess of curls now and there are creases on what used to be a crisp white shirt – when did Seokjin even grip Yoongi tight enough to leave marks on him like this? Seokjin can't remember a thing. All he knows is that his cheeks are too hot, that his ears are red, that his jaw aches so damn much and, "Red Velvet. You should consider 'Red Velvet' for a pet name."

"Wha--"

"Lips." Yoongi purses his own and tilts his head in Seokjin's direction. "Drink cold water before going to your meeting or else you won't hear the end of it. The creatives will give you shit for that for weeks."

Fuck. "Right. Meeting," Seokjin murmurs, then he's gathering the things he'd dropped to the floor somewhere between kissing Yoongi and leaving scars on Yoongi's mouth. Yoongi leans in for a moment, smoothing the creases on Seokjin's shirt, maybe even fussing with the little wrinkles in front, and Seokjin feels warmth bloom on his skin, his insides lurching in accord. Maybe it's fatigue and hunger speaking, or the panic running through his veins because he's no longer just fashionably late to a meeting he, himself, had set the day before; he's hella fucking late. And in his years as an accounts executive, he's never let delays get in the way of his perfect attendance to each every single meeting in his calendar. Not until today. It can't be from Yoongi's soft touch, or the way Yoongi's pulse keeps drumming strong beats on his skin even if they've already stopped kissing.

Still, he says, "And, uh, thanks?" before Yoongi can step well outside of his perimeter. For a second, he thinks he sees Yoongi hesitate in his steps, stuttering a little, but no – Yoongi's just taking little steps back, being extra careful, no longer taking crazy risks. Furrowing his eyebrows a little and squinting his eyes as if studying Seokjin again, this time more closely. Better. "For saving me back there. It means a lot."

Yoongi laughs, low and rough. It sounds like the same lazy drawl of his voice that fine one in the morning a week ago, except it doesn't come with the rush of cold that greeted them when Yoongi swung the door open. Instead, it makes warmth crawl under Seokjin's skin, brings the simmering heat in Seokjin's stomach to a powerful boil when Yoongi nibbles on his lower lip for a while. If this is an invitation to move closer then, damn, Seokjin would hate to decline. There are a hundred reasons for him to shut the door right now, punch the buttons in an effort to push Yoongi farther away, but none of them seem as enticing as the soft curls at the corners of Yoongi's lips.

"Cool," Yoongi says a few seconds after, voice barely above a whisper. Soon, he's turning on his heel, walking away, leaving Seokjin feeling unbearably, strangely cold. "Anytime."

The doors of the elevator creak, then they're closing in on Seokjin and drowning out the brewing noise from the pantry nearby. He catches Yoongi stopping in his tracks after a while, looking over his shoulder as he wraps his fingers around the handle of the door to one of the offices bounded by
glass walls. *Maybe he's just forgotten something downstairs, in the lobby,* says a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind. *Maybe he needs a ride. Maybe he wants company. Maybe he wants another kiss-* Seokjin shakes his head. Still, he feels around for the buttons, pressing them in endless circles without any semblance of control, meeting Yoongi's gaze through the narrow gap between the doors.

"Make sure nobody finds out," Yoongi mouths, then sucks in his bottom lip. He looks around for an audience then he's chuckling, heaving a sigh, pressing his lips into rather shaky line, his little mouth curling up at the corners as he voices out, "Company policy."

Seokjin gulps hard. He can't feel tongue anymore. He can still taste Yoongi in his mouth, though. "It's not even real!"

Yoongi shrugs, laughs for a last time and winks, then he's swinging the door open in earnest. Seokjin thinks he sees a faint glimmer in Yoongi's eyes for a second, something akin to another sign of trouble, but *whatever.* He has a meeting to attend. He has work to deal with. There are faint characters etched on the glass doors of Yoongi's office and they read a lot like 'Chief Creative Officer' or something. And he feels his insides lurch in an instant, all the blood in his fingers shooting up to his neck, crawling to his cheeks, scratching figures there that read, *you are so totally fucked, Kim Seokjin. You did not just make out with your boss.*

*Not cool,* he thinks, then slumps against the cool walls of the elevator. It's unfair – Yoongi has already stolen all the feeling in his jaw, mouth, tongue, replacing it with traces of his rough lips, his teeth, the sweet swipe of his tongue along the cavern of Seokjin's mouth; Yoongi can't take his job away from him, too. *Not cool at all.*

"Exactly how much sushi do you need to stuff in your mouth before you tell me why you went all the way to Gangnam and dragged my ass to this... expensive place?"

"'s not expensive," Seokjin grumbles as he breaks down the sushi he'd just popped in between his lips seconds ago into tinier pieces that are easier to swallow down. In all honesty, the Japanese restaurant he found on his way from the train station to his old office isn't at all a posh place, but factor in the reality that they ordered a thirty-course sushi meal and, well– Maybe Hoseok's right. The food is good, though. The side dishes they had been served earlier are already filling enough that he doesn't need a side order of soup or rice anymore. He doesn't even order a fruit shake like he normally would when eating out with friends or just plain treating himself to a nice meal. And the flavors of all the sushi they had been served so far stick to the roof of Seokjin's mouth enough that he's able to get rid of the taste of strawberry and coffee that had plagued him the whole day yesterday and, as much as he'd like to regret it, even until now.

He shivers. Close to twenty-four hours after and he can still feel a dull ache in his jaw from the kiss he'd gotten himself into. Twenty-four hours after and he can still taste a hint of Yoongi on the cracked skin on his lips that Yoongi had bruised even more with all the nibbling and sucking that he'd done. It isn't even *magical,* that kiss – he hadn't seen fireworks go off at the back of his eyelids or anything – but he can still feel every swipe of Yoongi's wicked tongue at the back of his teeth in contrast with Yoongi's soft, tentative touches on his cheeks, his jaw, his nape. He can still remember wanting to back Yoongi up against a wall so he can taste more of the sweet coffee on Yoongi's tongue, his cute little mouth, his lips. And he can still recall the way Yoongi had looked over his shoulder with a small smile curling up on the corners of his mouth and a promise of 'another time'
Did you get a promotion?" Hoseok asks, squinting as he purses his lips. His words come out a bit muffled, but Seokjin hasn't been roommates with Hoseok his entire college life for nothing. He's had to decode worse; case in point: Hoseok's muffled cries as they watched Hercules the night of their thesis defense. "I mean, org structure in agencies is normally weird so I won't be surprised, but it's only your third week--"

"It feels like I've been there for years," Seokjin groans, then sinks his lips in his tea that has already gotten cold. The drink washes away the thick flavors of salmon and cheese in his mouth. Then there it is again, strawberry and coffee on his tongue, his teeth, thick in his breath when he exhales. He should pop a mint or two on his way back to work. Or maybe he should brush his teeth twice. That should do the trick. "And no, no promotion. I'm just glad I still have a job, to be honest. I swear to God--"

I thought Yoongi was going to fire me and they'd throw out my things the following day, but Seokjin was more than pleased to see his table untouched from when he'd left it last night. Maybe they'll kick me out in the middle of the day, part of him mused, but nah. Not a chance. Joonmyun sent him out for a three-hour meeting right after lunch and, when he got back, everything was still there (along with job orders for the creatives that had already been signed by a Kim Namjoon and Min Yoongi). Then Seokjin insides lurched at the prompt of Yoongi's name, the lazy squiggle that was his signature, and a familiar voice breaking the thin walls of silence in the accounts area and curling around Seokjin's nape.

Then he looked over his shoulder, curiosity getting the better of him, and met Yoongi in the eye. Yoongi wasn't wearing one of those huge hats of his; instead, his bangs fell over his eyes and his hair was all mussed up. It was almost as if he'd just woken up. It was reminiscent of that time, back in the elevator, when Yoongi thought the best way to convince Ahreum to give Seokjin time to explain was by kissing him senseless, and Seokjin thought the best way to die was to kiss back with just as much intensity. And Yoongi seemed to remember the same because the next thing Seokjin knew, Yoongi was biting a corner of his mouth as the guy beside him – Namjoon, was it? At least that was the name Joonmyun had called out and had attached 'the curious case of missing job orders for the creatives, whoops' to – kept talking about concepts, designs, ideas, a big pitch.

"Did someone catch you--" Hoseok gasps, lips pulled down into one of the ugliest frowns Seokjin has seen. He looks around for an audience and leans in bit by bit, until all that Seokjin can see is a blur of flesh and the weird expression in Hoseok's features. Seokjin can feel the pulse at the base of his throat quicken, can feel his fingers growing cold, and all of a sudden the only thing he wants to do is to stuff his mouth with more sushi so he has an excuse to not answer any of Hoseok's questions. "You killed one of your clients, didn't you? I know they call you 'fresh blood', hyung, but really, must you let them find out?"

Seokjin chokes on his tea. "You're more concerned about people figuring out I'm a murderer?"

"Well." Hoseok twists his mouth and coughs a little. He reaches out, snatching Seokjin's glass of water, and downs the drink in big gulps. It's almost as if he's giving Seokjin time to process things, to string his words together, to find a way out. Like he's testing the waters, as well, and trying to see if Seokjin would ever be receptive to answering the simple question, so why in the world did you bring me here out of the blue? "Not that I think they'll ever catch you, but I'd like to think you do your job... cleanly? Like, if you were one of those murderers on TV--"

Seokjin rolls his eyes but places one sushi on Hoseok's plate, anyway. It isn't out of the ordinary, but there is a wasabi drawing on the slab of tuna wrapped around the rice. Hoseok needs more smiles of
all forms to replenish the energy he offers everyone in packets of bright laughter. "You watch too much TV, kid."

"And that's why I think you'll be able to pull off the perfect murder!" Hoseok exclaims, then quickly clasps his hand over his mouth. By now, Seokjin laughing a little, the tight knots in his nape and chest loose, allowing him to breathe. He knows Hoseok is mostly crazy with streaks of seriousness, but everything Hoseok does is to make people smile, feel a bit more comfortable sharing and opening up. Make people like Seokjin feel as if they can trust Hoseok with anything and everything, their darkest secrets included. "Seriously, though, I can't tell if you're troubled or hot and bothered. You've got that weird look on your face. The last time I saw that was--"

Seokjin rests his chopsticks on his plate. The expression on his features is still, almost blank, but he can feel one eyebrow of his slowly lifting in a gentle tug. This is his body getting the better of him, expressing feelings he'd otherwise keep bottled up inside him had the muscles in his body just cooperated with him instead of giving him away. And there are voices at the back of his head arguing, saying **I dare you to bring it up** and **Don't you even dare hint at it in intervals.** It makes the tea in his mouth taste even more bitter than before. It makes his lips sting, **swell** from the wasabi he'd accidentally-on-purpose brushed along his flesh. And it reminds him of the way Yoongi's mouth had felt to hot, **warm** against his as they kissed each other deep and rough, like they needed it more than they thought they did.

Seokjin snorts. Hoseok trails off, voice dropping to a whisper, then he's looking at Seokjin with a curious gaze, head tilted to the side in an effort to see better, differently. Seokjin's never been the type to rudely cut people off while they're talking, but he's never been a fan of bringing back the past, either. There's a reason why people move on and leave things behind, and that's because some memories are best left sepia than in full color.

"I picked up my last check then thought I'd pay you a visit, okay? That's why I'm in Gangnam," Seokjin finally answers, long after the question has ceased to be relevant. He should stop taking the long and winding road when driving a message across. He should just cut the chase and jump straight into the action even if he sucks at warding off the forces of evil. "And I dragged your precious ass here because--"

"Office crush recommended it?"

Seokjin's nose twitches. "Office crushes are for first jobbers. Oldies like us don't have office crushes anymore."

Hoseok furrows his eyebrows a little and squints. The wicked grin on his lips has thinned into a small, discerning smile, one that Seokjin remembers from... college, the era of what would have been a wonderful love story had destiny not decided that his junior should move to another country to pursue his dreams. The year Ahreum broke up with him and life helped him put himself back together by reminding him he had friends whom he could trust, and that there were other people ready to breathe more life and color into his life; he just needed to **let them in.** It's the same smile that Hoseok was wearing when he said, "So he's three, four years your junior. Who cares? He's cute and nice and he bites sometimes, but hyung. Hyung. I haven't seen you smile like that since... high school graduation, when you got almost all the awards, except best in physical education. Or when you actually won that... what was that race again? Whatever. I just– I haven't seen you this happy in years. And now you're thinking of pushing Kookie away just because he's too young for your old and wrinkly heart?"

Hoseok had scoffed, rolled his eyes, and thinned his lips into the same smile he's wearing now. Then, with a heavy sigh, he whispered, voice cracking like it was taking every ounce restraint for
him to just grab Seokjin by the shoulders and shake him, "That's stupid, hyung. And you're not supposed to be stupid because you have a choice to make the wise decision of listening to your heart. So stop thinking too much and listen to that voice inside you, for once. It's not bad to be happy. It's not bad to finally get what you want."

So Seokjin waits for it – for Hoseok to drop the big bomb, for Hoseok to knock some sense into his brain and tell him, 'look: whatever it is, it can't be worse than actually killing someone, right?' It's just a kiss, an action prompted by the ghost of his past coming back to haunt him just before he had to go to a meeting. It isn't anything big or serious or life-changing. it shouldn't bother him at all.

But Hoseok stays dangerously still and quiet, thawing out only to gulp down the rest of Seokjin's drink, holding back and putting his weapons down instead of prying, coaxing Seokjin to talk. When the standstill becomes too much, Hoseok says, "Yeah, we have office romances now. Or affairs. Apparently, that's an 'adult thing' to do," and orders for two bottles of beer. During lunch time. When Seokjin still has to take a train ride half an hour and two transfers long from Gangnam to the central district. Seokjin's lucky he doesn't have meeting scheduled for the next two days. And he's lucky Hoseok isn't pressuring anything, instead dropping his guns to the ground at the first sign of Seokjin's apprehension. "Remember the kid I was talking to you about? Jackson, the weird creative who isn't like the others? And I mean 'weird' in a good way, okay. Weird as in he gets shit done before shit's due."

Seokjin laughs a little. "You know, I used to get really, really lost whenever you say that, but now I get it." He shifts in his seat and leans back, and that earns him a smile from Hoseok. It isn't one of Hoseok's teasing grins, though, or the type of smile he uses to avert serious situations; it's the type that says, So glad you're not being slow and dense right now. So glad I know you like the back of my hand. "I totally get it! I get really, really shocked when I see emails from creatives in my inbox 9 a.m. of d-day!"

"Because you expect them to turn everything in at the very last minute." Hoseok heaves a sigh. "I feel like a meanie for thinking that, to be honest? But what can you do?"

Seokjin chuckles. He knows it's bad to generalize, to assume that all creatives are the same and that they will never be fully conscious of deadlines, but he's seen everything unfold before his eyes. He's seen the stark difference between Taehyung on a good day – he'll send designs the day before they're due – and Taehyung when he looks more like a zombie than a human who's tumbled out of bed – he'll ask for an extension from Jimin and will even tug on Jimin's sleeve, promise to buy him dinner, coffee, chocolates, give him a kiss. He's seen not only one person attempt to wrangle extensions from Joonmyun's stone-cold heart, but instead three, four people working on the same brand approach Joonmyun and convince him to try to talk to the client, make the impossible happen. And he's had first-hand experience with Baekhyun purposely dropping his calls because, "Ah, signal's–so bad–here in the–rooftop– Hyung, you're–choppy–shutupSehunsignal'sreallybadokay– I'll give you the script in an hour! Ciao!"

"Or past the deadline," Seokjin whispers in response, then sits upright again when the waiter arrives with their beer. He clinks his bottle with Hoseok's own, then says, "Fascinating creatures, really. I'll never be able to understand them in full– Sorry, what was it about your Jackson kid again?"

"Well–" Hoseok blinks a few times then he's nodding and pulling his beer closer for a sip. He hums when the liquid bleeds onto his lips, even smiles as he takes another loud gulp. Simple joys, Seokjin tells himself – it's been a while since they've gone out for a drink or even just had time to sit and talk. Sure, they're almost always chatting on Kakao ("HYUNG THEY'RE GONNA PROMOTE ME TO CREATIVE DIRECTOR I'M GONNA SHIT BRICKS" "Please don't. I won't visit you in the hospital if you do. "k fine but hey, coffee sometime? yeeees? :D" "Of course. Anything for my favorite ^^")
or email ("Joonmyun-hyung said you'll like this but told me not to open it? Please tell me it's not for blackmail... T_T" "nah just for email but hey, hyung, nice bunny ears. so does being the accounts sup entail wearing headdresses and tiaras? :3" "Fuck you." "pls send calendar invite tysm"), but sitting opposite each other, hearing each other's voices, knowing that if either of them reached out, there would be someone meeting them halfway and finishing their sentences for them—It's different. It almost makes Seokjin want to move to an advertising agency closer to Hoseok's workplace. Or make Hoseok move to the central district so they can meet more frequently. They used to prefer not meeting every week or more than thrice a month—"Give me a reason to miss you, okay?"—but you realize you need people around you as you get older. Not because you're lonely and you're weak—nobody should ever be made to feel weak—but because there are just some things better enjoyed with another person, and another, and another. Or maybe just one other. "Sometimes I forget we're of the same age, really, because the kid looks so bright all the time but—Anyway, to make the long story short, we caught him making out with someone in the stockroom. Well, mostly just me because the others hid behind me even before they could process a thing, but yeah."

"Isn't it—" Against company policy, echoes a familiar voice in Seokjin's mind, but he pushes that back in favor of his own voice. "—hard? I mean, the place is hella cramped and—"

"Excuse me, not all agencies have tiny as fuck stockrooms," Hoseok says in defense, sticking his tongue out at Seokjin when Seokjin rolls his eyes. "Ours is rather big. And nice. And comfy. You can fit three or four people there, if you want to. Y'know, in hindsight, if those kids were going for stress relief then they could have easily invited others—"

"Jung Hoseok."

"Buuut they didn't. It was just the two of them and the office supplies. That were mostly unharmed, by the way. They cleaned up really well after the whole thing." Hoseok nods thoughtfully, each bob of the head slow, deliberate. Part of Seokjin feels like he's missing the point, that he's focusing on the whole stockroom thing too much, but what is there for him to read more carefully or to breathe meaning into? He doesn't even know Hoseok's kids. He doesn't know how Hoseok's kids met, flirted with each other, got together, had sex in the stock room or something. And it's not as if he knows anything about Yoongi, either.

This isn't about you, he reminds himself. He should stop relapsing to twenty-four hours ago. There's yummy sushi right and beer right in front of him. Across the table, his best friend is talking about what seems to be the most interesting thing to him right now. He has other matters to busy himself with; he can't going back to what happened in that service elevator the day before. He takes a deep breath, then, and grips his beer tightly as he asks, "Your point is?"

"That office romance is totally a thing of our 'generation' and in our industry." Hoseok draws squiggly air quotes with his fingers, then snorts even before can 'underline' the whole thing. "Geez, I can't believe I'm even saying 'generation'. Are we really that old already?"

Seokjin laughs. Never too old for surprises, he whispers to himself as he thinks back on those two weeks between him sending an application to BBDO and getting hired, to getting the chance to work with his first ever boss again, back when he was still starting out in publishing, to getting welcomed in the strangest way possible and Jimin saving his first day at work by rubbing circles on his back when he choked on his cupcake. "Yeah, I guess," he whispers just the same, and takes a long swig of his beer, feeling the last dregs of his old age get drowned by the cool slide of the drink in his throat, making him feel a bit younger than he should be again.

He thinks of shoving a cupcake in his mouth just so nobody could take it away from him, thinks of all the crazy presentations he'd managed to bullshit his way through these past few weeks. And he
Seokjin can’t really call Joonmyun a prophet of bad news. Mostly because Joonmyun is his boss and he knows better than to kid around with Joonmyun while they’re still trapped in the four corners of their workplace, but still – Seokjin would like to think that every single task Joonmyun asks him to do is for his greater good. So handling three emerging brands all at the same time is alright; it’s good practice for when he gets a promotion. Being pulled into all sorts of meetings is good training; he does have to acquaint himself with every single character in the office, after all. Being assigned to lead a pitch, however… he has some reservations but, for the most part, he’s positive Joonmyun wants him dead even before he can celebrate his first month in BBDO. Which should also be for his welfare, because Joonmyun might be warning him of the danger that lies ahead. So yeah, it should be good. He’s okay. He’s dandy.

"Hyung, when you said ‘accounts supervisor for new businesses’," Seokjin begins, pausing to save the reports he'd been working on for the past hour twice before Joonmyun whisks him away from his desk. He tries to quicken his steps, to regain his balance and keep up, but Joonmyun walks so fucking fast that Seokjin's under the impression that the presentation is sometime the following week. Worse, Monday morning. And it's already Friday. "I'm pretty sure you meant me handling the newly acquired brands that we win from pitches. I mean, I checked and double-checked the job description, the contract–"

"It's there in tiny text," Joonmyun all but murmurs, but the corners of his lips are still pulled up in a curt and tight smile. Then again, when is Joonmyun not brandishing his presentation-perfect smile? In all the years Seokjin has known Joonmyun, he has never seen the corners of his boss' mouth pull down to a frown. Joonmyun always has a small smile playing at the corners of his lips. If not, he's hiding behind the mask of nervous laughter and gentle slaps on the arm. "Lowercase, the whole thing. But the big bosses signed that so everything's official. And you signed it, too, so thank you so much for offering to lead this pitch! I knew I could count on you!"

Seokjin heaves a sigh. Part of him wants to just slump in the seat Joonmyun had motioned for him to get settled on, throw his hands up in the air and surrender, but part of him... wants to give this whole 'pitch leading thing' a shot. He's good at organizing things and keeping his creatives motivated (with the help of good food and yummy coffee; sometimes he wonders if he's actually an accounts supervisor or a pet shelter owner taking in and feeding hungry puppies). He's had experience trying to con media agencies into booking spots in their online publications, has even seen success in convincing their clients to sign an exclusive contract with them lasting half a decade, sometimes even more, but he was selling products back then. Technology, not ideas. Productivity, not creativity. If, back then, he was trying to reach sales targets by dishing out one gem of an output after another, now he's trying to market ideas that aren't even tangible yet to people know are more focused on the business side of things than fun and discovery.

He bites the inside of his cheek and looks up, reconsidering. Joonmyun looks like he's ready to sell the very idea of taking charge over pitch procedures, but no need for that, whispers a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind. He already took a crazy leap by running to the other side of the spectrum and getting into the crazy world of advertising; might as well go all-out, right? Go hard or go home. And,
the thing is, he's already found a home in this agency of his, no matter how weird it seems. He likes
the noise that shatters the silence at ten in the morning and rings in his ears up until eleven in the
evening, as people shuffle out of the office one by one. He likes the late-night silence in the still
populated accounts area, peppered only with the clacking of keys as employees complete one task
after another at such a late hour. He likes looking to his side from time to time, checking if Jimin's
doing alright with the presentations, if Minseok needs help with his brands even at such a late hour, if
Joonmyun has already deemed the decks Seokjin has sent fit for presentation not only to the big
bosses but also to clients whose hearts they're hoping to win over.

He likes the little packets of surprise that greet him at the foot of the stairs to the second floor when
he runs into Yoongi and Namjoon, or sometimes just Yoongi. And he likes how even if Yoongi
looks like he's seconds away from saying something, pushing his buttons, Yoongi only
ever holds the door open for conversation but doesn't press anything. Only takes the stairs to the
lobby without saying a word, doesn't even mutter 'company policy' under his breath even if the small
smile pulling up at the corners of his lips screams the exact same thing.

"I'm getting regularized after this. And promoted. And given a raise. As in *right after this pitch,*"
Seokjin mutters, then sets the notebook he'd managed to grab before Joonmyun pulled him away
from his station on the conference table. It looks like a patch of imperfection on the expanse of wood.
It seems... a bit out of place. He looks around, giving the room a quick scan, and all of a sudden it
feels too huge for him, for two people who have supposedly been locked up in this conference room
countless times before. Maybe it's the looming dread of a pitch or the lack of coffee in his system at
three in the afternoon at work. Maybe he has to stop having his lunch at weird hours and that his
body is making him pay for the lack of rest. Maybe he just has to breathe and note down everything
he has to do so that he can somehow organize his tasks, thoughts, life. "But hyung, why me?"

Joonmyun laughs. "Why not?" he answers in a heartbeat, but soon he's waving his hands a little,
shrugging off his knee-jerk response. Taking everything back even before Seokjin can curl his
fingers into loose fists and groan in frustration. "But really, *seriously,* why not? You have an
impressive track record in account servicing. You're dependable and capable of a lot of things
outside your scope of work. You're not satisfied with just rendering 'okay' output; you keep pushing
your creatives to do their best. Not without the promise of food, of course, but *Jin.* Seokjin gulps
hard at the mention of the nickname, leaning back a little and taking a deep breath, slipping into
reflex developed years ago, back in college. His memory has always been impeccable to a fault.
"Tell me: do you see anyone else fit to lead this pitch?"

Seokjin worries his lower lip a little and lets his gaze wander. "I don't know," he confesses, then
breathes out a loud exhale. "You haven't even told me who the client is yet--"

"*Hyundai Motors.*"

Seokjin leans back a little, eyes widening in accord. "Wow. That's huge."

"Exactly," Joonmyun says, voice lilting just before he drops the last syllable. The corners of his
mouth tug up even more, reaching his eyes a little, then the fatigue is gone, replaced instead by a
familiar twinkle in his eyes that lights up the rest of his features. "Jimin's good. He's an effective
accounts executive. He knows when to go hard on creatives and when to baby them. And the kid's
never late for meetings – very few people here are like that. But I need someone with more
experience, Jin. I need someone who's been doing the same shit for years that people can't bullshit
their way past deadlines when they're faced with that person. I need someone who not only knows to
hold the hands of the creative babies but also someone who can teach them how to stand and
eventually let them walk on their own. And while Jimin can and will push himself to do better, you
and I both know he gets so worked up by the tiniest mistakes."
Seokjin laughs to himself. That was him years ago, when he was still an infant in the industry. He did his job well, brushed off criticism and passed them off as lame insults, but at the back of his mind he knew the critique was fast choking him, holding him down, keeping him from moving to his next task and moving on. Only two, three years after was he able to wean himself off of the negativity he'd been shoving down his own throat. Then, half a decade after that, he'd finally finished building the walls caging in on him, keeping sunlight from passing through and keeping him safe. A few more months after that and he was regretting even putting up those walls because damn, were they beginning to feel a bit too restrictive. He wanted something else, something new, something that wasn't safe. He wanted to take a risk so huge he'll be able to look back on that point in time that he made the decision and say, What the hell were you thinking, Seokjin?

"He should fix that. He's a really great guy," he murmurs after a while. Joonmyun breathes out soft laughter and shakes his head. "Remind me to buy him biscuits later. He's still craving them but kid won't get himself some because he thinks it's 'not yet time to reward himself'."

Joonmyun frowns. It isn't one of the sad, solemn ones, but he does look like a child who's been deprived of cotton candy. It's strange seeing Joonmyun just drop his shields without preamble, Seokjin muses. It's refreshing.

Then, in a smaller voice, he tells himself, You should do that more. You should give the whole breaking down your own walls a shot.

"Kid needs to get laid," Joonmyun grumbles after a while. He leans back in his seat, throws his head back, even stretches out his legs for a few quick seconds before snapping up straight again. Brief respite. He doesn't get that often. Perhaps it's part of agency culture, Seokjin muses, feeling bad for resting for too long. He always gets this weird, clawing sensation at the pit of his stomach whenever he takes more breaths and breaks than necessary. "You know, at this point I'm wondering how a) he and Tae haven't been caught making out yet, or b) how they haven't made a move on each other at all. I mean, dude. The tension between them's so thick, it puts those XL condoms they're making ads of to shame!"

"Please don't give the client ideas. Durex has those two so fucked up, I'm pretty sure they won't want to make XXL ads anymore."

"Or do they?"

"If you're implying you're going to ask them to test the condoms for science, I'm dropping this pitch." Seokjin stands, poised to leave, but Joonmyun anchors him back to his seat with a small frown. "So yeah, the kid doesn't need to get laid; he just needs to appreciate himself more. And we need chips and treats in this room if you want to give the creatives some motivation to at least drag their asses to the conference room." Because meetings in the midcon spell nothing but trouble and death, a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind grumbles, but he pays no attention to that. Instead, he takes a deep breath and cracks his knuckles. He's probably digging his own grave by doing this, but whatever. Participating in pitches is the fastest way to grow and learn. It may be the most painful way to experience getting shot down and having to redo every single thing he'd worked on from the day they got briefed to the night just before the pitch, but no matter – he's here to learn and, most of the time, the best way to learn is by doing things the hard way. The one that gives him the most hardships and scars, and makes victory feel so rewarding. "And maybe coffee, as well, but– Who's involved in the pitch again? To whom will I be sending calendar invites?"

"A shitton of people," Joonmyun begins, voice dipping into light laughter, then he's calling out names like reading items off of a grocery list – Baekhyun and Sehun as leads for creatives, Taehyung and Heechul for a quick and crazy ride. Chanyeol and Kyungsoo from production for feasibility
because, "I don't want us coming up with ideas that prod can just... shoot down because they're too ambitious. We need ambitious and actually possible. We need... nice and cut and heart-felt but also functional."

At the back of Seokjin's mind, he adds, *we need a miracle.* He doesn't utter a word, though, instead only nodding in response as he scribbles notes on his paper, some of the lines cut off by motivational messages, more for himself than anyone else. And he keeps his ears open, ready to pick up other names Joonmyun might drop without preamble.

"Yoongi and Namjoon, too. I'll make sure they make time for this. CC Sihyuk-sajangnim as well. He probably won't be there for the initial brainstorming but just... keep him in the loop."

Seokjin gulps hard. He makes a mental note to accidentally-on-purpose forget Joonmyun's instructions on who to cc and who to mandate to attend, wills himself to try to test rules and his inability to break them for once. Still, his hands betray him when he gets settled in earnest in the conference room, laptop sitting in front of him as he sets a meeting for five in the afternoon, and keys in names one by one, like counting down to his imminent death.

He types 'Min Yoongi' in a rush and lets the cursor hover the 'send' button before clicking it once and for all. His laptop gives of a chorus of shrill rings as pop-ups for the invite he'd just sent out come in one by one – *Heechul, declined, 'sorry, really busy, but I'll see what I can do. I'll drop by if I'm bored'. Taehyung and Baekhyun, tentative, but 'likely to attend if there's pizza :D'. Chanyeol and Kyungsoo from production, accepted, 'as long as there's food'. Namjoon, tentative, 'because I have something until 5 so can I just come in at around :15? TY tell Joonmyun I like breadsticks!'

Yoongi's response sneaks up on Seokjin like the thundering pulse at the base of his throat. Seokjin chokes on his own spit for a moment, forgetting to breathe.

*Accepted, 'As long as there's coffee. Excited.'*

"If I were client, I'd trash that idea in a heartbeat."

Seokjin swallows hard and gently presses down on the backspace key, watching as the cursor swallows the characters on the page one by one. It's the fifth time in the past ten minutes that he's had to erase everything he'd typed down in the Word document projected on the wall, the six in the past five minutes that he's heaved a sigh so loud Joonmyun would probably call him out on being too transparent in front of two of the company's big bosses as soon as they step out of the conference room. And in all honesty, it's the third time in the past hour or so that he's found himself shaking his head internally at the suggestions given by the creatives. The worst part is that they aren't just lacking; they're off-strategy, completely deviating from the brand brief that Hyundai had emailed half an hour before the meeting started. Granted, thirty minutes isn't enough to memorize the brief, to etch every single little detail about it until he can recite product details with his eyes closed, but still – it isn't too difficult to digest that Hyundai's problem isn't taxi franchises 'degrading' the Sonata by using it as a cab instead of a luxury vehicle. It's people actually forgetting that the Sonata has an identity separate from being Korea's most trusted cab car for more than a decade already.

The creative kids are overworked, tired, trying really hard, but one can only do so much with energy fast dripping from the tips of his fingers. Seokjin understands that more than anyone else.
"I mean fine, thanks for bringing up the taxi 'issue' again because people have probably forgotten about that already. Because most of you seem to have just glossed over the brief you're supposed to take to heart. Remember: your brief is everything," Yoongi adds after a while. Seokjin's under the suspicion that Namjoon had somehow conned Yoongi into saying that, at least giving Heechul some credit instead of just a judging look, but that's not to say Yoongi hasn't lost the edge to his voice, the drawl in his tone thinning into something that sounds more frustrated than tired and drained. It makes Seokjin's throat go dry and his chest grow heavy. It makes him feel... weird. "But telling franchises, 'hey, sorry, but we'll have to pull out our Sonatas because we don't want to be called a brand for cabs' isn't the best solution. That's degrading to the franchises. That's asking trouble for the brand. And that's lazy. That's something that comes out of your ass when you're dying to leave the office already because you have a date."

Heechul heaves a sigh. His features are scrunched up, lips pulled down to a frown, but the tone of his voice is steady, unwavering. It's almost as if he's raising the white flag and saying, I know, I screwed up and I'm sorry but it's getting late and the last thing I want to do is to think about cars.

Part of Seokjin understands the struggle, the desire to just pack up and leave before it gets too dark on a Friday evening, but what can they do? This is the life they signed up for the moment they walked past the doors of BBDO. They have to send an initial idea deck to the client on Monday to be able to get a chance to pitch for their business in earnest. They have to keep their jobs, and the best Heechul can say in an attempt to express his fatigue without dropping to the floor in a heap of limbs is by saying, "It's seven, 'Gi."

"Exactly: it's already 7 p.m., you guys have already mentioned the meat of your idea at the start of our discussion, and yet we're still here because you're too lazy to string your thoughts together into something that makes more sense."

"It's not a lazy idea. It's just step one."

"Step what?" Yoongi scoffs. "Can you even hear yourself?"

"Can you even hear--" Heechul huffs. Beside him, Namjoon cranes his neck, shifts his gaze between Yoongi and Joonmyun who's at the far end of the table, slowly clapping his hands together but leaning closer as if hoping to offer his two cents, between two forces Seokjin has always known to keep their cool unless provoked or lead to frustration. He hasn't had a chance to work closely with both Yoongi and Heechul before, but he has heard a lot of things about the two, their little similarities and differences and the things that make them ignite the worst flames but put them out in a heartbeat. They're harsh, critical, perfectionists to a fault. They're nice in their own, peculiar way, but it might take light years for people to realize that single act of kindness from either. Heechul speaks his mind all the time but puts down in writing his innermost thoughts, while Yoongi saves all of his words for the right time, looking for the best opportunity to arrange his thoughts into neat sentences that pack a punch.

Seokjin laughs to himself. Yoongi's very stingy when it comes to words, but generous with the scars he leaves on people's mouth when he kisses them. Not that Seokjin's jaw still aches or that he can still feel the sting of Yoongi nibbling on his lower lip hard enough to bruise; it's just that the memory of the kiss, of Yoongi's willingness to help, of Yoongi not even flinching when Seokjin stuck his tongue down Yoongi's throat in a moment of spontaneity – all these still haunt him like a plague. And Seokjin's never been good at forgetting bad dreams. He's never been the best at moving on.

"Okay, Yoongi, look: I know you can be the worst asshole during brainstormings but that doesn't give you the right to slam each and every damn idea to the ground even before people are done talking."
"I'm saving time. Time's precious. We're running late on schedule. Ideas – those are what we need right now, not petty arguments and silly thoughts."

"Stop being an asshole."

Yoongi laughs a little, the corners of his lips pulling up into a tight smile. Any minute now, a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind says – Yoongi's bound to crack any minute and Seokjin's about 90% ready to take cover, but it never comes. Instead, Yoongi bites the inside of his cheek, shakes his head, drops his gaze to his feet before looking up at Heechul to say, "Then stop giving me shit and pull out the same gem you threw at me earlier."

Seokjin blinks a few times. He feels like he's missing something and yet what? The entire team was rattling about the Sonata going through an identity crisis earlier. Yoongi had kept telling them to go back to the brief, remember what client felt the need to reiterate at the end of every section, relax, don't panic, I just need coherent sentences and not something that can win a Cannes. We can figure that out later. Taehyung had mentioned something about making Hyundai tie up with Samsung to develop a new kind of technology exclusive to the Sonata as some form of reminder that the Sonata is more than your ordinary sedan, and Yoongi countered with, "Why do you need new technology for it when you have so much untapped potential in the car already? Dig deeper, everyone. Think–"

Heechul blows at his bangs and leans back in his seat. His shoulders are slumped forward along with his the tight scowl at the corners of his lips, now pulled down to a frown. He hasn't stopped drumming his fingers on the table. He looks like he's seconds away from saying something, lashing out at Yoongi, maybe even storming out of the room and Seokjin won't take it against him at all, but instead Heechul lifts his gaze so he can look straight into Yoongi's eyes.

"I keep telling you guys that you already pinned down the big idea at the start of the discussion. Not just once or twice; I've been saying the same shit again and again. I'm beginning to hate my own voice." Yoongi takes a deep, shaky breath, then clears his throat before continuing. "So it's just a matter of actually stringing your thoughts, ideas, your words together. Taking everything you guys have been yapping about for the past few hours and piecing together puzzle pieces so we can finally form a nice picture. But how will you even remember the good stuff you said earlier when you didn't take notes? And not just you, Heechul – everyone. Production team, why aren't you jotting down insights from the discussion that you can use if and when we decide to develop an app? Creatives, I told you to make it a habit to write down every fucking thought that crosses your mind during brainstormings before you throw them out in the open. Out of, what – ten? – ten people in this room, only Seokjin made an effort to take down notes on paper and not on his clean Word doc. And don't tell me it's his job to note down every single suggestion because he's the accounts lead for this; it's your job to be responsible of your own ideas."

Seokjin gulps hard. Yoongi's words hang in the air, suspended in the low thrumming of the air conditioning and Namjoon tapping a soft beat on the table. They aren't sharp words, though, aren't like swords or daggers that leave Seokjin with a dull ache in his chest or something wedged in his throat. There's a strange sense of stillness in Yoongi's voice, in Yoongi's words that almost make it so easy to believe that Yoongi isn't mad or at least close to tipping point. There's a rhythm to it, so much so that Seokjin finds himself bobbing his head to the faint sound of Yoongi's voice filling his ears, curling at his nape, snaking up the back of his neck until he's shivering all over. It's soothing without being too passive, forceful without being imposing. It's almost like the way Yoongi had kissed him weeks ago, back in that elevator, Yoongi's pulse heavy and quick against his skin but his tongue gently drawing a line along the cavern of Seokjin's mouth–

Seokjin raises his hand in an instant. It happens in a rush, too quickly that he finds himself having to meet too many pairs of alarmed gazes as he drops his hand to his thigh. Yoongi's one of them, but he
looks more curious than anything else. Maybe even teasing. It's not as if Seokjin has spent an ample amount of time processing the few expressions he's seen on Yoongi's face all those times that they had either bumped into each other or descended the stairs alongside each other, or even creating a catalogue for them at the back of his mind. His memory's just good, that's all. Impeccable. Perfect to a fault, even if it makes sense only to him. Yoongi's... just another guy.

"Uh, well, for the past decade or so, all the brand's been focusing on when it comes to the Sonata is the form. Just... pure beauty. It's a pretty car that's not as expensive as your European cars that are fast populating the city, nothing more," Seokjin begins, pausing only to lick his lips and try to ease the tightness in his throat. C'mon, Jin, it's just another preso, he tells himself, but it feels a bit different somehow. This the first time he's presenting in front of the big bosses. This is the first time Joonmyun's actually telling him with that small smile on his lips, Impress them. If you do, you might just be in for something really exciting. And this is the first time he's speaking in front of people unprepared, the words falling into nice, tight spaces that sound a lot like a snug fit in his mind. "Which is why most people aren't aware of the technology that has gone into the car. And by 'technology', I don't just mean the cool multimedia panel and connectivity features – I mean the very structure of the car, the materials used, how even the trimmings contribute to, say, the best ventilation system and good acoustics because the trimming cushions only the noise but bounces off the rest of the crisp sound coming from the speakers."

"That's not in the brief."

"It's in the website," Seokjin answers, lips pulling up into a smug smile when he looks in Yoongi's direction. "Whose link is in the brief. You should check it out. The way car companies name their 'colors' is just hilarious."

"Yeah. Pacific Sky Blue," Yoongi whispers, then he's sucking in his bottom lip and nodding in thought. "Go on."

'Go on' means Seokjin curling his hands into tight fists on his thighs just before he pushes himself off his seat. 'Go on' means Yoongi following his movements with a careful gaze, nodding his head to Seokjin sounding like a living brochure of the all-new 2016 Hyundai Sonata, voice over not included. "So you don't just get to experience class with the Sonata," Seokjin mentions as he digs his hands into his pockets, when he sees Joonmyun easing the tight press of his lips into a grin. Seokjin hasn't seen that in years, or at least not when they're on opposite sides of the meeting table and Seokjin's presenting his ideas to an esteemed panel of creatives for dissection. This is a lot of firsts for an internal presentation; Seokjin almost feels like a first jobber walking into an interview room for the very first time. "You get a taste of class and comfort, convenience. And that's why the Sonata is the taxi brand of choice – because you want to experience these two things in a car while you're rushing from one meeting to another, or maybe when you've missed the last train and you're drunk as hell and you just want to get home without having to walk the next few blocks. Function and form come together to sweep you off your feet and take you on a smooth ride with the 2016 Hyundai Sonata."

Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath, then lets out a loud exhale. "It's everything you've ever wanted in a car."

Yoongi laughs. It isn't bright or loud, isn't even raucous, but it does ring in Seokjin's ears long enough that Seokjin feels a familiar shiver crawl down his spine. His first thought is, Why the hell are you laughing? Everything's backed up by facts! His second, Wait, did I actually say something wrong? But I made sure to research–"

"You sound like a walking commercial or something, complete with the drop in the tone and the dramatic pause. Geez." Yoongi shakes his head, laughs some more, then the corners of his eyes are
softening into smooth little crinkles. "Sounds perfect, though. Love the delivery and the grand reveal," he continues, then shifts his attention to the rest of the team, giving the creatives a discerning look. "And that could have been you talking earlier, had you only taken notes. Everything he said just now? All from our discussions. And whatever catalogue he’d read on the website, yeah, but point is – what are ideas floating in the air if you’re not able to string them together? What’s a nice idea in your head if you can't enunciate it properly and share it with people so you can bringing it to life? This is where media's been beating us, guys. This is where they shine – the whole processing thing. They take our ideas and make sure they're on-strategy."

"And they're elitist assholes who keep saying that ad people know only how to conceive ideas but not how to execute them," Namjoon offers soon after, heaving a sigh as he leans back in his seat. Soon, he's meeting Seokjin in the eye, gaze focused but not as discerning as the one Yoongi had looked at Seokjin with when they were trapped in the elevator with a shrieking ex-girlfriend and no other choice but to kiss to ward her off–

_{Let it go, Jin,}_ he tells himself, again and again until he can drown out the low humming of the air conditioning with the sound of his own voice. It's been weeks. It's a functional kiss. It actually worked and he got to talk to Ahreum without creating a scene in the lobby (even if Ahreum kept asking him if he'd had boyfriends back in college, after 'them', even if he kept pushing the thought of cute juniors and warm hands and shy kisses to the very back of his mind). He shouldn't get too attached to things. But Yoongi keeps looking at him like he's this close to broaching the topic, reminding him about it. Like Yoongi's about to tease him in front of this crowd smack in the middle of a brainstorming session that should have been scheduled weeks ago and say, _proud of you, boyfriend._

"I really like how you highlighted what's already existing, though– Seokjin, right?" Namjoon says, and that's what snaps Seokjin out of his trance. He surfaces with a violent breath of life, widening his eyes as he nods in confirmation. "Hmm. Not bad. If we had you in every pitch to process and streamline everything, we'll probably get ideation done in... two hours."

"How long do these things even last?" Seokjin murmurs.

"Three hours? Four?" Yoongi leans back in his seat and locks his arms in front of him, grunting low when he feels the stretch along his arms. "But well, we still need to flesh out the executional ideas. At least we have a big idea already backed up by insights. So!" And that's the only time Seokjin hears Yoongi's voice peak, the usual drawl in his voice, low and rough, replaced by something bright and... chirpy. Different, but not completely un-Yoongi. _What the hell is 'un-Yoongi' supposed to be?_ Seokjin files that sound at the back for later, for when he has to work with Yoongi again, for when he has to keep the thundering pulse at the base of his throat in check again for fear that his words will come out shaky. "Quick break, then we regroup in twenty for the execution? How does that sound?"

_{You sound like you're high,}_ Seokjin whispers at the back of his mind. Then, in a voice much smaller, quieter than before, _you sound exactly like your smile._

_{It sounds like death,_ Baekhyun groans.

"Cool. You be back in ten, then. Die then rise from the ashes," Yoongi hums, then presses his lips together in a small smile. The gentle curls at the corners of his lips pull up even more when he pushes himself off his seat and nudges Namjoon in his side before reaching out to give Heechul's arm a light squeeze. "Hyung," he says after a while, voice even softer now, and Seokjin watches with eyes wide open and lips slightly parted when Heechul rolls his eyes and just kind of _leans_ into Yoongi's touch. "One stick?"

Heechul scoffs. He snatches the cigarette between Yoongi's fingers, nonetheless, even grabs the
entire case from Yoongi and grumbles, "I thought you've been off of these for months!" It's a stark contrast from the scene earlier, when Heechul dropped his hands to his sides and voiced out his exhaustion through ideas and Yoongi dropped honorifics at the same time that he dropped the big bomb on Heechul. It's as if Yoongi has flicked a switch off all of a sudden, slipping out of the Chief Creative Officer jacket so he can welcome the cool winds fast wrapping around his arms. Tossing it to the side and forgetting it exists for the next twenty minutes, until they have to work again. "Didn't you say—"

"Chill. I haven't smoked in months. I just give 'em to people in need. People like you." Yoongi gives Heechul a shove, more playful than anything else, and soon he's making his way to the exit, fingers dancing along the edge of the table like the rest of the team – all eager to stretch their legs, get some fresh air, walk around the office for a twisted change in scenery before heading back. Recalibrate and put on their best suit before heading into battle. "Except for Namjoon. The asshole just steals my—Seokjin? Hey—"

Seokjin's body gives a powerful jerk at the first beat Yoongi taps on his shoulder. It doesn't hurt, doesn't even leave a warm mark on his skin, but it does reel Seokjin back to this moment, to a little past seven in the evening in the office, right here where Yoongi's fingers ghost over the expanse of his shoulders. "Nah. I have to answer all the emails I've missed," he answers at the second, third beat Yoongi taps. At the next series of beats, he adds, "I might have missed a lot—"

"He means you're an ass for keeping us locked up in the conference room," Heechul singsongs, then gives Namjoon a light nudge. Namjoon only rolls his eyes and shakes his head, but the smile on his lips makes Seokjin feel like he's actually siding with Heechul, nodding in agreement, calling Yoongi out. "And that you should buy us food because we're famished and hungry people won't be able to think properly."

"I can take care of ordering food," Seokjin offers.

"Nah, let him buy food for us. He owes us a feast. C'mon, you guys, back me up! Hungry people can't think properly, right, Seok– Can I just call you Jin? It's easier to say."

Namjoon heaves a sigh. "You can't be too lazy to say someone's name, hyung."

"I can't call him 'fresh blood' anymore. He's already 'coagulated blood'."

Yoongi narrows his eyes at Heechul. "You're gross."

Heechul cocks an eyebrow in response, a corner of his mouth tugging up in accord. "Mini Yoongi not jumping on the first opportunity to tease the new kid?" He hums. "Wow. Never thought you had it in you, little one."

Yoongi presses his lips together into a thin, thin smile. It doesn't last for more than a few seconds, or at least until Heechul's saying, breaking the silence with a response to a remark that has ceased to be relevant, "That's the product of lack of food and your boss who's younger than you ordering you around, calling you lazy and all that shit—"

Putting you on the spotlight and highlighting the glaring faults in your statement so you can come up with better ideas, Seokjin's tempted to say, to voice out, but he doesn't need to anymore. The next thing he knows, Yoongi's shaking his head and shuffling out of the room, pushing Heechul and Namjoon closer to exit and farther away from where Seokjin is. And Seokjin feels the knot in his chest loosen completely when he hears the soft 'click' of the lock, silence falling upon the room in earnest and wrapping itself around him like a warm, warm quilt.
He catches a glimpse of a sticky note just inches away from his laptop and snorts when the characters for *Breathe, noob. You're doing great* jump out at him in hastily scrawled writing. Takes a deep breath as he shushes the many voices in his mind etching questions along the column of his throat—*where the hell did he get the sticky note, what the hell is this note for, why do I even care?* And he bites the inside of his cheek to keep himself from grinning, to shush the same noises murmuring at the back of his mind, to remind himself to *focus, focus, focus* on the unanswered emails in his inbox and not on the small smiley drawn beside Yoongi's name on the sticky note. *Breathe.*

Baekhyun doesn't rise from the dead ten minutes after. Not that Seokjin minds—he likes being able to work in peace without having to resort to hiding in a conference room or plugging his earphones. The Manila papers he's taped to the glass walls also provide a nice contrast to the expanse of white all around him. He's awake, but not so much that the slightest movement makes his muscles twitch. He's calm without being too complacent. There's a twisted sense of balance in him that he hasn't felt in a while, from when he made the decision to jump ship and crash into BBDO knowing full well that he'll probably lose more than half of his social life and a quarter of his youth when he signs up for a job in an ad agency.

He laughs to himself. He regrets losing sleep, yes, but it's not as if he hasn't lost so much sleep and rest already in publishing. So he's cool. He's okay with everything else, even having to shell out so much money to feel a huge group of people because apparently, the creatives are always hungry—*Oh shit,* he still has to order food for the entire team—

"You really didn’t take a break," comes Yoongi's voice, just loud enough to ruffle the curtains of silence in the room. It breaks just as Yoongi kicks the door further open and holds it in place with his ass, just before he grunts, and Seokjin takes that as his cue to tear his gaze from the order page he's been staring at for the past three minutes. He stands from his seat to help Yoongi with the food containers he's carrying—more like to help Yoongi grow out the tower of Tupperwares almost half the size of his legs. He looks like some metahuman whose power is... delivering food to ad agencies. That's a cute superpower. Not that Yoongi's actually cute. "If it was really urgent then they'd call you, y'know."

Seokjin snorts but inches closer to where Yoongi is, anyway. "Everything's urgent, though."

"Because that's how you've trained your clients to think. Teach them new tricks. Shush them when they become too demanding."

"Oh trust me," Seokjin begins, pausing only to haul one stack of containers close to his chest for easier carrying. "I've done that time and again but some just... go back to their old ways. Old habits die hard. It's not that—"

"Easy, I know--" Yoongi grunts as he lifts the containers and attempts to set them down on the table, but to no avail—his arms shake for a bit before he's able to steady himself and regain balance. Carrying around containers filled with bibimbap, japchae, and jjajangmyun isn't a joke. Pool together all the food and suddenly the load's too heavy, overwhelming. It's the same for work, Seokjin supposes—add up all the little tasks you do on the side and you'll be surprised you've devoted at least two hours just revising and polishing designs, proposals, *ideas.* "But nothing good ever comes out of something easy."
Seokjin laughs a little. He can't even argue with Yoongi on that – it's in getting through the toughest times that he finds the most satisfaction. It's in dealing with the worst of clients that he learns how to control his temper. Seven out of ten times, he still thinks of maiming clients as soon as he sees the request 'can you make the logo bigger' or 'can you make the talent in the picture look just a bit younger' in emails, but that's the point – they're all thoughts, nothing he's ever decided on turning into reality just yet. It's all in his head and boy, is he thankful that none of his murder plans have come to fruition yet–

"What the hell?"

Something hits him. It isn't too big, just about the size of his palm and as light as a gentle slap on the cheek, but still – *you don't throw things at people just for kicks*. He looks up from where he'd been shoved a black pack to his face and finds Yoongi on the other side of the table, settling on his seat and smiling a little. The last time he ever took anything to the face – Hoseok had tossed a sachet of 3-in-1 coffee at Seokjin, sharing his last pack out of the kindness of his heart and because Seokjin looked like a zombie so close to finally dying – he ended up chucking all the throw pillows at Hoseok in wicked fast speed. Hoseok had sworn never to throw anything but hugs his way ever again, and Seokjin offered him a smug, triumphant smile in return. And a tight hug. Hugs almost always solve everything. It's been years since the agreement but neither of them has forgotten about it yet. They're already living in two separate flats on opposite sides of the river, and yet the rule is still there at the back of their minds, more of a looming guide than an afterthought. Not that Seokjin expects Hoseok to forget – Hoseok's just as bad as him when it comes to throwing away memories that leave them with nothing but a gaping cavity in their chests.

And Yoongi's probably just as bad with the whole 'moving on' thing, reeling Seokjin back to three weeks ago when he says, "Take a break, babe. Eat up. Or at least finish the whole thing before everyone gets back, unless you want them to steal gummies from you." Seokjin stares at the pack of gummy bears for a few seconds, *deliberately* ignoring the way the world 'babe' spills from Yoongi's pink lips, then looks up to meet Yoongi's gaze when Yoongi adds, "Or you can just take that home or something since we'll all be having dinner in a bit, anyway. Just don't let the others see or else."

"Isn't it--" Supposed to be the job of the accounts lead to pay for dinner, isn't it weird that you're giving me gummy bears, aren't you supposed to still be with your friends because it *hasn't even been fifteen minutes since the start of the break*, Seokjin's tempted to ask, but soon Yoongi's leaning back in his seat, fixing his gaze on whatever's projected on his screen, eyes going up and down, back and forth like he's going through numerous emails that he'd pushed aside earlier in favor of good company and a subtle apology. Stealing glances at Seokjin from time to time, every few seconds, like he doesn't know Seokjin has been watching him out of the corner of his eye since he'd thrown the gummies in Seokjin's direction. It would almost hilarious, but maybe this is how Yoongi really is, Seokjin muses. After all, all he knows about Yoongi is that he's a good kisser and that he has nice, warm hands.

So Seokjin rips the pack open, pops one, two, three gummy bears in his mouth as he picks up where he's left off, and ignores the way Yoongi's lips tug up in the smallest, subtlest smile at the sound of the wrapper crackling. There are emails to reply to before people start pouring in again. There's work to be done. There's no time to think of how delicious the gummy bears are, and how Yoongi's lips are softer than the treats. He *has* to stay focused.

He plugs on his earphones in an attempt to drown out Yoongi's words ringing in his ears, endless circles of *take a break, babe* forming a rhythm easy enough to fall into step to. When Yoongi holds out his hand to ask for some of the gummies, Seokjin sticks out his tongue and mouths, *nope, mine*, and doesn't even bother hiding the grin that stretches across his lips.
Yoongi laughs. It's bright and loud and makes Seokjin shiver. It bleeds onto Seokjin's throat, tickles it, and draws out the most ridiculous-sounding laughter Seokjin has coughed out in years. It makes Seokjin's insides lurch. It's a good lurch, though. It tastes like coffee, kiwi, strawberries, and a thousand unexpected encounters in the elevator, down the stairs, at the lobby just before calling it a day rolled into one.

He licks his lips and bites down on his lower lip hard enough to sting. It tastes a lot like Yoongi.

Seokjin leans back in his seat and closes his eyes. One in the morning at work means the creatives shuffling out of the office in clusters, means finally having the entire office to himself and getting the peace and quiet he's been craving all day long. The accounts area sounds like a war zone at any time of the day, what with all the account executives scrambling to be heard by clients on the other end of the line. Work isn't getting any easier or less; everything just keeps piling up on Seokjin. And he's been spending at least 90% of his time in the office inside the conference room these past few days. He can't say he minds, though. He actually enjoys hearing the creatives volleying ideas at each other, helping each other shoot bad ideas down so they can pick up the broken pieces and turn them into something more solid, something more convincing. Sure, he finds himself wishing he could just focus on his normal accounts job so he can go home a bit earlier than usual (read: in the evening and not too early in the morning), but the truth is that he likes how unpredictable pitches are. One minute, they're confident about their ideas and raring to get to designing print ads, web banners, social assets for the gold concepts; the next minute, they're second-guessing their thoughts, the idea they've been strengthening the past week, themselves. One minute, they're neck-deep into crafting the deck for the big presentation, then the next Yoongi's throwing his hands up in the air, calling for a break, screaming at the top of his voice, "Fuck this pitch!" Then they'd all be laughing in accord like that's the only thing keeping them from expressing their fatigue – Yoongi somehow being able to keep everything together until he admits to himself that, yes, he's only human and he needs more sleep.

"Pitch is a bitch," Seokjin hums under his breath now as he slumps in his seat, relishing the way his muscles relax against the cushion on his chair. He'll snap his spine straight again in five minutes, wear the straitjacket called 'client servicing' again once he feels the last dregs of fatigue from the pitch session spilt from his fingertips, but for now he'll just pretend he actually has time to laze around a bit and relax–

He opens his eyes as wide as he can when he catches the sound of footsteps. Which shouldn't be foreign to him at all since the creatives always leave the building late, but a voice at the back of his mind keeps telling him that these steps are familiar. Too familiar, in fact, that he feels a shiver crawl down his spine before surging back up and resting on the base of his nape. These are footsteps he's walked alongside of a handful of times already, footsteps that have served as his cue to drop the accounts cape to the floor to put on his pitch cap. Maybe it's Namjoon, he tells himself, but he knows better than to shit his own self when he saw Namjoon leave right after the pitch session earlier. Or Heechul-hyung. Or maybe even Baekhyun. Heck, I might just be imagining things and freaking myself out and focus, Jin! You have stuff to accomplish before sunrise–
"Hyung?"

Seokjin furrows his eyebrows and looks over his shoulder. He blinks a few times in an effort to get rid of the fatigue, but it hasn't even been two minutes yet. His eyebrows ache and his temples are throbbing and his eyes feel as if they're on fire, set aflame by lack of sleep. He needs no more than a glimpse of the small smile on the man's lips to know that it's Jimin approaching him with slow and steady steps, though. He's spent enough time watching Jimin out of the corner of his eye to know that only Jimin can pull of a smile as warm as the sun even if he's this close to passing out in the middle of a meeting.

"I thought you went home already?"

"Thought so, too," Jimin grumbles, then slumps in his seat before resting his head on the table. In the dim lighting in the accounts area, in this 'light', Jimin looks much, much older, tired, worn out. The glimmer in his eyes is gone, replaced instead with a thicker, deeper gray. It doesn't quite match the gentle quirk of his lips, especially when he says, "Well, I was trying to be optimistic but Innisfree emailed at 7 p.m., asking for a report that – according to them, at least; I'm pretty sure Joonmyun-hyung hadn't said 'yes' to the ridiculous request – was apparently due this morning."

"But it is morning now."

Jimin stomps a little, pouts, groans as he slaps Seokjin on the arm, but at least there's a bit more life in his eyes now. Nothing but a faint spark, really, but Seokjin will take this over empty and coasting Park Jimin. He'd rather have a flicker of light ghosting over Jimin's features than have to see Jimin dragging his zombie ass to work tomorrow and forcibly putting on the mask he always wears in front of clients. And he'd rather have Jimin relaxing right beside him, shoulders falling forward as he heaves a sigh, rather than to watch Jimin do robotic typing no more than two feet away in a few minutes.

"What are you doing here, though? Shouldn't you be heading home already?" Jimin sniffs, sits upright again, then takes one of the bottles in the paper bag he'd set down in front of him. It's not one of those energy drinks he gulps down like water, at least. Jimin isn't as hopeless as the roughness in his voice makes him out to be. "Don't you guys have a 7 a.m. tomorrow – I mean later, dammit – or something?"

"8 a.m.. Yoongi pushed it back by an hour," Seokjin replies, grunting as he mimics Jimin's position and pulls back his shoulders. He rubs at his eyes and cracks his neck, ready to resume working, but the gentle lift of Jimin's eyebrows sort of pulls him back, slows him down a little. Makes him think twice about getting straight to work and forcibly putting on the mask he always wears in front of clients. And he'd rather have Jimin relaxing right beside him, shoulders falling forward as he heaves a sigh, rather than to watch Jimin do robotic typing no more than two feet away in a few minutes.

"Big boss actually telling his people to rest, really?"

"Yeah. He's the one making sure we get breaks every few hours, actually. Or that we get breaks at all. I'm mostly in charge of making sure food gets delivered and that coffee's replenished every hour." Seokjin reaches out, motioning to snatch the drink away from Jimin, but drops his hand to his thigh when Jimin narrows his eyes in response. "Though he did buy everyone dinner on the first day–"

Jimin chuckles. "That's interesting," he whispers, then takes a long swig of his drink. His eyes are still on Seokjin, though, and if it weren't already one in the morning then Seokjin would probably ask him why, what, what the hell? "I mean, I don't doubt the 'buying dinner' bit because the creatives supposedly love him for that, but... You do know that he used to be really ruthless when it came to
work, right?"

*I won't be surprised*, Seokjin's tempted to say. *Yoongi does* seem like the kind of guy who would push his teammates, his subordinates to think long and hard until they arrive at an idea solid enough that even the clients won't be able to smash them into smithereens, if the way he's been handling the creatives helping out with the pitch is any indicator of that. Yoongi will *slave* over the smallest of details, get a bit too worked up by people who won't even make an effort to be creative and push their limits. He *would* be the type to drive others hard, to the point of insanity, but he would drive himself even harder. Four weeks isn't enough to get to know a person in full, but Seokjin trusts observation skills that he has honed through the years to give him an idea of how Yoongi is, how Yoongi *should* be.

"Well, I've heard of a few things here and there, but publishers work mostly with media. *I've* never worked closely with ad agencies."

"But you've *at least* heard about him? Didn't you mention your friend being in advertising for years now?"

Seokjin shrugs. Half the time in his old workplace, he had his earphones plugged on to drown out noise and undesirable things all around him. The other half, he had been constantly moving from one client to another, resolving issues, *cleaning things up*. So no, he hasn't had time to research on how Kim Namjoon is with his pool of art directors. He hasn't had time to discover things about Bang Sihyuk and how he managed to save BBDO from its supposed downfall around four, five years ago. And he hasn't had time to ask around about Min Yoongi who supposedly deals with his creatives the same way he kisses – hard and rough, demanding for attention when he gets so into it, but ultimately ending up with good results.

Besides, Hoseok knows better than to tell him about things that will stress him out even more. Maybe once or twice Hoseok mentioned those names in passing, said something about having to deal with insufferable people from other agencies, but Seokjin was much too busy with trying to appease clients and salvage whatever was left of his life that time. He was barely even powering through life then; he won't be surprised if he forgot his own birthday at one point.

And now, he's awake. Taking deep, ragged breaths as he shifts from working on one brand to another, but for the most part he's alive. Right now, he'll take that over just 'existing'. He's better than he's ever been in years.

"I was busy then," Seokjin mutters in response, then stretches his legs under the table. His knees feel like rusty hinges; his thighs feel like brittle planks so close to breaking. But he still has at least two tasks to cross off his list and a friend who probably needs to talk to someone to keep him awake. So *no*, he can't rest just yet. He can't give in. "And I was terribly anti-social that time. I didn't have friends."

"You – kind and caring Kim Seokjin who's loved by everyone – antisocial? Hyung–" Jimin scoffs and shakes his head. "You're kidding, right? I can't imagine– I can't imagine you not having friends at work! How did you survive?"

*I have acquaintance*, Seokjin whispers at the back of his mind. Friends, though? Questionable. It's the price he has to pay for getting too close and intimate with Joonmyun, he supposes. When you have a boss, *a mentor* as great and competent as Joonmyun, it's difficult to not compare him with the next boss, and the next, and the next. And in the eight years he had spent in the crazy world of publishing, changing bosses and brands but not work, he can say that Joonmyun isn't like the others. Joonmyun might as well be the best boss he's ever day.
"I did my job, did it well, submitted stuff on time for the next few years--"

"Yeah, yeah, that's a given. Geez--" Jimin huffs. He juts out his bottom lip, sticks out his tongue, then he's wailing in the silence of the area, "Okay, now I can imagine how you never had good friends in your old workplace! You're a sly, unassuming evil guy who knows how to manipulate--"

"Everything but time, apparently," comes another voice, this time softer than that of Jimin's. It sounds a lot like sunshine after the rain, or at least the gentle winds of spring settling in right after a storm. Like stepping into foreign territory but being greeted by something that reminds him a lot of home. Seokjin shifts in his seat, then, addressing Joonmyun with a small smile and a curt nod. "Why the hell are you two still here? Aren't you supposed to be--"

"Working?" Seokjin shifts in his seat, twisting in place until he's facing his laptop again. There are a handful of new unread emails, all of them pertinent to the pitch, and-- Who the hell even submits scripts past midnight and expects feedback? he murmurs to himself when he sees Yoongi's email. Granted, Yoongi had promised to send it 'in the next few hours' and it's been 'more than a few', but still. It's one in the morning. Yoongi was complaining about being too sleepy to function earlier. He'd laughed when Seokjin asked when he could send the script and said, I'll do my best, but no guarantees.

Seokjin takes a deep, deep breath, and exhales loudly. He'll have to endure this for the next few weeks. It shouldn't be too hard. Yoongi's a rather okay guy, if one can look past his inability to submit things ahead of time and to arrive at meetings on the dot. All he has to do is to focus on what Yoongi is actually saying, the lilts and rhythm of Yoongi's voice, the wicked contours of his mouth--

"We're working hard. Very hard," Seokjin says in a rush, tapping his fingers on the keys frantically. When he feels the tightness in his throat ease, he adds, "I mean, I was working really, really hard until Jiminnie got back and distracted me because the poor little kitten's tired and hungry and needs to rest--"

Jimin shivers. To Joonmyun, he says, "Why did you hire him again?"

Joonmyun shoots Seokjin a glance, then laughs. In a twist of fate, they choke back their laughter and, instead, turn to Jimin with a small smile and say in chorus, "Meow--"

"F-- I hate this place!"

Seokjin presses the back of his hand and catches the last part of Yoongi's email out of the corner his eye. The little frown beside the 'sorry for sending this late' steals his attention for the quickest second, his focus, all the air in his lungs, keeping him from breathing easily.

"The bosses love you," Joonmyun says much later, half an hour into resuming work again and into Jimin slumping in his seat and slipping on his earphones. For a second, Seokjin thinks he's just hearing Jimin's music spill over from his ears and morph into something strange and twisted because it's almost two in the morning now, but he can still hear Joonmyun saying the exact, same statement, only louder this time. He tears his gaze from his screen, then, pressing a finger where he'd left off on the screen before turning to Joonmyun with strained eyes. He'd put a marker on it or something, but Joonmyun looks like he's a bit too excited to deliver the big news. "They like how you've been
performing so far and—what the hell are you doing?"

"You distracted me," Seokjin mutters in a heartbeat. He sneaks a glance at the document and marks the last part he'd read in yellow, then looks back at Joonmyun and yawns. His chest feels too tight and heavy, but at least he knows this is from fatigue and not anything else. Or maybe he's sailing the boat of denial again and not acknowledging that he's a bit more invested in this job, in this particular project, than usual. "Didn't want to forget where I left off and wow, really, they said that?"

"They're more generous with praise than they look, you know."

"No, no, it's not that." Seokjin scrunches up his face, more in an effort to keep himself awake than to express what he truly wants to say. He's never had difficulty stringing together the right words in his mind for nothing less than a perfect enunciation, but this is probably the fifth time since the start of the pitch period that he's stayed in the office past midnight. It's the third straight day he's rendered overtime work not even because of his responsibilities as the pitch lead but because of work he'll normally be able to finish in three, four hours. And Yoongi, that asshole, sent the presentation flow that's nothing short of amazing at one in the morning. Sure, Seokjin could have opened the attachment at ten in the morning instead of two, but screw his inability to detach himself from work. Screw his inability to throw his hands up in the air and call it a day without finishing his tasks yet. Screw his inability to let go of things easily. "I mean— I don't know, hyung, I kinda feel like I haven't been... performing at my optimum? I've been missing emails—"

"Because you're involved in a pitch," Joonmyun argues. "That's normal, in case you're wondering. You know humans? Your kind? They can only do so much."

"My processing time's slower."

"Because your attention's divided. But it doesn't show in your output."

Seokjin lets his shoulders slump forward. "I could be doing more with all the time I spend here at work, you know."

Joonmyun rolls his eyes and huffs, the sigh escaping his lips ringing in Seokjin's ears. It makes Seokjin shiver a little. Or maybe it's the air conditioning at work.

"That's because you have such high standards for yourself."

"Which is just right, right? Because if I lower my own standards—"

"Then you won't be able to sleep peacefully at night because you're a fucking perfectionist," Joonmyun finishes. He snorts, reaches out, and threads his fingers through Seokjin's hair in a gentle touch. It almost feels uncertain, tentative, but Seokjin doesn't trust his judgment at such a late hour. Every single one of Joonmyun's touches leaves patches of warmth blooming on his skin. "Give yourself some credit, kid. If the worst workaholics and perfectionists in the company say that they're pleased with your performance and that they're impressed, then that says a lot, right?"

It speaks of how crazy they also are, Seokjin's tempted to argue, but his body gets the better of him and draws light laughter from his gut. He can taste acid at the back of his teeth, raking the column of his throat, opening him up and letting the words crawl from his stomach and up. He can feel his hands shaking, more out of fatigue than sheer excitement. And he can feel the pulse at the base of his throat quicken as he asks, "Did you mean Sihyuk-sajangnim?"

"All three of them. The three musketeers. The tres amigos, whatever you want to call them," Joonmyun replies, lips curling up into a smile. Sihyuk who wouldn't stop cracking the worst jokes
while they were presenting the initial idea because, *C'mon, you guys are too stiff! And we should never feel too boxed up, right?*" Namjoon who couldn't stay still in his seat for more than ten minutes, but could rattle about executional ideas in the most convincing way possible for nearly an hour. Yoongi who had to be tapping quick beats on something all the time, like there was a song playing in his head at any time of the day, but spoke with the calmness and stillness of steady ocean water. The big bosses whom Seokjin probably wouldn't have had the chance to work with on a normal day, he not been the designated lead for pitches. It's a bit hard to imagine, the bosses talking about him that way with Joonmyun, but *hey*--"I know Sihyuk-sajangnim's pretty unavailable 110% of the time and Namjoon looks like he's joking about every single thing, but they mean everything they say."

"Oh yeah?" Seokjin whispers, doesn't say, *Even Yoongi? Even what he does? *"I mean, *wow, thanks, but it's a bit-*""

"Overwhelming, I know," Joonmyun finishes. He heaves a sigh, the tight corners of his eyes easing into something more relaxed. Slowly, Joonmyun drags his hand down Seokjin's nape, then rests his hand on Seokjin's shoulder. Joonmyun lets his touch linger long enough that Seokjin feels his insides turning on reflex, feels his throat go tight and dry and his chest grow heavy. It takes him back to that day, weeks ago, when he had been stuck in a sticky situation in an elevator and Yoongi somehow got him out of the mess with a kiss. And it fastens him to that moment with a thick web, with the way Yoongi chased after his lips with his teeth, craving more. So yeah, maybe Joonmyun's right. *It is overwhelming. It's distracting. It's frustrating and it's driving Seokjin insane on those few times he isn't thinking about anything but breathing. *"And don't be... misled by Yoongi's frowny face. The kid's an absolute marshmallow on the inside. He's... a koala pretending to be some wild bear. Boar. Whatever."

Seokjin snorts. *You mean 'don't be misled by his empty gaze', right?* he muses as he quickly shifts his gaze to his laptop's screen at the prompt of another email coming in. It's from Yoongi again, this time with a 'draft deck' attached and the words 'This reads a lot like a really rough sketch but this is how the lines should be chopped up, more or less. Just so you have an idea of the actual pacing of the preso. Think of it as the bare bones for a song or something. Or just... let me explain tomorrow, yeah. TY.' written on the body of the message in abnormally big characters. Varying sizes. Like Yoongi had somehow fallen asleep while zombie typing the email and accidentally-on-purpose tweaked the font size because he likes screwing with Seokjin's mind all the fucking time--

*Cut it, Seokjin tells himself, again and again until he can drown out the other voices in his head. You're tired, drained, radioactive. Don't do or say anything you'll regret.*

So instead, he mumbles, "Or his dead expression. He looks a bit dead inside all the time," bites the inside of his cheek when Joonmyun cocks an eyebrow at him, urging him to say more. "Or a rotten marshmallow."

"He's still your--our boss, you know."

Seokjin shrugs and buries himself in work again, clicking the download button before he can even forget what he's supposed to be doing. "A floppy marshmallow, then."

Joonmyun hovers for a few more minutes then he's shaking his head, rolling his eyes, pushing himself off his seat and stretching out his legs. From where Seokjin is, Joonmyun's supposed to look a bit more imposing than he should, especially when he says, "You two better be on your way home before three or else I'm forcing you two to take a leave tomorrow," but there's no edge to his voice. The shadows are soft on his cheeks. It's two in the morning and Joonmyun's smiling and giving both Seokjin's and Jimin's hair a light ruffle before pulling away and picking up his bag from the empty
Seokjin can’t be assed to retaliate and say, *I’m not a kid anymore, hyung.* He can only stick out his tongue in response. "And don't you even dare reply to emails if you do go on leave or I'll twist your nipples."

Jimin snorts. "Ooh, kinky."

Joonmyun groans, but for the most part it sounds like laughter – tired and rough, but laughter just the same. "So, can I expect nipple clamps on my desk on my birthday?"

Seokjin buries his face in his hands and doesn't even bother choking back the sound lodged at the back of his throat. "Hyung, please–"

The petition for Joonmyun to leave lasts for about five more minutes, or at least until Joonmyun shuffles out of the office in earnest, leaving behind nothing but a trail of faint laughter mixed with warnings, a parting message, a last reminder – "3 a.m., no later than that!" As if we can afford to take a leave tom–later, Seokjin grumbles under his breath, but he can't say he minds. Taking breaks lasting longer than an hour make him feel antsy, uncomfortable, as if he's missing out on something he absolutely cannot be thrown out of loop of, like he's missing important details of a bigger picture that's being presented to him. Still, he pads to the pantry as quickly as possible, coffee mug, glass, and the sheer desire to rest in tow. What he can afford is to come in at ten in the morning since he's already replied to all his unanswered emails and even given feedback on Yoongi's draft for the deck. Or maybe even twelve – he can drop by his favorite coffee shop first and lounge a bit there, take his time sipping coffee while answering emails on his phone–

He stops abruptly in his tracks when he sees a lump of something on one of tables in the pantry. Bright, blond hair, a familiar deck flashed on his screen and an even more familiar fedora so close to bumping against a cup of coffee, face buried in his folded arms and his body curled up in such a painful position – Seokjin's pretty darn sure he knows this person. There aren't too many people in the office who wear their hair blond – Heechul had just dyed his a nice shade of 'icy blue' two days ago – and no two people have the same shape of the body, so he can't be mistaken – this is Yoongi. Yoongi who was feeling under the weather the whole day but stayed in the conference room with them, anyway, offering ideas and polishing blunt suggestions to turn them into something beautiful, Yoongi who had supposedly gone home already, right after he had emailed Seokjin and said that he'll try his best to have everything delivered to Seokjin's inbox before the end of day, Yoongi who had been working until two in the morning just to get things done, and has now collapsed in a heap of limbs on a table in the pantry.

Yoongi who won't stop shaking and shivering at the cool air all around the room, but won't rouse from his slumber, either.

Seokjin looks around for... something he can use to help Yoongi deal with the cold – the remote for the air conditioning, a switch, a sweater Yoongi could have left lying around? Something more than a Fedora he can cover Yoongi with? But to no avail – there's nothing in the area that can help Yoongi keep warm or even coax him to get up and sleep elsewhere instead of just dozing off. All the voices in Seokjin's head are telling him what to do, come on, Jin, you're not as heartless as some people think you are, right? And every fiber of his being is telling him to go, slip out of his jacket, give it to someone in need. So with a huff, he removes his coat, dusts off the chips that had stuck to the sleeves while he was having his snack earlier, and drapes it on Yoongi's shoulders. Never mind that the jacket is a bit too big on Yoongi, almost swallowing him up, or that the sudden rush of cold leaves him feeling numb all over; all that matters now is that Yoongi has stopped shaking, that Yoongi's breathing has evened out, that the corners of Yoongi's lips are slowly curling up into the faintest smile like the little warmth lent by Seokjin's jacket has thawed him out.
He picks up the fedora and rests it on the tuft of Yoongi's hair, just enough to lend him a bit of warmth. When the prickling cold reaches his stomach and makes his insides turn, he takes a step back, takes the mug he'd set down on the table just a few minutes ago in favor of helping Yoongi out, and drops the things he'd used for the day into the sink.

He gulps down hard when he hears the faint, satisfied sigh coming from Yoongi's direction. With one last deep breath, he digs his hands into his pockets, curls his hands into tight fists, and breathes out, the tight knot in his chest coming off little by little.

It will be a long ride home. Long and drawn out, but strangely not as cold.

In the morning, he finds two pieces of candy on his work desk and a note scribbled in hasty writing, screaming at him in big and bold letters – TY. It shouldn't mean much, shouldn't mean anything at all; still, he feels the pulse in his palms, the back of his knees, the insides of his elbows quicken. Feels his palms grow a bit sweaty, then cold. He looks around – for an audience, for clues, for someone who might see him and think he's crazy, he isn't sure. All he knows right now is that it's almost twelve noon already and most of the accounts people haven't come in yet. And that maybe he'd left the part of his brain that makes better judgments before he's had his second cup of coffee at home, at the bus stop, anywhere but here.

He runs his thumb along the surface for a quick second before rolling his eyes, then, slips the paper in his drawer, and rips one of the wrappers open so he can pop the candy in his mouth. The first lick sets off explosions at the tip of his tongue. It tastes a lot like strawberry and mint and coffee, like weeks ago and a surprise encounter in the elevator with the most unlikely of people.

He shuts his eyes tightly even before the voices in his head can say a thing. And he heads to the pantry for a glass of water, for a drink, for real coffee, eager to wash away the familiar taste in his mouth and the lurching sensation in his stomach when he found his jacket folded neatly on his seat minutes ago, another note safely tucked in the pocket – VM.

It's been a running joke in agencies for years now that pitches can make or break relationships. There's an ounce of truth to it, Seokjin supposes – with all the arguments over ideas that had been suffocating them in the conference room these past few weeks, it would be a miracle if relationships and people walked out of the room unscathed. With all the yelling and screaming they had been doing just trying to drive a point across, it would be almost impossible to not let ill feelings linger in their system long after they'd stepped out of the pitch room. The guys from production can only take so much of Heechul's eye rolling and scoffing and casual murmuring of, "We gave them nice designs and the UX team just murdered everything, everything!" The creatives can only take so much of Yoongi's heavy sighing and shaking of the head, no matter how much Yoongi tries to temper his reactions. And Seokjin can only stay in the office past nine in the evening so many times until his patience breaks and fatigue bleeds onto his sanity. It's not as if he isn't going crazy already; he just wants to convince himself that he can do a few more hours of overtime, just a couple more until the
actual presentation tides over.

Still, he heaves a sigh into the receiver and whispers, "I'll make it up to you next time. You know how rough pitches can get," when Hoseok hums on the other end of the line, neither expressing disappointment nor sympathizing with Seokjin. He remembers this from college – or was it high school? – during media pitch week when Seokjin had to market a tool to supposed Human Resource managers who spent more time doing paperwork and filing than actual 'people-work' and talking to employees to make sure they were happy with their jobs. Hoseok managed to finish his plates and presentations early. It was Ice Cream Thursday, yet Seokjin had to bail out that one time, *One last preso, Hobi, I promise. Then I'll join you in the land of the living again*–

He made it up to Hoseok with a sleepover and a marathon of all Harry Potter movies during the weekend. He hadn't seen Hoseok happier. Heck, it was the first time in weeks that he'd seen Hoseok display any sign of life at all.

Seokjin heaves a sigh, shutting his eyes as he leans back in his seat. Hoseok can be bribed with some quality liquor and the promise of samgyupsal, he's pretty certain, but it's the first time in a while that Hoseok's schedule has freed up. It's the first time in months that Hoseok has had the chance to leave work relatively early, and the first thought that crossed his mind was to spend some quality time with his best friend, ask Seokjin how he's been, if Seokjin's having the time of his life suffering the same fate as Hoseok was. It's the first time that Seokjin absolutely cannot make time for his friend even if his life depended on it, and he just feels like no amount of liquor and meat can ever make things right. "I know, I'm an asshole and I don't deserve to be called your friend and–"

"Hey, don't be too hard on yourself. You're still an okay friend. Just an asshole who keeps leading me on–"

*Jung Hoseok.*

"I'm just saying!" Hoseok laughs, bright and loud despite all the distance between them. Seokjin lets the sound curl at the base of his nape, lifting the tension in his muscles little by little. It pays to have a friend who works in the same industry. It pays to have known Hoseok for nearly his entire life already, pays that Hoseok knows Seokjin wouldn't miss meet ups like this if he weren't duty-bound and held up against the wall by work. "And we're doing a marathon of Toy Story and Lord of the Rings next time. No buts."

"Just those two?" Seokjin asks, the corners of his mouth lifting to a grin when he hears Hoseok snort on the other end of the line. "I thought you were going to make me sit through all one million episodes of Prince of Tennis and–"

"And your jjangmyun's here," Yoongi announces as he walks into the room, balancing food containers in his arms and pushing the door further open with one foot. He grunts, loud yet low, audible enough for Seokjin's muscles to shift completely on reflex. *You can ask for help, you know,* Seokjin would say but if there's anything he's learned about Yoongi these past few week, it's that soliciting help will be the last thing Yoongi would do even if he was already struggling. Yoongi hadn't ever stated it, probably never will, but Seokjin isn't blind to Yoongi brushing off Baekhyun's attempts at offering assistance and saying that he can work on the flow, *Just give me a few hours and you'll find it in your inbox within the day.* He isn't about to play deaf to Namjoon saying he can be the one to look through all the design requirements for the pitch and Yoongi just shrugging in response and insisting they check the visuals alongside each other just to be sure. At first, Seokjin had thought Yoongi just couldn't trust people to do their job and deliver but, after a while, after many sleepless nights and email exchanges at two in the morning – "*You shouldn't be awake, babe. Anyway, thanks for the feedback on the script. I'll get back to you in an hour.*" *Will you stop calling*
me that? Don't these emails get screened or filtered or something?" "Red velvet, then?" "Urgh, whatever. Just give me the revised script ASAP." "Got it, babe. :3" – he realized that Yoongi just wanted to check and double-check everything, make sure that everything they would eventually be presenting to Sihyuk was the best they could offer, go to bed knowing that they'd put their best work out there for clients to feed on.

Yoongi just wants to protect everyone from harsh critique from the outside. It hurt ten times more than the claws they dug into each other's skin during brainstorming, after all.

So Seokjin doesn't lunge forward. Instead, he stays a safe three feet away, only hovering when Yoongi meets his gaze and cocks his head in the direction of the containers. He tries to gather a few in his arms, but to no avail; the slightest movement makes Yoongi's arms jerk and the tower of containers shake.

"Did you even sleep last night?"

Yoongi peeks from behind the containers, blinking and lifting his eyebrows at the same time. His bangs cover his eyes a little, a light sheet of shadows draping over his eyelashes, but Seokjin can still make out the way Yoongi focuses his gaze on nothing, no one else but him, the way Yoongi sort of squints, but eases the furrow of his eyebrows soon after. He looks like... one of those anime characters in the shows he watches with Hoseok on the off chance they have time to power through an anime series. He looks surprised, but maybe it's just the product of his shaking arms. Seokjin had gripped Yoongi by his elbows without realizing in an effort to help Yoongi save the food just a few seconds ago; maybe if he takes a step back, puts some distance between them, he'll be able to see the look in Yoongi's features better.

"I remembered to ask for extra yellow radish, if that's what you're asking," Yoongi answers after a while. A loud gulp, then, "Two sets, actually. I tried your suggestion the other day, about eating jjajangmyun with the radish, and it actually tastes better."

Seokjin bites the inside of his cheek hard enough to sting. You remembered?, he's tempted to ask. He's tempted to prod. He's tempted to make Yoongi narrate the entire sequence where the yellow radish opened his eyes to an entirely new slew of possibilities with jjangmyun, but no, stop. Don't push too hard. Seokjin curls in his toes, then, the sharp jolt of electricity crawling up his legs a reminder that some people don't like being dissected out in the open. Some people like Yoongi like helping people get out of weird situations with a kiss, but refuse any help they're offered. Seokjin has to live with that.

"You can... ask for extra mushroom and bean sprouts from that resto, too," Seokjin murmurs after a while, once he feels the tightness in his throat ease and sees the curious, curious gaze in Yoongi's eyes dissolve into something... safer. Not as intense, but not unfocused either. Yoongi always looks at people like he means to peel off their layers in the slowest, more torturous way possible. And Seokjin feels a bit too exposed right now even with all the stacks of food containers keeping them apart. "That is, if you want your jjajangmyun dryer than usual and you want to... spread out the sauce even more."

"It acts as an extender?"

"I wouldn't call it that? It's more of--" Seokjin twists his mouth to the side, then quickly presses his lips together, instead, when he sees the beginnings of laughter dancing on the jut of Yoongi's lower lip. Yoongi's arms shake again, and Seokjin takes it as his cue to jump, take the leap, guide Yoongi to the closest flat surface so they can get the food out of harm's way once and for all. Never mind that Yoongi might flinch or pull away any second; it's nine in the evening and they need to eat if they
have plans of staying in the office for another four, five hours just so they can polish the presentation for tomorrow's pitch. He can live with the patches of warmth that will bloom on his skin if and when Yoongi decides to push him away. "Something you can add to your noodles so that the sauce isn't as thick and concentrated?"

"And the yellow radish is for?"

"To counter the thick and heavy taste. You'll want to even out the flavors on your tongue if you want to eat a lot of jjajangmyun." Seokjin drops his gaze to the bento-sized boxes he's arranging on the table in neat columns. Namjoon and Heechul will probably mix everything up later, but he doesn't care – arranging things and making sense of the chaos in his mind puts his heart at ease. "And this particular resto makes really, really great noodles. Even their classic ramyun's great!"

Yoongi chuckles. Without the tower of containers muffling the sound, filtering the crackles in Yoongi's voice, keeping them apart, it sounds brighter than usual, unlike most of Yoongi's 9 p.m. laughter. Not that Seokjin has been keeping a record at the back of his mind, cataloguing the sounds Yoongi makes when he's mad, frustrated, disappointed, sad, when Yoongi's excited, thrilled, curious, interested. He hasn't. His brain just happens to... be able to retain things he sees and hears in passing in clear and crisp images. And when you spend nearly twenty-four hours with the same person every single day in the same workplace, the same conference room, breathing in the same air, it's difficult not to care. "I should take eating lessons from you."

Seokjin furrows his eyebrows, face scrunching up a little in accord. He doesn't feel it – hasn't been feeling much since the clock struck six in the evening – but the way Yoongi throws away the small smile on his lips in exchange for something bigger, brighter, a grin that reaches the corners of his eyes, is enough to tell him that he probably looks a bit more hilarious than he'd like. "Eating lessons? Do those even exist?"

Yoongi shrugs. "You can be the pioneer or something. You've always had great ideas."

Stop. Don't go there, whispers a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind. It sounds a lot like his thirty-year old self, the same voice that had told him to pack his bags and leave his old company once and for all. It sounds a bit too real. He'd tried not to listen to it for the longest time but it just wouldn't stop until Seokjin said, "You know what? You win. You're right. I should leave this toxic place. I should start living again. "Do I look like I have time for something like that?"

"You can make time."

"I'm--" No magician, he's tempted to say, but he manages to bite down on his tongue to recalibrate and mutter, "Whatever. I'm busy. And besides – is eating something you even teach? Doesn't that just... occur to you naturally or something?"

Yoongi stares at him for a while. Just stares, eyebrows lightly furrowed, but lips still quirked into a peculiar smile. He looks like he's seconds away from laughing again, the corners of his mouth pulling up and down in intervals, but he doesn't say a word, doesn't even make a sound for the next few seconds. In the past few weeks leading up to pitch day, Seokjin has seen this look on Yoongi at least ten times already, and every single time there isn't anyone else he can turn to to ask, Is it just me or is he just perpetually amused with my face?

"Stuffing food in your mouth is different from actually eating, though," Yoongi says after a while, voice a bit rough, but so strangely warm. It wraps around Seokjin's neck like... a scarf of sorts, soft and comfortable, nothing too imposing. On a normal winter day, he'd prefer just wearing multiple layers of clothes and praying to whatever god that his nape won't feel like breaking before he gets on a bus (and Hoseok would always berate him for deliberately not wearing enough layers, not taking
care of himself enough). He'd do away with the scarf and the gloves, allow some of the cold from the outside seep into his skin, but right now he wants nothing but to wrap the warm lilts of Yoongi's voice around himself like a quilt. Maybe it's the late hour, the fatigue, the drain and drone of the pitch at work, but—"And you always look like you're having the time of your life whenever you eat."

—but Yoongi feels like a touch of home right now, at this very moment, a little past nine in the evening the night before the pitch. It's strange – he's only ever talked to Yoongi about work, deadlines, blasted cars and how to market them, getting enough sleep even if they have been going home at two in the morning these past few days, and about improving the jjajangmyun's overall flavor, but there's something about the way Yoongi studies him and searches for clues without begging for them that makes him feel okay with the whole... curious gaze thing. There's something about the way Yoongi pokes but doesn't push, the way Yoongi hovers but doesn't quite lean in all the way that makes the tight knots in his muscles come off slowly and surely.

There's something about the way Yoongi had enough sense to ask if Seokjin was okay with a kiss before making their mouths meet in an inelegant slide, before leaving scars on Seokjin's skin, bite marks on his lips that stung for days, that makes his insides turn.

"You're right, I guess," Seokjin mutters after a while, voice barely above a whisper. Yoongi shrugs, the same shrug he does when Namjoon commends him for a good idea or Joonmyun applauds him for turning that would otherwise sound like crap into gold. It's as if he's used to it already, turning blood into water and pulling off miracles. It's amusing as much as it is hilarious. It tickles Seokjin's insides hard enough to coax laughter to spill from his lips. "Should I call the others before the food gets cold?"

"Nah, let them come here on their own." Yoongi peels the cover from the container. The scent of the soybean paste wafts across the room, filling Seokjin's nostrils and tugging at the corners of his lips. His stomach lurches again, but this time it's a comfortable, familiar lurch. It doesn't make him want to curl up in a corner and hide. "They should have been here five minutes ago, anyway. You can't keep cleaning after their shit, else they won't learn."

"At the expense of missing deadlines?"

"Do you want them to miss a deadline one, two times, or do you want them to keep messing things up?"

Seokjin snorts. "Point," he whispers, then Yoongi's doing that cute little shrug again, the corners of Yoongi's mouth pulling up into a small smile.

Seokjin laughs a little and leans back in his seat. He watches as Yoongi snatches some of the mushrooms in the other container and adds it to his noodles, as Yoongi mixes all the ingredients together and takes small, tentative bites of the dish. Yoongi looks like a kid tasting something for the first time, or an adult who hasn't had a taste of jjajangmyun in a while because it once screwed with his system. And Seokjin probably looks like the creepy playmate hiding behind a tree trunk, watching Yoongi breathe, but at least he can hide that behind the veil of black noodles. He can stuff his mouth until he can't feel it anymore, until he can smile without Yoongi noticing, too tangled up and tied in his food.

He's okay with this distance between them, with Yoongi nodding in approval and holding two thumbs up as he licks the black sauce off of his mouth, with the way Yoongi's eyes quickly flit south, to the gentle swell of Seokjin's lips, then back up to look at Seokjin straight in the eye.

He's safe.
"You know, it never quite made sense to me how you ended up in accounts instead of creatives."

Seokjin looks up from where he's been adding slide transitions to the presentation and furrows his eyebrows a little, just enough for him to feel the throbbing in his temples all the more. The first thought that occurs to him is, what the hell is that supposed to mean? The second, I have to present this to you in a bit and you're distracting me? And he'd voice those out, let the words spill from his lips without preamble, but he's tired. It's closer to four in the morning now than three and their presentation is in five hours. It takes a little under half an hour to get to the Hyundai Motors office in Seocho-gu, and possibly another half hour to make sure that their brains are awake enough to take any questions thrown at them by their prospective client. He doesn't have time for games like this, but if there's one thing he's learned about Yoongi in all the weeks that they've spent holed up in the same room until the whee hours of the morning, it's that the only games Yoongi's willing to play are those he knows he can win cleanly.

So Seokjin heaves a sigh, lifts his fingers from the trackpad for a while as he mumbles, "I applied for the job. Like most people do." He waits for Yoongi's response, a follow up, and when all he gets is Yoongi narrowing his eyes at him, Seokjin drops his gaze back to his screen. "It was a conscious decision."

"Yeah. You don't look like the type who'd be swayed so easily."

Seokjin scoffs. It's true for the most part, but from time to time he'll recall that the whole 'getting a girlfriend thing because his parents have been asking about it' and realize that he can be swayed by the right people at his weakest moments. He was tired then, sick of his parents breathing down his neck and telling him what to do, that he should take up business in university instead of some 'stupid communications course', that he was getting old, he should start seeing women and saving up for his family in the future, "You don't want a girlfriend? What, are you gay?" It was bearable at first, but after a while the monotonous lectures felt more like taking a punch to the gut instead of just hearing sharp words pass through his ears. They choked him up so badly that he had to hold onto the closest thing for a chance to breathe easily again, to stay alive.

He laughs to himself. In hindsight, maybe he was an asshole for tricking Ahreum into believing that they could ever have a happy ending. Maybe he should buy her coffee or dinner sometime, ask if she wanted him to introduce her to good friends, confess, "Remember that kid from the anime club? Jeongguk? We sort of were a thing back in senior year. We could have been more." Or maybe he should just nod at Yoongi in approval because Yoongi hasn't looked away since he'd dropped his comment.

Stop complicating every single thing, he tells himself. To Yoongi, he says, "I'm a rock."

"You're a colorful rock."

Seokjin squints. He'd dissect that statement on any other day, but right now his brain and limbs feel like jelly. His eyes are sore. His can't even bring himself to thin his lips into something neutral that doesn't resemble a frown at the slightest. If this is Yoongi's attempt at wheedling answers out of him then Yoongi might just be successful. It won't be a clean win, though. It's unfair. "Yeah, I wear all the colors of the rainbow on my skin. In matte and metallic. Yay." He tries his best to smile, but he's already lost the feeling in his cheeks. He can't even feel himself breathing anymore. "That doesn't
"It will later, once you're done with that preso and I'm the one going through it already." Yoongi shifts in his seat, pulling away from his laptop, then heaves a sigh. "You think differently." His shoulders fall forward automatically and all of a sudden Seokjin's muscles are twitching, the insane urge to lean forward so he can pull Yoongi's shoulders back, help Yoongi find a better, more comfortable position, press his thumbs down on the tense muscles on Yoongi's back teasing him to move closer, to reach over. It's hilarious – he's probably just as tired, but part of him can't seem to let go of the realization that hit him just hours ago, nine in the evening, when Yoongi sat up straight and slipped on his Chief Creative Director coat again at the first sign of the Baekhyun and Taehyung walking into the room.

Yoongi had looked at him with a stern gaze then. It felt a lot like a warning, but part of Seokjin felt like it was a plea for help, *Please cooperate. I have to do this else I won't be able to scare them into meeting deadlines. You know how these kids are.* So Seokjin hadn't said a word, simply sank his teeth into his food and tossed paper towels in Yoongi's direction when some of the soy bean paste stuck longer than usual to the corners of Yoongi's lips. He hadn't even uttered anything when he felt Yoongi kick at his foot under the table as a twisted form of gratitude. And Yoongi hadn't made a noise when Seokjin kicked back like they'd just formed some sort of secret footshake, except it was nothing like dancing.

"Is that a creative director's way of saying, 'you're crazy'?

"Well–" Yoongi laughs. It sounds a lot like a bubble bursting into little giggles faint enough to go unnoticed, but there's no one else in the room but the two of them. Heechul and Taehyung have already gone home. Chanyeol and Kyungsoo from production are busy adding the last few touches to the credentials video in the broadcasting booth. Joonmyun's probably in the accounts area, either making sure Jimin goes home in the next five minutes or making sure that all the equipment they'll be bringing to tomorrow's pitch is already in one place, ready to just be shoved into someone's car trunk or backseat. Namjoon's supposedly taken a dump and hasn't returned since – "*Don't believe him,*" Yoongi had muttered earlier, "*He's just sleeping in his room.*" So there's nobody else for Seokjin to focus on but Yoongi and the way his lips curl up then pull down in an instant like he's fighting this insane urge to just let loose and grin in earnest. Seokjin's trapped, caught in the web of the situation, the moment, and he'd be lying if he said he wanted to be freed from the strings of Yoongi's voice anytime soon. This is the closest to feeling at home right now, and he'll take what he can get. "It is what it is. But if you've interpreted it that way, then–"

"Then what, that makes me fit to be part of you cult of creatives worshipping nothing but work?" Seokjin's eyebrows lift in thoughtless response. Good ideas can be anything – eating on time and not long after it's ceased to be 'lunch time', leaving as soon as he has already rendered eight hours of work whenever possible, midnight snacks and coffee runs more for his sanity than to stay awake,
rest. Not having slide transitions in the chart-heavy parts because we don't need drama in data; we have to keep those secure and straightforward, he reasoned with Yoongi around half an hour ago. But Yoongi doesn't seem to be interested in those, instead dragging his gaze south when Seokjin sucks in his bottom lip and gives it a gentle nibble, just enough to keep him in this moment, awake, alive only five hours before the big pitch. "Good and bad ideas."

"Sounds ominous," Seokjin says, voice dropping beneath the clacking sound of his keys. He shifts his gaze for a moment, hoping to lose Yoongi, but Yoongi's gaze is focused and unrelenting, forever discerning. "Well, I guess I have really good days when I come up with amazing things, but otherwise--"

"You come up with better concepts than some of my art directors, to be honest."

Seokjin scoffs. He stops typing, the joints in his fingers locking as he lets the pads of his fingers hover the keys. He's fast losing time to make the transitions for the slides and the formatting uniform across sections, yet part of him is more interested in knowing what those good concepts are, why Yoongi thinks they're good, why Yoongi believes it isn't strange for someone who has had eight years of training in accounts to shift to creatives but thinks it's just so weird that Seokjin has never thought of dabbling in the arts. Duty, duty, duty, he tells himself, shoves down his throat until he can feel his insides turning, tickling his throat. After this, you can play games again and maybe talk to him if he isn't busy but for now, Seokjin, just please focus on what you're supposed to be doing.

He gulps down hard and curls his hands into loose fists. He trusted you to get things done. Now, don't let him down--

"You're kidding, right?"

Yoongi squints, eyebrows meeting in the middle a light knot. It eases just as soon as it settles in, doesn't even give Seokjin the chance to dissect it further and compare it against the catalogue of Yoongi expressions he's kept at the back of his mind. The one that he keeps shoving to the far back until he's forgotten them (or at least until Yoongi looks up at him with the same softness as he did just before Seokjin closed his eyes and let Yoongi kiss him). Seokjin prefers the indiscernible look over the blank canvas scrawled all over Yoongi's features right now, though; there's nothing to read here, nothing to discover, to understand. There's nothing to work with but the way Yoongi's voice drops low, heavy, dangerously rough. And he knows better than to study lip movement at three in the morning. He always gets the worst ideas past three. "Do I look like the type of person who'd joke around?"

"Well, no," Seokjin answers in a heartbeat, doesn't say, Just the type of person who'd kiss someone for kicks. A deep breath, then, "Sorry, forget I said that. I'm just--"

"Tired, hungry, late," Yoongi mumbles, pursing his lips as he finishes and heaves a sigh. He looks like he wants to say more, wants to tell Seokjin off for slipping back into old habit that he should have outgrown already, but he doesn't. Instead, he lets silence settle all around them for the next few seconds, until Seokjin feels a familiar shiver crawl up his spine – at the prompt of his muscles relaxing or at the sight of Yoongi's focused gaze, he isn't certain. All Seokjin knows right now is that he should probably kick Yoongi in the ass for distracting him, calling him out on being late when Yoongi was the one who'd stolen all of his attention, the air in his lungs, the last few dregs of his sanity. "You promised to let me see the deck in ten minutes and it's already been twelve."

"You promised to not disturb me and just behave."

"You were drifting off. I had to do something to keep you awake." Yoongi heaves a sigh, shoulders lifting a little in accord. A heartbeat then there it is, the corners of his lips curling up into a small
smile, widening with every passing second, with every little bubble of laughter that spills from the corners of his lips. Seokjin's chest tightens just enough to make acid crawl up his throat but, for the most part, he can still breathe. If Yoongi doesn't say anything weird and stupid again then he'll be back to tip top shape in no time. The chances of that are zero to none. "What? You're awake now, right? You got shit done. All is good. Stop looking at me like you didn't actually benefit from this."

Seokjin rolls his eyes. "I can't believe you," he mumbles, then submits to the strangest urge to laugh. He can spare a few more ounces of energy for this; he's positive he can count on Yoongi to give him a gentle nudge if he ever passes out again or teeters on that thin line between sleep and consciousness. He can feel his limbs again. He has full control over everything but the thundering pulse at the base of his throat and the thumping in his chest. He's awake. "Okay, your turn. Don't mess with my animations; I made sure they were tastefully done."

"That explains the curtain animation, then," Yoongi comments as he walks over, inching closer to where Seokjin is. "Tastefully done, eh?"

"What? You haven't even seen--" Seokjin shakes his head. He's pretty sure he didn't include any crazy effects that can make the presentation look tacky instead of artsy, but then do I look like the kind of person who'd joke around? He leans closer to his screen, then, squinting as he goes through the slides he worked on earlier. But Yoongi beats him to it, gives his arm a gentle nudge and bumps his seat into Seokjin's own in an attempt to make space for himself. "You better not be shitting me or else--"

"Didn't I tell you I trusted your taste?"

"Yeah, but--" But sometimes I do things without realizing and maybe that has spilled over to my work? "Yoongi--"

Seokjin bites down on his lower lip long enough to sting. Sajangnim. Add an honorific at the end. Go on, save yourself, a voice at the back of his mind tells him, but too late – Yoongi's already contorting his face to this strange... smile. A cross between the shit-eating grin he loves wearing and the lazy smile that surfaces on his lips when he's pleased with the output he's reviewing but is too tired to use elaborate gestures as reactions. The type Seokjin has only ever seen in dramas or on the off-chance Joonmyun manages to convince Yoongi that having his art directors turn in designs two days before deadline is actually a good idea. It makes the slow, simmering heat at the pit of his stomach come to a boil but, at the same time, it makes him feel incredibly warm, enough that he feels the tension in his shoulders lift, the throbbing pain in his temples easing in accord.

"Doubt isn't good. Been there, done that," Yoongi says, voice just above a whisper. Then, reaching over, he lets the pads of his fingers ghost over Seokjin's skin. Seokjin shivers all over, little prickling packets of heat settling on his nape, then his insides are lurching in the way they did when Yoongi stopped right in front of him and asked, May I? May I slowly end your life with a kiss? "Now, move. And when I said I trusted your design sense, I meant it. If you could let some of the confidence you have as an accounts head or something spill over to the artist in you, that would be great."

Well sorry, I haven't had the chance to practice art and design in eons, Seokjin's tempted to say, but enough with that. They're heading into battle in a few hours. He can't keep lugging around old armor even if it's been tainted with nothing with victories. He's being offered new and shiny suits, much tougher than before, and he can't keep turning opportunities down; that's just ridiculous. So instead, he takes a deep breath, moves to his right to give Yoongi some wiggle room, and says, "I'll do that."

"And thanks. For believing," he says much later, when Yoongi's already a fourth into reviewing the presentation. Yoongi lets his fingers hover the track pad and tilts his head, but doesn't meet Seokjin's gaze yet. This is wiggle room, Seokjin muses, when Yoongi nods as if urging him to go on, but
doesn't repeat himself when silence hangs in the room longer than usual. It's a comfortable silence that Seokjin doesn't mind listening to, doesn't mind wrapping around himself in a cocoon warm enough to lull him to sleep. It isn't—they aren't awkward. They're alright. And that's all Seokjin needs right now to temper the sinking sensation in his stomach. "That means a lot coming from you."

Yoongi chuckles. "I'm just me," he says, but the lil in his voice and the slow-forming smile on his lips say otherwise. Still, Seokjin doesn't push, instead leaning away from Yoongi, putting more distance between them, letting both of them breathe. Pays Yoongi back with the same ounce of respect for space and sinks back in his seat, watching Yoongi from a safe distance as Yoongi hums, "Nothing special about that."

'Nothing special' turns out to be the best presentation Seokjin has seen in years – and that says a lot because his life back in publishing has been 50% actual client servicing and 50% trying to outsmart suppliers that have presented to clients before them. It isn't even because Chanyeol and Kyungsoo produced the credentials video in a way that made the people at BBDO look like secret agents who would go to great lengths to – "What," Seokjin recalls Yoongi grumbling after watching the first pass, lips turned down into the nastiest scowl, "Save the Sonata from the end of the world? Or save the world with the Sonata? No? Then redo the whole thing because that's what it looks like right now. We're not selling cars to Hyundai – we're selling ourselves looking good riding their cars to and from their office!" – deliver what Hyundai needed, or because they actually came to Hyundai in undercover clothing at first and ripped their shirts open to reveal their salespeople outfit. It's because of the time, effort, heart they'd poured into the preparation and the ideas coming together in a nice and perfect fit. It's all their plans – silly get ups included – coming to sweet, sweet fruition.

'Non-agency clothes,' Namjoon had called their outfits as he looked at his reflection in the glass walls of their building. Seokjin recalls Namjoon frowning at his dress slacks before they shuffled inside Sonatas they'd rented out just for the presentation, recalls Joonmyun rolling his eyes and shoving Namjoon inside before the latter could even complain another time. And he recalls as well, details clear and crisp in his memory, the way Yoongi had given him a once over when he walked into the conference room after brushing back his hair, the way Yoongi bit the inside of his cheek when their eyes met in the crowded room, the way Yoongi hummed and nodded and laughed a little before saying, "You're gonna upstage Hyundai's CEO," before sucking in his bottom lip and shifting his gaze.

Seokjin took that as his way out, his chance at taking a step back and looking at anything, anyone else who isn't Yoongi. "Maybe I should have gone with a bowtie."

"Maybe you should stop worrying," Joonmyun had commented as he ran his hands down his own polo for the nth time in the past ten minutes, then looked in Yoongi's direction for support. Yoongi's response was a small smile and a thumbs up; Seokjin's reflex was to adjust his tie, pinch his ears, look away. "You're gonna blow them away, knock 'em off their feet, give you the entire Hyundai portfolio without them realizing–"

Yoongi had laughed, low and faint, then heaved a sigh. Seokjin could've sworn his insides lurched, but that could be from not being able to eat anything before the big pitch. It was his body telling him to take deep breaths, take a break. It was his body telling him things he would realize later on, weeks down the line, when it's already too late. "You're perfect."
So Seokjin takes a deep, deep breath and wears his best smile as he goes through BBDO's entire list of accomplishments in front of the panel, talks about case studies in brief, sets up the stage for the next presenters and hopes for the best. Yoongi delivers with his dramatic narration of the idea, sprinkles bits and pieces of science here and there but ultimately highlights the meat of the message, the heart behind the whole execution. Namjoon takes the panel through the commercials they actually produced – "It's alive," someone from the panel exclaims, then laughs just before he covers his mouth with his hands for the briefest of moments. "The idea's– It's actually alive!" – and finished mastering just two hours before they left the office, and Joonmyun slides next to Namjoon, ready to back the material up with support, real research and data put together by a team Hyundai probably won't ever get to interact with closely but should be grateful for. It would be a rigid presentation if they hadn't been staying in the same conference room, breathing down each other's necks and breathing each other in for the past few weeks, Seokjin knows it, but the pitch sounds more like a performance now than a face-to-face with prospective clients and handing out brochures in the form of words. It sounds a lot like people dancing to the same beat, singing the same song. It feels both real and surreal sometimes. It's... magical. "If the last part makes me cry, don't laugh. Just cry with me for full effect. Then we can all look weird together." It isn't difficult at all. All Seokjin has to do is to close his eyes, listen for the next few lines, and let the words come to him like one of his favorite songs whose lyrics he's memorized like the back of his hand years ago. All he has to do it to recite them at the back of his head, maybe even under his breath, as if they were his own.

"Because trust me, there's nothing to change," Sihyuk continues now, inching even closer to the panel until he's only around two, three meters away from them. "There are things to improve, yes – we should all always strive to improve – but to change and take away?" Seokjin shakes his head at the same time that Sihyuk does. "Never. That won't solve things. That isn't the solution. It's all about going back to where you began, that magical moment years ago when you promised riders and car owners that the Sonata would be a legacy brand they could and would be able to depend on no matter what. To that time when people said, 'You know what? Hyundai's right. The Sonata's not just a luxury car. It's comfort and class in one. It's a legacy.' You take that knowledge, that truth, and magnify it tenfold – by using your TV spots, actually highlighting the fact that this is the car you have other people drive you and trust to bring you to wherever it is in Seoul you want to be on a regular basis, by using print to remind another section of the market, the one that focuses more on the function rather than the form of the car, that these are what the Sonata has to offer. Here are the things you keep looking for in other cars, elsewhere, but only the Sonata can give. You use digital to make it easier for them to know about the Sonata better, to make it easier for them to book test drives, to get in touch, to build a certain brand of trust not only with the one repairing their car and making sure it's alright, but with you.

"You use us to bring you one step closer to your goal." Sihyuk thins his lips into a small smile, just enough to make Seokjin mirror the same look on his features. "It's as simple as that."

This is it, he notes when the silence stretches longer than usual, takes it as their cue to join Sihyuk at the center. They always skip this part during rehearsals and quickly go back to the beginning to polish whatever they'd done wrong in the previous run-through. Namjoon often says it's to preserve the magic of the moment, but Yoongi slams him right back to reality and says, "We just don't have much time. And we can't have hyung bawling everytime we do run-throughs. It will take him forever
to calm down." Then Joonmyun would laugh and Sihyuk would nod in agreement and they'd all be shaking their heads, and Seokjin would have to push the lingering thought of wow, you talk to your boss like that? at the back of his mind, saving it for when it's just him and Yoongi in the conference room again, with nothing but the glass walls and the cool air all around them to bear witness to their conversation. After all, he talks to Yoongi like his underling sometimes, or someone he'd met for college; he's not about to be a hypocrite and call Yoongi out on an offense he's also guilty of.

But the pitch is about to end. Just a few more lines in the script and Sihyuk will have already wrapped the entire presentation up, all the weeks of preparation dissolving into their last bow, their last chance as standing next to each other and breathing in the same air. There will be more pitches in the months to come, but when? Seokjin hates uncertainty as much as he does late submissions. It makes him sick.

It throws him off-course, ruins his plans, shakes him up harder than it should.

"Smile," he hears someone whisper, a sudden burst of sound sticking to the back of his ears and making his shiver a little. It could have been anyone – people were passing behind him earlier, and he's sandwiched between Joonmyun and Namjoon right now, but neither of them seems to have just been talking seconds ago. They're wearing the same smile, though, the same brand of wonder in their focused, focused gaze that makes their eyes glimmer. And Joonmyun's turning to meet him in the eye, cocking an eyebrow at him as if saying, C'mon, smiling can't be that hard now, can it?

"Allow us to make the unimaginable happen for a second time and revive the legend," Sihyuk declares, firm and resolute, but not without that little curl to his tone, the excitement in his voice crawling up his throat and getting the better of him. "Allow us to pass on the legacy with you."

Seokjin gulps hard. This is the part where they have to hold hands and take a step forward – just one – before bowing. Or at least that's what they'd agreed upon before leaving the office, but everybody seems to be either too stunned or too tired to move. There's no hint of it on the smiles on their faces, though, even if the corners of Namjoon's mouth shaking a little like he isn't accustomed to wearing a small smile instead of a big grin, isn't apparent until Yoongi's shifting in his position two people away and walks over until he's making a space for himself between Seokjin and Namjoon.

Then Yoongi's looking up at him with eyes that would be too tired to focus if not for the adrenaline coursing through his veins, nudging Seokjin in his side with a gentle push of the elbow, dropping his hands to his sides until their brushing against Seokjin's own. Never mind that this might just be rehearsed, as well – Sihyuk's giving them a look that says, Well, what are you waiting for? We can't just stand here forever! So Seokjin splays his fingers out against his thighs, allows Yoongi to slip his fingers between Seokjin's own, the heat of Yoongi's palm and the thundering pulse on his skin bleeding onto Seokjin's unsteady, wavering hand.

Seokjin catches the small smile on Yoongi's lips blooming into a grin as they lift their intertwined hands in the air and bend their backs in a bow, catches the light squeeze Yoongi gives his hand before Seokjin tightens his hold on Yoongi even more. It feels like Yoongi wrapping his fingers around Seokjin's wrists, throat, Seokjin's chest with that bright smile of his.

Yoongi lets out a small laugh when Seokjin jerks in the fit of their bodies and holds onto his hand tighter than he should.

It feels a lot like winning.
"It feels... weird."

Hoseok looks up from where he's been trying to get the flavor of his coffee right for the past minute or so and laughs, the corners of his lips quirking up and down in intervals as if in an attempt to take back the sound, the action, to make amends. On a normal day, Seokjin would scrunch his nose in disapproval and in response, would probably even kick Hoseok under the table and look away as if it wasn't obvious he was the culprit, but he simply doesn't have the energy to wipe the look off of his friend's face right now. Sure, he's had twelve solid hours of sleep since he got home from the pitch – more like the 'post-pitch celebration' that was mostly Sihyuk passing around shots of soju and Namjoon dunking several shots into his glass of beer than anything else – and Hoseok, bless the kid, appeared at his doorstep at eleven in the morning with his DVDs and brunch so Seokjin didn't have to think of what to eat and how to actually get to the eating part without using up too much energy cooking, but Seokjin's brain still feels like two parts alcohol and one part 'the all-new 2016 Hyundai Sonata'. His legs feel like jelly. His arms feel like heavy logs with dull red marks and little patches of purple, last night's scars finally rushing to the surface.

He can explain, though: the group wouldn't stop talking about the damned pitch and the damned car even as they dined out after the presentation. Fast forward two, three hours and too many bottles of soju and beer after, and Joonmyun had already turned into an arm-slapping machine, hitting Seokjin like it was the only thing that could keep him sober or at least drive whatever message he was trying to get across. A few more minutes and Namjoon had turned into a mess of exposition about how pretty cars weren't seen for their real beauty, that they were only taken at face value – "Shut up, Namjoon. Pitch's over. Stop talking about the car," Yoongi had said. Heechul flashed Namjoon both of his middle fingers. Seokjin had lifted his glass in approval, then clinked it with Yoongi's own. Cocked an eyebrow at Yoongi for a while when the latter turned away to take his shot, still not drunk enough to forget customs and formalities but just inebriated enough to inch closer, their thighs now pressed so close together.

A few more minutes, then Seokjin was fast realizing that Yoongi felt much, much warmer after a few bottles of soju, that Yoongi wasn't at all heavy even if he'd been slumped against Seokjin the entire hour, or at least when he wasn't flipping the meat on the grill, making sure nothing had been burnt, or reaching for shots across the stable (until he decided to just snatch an entire bottle and split it with Seokjin as they watched everyone do hilarious things while drunk). That Yoongi wasn't quiet or shy or the slightest bit withdrawn; he just preferred watching everyone and studying them carefully before throwing the silliest jokes at the group, before resting his head on Seokjin's shoulder and staying dangerously still for a few minutes as if listening to Seokjin breathe.

Seokjin takes a deep, deep breath, then blows into his own cup of coffee. His third of the day – not at all a surprise since it's already eight in the evening and Hoseok's bent on having the two of them stay up to finish the entire Lord of the Rings series tonight. He's had more during the preparation period that, at one point, he was positive it was already coffee coursing through his veins instead of blood, but, to his defense, Yoongi has it worse—

Get the guy out of your mind, geez, groans a voice at the back of his head. And really, he would, he'd try to just push any thought related to Yoongi to the back of his mind, but when you spend nearly an entire month breathing the same air as someone twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, when you catch them flashing you glimpses vulnerability and concern, it's hard to not feel a bit more connected with that person than usual. It's difficult to detach without feeling the slightest bit uneasy.
"Rest feels weird. Rest feels weird for you." Hoseok rolls his eyes and empties out the pack of creamer into his coffee. It looks like a power explosion on cubes of ice more than anything else, but— "Fireworks!" Seokjin recalls Yoongi crying out at one point when they were talking about Namjoon narrating the execution idea to the panel of clients. "Seokjin starts out with something dramatic then I do the boring data shit and Namjoon's suddenly 'fireworks!' and flailing arms and—"

"You're drunk," Seokjin said, half laughing and half murmuring into Yoongi's hair. Only then did he realize how close they were, how Yoongi's palm felt a bit too warm on his thigh, and how Namjoon was peering at them through his bangs like everything was wrong about their picture. "Hey. Hey—Stop it with the soju—"

Then Yoongi looked up at him with a sharp, sharp gaze, with eyes that could... cut out dough like a cookie cutter if he wanted to. There was a huge difference between Yoongi when he was just leaning back in his seat and sharing stories with his friends, and Yoongi while he was presenting ideas to the client or shooting down concepts in the conference room and urging people to come up with something better, and the difference was this – the way every batt of Yoongi's eyelash felt like a countdown to death, to Seokjin's untimely demise, to Seokjin leaning even closer so he could brush whatever it was that had caught on Yoongi's eyelashes.

"I've stopped drinking an hour ago. Relax," Yoongi had whispered, wrinkling his nose a little when Seokjin's breath ghosted on the bridge of his nose. He cleared his throat and wrapped his lips around the rim of the bottle. Slowly, he tilted his head back, gulped down the contents, and— Right, he'd refilled the thing with water while the others weren't looking, whispered a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind. While I was looking. So Yoongi was probably less inebriated than he should be now that he was lugging around 50% water and 50% alcohol in his body. Having half of Yoongi's body pressed against his probably wasn't an accident.

Seokjin had probably gulped down more alcohol than he should, and he needed to sober up really quick.

"In hindsight, I probably should've stopped you from getting into advertising," Hoseok mutters now as he stirs his drink, then frowns when he sees blotches of white rushing to the surface. Hoseok does that a lot, lets his face reflect whatever he's feeling on the surface instead of pushing everything down, down, down to the pit of his stomach or to the very back of his throat. He says it's to keep himself 'balanced', to maintain a certain sort of equilibrium in him that he's sure he won't be able to maintain if he goes 'full Jin-hyung mode' and keeps tossing feelings to the side or burying them beneath pressing deadlines, requirements for his job, work. Part of Seokjin wishes he could do the same, but some people just aren't engineered that way. And some people, people like Hoseok, are born with the ability to take whatever someone else is feeling and reflect it on his own features so he can set people's heart at ease. "It's an industry where crazy ass people who love slaving over work thrive, and that's exactly who you are, and I'm supposed to be the guy who keeps you from unintentionally developing weird sleeping habits but—"

"But you know that work gives me life and that advertising is for me."

Hoseok snorts. "I don't think I've ever seen you happier, to be honest." He alternates between stirring quickly and pressing down on the clumps of creamer with the back of his spoon until his coffee turns a lighter shade of brown. "Correction: I don't think I've seen you more tired, but it's not... the drained kind of tired? Like, you're actually happy because the work's—"

"Fulfilling." Seokjin laughs a little. He could recall one of his conversations with Jimin about that, one fine two in the morning, sitting crosslegged beside each other, backs against the wall, knees
rubbing against each other so they could keep one another awake. There was more fatigue in their veins than coffee already and typing felt more like a program that had been installed in them that anything else, but there was something so enticing and still refreshing about turning the creatives' ideas into a story through slides. At first, Seokjin thought he was alone in thinking that, that he was probably a bit crazy for thinking that it was okay to not get much rest as long as he felt happy doing the things he did for work, but it made a lot of sense. 70% of the time, it was the client servicing part of the job that he hated, not coming up with ideas with the creatives. It was actually creating decks that kept him sane.

"Or we're just workaholics," Jimin had said then, chuckling, and tilted his head back as he closed his eyes. A ghost of a smile played on his lips as he drummed a beat on his laptop. "But hey, nothing wrong with looking for something to enjoy about the very thing that drains you, right? That should be normal, right, hyung?"

"I was going to say 'varied' and 'exciting', but that also fits the bill." Hoseok leans back in his seat and takes a long sip of his drink. It leaves him with the wildest smile on his lips. It makes the light knot in Seokjin's chest come off completely, helps him breathe more easily. "So yeah, whatever, no regrets. I mean, I never thought you'd get into advertising because you said you hated how creatives 'operated'."

"I still do," Seokjin answers, curt and honest. It's easy to be transparent with simple realities, but difficult to push down all the reasons why he can somehow manage dealing with pesky art directors and copywriters without getting thoughts of taking away all the games in their laptops just so they can get things done – Joonmyun's more apologetic and understanding than most bosses and will try to back them up if and when he can. The creatives in BBDO aren't that bad; Heechul just gets these really bad spurts of sensitivity that make it impossible to sit him down for an hour so he could brief Heechul on the new project they'll be working on. Namjoon is an okay conversationalist when he's not trying to be funny or drunk or both. And Yoongi talks about the most interesting things – things Seokjin can actually learn from – when he's trying to distract Seokjin from remembering that the script was due ten minutes ago; why is it in my inbox yet, huh?, keeps telling him that he can make a fortune out of his ideas that are 'better than some of my creative directors, to be honest'. "There are just... a few exceptions."

"Exceptions?" Hoseok voice lilts just before he thins his lips into a small, small smile. Something flashes across his features – nothing that lingers long enough for Seokjin to call an 'expression', but it still looks like something Hoseok would otherwise be expressing in words had they just come to him more easily. Something Seokjin feels he should be able to read if his brain were just a bit more functional when it came to processing information instead of just relapsing to some twenty-four, twenty-five hours ago, where both nothing and everything happened. Yoongi always seemed to gravitate towards him, somehow, like their bodies were always meant to be in a tight fit, but that was it – just two bodies pressed side to side, limbs aligning, elbows touching, the friction sending jolts of electricity up their arms.

And Namjoon's eyes would always find his, as well, through the wave of flailing limbs and laughter. And Joonmyun would somehow end up slapping him on the arm every few minutes, like Joonmyun was checking on him, seeing if he was alright, if he wanted to escape. So maybe Seokjin was just imagining things. Maybe Yoongi's right about him being a good fit in creatives. Maybe he should give it a shot.

A blink of an eye, then Hoseok leans back, heaves a sigh, drops his gaze to his coffee. "Should I ask?"

Seokjin snorts. "Do you want to ask?"
"Actually, do you want to talk about it?"

Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath. If 'talking about it' meant him having to go back through the catalogue of thoughts he had back then – on what they could've done better for the pitch, on Joonmyun telling him that he did great, the bosses were happy with his performance, 'get ready; you're in for a treat', on Yoongi withdrawing his hand all too quickly when Seokjin flinched upon realizing when they were too close – then, "Nah, I'm good." A loud gulp, then, "So, ready for three hours of Legolas' pretty hair again?"

Hoseok hovers. He doesn't say anything yet, doesn't even change expressions, but he does shift his gaze from where Seokjin's been busying his hands with tearing open the bag of chips up to his eyes. "I'll be imagining him doing a Dove commercial the whole time," he groans, but he pushes himself off his seat, anyway, sauntering back to the living room, giving Seokjin some space.

Seokjin shuts his eyes for a quick second and grabs the bag of chips tightly. He counts to ten, until the images of last night's events become blurry in his eyes, then wakes up.

Three days.

It takes three days for things to feel normal again. By normal, Seokjin means leaving at eleven in the evening instead of rendering forty-eight hours of work straight, just heading to the mall to grab new clothes as soon as malls opened, or dragging himself back home to get a shower, hop on the first bus to the office, then leave for the office again, this time more fragrant but not necessarily fresh. Normal as in having enough time to eat lunch he'd made for himself – this time, he brings two boxes of cupcakes; he actually has time to bake now, actually has weekends and not merely hours left of his Saturdays and Sundays – and dragging Jimin to the pantry relatively early so the guy could talk about his concerns, what's been worrying him, I mean, I know I'm doing well but am I improving? Because there's a huge difference. And I feel like a superstar right now but I don't know if I'm actually getting better at this job. I want to know, hyung. Normal as in spending more time in his work station, making calls, answering emails, shooting out reminders to his creatives, instead of spending the entire day locked up in a conference room where he feels a bit more exposed than he should be.

He laughs to himself. It's nice being able to breathe again, to have time to do things normal humans would, but for the most part it feels like shallow breathing, the type that leaves him wheezing for hours or choking on the acid in his throat at the most inopportune of times. Once, Heechul called him out on the weird, hiccuping sounds he was making at the height of the preparations. Joonmyun stood from his seat but didn't walk over. Namjoon looked up from where he was taking notes. And Yoongi shot a glance at him, cocked an eyebrow, tilted his head as if asking, do you need to step out or something? I can call for a break.

Goddamit, Kim Seokjin. He's not the only guy you worked with back in the pitch, he groans to himself, chants under his breath until he can push away the other voices in his head, the ones that won't stop screaming Yoongi's name. The last time this happened was back in college, when that silly kid from the anime club thought it would be nice and cute to give Seokjin a mixtape of songs from all the anime series that he fell in love with (read: those he'd watched with Seokjin during 'familiarization with the animation culture week'). Hoseok had gurgled at the gesture, called it 'cute'. Seokjin only laughed in response and said he was touched, but at the back of his mind he could hear
nothing but the word 'trouble' in three different languages. Mixtapes were supposedly a thing of the past. MP3s and online streaming was already in that time. And nobody was supposed to know that one of Seokjin's most prized possessions back in his shared dormitory with Hoseok was an old cassette player from his grandmother.

Nobody was supposed to have him figured out.

He had the entire mixtape on loop in the background for a week, while he powered through unreasonable course requirements. It was the first time in months that he didn't set his working rhythm to the beat of shoujo anime lines playing faintly in his earphones. It was the first time in years that he sang out loud again rather than under his breath. And it was the first time Hoseok dropped whatever he was doing in favor of giving Seokjin a careful, meaningful gaze, mouth twisted to the side as he said in the faintest voice, "You were harmonizing with the track just a while ago."

"Oh yeah?" Seokjin had gulped hard, twirled the pen in his hand, then leaned back in his seat. He curled in his toes.

Hoseok laughed. He had lifted both eyebrows, then breathed out in a soft, soft sigh. "The track that Jeonggukie actually sang but you didn't realize it because you were so into the song."

Seokjin furrowed his eyebrows. Then, retracing his steps, the beats in his head and the vocals that made the music thicker, made the sound stick to his system even more, he whispered, "Right." He gripped the pen tightly until he could feel his nails digging into his skin. "Yeah, I thought it sounded weird."

He'd turned away from Hoseok after that and flipped the notebook just beside him to an empty page, pretending to be going through his notes. In a fit of ragenerousivenesspanic, he doodled the first thing he could think of on the piece of paper, filling in the holes with hatched shades and light washes of blue, letting the dull ache in his chest spill onto the canvas he can never truly lie to. Never mind that he actually came up with a caricature of some random freshman beaming at him – "Looks familiar," Hoseok had said, teasing, but never prodded – or that the veins at the back of his hand ached a little because he hadn't drawn something like this in a while; what was on paper could neither touch nor hurt him. What lived in his chest and festered inside him could, would.

"Hyung?" comes a familiar voice, soft and faint through the fading music in Seokjin's earphones. He risks a glance to his side, then, meeting Jimin's gaze, and notices the faint furrow of Jimin's eyebrows. "You alright? You look like you're, I dunno, carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders or something. Want some food? I still have half of the cupcake you gave me this morning." You need it more than I do, Seokjin muses, but Jimin presses on, only pausing to wrinkle his nose, before adding, "Hey, isn't coffee time 3 p.m. or something? Maybe you should have coffee or something first?"

Seokjin laughs a little. I'm not like the creatives, kid, he's tempted to say, but he knows very well that there are some art directors and writers who can operate and accomplish tasks without having to be bribed with food. Case in point: Taehyung on a good day, Heechul when he's inspired and really passionate about his ideas, Namjoo when he has his favorite beanie on (then he'd be creating quality designs at the speed of light, faster than Joonmyun can walk up to him to give him a reminder on the deadline) and when he's blasting music from his headphones.

Yoongi when... well, when it was past two in the morning and there was nowhere to order food from anymore, so he had to make do with coffee and warm water in two colored mugs. They both had to be mugs, not a cup and a tall glass. And they had to be colored. It weirded Seokjin out the first few times he saw Yoongi tiptoeing for two of the same cup in the pantry, but after a while it became sort of a habit to slide two mugs in Yoongi's direction when he was the one in front of the cupboard and
Yoongi looked like he was seconds away from pulling up a chair so he could reach the mugs instead of asking for help.

Then another: Yoongi right after trying to draw answers from Seokjin with subtle cues and questions — "Wow, the design's pretty good. You have a great eye for design. Are you sure you didn't apply for an accounts position by mistake? Are you sure you don't want to create things with us in the creative side of the business? Are you sure this – what you have right now – is what you really want?" The asshole would show off after that, finish the flow of the deck in the next ten minutes, then send in a script for a ninety-seconder in another ten. Ask for Seokjin's opinion on the output because apparently he trusted Seokjin's creative sense. Then they'd be walking to the pantry for their sixth cup of coffee for the day, clinking mugs in celebration and to mark the start of the next output they had to work on before daybreak.

If Yoongi was trying to instil the habit of coming up with creative ideas in such a short period of time in Seokjin then he might have just succeeded. But Yoongi doesn't have to know that now. He probably won't have time to sit down and talk to Seokjin about it – he's a busy guy, burdened with all sorts of meetings and ideas to be executed. Seokjin's internal conflict between wanting to be in creatives and wanting to make huge progress in his career as an accounts supervisor is an ant bite compared to the way Yoongi's other concerns chomp down on his time, energy, life.

Seokjin's body gives a powerful jerk, enough to jostle him out of his thoughts and reel him back to this moment where Jimin's looking at him with wide, wide eyes that crinkle at the corners with a brand of curiosity that Seokjin isn't quite familiar of yet. He should spend more time with Jimin, with his teammates, instead of holing himself up in a conference room. He should go out more often, take in sights other than people making their way past each other in a rush. And he should probably say something in response to Jimin's question, but a light bop to his head has him looking over his shoulder, squinting so he can make out the blur of black that has just passed by.

He gulps hard and bites the inside of his cheek. Half of him wishes it was Yoongi; half of him wishes he didn't have to wish at all. "Yeah, I'm good."

Seokjin takes a wicked turn on his way to the coffeemaker instead of walking down the straight path blocked with an obstacle in the form of Min Yoongi. Not that Yoongi's even really in the way – he's just occupying the table closest to where Seokjin is, his back facing the entrance to the pantry and hands busy poking at his food with chopsticks that look like they haven't been sullied yet. It's the fourth, fifth time in the past two weeks that Seokjin has found Yoongi like this, eyes squinted and eyebrows furrowed as if trying to dissect his food with a focused gaze. There isn't anything peculiar with the meal, though – just oodles of noodles and black sauce, some beans and mushrooms, kimchi on the side. Slices of yellow radish in a separate container that Yoongi's stabbing so he can break them down into tinier pieces. Food Seokjin has seen Yoongi consume during the long and drawn out pitch period, has taught Yoongi to appreciate in those weeks leading up to the day of the presentation, thighs pressed side to side in the small conference room that housed at least seven to ten people at any given time. Food that Yoongi hadn't been completely sold on at first, until Seokjin taught him the best way to consume jjajangmyun because there's more to black noodles than just eating them when one's feeling down or a bit low on Black Day.

Seokjin risks a glance at his wrist watch. It's closer to three in the afternoon now than two, and the pantry is rid of people who are taking their lunch, save for Yoongi who seems to be taking his time
studying the finer details of his meal. *Trying to think of a way to market this?* Seokjin finds himself wondering, lips twitching, curling up as he does so, and he shakes his head even before he can delve deeper into his thoughts. He's here for coffee and nothing else. He doesn't need to know what Yoongi is thinking about, if he's even thinking of anything at all.

Once, he'd seen Yoongi slumped in one of the chairs in the pantry, staring aimlessly for a few good seconds. He looked a bit troubled, maybe even lost. His eyes were a barricaded door. The air all around him felt so dry and suffocating and Seokjin wanted *out* at once, but then the next thing Seokjin knew, Yoongi was burrowing his hands deep in his pockets as if in search for a hard-to-find tool, the blank expression in his features turning into something that said too much and too little about what he'd just thought of at the same time.

Two beats, then Yoongi was brandishing a ballpen in the air. Two more, then he was scribbling something down on the table napkin, writing down his thoughts in neat, neat Hangul. Three bobs of the head and he was slowly looking over his shoulder as if he'd caught on, and Seokjin's first line of defense was to duck and crawl to the seat behind Yoongi's own. Only when Yoongi had shifted his attention back to what he was writing did Seokjin straighten up his legs, snap up straight, pull back his shoulders and *breathe*.

*You're an accounts supervisor, not a professional stalker!* he'd reminded himself, then retreated from the pantry. He could always get coffee from the nook in the lobby, after all; he just preferred the bright lights in the pantry in the third floor, the view outside, the memories walking into the room and finding Yoongi's figure slumped on the table right and his fingers still hovering the track pad gave him.

*Coffee*, he tells himself now, then resumes in his walk, making sure to go unnoticed as he takes soft, careful steps to the coffeemaker. He doesn't risk a glance to his side or over his shoulder to see Yoongi better.

It's not as if he has to, though – Yoongi has a presence the size of Asia. Yoongi doesn't have to utter a word, make a sound, or even shift in his position in the slightest so he could steal the scene, draw the spotlight to himself; just being there will strike a chord of... fear, attention, something so strange and peculiar that it's hard to define using just one word, in people. Exactly which emotion, Seokjin can't tell. All he knows is that seeing Yoongi sitting there, alone in the dining table and slowly mixing his jjajangmyun, is enough to steal the show, make the steady thumping in his chest come to a dangerous standstill then pound against his rib cage with a force much stronger than before.

Besides, unless necessary, Yoongi would rather be staying at the sidelines and quietly eating his lunch than be subject to Seokjin's wayward thoughts at three in the afternoon, when he needs coffee more than anything else. And Seokjin has to respect that. He can't put himself at the risk of getting kicked out of the company again just because of his desire to engage Yoongi in a conversation he doesn't normally get from people in the accounts team. He can't fuck up.

The quick trip to the coffeemaker turns into the longest five-minute journey of his life. With soft, careful steps, he inches closer to his source of salvation, mug secure in one hand and every ounce of caution safely tucked in the tight fist of his hands in the other. Yoongi doesn't seem to mind sharing the pantry with anyone else, though, if the way he keeps his attention fixed on mixing his food is anything to go by. So Seokjin tries to imitate that, tries to act comfortable and *natural* because *damn* if he doesn't look weird right now just trying to stealthily get coffee from the machine. He leans against the wall as he waits for the stream of brown liquid to stop pouring out from the spout of the machine, counts down to the time when his mug will be filled to the brim, all while trying not to sneak glances at Yoongi.
Instead, he looks into the distance, at the far end of the path he'd just trodden, and watches Yoongi like that, catching the faintest image of Yoongi at the corner of his eye.

He can't help it, sometimes, studying Yoongi from a few feet away. Usually, it's from the top of the stairs to the third floor where he's almost always guaranteed a snapshot of whatever Yoongi is doing in his office. A month ago, all the blinds were down and Seokjin didn't even give a shit if there were shadows on the other side of the thin material, but now–

He laughs. Funny how things can change in such a short span of time. It took him a week to get his shit sorted out and resolve to himself to switch jobs, two weeks to actually get the job, then another two to iron out his paperwork with his previous company, throw in the towel, tender his resignation. A month later, he was walking past the doors of BBDO Korea, being dragged around for introductions, shoving a cupcake in his mouth. Then just a few weeks after that, he was burying his face in his hands, silently screaming at the pitch Joonmyun had asked him to handle, hoping he would just melt to the ground and disappear (and that the Sonata wouldn't run him over). Everything happened so damn fast that when Yoongi stepped on the breaks, slipped right beside Seokjin during one of those many quiet nights and just stayed there, studying whatever it was Seokjin was typing on his laptop, Seokjin's body gave the most powerful jerk and suddenly everything was slowing the fuck down.

And now – now, standing opposite Yoongi three, four feet away, leaning against the wall and watching Yoongi catch strands of noodles with his chopsticks – here Seokjin is, the corners of his lips curling up into the smallest smile when Yoongi groans at the noodles slipping from the metal sticks, chest tightening when he sees the hard lines of Yoongi's eyebrows soften a little when their gazes meet.

Yoongi's lips quirk up, nothing more than a subtle upward tug at the corner of his mouth but still noticeable enough even with the safe distance between them. He still has some black sauce on the corners of his mouth when he asks, "What, is Joonmyun using his secret weapon now to tell me that my kids failed to turn in their homework again?"

Seokjin snorts. He hasn't heard Jimin freak out the entire day and hasn't seen Minseok puncture his stress ball with a ball pen the whole afternoon so, no, maybe not. Maybe they're actually shaping up to be good kids now and doing their assignments. Maybe they're finally changing their ways after learning the hard way, but a little teasing won't hurt. And Yoongi scrunches up his nose in the cutest way when realization dawns upon him that he's being taunted, so Seokjin answers, "Yep. Time to go to the principal's office." Never mind that Yoongi's office is supposed to be the real principal's office; Yoongi seems to have already forgotten that because now he's standing from his seat, lips hanging in an awkward cross between a smile and a scowl, and making these weird gurgling sounds at the back of his throat.

"Hey, I made sure they turned in everything yesterday–"

Well, technically they still submitted late because the emails came in past twelve midnight, but-- "Are you sure?"

"Are you sure? Because if you're shitting on me, Jin, I swear--"

Seokjin cracks. He bites the inside of his cheek, trying to salvage the situation, but to no avail – Yoongi's making that face now, furrowing his eyebrows but not in a way that he looks as if he's pissed off, twisting his mouth until the scowl that was once on his lips eases into a defeated grin, eyes shutting closed as he shakes his head and leans back in his seat. Then he's wailing, laughing out loud, flashing the brightest smile in Seokjin's direction, stealing all of Seokjin's attention with the way his voice curls around 'Jin' in the most twisted, most peculiar way possible.
It's 3:06 now and Seokjin's straying from his schedule a bit, but he can't say he minds. He has the scent of coffee wafting in his perimeter and Yoongi's laughter draping itself on his nape, sending shivers down his spine and settling off explosions at the tips of his fingers. Those two have to be the best pick-me-up he's had in months.

Seokjin isn't the biggest fan of town hall meetings. He'll attend them for the food and drinks – mostly the food because the company hardly ever stocks up on quality rum whenever there are gatherings – to unwind for a bit and maybe get to know people whom he only ever gets to talk to about work concerns, but the truth remains – if he had the chance, if he was given an option to go to some other meeting two train transfers away then he'll choose that over the town hall meeting any damn day.

But then Sihyuk had promised when he rounded everyone up with the gentle wave of the hand, "This will be short, I promise. Not more than fifteen minutes, then you can all go back to your stations and pretend nothing happened." Gathered everyone in the lobby and called the attention of bosses whose teammates were missing from the supposedly important alignment on the first floor of their office building. It could only mean one of two things: either the Sihyuk, himself, was leaving the company and dragging a few people along with him (which more or less meant BBDO shutting down, goodbye, dreams of being the best accounts supervisor in one of the biggest agencies ever,) or the company had just lost a really big account and management would have to scrimp on the performance bonus a bit instead of going all out on it like they normally would. They might even cancel the company trip in summer.

Or it can be good news, Seokjin whispers to himself as he shuffles to the stools lined up on one side of the lobby. Maybe they're adding new people to the management. Maybe people from the global office are visiting. Maybe we won an account, he tells himself again and again until his headspace clears. He motions to settle on one of the stools, reaching out with an arm, but Jimin beats him to claiming the one farthest from the 'main stage'. The punk even sticks out his tongue. If it were a normal work day thick with fatigue and stress from dealing with clients then he'll probably be strangling Jimin in the most playful way possible any minute now, but it's been a good day thus far – Heechul sent Minseok the script for the web film they'll be shooting the following week three hours earlier than expected. Taehyung actually submitted three different design studies to Jimin. It put Jimin in such a good mood that the latter decided to buy pizza and cake for the entire team (Though he'd asked for the food to be delivered at five in the evening because who were they kidding? They were always going to render overtime work. Might as well have something to look forward to despite that.). Yoongi had walked over to the accounts area earlier and rested his warm hands on Seokjin's shoulders, fingers tapping a slow, soothing beat as he asked Joonmyun, "Are you happy now? Are my kids doing well? Am I being a good dad?"

Joonmyun swayed from side to side, a peculiar pout dancing on his lower lip as he slowly narrowed his eyes. Seokjin had felt laughter fast crawling up his throat then, but everything stopped when he felt Yoongi inch closer, torso pressed to his back, hands ghosting over his chest until Yoongi was clasping them where everyone could see. And Seokjin would pull his shoulders back, flinch when Yoongi's touch lingered longer than it should, but every nerve in his system seemed to have short-circuited at the first brush of Yoongi's hand against his chest and the rest of his body just decided to freeze.

Two beats, then Yoongi was moving even closer. Another, and the muscles in Seokjin's back tensed
all the more even when he felt Yoongi’s warmth bleed onto the material of his polo. If Seokjin leaned back at the slightest then he could have tilted his head back and against Yoongi’s chest, payback for Yoongi stirring up his senses, but no – instead, he stayed still, eyes fixed on Joonmyun who wouldn’t stop alternating between cocking an eyebrow at Seokjin and looking up at Yoongi with a curious gaze.

Joonmyun hummed. He looked like he wanted to say more, but if the urge to ask what the hell was happening ever got the better of him, he didn’t let it show. He only ever stared at the two long enough for Yoongi to get it, pulse quickening where he’d rested his hands on Seokjin's chest, and pull away.

"I'm giving all of you full marks," Joonmyun answered after a while, recovering. Another long look, then. "Though next time, can you actually tell them to submit not just five minutes in advance?"

Yoongi snorted. "Five minutes in advance is still early," he said with a shrug, then he was ducking at the sight of Joonmyun grabbing the closest thing to him – one of Minseok's stress balls that had rolled over to his side of the table – and threatening to throw the otherwise unassuming ball at one of the company's owners. And by ducking, Seokjin meant Yoongi pressing his cheek to Seokjin's own or tucking his chin on Seokjn's shoulder, whichever made more sense. Seokjin would try to put a word to it, but his mind had been so clouded with tasks and emails and the steady sound of Yoongi's hiccuped chuckles that time that it was impossible to think, much less breathe.

"Thank you, all, for coming!" Sihyuk says now, as he brings the microphone closer to his lips and gestures for everyone to come closer, fill the seats in front, come out of hiding. Yoongi and Namjoon move forward, as well, the expression on their faces tight but not too forced. For the most part, it seems like they're hiding something – lips pressed thinly together, cheeks shaking every so often even if the two aren't even smiling, unfocused gazes that are afraid to be pinned to just one place for fear of giving themselves away. Seokjin doesn't even need to spend an entire decade in this agency, across Yoongi a few feet away, to know what that means – this is excitement, plain and simple. It's the same glint that Seokjin had seen in Yoongi's eyes when Yoongi stepped inside his perimeter that one afternoon in the elevator, looked up, and asked, "Can I–"

"I know you're all busy so really, I–we appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to accommodate us."

"Someone tell Namjoon to stop acting. The kid can barely even keep it together," Joonmyun whispers, shifting in his seat until he's leaning back against the counter and moving closer to where Seokjin can hear him better. "Just look at his face! He looks like a kid who's up to no good!"

Seokjin snorts. "He's still our boss, hyung," he argues, but who is he kidding – he isn't even the best of actors outside of presentations, either. He can bullshit his way through client meetings, look as if he intends to keep his promise of saving the world through the client's brand in the conference room, stand in front of people whom he would rather just talk to over the phone instead of seeing them up close for fear of doing something evil to them, but the moment he slips out of the client's office building, all pretense of kindness goes down. He'd say he learned it from Joonmyun back when they were still working with each other in digital publishing, but he knows very well that it's his way of keeping a nice balance inside him, the way Hoseok uses many different channels for release. It's what years of being in accounts has done to him. Other than turn him into a disgruntled person, at least.

Joonmyun scoffs, but he threads his fingers through Seokjin's hair in the gentlest manner, anyway, fluffing up the tuft. "You've always been a fast learner," he murmurs, lips pulled down to a frown, but there's no denying the little lilts in his voice when he says, "I can't decide if I should punch you in the face or just feel proud that you're getting more of your snark back. Like, twenty-three-year-old Kim Seokjin snark, that kind of thing."
"You've been keeping track of my snark levels, hyung? That's pretty scary."

"Let's just say I've been watching over you all these years, even after I left the company," Joonmyun answers, humming soon after, then he's thinning his eyes into half-moon crescents. "How's that for scary and creepy, huh?"

You're doing really badly in that department, hyung. Seriously, who even keeps tabs on his trainee's progress for so long? Seokjin's tempted to say, but soon Sihyuk's voice is booming across the lobby again, louder this time, a bit brighter, less strained and contained than it had been just seconds ago. "To those who don't know, we pitched for Hyundai Motors a few weeks back. We were up against some of the biggest names in the industry – Starcom was there, both Mindshare and Maxus were trying to duke it out with us, McCann was also there – and trust me when I say that all of us – and I mean the entire pitch team, not just the three of us here, standing in front of you – we all felt like we were destined to flop the moment we entered Hyundai's building."

The crowd laughs. It's true, though – Seokjin can still recall everybody's reactions when they saw the people from Starcom walk in in there cool space outfits, and the people from McCann arriving in these cool, Iron Man suit-looking getups. They gaped at the lot, exchanged worried looks, mouthed at each other, what are our secret agent outfits to these... things? Because that's another truth in the wonderful world of advertising – pitches and presentations? They're not just about the thought behind the execution ideas or the science backing up the ideas; the confidence to walk into a presentation room looking like absolute fools is also part of the pitch grading system. The team's willingness to pull off something crazy in the form of outfits also plays a role in snatching success from the other agency's dirty hands. Pitches are one part trying to win the client's business and two parts trying to win the trust of the members of the pitch team because even the slightest rift, argument, miscommunication between two people can ruin the entire presentation. You're not just pitching to grow your business; you're trying to groom relationships for better teamwork and a happier workplace.

So Seokjin nods, laughs quietly, props his chin on his clasped hands, anticipating Sihyuk's next words. This isn't part of the script, isn't something they've rehearsed, and while most unplanned things scare him, this one sort of... tickles his insides more than makes them lurch.

"And, well, I guess we did," Sihyuk continues, pausing only to chuckle. "We experienced a few tech difficulties. Everybody's laptops were hanging, probably due to overwork. Our online back ups were useless because the data connection there was so bad, even the clients had difficulty connecting to their work emails. But you know what? They didn't realize until ten minutes after we were supposed to have started already because everybody was engaging the clients while Seokjin was doing his magic on technology. Joonmyun and Namjoon chatted up the panel and Yoongi was awake at nine in the morning, for once. Baekhyun and Chanyeol contributed some... wholesome jokes and made sure to literally shield Seokjin from the clients' eyes. Kyungsoo helped Seokjin revive our laptops and they even had the best transition from 'what the hell is happening' to 'what the hell are you doing still chatting with those guys'."

"That was a joke," Seokjin mumbles, choking on his speech when Joonmyun slaps him on the arm. He turns to the latter with eyes wide open, with a smile hanging awkwardly at the corners of his mouth, and reasons, "Look, hyung: we weren't supposed to turn off the lights, okay. That wasn't part of the script. We were supposed to – what was that again – suddenly drop to our knees or something and act like weird agents on a mission–"

"The expanse of darkness was a nice touch," Joonmyun offers, slowly, dramatically nodding as he does so.
"I'd punch you if you weren't my boss, really. The red on your cheeks would be a nice touch."

"Oh, but I already have rosy cheeks." Joonmyun shifts in his seat, turning to his side so that he's facing Seokjin. He puffs up his cheeks and leans in close, thinning the distance between them to just two, three inches. It doesn't feel strange, though, studying Joonmyun's features at such close range. If it were someone else, however-- "See? Right there--"

"The point we're driving at," Yoongi begins, pausing to clear his throat and to inch closer to the crowd. Seokjin drags his gaze along that, looking to his side and pulling away from his little tirade with Joonmyun but making sure to slap his boss on the chest for good measure. Yoongi's eyes are crinkled at the corners. They're glimmering. He's glowing. It's not even because of sunshine filtering from outside – it bathes Namjoon in more light that it catches on Yoongi's skin. Every twitch of Yoongi's muscle, every twist of the body is telling Seokjin that Yoongi probably got a lot of rest last night or he's just had the best coffee of his life. And every fiber of his being is telling to look away even before Yoongi can catch him staring, even before he can catch the familiar smile on Yoongi's lips that only ever takes him to that time in the elevator, too many weeks and not enough kisses ago, but he can't. His nape feels too stiff and he can't feel his limbs, can't even breathe easily. "--is that we wouldn't have been able to save each other's asses on d-day if it weren't for teamwork. It's not just one person working to clean up after everyone -- everyone was on the case, creating a diversion while the intelligence was trying to figure out why the laptops were giving us such a hard time. Also, something worth noting: this is our first pitch of the year, and a big one at that. Last year -- last winter, in particular -- was all about strengthening relationships with existing clients, proving to them that they didn't make the wrong decision by partnering with us. Last year was... all about teaching our clients how to use digital more, what to do with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, how to grow their businesses through these platforms.

"But now we're back to the business of pitching for businesses and trying to woo clients." Yoongi shifts his gaze, breaking the spell and looking at either side of him to meet Sihyuk and Namjoon in the eye briefly. A deep breath, then he's scanning the crowd, addressing everyone with a gaze that... isn't entirely scrutinizing. It's still focused and meaningful, as with all of Yoongi's gazes. Not that Seokjin's been creating a profile for each these past few weeks. It's just that these little details stick to his head, and Yoongi has this peculiar ability of wedging pieces of himself in people's minds, habits, lives without others noticing. Add to that the reality that Seokjin isn't the best at letting go and what do you have? Disaster in the form of Kim Seokjin and Min Yoongi in the same room, just feet away. "Now that we have ample knowledge on how digital works, we can start selling our digital expertise to prospective clients, as well. And to those who might not know -- the Hyundai Motors pitch was both for their above-the-line and digital business. Have we done something like this -- pitched for both total media and digital -- before? No. Are we planning to do it again? Why the hell not?"

"He means 'Get ready, pitch team. We're doing this again in a few months'," Namjoon offers, and that's when the crowd erupts into a lovely peal of laughter, the cool air of seriousness lifting for a bit before thinning into something light enough to breathe in. It makes Seokjin shiver a little, but part of him can't help but feel... a bit too excited at the prospect of having to push himself to the limit again, to try and try even harder until there's nothing more to squeeze out of his brain but creative ideas. He isn't just looking forward to doing another pitch, be it with the same bunch of people or an entirely different group; he's dying to be involved in one again even if it means losing sleep and sanity.

He has a couple of reservations, though – an account any larger than Hyundai, he'll immediately tap out of. Samsung, he'll probably pass on, as well, but he can try to help out in the brainstorming part of the preparation process. Actually leading the pitch and handling the account are asking for trouble. Fast-moving consumer goods are easily a no-go for him, else he'll relapse to seven, eight years ago when he hated almost every hair care brand that he'd come across. Food brands, however, he'll
definitely want to pitch for. He can even do the entire thing on his own and he won't mind.

Yoongi would have great ideas for food brands, he finds himself murmuring under his breath after a while in a voice so faint even he doubts he'd said it. There's a dull ache in his throat from where Yoongi's name had been stuck for minutes, though, threatening to spill from his lips if he so much as kept those two syllables at bay much longer. That's enough proof for him.

"But for now--"

"For now," Sihyuk begins, pausing to clear his throat and to take a deep, deep breath. The corners of his mouth pull up into the brightest smile, but Yoongi snatches the title all too quickly when he chuckles, shoulders shaking, lips falling open into a grin as he does so. Seokjin feels his stomach lurch for a second, then he's cracking his neck, his knuckles, flexing his fingers in an attempt to distract himself from the sinking sensation in his gut, but it only makes him feel even dizzier, a bit fluttery. Not at all the comfortable stillness that he's accustomed to. "Let's not think about that. Let's focus on the present, on our plans for Hyundai Motors, on what we can do for the account that we've just won even if the clients thought the secret agent getups were hilarious." Then Sihyuk looks around, taking stops like he's picking out faces from the crowd, looking for the same people he'd worked with for weeks just to make the win possible. For a second, Seokjin thinks of craning his neck, but every part of him is frozen and his heart is racing in his chest. Even without a script, he already knows the next stream of words that will spill from Sihyuk's lips – "Starting June 2016, BBDO will be handling all of Hyundai Motors' advertising efforts, both above-the-line and on digital. So pitch team, congratulations! All your hard work has paid off!"

Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath. He's seen this coming, has rehearsed this moment in his head at least a hundred times but dammit, it feels different hearing those words from the big boss, himself. It feels different now that Sihyuk's holding up the announcement letter, Hyundai's logo glowing with the harsh sunlight filtering through the paper. It feels different when Seokjin sees the crowd part and Yoongi and Namjoon descend from the little stage, eyes searching the area for clues, answers, faces. Namjoon grabs the people from production, tells them to join Sihyuk on stage before passing by where Seokjin is to wrap his fingers around Joonmyun's wrist and giving it a light, feeble tug. Rallies the other members of the pitch team to move forward so they can be recognized, C'mon, guys, hurry up! We don't have all day! Yoongi makes a beeline for Heechul, Taehyung, Baekhyun, and Sehun, tiptoeing for the briefest second to whisper something in Heechul's ear and urging them to go to the stage with a hand on the small of Heechul's back. Jimin keeps whispering something in Seokjin's ear, something that sounds a lot like, Hyung, hyung, boss is telling you to– Hey, hyung, can you even hear me? Hyung--

"Wake up, babe. You're not dreaming anymore," Seokjin hears someone whisper right in his ear in a voice too familiar that it makes a sizzle of heat roll down his abdomen, then his body's giving a powerful jerk—or is he actually being pulled, guided forward by a firm grip on his arm and a steady hand on the small of his back, both of which are Yoongi's? Must be the latter, registers a voice at the back of his mind when he sees patches of color on either side of him, everything around him but Yoongi's features, too close and too crisp in his eyes, becoming a blur. They aren't walking too fast or sprinting, but Yoongi's pulse is quick and heavy on Seokjin's skin. Or maybe that's his own pulse; it's hard to tell right now where Yoongi ends and he begins. "You look weird when you're shocked. You didn't see the win coming?"

Seokjin snorts. It comes out sounding like a chuckle, which shouldn't be far off. If he ever makes a weird, gurgling sound on stage, in front of all the employees clapping for them, smiling, looking at them like they're heroes who'd just saved the company, he can always say it's because of the look on Yoongi's features – Yoongi's cheeks, a nice blush of pink, pulled up as he smiles, a peculiar glimmer at the corners of his eyes like he's actually close to tears and he needs people to swallow up his small
"Of course, I did."

"Good," Yoongi says, then pulls Seokjin just a bit closer, enough that he can whisper in Seokjin's ear without having to yank Seokjin by the collar, or brush his mouth against Seokjin's cheek before he can accidentally miss the target and aim for something else. "Because we all did well during the presentation. That includes you. Don't even try to deny that."

Seokjin laughs, bright and loud. It doesn't even sound like any of his usual chuckles, the little bubbles of laughter he lets loose when the tickling sensation in his throat is already too much to bear. He likes it, though, enough that he doesn't press the back of his hand to his mouth or even thin his lips into a tight, tight smile. Instead, he lets it hang in the air with the collective sound of cheers and applause and the whispered words he tells Yoongi when Yoongi leans in close, smile blinding, disarming.

"Never even thought of it."

'Thrusty Thursday' starts earlier than expected, something that Seokjin has been praying for the entire morning. See, it's difficult to stay focused on work when you have the promise of a big agency celebration hanging suspended in the air, thanks to Sihyuk's announcement earlier that morning. It's hard to not think of anything but the gathering when you have the scent of yummy food wafting in the air instead of the scent of coffee filling Seokjin's nostrils at every deep inhale. Not that Seokjin minds being able to breathe in coffee whenever he pleases as long as he's at work – he doesn't. He likes it enough to keep sniffling the air when he's still sleepy and he has just had coffee, enough for him to let out a breathy sigh even when the scent becomes too strong and powerful that Seokjin swears he tastes the flavor at the back of his throat, spreading to the rest of his senses, taking root in his body. It's the same thing that keeps him sort of on track from nine 'til a little past twelve, from the time he clocks in and opens his laptop up until Jimin drags him all the way to the pantry for early lunch, then from the time he has to wear his accounts supervisor cap again until Joonmyun finishes making his rounds and says, "Okay, turn those laptops off. We're all going down." Joonmyun even claps his hands in the air in an effort to get everyone's attention, but it's not as if he has to – food is a powerful enough come on for anyone who wants to take a much needed break. "Mandatory party time!"

"In hindsight," Jimin says now, about ten, fifteen minutes into them finishing their meal and getting started on drinking – somaek that Joonmyun, himself, had mixed for them. Minseok's now with the people in production, hopefully not talking to them about work but about other areas of interest, and Joonmyun's probably hanging out with Namjoon and the others – Seokjin can't even recall seeing Joonmyun slip from the group, but he does have the vaguest recollection of seeing Joonmyun landing small, playful punches on Namjoon's arm and rolling his eyes at one of Heechul's silly jokes. Taehyung was with them just a few minutes ago, but he'd excused himself to go to the bathroom (and Seokjin will pretend he hasn't caught on on Jimin's worry even if Jimin keeps shooting glances at the bathroom door every five seconds). So it's just him and Jimin now, clinking their bottles in the air before taking a long swig of the drink, moving moving much closer to each other when the noise all around them grows much louder. Seokjin isn't big on parties for the very same reason, but it's nice seeing people who are normally too focused on work to do anything else drinking and just having fun. It feels good watching their shoulders lift, their eyebrows furrow, their noses wrinkle as they
nudge and slap each other on the arm, rid of all the stress from the week that was. He can get drunk on this if he wanted to, but beer doesn't even make him the slightest bit tipsy. He'll need something stronger if he wants to at least feel buzzed. "The fact that we're being forced to rest is actually very saddening."

"Well, it's all a matter of perspective. Either the bosses are just really nice or the clients are just assholes that we're mandated to take breaks," Seokjin answers, but the scoff that had been dancing on his lower lip over just the same. He takes another long swig of his beer, shivering when the cool liquid betrays him and turns warm as it rolls down his throat, then he's resting the now-empty bottle on the table with a dull thud. Opening his eyes to the sight of the grin on Jimin's lips fast tugging down to a frown when a shot glass is pressed to Jimin's cheek. Seokjin wraps his fingers around the bottle tightly, hoping to use the empty bottle as an escape, to ward off people who might force him to drink whatever deadly liquor the bosses have requested for, but too late – he's already been spotted. The people in charge of having everyone take shots are closing in on them, and Jimin's widening his eyes at him as if saying, *What the hell– I thought we were safe here!* And he's now being offered two shots, being told that this is part of agency tradition and that, apparently, not taking part in the drinking bonanza is going to reflect on his evaluation due in a few months. "Is this tequila or is this death in two shots?"

"I can take one off you hands–" Fingers splaying on Jimin's stomach cuts Jimin off, and soon he's widening his eyes at the newcomer – at Taehyung who has snuck up on him somehow and is holding up a cute little shot glass in front of him. Seokjin laughs a little, presses the back of his hand to his mouth, tries to swallow the sound, but to no avail – for all of Jimin's being tough on his favorite creatives, he's still a complete marshmallow inside. Taehyung just happens to make the melting process ten times faster, *more painful.* "If this is tequila, I'm going to kill you."

"Hyung, I didn't need to know!" Jimin groans, but there's no denying the way he widens his eyes as some last ditch effort to ask for help, the way his breathing hitched when Taehyung takes the shot from him so his hands can be free of anything, anyone who isn't Jimin. His body says otherwise, though, when his shoulders relax and his head tilts back almost on reflex when Taehyung pulls him close, even closer. "Hey hyung, do you think you could– If you're gonna leave already, can you give me a ring–"

Seokjin heaves a sigh. He's never been a fan of getting involved in people's trysts, of bailing people out of sexy times gone wrong, but Jimin looks more afraid of suddenly waking up and realizing that whatever he's about to do, whatever Taehyung's about to ask from him, is something he'd like to make a habit out of even without alcohol coursing through his veins more than anything else. He isn't scared he won't make it home in one piece; he's afraid he won't want to go back to his own home and, instead, find a home in wherever Taehyung will take him, where *this* will take them. So Jimin's not asking to be saved; he's asking Seokjin to keep him afloat.
You dug your own grave, kid. This isn't my shit to take care of, Seokjin's tempted to say, but he knows how it feels, wanting to sink to the very bottom knowing full well that there's someone willing to stay there with you. He knows how frightening the silence is, and how loud two heartbeats can be when there's nothing to noise to temper the sound. That, and Seokjin catches a familiar figure out of the corner of his eye. Bright, blond hair sticking out in the middle of the crowd, that's about all he can see, but when the crowd clears a little and someone makes the smart move of turning up the lights from complete darkness to dim Seokjin's able to make out the peculiar curl of the mouth, the small, sly smile that his system has come to develop a reflex to in three, two, one--

It hits him like a wave, the lurching sensation in his stomach. It claws on his insides a bit harder than usual. It tastes like acid and blood at the back of his teeth. All of a sudden, it feels like ten degrees under and he's forgotten his coat again, maybe even lent it to some guy who carries around a fedora half the time but can't be bothered to drape a jacket over his shoulder before taking a nap in the pantry. The easiest way to remedy this is to down the shots he'd been given in two big gulps, but he knows better than to take tequila lightly. The last time he did, back in college, he ended up spending the night in the roof deck of the school building with a junior not saying a thing, just holding hands and listening to each other breathe until one of them decided it was better to taste words on each other's mouth, instead.

He laughs to himself. He'll never forget the way Jeongguk couldn't stop giggling when their lips finally touched, or him telling the latter, if you don't kiss me within the next ten seconds then I'll kiss you so hard you'll regret not taking control when you had the chance to. Fifteen seconds in and Jeongguk still wouldn't stop shaking, slapping Seokjin's chest in playful little hits, so Seokjin kept his word, sucked hard on his lower lip, gave Jeongguk a kiss he would never forget.

Yoongi looks up. Or at least that's what it looks like – it's difficult to see clearly, what with all the blur of colors and people around Seokjin. In hindsight, maybe Seokjin should have worn his glasses today instead of slapping on his contacts, knowing he might fall asleep with the amount of liquor people here will be making him drink, but what's done is done. He has to live with this for the next few hours. He needs someone to keep him awake.

Yoongi's good at that. If Yoongi hadn't taken him through nearly all the creative executions BBDO had presented in pitches in the past then Seokjin probably would have fallen asleep in the middle of crafting a deck, checking scripts and visuals and making sure they were in their proper place. He would have let fatigue take control over him instead of letting his inability to stop working until everything was perfect reign.

"Yeah, sure, I will," Seokjin tells Jimin after a while, then takes a shot of tequila. The liquid burns in his throat, eases the tight knots, so he takes another, silently thanks Sihyuk for allowing everyone to take the morning off tomorrow, then turns to Jimin with a tentative smile. "Have fun--"

"Hey," comes Heechul's voice from not more than a foot away, loud and crisp even with the music and chatter all around them, and the next thing Seokjin knows he's being dragged forward, away from Jimin and Taehyung who are cocooned in their own little world, and closer to where Yoongi is, drawn to the bright tuft of hair like a beacon of light. "You're too sober. Let's get you drunk."

Seokjin looks up from where he's been watching his steps and meets Yoongi in the eye – or at least through the haze of the glass right in front of him, filled with something that smells a lot like rum.

He wraps his hand around the glass, the pads of his fingers catching on Yoongi's skin just before Yoongi pulls away. And he takes a deep, deep breath before gulping down the rum in the glass, regret kicking in when the liquor meets the tequila he'd downed just minutes ago at the pit of his stomach.
This is going to be a long night.

Ten shots straight – that's Seokjin's limit when it comes to tequila and tequila alone. Every additional bottle of beer lessens his alcohol tolerance by a couple of percentage points, but space out the shots and he'll probably be able to take ten more. Back in college, when he was trapped in a party that involved only five people and one of them was a Hoseok who was too far gone, ten shots was more than enough to make his vision go from blurred and hazy to a thick sheet of white. So he's pleased that long after his tenth shot of tequila has passed (and a few beers; he's lost track because of the conversations), at a ripe age of thirty-three even if his body makes him feel as if he's at least a hundred years old, he still has all of his senses in check. Not just pleased – he's proud of himself.

His vision screws him over from time to time, though. He can still make out the faces of people, can still comprehend the concept of depth enough that he hasn't bumped into anyone yet, but ten minutes into his search for the missing Jimin and he still hasn't seen any sign of his friend. He'd check the bathroom stalls or the stock room or one of the offices, but he's pretty darn sure he doesn't need to sober up by seeing people making out in closed spaces. He has a pack of mints in his back pocket, after all, and mints haven't failed him yet.

He digs one hand in his back pocket when he feels the last shot of tequila he'd taken kick in – more like punch him in the gut until he's seeing stars – and leans against the closest stable thing he can find. His pocket feels unbearably empty, though, and shit, he's going to kick Heechul in the balls for not returning his mints. Rather, he'll knee Heechul in the groin and twist his leg for good measure and grab Heechul by the collar and say–

"Hi. I'm a person, not a pole," comes a familiar voice just a few inches away. The stable thing he's holding onto shifts, then he's feeling a pulse against his palm, the beats quick and heavy unlike the steady thumping in his chest. It takes a while for things to click, for him to feel the warmth pressed close to his body, for him to realize that the voice isn't just a few inches away – it's coming from right beside him, and that it's Yoongi he's actually holding onto with his fingers wrapped around Yoongi's throat, his free hand flat on Yoongi's chest. And that Yoongi's looking up at him through the slits of his bright, bright bangs, eyelashes catching on the strands and making each flutter just a bit... mesmerising. "I've been mistaken for a lot of things but really – really – a pole?"

"Sorry," Seokjin mumbles, then quickly drops his hands to his sides. His vision has cleared up considerably, now crisper than before, enough that he can see Yoongi's features in great detail – eyebrows lifted, a small smile pulling up at the corners of his lips, nose slightly wrinkled. The band of red around his throat doesn't lift yet, lingers longer than it should, but Yoongi's breathing has evened out and turned into faint wisps of laughter. "Sorry, I'm kinda blind right now, I can't– Hey, have you seen Jimin?"

Yoongi doesn't answer for a while. Seokjin can still hear his voice though, ringing in his ears and echoing in the entire area except now it... isn't wearing its usual cadence. It's a bit more melodious. It's higher than Yoongi's normal pitch, too. Not that Seokjin's been trying to commit to memory the way Yoongi talks an enunciates his words; it's just that sound sticks to his memory quicker than words and events. The only thing that rivals it is actions – those haunt him like the plague every breathing moment of his life, sometimes even in his dreams.

He blinks twice, then furrows his eyebrows when he finds Yoongi holding a microphone and
Seokjin shivers. It isn't even the first time Yoongi had called him that the entire night. This would be, what, the fourth time Yoongi has whispered it in his ear? Maybe even the fifth? The first time it happened, Seokjin had narrowed his eyes in response and snarled at Yoongi in his best imitation of an angry dog, but he ended up being called a cute puppy, instead. The second time, he'd shot Yoongi a glare, but it was hard to figure out if he was able to pull it off because there was more alcohol than blood in his system at that time. He'd guessed he failed at his attempt at trying to ask Yoongi why, why, why did he have to bring it up at every unguarded moment because Yoongi was trying hard to keep it together, lips trembling with little bubbles of laughter, but it wasn't as if Yoongi screamed it at the top of his lungs or announced it to the entire company. All he had ever been doing was to whisper the same syllables and then some in Seokjin's ear, the word 'boyfriend' rolling off his tongue in the softest, most hushed tone as if he were just breathing it out.

"I'll ruin it," Seokjin murmurs, then yelps a little when he feels Yoongi pinch him in his side. You'd think that after too many shots of tequila and bottles of beer, Yoongi would be less likely to pick up on things like this, but no – you don't know him that well yet, Jin, whispers a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind, you think you know exactly what he's thinking of but you don't, and you don't have to– "I mean, you're already doing so well–"

"I know, thanks," Yoongi answers, pausing to sing into the microphone when the lines come on again. He leans back at the first opportunity, turning to look in Seokjin's direction, and tugs Seokjin even closer. "But don't think I never heard you singing while we were preparing for the pitch. You sing a lot during downtime."

Seokjin gulps hard. *It's been weeks; why do you still remember?* he wants to ask, but it's not as if he hasn't been getting flashbacks, either, only for him it's to that moment two months ago. His insides still turn whenever he remembers Yoongi walking up to him and wrapping warm, slender fingers around his wrist to pull him close and ask, *Hey, director, mind if I kiss you for authenticity? You can yell 'cut' whenever you feel like pulling away.* His pulse still quickens whenever he recalls the way Yoongi had kissed him, left scars on his lower lip and a dull ache in his jaw that haunted him for days. And his chest still grows unbearably tight whenever he recalls the way Yoongi keeps convincing him to give creative work a shot, to take a leap of faith and just believe in what he's capable of. *I'm just saying, you have a lot of good ideas. Best not to put them to waste.* Every part of his body has developed a reflex to stimulus in the form of Yoongi's careless words that it's difficult for Seokjin to wean himself off of the habit of questioning, both himself and Yoongi, *why, why the hell not?*

Yoongi isn't even careless with his words. Or at least that's what Seokjin would like to think – one does not get to a Chief Creative Officer post without knowing how much a single word, a single syllable can change the meaning of a statement. Yoongi doesn't seem like he'd be reckless with things that matter.

"I thought you were sleeping then," Seokjin grumbles. He scratches behind his ear, rolls his earlobe between his fingers, then adds, "Didn't you say you sleep like a log or something?"

Yoongi snorts, shaking his head for a second until the instrumentals of the track in the background bobbing his head. A few feet away, Heechul is clapping his hands in the air, and beside Heechul Joonmyun grips another microphone tightly in his hands, motioning to singing into it until Namjoon joins in and harmonizes. Then it clicks and kicks in, not the tequila but a violent breath of life – Joonmyun and Namjoon aren't even making a sound, just making fun of Yoongi as Yoongi belts out a line, Yoongi's *singing* some trot-sounding song and he actually sounds good, and Yoongi's draping an arm around Seokjin's shoulder, pulling Seokjin close yet pulling away from the microphone briefly to whisper in Seokjin's ear, "Pretty sure you know this one. C'mon, boyfriend, sing with me–"
thins and he has to sing again, voice softer this time like talking to Seokjin for just a minute or so has trained him, snatched all his words away. Soon, though, Yoongi's retorting, "Didn't you say your focus was – what's that again – immaculate?"

"It would be if you didn't keep distracting–"

"I kept you awake," Yoongi argues, thinning his lips into a smile soon after and ending with a wink. Seokjin scrunches his nose and balls his hands into tight fists, but alcohol gets the better of him and makes the nerves at the back of his hands tingle, makes him relinquish control to the allure of liquor. "I was actually being helpful."

Whatever, Seokjin's tempted to say, but he knows deep inside that Yoongi's right – Yoongi was being helpful, in the same way that singing out loud was Seokjin's attempt at easing his nerves and keeping Yoongi up whenever Yoongi was close to drifting off right in front of his laptop (and Seokjin was still waiting for at least two write ups from Yoongi). So they're quits now – they've both taken away quiet time from each other – and it's time to settle this match once and for all. It's time to grab Yoongi by the wrist so they can take the leap again and start a new race, knowing they'll inevitably cross the finish line at the same time and share in each other's victory.

"Well, I'm glad my singing could inspire you, then," Seokjin retorts, pressing his lips together into a smug smile when Yoongi brings the microphone away from himself. There it is again, the searching look Yoongi always fashions, the one where Yoongi squints and leans closer and furrows his eyebrows as if trying, trying, trying to understand Seokjin. But what is there to understand? What is there to read into? Seokjin means what he says. If there are other words he means to enunciate, he says them in a quiet voice, in subtle touches and passing glances and deep, shaky breaths that get him into trouble instead of steering him away from it. "Should I sing to the entire team so they can get things done faster?"

Yoongi snorts. "They get enough of my singing already. I'm sure that's inspiring enough for them."

He licks his lips, shifts his gaze when the screen flashes his score – a whooping 98% that Joonmyun and Namjoon call 'a joke'; "He didn't even sing! He just screamed the whole time!" – and twists his mouth for a second before saying, "Sing with me?"

Seokjin holds his breath. He hasn't sung with anyone other thank Hoseok since... since the last time they hung out with each other. They recorded their own version the Isengard song and ended up deleting the sole copy they had of it. It was a disaster. It was one of the best things they'd ever done. Heck, he hasn't even done any serious duets since... Jeongguk's send-off a decade ago. It's either just him belting out songs while cleaning his place or him and Hoseok geeking out over anime soundtracks and songs they chance upon in movies. And even then, they wouldn't be using their normal voices; they'd be assuming roles and characters, trying to be someone else, someone completely unlike how they truly are.

"Only if you want to, at least," Yoongi adds after a while, then drops the hand he's been gripping Seokjin's arm with to his side. Slowly, he pulls away, taking little steps to his right, until Seokjin feels a rush of cold assaulting his skin where Yoongi's warmth once bled onto. "Didn't you say you were looking for your friend or something? The one with orange hair? I thought I saw him eloping with Taehyung to the pantry. Should we call for reinforcements and save–"

Seokjin snatches the microphone from Yoongi's grip, wrapping his fingers around it tightly until he can feel a dull ache in his knuckles. I hate it when you turn orders into suggestions, when you care too much, when you do you, he would say if the music was turned up louder, if he was a bit more drunk and his lips were far too loose to be controlled, but he's far too tired to argue. And Yoongi's looking up at him with bright eyes and an even brighter smile and Seokjin doesn't have the heart to
take happiness away from kids like Yoongi who smile like the sun. So instead, he leans into whisper, "Pick a song, boyfriend," and pulls away even before he can hear Yoongi’s breath hitch.

He fishes for his phone deep in his pocket, texts Jimin, we leave at 1 a.m., and doesn't flinch when he feels the cool pads of Yoongi's fingers brush against his skin. It's a little past midnight and they still have a few minutes. Might as well make the most out of this night, keep the magic alive until all the alcohol in his body thins into little realities and consciousness sets in in earnest.

He looks to his side, meets Yoongi in the eye, and starts singing.

_Might as well make this moment last._

Moments breed memories and memories breed bonds. And bonds sticky enough to last more than a few hours, days, weeks, leave Seokjin with a lurching sensation in his stomach that even eating on time cannot ease.

Not that he has actually had the opportunity to drop work at twelve noon, sharp, so he can get up from his seat to have lunch – it's been crazy these past few weeks. He goes to work at nine and leaves at around two, three in the morning even if he isn't working on a pitch. The pile of unread messages in his inbox has stacked up even more, if that's even possible, but at least he hasn't missed any project updates and important details that some of the newer accounts people have to clear with him. He's just been finding it hard to make time to sit down and formalize discussions he's had on the phone through email, that's all. And he's barely been spending time in his station in the office, always getting pulled to meetings and dinner appointments with clients even late in the evening, being seated amongst bosses who look like they're five seconds away from cracking and just saying, _can we please go home already and stop doing this client servicing thing at ass o’clock in the evening?_ Seokjin laughs to himself. He'd like to think they're all better than that when it comes to feigning interest in whatever the client has to say, but at one point everything has already become scripted, predictable. They will shuffle to the restaurant and greet the clients with big grins. Sihyuk and Namjoon will take the seats on either side of the panel of clients sitting opposite Seokjin and engage them in conversation with dead eyes yet bright smiles. Joonmyun will claim the seat on Seokjin's right, taking down notes with each bob of the head, with every squint of the eyes as the clients drop bits and pieces of information on what they want to do for the brand, what they want to see, dreams of extending digital support to the rest of the bigger brand. Yoongi will crane his neck, look for whichever seat is left or needs to be filled, but half the time he'll zombie walk his way to Seokjin's left, settle there comfortably, and study every detail of the clients' movements, the expression written on their features, the words they aren't saying but are screaming with the way they twist their mouth. It's almost as if Yoongi's trying to craft stories out of those little things, trying to breathe meaning into an action that would otherwise be as insignificant as dust, but give him a few more minutes and he'll look like he's this close to slumping in his seat and saying, _I'm not an accounts person so why do you guys keep dragging me to these boring meetings?_ "9 a.m.. This is a record," Seokjin says now when the sight of Yoongi standing right in front of the coffeemaker greets him as he enters the pantry. Yoongi tears his gaze from where he's just slotted the milk compartment into the machine, then cocks his head in the direction of a table nearby – the one where there are at least seven, eight pieces of toast and jams of different flavors. They're arranged in neat scallops, almost like they're forming a flower, but Seokjin knows better than to trust his vision
before he's had coffee and at such an early hour. That, and Yoongi's patience to form jam flowers for no reason at all rather than to spend more time away from his office desk at nine in the morning isn't something Seokjin is able to gauge just yet. "Preso later? I thought you didn't do Friday meetings?"

"I thought so, too, but eh." Yoongi shrugs, then slumps against the cool, hard wall just behind him. He looks like he could use another cup of coffee right after he finishes his first cappuccino for the day, but more than that he looks like he could use a nice, long sleep, tucked in the softest comforters and snuggled against the biggest stuffed bear – a polar bear. A polar bear with extra thick fur that shields its smile from the world because apparently, polar bears aren't supposed to be giggly and have to maintain this cool, distant image of theirs.

So melt the ice, whispers a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind, but soon he catches Yoongi giving him a slow, scrutinizing look, eyes lingering just a second longer on the column of his neck – or maybe his bow tie. Only the fifth time he's worn one in the office and he's already being branded by people as 'the bow tie guy'. It's better than being called 'fresh blood', he supposes; he's just not that comfortable with Joonmyun trying to determine the ratio of the frequency at which Seokjin chooses bow ties over normal ties that look like they've been stolen from his father.

"Lose the tie," he recalls Yoongi telling him one time, just before one of their dinner meetings with Hyundai Motors. Sihyuk was in his usual button-up and slacks, and Joonmyun had just slipped into his favorite blazer to make the white polo and light jeans combination look a bit more formal. Namjoon... had never dressed formally, not even in events ceremonies, but no one could ever go wrong with black on black, and Yoongi was probably the least appropriately dressed with the way the blazer he was wearing was a bit too loose towards the base and with the way his dark jeans were ripped in certain places. Seokjin could easily tell Yoongi, no, I'm not about to dress like the rest of you just because that's how agency people do it, but he had been trying to loosen his tie for the past two hours in an effort to help himself breathe more easily. It was nine in the evening and they hadn't had dinner yet. He was supposed to clock out two hours ago yet here he was, miles away from home and stuck in a business meeting with Hyundai executives whose faces were beginning to appear in his nightmares. The last thing he should be doing was to deprive himself of little victories and leisures.

So he loosened his tie, yanked it off all the way, and rolled it up before stuffing it in his pocket. The lack of crippling warmth around his neck was liberating. The fond look in Yoongi's eyes, the small smile on his lips, the way Yoongi gestured for Seokjin to fix the wrinkles on his polo instead of reaching over to do it, himself, and run his hands down Seokjin's chest, however, weren't. They kept making Seokjin retreat to the farthest corner of his mind, asking, why the hell do you have to look at people that way? Why?

"It's not until 3 p.m., at least. I just... couldn't sleep even if I wanted to sleep in." Yoongi cracks his neck, massages the slope for a few good seconds, then retrieves his coffee from the machine when the humming sound dies down. "I'm inclined to think you've infected me with your early morning virus or something. Clocking in at ten makes me feel weird now."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Seokjin says, humming as he takes Yoongi's place in front of the coffeemaker. Yoongi has been reporting to work earlier than usual, and he isn't the only one who's noticed the change. It started after they were awarded the Hyundai Motors account, the week right after Sihyuk dropped the big bomb on them and staged the wildest agency party the company had ever seen (Heechul's words, not his). Monday the following week, Yoongi came in at ten instead of eleven. It went on for another four days, and the week after that Yoongi had been clocking in sometime between half past nine and ten already. Fast forward a few more weeks, a month and then some, and Seokjin is now seeing Yoongi gesture at him with the gentle coax of a hand, urging Seokjin to join him in the table when he pats the surface twice, then the seat right beside him thrice
Yoongi did that before, back in that party, when Seokjin returned from finding Jimin sleeping soundly in Sihyuk's office, curled up against Taehyung and even snoring into the thin material of Taehyung's shirt. Seokjin had poked his head inside the karaoke room and while Yoongi didn't stop singing, he did crane his neck and gestured for Seokjin to come closer, to sit beside him, to take the other microphone because apparently, Heechul wasn't the best when it came to duets and would rather do solos of six songs straight. And then again, during one of those dinner meetings Seokjin had to miss half of because he had to sort out issues in the office -- Yoongi had motioned for Seokjin to 'save him' with a gentle nod the head, then heaved a sigh of relief as he whispered in the thin space between them, "Thank god you're here. I've run out of bullshit to tell the clients because apparently they think the creatives know stuff about media spending, as well. What the fuck?" And then another, on their way to the parking lot where Yoongi and Sihyuk had parked their cars, when Yoongi reached out to give Seokjin's shirtsleeve a light tug and whispered, "Dibs on you as a car buddy because Namjoon will just talk my head off the entire time and I'm too dead in the head to process things."

"Even if he doesn't ride shotgun, he'll still chat you up," Seokjin had offered, then stepped to his side to dodge the light jab Yoongi pressed to his arm. "What? Come on, you know I'm right. He'll choose the music but talk over it, nonetheless, and--"

"It's easier to find inner peace when you're around," Yoongi had countered, voice barely above a whisper. He let his shoulders fall forward. He was slouching again, dragging his feet, jutting out his lower lip as he looked up at Seokjin. He looked like a kid who'd been deprived of time to play, or an adult who had been deprived of sleep. Maybe Yoongi was both, and he just wanted to build castles quietly in the sandpit with Seokjin because he knew that, no matter what, Seokjin wouldn't ask him why the castle looked like a mansion or a building or a lighthouse in the middle of nowhere, the only source of light. Instead, Seokjin would even offer to fill the pail with water again or even poke holes in the walls of the castle to create windows through which light could pass. "Please? I promise to remind Yixing-hyung about the scripts and Tae about the... storyboards, right? Or has he still not submitted the digital posters? I made sure to email him earlier--"

"Fine," Seokjin had groaned, rolled his eyes, even heaved a sigh before turning to Yoongi with a frown, but who was he kidding by taking a steps closer to Yoongi until their arms were brushing against each other? Who was he kidding by pressing his thumbs down on Yoongi's shoulders before pulling them back and whispering in Yoongi's ear, "Stand straight. You'll only hurt yourself if you keep slouching."

"You sound like--"

"Your mom?" Seokjin laughed. "I get that a lot. Hobi--"

Yoongi shook his head. He stopped in his tracks, snapped up his spine, and resumed in his steps, except now he was timing them with Seokjin's own. It was already spring and nights weren't as cold anymore, but every brush of Yoongi's hand against his own still felt like coming contact with ice – blocks of ice that were fast melting, cool water wrapping around Seokjin's fingers and making him shiver all over as his insides lurched. And Yoongi's whispering, "Nah. Much better," felt like taking a punch to the gut, all the air in Seokjin's lungs rushing up his throat and out of his system when he looked at Yoongi in the eye. "Much, much better than that."

"I made too many of these... things. Get some, please. They won't be as yummy later," Yoongi mumbles now, then points at the tower of toast with pursed lips. Seokjin allows himself to stare a little longer than he should, or at least until a corner of Yoongi's mouth curls up into a smile.
"Seriously, I should just keep grabbing takeout or something. This is what I get for attempting to cook without having coffee yet."

Seokjin laughs a little. "That's pretty dangerous," he mumbles, then takes his cup from where it had been slotted in the coffeemaker for the past few minutes. He isn't worried about his coffee getting cold, though; he's more worried about what Yoongi is about to do with mischief written in the way he twists his mouth and squints at the selection of jams. Yoongi takes a dollop of one and spreads it evenly in a triangular pattern, scrapes off the excess by raking the knife against the edge of the container. Dips the knife into a different jam, this time, and takes a much smaller amount like he has a clear picture in mind of how he wants his toast painting to look like. So 'pretty dangerous' is a safe term. If Yoongi weren't his boss, he'd say Yoongi pre-coffee is as lethal as a pitch. "Coffee's important. Very important. I wouldn't know how to survive without it, to be honest."

Yoongi doesn't answer for a while, looks up only when Seokjin's already settled on the seat beside him and rested his own cup of coffee opposite Yoongi's. "Well, you look pretty alive even without coffee," he comments, snatching glances at Seokjin through the narrow slits of his bangs, and finally pulls away from where he's been painting... mountains on the toast. Peanut butter mountains with touches of kiwi-flavored trees along the steep path. Seokjin would climb those every damn day if it means being greeted by toast like this at the end of each hike. Alternatively, if Yoongi was climbing the same path as he was, groaning and laughing and shaking his head as he tightened his hold on Seokjin's wrist. "You attend 8 a.m. meetings and I haven't heard anyone complain about you yet."

Seokjin grips his mug tightly. The heat prickling his skin is nothing compared to the sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach. "You've been asking around?"

Yoongi shifts. He hasn't put down the butter knife yet, has actually started painting on another piece of toast, this time using mango and orange jams, but his torso is twisted to the side now, body facing Seokjin in earnest. The stretch is probably difficult, puts so much strain on Yoongi's back and will probably worsen his posture as the minutes tick by, but Yoongi doesn't seem to mind. And he doesn't seem to be bothered by slicing up an incomplete toast painting, either, and stuffing a fourth of the toast in his mouth without preamble. If this were an answer then Seokjin's inclined to think that this is a 'yes', but he's learned never to take Yoongi's actions at face value. There's always something beneath the surface or right between the gaps in his words and actions. Yoongi's that one subject in school that you have to study for on a regular basis, and you wouldn't really mind because each word, each sentence, each paragraph is an entirely different experience on the second, third, fourth read through. There's something new to be discovered about Yoongi every single day.

"Well," Yoongi begins, pausing to lick the jam flaunted on the corners of his mouth. It leaves Yoongi's lips looking warmer than usual, more orange than its usual light pink, but not so much that it turns into the same bright red that they were back when Seokjin and Yoongi pulled away from each other in the elevator, chests heaving, realizing they were no longer supposed to be kissing or even breathing each other in. Not that Seokjin has been studying Yoongi's mouth. He has more important matters to attend to; he doesn't have time to memorize the way Yoongi quirks up his lips when he's amused, or the way the corners twitch involuntarily when he isn't completely sold on an idea and would rather rework it, himself. He doesn't have time to slip into little moments of weakness and to give in. "I have to keep track of how you guys are doing. I have to make sure my employees aren't slacking off."

Seokjin gulps hard. "Right," he whispers, nodding in thought – but more in an attempt to silence all the voices in his head, the ones screaming and the ones talking in hushed tones and even the ones that are just humming in question. Of course Yoongi will want to make sure that they're all doing their job properly, that they're not running into nasty bumps and hiccups in any of their projects. Of course Yoongi will want to get to know each employee better so that he'll know if they are, indeed, a
perfect fit for the company. Of course Yoongi will always think of the company first and the workers second. He's running a business, after all, and to be an effective leader he has to maintain a balance between perceiving with his senses and discerning with his heart.

Yoongi isn't supposed to be reaching for the toast Seokjin has just placed on his plate, though, isn't supposed to be digging the butter knife in the strawberry jam and taking a generous amount of it, lathering the lot on his toast canvas and painting with the jam in broad strokes. Yoongi isn't supposed to be decorating the toast with little trees using the kiwi jam again (the last time Seokjin had strawberry and kiwi in combination, he fell in love; half of him is concerned the same thing might happen in a while). Yoongi isn't supposed to be looking up at him with a peculiar light in his eyes and a small smile pulling up at the corners of his lips as he asks, "You like strawberry, right?," but doesn't stop adding little red dots on the mini forest as if decorating a Christmas tree even if he hasn't gotten a response yet. He's months delayed. The heavy thumping in Seokjin's chest hasn't stilled yet. It's nine in the morning and neither of them has had coffee yet and bad things are going to happen if they don't take their first sip now. "I'm pretty sure you like kiwi – you mentioned that the other day – but not from the butterflies in his stomach when they pulled away from the kiss. He shouldn't be any different from Yoongi's creatives, or the other accounts people whom Yoongi dotes on whenever he's in a good mood, just because they've had more conversations about aspirations in life than the number of times Seokjin has seen Hoseok in the past three months. Yoongi is still his boss, and he's just an employee. Cappuccino is still coffee even if the espresso has already been tainted with milk. There's nothing wrong with the picture, and there's nothing special about it, either.

Seokjin takes a sip of his coffee, the little bubbles on the surface popping on the sensitive skin of his lips. It's just toast, he tells himself, reminds himself. It's just a piece of bread and jam painting and your boss offering you excess of his food. No biggie. For all he knows, Yoongi makes sandwiches for Joonmyun and Heechul, as well. Maybe Yoongi even makes soup for Sihyuk and Namjoon when they're sick. He seems like the type who'd drag his ass out of bed for friends in need but will whine and ask for payment in the form of quality coffee. So whatever Seokjin and Yoongi have is probably normal. Seokjin isn't supposed to be special just because Yoongi saved him from his ex and but not from the butterflies in his stomach when they pulled away from the kiss. He shouldn't be any different from Yoongi's creatives, or the other accounts people whom Yoongi dotes on whenever he's in a good mood, just because they've had more conversations about aspirations in life than the number of times Seokjin has seen Hoseok in the past three months. Yoongi is still his boss, and he's just an employee. Cappuccino is still coffee even if the espresso has already been tainted with milk. There's nothing wrong with the picture, and there's nothing special about it, either.

He's just an ordinary guy.

"Slacking off isn't in my vocabulary," Seokjin answers, then he's taking a nice, long sip of his coffee. The first touch burns, scalds his tongue, but nothing quite rivals the burning sensation in his chest when Yoongi slices the toast in little squares and holds up one of them in his direction. So he breathes in deep, takes another gulp of his drink, and takes solace in the way coffee lends him a few seconds of respite, a few seconds to recalibrate and pull up walls that have always proved to be useful.

He sets his mug down on the table only when he feels the lurching sensation in his stomach lift considerably, then leans in to catch between his teeth the piece of toast Yoongi hasn't set down on the plate yet, the same piece that he's been holding up in front of Seokjin as if an invitation to move closer. The mix of strawberry and kiwi and Yoongi will stick to the roof of his mouth for hours, will haunt him for days, but at least he has coffee to drown out the flavor for a few sacred minutes.

Yoongi licks his lips at the same time that Seokjin scrapes the remaining jam at the corners of his mouth with the gentle swipe of his tongue. Seokjin needs another cup, an extra hot cup of coffee whose smoke can and will blur the bright smile on Yoongi's lips, not make his insides lurch even more when Yoongi's eyes soften and turn into half-moon crescents. He needs more coffee now.
Seokjin laughs into the receiver before hanging up, echoes of *yeah, I know I suck a lot but you suck just as much* still dancing on his lower lip. He's supposed to be somewhere in Garosu-gil right now, sipping champagne while eating expensive pizza or just plain getting drunk and catching up with his best friend, but life decided to be unkind to them on one of the last days of spring. Hoseok had been pulled into a meeting all of a sudden, and the next thing he knew he was already part of the team working on a pitch and an evil plan of snatching the advertising business of Procter & Gamble from incumbent agency and P&G's long-time partner, Publicis. Seokjin was... well, by now, he had already gotten used to being pulled into many different meetings, short appointments with different clients, had already developed a habit of hopping on Yoongi's car the first chance he got so they could head to the Hyundai office thirty minutes away from BBDO at the client's request, but that didn't mean he wasn't prone to fatigue and stress getting the better of him. It took longer to get back to people, even through text and short calls whose purpose was to reassure the younger account executives that they weren't fucking things up more than actually holding their hands through every single test. He had to dedicate more time to replying to emails that had been sitting in his inbox for more than six hours already. He had to check and double-check every single line to make sure he hadn't typed anything silly in his sheer desire to lessen his workload and cross off items from his long to-do list. And he could have easily taken the first train to Gangnam and surprised Hoseok by showing up at Tragos & Bonnange's doorstep unannounced, but he knew better than to snatch attention from a creative who was busy trying to make sense of a brand brief and breathing meaning into it.

The worst Yoongi had done at the peak of his creative process was to glare at Seokjin, but other than that Yoongi was one of the safer creatives – safer than Taehyung who would rush to the fire exit so he could throw paint balls at the empty lot nearby whenever stress and interruptions from other brands got the better of him, or Baekhyun who would grab the first sheet of paper and rip it into shreds while holding his account executive's gaze. There was one time when Yoongi threatened to throw candies at Seokjin, though, but in the end he'd only unwrapped the treat and popped it in his mouth. And that wasn't harmful at all.

"The candies are good," Yoongi had said, voice garbled by his chewing and his gaze fixed on whatever he was doing on his laptop and fingers dancing across the keyboard in quick beats. His eyebrows were furrowed, but the corners of his lips were curled up into the smallest of smiles. He probably wasn't multi-tasking – Yoongi was shit at multi-tasking, Seokjin discovered one time, after one of their longer, more torturous meetings – but he had this strange ability of balancing two looks on his features at any given time – restraint and disappointment, amusement and interest, curiosity and an overwhelming look of fondness that often made Seokjin's insides lurch and his chest grow tighter. "Joonmyun-hyung got those for me when he went to Japan. You should try them. I won't be able to finish sending out emails for another ten minutes, anyway."

Seokjin squinted. He'd seen those candies from somewhere before. During the pitch? Or was it one of those treats Yoongi had indulged in before heading to a meeting— Right. "Aren't these your energy boosters, though?"

Yoongi had paused in his typing, looked up, and laughed. He was doing that thing with his mouth again where he looked as if he couldn't decide whether to smile or frown at Seokjin's inability to accept realities that had been shoved in his face. Seokjin wanted to... make Yoongi stop, snatch that small, simmering smile away, tuck it in his chest for a rainy day. Or for when he didn't feel queasy anymore that Yoongi's little laughters would cease to make him shiver in the best way possible. "I think I'm good for the next few months," he answered after a while, then reached over to take a
couple of pieces of the sweets and push three of them in Seokjin's direction. "The strawberry one's really good. Doesn't taste like cough syrup. The white one's vanilla and the brown one's coffee and--"

"Overtime again?"

Seokjin looks up, peeking through his bangs and squinting when his vision betrays him a little. The lights in the area are dim – no longer the same bright lights that they were only an hour ago – and his thoughts aren't quite in this moment yet, but he does catch sight of blond hair, a discerning gaze, and the dregs of the question hanging in the air in the familiar curl of the lips. It pulls up at the man's cheeks, teases a few crinkles out of the corners of his eyes, lights up his features a little like the beginnings of a flame. This is the Yoongi he's most familiar with, the same Yoongi who breathed a bit of life into the otherwise insipid conference room Seokjin was trapped in for nearly a month, the same Yoongi who had been asking Seokjin on many different occasions, be it overt or covert, why he'd picked accounts over creatives over his sanity and social life. It isn't much different from the Yoongi he slips into the car with, the Yoongi who looks at him with soft eyes as Yoongi says, "Fine, fine, you can pick the music. You have good taste, anyway," but it's been a while since they've last been where they exactly are – Yoongi at the foot of the stairs, head cocked to the side, and Seokjin in his seat, the budding smile on his lips hidden behind the screen of his laptop, his lifesaver. Months. Five to six months, give or take. It's been six months since he entered the company, since he had to stuff an entire cupcake in his mouth in an attempt to save it from the evil clutches of the creatives threatening to steal the treat and Yoongi just had to laugh at him silly. It's been a little less than that since Yoongi offered to kiss him out of the kindness of his heart. It's been a little over three months since he's had to work with Yoongi for a pitch, and a couple of months since being right beside Yoongi began to feel less of a responsibility and more of something he would rather be doing versus leading pitches and doing presentations to prospective clients. Only half a year since he'd walked past the doors of BBDO and he's already swum too far from the beach, too far away from familiar shores and deeper into the unknown with Yoongi right beside him, flipping his cute little fins and laughing at his own self for being a shitty swimmer.

We're bothgoners, I guess, Seokjin muses, then cranes his neck so he can see Yoongi better. Yoongi takes a step forward, and another, and another, until the yellow light a few feet away catches on his skin and casts him a warmer glow. There are dark circles under Yoongi's eyes and he looks like he could use an entire day off from work, but come on, who is Seokjin kidding? Yoongi would show up at work even if he was coughing up a storm. And, strangely enough, Seokjin thinks he'll do the exact same thing. Advertising is something he's come to love, after all. I don't know how to swim, either.

"Lots of stuff to do," Seokjin says after a while, then shifts in his seat. He's only half lying – he still has three more items to check off of his list, and if Yoongi will be hanging around longer than he should then Seokjin's pretty darn sure he won't be getting much done for the next few minutes. "Because someone dragged me to a meeting I'm not even supposed to be part of--"

"Look, expect to be dragged into all sorts of Hyundai meetings even if we're just going to talk about the president's cats – and his cats are cute, I'm just-- You're not allergic to cats, are you--"

"Relax, it's not you," Seokjin says, voice thinning into laughter soon after. "Namjoon involved me in the Samsung thing in the interim since Minseok-hyung couldn't make it. The SCJ turnover took longer than it should."

"Because Joonmyun-hyung should've split that account between two people a long time ago. I kept telling him--" Yoongi heaves a sigh. The corners of his lips pull down for a quick second then he's
looking up again, gaze flickering across Seokjin's features before saying, "Namjoon pulled you into a meeting? What did he need from you?"

Seokjin blinks a few times. *A lot of things, really,* he's tempted to say, but it's not as if he needs to explain. He made sure to check if he'd already accomplished everything that he had to submit for the day before saying 'yes' to Namjoon's cry for help, even made sure to double-check with Jimin if the kid needed help on anything, so he couldn't have missed anything right? He couldn't have overlooked any appointment with the Hyundai team that involved Yoongi, somehow, right? Because if he had, Joonmyun would be biting his ass now and reminding him in his most controlled voice, *You have to learn to choose your battles, Jin. You can't readily give help to everyone. You have to keep some of your energy and time to yourself, otherwise you'll only end up screwing everyone over, yourself included.*

"A sense of direction? Opinion on timelines since I more or less have a good idea of Minseok-hyung's schedule?" He scratches his nape, scores a line there with a lone nail, and takes a deep, shaky breath when Yoongi purses his lips. There's a question there, in the curve of Yoongi's mouth, tucked in the seams where only a sliver of a sound escapes, and then another in the way Yoongi shifts his gaze for a quick second before peeking at Seokjin again through the slits of his bangs – they're pink now. Had they been pink this morning, when he ran into Yoongi and greeted him with a passing glance and a small smile? Or even the day before, when Yoongi passed by the accounts area and rested his palms on Seokjin's shoulders as he talked to Joonmyun? When had Yoongi dyed his hair pink? Why does pink look strangely good on Yoongi despite the light flush on his cheeks and the soft flesh of his lips and-- *Doesn't matter,* murmurs a voice at the back of his head now. He has to focus on this, on Yoongi looking like he's inches away from saying something, from demanding more answers and explanations but neither uttering a word nor making a sound. "It wasn't so bad, though. I've had to sit through longer meetings. More boring ones."

"Well, yeah," Yoongi murmurs, then he's retreating, taking a step back and away from the spotlight. Parts of him are still aglow and his face is still scrunched up in what seems to be the dregs of a question he'd tried to let go of, but Seokjin hasn't spent eight years servicing both clients and agencies to not know that Yoongi will try to drop the question at the most opportune time; the only question is, what the hell is the guy even thinking? "Exactly why meetings in Samsung are ten times better. They have pipe in music all around the building. Makes even the most dragging of meetings a bit more bearable."

Acid shoots up Seokjin's throat and *shit,* that feels like taking a thousand punches to the gut. Right. *Right.* He'd sort of promised to listen to the tracks Yoongi was talking about a few days ago, on their ride back to the office after one of those long and pointless meetings ("That we could have done through video call," he and Yoongi said in chorus, to which Namjoon cocked an eyebrow and Joonmyun only rolled his eyes in response). In his defense, Yoongi never set the date and the time so really, Yoongi couldn't have been *expecting* him to share his schedule with him or update him on everything that Seokjin's about to do or for Seokjin to at least keep his schedule open for when Yoongi felt like pulling him into a non-work discussion during work hours, right? Besides, Yoongi doesn't seem to be that kind of person, one who would demand time and attention outside the boundaries of work. He'll always give options, a way out. He'll be gentleman enough to show Seokjin the closest exit and say in hushed whispers, *If you ever change your mind, just let me know. You know how to reach me.*

"The Hyundai office is nicer, though. Better lighting, definitely more spacious--"

Yoongi snorts. "Definitely more rigid and boxed up and boring," he adds, voice thinning into a light hum. Half of Seokjin wants to punch Yoongi in the face for feeling the need to win arguments 75% of the time, but half of him just wants to reach over to rest a warm palm against Yoongi's cheek and
maybe even give it a light pinch. "And sadder, because they don't have a coffeemaker. How do you even survive in a place like that? How do their employees live?"

Seokjin narrows his eyes. It feels more like squinting in an attempt to see things clearer rather than to push Yoongi away. It's not as if he really wants to, though. He just needs time to himself occasionally, time to swim through his thoughts instead of drowning in them. Lately, he's been crashing into Yoongi-sized waves powerful enough to push him deeper into the ocean, and while it's scary staying stuck down there for so long, left to nothing but the hazy figures of his own thoughts, the silence is comforting. It's the same brand of silence that Yoongi offers whenever their bodies collide. "There's a coffee shop at the ground floor?"

Yoongi huffs. He sticks out his tongue, juts out his lower lip, even growls in defeat, but if anything he looks like a cute little puppy who's been told to get off the couch. We can be puppies together, then, whispers a voice at the back of Seokjin's head; he pushes that further back even before it can betray him and slip from the corners of his mouth somehow. Then he zips his lips, holds his breath, and gulps hard when Yoongi slides right next to him, making himself comfortable in Jimin's seat. Inches closer to where Seokjin is until his knees bump against the side of Seokjin's thigh, until Seokjin has to hold back a shiver. "There's no winning against you. If I were an ass, I'd use the boss card in a heartbeat and say you're wrong."

But you're not that kind of guy. Yoongi is kinder than he makes himself out to be, more tender and caring than most bosses Seokjin has come across. His methods are just unheard of sometimes, but eh. Seokjin almost laughs to himself. He can hear that 'eh' in ringing in his ears in Yoongi's voice, so clear and crisp that he wonders if he'd just imagined it or if Yoongi actually said it at the same time that Seokjin's mind did. Yoongi sticks to people faster glue. There's a force circling Yoongi's perimeter, hanging about in his air, that just draws people to him and makes it impossible for anyone, everyone to escape.

That is, if they even want to break free from the sweet allure of Yoongi's gravity. Seokjin's mostly undecided, but half the time he finds himself wishing he didn't have to pull away so he could focus on everything but Yoongi.

"Well, I'm wrong sometimes. But right now, I'm a hundred percent correct. You know I am," Seokjin says after a while, throwing his head back in an effort to ease the tightness in his throat. When he hears, feels Yoongi shift, he shuts his eyes as tightly as he can, half scared to find Yoongi leaning in too close and half afraid he'll find Yoongi still more than a few inches away (and that he'll want to be the one to reach over, pull Yoongi close, and wait with bated breath until either of them took a leap of faith and crashed into each other's arms). "How are the tracks coming along, by the way? Found a way to stitch the ballad and pop sections together?"

Yoongi chuckles, voice cracking a little when it peaks. Or at least that's what it sounds like, if not a faint 'huh' or humming or amusement in the way Yoongi heaves a sigh. Seokjin can't be bothered to pop an eye open now. It's nine in the evening and he's tired and he knows he still has at least three to-do items to cross off his list so his mind can finally breathe and relax, but right now he knows exactly what he needs, and it isn't to finish his work before ten in the evening. It's to listen to rhythm of Yoongi's voice, to drape the soft lilts on his shoulder until he's all bundled up in the warmth of Yoongi's humming, to let Yoongi breathe out for him because he can't even feel his throat anymore. All that registers in his senses is the thundering pulse at the base of his throat, the heavy thumping in his chest, the cool pads of Yoongi's fingersghosting along his thigh before he hears the soft scratch of the wheels of Jimin's chair against the floor and the dull 'thud' when Yoongi moves even closer.

"Nah, not yet. I mean, I'm getting there but not everything's set in stone yet so if I find a little bubu there or something--"
Seokjin chortles. "A little bubu."

Yoongi slaps him on the arm. The heat in his palm bleeds onto Seokjin's thigh for a quick second, but too soon Yoongi's dropping his hand to his side. *I didn't tell you to pull away,* Seokjin wants to say, but that's not something he should be saying right now. It will only lead to a discussion they shouldn't be having at nine in the evening here in the accounts area. They can save that for later, for Monday the following week at nine *in the morning,* when the rest of the office hasn't risen yet and he and Yoongi have the pantry *to themselves.* For when they're both without coffee yet and they can both just choke up whatever weird, funky things they'll be telling each other to the lack of caffeine in their system.

For a future Seokjin isn't sure if he should be looking forward to, knowing that there will be more work, presentations, pitches to work on—

—more reasons to be holed up in the same conference as Yoongi. And Joonmyun and Namjoon and Heechul and Taehyung and Jimin, learning from the others, taking steps to become a better accounts supervisor. It doesn't have to be about Yoongi or about *them* all the time. And his breath doesn't have to hitch when Yoongi finally, *finally,* finally rests his palm on his thigh, pulse quick and loud even with the thick material of Seokjin's pants keeping them from truly touching. Yoongi doesn't have to affect him this much.

"A little bubu, yes." Yoongi sticks out his tongue again, except this time the corners of his mouth tug up into a small smile. "What, did you want me to say—" Then he thins his voice into something that sounds vaguely... funny, a strange mix of hilarious yet still so endearing. Yoongi's making fun of his own self in front of Seokjin, digging his own grave, and Seokjin isn't sure if it's normal or if it's the last thing Yoongi would want to be caught doing with someone else, with someone who *isn't him.* "I'm still trying to link the troughs with the crests in the waves because if I don't, everything will sound choppy—"

Seokjin cackles. He presses the back of his hand to his mouth, hoping he can still take back the sound, but too late — Yoongi's already widening his eyes in response, standing from his seat, twisting his mouth and thinning his lips but only ending up with the silliest smile on his lips. He looks like he's seconds away from hitting Seokjin on the arm, brushing his knuckles against Seokjin's cheek, maybe even pinching it, but instead Yoongi threads his fingers through Seokjin's hair and drags his fingers down until they're leaving warm tracks on Seokjin's nape, the slope of Seokjin's neck, Seokjin's collarbones.

In a last ditch effort to save himself, Seokjin whispers, "Show-off," and meets Yoongi in the eye. He pointedly ignores the way Yoongi drags his gaze down to the swell of his mouth, the way Yoongi's pulse quickens against his skin, and the way Yoongi gulps hard when Seokjin rests a hand on his hip.

And he pinches Yoongi in the side, earning him bright, loud laughter, a chance to breathe.

"They say—" Heechul begins, pausing only to swallow the thick lump of cupcake that had lodged itself in his throat, "the fastest way to a creative's heart is through his ECD's stomach."

Seokjin laughs and rolls his eyes, but he continues to transfer the little cupcakes from the box he'd
transported them in to a nice little plate, anyway. Heechul had, out of the kindness of his heart, passed by the cupboards earlier and gotten a plate for him, and apparently – according to Yoongi, at least – that translated to your cupcakes look cute and I bet they're really tasty but would you like me to double-check, just in case? Can't be too sure! Seokjin's first thought was 'cute'. The second, 'why the hell do most creatives find it hard to actually use words?'. Then the third, when Yoongi inched closer to him in the large, mostly unoccupied table, he thought, 'Why does it even matter, Jin? Why do you care so much?'

"If it means getting stuff from your kids earlier than usual then sure, hyung. I'll bake stuff for you everyday," he says, humming as he sets down the last little cupcake on the plate. The smile on Heechul's lips blooms even more, and even with the little dots of icing on his chin he doesn't seem to be the slightest bit bothered. If anything, it looks as if he's wondering how Seokjin managed to bake this much overnight. Or why Yoongi's moving close, close, closer, enough that if Yoongi wanted to, he could tuck his chin on Seokjin's shoulder. With the growing crowd in front of them. Seokjin can see Taehyung and Jimin approaching now; who knows who else those two have brought with them?

"Do you want me to make you lunch in exchange for more design studies? Two per job order? How does that sound?"

Heechul hums. That's not an answer, Seokjin almost argues when Heechul says nothing else for the next few seconds, when silence hangs in the air a bit longer than it should. Heechul breaks it with a loud snort, a cross between a smile and a frown, and a gentle cock of an eyebrow that would otherwise seem off-putting had Seokjin not known Heechul for a while already. This can mean a number of things – shock, surprise, disbelief, a challenge in the subtle scrunching of Heechul's features. Or this can be trouble, if the way Heechul keeps shifting his gaze from Seokjin to Yoongi and then back is any indicator of that.

"That's unfair," Heechul says after a while, drawling the last few syllables before sticking out his tongue. Then, turning to Yoongi, he says, "Your cub's vicious. Where does he keep his claws?"

I think I'm a bit too old to be called a 'cub', Seokjin's tempted to say, but then what the hell does Heechul even mean by that? Seokjin's pretty darn certain his leadership style has always been an interesting balance of wooing his creatives and cracking the whip whenever necessary, so he can't be rainbows and butterflies, right? The creatives and clients can't possibly perceive him as a softie who doesn't know how to be strict and stern if the situation calls for it. He can't possibly be a walking cupcake with candy sprinkles on top.

Cupcake doesn't clock out from work at six in the evening because there isn't anything else to do. Cupcake punches out late in the evening because he's worried other people might need help and he feels bad not lending a hand when he very well can. Cupcake doesn't know how to choose his battles, doesn't even know how to say 'no'. Cupcake isn't capable of turning down requests even at the expense of his sanity. And Kim Seokjin might have been Cupcake on his first month at work, but isn't it normal for new hires to put their best foot forward and even wiggle it in front of all the important people? Hasn't he evolved from Cupcake to a full-fledged cake that isn't just decorated with the most elaborate icing design but is also moist and soft on the inside?

Red Velvet, then, he recalls Yoongi saying months ago, voice low and rough like kissing Seokjin had peeled off that nice, velvety tone to reveal the bumps underneath. It makes Seokjin's insides turn now as he watches Yoongi lift his eyebrows at Heechul who's this close to getting another mini cupcake, as he feels Yoongi press down on his thigh with his palm so he could get up, give Heechul another stern look, then swat Heechul's hand away as he says, "Hyung, leave some for the kids!"

There's plenty to go around, Seokjin wants to say, but there's a strange, peculiar force wrapped around his throat right now that's keeping him from breathing easily. It must be the fatigue taking
root in his body. He'd managed to clock out of work at 6 p.m. last night for the first time in months, and yet the first thing he did was to ring up Hoseok and ask if they could meet up at a supermarket, "It's an emergency. I have free time. I don't know what to do with it. Help?" Condemning himself to solitude was only an afterthought. Luckily, Hoseok had every intention to leave work early, as well, after spending too many 3 a.m.'s contemplating which he needed more: a life, or money. Hoseok would have picked 'money' over living a normal life on a normal day, Seokjin was certain (and he would understand; they were both in their thirties and practicality ruled their lives now), but Hoseok had just come from rendering overtime work for three straight days. He was allowed to make bold decisions like filing a week-long leave at six in the evening, in the same way that Seokjin was allowed to bake an entire army of little cupcakes and realize that venting about work through baking was the best thing he had done in years.

"By the way, almost for got to tell you," Hoseok had mentioned just as they'd packed the last batch of cupcakes. He drummed a beat on the table, looked up at Seokjin through the narrow slits of his bangs, licked his lips. Did everything to keep Seokjin from pressing down on the lid of the container so he could snap it closed once and for all. Part of Seokjin wanted to knee Hoseok in the groin already – it was one in the morning, after all, and his 1 a.m.'s were reserved for other conversations in other places with one other person – but he was too tired to even tell Hoseok off for agitating the flour that had gathered on his kitchen top, for sprinkling freckles of white on the counter he'd already cleaned. So he waited, cocked his head until Hoseok felt it was right to drop the big bomb in the most dramatic manner he could think of. "I got a message from your kid. Said he couldn't reach you because you changed numbers. I can't believe you didn't tell him."

More like, you can't believe I kept my word and actually didn't break my resolve, Seokjin wanted to retort, but his throat felt unbearably tight and palms were sweaty all of a sudden. That, and he'd taught himself to focus on one thing and one thing, alone, when he wanted to get things done. And all he wanted right now was to clean up his kitchen after baking for hours.

"He only gave me an address to send letters to. You think I'll be stupid enough to write my number there?" he answered after a while, pushing down the other words threatening to spill from the corners of his mouth. "And for the record, I did send him letters. Before I changed numbers. He never wrote back."

Seokjin backpedalled and gulped hard. Correction: Jeongguk did write back a handful of times, but stopped after a while, on the fifth time Seokjin asked for an email address he could write to. Seokjin took that as a sign to take a step back, give Jeongguk some space, some time to breathe and stop missing people and places in his old home. If the kid liked physical intimacy back when he was still in Seoul, when he and Seokjin were still in college and Jeongguk spent more time in Seokjin and Hoseok's dorm than he did in his own, then maybe moving to a different country had changed him, forced him to distance himself from things and people that would make his resolve crumble and convince him to take the first flight home. Seokjin understood that, the desire to stay strong, to keep the walls around oneself up and in tiptop shape, but goddamn if he didn't wish Jeongguk wasn't so brave and set on pursuing his dreams elsewhere. Damn if he didn't wish he hadn't taught Jeongguk Japanese too well that the kid decided he could sculpt a future for himself in Japan instead of right where Seokjin was.

"You'll come over to visit, right?" Jeongguk had asked a few days before his flight, and all Seokjin ever responded with was a small smile. "I'll... try to look for a place where we can both fit? Because y'know, I'm still gonna grow taller and your legs will keep growing longer and–"

"I hope you gave him my number," Seokjin told Hoseok after a while, surfacing from his thoughts. A deep breath, then, "Actually, what's his– Can I get his number? Just to assure the kid that I'm actually alive. You know how he worries about every single thing. And stop it with that face. For all
I know, he already has someone else—"

"He only shows them to those he trusts," Yoongi says now, lips curling up into a smug little grin that reaches the corners of his eyes. Seokjin furrows his eyebrows at that, tilts his head a little, and yeah, right, they’d talked about that one time, a few weeks ago back in the pantry. It was two in the morning then and they both had better things to do (go home, not work; pull away from each other and not inch even closer until their knees bumped), but somehow spending at least another half hour just listening to each other breathe while they clacked away at their keyboards seemed more appealing than taking the first cab home. From time to time, Yoongi would play a track, one he had been working on for a few days already—"I mean, I don't really have anything to use this on yet, not even a TVC or something, but the beat just wouldn't... leave me alone. So I... made something out of it and—"

"There's a weird beat there, somewhere," Seokjin had said when silence hung between them longer than it should. He moved closer to where Yoongi was so he could hear the track better. He could very well catch the little crackles in the sound from where he was, could pick out the parts that would sound better without the extra layer of percussion that Yoongi had plugged in, but it was easier to focus on nothing but the way Yoongi's hands moved across the keyboard when he was watching Yoongi at such close distance instead of being able to see every single detail of Yoongi's features. That, and it was getting late. He knew better than to fully trust his senses to not mess with him at two in the morning. "Just before the chorus. The transition is a bit weird? I mean, I see the intent behind the pause – you want to give the listeners time to breathe and sort of... process the beats before the chorus – but right now it's just sounding—"

"Unbelievable," Yoongi finished, syllables tumbling from the corners of his lips in a voice so soft and faint he could have just been breathing. He leaned back, eyebrows furrowed and mouth quirked up, sort of like he was hoping to say more, to come back with a sharper retort, but two in the morning never was Yoongi's best hour. Two in the morning was when he often fell asleep in front of his laptop shortly after sending scripts and presentation flows and weird, unguarded emails saying, Okay, honesty hour: is your kid sleeping with one of mine or is it just normal for Jimin and Taehyung to grab each other's dicks as a greeting? Two in the morning was when coffee ceased to work its magic on him and instead zapped his energy, turned him into a grumpy mushroom, the blunt edges of his spikes drawn out to keep people at a safe distance but not to drive them away. Two in the morning was when Seokjin often forgot that Yoongi was his boss, one of the company's owners, possibly one of the most respected and revered names in the advertising industry, and that for all of Seokjin's accomplishments he was just plain ol' Kim Seokjin, accounts supervisor extraordinaire. Two in the morning was when Yoongi made everything so easy – talking, sharing, unraveling each other, pushing to the sides pieces of his past so Yoongi could make himself comfortable in Seokjin's life. It was when Yoongi would comment with the weirdest of things, saying, "I know you have strong opinions on a lot of things but detailed feedback on music– You're a box of surprises, Kim Seokjin."

Yoongi shook his head and laughed. The smile on his lips was blinding. "You're unbelievable."

Seokjin gulped hard. Hoseok often told him he was scary when mad or when he was completely honest to everyone but himself. He never quite understood what that meant in all the years that Hoseok had been telling him how 'evil' he truly was, joking around with it and calling Seokjin a volcano waiting for the right time to erupt, but right now, here, sitting beside a wide-eyed Min Yoongi who wouldn't stop squinting his eyes then easing the furrow of his eyebrows in intervals, a Min Yoongi who seemed to be a twisted mix of amused and confused, he could see what Hoseok meant by it. So Seokjin felt the need to fix things, more in an effort to still the lurching in his stomach to wipe off that strange look on Yoongi's features. "I just want to make it clear: I'm not saying the
"That's bothering you." Yoongi laughed. He wrinkled his nose, shifted in his seat, leaned in until he was tucking his chin on his clasped hands. This wasn't 'mad' – mad Yoongi was wild arms and heavy hands on conference tables and strained, strained words that were threatening to become even sharper by the minute. Miffed Yoongi was a light scrunch of the nose and sarcasm thick in the way he drawled his syllables. This was... 'amused'. This was amused Yoongi. Seokjin had seen it quite a handful of times already, whenever Yoongi chanced upon good ideas from people, from his kids and Joonmyun and Seokjin, himself. It was the look plastered on Yoongi's face during the latter part of the pitch preparation period, when everything had already fallen into place, Yoongi and Seokjin's bodies aligning somewhere along the way. "It's cool, no worries. It's the same thing that's been bothering me the whole day. And if fresh ears caught that thing then it must have been really bad. I can't believe I've gotten shitty at this thing, Christ--"

Seokjin reached out, hand hovering Yoongi's back. He could go for a pat now, maybe a gentle squeeze of the arm if Yoongi would let him rest his arm around his shoulder, but there were people shuffling in. Jimin was dragging a mostly sleepy Taehyung with him as he made his way to the fridge. Three people from production were making a beeline for the water dispenser and grumbling about tight timelines and unreasonable clients. All the voices at the back of Seokjin's mind were groaning, Why does everyone's timing have to be shit? Why are they taking too long to leave? Why the hell do we even have to be alone to say something?"

He took a deep, shaky breath, the knots in his throat loosening a little, pushed the words threatening to spill from his lips to the back of his throat. He could be doing more important things right now, such as finishing his work, his conversation with Yoongi; the last thing he should be doing was partaking in the intimate party of thoughts in his head, the most drunken and chaotic one he had been invited to in years.

"It's good shit, though," he whispered after a while, when he caught Jimin and Taehyung slipping into the passageway to the fire exit. Seokjin could use some time to breathe, a well, but Yoongi's eyes, focused and discerning, were still on him. Yoongi was unrelenting. "Dope shit. The best kind of shit."

Yoongi laughed. "Still shit, though," he said, leaning back and taking a deep breath. Soon, he was inching closer again, reaching out, the cool pads of his fingers grazing Seokjin's cheek. For a second, Seokjin thought Yoongi was going to... pinch his cheeks or something, but instead Yoongi dropped his hand to Seokjin's shoulder and tapped a light beat on Seokjin's skin with his thumb. "I love it when you bare your fangs, by the way. It's cute."

' Cute' was the corners of Yoongi's eyes crinkling as he stared. 'Cute' was Yoongi sucking in his lower lip and nibbling on it in an effort to keep himself from smiling. 'Cute' wasn't Seokjin narrowing his eyes at Yoongi and snarling and thinking of pushing him away but never really getting around to it. That was cowardice, and fear never looked good on Seokjin. It was a loose-fitting blazer draped on his shoulder on pitch day – ugly, wrong, and ultimately born out of not sticking to his plans.

"Not cute," Seokjin had said in response, then pulled away. Tucking his hands under his thighs, he added, "And I don't flash my fangs at people on a whim. I don't want to drive them away. I just want to scare them shitless and into submission, that's all. The only ones who get to see the whole transformation are those who stick around to see the whole process through."

"So, you're saying--" Heechul begins, laughter breaking the thinning sheet of silence all around them. And all of a sudden Seokjin's made too aware of where they are, of what they should be doing, of who they should be – bosses, workers trapped in the confines of their office pantry where people are
beginning to gather, two people who may or may not be a bit too close to each other, what with the heat of Yoongi's palm now blooming on Seokjin's skin. "–Seokjin trusts you enough to bare his claws–"

The rest of Heechul's speech dips in the heavy, thundering pulse in Yoongi's palm against Seokjin's thigh. *Hey, you alright? What's up?* Seokjin almost asks, but he makes the mistake of looking to his side, seeing Yoongi in earnest, meeting Yoongi in the eye, and– *What the hell is that?* A cross between a squint and wide, wide eyes, slightly furrowed eyebrows, Yoongi thinning his lips every so often like he can't settle on a particular feeling to let take root in his body yet – Seokjin has never seen this on Yoongi before. It isn't in his long list of Yoongi expressions, not even hastily drawn in the catalogue of Yoongi things he has tucked at the very back of his head and it... frustrates him? Or does it bother him? He isn't sure. All he knows right now is that he can taste a sickening mix of acid, blood, and metal at the back of his teeth, and there's an overwhelming urge to reach out and cup Yoongi's cheeks with his palms so he can examine Yoongi better.

*Don't do that. You have claws. You don't want to hurt people dear to you,* he tells himself. To Heechul, he says, "Claws and fangs, actually, but yeah." He takes a deep, shaky breath when he feels Yoongi's fingers twitch against his skin. "I guess–"

"It's 3 p.m.,” Yoongi announces all of a sudden. Heechul shifts in his seat, leans back, lifts his eyebrows as if in some twisted realization of something Seokjin can't seem to place just yet. Maybe he needs to spend more time with the creatives to understand them better. Maybe he needs to expand his network, break away from talking to just Yoongi, Namjoon, Heechul, and Taehyung whenever he has certain things to consult with the creatives. Or maybe he should just stop thinking too much and reading too much into things when it's three in the afternoon and he hasn't had his afternoon coffee yet. "Aren't you supposed to be leaving for your meeting in Seocho-gu or something? I mean, you *are* trying to woo new clients so you don't want to be late–"

Heechul huffs. "Someday, kid, someday," he grumbles, but he withdraws his hand from where he was planning to snatch one last little cupcake earlier and gets up from his seat, anyway. Never mind that he's leaving Seokjin in a state of shock and confusion, or that Jimin and Taehyung look just as curious at to what has just happened; new business means money and more money for the company generally means happier bosses. And happier bosses means Yoongi no longer wearing that strange, *strained* look on his features, one that makes Seokjin's insides turn and makes acid shoot up his throat. "Hey, Jin! Yummy cupcakes! Now I know why Yoongi can't stop talking about them!"

'Fuck you,' Seokjin thinks he hears Yoongi say, but he has no proof of that save for a few syllables hanging loosely in the wind, or the subtle scrunching of Yoongi's features before Yoongi sinks his teeth in a cupcake. So Seokjin flashes two thumbs up, grins, and promises, "I'll make more in the future!"

"Red velvet?" Yoongi asks a bit later in a voice so soft, he could have been just whispering. But his lips are curled up into a small smile and there's a familiar light in his eyes, one Seokjin remembers from a couple of those two-in-the-mornings that they have spent keeping each other awake and sane during the pitch, that Seokjin knows exactly how to read. He nods, then, smiles, and pushes the last little cupcake in Yoongi's direction.

"Your wish is my command."
It's the strangest Monday Seokjin has experienced in months.

He leans closer, cocking his head to the side and watching with morbid fascination as Yoongi arranges the red velvet cupcakes on a pastry holder that Yoongi, himself, had bought specifically for today. It isn't the first time Yoongi has helped him transfer cupcakes from cute little boxes to more practical plates, not since Seokjin had proven that the little treats were indeed effective in convincing the creatives to send their deliverables three hours earlier than the submission they'd agreed upon, but it's the first time that it was Yoongi who'd requested for Seokjin to bake the treats, volunteered to help him with the presentation, even offered a hand with the baking proper and said Seokjin could 'use him anytime, just tell me how you want it done'.

"I don't really want to know what type of lover you are, boss, but okay," Baekhyun had groaned one time, when he and Yixing somehow ended up in the pantry for lunch at two in the afternoon. It wasn't as if either Seokjin or Yoongi had claimed ownership over the place at that exact hour, or patented two in the afternoon until Lord knew when as 'Seokjin and Yoongi alone time spent staring at each other from time to time but mostly just talking about music and how to discipline the creatives'. Yoongi could, probably would if he was bored and on a kick, but still – it felt a bit... weird knowing there were other people who could see what they were doing, hear them talking about things that weren't exactly related to commercials the agency had produced or initiatives the creatives were hoping to present to prospective clients, about things Yoongi probably wouldn't want to get caught discussing with anyone other than top executives and people he trusted. It made Seokjin wonder what other people would think when they saw them outside of meetings and pitches. It made his thoughts drift to things he would otherwise not be thinking about, had Yoongi's gaze not lingered on his mouth just a split-second longer, or had Seokjin's insides not lurched at Yoongi sucking in his bottom lip at the same time that Seokjin licked his own. "I know, I've always wondered how office romances between superiors work. Like, I know for a fact Namjoon-hyung and Joonmyun-hyung are totally doing it because they keep shooting each other sex looks during meetings, but other than that—"

"You're subbing for Taehyung in the social pitch. He's taking care of the big Hasbro one. No but's," Yoongi had muttered as he turned to Baekhyun with a tight smile. Then, to Yixing who was right beside him, he said, "And you're taking your boyfriend out of here and sending me the script that's due in three hours because last I checked with Joonmyun-hyung, you said 'yes' to helping out with the HP presentation. You didn't forget, did you?"

Baekhyun snorted. That was what Seokjin thought it sounded like, at least. It was beginning to become even more difficult trying to make out a single sound above the loud thumping in his chest. Months after and Yoongi still elicited this kind of response from him, the type where his senses went haywire and the simmering lurch in his stomach came to the most powerful boil at the slightest hint of... of... He couldn't even explain it. It wasn't just the occasional smile from Yoongi that screwed him over, or the soft, tender gaze that Yoongi gave him at two, three in the morning that coaxed him, convinced him to stay – more and more, all the little things that Yoongi did were beginning to make him feel things. Strange, funny, and dangerous things.

Nothing more dangerous than Yoongi looking murderous at someone bumping him from behind and him almost knocking over the tower of cupcakes, though. Seokjin reaches out, grabbing Yoongi by the wrists to steady him, to save the cupcakes and, potentially, the world. Yoongi flinches – in retaliation or plain reaction, Seokjin can't tell yet, but Yoongi's eyes are wide open and his eyebrows are furrowed and his lower lip is trembling. Relax, it was an accident, Seokjin's tempted to say, but soon Yoongi's cracking his neck, breathing out heavily through his nose, shutting his eyes tightly and shaking his head as he mumbles something under his breath.

"Fuck. That was close."
Seokjin laughs. "I can't believe you're getting worked up over cupcakes--"

"_that you baked," Yoongi counters, pausing to grit his teeth. He balls his hands into fists, tightening them by the second until his knuckles go pale, then he's unclenching them, heaving a sigh, letting go. He hasn't inched away yet, though, hasn't slipped back into his seat, and from where Seokjin is – with the very little distance between them – he catches the small frown that flickers across Yoongi's features. By the time Seokjin gets around to thinking of teasing Yoongi about it, though, Yoongi's already explaining, "You made those for the kids. I... told them to look forward to something nice and special on Monday because they've all been working so hard and--"

**Special.** Seokjin gulps hard, trying to ease the sudden tightness in his throat. The last time his name had been attached to the word was when Joonmyun commended him after a presentation, saying he'd done a great job at making the meeting impressive, different, **memorable.** He'd responded with a bright smile, light laughter, and a small wave of the hand as he said, "**Just doing my job, hyung,**" but he couldn't stop grinning for the next ten minutes. It was easy to digest little bubbles of happiness like that in the context of work, but add a few sprinkles of something Seokjin had always been passionate about, add praise for something Seokjin had learned on his own instead of taking classes for, and he was bound to take more than a few seconds to string together a nice response.

**The cupcakes.** The cupcakes are the ones that are special. **Jesus– It's not supposed to be about you all the time,** he says to himself, again and again until he can shush the voices in his head. Only nine in the morning and Yoongi's already making him feel things. Maybe it's just his body telling him to drink coffee already, it's already a few minutes past the hour; aren't you supposed to be halfway through your first cup by now? but Yoongi's focused gaze makes it almost impossible to think of anything else but the tower of cupcakes putting too much distance between them. And Yoongi leaning in despite the same distance makes it difficult to think of just shoving the entire cupcake rack away and grabbing Yoongi by his shirt so Seokjin can--

"You're cute," Seokjin says, the words tumbling from his lips without preamble, catching even himself off-guard. Not that he thinks otherwise – Yoongi is cute and adorable in his own little way, but they're in the pantry and it's ten in the morning and anyone can walk in on them and take that comment completely out of context. If he's lucky, it will be someone just as drained and lethargic as them, someone who needs at least two cups of coffee to get through the next two hours, but if luck isn't on his side then Jimin might be the one to step into the pantry and greet them with a curious, curious gaze. It might be Baekhyun who will drop a casual comment on office romance and hook ups and So, I heard there's going to be another company drinking session soon. 'Guess I'll have to warn the creatives to stay away from boss' office, huh? And if fate and destiny are really, really out to fuck with Seokjin then it might be Namjoon or Joonmyun or Heechul who will chuckle at them and say, I can pretend I didn't hear a thing if you two promise to buy me coffee everyday for the next two weeks. Months. How about a year's supply of coffee? C'mon, you two. That shouldn't be too much to ask, right?

So Seokjin reaches out for one of the cupcakes threatening to fall from the edge of the pastry holder and gives it a gentle push, just enough to get it out of harm's way. Takes in the calming silence and wraps it around himself like a quilt until Yoongi's leaning back, pulling away, letting him breathe. Steers the conversation to a slightly different direction but doesn't stray too much because he knows Yoongi will catch on. Yoongi's good with that, finding the little gaps in his strategies and making sure to patch them up before d-day. The only problem is, Yoongi isn't on his side this time. Yoongi won't be right beside him to go through the presentation deck where his thoughts are outlined in neat little bullet points. Yoongi will be on the other side this time, watching him go through the presentation deck and explain why there shouldn't be anything wrong with two people holding onto the same cupcake at the same time, the tips of their nails touching but their gazes locked onto each other with no chance of breaking free.
"As are your kids," he whispers, then he's breathing out a long and loud exhale. Yoongi thaws out at that, sort of shivers, sort of leans back, but if there's anything Seokjin is certain of, it's the way Yoongi's hanging on by the thread of their gazes, urging Seokjin to go, go on, if you have something to say then fucking say it already or forget this thing happened. Again. "I thought my friend was kidding when he said the creatives love asking accounts people for food in exchange for actual creative output but I guess I was--"

"You have a friend who works in advertising," Yoongi interrupts, then he's scoffing, laughing, narrowing his eyes at Seokjin. At least the strange look on his features has lifted and has, instead, turned into something Seokjin can easily I.D. as amusement, but part of Seokjin sort of wants to know exactly what the shy twist of Yoongi's mouth earlier meant, or what Yoongi was trying, trying, trying so hard to push to the back of his throat when he kept worrying his lower lip as Seokjin licked his own. "You have a friend who works in adver--" Yoongi shakes his head, then he's laughing again, voice trailing off as he surfaces with flushed cheeks and eyebrows furrowed in the cutest little curl. Which is probably strange, because Seokjin has never seen anyone fashion furrowed eyebrows the way Yoongi does and he sure as hell hasn't ever felt his chest grow this tight at the peal of Yoongi's laughter cutting through the 9 a.m. silence. "So you know how agencies operate and you've probably fallen victim to cranky creatives before and you know that we're a blood-sucking agency yet you still decided to work for an advertising agency? Are you-- Are you crazy or are you fucking crazy?"

Seokjin laughs. "Hella fucking crazy," he answers even before he can think twice, before he can filter his words again, retreat to the farthest corners of his mind, and chicken out of letting a few casual words – truthful ones – slip from his lips. He still has the thin veil of lack of caffeine to hold on to, anyway. Yoongi will understand. Yoongi might even be suffering the same condition and hoping that Seokjin can be that one person he can cling to for sanity, support, a bit of fresh air. "Though sometimes, I look back on my old job, contrast it with what I have right now and go, 'Yeah, this is ten times better. I can actually breathe now'. The work hours are fairly reasonable and it's usually my choice to stay behind so I... shouldn't be as crazy, right?"

Yoongi thins his lips to a smile. It isn't one of his smug grins, and neither is it the type of smile that makes Seokjin want to take one, two, three steps forward so he could kiss that stupid smile look off of Yoongi's face for some weird, twisted reason, but it's tender enough that Seokjin finds himself wondering how things could have been if he'd held back in his speech, stuck to the 'hella fucking crazy' bit and dropped the backgrounder, waited for Yoongi to say something other than a faint 'huh' or a 'hah' or made the slightest sound. Yoongi speaks only when he has to, would rather put his thoughts and feelings into writing, but he's generous enough with facial expressions that the subtle quirk of his lips is sometimes already more than enough to say 'no, man, you're definitely the craziest accounts person I've ever met, and I'm about 110% positive you'll get even crazier in the days to come'.

"Well, you did apply for a position in accounts. That, alone, makes you 'hella fucking crazy'," Yoongi answers after a while, voice thinning into a lazy drawl as he ends. He squints again, almost as if he's trying to study something closer, better, trying to memorize the wicked contours of Seokjin's face or the shape of Seokjin's mouth, but soon he's dropping his gaze back to the cupcakes, to that three-tier pastry holder, to the tips of his fingers that he keeps drumming on table. To anything, anyone but Seokjin for a reason he isn't aware of. The desire to know all the 'why's' to Yoongi's actions has made a home at the back of his mind just recently, blooming into a niggling thought that just won't let him sleep peacefully. It's the same desire that jerks him back to reality, though, to the truth that he probably shouldn't be leaning in too close to Yoongi, probably shouldn't be spending so much time talking about non-work things with his boss, that the last time he decided to mix work and play, he ended up with who would have been the love of his life flying to another country with his heart in tow. And he doesn't want that to happen again.
"Don't even go there," he murmurs to the voices in his head. Then, to Yoongi, he says, "What's that even supposed to mean?"

"I don't think sane people ever apply for that job, that's all I'm saying," Yoongi begins, yawning a little as he leans back in his seat. "It takes a certain kind of craziness to try to apply for a position like that, you know? It's not everyday you see people signing up to sell their soul to clients." Under the table, Seokjin feels Yoongi's shoes grazing his bare ankles, feels the light brush of cold, hard rubber against skin. It's a stark contrast from the way Yoongi held him months ago, the night when he found out Yoongi could actually sing if he put his heart into it, if he actually sang instead of cracking his own voice or thinning it so he could sound like a wheezing lady.

The same night, he discovered Yoongi had a penchant for holding people – *holding*, not just touching them, making the heavy pulse on his palms felt on someone else's skin. Holding, as in Yoongi's fingers wrapped lightly around Seokjin's arm before he dropped his hand to the side *then* rested his hand on the small of Seokjin's back. *Holding*, as in the tips of Yoongi's fingers grazing Seokjin's own as they walked from the karaoke room to Yoongi's office, then to *that one other place* where they found Jimin and Taehyung *cuddling* in the dark. *Holding*, as in Yoongi's head on his shoulder at one point, just before Seokjin had to excuse himself to 'find his kid' and make sure Jimin wasn't gyrating his ass in the air (or wasn't staring aimlessly at the floor meters away from where Taehyung was, asking himself, "What the hell do I really want?").

"And it takes something else for people to stay in that line of work," Yoongi adds after a while, voice thinning to a loud exhale, a low hum. For a second, Seokjin thinks Yoongi's about to laugh, to make that scoffing sound he usually does when he's stuck between disbelief and amusement, but none of that. Instead, Yoongi just kind of stares, watching Seokjin through half-lidded eyes, a small smile perched on his lips. "Probably a weird desire to be a hero. Well, I'll admit, I wanted to be Batman when I was a kid. Like, six, seven years old or something, and I guess I still *do* want to be a hero of some sort, except I'd be saving copy and designs instead of people."

Seokjin snorts. The knot in his chest loosens, but only until Yoongi's eyebrows tremble and meet in the middle in a curious little furrow. "You'd be good at that."

"Same with you, if you were in creatives," Yoongi mumbles, but– *Whatever*, Seokjin muses, *that's too loud to be a mumble*. It's too loud to be Yoongi mindlessly whispering, airing out his thoughts in a faint, faint voice without any intention of letting Seokjin hear them in the easiest way possible. If it were anybody else trying to coax answers out of him, trying to convince him to *share* whatever dark, bitter past he had with the arts, then he would probably be pushing them away already, taking a step back, running away. But there was something about the way Yoongi poked but never pushed all the way through, the way Yoongi hovered but never peeked at whatever he was trying to cover with his hands, the way Yoongi stared long enough to make Seokjin feel a bit too exposed but never *ever* peeled off Seokjin's layers forcibly that assured Seokjin that the last thing Yoongi would want to do is to shove questions upon questions in Seokjin's chest until Seokjin threw his hands up in the air in and said, *You know what? Fuck off!*

"But I'm not," Seokjin answers after a while, the syllables tumbling from his lips without preamble. He laughs to himself. Yoongi... *sort of* makes it easy for him to lose control over his words, for the little sounds to actually climb up his throat completely out of his volition and pry Seokjin's tightly-pressed lips open. Yoongi makes it easy for him to speak up because really, *really*, how often do you meet a boss who seems to be genuinely interested in your personal life? How often do you meet a boss who would try to challenge you to do something out of scope but not outside of your wide realm of interests? Seokjin had been through two, three bosses prior to Yoongi and after having been mentored, and he can say without a doubt in his mind that this man, this Min Yoongi right in front of him is different. *Dangerous.* "Sadly, I'm not part of your team."
Yoongi shrugs. He looks up, meeting Seokjin's gaze, purses his lips, and goddammit, Min Yoongi, just say it. Seokjin wants to blurt out. On all the occasions that they've broached the topic of Seokjin 'mistakenly' ending up in accounts instead of creatives, Yoongi has never missed on the opportunity on dropping the big 'Why'. Why hadn't Seokjin spoken up more on all of those brainstorming sessions that they held for the Hyundai pitch? Why hadn't Seokjin shared his ideas with the team earlier instead of waiting for Yoongi to combust? Why hadn't Seokjin given a creative job a shot when he clearly had ideas that could win awards? Yoongi hadn't enunciated any of those, hadn't said anything beyond the usual "Why aren't you in creatives again?", but every squint, every furrow of the eyebrow, every gentle upward curl of his lips whenever Seokjin shared more than timelines and his spiels that somehow spilled over to creative executions meant all of those why's that Seokjin couldn't answer. Didn't want to answer just yet.

"But hey, you've been guiding the creatives for your brands." Yoongi takes a deep, deep breath, then throws his head back. "That's a start, I guess?" He shuts his eyes for a few sacred seconds. Light filters through his eyelashes, casting soft shadows that touch Yoongi's cheeks, setting him aglow, and wow. From where Seokjin is, with the distance between them, he can make out the dark circles under Yoongi's eyes, can see the freckles of red dots on his cheeks, can make out the little wrinkles along Yoongi's skin. In all the months that he's known Yoongi, he's never seen Yoongi so dangerously still, worn out, tired, not even when they were pitching and there was more coffee than blood in their system.

He's never seen Yoongi give up.

Seokjin laughs a little. He leans in, close, close, closer, until he's resting his chin on his clasped hands, until he can just let his shoulders fall forward and undo the tight knots of tension in his muscles. "I could do better," he confesses, and Yoongi's poking an eye open in response, craning his neck, sucking in his lower lip. Still giving me a way out? whispers a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind, but now is not the time to be listening to himself. Now is the time to give answers, to speak up, to try to leave whatever words he'll be carefully laying down on the table and never look back because it's been years, Jin, it's been so long. Surely, you can get over all those little hiccups, right? "Or just... try not to be too weird. I always got called out for that shit."

Yoongi cocks an eyebrow at him. "I'm pretty sure you know by now that 'weird' isn't that bad."

"Well apparently, it is. For twelve-year-olds." Seokjin shifts in his seat. Yoongi sits up, snaps up his spine for the quickest second, but soon he's slumping in his seat again. Part of Seokjin likes it, Yoongi still giving him space to move around, to drop the conversation should he feel uncomfortable sharing something from more than a decade ago, but part of him just wants to cross the distance between them, move to the other side, make himself comfortable on the seat right beside Yoongi and babble about adults being so hard to please and being the least imaginative sort. About adults being boring. "Twelve-year-olds who join contests and are asked to draw their idea of a perfect vacation or their dream sport. Apparently, we're not supposed to draw kids having a unicorn race. Or racing with a griffin. We're not even supposed to know what griffins are because they don't exist! So--" Seokjin scoffs. "I just... stopped. Or slowed down, I guess. I still draw – I don't think that's something you just outgrow – but... I'm rusty? Terribly out of practice? I don't know. I just... don't have much time to try to be good at it again."

Seokjin scrunches his nose and takes a deep, shaky breath. "I'm... okay with where I am now, with or without drawing. So I guess I'm good. I'm... alright."

Yoongi chuckles. The corners of his lips have been slowly curling up to the smallest, most peculiar smile the whole time Seokjin was putting together the blocks of his little story, but he doesn't grin all the way yet. Which is weird, because this is Yoongi, after all, Yoongi whose words are so controlled
but whose facial expressions are a dead giveaway, Yoongi whose words can either be text written in plain, black ink in big and bold characters, or doodles drawn on a huge canvas in invisible ink. Yoongi who can either be poking too hard or pulling at all of Seokjin's strings only to coax ideas out of him, ones that can win the company businesses, clients, respect. Instead, Yoongi's nodding in thought, humming a little before saying, "I'd totally sign up for a griffin race. That's pretty cool. Well, I'm total shit at sports but might as well have fun while failing, right?"

Seokjin scoffs. You have a twisted sense of victory, he's tempted to say, but there is truth to what Yoongi has said. After all, the only thing Seokjin has to lose is time spent thinking what could have been if he had just cast aside his inhibitions, taken a wide and blind leap of faith a long, long time ago, if he'd hopped on a plane to Japan during one of his breaks so he could see Jeongguk again, talk to him, reconnect. And those are baggages he won't mind losing any day. "If you were one of the judges, I would've had a chance."

"Did you tell them? That griffin races are totally a thing? I mean, they're... probably not just updated on those stuff. You know adults."

There's no point in reasoning out, Seokjin is tempted to say, but then... "I... didn't," he confesses, then takes a breath out a long and loud sigh. He would have reasoned out to his teachers, would have explained – the drawing, the idea behind it, himself – but it was useless trying to explain things to people didn't know how to imagine. It was futile for a kid like him to try to help adults see the sense in the surreal, in what was weird and twisted and didn't even exist, when his teachers' initial reaction was to ask him if he was okay, was he going through some difficult times back at home, "Is something bothering you, Seokjinnie? Do you want to talk about it? Do you need help?"

"I just want to draw," he'd said, then heaved a sigh. He hadn't recognized that as 'defeat' yet, but certain parts of him recognized the look of concern on his teachers' features as one part 'disappointment' and two parts 'fear'. Even at a young age, he already knew that he liked neither on people when it was directed at him. He hated disappointing people. "I just want to win."

"But I wanted to," Seokjin adds after a while, when the tightness in his throat eases. Then, taking a deep breath, he continues, "I tried getting through them, but–"

But Yoongi probably shouldn't look as if he understands exactly what Seokjin is trying to say. But Yoongi shouldn't be pausing in his actions, halfway through pushing himself off of his own seat and leaning back in it to marvel at Seokjin some more before doing, saying something. But Yoongi shouldn't be giving him multiple exits, ways out when he was the same guy who shoved Seokjin in the direction of this ending in the hope of coaxing reasons out of Seokjin as to why he didn't apply as part of the creative team in BBDO.

And yet Yoongi's nodding instead of laughing at him silly, watching and studying him as if searching for clues, hints as to whether or not it's the right time to strike. Yoongi sits up straight, rests his hands on the table, curls his fingers into tight, tight fists, but doesn't say anything yet. Only when Seokjin chuckles does Yoongi take a deep breath as he says, "But they'll never understand how a mind like yours operates."

Seokjin laughs a little. "Yeah, that," he whispers, then drags his gaze north, up, up, up until his eyes are locked onto Yoongi's own. The pulse at the base of his throat throbs. "Unlike... some people, I guess."

Yoongi lifts his eyebrows. No, Jin, the guy's not blushing, Seokjin keeps telling himself, but it's beginning to be difficult to convince himself that the dusting of pink on Yoongi's cheeks has nothing to do with the way the corners of his lips are curling up. And that Yoongi can't possibly be laughing, chuckling, giggling at the slip of Seokjin's tongue because does it really matter? Seokjin's just one of
those people whom Yoongi has worked with in a big pitch, one of those employees whom Yoongi has probably seen promise in. It's normal for bosses to favor the productive and dependable ones, right? So they're normal. They're nothing special. Sure, Yoongi may spend at least an hour in the pantry with him every two in the afternoon so they can have conversations over coffee, so they can talk about things even Seokjin wouldn't normally discuss with neither Joonmyun nor Jimin, but other than that? Nothing special at all.

So Seokjin takes a deep breath, curls in his fingers until he can feel his nails digging into his skin. Yoongi hasn't budged an inch yet, as if he's rewritten his plans of moving to the other side of the table and sliding right next to Seokjin so they can hear each other better, clearer, so they can be closer, but the corners of his lips keep tugging up into a sly grin. It's almost as if he's finally gathered enough energy to prod Seokjin to say it, to let the loose words brimming on his lips and finally admit to Yoongi what he's been long pushing to the far back of his throat. "Unlike you," Seokjin murmurs after a while. It sounds more like a confession that anything else and that, alone, makes Seokjin... feel strange? Weird? Squirm a little? But whatever, whatever, it's not as if there's anyone else in the office who has been talking to him about creative executions other than Yoongi. Seokjin gets to dissect designs with Jimin sometimes, whenever they have to go through countless emails from the creatives and make sure that the designs actually on strategy and not just artworks they've come up with on a whim. He gets to talk to Joonmyun about top-line ideas, yes, gets to come up with concepts that Minseok and Jimin try to shoot down until those same concepts are already the best that they can be, but that's it. Joonmyun praises him for taking a wide leap of faith and doing out of scope work, but Joonmyun will never say, Why are you in accounts? Why aren't you in creatives? Jimin won't even dare ask, Hyung, are you sure you really want to stick with accounts all your life? "I mean, it's not as if anyone bugs me about creative stuff other than you. No one would dare."

Yoongi scoffs. The smile on his lips hasn't eased yet, hasn't waned, but the glimmer in his eyes has lifted, replaced instead with something... softer. Something that, albeit grudgingly, Seokjin recalls from one of those late nights during the pitch preparation period, from one of those 'two in the mornings' when he and Yoongi may or may not have talked about things completely unrelated to work. Too fond, half of him registers; the other half of him keeps saying, don't do it. Don't go there. Turn back while you still can. But Yoongi's finally getting up, leaning in, twisting his torso such that he looks as if he's about to walk over even if Seokjin tells him not to. Yoongi's taking slow, forward steps until he's right beside Seokjin, leaning against the edge of the table, studying Seokjin at an arm's length. "No one would dare or..." Yoongi throws his head back a little, dragging his gaze up to the plain, white ceiling, before looking back at Seokjin with a focused gaze. "No one has caught you doing creative stuff other than me?"

Seokjin laughs, rough and low. Goddamn, this man can read him so easily, almost like an open book, except Yoongi isn't scoring his pages with his sharp nails or bookmarks or even underlining important parts with a highlighter. Yoongi's just... reading him. Reciting certain lines out loud in a 'subtle' attempt at blurting out You know, you're a fucking predictable plot twist but hey, I'm enjoying this book, anyway. And while Seokjin isn't entirely comfortable with the knowledge that there's one other person in the world who knows him better than he, himself, does, this is much better than being shoved into the spotlight.

"Does it really matter?" Seokjin heaves a sigh. He cocks his head so he can see Yoongi better, but soon he's shivering against Yoongi's soft touch, when he feels the pads of Yoongi's fingers brush against the slope of his neck. It isn't even rough, but the contrast of his warm skin and the cool pads of Yoongi's fingers is electric. Or maybe Seokjin just really needs his coffee right now. It's now
closer to ten in the morning than nine and both him and Yoongi still haven't had enough coffee in their system to ensure smooth and safe conversations, emotions. The more they stray from the path they've sketched for themselves, the more they'll run into hiccups and into each other. Seokjin has never had the most coordinated of limbs, and Yoongi seems to be suffering from the same condition. Seokjin can't tell whether or not he should be relieved. "Whether people actually see me doing creative stuff or are just curious if fresh blood can actually do design shit for a pretty good sum? I mean, most people here are required to be creative. We're-- We're in an ad agency, after all! So isn't it a given that we're all creative in our own way? Do other people have to know the extent of my... I don't know, talent? Does it matter if they know anything at all about this?"

Yoongi leans back a little, his eyebrows quivering for a quick second before he lifts them in a slow, gentle motion. On most people, this would look like a eureka moment, but on Yoongi it feels more like a whisper of success, a fist pump to the side, hidden from the world but not from Seokjin. *Triumph over what?* Seokjin wants to ask, but Yoongi doesn't give him time to enunciate his thoughts. Instead, Yoongi says even before Seokjin can coax the right words to spill from his lips, "It doesn't. Seriously, it doesn't matter if you tell Namjoon or Heechul-hyung or--" Yoongi shakes his head. "Actually, that sounds really weird because you're not-- Whatever. All I'm saying is that you don't have to broadcast it to the whole world, but you can't keep denying the fact that you have an eye for art and design. It's so fucking obvious in the same way you can't hide all six feet of you in a crowd because you were born to stand out, Jin. Talent like that? A skill like yours?" Yoongi laughs. He furrows his eyebrows, heaves a sigh, and ends with a small, familiar curl of the lips, one that, months after, still makes Seokjin's insides turn. "You can't just keep... pushing that down. You can't suppress that forever. That's *ridiculous.*"

Yoongi bites the inside of his cheek at the same time that Seokjin sucks in his lower lip. "It's never too late to make your dreams come true, you know."

*You have to stop doing that,* Seokjin wants to say, but who is he kidding? Who is he to talk about not causing oneself pain and misery when he's been doing the exact same thing until he jumped ship just a few months ago and left his hell of an employer for the past eight years? He should probably swallow every single word threatening to spill from his lips and shut up. Heck, *both of them* should probably just shut their mouth because shouldn't they know better than to do stupid things before having coffee? Yoongi almost fell flat on his ass while descending the stairs one time at nine in the morning, so he wasn't any better without a hint of caffeine in his body. Seokjin... well, he almost poured brown sugar into the beans compartment of the coffee machine in the office after zombie walking to the pantry at eight in the morning. Half of him was appalled he was even capable of making such a mistake; the other half of him was scared at how tired he could have been for him to completely lose any sense of logic and familiarity with habit. They're in their thirties and they've already gone through too much shit in life to *not* know how to not fuck up things anymore, and yet--

Yoongi's whispering, "I studied law before shifting to an art course. Weird, yes, but I'm not shitting you. I wanted to create kickass laws way, way back," scrunching his nose and tearing his eyes from Seokjin's curious gaze before continuing, "Two years, man. I wasted two years doing law things before I realized I wouldn't be as happy trying to right wrongs as I would be if I were trying to... I don't know, paint a better picture of the world? Of how it should be?"

Yoongi's narrowing his eyes at Seokjin when Seokjin twists his mouth, poised to speak. It almost feels as if Yoongi wants to say something, wants to shove realities and realizations in Seokjin's face but doesn't have the heart to. Seokjin doesn't mind at all because isn't this grand 'waking up' long overdue? Hasn't it been decades since he's had to break free from his shell and see the light once and for all? Wouldn't he benefit from Yoongi telling him to run right into a wall of realities and possibilities? But then Yoongi is Yoongi and that means the last thing Yoongi will want to do is to impose. He will tease and push people to their limit, but he will never press anything.
Yoongi's inching even closer and saying, "But here I am now. It took a while to get here, but—" He laughs. "I mean, seriously, can you imagine me getting into law or politics or saving people from their own crimes? Because I can't. Hell, I'd probably be a better fit teaching kids how to do design or mix music, but law?"

You'd be a great teacher, whispers a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind. Yoongi... is patient for things that matter, when he knows he's working on things that take time to develop. But when he's well aware that he can get what he wants at once then patience is something he'll throw out of the window the first chance he gets. And Yoongi seems to deal with children pretty well. Seokjin recalls that time when one of the people in production – was that Sooyoung or Yoona? He can't recall anymore. There's too much of Yoongi in his mind that it's difficult to navigate his own thoughts – took her kids around, let them play with some of the creatives, ushered them in the direction of Yoongi's office and told them to 'play with Uncle Yoongi and ask for candies–'

Seokjin's heart skips a beat. He may or may not have snapped a photo in his mind of Yoongi grinning from ear to ear that time, when the kids peeked from the door of Yoongi's office and greeted him with big, big smiles, might have looked back that particular photograph too many times to count, during idle moments when he needed something to wean him off of lethargy and sleep. He might have memorized it already such that he knows that it's the same smile forming on Yoongi's lips now, but why the hell is Yoongi even–

"Don't change the topic," Yoongi murmurs, but there's no mistaking his grin. It's slightly different from all the other smiles Yoongi has worn in the past, but— "But thanks. I'd like to think I've been teaching the creative kids well."

Shit, Seokjin thinks, then punches himself at the back of his mind. He has to stop loosening his hold on his words, thoughts, actions. He has to be more mindful of how he acts around Yoongi, around his boss. But Yoongi makes it so easy to just express himself and be himself. Yoongi is comfortable. Yoongi... feels a bit like home.

"And the others. I've learned a lot from you, as well," Seokjin adds after a while. Kicking at the floor, he shivers when he feels a wave of heat crawl up his legs, wrapping around his knees before he can even say, "But seriously, I'm old, boss. And it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks–"

"Wow. Can you not? Say my name, c'mon." Yoongi scoffs and shakes his head. The corners of his lips pull down into a frown – exaggerated, yes, but a frown just the same. And while Seokjin has seen Yoongi frown at a lot of things – bad ideas, cold coffee, other people occupying the pantry at two in the afternoon, keeping him and Seokjin from enjoying the silence of the room – this one looks nothing like the glimpses of disdain Yoongi lets surface on his features from time to time. "Seriously, that's such a boner killer. Besides, it's not as if we're strangers or anything. Aren't we–aren't we supposed to be boyfriends or something? Or whatever a relationship where an employee sticks his tongue down his boss' throat is supposed to be called?"

"Wha–" Seokjin heaves a sigh. Part of him is relieved that the dark look on Yoongi's features has lifted, that the Yoongi's no longer wearing his 'scrunchy scrunchy face', but his insides still lurch and turn at the mention of the kiss that happened... months ago. Just months ago. It feels as if Seokjin has known Yoongi for years already, but the reality is that they're 'strangers' relative to how long Yoongi has been friends with Namjoon, Heechul, or Joonmyun. So maybe Yoongi has every right to ask why Seokjin got carried away, but hey, doesn't Seokjin have the right to ask why Yoongi wouldn't pull away that time until they absolutely had to? Until the elevator came to a dangerous standstill and it became a bit too obvious that neither of them wanted to take a step back and leave just yet? "I can't believe you. How can you–why do you keep bringing it up? It's been ages–"
"Nine months." Yoongi beams at him. "Nine months and a couple of weeks. Can't be assed to compute for the exact figures."

" Doesn't matter. It's been a long time since--"

Since he's last completely lost control, he means to say, but Yoongi doesn't seem to be interested in that. Yoongi's rolling his eyes, mumbling something that sounds a lot like 'all the little things matter because they make up something magical and explosive', leaning against him a little before threading his fingers through Seokjin's hair so he can give it a light ruffle. Saying 'but I get you, I completely get you' through the way he gently drops his hand along the slope of Seokjin's neck, down to his shoulder until he can rest his palm there. They're facing each other and there isn't anyone else in the pantry anymore, but it's nearing ten in the morning and that means the office will be brimming with activity and life in just a few minutes.

They won't be alone anymore. They're no longer safe.

"I can't get it out of my head, that's why," Yoongi murmurs after a while, not too long after the question has ceased to be relevant. Seokjin squints, furrows his eyebrows, cocks his head, now poised to speak and ask again, but Yoongi beats him to it, licking his lips before continuing, "Not because your ex almost broke my eardrums or anything, but because--"

Because you looked funny with that look on your face, Seokjin's almost convinced Yoongi is going to say, what with the subtle teasing curl on Yoongi's lips, but instead Yoongi says, "Because you have... great kissing technique... or something. I don't know what to call it, but yeah. Where did you--" Yoongi laughs a little. It sounds more like exasperated heaving, maybe even a scoff because did Yoongi just tell Seokjin he's a good kisser? Or maybe it's the sound of budding defeat, a countdown to Yoongi finally dropping the subject and asking Seokjin if he wants coffee, extra strong and black, the type that can flush down all of the weird, dangerous thoughts playing at the back of Seokjin's mind. "Where did you even learn that? Teach me your technique."

Who the hell even asks for kissing lessons, Seokjin almost blurts out, but he isn't that much of a hypocrite to actually drop the question on Yoongi's lap when he, himself, had to ask Hoseok for help before Jeongguk decided to teach him advanced kissing tricks. So to answer Yoongi's question, he learned it from Jeongguk. He learned everything he knows about romance from trying not to fall for Jeongguk's youthful charm, his bright eyes that are filled with wonder, the promise in Jeongguk's voice, words, actions. He learned everything he knows about what and what not to expect from twisted links and connections with people from those few months he's spent hanging out with Jeongguk (and leaving Jeongguk hanging by a thread because he didn't want to get into a relationship with anyone just yet, just a few months into breaking up with a girlfriend he once thought he could love with every fiber of his being). Most of the things he knows about moving on and setting someone free is from the last week he spent with Jeongguk before the latter had to fly out of the country to pursue a bigger, brighter dream, one he could see materializing right in front of him instead of the weird and twisted arrangement he had with Seokjin.

Self-restraint and control, though, Seokjin learned on his own. He'd honed it in all his years in publishing, dealing with both his internal and external clients. He polished it even more when he took the leap to advertising and fell right into the trap. His greatest exercise of control? It isn't all those times he wanted to strangle his clients and creatives; it's that one time back in the elevator when he was dying to ask Yoongi, Who the hell kisses a stranger like they've known each other for months, years, decades? Who the hell kisses someone he's just met like he trusts him to not tip over so easily and fall?

Who the hell gave Yoongi the impression that Seokjin was a man of control when he stayed in the
lock of their lips long after the director of life yelled 'Cut!' and didn't push Yoongi away?

"Whatever," Seokjin mutters in response, then waves Yoongi off. He doesn't move away, though, doesn't even brush off Yoongi's fingers still tangled in his hair. Instead, he says in an effort to steer the conversation back to a safer territory, "I'm just saying that at my age, I'm supposed to be looking for stability already and not... trying new things. That's for younger people, for... fresh graduates or something. I'm not that. I can't afford to explore anymore. I can't just... risk jumping ship all of a sudden, just because I realized I actually wanted to make a living out of art and design but damn, I'm stuck in accounts. Poor me. I just can't do that anymore."

Seokjin heaves a sigh. Tentatively, he leans into Yoongi's touch and rests his head on Yoongi's side. He can easily pull away if he feels Yoongi twitch or shiver, if Yoongi expresses the slightest hint of feeling uncomfortable at the contact, but come on. They've already tasted surprise and shock and the unknown on each other's lips. Surely this won't bother Yoongi too much. But in case it does, just in case--

"I... don't have the luxury to chase after that particular dream anymore."

Yoongi chuckles. Seokjin looks up at that, squints so he can see Yoongi better through the narrow slits of his bangs. Even from a weird, difficult angle, even without coffee to help Seokjin make sense of things, Seokjin can make out the gentle furrow of Yoongi's eyebrows and the quirk of his lips. He looks like he's seconds away from saying something, from sounding the horns all of a sudden and making a big announcement, but instead Yoongi just shakes his head and sighs. Slumps in his position and gives Seokjin's hair a light pat, then drops his hand to Seokjin's shoulder. The pads of his fingers are cold and the pulse in his palm is quick. It feels a bit like lightning. They are electric. "Dreaming has no limits. But in any case," he begins, pausing only to clear his throat, "Remember that you can always talk to me about transfers and stuff. If you get the weird urge to 'jump ship or whatever' all of a sudden, I mean. We can work something out, and fast. One of the perks of having the CCO as your boyfriend, really."

Seokjin groans. Still, when Yoongi motions for him to move even closer, he doesn't pull away even as he says, "I really, really hate you."

Yoongi tenses in the fit of their bodies. It isn't much, just a shift of his muscles, but Seokjin takes it as his cue to nudge Yoongi in his side, anyway. Yoongi may not be the most transparent person in the planet and he's probably just tired from all the long hours he renders at work, but that doesn't mean Seokjin can discount the fact that Yoongi speaks of nothing but the truth, that Yoongi has always kept his promises, that Yoongi has never failed. That Yoongi can fake a lot of things – calmness, knowing everything about media plans, being completely prepared for whatever presentation that comes his way – but concern isn't one of them. So the worried lilt in his voice earlier was legitimate. The nervousness in broaching the topic for the nth time in the form of cold, rigid fingers on Seokjin's skin was real. And the sad smile resting on Yoongi's lips now is from Seokjin being an ungrateful person who keeps pushing opportunities, help, people away.

In a last ditch effort to make things right, Seokjin reaches up, grabs Yoongi by his shirt and pulls him down, closer. Then, resting his palm on Yoongi's cheek before giving it a light pinch, he says, "Thanks. Always."

Yoongi widens his eyes – in question or in response, Seokjin isn't sure yet, but does it matter anymore? Yoongi's lips are quivering slightly and the corners of his mouth are pulling up into a smile and Seokjin feels warm all over. And Yoongi's tilting his head a little, leaning into Seokjin's touch, breathing out. Never mind that there might be people who might walk in on them and get the wrong idea – what's important is that everything is clear to them: that Seokjin isn't a complete asshole, that
Yoongi isn’t allergic to touch and concern, that they’re okay, they're alright, they're happy with where they are right now. And that they need coffee because ten in the morning means work coming in in a deluge of emails and people caging in on them, suffocating them, making them feel the need to escape.

"The nearest Starbucks is a ten-minute drive," Yoongi mentions after a while, when Seokjin drops his hand to his lap. He locks his arms in front of him and stretches out, but he doesn't look away yet. Here they are again, toeing the same line and bumping into each other, trying to make big decisions – do they take a step back or do they leap into each other's arms? Do they move towards the same direction, or do they step to the side and fall? – and Seokjin's just about done with going through a list of schooled response in his head. He wants coffee and he wants to hear Yoongi talk about all sorts of things and he wants to just get away from the noise in the office. "Wanna come?"

"Only if you're paying," Seokjin answers, teasing, but he pushes himself off his seat, anyway.

Yoongi breathes out and shakes his head. The smile on his lips is blinding. "Anything for you, boyfriend," he whispers right in Seokjin's ear, then he's sauntering away, shoulders shaking as little bubbles of laughter spill from his lips, leaving a trail.

Seokjin collects the fragments and tucks them in his pockets. When he's fully caught up with Yoongi in the parking lot, he whispers another 'thanks' and looks straight ahead when he catches the beginnings of a blush on Yoongi's cheeks, of a familiar glimmer in Yoongi's eyes, of a powerful, lurching sensation inside him, consuming him whole, making him feel alive.

"That's actually pretty good."

Seokjin looks over his shoulder and offers Yoongi a wry and weak grin. On a scale of one to ten, ten being the highest, he's already dying to punch Yoongi in the gut for being a complete ass and actually asking Joonmyun to involve Seokjin in the latest Innisfree campaign even if it's not his brand, but what can he do? All that spilled from his lips earlier was dry laughter and a faint 'I'm gonna charge OT for this, just you wait'. All he was able to do with his hands as he grudgingly, grudgingly accepted the workload thrust in his chest was tuck them in his pockets even as Joonmyun tiptoed, fluffed his hair, and crooned, "Ah, I knew I could depend on you. You're the best!" If he couldn't say 'no' to Joonmyun and reason with his boss that he was already dying from all the things he has to take care of for the brands he's been assigned, then what more with Yoongi? What more with the Chief Creative Officer whom, Yoongi kept reminding him, he had some strange, illicit affair with?

You got to fake punch him in the face earlier, at least. And he winced. A little. Or maybe he was just scrunching his face like usual, a voice at the back of his mind says. Clearly not enough, though, says another, even heaving a sigh before trailing off into silence. Maybe later he can storm into Yoongi's office, grab a handful of candies from Yoongi's stash, and walk out without a warning (though he's done this several times and Yoongi's only retort was to fill the container with even more candies. It's not even a form of revenge, dammit). Maybe he can surprise Yoongi with coffee that's too sweet and just a bit too sour for his taste. Worse, he can sneak into Yoongi's office while Yoongi isn't around and turn the temperature in the office from comfortably cool to Siberia-cold. Then he'll hide all of Yoongi's sweaters in places he knows Yoongi would never go to unless it was a matter of life and death–
"You two are pretty tight."

Namjoon and I? Seokjin furrows his eyebrows. He looks around, blinks a few times, listens for any familiar humming that can only be Yoongi's but ends up with nothing. Only then does it click that Yoongi's no longer anywhere to be found. There's no obnoxiously large hat in sight anymore, or even Seokjin's jacket that Yoongi keeps 'borrowing' even when he has a selection of jackets to keep him warm in the office. Often, Yoongi would argue that the material of his coats was too thin or too thick, and that Seokjin's was almost always 'just right'. And he needed 'just right' to keep him warm. He needed that in his life.

Seokjin shakes his head. He needs just the right amount of rest in his life right now, but at the rate he's going, with all the work he still has to do for the next few days, he probably won't get more than a few hours of sleep. Recalibrating, he asks, "Who is?" and tilts his head for good measure. Maintains the pace at which he's typing because the sooner he gets the deck done, the sooner he can move on to other things related to the campaign. The sooner he can get closer to two in the morning again and maybe con Yoongi into buying him coffee and food and hey, remember the band I told you about the other day? Apparently, they're coming to Seoul in fall and entrance is free but you'll have to go all the way to Busan-- "I mean, who's tight with whom? And, well, that should be a good thing, right? Because tighter bonds mean better working relationships and--"

"You and Yoongi-hyung," Namjoon says, voice barely above a whisper. It feels weird hearing Namjoon call Yoongi 'hyung' when, half the time back in the conference room, they were arguing over concepts and ideas and how the creatives 'weren't trying hard enough', but the way Yoongi's name rolls off of Namjoon's lips sounds so... delicate, almost tender. It makes Seokjin's insides turn, makes his chest grow tight and his throat go dry. It makes him... wonder – about what in particular, he isn't sure yet, but he does know that he shouldn't be feeling queasy knowing Yoongi's name sound like a song on someone else's lips. "You two are close. I mean, I know he's in good terms with most people in the company even if he doesn't give a fuck half the time, but--"

"But you don't normally try to punch your Chief Creative Officer in the face just for kicks?"

Namjoon chuckles. From where Seokjin is right now, with this distance between them, Namjoon... looks at least a couple of years younger than he should be. Or he looks plain happy and relaxed, a far cry from the worried and stressed look he was fashioning in his features earlier. Seokjin has worked with Namjoon a handful of times before, most of them little pitches to existing clients who want 'something more' out of what they're paying the agency, but he's never seen this look on Namjoon before. It's almost refreshing. To an extent, frightening.

"That was actually cute, but yeah," Namjoon whispers after a while. He leans back in his seat, throws his head back, then clicks 'Save' on his laptop before looking to his side to meet Seokjin in the eye. "Something like that. I mean, he obviously won't skin people alive for touching him because handshakes are a corporate thing, but... " He heaves a sigh. "I dunno. There's– This isn't even the first time I've seen you two joking around and getting touchy and--"

Whoa there. Touchy. Where the hell did that come from? Seokjin screams at the back of his mind. If Namjoon had mentioned anything about intimate conversations about work and life then he'd nod and agree with everything that Namjoon is saying, but 'touchy'? He pinches Yoongi's cheeks in lieu of a real punch and Yoongi ruffles his hair when Seokjin asks for designs with such short lead time, but other than that--

Yoongi rests his head on Seokjin's shoulder from time to time, mostly at three in the morning, when Seokjin's already dead in the head but keeps babbling about how all the time and effort they've poured into the projects they have to render overtime work for will pay off eventually. Seokjin
reaches out to give Yoongi's hand a gentle squeeze, sometimes slots his fingers between Yoongi's own in an effort to keep Yoongi from slipping into some weird spiel about hardships in life and being tired and Seokjin being a breath of fresh air. They waltz around when they try not to talk about Seokjin wanting to do more creative projects than actual client servicing. They nudge each other in the side, kick at each other's feet, link pinkies under the table at obscene hours in the morning, but other than that? Nothing. So maybe they are a bit more touchy than other pairs of friends in the office, enough for Namjoon who would normally be talking about creative ways to fight fatigue from overwork and not relationships to bring it to Seokjin's attention, but they shouldn't be alarming, right? Seokjin can't possibly be making Yoongi feel uncomfortable, right, because if Yoongi had been thrown off and irked by Seokjin pinching his cheeks or the tip of his nose or his sides, then Yoongi would have used his words and told him off a long time ago.

And yet the worst Yoongi had said to him was, 'That's some halfassed thinking right there. Try again. Do better next time.' It wasn't even derogatory. Sure, it made Seokjin feel like an absolute failure for ten whole minutes, but after that it fueled him to churn out ideas for the little pitch that he and Jimin were working on. It made him yearn to outdo himself, to rewrite his own records.

It made him want to succeed.

"–and don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong about it at all, but–" Namjoon laughs. The corners of his mouth curl up into a smile, reaching his eyes and making them crinkle at the corners. Amusement, a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind hums. Then, a little later, when Namjoon lets out a soft sigh, Relief? "I dunno, it just feels a bit weird to be seeing hyung let loose with people he's met after his stint in Saatchi? That was where I met him. Heck, that was where he met most of his advertising friends. Not that I'm saying he's become anti-social, but–"

But he doesn't let too many people into his life, whispers a voice in Seokjin's head. But Yoongi doesn't allow himself to spend more than a few sacred minutes with people he can't even drink coffee with, unless they're clients or suppliers he plans to use in the future. But Yoongi isn't the type who will 'waste time' dealing with people who won't a) help his beloved agency earn more; and b) people whom his heart is at ease with. Seokjin has seen the stark contrast between Yoongi dealing with the entire creative team versus how he would talk and brainstorm with Baekhyun, Taehyung, Heechul, and Namjoon. Seokjin has experienced, first-hand, Yoongi ending useless discussions even before they can gobble up more of his time. And Yoongi has tugged at his shirtsleeves at least ten times now, has pulled Seokjin back down to his seat for a few more minutes of conversation about music, composition, passions and making dreams come true.

If you ever decide to take another leap– Seokjin shakes his head even before he can hear Yoongi's voice ringing in his ears again. He's supposed to be focusing on Namjoon and not Yoongi's endless spiel in his head. He's supposed to turn in this deck before eight in the evening, and it's already five. He's supposed to be thinking of ways to steer the conversation back to work and yet his mind keeps relapsing to what happened a few minutes ago, to Yoongi's passing comment on Seokjin doing well but not enough to sweep him off his feet, to Yoongi threading his fingers through Seokjin's hair before giving it a few lights pats and pulling away to leave.

"I'm sorry. Don't mind me. I'm just–" Namjoon presses his palms to his cheeks, smushes them, then breathes out in a heavy exhale. "You two are human, after all – though in all honesty, sometimes I think hyung's a vampire or something. Or a robot. Yeah, he's definitely a robot – and humans are naturally drawn to other humans. And there's nothing wrong with that. This is just an observation, okay, and I swear to god I won't send you a memo for this or anything. Just–" Then Namjoon gulps hard, sucks in his lower lip, and narrows his eyes in a way that makes Seokjin feel as if he's being studied. "It's... refreshing, I guess, seeing him get intimate with others."
Namjoon shifts his gaze for a while, looking up, then laughs a little. "It's nice seeing him alive again."

Seokjin furrows his eyebrows. For a second, he thinks of asking how Yoongi was before, back in his old agency – Saatchi, was it? *Wait, wasn't Hobi in Saatchi before– holy shit* – but he knows better than to seek answers to things he shouldn't even be wondering about. If Yoongi wanted him to know about a dark, sordid past, then Yoongi would have let him know already. If Yoongi wanted to tell him about old songs he'd composed then Yoongi probably would have already dropped hints about it in one of their conversations. And if Seokjin ever missed any of the clues, Yoongi would have already highlighted them in bright yellow ink, would have already guided Seokjin to those little spots of vulnerability in the road map of their friendship and asked, 'So, what will it be? Heads or tails? Will you pick that up or do we pretend that we don't want to know more about each other? You have ten seconds to answer. Your timer starts now.'

"*Chill. That's something he hasn't rubbed off on you yet,*" Namjoon mumbles after a while, then reaches for a few pieces of candy right beside Seokjin. Only then does Seokjin realize Yoongi had given him candies again – whether as a reward for all his hard work or a twisted apology, Seokjin can't tell yet. He doesn't have time to figure that out now, though, so he lets the thought brew at the back of his mind, the sweet taste of the toffee candy that Yoongi loves – eating, consuming when he's tired, giving Seokjin as a distraction, before they even delve deeper into conversation about their personal lives – keeping him from coming up with a retort, from brushing off Namjoon's statement, question, reaction. Helping him focus on the important things – the task at hand, the deadline fast approaching, and not the feeling of Yoongi's fingers slipping between the strands of his hair against when Yoongi passes right behind him (and Namjoon biting the inside of his cheek to keep himself from bursting into bright, deafening laughter, from giving Seokjin away).

"*What a fucked up plot twist.*"

Seokjin reaches over and gives Yoongi's arm a light squeeze. Getting lost in Itaewon isn't so bad, not when Seokjin sort of knows the area well enough that he can walk from the nearest convenience store to his condotel with his eyes closed because *come on,* he lives in this area, this is the place he's been existing in for the past nine months, but it's two in the morning on an autumn night. The last time he was out at such a late hour without work to blame was when he and Hoseok met up for drinks at the height of summer. But temperatures have now dropped and he and Yoongi simply can't walk along the streets, navigate their way to Seokjin's place, not in the biting cold, not when they have just come from a tough overtime session back at work in preparation for a pitch. They can't just burst from the car and stroll along streets with the wind blowing mercilessly outside. If it were an issue of changing tires then Seokjin would help out in a heartbeat, wouldn't even bat an eyelash and, instead, get up on his feet even before he's asked, but–

"*Do you mind sleeping in the car?*

Seokjin snorts. He cracks his neck, squints, looks around. He knows this place, not like the back of his hand but he knows it well enough that he can draw it on paper for people who might not know their way. It's just that he doesn't trust his vision that much at such a late hour. It's closer to three in the morning now than two and he's tired and the throbbing sensation at the back of his eyes hasn't eased yet. He can't let all his guards down so easily just yet. Surely, there's a better workaround for this. Surely, spending the night in Yoongi's car isn't the best and only solution they can find to them.
getting 'stranded' in a place Seokjin can hardly say is foreign to him.

"My house is around... ten minutes away by foot. Or fifteen, if we walk extra slowly. You can take my coat. And the bonnet. And the scarf--" Seokjin huffs. Slowly, he undoes the knot his scarf is woven in and yanks it off his neck. "Okay. Don't tell me you left all your winter wear in the office because I swear to god, Yoongi, I swear to god--"

Yoongi shrugs. There's a small smile, curling up at the corners of his lips, but it doesn't bleed onto the rest of his features just yet. So Seokjin pinches Yoongi's cheek once, twice, then another time when Yoongi sticks out his tongue, but soon Seokjin drops his hand to Yoongi's elbow.

"So you do mind," Yoongi whispers. He looks up, kicks at the carpet and allows his limbs to thaw out, then gives Seokjin's arm a light nudge. "You mind staying in a cramped little car the whole night."

Seokjin gives Yoongi a pointed stare. First thing's first: Yoongi's car isn't cramped at all. It's spacious enough that Seokjin would choose to go on a road trip with Yoongi rather than Joonmyun just based on the type of car their drive and how easy it was to wiggle inside. And the conversations they would be having, of course, because even if Seokjin had technically grown up in Joonmyun's loving care nearly his entire professional career, it still feels different talking to Yoongi. Conversations with Joonmyun feel more like... seeking advice from an older brother, whereas talks with Yoongi feel like--

Don't go there, he tells himself. Then, taking a deep breath, he repeats, Don't you even dare think of giving yourself away.

The truth is, Seokjin isn't picky with sleeping places at all. Once, he had to sleep on a thin blanket draped over cool grass when he was a boy scout. Another time, he had to sleep sitting up while powering through his thesis, and on both counts he hadn't made the slightest complaint, hadn't even made a sound of protest beyond the early morning groan he muttered when his father woke him up. Then there was a time when he got stuck in a shoot twenty-four straight hours long, so he knows that sleeping in cars or just plain taking naps in them is an uncomfortable as him trying to fit into his shirts from elementary. And the last thing Yoongi needs after coming from grueling hours at work is to wake up with sore limbs and an aching back. They still have a ton of things to do for work tomorrow, after all. They have a mock presentation at twelve in the afternoon. Yoongi has a 1 p.m. meeting after that, and possibly a truckload of small yet equally demanding meetings scattered across the afternoon. The next opportunity to rest won't be until late in the evening again, and by then Yoongi would probably already be toast or too drained to register that it's time to take a break, to rest, to not be the superhuman he makes himself out to be in broad daylight.

Rinse and repeat until Yoongi expresses distaste for his crazy work schedule that won't even let him breathe properly. Rinse and repeat until Seokjin decides to take matters in his own hands and does something that, surprisingly, Yoongi isn't opposed to at all.

"I don't," Seokjin reasons after a while, fiddling with the hem of his shirt as he does so. He looks like a kid, he knows it can see it from the way Yoongi keeps nipping on his lower lip as if in an effort to hold back his laughter, but whatever. He needs to do something with his hands, else he might lose control over his words again. He can't afford that right now, not at a time like this, not when it's just the two of them in the car, equal parts alone and exposed to the world. "I used to sleep on the ground when I was a kid. Boy scout stuff. I'm just--" Worried about you, Seokjin muses, but Yoongi doesn't need to know that. Yoongi will probably feel uncomfortable occupying someone else's headspace. Seokjin would, too, if he was in Yoongi's shoes. There's something so unsettling about knowing you've snatched someone's peace of mind in exchange for room in that person's head and heart. So
instead, Seokjin says, "Look: we're old. We'll get sick in this weather. We have to stay indoors. And I know for sure that you have zero tolerance for the cold weather. If I'd just known--"

Yoongi laughs a little. The dark circles under his eyes lift just slightly, enough to illuminate his features, but the darkness settles again as soon as he heaves a sigh. He doesn't even look just tired; he looks drained, defeated, almost as if he's giving up. It's two in the morning and he hasn't had any decent sleep in a while, and life actually has the gall to slap him in the face with this. The nerve of life. The nerve of destiny to play with him like this. The nerve of every fiber of Seokjin's being to feel like wrapping his arms around Yoongi, pulling him close to keep him warm and--

"Of all places," Yoongi mutters after a while, voice dipping to silence in a heartbeat, then he's laughing again, shaking his head, jutting out his lower lip. Doing that 'Yoongi thing' of his where he sails between two emotions and Seokjin just can't stay afloat, much more keep up with him. It's amusing as much as it is frustrating. "Of all places, it just has to be Itaewon."

Seokjin loosens his grip. Yoongi hasn't tried to brush him off at the slightest, hasn't even dropped the soft smile on his lips yet, but Yoongi looks like he's seconds away from curling up on himself again. So this should be Seokjin's cue to change the topic, right? This should be Seokjin's cue to steer the conversation in an entirely different and much safer direction. He shouldn't be licking his lips in preparation for asking what was wrong with Itaewon, was there anything everyone should be wary about, did Yoongi want to talk about something? He shouldn't even be studying the way Yoongi tenses in his seat a few inches away. What he should do is to reach over and bundle Yoongi up so they can get started on their journey to Seokjin's place already, so they can curl up in the couch or in Seokjin's spacious bed--

"Is it that far away? Your place, I mean." Yoongi scrunches his nose, rubs its tip, then meets Seokjin's searching gaze. His eyes look like barricaded doors, dark and guarded and laced with secrets, but if Yoongi wanted to ward Seokjin off a long time ago then Yoongi would have told him off already. Yoongi would have pushed him away without a doubt in his mind and without preamble. Heck, he wouldn't even be able to suggest going to his place and taking shelter there, miles away from a place Yoongi considered home. There are a lot of opportunities he could have missed if Yoongi didn't want him to be here. And yet-- And yet-- "Maybe we can take a cab or something. Do cabs even pass by this side of town? I don't think I've seen--"

The wind blows. It raps at the windows of Yoongi's car, making sharp sounds of despair echo in the four corners of the vehicle and making Seokjin shiver. Yoongi only flinches a bit, but for the most part he seems to be unnerved, the only hint of a reaction in his features being him shifting his gaze, looking at his feet, then the steering wheel, then Seokjin only a few feet away. Seokjin gulps hard, wiggles his toes in his shoes, then he's breathing in deep. He's no stranger to being subject to Yoongi's pointed stares, but they're in a small, small room and there's barely any room for them to breathe here. There's not a single exit in sight and Seokjin likes being given options. He likes being given a chance to push the self-destruct button if he has to.

He likes having a few minutes to himself to breathe and shuck off whatever remains of Yoongi's scrutinizing gaze sticks to his skin and takes root in his body.

"Sometimes," Seokjin answers after a while, then clears his throat. Yoongi inches closer, sort of leaning in, and brushes his fingers against Seokjin's own as if in permission. Or maybe he's just reaching over, unlocking Seokjin's seatbelt, helping Seokjin breathe easier. "Sometimes cabs pass the area but... we'll have to walk a few more blocks if we want to get to a clearing. And besides--"

And besides, it isn't so bad walking in the cold with you. And besides, it shouldn't be a boring trip because when have we ever been boring? And besides, this is you and me and we've gone through
worse – tight deadlines, pitches, two in the mornings spent talking about work and aspirations and life. We're alright. We're okay. We'll live.

"My car's stuck here. In the middle of Itaewon. At ass o'clock in the morning. Right." Yoongi snorts. He breathes out, low and deep, presses down on the release button of his seatbelt. "Why do you even live here? Why don't you just... board somewhere closer to the office? Itaewon isn't exactly... the coziest place, you know."

Why did you even volunteer to take me home? Seokjin wants to argue, but it's not as if it's the first time Yoongi has assumed the responsibility of driving him home. Often, Yoongi would ask Seokjin to take on the offer for his peace of mind, just so Yoongi's assured that he would still see Seokjin the following day even if he had to ask so much of the latter for work. "Seriously, the rumors about me being a slave driver have to stop now. I'm not even the worst among the execs; that's Namjoon. So you're actually helping me rebuild my image. It's not... You're not being an inconvenience. You are not an inconvenience at all." Seokjin would always decline, say it's safer that they stay in the office until the sun went up again and they're no longer drunk on coffee, until they could walk down the streets of Sallimdong with more stable knees and a sounder mind. Yoongi would retaliate for a while, try to argue his case, but in the end Seokjin would always win. And Seokjin would always walk away with a twisted sense of pride, knowing that he had just told his Chief Creative Office to shut up, relax, and just breathe for the next few hours so they could work again in the morning.

"Lowest and most affordable rates," Seokjin mumbles in response, then locks his arms in front of him. Slowly, he tears his gaze from Yoongi's, hoping he would do the same, but come on – when has Min Yoongi ever been predictable? "And it's much more exciting than Ilsan, I guess. Not that I'm looking for an adventure, but–"

Yoongi scoffs. "An adventure," he mutters, then lets out a heavy sigh. His cheeks pull down and his eyelashes flutter a little and must there really be something to discover about Yoongi everyday? Yoongi's eyelashes aren't that long, aren't even curled up that much, but from a certain angle they look like beautiful threads taking a nice, shallow slope, just enough to lend a hint of darkness, mystery to his gaze. Yoongi can't be a mixed bag of tricks all the time. Yoongi can't keep surprising him. It isn't fair. "I kinda get you, though. You get tired of seeing the same damn 'buildingscape' after a while. Itaewon gives you–"

Surprises and stranded moments in the cold weather and Min Yoongi's cheeks turning an interesting shade of pink. Seokjin's pretty darn sure Yoongi will never admit that, though. Yoongi is the last person who would wave the white flag only months into a battle. So instead, Seokjin answers, "Lots of lights. Of different colors."

"And insane night life," Seokjin thinks he hears Yoongi mumble, but Yoongi's out of the car even before Seokjin can ask him to backtrack a bit, to repeat himself, to make things a bit clearer than before. So he shushes the voice at the back of his mind whispering, saying, screaming, what do you mean by that? Why do you keep turning around before I can say a word?

Why do you keep running away?
small talk, the tiny tremble in Yoongi's voice. **It's just from the cold**, Seokjin tells himself, again and again until it becomes just a tad more believable, but he's not blind to Yoongi shifting his gaze every so often, or to Yoongi looking around in the most 'inconspicuous' way he knows how. He's no stranger to Min Yoongi and even with only nine months of friendship to base his assumptions off of, he's certain of this – Yoongi doesn't brandish fear in his features, but he's shit at hiding discomfort in every part of his body.

Min Yoongi isn't always the superhero other people perceive him to be.

Still, Seokjin asks, "Cold?", and pushes all other thoughts to the back of his head. Nudges Yoongi in his side when he neither budges nor makes a sound. Yoongi's only response is a small smile and a casual shrug, but Seokjin slips out of his other scarf, anyway, resists the urge to bury his nose in Yoongi's hair even as he wraps the scarf around Yoongi's neck. Yoongi makes this small, almost indiscernible sound, but– Chill. Nobody else can see. It's just the two of us here and seriously, what's there to hide? Seokjin wants to say. This isn't even a display of weakness, Yoongi letting Seokjin have his way and accepting help in the form of clothes to keep him warm. It's just Yoongi admitting that yes, there are things that he can't control and can't power through. And that the cold weather will always be one of his greatest nemeses.

"Y'know, at this rate, I'm pretty sure half of your winter wear's gonna end up in my closet by the end of the month. Or the season," Yoongi mumbles. He doesn't push Seokjin away, though, instead just adjusting the scarf around his neck, burying his nose in it for a quick second, then looking up to meet Seokjin in the eye. "And I'll have to pass by this area again just to bring everything to your place–"

Seokjin snorts. "You just want me to bake cupcakes for you."

"Muffins. I like your muffins better." Yoongi wrinkles his nose. Seokjin digs his hands deep in his pockets and pulls away, trying to push down the urge to pinch the tip of Yoongi's nose. Yoongi makes all these cute little expressions without knowing, tugs at Seokjin's heartstrings without even meaning to, and Yoongi has to stop doing that so well. If this continues, Seokjin will end up a pile of–of–something Seokjin can't even find the right words for. Yoongi can melt the biting cold all around him with his little bursts of warmth if he wanted to. If he wasn't feeling too lazy to offer people more than just a corporate smile and actually flash that bright grin he so easily puts on for Seokjin at two in the afternoon, two in the morning, when it's just the two of them in a quiet, quiet room. "Have you ever tried making one of those... meringue things? Meringue muffin sandwich or whatever? Heechul-hyung used to buy those when we were still in–"

Yoongi stops. Seokjin furrows his eyebrows a little and tilts his head in question. *Too personal?* a voice at the back of his mind asks because this isn't the first time Yoongi has stopped mid-thought and swallowed down his words, but there's a flash of *something different* in Yoongi's eyes. Fear? Nah, not a chance. *He won't let me catch that*, Seokjin muses, and yet Yoongi isn't wiping that indiscernible look off of his features. Yoongi isn't shaking it off and putting on his superhuman cape yet. It's almost as if Yoongi wants Seokjin to find out whatever it is that's brewing in his mind at the moment. He's standing still, chest heaving in deep breaths, unmoved even by the blowing winds like he's giving Seokjin enough time to examine him.

Seokjin shifts his gaze. There are at least three people in the area other than them, three unfamiliar faces all eyeing Yoongi with the greatest interest. He's convinced he's just seen too many of the action moves Hoseok loves watching (reacting to, mostly, but from time to time Hoseok does drop his hands to his thighs instead of just peeking at the film through the slits between his fingers and watches instead of screaming at the movie), and that he shouldn't be feeling the most awful lurching sensation in his stomach right now, but– "I... know another route," he whispers in Yoongi's ear. He gives Yoongi's shirtsleeve a light tug when Yoongi still doesn't budge, pulls him just a bit closer, and
says again. "We can take another route, c'mon," just in case Yoongi hadn't heard him the first time around. If Yoongi ever pushes him away, he can always choke it up to his desire to keep Yoongi warm, but something about the way Yoongi's deep breathing has turned shallow tells him that there's no need to pull away anytime soon.

Or that he shouldn't have held onto Yoongi longer than he should, in the first place.

"No, we're not--" Yoongi looks to his side, meeting Seokjin's gaze and-- *Shit. Don't do that. You shouldn't have done that*, Seokjin wants to scream. Being subject to Yoongi's sharp, careful gazes isn't something new to Seokjin at all, but this one's different. It tugs hard at his heartstrings before clawing at his chest and leaving a dull ache there. It makes him... feel a bit hollow yet stuffed to the brim with something he can't pinpoint just yet at the same time. It makes him feel things he's never quite felt before, or at least dealt with too well in the best. The closest he's been to someone leaving a dull ache in his chest this painful and so easily is Jeongguk's departure a decade ago (and discovering that Jeongguk had left him a letter in the book Jeongguk returned only the night before, the one Seokjin had been bugging Jeongguk to return for months already). But other than that--

Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath. He has zero practice and experience in this. He doesn't have a single fucking clue what to do at all.

"We walk. Straight ahead. Forward," Yoongi continues after a while. His voice cracks somewhere in the middle where syllables turn into weird noises and whinging sounds at the back of his throat. Seokjin takes it as his cue, then, dropping his hand to his side, withdrawing, pulling away, but Yoongi catches him by the pinky even before he can take a step back. "No turning back."

"I'm not--" Going anywhere, Seokjin means to say, but instead he drops his voice to a whisper, to a word a lot more complicated than it should be -- "Leaving." Then he pulls Yoongi closer, until their elbows touch and bump. Seokjin feels goose pimples crawling up Yoongi's skin at the same time that electricity numbs his arm and makes him shiver. Yoongi is cold, colder than he's ever been in all the months that Seokjin has known him, and Seokjin doesn't know which he should be more concerned about -- the fact that Yoongi feels uncomfortable in front of these strange, unfamiliar faces, or the fact that he can tell when Yoongi feels uneasy with the situation at all. "I'm kinda out of practice when it comes to punching people, though? Just thought I'd warn you. Though I *did* take boxing lessons for a time--"

Yoongi laughs a little. The smile on his lips is strained, but anything's better than the dark look he had fashioned earlier. Even the slightest glimmer in his eyes is better than the gentle frown pulling down at the corners of his mouth, pulling down at the rest of his features and making him look at least five, ten years older than he should be. Zapping all of his energy until he's tight and dry and without any energy to live.

"No boxing," Yoongi begins, pausing only to swallow hard and ease the tightness in his throat, "Unless we're going with emotional boxing. That sounds pretty exciting."

Seokjin narrows his eyes. "I... don't have experience in that."

Yoongi rolls his eyes. The smile on his lips curls up even more, reaching his eyes and making them crinkle at the corners. "Trust me: you do. You're actually good at that."

'Good at that' means taking a few steps forward until Seokjin can memorize the small, slow-forming smile on the lips of the three people approaching them and I.D. them as more than dangerous -- they're deadly. 'Good at that' means him catching on to the slightest shift of Yoongi's muscles, means him understanding that Yoongi is more than uncomfortable with the entire situation -- Yoongi is *dying* to find an escape route but won't because that means backing down from the fight and running
away from a battle. It means him being able to digest Yoongi's gaze flitting from side to side, to
Yoongi moving just a few feet away as a call for help, leaving Seokjin open to biting cold assaulting
his skin, so he can fit himself again in the mold of their bodies later on.

But 'good at that' isn't Seokjin warding these people off with a pointed gaze. He's been dubbed as the
kindest-looking person in the block for three years in a row back when he was in university and
goddamn if Seokjin will ever be able to push people away with what's supposed to be a scrutinizing
gaze. He knows what he's good at and what he still needs to work on, and reading people is the first
item in the 'damn, Seokjin's a superstar at this' list.

"What do you want me to--"

Yoongi tugs at Seokjin's hand wrapped around his wrist. Slowly, he draws his hand up until his
fingers slotted with Seokjin's own, hands in a neat tangle and Yoongi's pulse quick and loud on
Seokjin's skin. On a normal day, Yoongi would probably rather die than be seen initiating contact
like this, but every beat of Yoongi's pulse tells Seokjin that they're in danger, that they should be
looking for ways to escape rather than thinking of ways to still each other's racing heartbeats. These
people right in front of them look as if they won't hurt a fly even if they wanted to, but-- "Fuck off,"
Yoongi can even say a thing. He gives the men sharp gaze, looks around him just to check if there
are others in the area, then repeats, "I said, fuck off if you want still want to live. Back the fuck off if
you want to live another day."

The men scoff. The harmony is nice, easy, almost natural, but the sounds and voices are too rough
for Seokjin's liking. It's all a matter of personal preference, yes, and maybe some people like listening
to rough rasps and crackles in people's voices and awful lilts, but Seokjin doesn't like that. He likes
the easy rhythm of Yoongi's voice, the melody in Yoongi's tone, the way Yoongi's voice wraps
around his neck like a nice, warm hand, tender fingers, a soft touch. He likes Yoongi whispering
reassuring words right in his ear. He... likes Yoongi's company, the way they fall into place even
without meaning to, the way they just fit. And he would like Yoongi wrapping fingers around his
wrist on a normal day, except--

"Didn't think I'd see you here again... Yoongi, isn't it? Min Yoongi from... a couple of months ago?"

Yoongi takes a deep, sharp breath. Beside him, Seokjin gulps hard and tightens his hold on Yoongi's
hand. He's concerned that it might drive Yoongi away, might make things worse given that Yoongi
is already feeling uneasy, as it is, but Yoongi hasn't pulled away yet. Yoongi's muscles are relaxing
against his own, and if anything Yoongi's urging Seokjin to move even closer until it becomes
impossible to tell where they end and begin. "Me neither," Yoongi murmurs after a while, then twists
his lips to the side. It looks nothing like the wry smile that almost always blooms into a toothy grin
that Seokjin sees him wearing. In fact, it looks nothing like most smiles Seokjin has seen bloom on
Yoongi's lips all these months. "Didn't even think you'd be alive after--"

After whatever it is that's really awful happened, finishes a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind, but
now is not the time to be making up stories. Yoongi's trying to tell him something here, trying to etch
words on his skin in the subtest of touches and the quickest glances. Yoongi's trying to... find a way
out even if, earlier, he'd been so averse to the idea of escaping. Yoongi is asking for help now, and
it's all up to Seokjin how to pull it off without making Yoongi feel like the most helpless asshole in
the entire planet who's indebted to him forever.

"Oh come on, admit it: you had a lot of fun back when we were--"

"That was in the past." Yoongi huffs. He digs his nails even deeper into Seokjin's skin, leaving half-
moon crescents on the back of Seokjin's hand. There must be a code for this, because right now the
only thing that Seokjin's getting out of the whole situation is who the fuck is this guy and why the hell
is he talking about Yoongi this way and how dare he reduce Yoongi to this? Sure, he and Yoongi are just friends and they haven’t been through as much shit as Yoongi and Namjoon have, but– "Now please get out of the way and get lost. We can pretend this never happened and walk away without ruining each other's lives again."

Again. Seokjin bites the inside of his cheek. He's pretty darn ready to throw a punch or two and smash that guy's face. All Yoongi has to do is to say the word–

"Is that really a habit of yours, pushing people away without any trace of remorse? Taking and taking and never giving anything in return?" The man walks over, saunters closer, kicks at the dust on the ground and taps a small beat before standing still. Light from the lamp post filters down on his features and wow, he doesn't look too bad, Seokjin muses. He can sort of imagine it, Yoongi backing this man up against a wall and asking, asking in the softest, gentlest voice, is it okay if I kiss you? And he's sure he isn't imagining the lurching sensation at the pit of his stomach. It feels too real to be made up. "Throwing people away once you're done with them, once you've used and abused them and–"

Use and abuse? Seokjin shakes his head. Yoongi can't possibly do that. Next to Hoseok, Yoongi's possibly the kindest person he has known. Joonmyun is nice to people who are nice to him, won't hurt a fly unless it stung him first, but Joonmyun controls people and teases them into submission regardless of who they are in his life. Meanwhile, Yoongi stares, watches, studies until his subject slowly peels off his layers. Yoongi uses people's talents and resources for the greater good, to win pitches and businesses and trust, but he gives more than he's ever taken. Yoongi... Yoongi doesn't abuse people. He lends his time and talent and trust without asking for anything in return. If anything, he's the one being abused by others.

Well, he does ask and demand for cupcakes from time to time, but that's not the point. Seokjin would bake him treats any damn day, even if Seokjin goes home at fucking six in the morning and he has to report to work by nine. Seokjin would even add sprinkles to every single cupcake he makes for Yoongi because apparently Yoongi loves seeing colors on food and not his outfits. Heck, Seokjin would bake a three-tier cake for Yoongi for no special reason other than he has a bit more time to spare and maybe, maybe, maybe Yoongi would want to extend their two-in-the-afternoon sessions for another hour or so.

So Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath, gulps hard before saying, "Yoongi would never," and takes a step forward. The last time he won in a brawl was when he was in elementary, against one of those kids who bullied Hoseok until Hoseok was bawling into Seokjin's school polo, and even then he'd tried to weaken the kid with a bit of mental punching. His mother had made it a point to remind him never to get into fights and into trouble, but Hoseok was one of those few people he was willing to risk both his entire month's allowance and his life for. And his next life. And the next.

"You're just making fun of him because you know he sucks more than you do in Math," he'd said, then pulled Hoseok closer to his chest. He could feel Hoseok trembling in his arms, could hear Hoseok's faint whispers of 'stop, don't do it, they'll hurt you, hyung, and I can't bear to see you get hurt–' but those didn't matter anymore. Seokjin had remained silent about the whole pushing Hoseok around thing for so long and Hoseok trying to avoid trouble, and he wouldn't just sit back and watch his best friend get bullied by kids who didn't even know how to spell 'onomatopoeia' even if it was part of their vocabulary words in their morning English class anymore. He was going to fight – for justice, for Hoseok, for every single person who didn't know when and how to exercise their rights. For those who needed protection because he knew how it felt to be shoved around. He knew how it felt to be beaten up so badly, emotionally. "But let's see you try to make fun of him outside of that. Hobi's better than you in English and Science and P.E.! And every single subject in the planet! Just... not Math!"
He threw a punch, then another, then another. He might have landed one on Hoseok somewhere along the way, but five minutes in all the bullies had already scurried far, far away. He ended up with sore limbs and a weak, weak body, but his heart felt strong. And Hoseok's big, big grin leaving scars on the crook of his neck felt like winning a championship belt in wrestling. He wasn't even a fan of the sport, yet knowing he'd finally, finally, finally been able to defend his best friend felt like the world's greatest victory.

He takes a few more steps forward, then, but doesn't loosen his grip on Yoongi at the slightest. Maybe in the morning he'll think and feel differently. He makes the worst decisions at two in the morning, after all, but if there's one thing he hates more than rendering overtime work during the weekends, it's seeing people — innocent people — being backed up against the wall and shamed for something they hadn't done. It's seeing these people have to take a beating and him not feeling courageous enough to do anything about it.

_Thirty-three years of age and still disappointing your mother_, mumbles a voice in his head. He pushes that further back, shuns it out, and takes a deep breath. Right now, at this very moment, all he's concerned about is the way Yoongi's fists shake completely out of control, the way Yoongi's easy breathing turns into heaving. The way the beat of their pulses match as Seokjin pulls Yoongi even closer and says, "He would _never_ do such a thing. Who the hell are you, anyway? I'm pretty sure you're not his friend because no good friend talks about his friend like that. You aren't supposed to talk shit about people you don't know."

He balls his free hand into a tight, tight fist, and breathes in deep. Yoongi's saying something, making a sound right in his ear, but he can't hear anything beyond the loud thumping in his own chest. And he wants to apologize for meddling in Yoongi's affairs, but _later, later, later you can think about the things you've done wrong_, he tells himself. He has a score to settle with this asshole and his two other minions. He has a fight to finish alongside Yoongi. And he might wake up with sore limbs in the morning, but who the hell cares? Yoongi is one of those few people he would risk his neck for. Even if he gets beaten to a pulp, he won't have any regrets.

"Not worth your time, Jin. Save you energy for something else," Yoongi whispers in his ear. To the men, he says, "We had a deal, remember? I'll stop fucking up—"

"Fucking with us—"

"Shut the fuck up— I said _we had a deal_!" Yoongi grips Seokjin tightly. He isn't shaking anymore and his voice is much stabler than before, but his fingers are too cold. It makes Seokjin shiver all over. "Now, if you don't remember what we agreed upon, I'll give you a refresher: I stop fucking up with your future and you stop fucking with my life. You asked for money and I gave it to you so shoo. Get lost. If you don't, then I'll—"

"What?" says the man, voice trailing off to a scoff. He gives Yoongi a once over, even licks his lips as he does so, and _god-fucking-dammint, you do not get to look at Yoongi like that!_ screams a voice at the back of Seokjin's head. And it's crazy. Yoongi _isn't his_ and Seokjin is as sure as hell he _never_ entered into any agreement with Yoongi about connections and exclusivity and kisses long overdue, but a strange surge of... _something_ washes over him, crawls up his throat, claws at his chest. Urges him to hold Yoongi's hand, _really_ hold Yoongi's hand instead of just clutching it, feeding off of Yoongi's warmth. "Then what, you'll elope with your new boy and trash him like the others once you're tired of him? Like the rest of us?" The man laughs and shakes his head, then shifts his gaze to Seokjin. "Look, kid, we're just trying to save you from this monster. He gobbles people up and spits 'em out when he doesn't feel like _devouring them_ anymore. Word of advice? Run away while you still—"
"I won't run away," Seokjin grumbles. Yoongi nudges him in his side, twists his elbow until Seokjin's cringing and sharp jolts of pain shoot up to his shoulders. This is more than a warning: it's Yoongi saying 'fucking stop already or I'll kneel you in the groin', but if Yoongi really wanted Seokjin to stop then he would have used his words again, would have enunciated them more clearly. "I will never run away, not from him. Not from Yoongi. And excuse you, if you actually know Yoongi then you'll know he doesn't run away from shit. He fucking faces everything head on. So if he did 'run away' from you assholes like you claim he did then--" Seokjin laughs, dry and bitter. "You probably deserved it. Because this... thing, this assholery that you guys are doing right now? This won't even defend you in the court of law even if you tried really fucking hard."

"Jin," Yoongi whispers, softly now as if he meant to take a deep, deep breath, instead. There's a hint of laughter there because who the hell even brings up the court of law while shit-talking someone?, but Seokjin doesn't even mind anymore. Yoongi's voice, now even and stable, sounds a lot like music to him, the type that lulls him to sleep and promises him a wonderful morning when he wakes up. "Enough. We have a preso tomorrow. We can't waste our energy on these asses--"

The man snorts. He takes a few steps forward, long and drawn out, boots drawing awful, squiggly lines on the moist ground. Can't even draw a straight line, Seokjin mumbles at the back of his mind, and the next thing he knows he's feeling Yoongi's hold on him loosen a little. Maybe Yoongi's thinking the same thing. Maybe Yoongi's finally, finally thawing out. Or maybe Yoongi's using one of his tricks again to fool Seokjin to thinking that everything has been settled and they can walk away in peace already.

"You talk like you two have something special, kid," the man murmurs. He kicks at the ground hard enough to lift dust off the floor, summoning them to latch onto Seokjin's coat, then heaves a sigh as he looks past Seokjin and fixes his eyes on Yoongi. "Your new boy barks pretty loudly. Y'know, on a normal day I'd be really annoyed and I'd be beating him up even before he can say another word, but he's actually--"

"Boyfriend," Seokjin says, voice cracking as the syllables tumble from his lips. The fuck are you saying, he thinks he hears Yoongi whisper right in his ear, but when he looks over his shoulder to meet Yoongi's haze, Yoongi's just... staring at him, eyebrows furrowed, lips parted. Pressing his lips together in a thin, thin line before mouthing at Seokjin, what the hell? "No hard feelings, man, but I honestly didn't think you'd be smart enough to figure that out. And yeah, we do have something special. He's my boyfriend." Or the person who'll maim me later, I dunno, part of Seokjin muses, but soon Yoongi slips his fingers between Seokjin's own. Never mind that Yoongi's fingers are cold or that his hands are shaking again or that the stretch is a bit difficult for Seokjin – this pain is far more bearable than the ache in his chest from just seeing Yoongi's lips tremble a little, from watching a small smile pull up at the corners of Yoongi's lips as Yoongi holds his gaze, holds onto it like a lifeline. "We've been going out for nine months, and not once has Yoongi ever shown signs of wanting to run away or disappear. So sorry to burst your bubble, but no, he won't run away from me, from us. Sorry if he never deemed you – or even your ugly as fuck friends – worthy of him. But he's right, you know. You are not worthy. He's too good for you. Heck, he's probably too good for everyone in this world."

Okay, Jin, you've hit your quota for cheesiness. Now, stop, says a voice at the back of his mind, but his lips are loose and the words just keep prying his mouth open. He can bite the inside of his cheek and keep swallowing down every single thing about Yoongi that has been plaguing his mind for months, but it's closer to three in the morning now than two and he's tired and he simply has no energy to fight his senses. Yoongi will have to bear witness to his not-drunken not-confession and an awful attempt to defend a friend, but he doesn't care anymore. All that matters right now is that the man who'd assaulted Yoongi earlier is now slowly inching away, shaking his head, muttering like a mantra. "You– You? You're in a relationship with someone? But you said before that you didn't do
relationships--"

The man scoffs. "No, no, this is a joke. This is--" He laughs. Hand still shaking, he lifts a finger and points it at Yoongi, then Seokjin, then Yoongi again. "Impossible. I don't believe you. Min Yoongi will die not having loved anyone but himself or his job for the rest of his life. Min Yoongi will die a miserable man because he doesn't know how to give a fuck about anyone but himself. Min Yoongi--"

"Is my boyfriend. Min Yoongi is my boyfriend," Seokjin declares, then looks to his side to meet Yoongi's gaze. There are a lot of questions swirling in his head and maybe, if he squints hard, he'll be able to find the same questions in Yoongi's eyes, but right now, right now--

Right now, Yoongi is squeezing Seokjin's hand even tighter. Right now, Yoongi's whispering, "You don't have to do this," but screaming with the rest of his body, fuck you for being able to read me like an open book but thank you for that, for this, for whatever you're about to do. And right now, Seokjin could be scrunching his face in response or sticking out his tongue, but instead he shakes his head, kicks Yoongi's foot, and laughs.

"It's past office hours now," he begins, then licks his lips when Yoongi cocks an eyebrow at him. "You don't get to tell me what and what not to do." In the office, when Yoongi has his Chief Creative Officer cape draped on his shoulder, he's vicious and demanding and can be a bit overwhelming. He has a habit of being a bit too controlling because he wants nothing but the best from his creatives, from every single person he interacts with. But as soon as work is done Yoongi drops the whole boss act and just... breathes. Waits for people to warm up to him, to open up, to feel comfortable enough to let him in and listen to what he has to say. Yoongi isn't the scary guard dog that he makes himself out to without the cape. He's tough, yes, like a damn hard shell of chocolate, but underneath that thick shield lies nothing but sweet and soft marshmallow.

Seokjin laughs to himself. Yoongi will kill him if he ever finds out that Seokjin has been calling him a 'marshmallow' in his mind, but the warm gaze and an even warmer smile on Yoongi's features hardly communicate the words 'if you ever call me that again, I'm going to kick you out of the company and make you regret even thinking of giving me a pet name every single day of your life'. They hardly say, 'I can't believe you're talking to your boss like this' or 'I hate you' or 'What the hell are we actually doing right now?' And they shouldn't be coaxing Seokjin to lean in even more, and yet--

"Can I kiss you?"

Yoongi widens his eyes. "Wh--what?" he says, half-whispering, half-wheezing, and another half something Seokjin can't seem to identify at the moment. It's three in the morning and it's freezing outside and they have to be back in the office in six hours, but Yoongi's hold on him keeps growing tighter as if keeping him from running away. And Yoongi's shaking his head now, closing his eyes, laughing as he says, "Look: we're quits now. You've saved my ass in presentations countless times before. And your crazy ex is much, much tamer than these three, so Jin--"

Seokjin shakes his head. "I don't care," he answers, then submits to the gentle tug poking at the corners of his mouth. Never mind that his lips are trembling, or that he's probably shaking all over, or that they probably look weird and ridiculous to the man who'd talked shit about Yoongi earlier and to the other two who look like they'd jump on Yoongi at the man's command; he can almost hear Yoongi's answer now. It's there in the way Yoongi lets out a soft, shaky breath against Seokjin's lips, in the way Yoongi leans in, close, close, closer, until their foreheads touch. It's in the way Yoongi sort of tiptoes but balls his fingers into a loose fist in Seokjin's shirt soon after and gives it a light tug, almost as if he's given up all pretense of control. All that's missing is a single word from Yoongi, just
one word, and Seokjin will break down his very own resolve and let himself crumble into Yoongi's arms.

So say it, urges a voice at the back of Seokjin's head. He rests his free hand on Yoongi's cheek, motions for Yoongi to move even closer, and breathes out in a loud exhale when Yoongi laughs a little. Come on, just say the word--

"It's a yes or no question, Yoongi," Seokjin teases, "I'm not asking for a big idea or anything--"

"Yes," Yoongi breathes out. He nods, gulps loud enough for Seokjin to catch it through the loud beating in his chest, and whispers more clearly, "Yes, you may."

Seokjin kisses Yoongi. It isn't anything big, nothing explosive, just a tentative press of lips on lips and Yoongi's breath warm on his skin. Yoongi twists his knuckles in Seokjin's shirt and Seokjin gasps a little, jaw relaxing, the knots in his chest tensing, and that's when Seokjin feels it – the warmth that had pooled at the pit of his stomach searing to a sizzling heat, the pulse at the back of his elbows, knees, at the base of his throat tapping a beat too quick for him to sing to. The familiar rhythm of Yoongi's pulse on his chest quickening bit by bit, with each passing second that they spend standing so dangerously still. So Seokjin tilts his head, darts out his tongue, teases Yoongi's mouth open with gentle nips on his lower lip, soft sucks, and Yoongi sighs at the sudden rush of cold blooming on his lips. Yanks Seokjin closer because a millimeter or two between them is too much space and Yoongi hates the cold weather, hates not having Seokjin's warmth sticking to his skin and leaving scars on his lips that will ache for days. Seokjin can taste acid at the back of his throat, can taste a thousand regrets and wrong decisions at the tip of his tongue, but Yoongi washes all those away when he parts his lips in earnest, letting Seokjin in.

Coffee. Three in the morning and you still taste like coffee. And Seokjin would search for a hint of strawberry at the back of Yoongi's teeth just like before, as he licks a stripe there, would try to taste more than just the dark, heavy flavor of coffee as he conquers the corners of Yoongi's mouth, as Yoongi lets out a soft whimper and chokes down the sound by sucking on Seokjin's lower lip and tongue, but all of these flavors are Yoongi. Seokjin doesn't—he can't even dissociate strawberries and cupcakes and the treats he bakes from Yoongi anymore. He can't even take a sip of his favorite coffee without wondering why it tastes just a bit better on Yoongi's mouth even if Yoongi is sweet. And the last time he had kissed Yoongi was months ago, but the taste, the scent, the sting of that kiss lingers in every fiber of his being. It's almost as if he'd already developed a stimulus to every single thing that is Min Yoongi, and that the rest of his body knows Yoongi just as much as his lips, his hands, his heart do.

Yoongi has carved out a place for himself in Seokjin's life without Seokjin knowing. And while Seokjin's aware of it now, even if he already knows he should be asking for rent or payment or whatever compensation he knows Yoongi's more than able to give him, all he wants right now is to feel Yoongi relaxing in the fit of their limbs, for their bodies to align.

Yoongi's mouth quirks up when Seokjin's breath hitches. Seokjin lets out a low groan in response, in retaliation, and ah, there it is, the slow-forming smile on Yoongi's lips, the beginnings of laughter in the way Yoongi's lips tremble in the open press of Seokjin's mouth. Seokjin can hear footsteps in the distance, moving away and fading into the silence of the night along with murmurs and whispers and I can't─I don't believe this!, can feel himself slipping away again when Yoongi gives his lower lip a slow, languid suck, but the cold autumn breeze reels him back to his senses, reminds him of where they are and where they should be – in his house a few blocks away, warm and bundled up, and not clinging onto each other's mouths in an attempt to thaw themselves out completely.

"You've gotten better," Yoongi whispers when they part, when the winds around them calm down
considerably and leave Yoongi’s hair tousled, a complete mess. Seokjin runs his fingers through Yoongi’s hair, then, and shivers – when he feels the strands untangling against his skin, when he feels Yoongi lean into his touch and breathe out against the bridge of his nose, when Yoongi opens his eyes and looks up at him with all of his shields down, conning, coaxing, convincing him that this is safe so come closer, just a bit more, come on– “I’m–”

Seokjin leans in again and presses a kiss to the tip of Yoongi’s nose, the jut of his upper lip, the soft skin just under the gentle pillows of Yoongi’s mouth, then Yoongi’s eyelids when Yoongi lets his eyes flutter closed as he takes a deep, deep breath. “Thank you,” Yoongi says, voice barely above a whisper, and that’s when Yoongi lets his shoulders fall forward, buries his face in Seokjin’s chest, faint laughter spilling from the corners of his lips and bleeding onto Seokjin's skin, keeping them warm.

"Thank you."
Seokjin gives the knob a slick twist and swings the door forward. The sticky slide of his palm on the surface produces a shrill squeak. It makes him shiver. On a normal day, he'd be kicking the door open, then kicking off his shoes and throwing his bag onto the couch nearby while walking aimlessly in the dark. Other times, he'd also be tossing his sweater onto the mix if he feels too contained and restricted by his clothes, add his bonnet there, his scarf, his gloves because there's no need for all these layers of defense anymore, but today he simply looks over his shoulder. He furrows his eyebrows and tilts his head. Bites the inside of his cheek when he sees Yoongi inching even closer as if the few inches between them are still too much distance, until he can rest his chin on Seokjin's shoulder. The fit is a bit awkward and he knows Yoongi's straining himself a little when Yoongi tiptoes, but he also knows Yoongi will either twist his knuckles in his gut or literally kick him in the ass if he even attempted to bend his knees to accommodate.

"Welcome home, I guess?" Seokjin says, then casts a glance at the hallway ahead. He can make out the stray clothing on the couch, the stack of books placed so dangerously closed to the edge of the center table and the pillows haphazardly 'arranged' to form a short flight of stairs from the floor to the cough. The aftermath of a tough week at work, really, because the last thing Seokjin would want is to get even more stressed by the sight of his unruly flat. But oh well. "You... actually caught me at a bad time. I usually make it a point to tidy up during the weekends but it's been hell the past few weeks so I haven't been able to--"

Yoongi shakes his head. "Nah, it's fine. I'm the one who crashed here, so--" His voice trails off into a heavy sigh, then he leans his head against Seokjin shoulder. He closes his eyes, breathes in deep, and soon his body's relaxing against Seokjin's back, racing heartbeat bleeding onto Seokjin's skin. It makes Seokjin shiver a little, nothing more than a light shake of his shoulders, but it must have been a powerful enough jerk that it coaxes Yoongi to say, "Sorry. Just tired. And whatever, that wasn't a fifteen-minute walk, you liar. That felt like--"

"Sixteen minutes. Huge difference," Seokjin groans, but looks to his side, anyway. He catches the scent of sweat and autumn in Yoongi's hair, then a tinge of the coffee Yoongi takes in huge doses. An hour or so ago, they met up in the pantry, reached for the same coffee cup, and laughed as they chorused, "What if we just split?" After all, they both knew they were seconds away from palpitating, but that they were also this close to snapping at every single person they came across with coffee fast slipping from their fingertips with every keystroke on their laptop. And there was an odd form of comfort and relief in the way their bodies danced around each other in a nice, easy rhythm – Yoongi waiting by the coffee maker, pushing the button for the regular shot another time because he knew one shot of espresso wasn't enough for two people in need, and Seokjin filling two glasses with warm water because he knew how to take care of them when they were almost shaking in fatigue already. "But hey, at least we're here now right?"

"We're at your doorstep." Yoongi shifts a little, but for the most part they're still stuck to each other, caught in a messy tangle of limbs. Warm. "Where it's still cold and it still feels more like winter than
autumn. We should have gotten inside minutes ago."

Seokjin laughs. You're cute when you try not to sound concerned or relieved or just happy, he wants to tell Yoongi, but now is not the time for drive-by comments and anecdotes and not-confessions let loose in the air. Now is the time to take shelter, to keep each other warm. So he retorts, "I wasn't the one who asked to be koala hugged from behind," but fastens Yoongi in place even before Yoongi can slip away, anyway. He grips Yoongi more tightly where they're linked by the hands – where they have been holding each other for the past... thirty or so minutes? They'd been holding hands from the time they pulled away from the kiss and began walking in the direction of Seokjin's house. For a second then, Seokjin wanted to ask if Yoongi was okay, if he was scared or frightened or literally feeling weak in the knees from the encounter they had just had and needed someone to hold onto for support, but Yoongi gave him no time to string his words together. Instead, Yoongi shifted his hand a little until their fingers were slotted between each other in a nice, snug fit, and pulled Seokjin forward, just forward, "Let's just keep walking until we get to wherever we should be." "You give really warm hugs, though. They're nice."

Yoongi snorts. He pinches Seokjin in the stomach before letting his face fall forward and burying it in Seokjin's back. He murmurs something that sounds a lot like 'whatever, you're just really cold', but it can be anything. Yoongi could have said 'shut up, it's not cute' or 'you can't tell me what to do; nobody has the right to tell me what to do', but the way Yoongi rests his fingers on Seokjin's torso tells Seokjin he'd heard the right words despite the sound being muffled by his clothes and by circumstance.

"Do you really want me to push you inside your own flat?" Yoongi grumbles after a while, and that thaws Seokjin out. Seokjin guides their linked bodies forward, then, yanks at their still intertwined fingers, and only pulls away when he feels the warmth of his house bleed onto his skin. "I thought you were going to let us freeze to death just outside your place, really. Would've been stupid, but eh."

Seokjin flicks on the lights. Yoongi squints in response, narrows his eyes when he isn't able to shield them with his hand, but widens them as he looks around. Light catches on his eyelids, filters through the narrow slits of his eyelashes, and it softens his features a little. It neither highlights the fatigue written all over Yoongi's features or not lifts it completely, but it does lighten up his face a little, just enough that Seokjin can make out the blush of pink blooming on Yoongi's cheeks and the way the corners of Yoongi's eyes crinkle.

What are you smiling about? Why are you smiling? Seokjin wants to ask but does it really matter now? What's important is that Yoongi feels warm and comfortable and safe in the four corners of Seokjin's little home. What's important is that the fear that was once thick in Yoongi's eyebrows, in the chains keeping blood from coursing freely through Yoongi's system, in the invisible hand that wrapped around Yoongi's throat earlier and gripped him tightly until Yoongi was choking on his own words is now gone. It fades into dust at the same time that Yoongi heaves a sigh, stifles a chuckle, and says, "I can't believe you actually did it."

Seokjin curls his fingers into loose fists. I can't believe it, either, he would say if he were better at lying, but who is he kidding? Every single two in the morning and in the afternoon that they have spent together, dissecting and studying and memorizing each other and not just the movement of their lips, has led to this. He can't even say he's never thought of leaning in too close just to check if Yoongi still tastes like coffee and strawberries and second chances even months after they first kissed. It's always there at the back of his head, a niggling thought that both keeps him awake at night and lulls him to sleep when he's troubled and tired and without energy to get through the day.

And he can still feel the way Yoongi had tensed for the quickest second before melting into his touch.
earlier, can still feel the way Yoongi sucked on the corners of his mouth, his lower lip, his tongue, until all Seokjin could say was *fuck, yes– Yoongi*– and all he could do was to give and give and take Yoongi's breath away. He can still feel the way Yoongi's soft 'thank you' had bloomed on his skin when the evil creatures finally scurried away, and the way Yoongi felt so small and *vulnerable* in his arms when Yoongi rested his head on Seokjin's chest in complete and total surrender.

So instead, he laughs. Shakes his head and inches farther away from Yoongi – whether to give himself space or to give Yoongi room for breathing, he isn't sure. It can be both. The fit of their bodies isn't so strained anymore, feels a lot more natural, but two people so dangerously radioactive colliding, crashing into each other is never safe.

*Of course, you'd know,* murmurs a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind. He'd tripped on his plans that Jeongguk had messed up and ended up rushing in Jeongguk's direction. His knees had given away a bit too early and, the next thing he knew, he was moving too close to Jeongguk. He'd crashed into Jeongguk's arms heart-first years back and, well, look what that did to him – left him with scars that stung for days, weeks, *months,* every silent hour that he had been blessed with between stressful days at his previous job.

He gulps down hard. He... can't bear to see that happen Yoongi. Just thinking about it tears him apart.

"Drinks?" Seokjin says in an effort to lighten the mood a little. Maybe, in another lifetime, he'll berate himself for offering his boss alcohol in lieu of a comforting pat on the back, a hug, a kiss on the cheek to lift the pain and drive all the evils away, but right now Yoongi looks like he's seconds away from either tipping over and asking for hugs and staying as far away as possible. It's as if everything fast catching up with Yoongi – the realization that he'd just peeled too many of his layers earlier, that he'd dropped his defenses to the cold, hard ground even if Seokjin hadn't asked him to.

The fact that even with the open invitation to come even closer until they collide, Seokjin has chosen to stay away and is whispering in a small, small voice, in the way he peeks at Yoongi through the slits of his bangs, *Hey, I think you dropped your armor and I'm not that big of an asshole to attack you without your shields up so... Ceasefire? "*I mean, water, tea, coffee, whiskey or something-*"

Yoongi chuckles. It comes out low and rough, like sandpaper, and *no, no, that sounds so wrong,* groans a voice in Seokjin's mind. Yoongi makes all sorts of sound whenever he can't express himself in words, when he finds himself pressed for time to string the right words together and polish his statements until everything's woven in a snug, snug fit, but this strained laughter sounds nothing like anything Yoongi would make on a normal day.

It's not a normal day. Seokjin has someone else other than Hoseok over at his flat at such a late hour. It's half past three in the morning and Yoongi's sauntering over, waltzing as he makes his way to where Seokjin is. And Yoongi's grumbling, "Whiskey, because that'll make me hate myself less for setting a thing at 9 a.m. tomorrow. Later. *Whatever,*" and resting his forehead again on Seokjin's chest like the only way to silence all the voices in his head is by making sure he and Seokjin are *connected,* somehow, by making sure that he can feel Seokjin's pulse on his skin. "Why didn't you stop me from saying 'yes' to that 9 a.m. thing again?"

"I did. Then you said you wanted to get the thing done and over with as soon as possible and waved me off and—*" Seokjin argues. He hesitates, choking on his own words for a bit until he feels Yoongi jabbing him lightly in the gut. "*What?* Come on, don't tell me you don't remember—*"

Yoongi looks up. He wraps his fingers around Seokjin's wrists and gives them a light squeeze. He doesn't pull Seokjin close, though, doesn't yank at Seokjin's arms like he normally would. Instead, he holds Seokjin's gaze as he answers, "I remember everything. Every damn thing." He takes a deep,
shaky breath, then, a soft little sigh escaping his lips before he adds, "I just... choose not to let people know that I do."

Seokjin snorts. He licks the corners of his mouth, ready to retort with of course, you would. You're so fucking predictable, it's not even funny anymore, but Yoongi silences him by placing a finger on his lips. And he would press a kiss to Yoongi's skin, could even suck a mark there if he was courageous and crazy enough, if he was the slightest bit tipsy, but he doesn't even have alcohol in his body. All he has right now is cold and caffeine coursing through his veins. And the last thing he wants to do right now is to drive Yoongi further away. There's already too much distance between them, as it is, and even if the room isn't that cold anymore, he'll still need Yoongi's warmth to lull him comfortably to sleep.

Marshmallow, Seokjin thinks. Yoongi is marshmallow, the type that melts in your mouth slowly and whose flavor blooms on your tongue until you can taste the subtle sweetness in every curve, slope, wicked contour of your mouth. Yoongi is that peculiar flavor that grows on you until you get hooked on it, on him.

"Drinks," Yoongi says after a while, then cocks an eyebrow at Seokjin. Seokjin's body gives a powerful jerk then he's nodding, taking a step back in response, climbing back to the surface. Whispering as he shakes himself out of his trance, Right, the whiskey. I'll get right to it. The soft smile on Yoongi's lips disappears in a blur of motion, but it's still there when Seokjin surfaces from his search in the kitchen with a bottle of liquor and glasses in hand. The smile isn't as delicate as before, looks a bit more strained than it should be when Yoongi's cheeks quiver and his lips tremble. It's as if he isn't used to letting something like that conquer him and put cracks on his thick walls of defense, but that's what happens when you're too busy to notice things around you, Seokjin surmises. Yoongi has been too caught up in meetings the past week, has been flitting from one client to another in the hope of bringing in new business for the company, that Seokjin won't be surprised if Yoongi would be shocked to find a box of cupcakes he'd asked Seokjin to make the night before on his desk the following day.

You could always surprise him, you know, chimes a voice at the back of his head. Seokjin pushes that further back and pours some whiskey into Yoongi's glass, fingers wrapped tightly around the bottle so he has complete control. For fear of pouring too much, of messing things up. Or you could always tell him you just felt like baking him cupcakes since that's the truth, anyway. Stop lying to yourself, Jin. You're too old for that already.

Stop fooling yourself.

It takes three rounds of whiskey to thaw them out. Or two and a half, because just a few sips shy of finishing his third glass Yoongi folds his legs under his weight and shifts in his position until he's found a more comfortable spot, one good enough to coax out of his chapped lips, "The other year, two years ago, things were pretty tough." Yoongi says it in a voice so faint, Seokjin could have just been imagining things – he's been doing that a lot these days, more often than not when he's with Yoongi – but soon Yoongi's nudging him in his side, snatching his attention from whatever he's found interesting in the brown liquid swirling in his glass or hanging in the silence pushing apart. Saying in a louder, clearer voice, "Probably the company's worst year, to be honest. We were losing accounts, left and right. Some of the best talents were leaving the company. Heechul-hyung almost resigned due to overwork but come on, let's be real now – even if he does move to a different agency, as long as he works in the same sickening industry, nothing will change."

Seokjin laughs. "It's a trap. The whole thing's a trap," he whispers, then takes a long sip of his liquor. Warmth blooms at the back of his throat as soon as he swallows hard, and it makes it just a bit easier to pull out the words that he's had to push down his throat so many times already. "You know, if I
Yoongi rests his glass on his lap and tilts his head a little. His eyes are hooded, dark, almost unreadable, but Seokjin knows this particular eye squint. Yoongi does this when he means to challenge people but doesn't have the energy to use the right words. And Yoongi's very particular with his words. So instead of saying something he'll regret, he resorts to actions, body language, fleeting touches that, no matter how light, will leave a dull ache on whoever he brushes his fingers against or holds onto a second longer than usual.

Instead of *him* saying something, he'll convince others to speak on his behalf. Or he'll convince them to speak up and ask what has been bugging them for so long already.

"I'll stick around a little longer, see how I can help out or something. It feels nice winning accounts for the company," Seokjin continues after a while. He gulps down the rest of liquor in his glass in one go and seethes when he feels a nasty burn in his throat, when he feels the pulse at the back of his knees and elbows quicken. He's about three more glasses from feeling tipsy *and then* passing out, but his insides won't stop lurching and his heart won't stop racing in his chest. If this is life's way of telling him to stop biting back the words he wants to say then *fine, life, you win*, but it's not as if he hasn't been teasing words out of his mouth from time to time. It's not as if he hasn't been at least 90% honest and transparent with Yoongi in all the months that they've known each other. "But things got better last year, right? I know next to nothing about ad agency history but I've been hearing stuff--"

"What kind of 'stuff'?"

Seokjin shrugs. "All sorts of things," he mutters, trying to buy himself more time to think. He's heard a couple of horror stories finally seeing a resolution last year, recalls Jimin mentioning something about sabbaticals and Yoongi appearing at the doorstep of the agency building at obscene hours of the day and-- "Like Namjoon doing lots of client servicing even if it's not his forte or the big boss flying from one country to another just so you guys can get more accounts even outside Korea. Like... Like Joonmyun-hyung actually being ten times worse that he is now and trying to be the company's superhero or something."

Yoongi laughs. He takes a sip of his drink, licks his lips, then scrunches his nose when heat blooms on his tongue. "He was an absolute slave driver back then, I swear to god. The first half of the year was awful. I kept getting complaints in my email--"

"Email?" Seokjin gulps hard. He looks down on his glass, frowns when he remembers that he's just gulped everything down earlier, then looks back up to meet Yoongi's curious gaze. *If you back down now then he'll find out you've been asking about him, talking to people about him, and he won't like that because come on, Jin, you know how much the guy hates having the spotlight on him--* "Why didn't they just approach you or something? Did you chase them out with your fangs or something?"

Yoongi cocks an eyebrow at him, lips quirking up in accord. *Now this* is the Yoongi he's missed, the Yoongi that makes his insides turn in the most pleasant way possible. He can't call this his favorite Yoongi – every single one is his favorite, but Yoongi doesn't need to know that – but *close enough. I missed this. I missed him.* Yoongi hasn't been himself the past few days and Seokjin has just been choking it up to the worsening weather, what with winter fast approaching, but that doesn't mean he doesn't want to find out what has been making Yoongi feel weird, uncomfortable, detached.

"Excuse me," Yoongi says now, voice rough and low and curling around Seokjin's nape in a tight, vicious grip. It makes Seokjin shiver. It sets off little explosions at the tips of his fingers that bloom into massive fireworks when a smile cracks across Yoongi's features. It makes him just a bit too conscious of the thinning distance between them and the voices in his head telling him, convincing him to move even closer. "*I do not* have fangs."
"Right. Because you're marshmallow. And marshmallows don't have fangs," Seokjin leans forward, closer to the table, and sets down his glass on it. Yoongi's probably setting up his little daggers where Seokjin had been slumped against earlier, but eh. Seokjin's been through worse. And Yoongi never hurts people for too long, anyway. He'll swoop in for the rescue and apologize through the smallest of actions – a soft 'hey', a small smile, eyes dropping to the gentle swell of the mouth before he whispers, 'don't do that again or else'. "Don't change the subject."

Yoongi leans back. The sly smile on his lips is still there, albeit a bit more crooked than it should be. It looks gentler now. A bit more... tender? Seokjin cracks his neck, shakes off the thought, and tries to focus his gaze on the peculiar glimmer in Yoongi's eyes, instead. "This is going to appear on your evaluation, I'm just saying," Yoongi mutters after a while, then reaches for the bottle of whiskey to pour both himself and Seokjin some. Round four. Seokjin might have just found himself a drinking buddy who won't pass out on him after the second glass – sorry, Hoseok. "And if Namjoon ever heard you, he'd be laughing his ass off right now. Don't even get me started on Heechul-hyung's reaction."

Seokjin snorts. "Well, aren't you glad it's just the two of us here, then?"

Yoongi heaves a sigh. "Very," he whispers, then takes another sip of his drink. "You have no idea."

The waltz lasts a few more minutes, with Yoongi taking Seokjin through a narrative of how he, Namjoon, and Sihyuk decided to change the way they did things in BBDO and completely break away from how they had been brought up when all of them were still with Saatchi. "We didn't realize 'til then how toxic the environment was, you know. It sounds so sad and stupid how we just... I dunno, we got used to taking on one project after another and shitting out good output. But that's it – they were 'good', but not the best they could be. And it makes sense? I mean, what would you expect from people who were rendering overtime 'til seven in the morning but still had to come in at eleven for a 2 p.m. presentation?" Yoongi scoffs. "None of us had the balls to actually say 'no' to clients until the employees started saying 'no' to us. In fact, none of us, Joonmyun-hyung included, felt the need to say 'no' until we actually heard our very own bodies saying 'no' to ourselves."

Seokjin furrows his eyebrows. You're right about being blind to how draining the work environment is being stupid, he's tempted to say, but what gives? That won't help anyone, and it certainly won't make Yoongi feel better. So instead, he says, "But the spirit was still willing, wasn't it?" and inches just a bit closer to Yoongi so he can see the latter better. Yoongi's eyes are wide open, his lips pursed and his head tilted, and every little detail on his face right now is screaming, I just said our bodies were already tired. What part of that is hard to understand? So Seokjin adds, "I don't know. I... just can't imagine you giving up on things so easily when you're the one who keeps pushing people to do better? I've seen you motivate your creatives, Yoongi, don't think I haven't, so I just--" He shakes his head. "You giving up and not being around to take requests for conversations just doesn't make sense?"

Yoongi licks his lips. "Thanks, I guess. For noticing," he whispers, then stretches out his legs and wiggles his toes. Seokjin can't I.D. this move just yet, can't tell if Yoongi's just trying to thaw himself out or if he's stilling so he can think about what he'll be answering with, but Seokjin is confident that, with more exposure, he'll know exactly what Yoongi wants to say it. Or he can just ask. Yoongi's almost always bound to answer in the most succinct way he knows how, but then answers from Yoongi feel a lot like deciphering code most of the time. Sometimes, it's much easier to analyze the way Yoongi looks at him like he's the only real thing Yoongi can hold on to in this world. Sometimes, it's easier to not wonder at all. "And you really won't let go of the emails thing, will you?"

"Sorry," Seokjin mutters, then sucks in his lower lip. "If it makes you uncomfortable, you don't have
"It does. It... feels weird talking about it." Yoongi lets out a shaky breath. "I don't even know why I slipped earlier but I guess you make it... easy for people to just speak their mind, even if it's not the prettiest thing."

A corner of Seokjin's lips pulls up into a small smile. This feels weird, having a grin hang awkwardly from the corners of his lips because he's been trained to smile and look so damn happy all the time, but somehow nothing can rival the offbeat rhythm Yoongi's drumming on Seokjin's thigh right now. Yoongi has always been extra careful with sound, with music, but now it just seems as if he's letting the beat take control of his body.

It's almost as if Yoongi is dropping all of his defenses to the ground and just letting himself breathe.

"Well, reality isn't always pretty," Seokjin answers after a while. Slowly, he rests his hand atop Yoongi's own, more in an attempt to communicate with Yoongi through his pulse than to suppress the weird rhythm on his skin making him shiver. There are too many words threatening to spill from his lips right now, all of them scrambling for a chance to be spoken, and Seokjin doesn't trust himself to not mess up his speech. So he follows Yoongi's lead, seeks help from body language and his pulse, and slots his fingers between Yoongi's now frozen ones. "That's why we keep trying to find ways to live a better life."

"You just have to say the right things all the time, don't you?"

Seokjin blinks a few times. How do you even respond to that, he asks himself as he tries to scour his brain for answers, but he doesn't really have to. Soon, Yoongi's shaking his head, the weird cross between a smile and a scowl on his lips easing into something a bit more natural. Something—something Seokjin is a lot more familiar with. A wistful smile on Yoongi's lips, Yoongi's eyes just slightly hooded but not guarded all the way through—this is him slowly, slowly, slowly letting Seokjin in. This is Yoongi unlocking that tiny chamber of his past so Seokjin can poke his head inside the room and take a look inside to find things out on his own. "Sometimes, I really think you're... psychic or something, but if you were then you won't be asking why I even took a sabbatical last year. And you'd know exactly why those guys back in—back there kept saying what they did."

"The thing about you running away?"

"Mhmm." Yoongi nods. He takes another sip of his drink before setting the glass down on the table again, this time pushing it farther away from himself. "And you running away while you still can."

'Running away', Seokjin soon discovers, is Yoongi disappearing from the of the Earth smack in the middle of the week sometime in January. "We were fresh from the holidays then. Two years ago, I mean. I haven't taken any breaks after coming back from—" Yoongi shakes his head, clenches his fists, then he's surfacing after heaving a sigh. "Doesn't mean we actually took a break from work, of course, so yeah. We were working over the holidays, much harder than before. We were preparing for... possibly the biggest media pitch that we had that time. We won that, by the way. Kinda sucks that I wasn't around to celebrate with the rest of the team, but—"

Yoongi bites down hard on his lower lip. It makes Seokjin's chest grow tighter, makes his insides turn, makes the pulse at the base of his throat quicken until he can't even feel himself digging his nails into his skin. Makes him regret a could of his decisions because look at him, Jin, look at him! He doesn't want to do this. And you hate seeing him like this, right? "Hey, you know— You know what? Just forget it," he whispers after a while, when the silence lasts longer than it should and Yoongi hasn't picked up yet from where he'd left off. He might miss out on important information,
might not ever find out what exactly those assholes were talking about when they assaulted Yoongi earlier with shards of the past, but between not knowing everything there is to know about Yoongi for the rest of his life and seeing Yoongi like this – trembling lightly, shaking his head, fighting his own fears and fighting the urge to scream in the darkness of the night – Seokjin would rather not know a single thing about Yoongi's past until Yoongi found it easier to talk about the whole ordeal from twelve, twenty-four months ago. He can pretend he isn't curious or that he doesn't have a burning desire to understand, but he can't pretend he's okay with seeing Yoongi gently rocking himself in his seat in an effort to silence his wicked thoughts. "Besides, we have a meeting early in the morning. 9 a.m., right? Maybe we should just head to bed now and--"

"No. I can do this. I--" Yoongi takes a deep, shaky breath. Slowly, he unfurls, looking up at Seokjin and meeting him in the eye. "I have to do this. It's been a year. And Heechul-hyung's right – I can't-- I can't keep pushing all the memories down until they disappear because they won't. They'll haunt me forever. It's just a matter of fighting my ghosts."

"And out-spooking them?" Seokjin tries.

Yoongi laughs a little. He reaches over, wrapping his fingers around Seokjin's wrist for a quick second, then sliding his hand down until it's resting atop Seokjin's own. It's almost funny how Seokjin automatically splays his fingers on his thigh, how it takes no more than a second for Yoongi to find the perfect fit of their hands even in such an awkward situation but hey, at least the hard corners of Yoongi's mouth have softened into a small smile now. "Yeah, that," he whispers, then he's moving just a bit closer, until the ball of his ankle brushes against Seokjin's own. "Where was I again?"

"Right here," Seokjin whispers, but this time Yoongi doesn't roll his eyes in response. Instead, Yoongi's leaning his head on Seokjin's shoulder, shutting his eyes, breathing in. "Right here."

Yoongi talks about his past the same way he talks about a big idea in a pitch. He starts with a dramatic exposition, except Seokjin knows Yoongi isn't bullshitting his way to 'the meat' of his story. Yoongi tells Seokjin about how all the fatigue and pressure and stress from two years ago took a toll on his body and his mind, how every business loss felt like a dagger being driven through his chest, again and again until he couldn't feel anything anymore. "Namjoon kept distance from me after... staging an intervention or something, said he couldn't bear to see me a wreck for too long and knowing there wasn't anything he can do to help anymore. I mean, he still helped out and we obviously reconnected, but--" He heaves a sigh. "It was really hard for him. He saw the whole thing. I won't be... surprised if it still gives him shivers until now.

"Sihyuk-hyung and Heechul-hyung-- They were the ones who kept trying. And it was Sihyuk-hyung who suggested I take a long break to... sort of find myself again? I was averse to the idea at first because almost everyone in the creative team was new and I knew I had to train them before letting them out of their cages or something. I mean, come on, they were still kids then. Kids! And you can't just entrust your big brands to fresh faces who don't know a single thing about branded entertainment!"

Seokjin laughs. *Always the perfectionist. Always the one to sacrifice himself for the greater good,* whispers a voice in his mind, but he pushes that back in fear of the words escaping from his lips again. There are clients to present to and to wow here. Right now, he's not Kim Seokjin, the accounts supervisor who has a penchant for salvaging dying brands and relationships with clients. He's simply Seokjin, the one who has spent most of his two in the mornings and afternoons finding comfort and peace in listening to a Min Yoongi who can, sometimes, be the most disruptive noise in his life. He's Seokjin, Yoongi's friend, one who Yoongi trusts enough to share this little secret with.

"And yet you trust Taehyung to deliver all the time. Like, *all the time.* I'm surprised your other
creatives don't get jealous."

"Oh, you'll be surprised," Yoongi murmurs, then gives Seokjin's hand a light squeeze. He looks up for a bit, meeting Seokjin's curious gaze, then continues, "And I'd like to think I've learned from my mistakes already. If not, well, I'm probably just really stubborn. Which means Joonmyun-hyung's right about me."

Seokjin gulps hard. He can't know you more than I do, he wants to say, but come on, Kim Seokjin, he met Joonmyun first. So instead, he says, "He's really good with people."

Yoongi chuckles. "Not as good as you are."

Yoongi delves back into his story even before Seokjin can think of tensing up, of curling in on himself, of listening to all the voices in his mind, screeching at him to ask for answers. Whether in the form of words or kisses, he isn't sure yet, but he's most certain that the feeling of Yoongi's pulse quickening against his skin, that the feeling of the pads of Yoongi's fingers growing unbearably cold in the fit of their hands, is unsettling. Sure, he's seen Yoongi drop his defenses from time to time, whether awake or asleep with his lower lip jutted out in the cutest manner, but Yoongi telling him about how the chain of really unfortunate events started one somber January, coming from a tough pitch preparation period and from rendering extra hours at work until five in the morning, while taking shallow breaths, is different. Yoongi talking about how the call from his mother came in at the right time, just when he'd slipped inside his car and slipped out of his creative cape, let his walls come down at the first crack of his mother's voice, while taking little breaks in between to lick his lips, gather his thoughts, to even his breathing, is more than just him tentatively opening his doors so that Seokjin can explore the deepest caverns in Yoongi's past. Yoongi talking about needing someone is him ushering Seokjin inside his heart and showing him around and saying, You see the shadows there? My darkest secrets. If you ever tell anyone anything about them, you know what will happen.

Yoongi takes a sharp breath, then he's telling Seokjin about that time when he had to ask Namjoon to drive him back home, get him on a bus to Daegu the first chance he could, and make sure he arrived at his hometown in one piece because, "I couldn't even feel my hands back then. I--I'm not even sure how I got through the first few minutes, to be honest. I mean, how the hell do you react to news about... about your father who told you he was never going to be proud of your achievements because 'studying the arts is a joke'? What do you tell your mother who's sobbing on the phone and asking you to come back because your father's already dead and he won't yell at you for being a disgrace to the family and drive you away anymore? What are you even supposed to feel when you find out your father told your mother before passing away, If Yoongi makes it home before I die, that will be a miracle. The boy hates me. He's never coming back. Stop expecting anything from him because he's never coming back.?” He hangs his head low for a few seconds, then he's looking up again, meeting Seokjin's steady gaze, biting his lower lip as he tries to pull his mouth up at the corners in a smile.

"The one time I needed Namjoon to be less emotional than I was, the asshole bawled in front of me and hugged me tightly," he whispers after a while, and that's when his voice cracks. He laughs and snores and scoffs, but Seokjin can still hear the distinct quiver in Yoongi's voice, can still feel Yoongi shaking all over, in the tight fit of their hands. And Yoongi, for all of his sharp, prickling words, doesn't push Seokjin away when Seokjin tightens his hold on him. "He drove me to Dageu then I drove him away and told him not to call unless I called him first."

"That's--'Cute,' Seokjin wants to say. He wants to focus on Namjoon going out of his way for Yoongi in times of great need. He wants to focus on Yoongi actually seeking help from someone he trusts with everything, even his life. He wants to wipe his slate clean of everything he's just heard,
wants to forget every single thing that Yoongi has just told him because how the hell do you get through that in a year? Sure, when almost the same thing happened to him with his mother back when he was in university, just a few months shy of his graduation, he was still able to smile at people in the morning and take his tests in the afternoon, but he spent most of his nights curled up in bed, wishing he could have done something to make his mother happier, much prouder of him. He spent weeks, months, years wishing he could have at least tried to understand her more, that he could have been born a bit more differently, that he could have loved the course she had enrolled him in more. Even until now, he gets hit by the insane desire to rewrite his history such that wouldn't have to remember the time when he felt tempted to try to dabble in the arts because he was finally free from his mother's watchful eyes, her claws, her tight, tight grip on him. It's a shadow that follows him wherever he goes, a shadow that drapes itself all over him without warning and chokes him until he's begging for another day to live. "That's... something."

Yoongi snorts. "Something an A-class asshole would do, yeah. Said it for you." He splays his fingers before curling them in again, but this time his grip is a bit loose, weaker. It's as if he's given up all pretense of having already forgotten the pains of losing his father. With a deep breath, he slumps against Seokjin again, shuts his eyes, heaves a sigh. "I probably should have asked him to stay. He was being nice, after all. He didn't deserve that kind of shitty treatment. I guess I'm just lucky that the kid didn't take it the wrong way. And that he... actually understands. Not everyone does," he adds, voice a bit strained, but Seokjin can't deny the sincerity in his tone. Yoongi speaks the language of sarcasm from time to time, but only when he's in the company of people he trusts, when he's comfortable enough with the crowd he's with and he knows they won't take offense in his words. Otherwise, he'll say what he needs to say in curt statements shorter than a hitch of a breath, or in ten feet of sentences that can, in fact, be summarized in a few words but sound better when elaborated on.

There are no in-betweens with Min Yoongi, only extremes. And the thing is, Seokjin's good with tying opposite ends together. He's good at helping people find a nice balance in between and sailing it with them until such time that they feel it's already safe to let go. He'd like to think he's good with deciphering Yoongi, as well. It's still a work-in-progress, yes, but it's not as if he's in a rush to unravel everything about Yoongi. He has time to study him.

He will make time for Yoongi, no matter what.

"And not everyone liked what I did after that, when I got back," Yoongi adds, then he's reaching for his glass for the first time in the past ten, fifteen minutes, since he's started his exposition. Seokjin beats him to it, though, wrapping his fingers around the bottle even before Yoongi can swat his hand away, and pours each of them half a glass of whiskey. Buys Yoongi time to rethink his decisions because they can easily drop the subject now and pretend they never had this conversation. All Yoongi has to do is to use his words. But no – Yoongi's delving back into his narration right after he takes another sip, doesn't even wait for Seokjin to take one of his own so he can numb himself to the next few daggers Yoongi will be driving right through his chest. "If I were in their shoes, I'd probably feel the same. I mean, I've always been a bit of an ass but man, that time two years ago... I was a complete douchebag then. Said 'yes' to every single client request even without consulting my team. Heechul-hyung actually had to punch me at one point for being an asshole to everyone, myself included. But--"

Yoongi heaves a sigh. He brings his glass closer to his lips but doesn't take a sip, doesn't even take a whiff of the drink. Seokjin... sort of gets it, though, how Yoongi just wants to be assured that he at least has one shield up even if he's taking Seokjin through his black book of dirty secrets. He would do the same, if he were Yoongi. He would put a pillow between the two of them and look straight ahead, where he would see nothing but his reflection on the television, then the painting of horses chasing after something right above it. He wouldn't even try to risk a glance at Yoongi. Whether in
an attempt to not give more of himself away or just so he could keep himself focused, he isn't sure yet, but he does know that there are a lot of people in his world who live even for only five minutes outside a comfortable protective shell.

So Yoongi isn't that bad. Yoongi isn't one of those people clinging so desperately to the last few shards of his shell; he just knows when to put up his defenses and when to let them down. He's testing the waters for when he feels like reeling Seokjin in and getting soaked in salty water with him. Yoongi is being human, admitting both to himself and to Seokjin that him being a superhero is complete bullshit. He gets things done because he stays in the office for long, long hours. He delivers output at the expense of his own health and sanity. There are sacrifices to be made to get to the top, and Yoongi has decided to sacrifice any hope of him getting more than a few seconds to breathe.

"But what?" Seokjin says, a cool shiver crawling up his spine when he snaps out of his thoughts. He nudges Yoongi lightly, just enough to jostle Yoongi and help him thaw out, then tilts his head as he asks, "But one punch wasn't enough?"

Yoongi scoffs. He breathes out, long and loud, then he's leaning his head on Seokjin's shoulder again, pressing his cheek to Seokjin's skin. Laughing a little there, the vibrations of his movement making Seokjin shiver all over. "Wish I could say 'no', but yeah. I needed more than just one punch. A lot of punches, I mean." He swallows hard, and when Seokjin shifts his gaze a little he finds Yoongi closing his eyes and taking deep breaths, a small smile perched on the corners of his mouth. "I guess the shit they say about family deaths killing part of you is real. It wasn't until... a few months after that, when Heechul-hyung sat me down for a long talk, that I realized what I was doing. It was a splash of reality in my face."

Reality meaning Yoongi losing even more people, the more he said 'yes' to client requests. Reality meaning him not checking in with his family back in Daegu even when he promised them he would try to keep in touch, come over to visit, prove his father wrong. Reality meaning him figuring out that the only thing he needed to do to draw his closest friend back in was to reach for Namjoon's hand and pull him in for a hug. Then take him out for dinner, a long chat, and a couple of drinks that may or may not have made Yoongi create a bad habit out of just one encounter. I can't believe it. I can't believe you'd subject yourself to this is the only thing Seokjin can whisper to himself, again and again as Yoongi tells him about him spending less time rendering extra hours at work and more trying to find himself in little flings in Hongdae, in Jongno, in Itaewon, backed up against the wall and grinding against the knee of some guy he'd managed to fall into a meaningful enough conversation with that he'd been persuaded to jump from giving the man a high-five to sticking his hand down the man's pants because how many people in the world actually hum Charli XCX songs while downing quality scotch? How many people could understand him through music, could understand exactly what he wanted to say but would not ask for more than a kiss? How many people could make him feel warm for a few hours and not question why he even needed arms wrapped around his torso or butterfly kisses covering his chest to make him feel less like hell and just a bit closer back to earth instead of being trapped in his little cave somewhere far away? Exactly how many people could make Yoongi feel not as lonely as before but still a bit more human and not guilty for grieving the loss of his father, a good family life, a more peaceful state of mind?

Seokjin's insides lurch. It feels like a thousand claws digging into his skin and raking on it. It feels like... taking too many punches to the gut, all of them from Yoongi. And the thought of all those people who didn't understand a single thing about Yoongi at all touching Yoongi makes Seokjin's chest grow tight and his throat go dry. It makes him sick. The guy back in that alley a few blocks away fooling around with Yoongi more than once, fucking Yoongi until Yoongi's knees gave away and he had to skip on morning work the following day? Those two other guys joining in on the fun because apparently, Yoongi thought back then that the dull ache in his limbs was much, much better than having to nurse the stinging ache in his chest from the ghosts of January? Hands and mouths
leaving impersonal touches on Yoongi's skin and, ultimately, leaving him with scars that still burn a bright red until now–

God-fucking-dammit– You have no right to touch him. You have no right to even breathe around him. You have no right to ruin him, you fuckers– Seokjin digs his nails into his skin hard enough that he can feel the strain in his knuckles. He breathes out in a low and shaky exhale, eyes fluttering shut until he can feel the back of his eyelids burn. And he'd done it in the hope that he will be able to erase the image of the strained smile on Yoongi's lips, but to no avail – it's still there, burning even brighter than before and making him shiver. He knows he has no right to feel this way, to want to punch every single man Yoongi had been with in all those months that Yoongi tried to find himself in others, but friends can do that, right? Friends have the right to feel like kicking others in the ass for touching their friends in ways that can only hurt them? Friends have the right to get a bit protective of each other? He and Yoongi may not have anything special beyond friendship, bonding over long hours of work spent perfecting ideas and concepts, and a twisted sense of understanding of each other's wants and needs, but that doesn't mean Seokjin can't feel like dying inside just thinking of all the hardships Yoongi had to go through, right? Isn't it just normal for someone to feel almost the same pain as the person who had originally gone through it just by listening to someone else's words?

It is, but not this much, whispers a voice at the back of his mind. That's the problem with you, Jin – you feel too much and do too little, sometimes nothing at all about those feelings eating you up. You're too chicken to do a thing. After all, what's courage without action? What is bravery without actually taking that wide leap and rising from the crash? He swallows hard around the thick lump of words in his throat and takes a deep, deep breath, exhaling only when Yoongi nudges him in his side and says, "You're shaking."

Seokjin shrugs. His body jerks a bit too much, fatigue taking over his senses and snatching control from Seokjin's mind, but it isn't enough to drive Yoongi away yet. It is enough to loosen the fit of their bodies, though, just enough for Seokjin to be able to pull away a little, to allow himself the chance to breathe without taking in the faint scent of whiskey in Yoongi's breath. Or maybe it's his own – they're too close and too linked right now that Seokjin can't tell anymore where either of them ends and begins, if they can both feel each other spilling over to the other in the same way that Yoongi's warmth slowly bleeds on the back of Seokjin's hand where Yoongi is giving him a gentle squeeze.

"Just a bit cold. It's almost winter now," he mutters in response, but makes no effort to shake his hand free from Yoongi's strong grip. Instead, he slides just a bit closer. This time, it's him resting his head on Yoongi's own for a brief second before he looks at Yoongi and meets him in the eye. "Aren't you?"

Yoongi snorts. "I think I'm supposed to since you've just absorbed all of my rage, but nah." He reaches up, brushing his thumb against the corner of Seokjin's eye, and shakes his head. "I can't believe you're crying–"

"I'm not."

"Right. And your cheeks are wet with sweat. That's neatly drawn in a line, by the way. Really cool sweat glands. I'm envious." Yoongi brushes the back of his hand against Seokjin's skin, and Seokjin thinks, Wow, this is hardly being envious. Do you even know what the word means? Where's the audio-visual lock? Where's the cruel Chief Creative Officer who pushes everyone to perfection and pushes himself even harder? Where's the logic in things? But then logic had ceased to exist the moment their bodies aligned back in that conference room, the moment they worked with each other on that pitch that cost Seokjin his sanity and his heart. The only thing that has ever made sense to
Seokjin with Yoongi is the wave of comfort that untangles the knots in his stomach when they sit down and talk over coffee, regardless of the time of the day.

Another light brush, and only then does Seokjin feel the cool, wet patch on his cheek. He shivers. "Sorry for making you go through all this shit, by the way," Yoongi murmurs after a while, still busy with wiping some of Seokjin's not-tears away. "And for finishing your whiskey. I'll make sure to replace--"

"It's okay. I haven't touched that bottle since--" Sending Jeongguk a message on Facebook and not getting a reply even after a week, groans a voice at the back of his mind, but he brushes that off and laughs to himself. Hoseok came over then, out of the blue, with fifteen seasons' worth of episodes of Bleach on his hard drive and a complaint about Jeongguk, That crazy kid, keeps asking stuff but never replying! Is that a habit of his, ignoring everything but what he wants to hear? Is it? Seokjin felt a bit more relieved that his effort to craft a letter that wasn't about him telling Jeongguk that it's okay to reconnect now, he feels nothing like he did a decade back anymore, they can remain just friends if Jeongguk wants to, hadn't completely gone to waste. And he felt a bit sad for Hoseok, because if Hoseok had to spend an hour on the road to crash at Seokjin's place just so he would feel better about things and not just Jeongguk's lack of replies then the situation must have been really bad. "--for a while now. And I don't drink much unless Hobi comes over. He's... mostly responsible for all my alcoholic exploits."

Yoongi tilts his head. "Hobi?" he whispers, then he's shaking his head, waving a hand in front of Seokjin as he says, "No, seriously. Let me just– You weren't supposed to see that, okay. You weren't supposed to get dragged into that mess--"

"It isn't fair, okay," Seokjin grumbles. He feels Yoongi's hand jerk, feels the slight shift in Yoongi's muscles where their bodies are pressed so close to each other. He takes a deep breath, then, tries to part his lips and coax the words out, but all he manages is a sob he'd been pushing further down the whole time Yoongi was taking him through his past, a quicker beat at the base of his throat, Yoongi looking at him wide, wide eyes and a light furrow in his eyebrows that isn't a question that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no'. He'd answer that, but now it's his time to speak up. And Yoongi seems to be more than willing to listen, if the way he relaxes the tense corners of his mouth is any indicator of that. "For someone like you to experience so much pain and suffering--"

"That I brought upon myself," Yoongi says, interrupting, then laughs a little. "I think you're forgetting that. It's alright. Everything's--" "If everything were alright then you wouldn't have looked so--so--" Scared, Seokjin almost says, but he manages to bite that back before he can even make the mistake of surrendering to his emotions too early. So instead, he shakes his head, grits out, 'Nothing's 'alright', okay. It's okay to feel bad or mad or sad or a combination of those. And you didn't– Heechul-hyung and the others were right – you didn't have to go through all those shit alone. You're strong, yes – and I'm being completely honest here, okay; I don't think I've ever met anyone as tough as you are – but you can only do so much on your own? You can't– You're not some superhero who's capable of every damned thing. Sorry to burst your bubble but as much as you are amazing, you're... also human. Disguised as a hero. Yeah, yeah, it's the other way around. But even heroes need to rest. Even heroes... need help sometimes. It's not so bad to ask for help when you really need it."

Yoongi chuckles. His lips are pressed together in a thin, thin line, the corners of his mouth are tight, and his cheeks are trembling from the strain of the smile on his lips, but he doesn't drop the look just yet. You don't have to pretend, though. Drop the fucking cape, dammit, whispers a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind, It's just the two of us here and you know I'll never judge you so please, please stop pretending– But the thoughts fade into silence when Yoongi offers, "Or a sidekick. Maybe all the
hero needs a sidekick."

_Or me?_ chirps a tiny voice inside Seokjin. He pushes that further back and, instead, narrows his eyes a little. "Is this your slave driver tendencies manifesting again?"

Yoongi shakes his head. He stares at Seokjin for a few seconds, just stares and smiles and twists his mouth like he's waiting for... more. For Seokjin to add something to that, to keep trying to lift the heavy air all around them, to reach out and brush the little beads of tears at the corners of Yoongi's eyes? For Seokjin to take that blind leap of faith he was supposed to take months ago, on all those two in the mornings that they spent bobbing their heads to the rhythmic sound of each other's breathing, to the companionable silence they so loved? Seokjin isn't quite sure. He's two more glasses away from feeling the whiskey take control over his sense but he won't be surprised if fatigue and stress evolve the slow crawl of alcohol to his brain into quick, wicked punches to his gut, mind, heart.

He won't be surprised if Yoongi dodges the little question in the way Seokjin lifts his eyebrows, either. _Why do I even know you so well?_ he asks himself, again and again until his breathing evens out. _And why do you let me read you so easily?_

Silence hangs for a few more seconds. Yoongi stays dangerously still, testing and challenging Seokjin's patience. Sick of the standstill, Seokjin pulls away from the lock of gazes and fixes his eyes on the brown liquid swirling in his glass, instead. But then the image of Yoongi haunts him, catches on the rippling surface of the whiskey, and burns brightly at the back of Seokjin's eyelids when he takes a long swig of his drink, shutting his eyes in the process.

"If you were my sidekick, though, you'd probably be the one bossing me around," Yoongi says after a while, reeling Seokjin back in. Seokjin chokes on his drink at the same time that laughter stuns his tongue. The liquid burns at the base of his throat even before he can take a breath or come up with retort and it chokes him up a little, but he doesn't quite feel as restrained by Yoongi slowly wrapping his arms around him, by Yoongi burying his face in the crook of his neck, by the mirrored loud thumping of Yoongi's chest against his, the tight press of their bodies hot, prickling–

–little sparks of electricity lighting up everything around them, setting Seokjin's house aglow, making it feel like home.

Seokjin has a pretty clear idea of how he ended up in the same bed with Yoongi the night – or a few hours – before.

Or maybe it's a bit hazy. The dull ache in his nape and the thundering pulse in his temples make it nigh impossible to backtrack to an hour or two ago. Their drinking session didn't stop with them emptying out Seokjin's whiskey bottle, after all. They'd found a bottle of rum halfway full somewhere in the living room, then a can of beer and an unopened bottle of soju in the crisper of Seokjin's fridge. Yoongi found some chips in Seokjin's cupboards and even commented at how Seokjin's kitchen was a perfect contrast to the state of his living room. "If there was a Dewy Decimal Classification System for food, this would probably be it," Yoongi had said, then gave the liquid in his glass a light swirl. Seokjin had followed the motion up until Yoongi brought the glass closer to his lips, closer to danger. "You should have this patented or something. It's pretty cool. And helpful for starving people like me."
Seokjin had rolled his eyes, then stuffed a few pieces of cheese puffs in Yoongi's mouth. Never mind that this was probably going to appear in his evaluation if Yoongi ever got pissed off with him close to his evaluation date – it was the only way he could keep Yoongi from saying... something weird. Yoongi had done it a handful of times during the course of their conversation, involving Seokjin in some of his plans for the company, for his creatives, for the people he trusted the most. And judging by how Yoongi was already tipsy but not enough to pass out on Seokjin's couch, Seokjin was certain he had to find a way to make Yoongi shut up somehow.

"There. Not starving anymore. Happy now?" Seokjin had muttered after a while, and Yoongi's only response was a small smile, soft crinkles at the corners of his eyes, a peculiar glimmer in them when he squinted a little. Half of Seokjin wanted to know what the words running through Yoongi's mind were because Yoongi was always thinking about words, sentences, ideas, but half of him was too caught up feeling the warmth blooming on Yoongi's lips where the pads of his fingers were pressed to.

And then a larger fraction of him, the one that kept him from looking away from the gentle swell of Yoongi's mouth, the same lips he'd kissed earlier to drive the evil people away and to save the day the way heroes would, wanted to know how alcohol would taste on Yoongi's lips, if rum would taste much sweeter on Yoongi's tongue or ten times more bitter when Yoongi pushed him away.

But Yoongi didn't. Yoongi loosened his hold on Seokjin's wrist, splayed out his fingers atop Seokjin's own from time to time, but not once did he make an effort to push Seokjin away. The closest to having enough distance between them the entire night was Yoongi making a beeline for the cupboards when Seokjin gave him permission to 'raid' his kitchen. Other than that–other than that–

"Mhmm. Definitely, Yoongi whispered, then licked his lips. The tip of his tongue grazed Seokjin's thumb. Seokjin tried hard not to shiver, but it was difficult when every part of him was screaming for respite, when all the voices in his head were screeching, Come on, Jin, you know you want more than just that. So lean in. Move closer. You've got nothing to lose. "Much, much happier."

Thirty minutes and a few more empty bottles of liquor after, they were sauntering to Seokjin's room, berating themselves out in the open for drinking too much and sleeping too little. Promising each other to not tell anyone they'd decided to walk outside for fifteen, twenty minutes at ass o' clock in the morning at the cusp of autumn and winter, and that they'd even decided to drink more than just one glass of whiskey in an effort to thaw out their frozen limbs. "Why do I always do weird things when I'm with you?" Seokjin had whispered to himself, heaving a sigh as he propped up the pillows and arranged them on his bed, and the next thing he knew Yoongi was poking his cheek, cradling it with his warm hand, drumming beats on his skin with the quick pulse on his palm. "What?"

"You said–" Yoongi took a deep, shaky breath. He bit down on his lower lips, wrinkled his nose a little, then he was dragging his gaze south, down, down, down until he had already traced a straight line from the tip of Seokjin's nose down to the swell of his mouth, then the column of Seokjin's neck. "What did you just say?"

Something stupid, Seokjin had almost blurted out, but he managed to choke that back and, instead, answer, "Nothing. You're just drunk. Sleep. You need it."

"So do you."

Seokjin heaved a sigh. "I am sleeping, just not here," he murmured as Yoongi slipped beneath the coverlets. Slowly, he pulled the covers up to Yoongi's torso, then his chest, stopping only when Yoongi wrapped his fingers on Seokjin's clenched fist. "I'm gonna check on you in ten minutes, and if I don't see you sleeping then I'll–"
"You'll what, punch me in the face and knock me out?" Yoongi snarled. Seokjin frowned in response, stuck out his tongue, but the tremble of his hand cocooned in Yoongi's own was saying something else. Something... worse. Soon, Yoongi was loosening his hold, dropping his hand to the sheets, and squinting up at Seokjin as he furrowed his eyebrows. A part of Seokjin wanted to... lean in and run his thumbs along Yoongi's creased forehead, ease the tension there, but a part of him wanted to— "Why don't you just sleep with me? I mean here, in the room. Same bed. Your bed."

Because we've had a lot to drink and I'm stupid enough to give myself reasons to commit more mistakes? "We won't fit. I mean, you're tiny and pocket-sized but I'm... long."

Yoongi snorted. A corner of his mouth quirked up, but his eyes were still dark, hooded, barricaded. It sort of felt as if Yoongi was pushing Seokjin further out... or was he coaxing Seokjin to come closer because he knew Seokjin loved inspecting things, dissecting them, learning about them with his own hands? Seokjin gulped hard. Yoongi made him do silly things, alright, and one of them was thinking of how it would have been if he did slip beneath the covers with Yoongi, wrap his arms around Yoongi's slip torso, breathed Yoongi in and just stayed there, in the fit of their bodies, the entire night, memorizing the steady thumping in Yoongi's chest.

"'Tiny' is okay, but 'pocket-sized', really?" Yoongi rolled his eyes. A deep breath, then he was patting the space beside him. "Come on, we can make things work. You've slept on Namjoon's couch before, right? The one in his office? If you were able to fit there—"

"No," Seokjin said through gritted teeth, and immediately Yoongi was looking at him with wide, wide eyes. Yoongi lifted his eyebrows slowly, tentatively, bit the inside of his cheek, but his hands remained in an awkward cross between spread out on the warm comforters and curled into tight fists. And Seokjin knew better that to breathe meaning into something that probably meant nothing but Yoongi feeling a bit uncomfortable being in someone else's bed in his drunken stupor, so instead of reaching out to pull up at the corners of Yoongi's mouth to draw a smile, he dug his hands in his pockets, shied away, cleared his throat. "I mean, I just... really move around a lot when I sleep and I don't want you to get hurt so just... Yeah. I'll–I'll be okay sleeping on the couch. You have a nice, good rest here. The pillows are really soft and comfy and—"

Yoongi made a small, gurgling sound at the back of his throat. For a second, Seokjin wondered if Yoongi planned on saying more, but Yoongi was eerily silent. His lips were pressed to a thin, thin line, and his eyes were dark again and his eyebrows were slanted in this gentle furrow that Seokjin hadn't seen in a while. The last time he did, it was ten in the morning in the office pantry and Yoongi had almost toppled over the three-tiered cupcake holder they had arranged the treats Seokjin had baked the night before on.

The last time he did, there was the threat of people walking in on them, seeing them caught in a messy tangle of stares. There was a 70% chance of people finding out whatever it was that they were supposed to be hiding. But now they weren't hiding from anyone anymore. No one was going to catch them exchanging long, meaningful looks. No one was going to tell them off for wasting time studying each other from a safe distance. It was just the two of them and the silence pulling them closer yet pushing them farther from each other in equal amounts.

"I'm... going," Seokjin whispered after a while, then looked away, breaking the spell. He smoothed out the creases on the blanket pulled up to Yoongi's shoulders, then took a step back. "Good night. Or morning. We get up in two hours so—"

Yoongi reached over and wrapped his fingers around Seokjin's wrist. On a normal day, if Yoongi was in a rush, he would probably tugging at it already, telling Seokjin exactly what he wanted and needed, but nothing had ever been normal ever since Seokjin walked past the doors of BBDO.
Nothing had ever been the same since Seokjin had to stuff that stupid cupcake in his mouth, since Yoongi laughed at him from the foot of the stairs, since chance encounters at two in the morning turned into planned coffee sessions in the pantry. And part of Seokjin was scared, so damn scared of changes, of what would happen to him if he ever fucked up because he hadn't planned things thoroughly, but somehow Yoongi made every mistake feel a lot like learning very important lessons in life.

Yoongi made even the toughest losses – of sanity, control, of restraint – feel like victory.

Yoongi shifted in his position, moving to his side just a bit more to make space on the bed. The stretch was probably difficult – Seokjin could feel Yoongi's pulse quickening against his skin, could feel the shift in Yoongi's muscles when Yoongi tightened his hold on Seokjin and gave his wrist a light tug. Yoongi still hadn't said a thing, was just pulling him closer in quick little breaths, but the light furrow of his eyebrows, his soft gaze, his lips pulled down in what seemed to be a frown were all pleading, please, please, please come closer.

Seokjin took a deep, shaky breath. Somewhere between his insides lurching at the sight of Yoongi trying, trying, trying so hard to pull up the corners of his mouth into a smile and a powerful shiver crawling up his nape, settling there, and leaving a nasty stinging sensation on his skin, he decided, You know what? Fuck this. Taking one step forward, then, he closed his eyes and let Yoongi pull him down, breathe him in, whisper in his ear in a voice so soft, he could have just been breathing, "Thank you."

He laced his fingers between Yoongi's own, then pulled Yoongi even closer, until he could feel the heavy thumping in Yoongi's chest on his skin. And Yoongi buried his face in Seokjin's back even more, mouthing words Seokjin wish Yoongi would air out in the open, instead.

What Seokjin doesn't know, however, is how they somehow managed end up with their arms around each other, Yoongi snoring against Seokjin's chest and Seokjin waking up to the scent of sweat and coffee in Yoongi's hair. Not that he minds – he's woken up in worse positions before, most of them making him end up with sore limbs and his shirt sticking to his skin – but Yoongi won't like this. He probably won't like this. It's half past six in the morning and sure, Seokjin's nursing a hangover that will last for hours, but he can't blame this on alcohol. Somewhere between the two of them melting in the fit of their bodies and their fatigue taking control over their limbs, they couldn't have made an agreement to disentangle themselves from each other only to wrap their arms around each other again in a fit that allowed them no escape. It didn't–doesn't make sense.

Seokjin takes one look at Yoongi's sleeping face, at the small smile curled up at the corners of his lips, at the light fluttering movement at the back of Yoongi's eyelids, and his insides do that funny lurch again, except this time it isn't as funny. It claws at the walls of his stomach, makes acid surge up Seokjin's throat, makes Seokjin taste blood and metal and everything that isn't Yoongi at the back of his teeth.

Get up, he tells himself when Yoongi shifts. Yoongi stretches out, ankles unhooking from where they'd been attached to Seokjin's own, and buries his face in the bunched up comforters near Seokjin's chest. Get up, walk away, don't even think of looking back–

Which is why he runs to the train station in the first pair of jeans that he sees, the boots he'd worn the night before, and the only coat hanging on the rack because he can't be caught in this state. Yoongi can't see him like this – a mess, without any sense of control over his limbs, his thoughts, his very own emotions. What he has to do right now is to head to Hoseok's place for... for... "For what?" he grumbles to himself as he swipes his train pass on the turnstile and dashes to the platform when he hears a familiar tune playing in the background. If he had the slightest idea why he felt the need to
pull away then he probably would have stayed in his own house a little longer and cooked a proper breakfast for Yoongi instead of fishing for leftovers from his fridge and arranging them at the center of his dining table so Yoongi wouldn't miss the food. If he had any idea why he felt so compelled to not give into Yoongi’s warmth just yet even if they were already so close to each other then he would have pulled Yoongi out of bed instead of leaving him a note that said, "Sorry for heading out much earlier than expected. There's food in the kitchen. See you at work! :)")" If he had the slightest idea why he even felt the need to give Yoongi 'space' or 'time to breathe' from the perfect fit of their bodies then honestly, he’d be cuddling with Yoongi a little longer instead of ambushing his best friend at such an early hour.

It doesn't have to mean anything. It... shouldn't. Yet Seokjin won't deny that every single fiber in his body wants the warm, snug fit of their limbs, wants Yoongi's contented sigh, wants the way Yoongi's arms automatically would around his waist when he tried to pull away to mean everything.

"O...kay," Hoseok says now as he peeks from the narrow opening of his door. His shirt hangs off his shoulders, leaning a bit more to the left than the right, and there's still saliva at the corners of his mouth. He rubs his eyes, squints, and leans in as if in an attempt to check and double-check if it is indeed Seokjin at his doorstep at almost eight in the morning. It's almost as if he's... confused, disoriented, like he isn't acquainted with the concept of letting people into his life at eight in the morning anymore. Seokjin can see it in the way Hoseok twists his mouth, wrinkles his nose, tilts his head as if a change in perspective will make him see more clearly. He doesn't blame Hoseok, though; the last time either of them caught the other awake and alive enough to function at eight in morning was when they were still university, when they were much younger and, thereby, a lot less prone to regretting silly things they'd done the night before. "So you... went all the way to Bundang at ass o’ clock in the morning just to tell me that you kissed some... guy and you liked it. A lot. Alright. Cool. Good for you." He rubs the tip of his nose then mumbles, "Now, can I go back to bed?"

Seokjin shakes his head. "No, I mean, you can go back to bed. Or not. Not yet. I mean–" He heaves a sigh. "It's my boss," he continues after a while, hoping it will somehow make things better, but all he gets from Hoseok is wide eyes and his lips parting into a small, small 'o'. At least Hoseok isn't retreating back to his room and throwing his blankets over his head yet. Then again, Hoseok has never walked away from him. Hoseok has never even looked the other way when Seokjin needed someone to listen. "Not Joonmyun-hyung, God. I'm long past that--" He huffs. "I mean–I mean, my–"

He heaves a sigh. How does one even describe the weird, twisted relationship he has with Yoongi? The easiest answer is that they're boss and employee, that Yoongi is the Chief Creative Officer and Seokjin is an accounts supervisor that sort of functions as an accounts director, what with all the tasks that Joonmyun has been giving him these past few weeks. Yoongi is the same guy who laughed at Seokjin on his first day, when Seokjin stuffed an entire goddamned muffin in his mouth in a silly attempt to save his dessert from the evil clutches of the creatives. Yoongi is the guy who helped Seokjin get out of his sticky situation with his ex and asked before kissing him instead of just sweeping him off his feet, "Can I kiss you?" Can I slowly make some space for myself in your life? Won't you please let me in? And Seokjin's stupid enough to give in, let Yoongi pry his lips open with the gentle coax of his tongue, let Yoongi leave scars and marks on his mouth, his chest, his heart.

The slightly trickier one would be Yoongi is... Yoongi. Yoongi is someone Seokjin feels completely comfortable with, but someone who makes his insides turn in a funny lurch, as well. Yoongi is someone he can talk to when his brain feels like exploding, when there are too many things and thoughts and voices running through his mind and only Yoongi can calm them down with choice words, with his soft, barely there smile. Yoongi is someone he will, without a doubt, head into battle for, with or without ample sleep, because he knows Yoongi is the type of person who would risk his integrity, his name, his life for his subordinates, his co-workers, his friends.
Yoongi is everything Seokjin never knew he needed, wanted in his life. And Yoongi is the same damned asshole who fucked with his system of emotions, the same person sleeping in his bed now, possibly waiting at home for Seokjin to make breakfast, lend Yoongi a change of clothes, for him.

"We... kissed. Twice," he whispers after a while, the words spilling from his lips without preamble. His chest feels so tight and the pulse at the base of his throat is beating so damn fast and damnit, Min Yoongi, how dare you shake me up like this. How dare– "Granted, we needed it on both occasions and we used it to cover our asses, but–"

But they were supposed to pull away at the first opportunity. But they weren't supposed to hold on for more than a second longer, authenticity be damned. But Yoongi wasn't supposed to chase after Seokjin's lips in the same way that Seokjin wasn't supposed to press another kiss to the crown of Yoongi's hair because if they were just trading kisses then it wasn't fair for Yoongi to get another one, even if it wasn't to his lips. It wasn't fair for Yoongi to return it with hands balled in Seokjin's shirt and knuckles digging into Seokjin's skin, with his face buried in Seokjin's chest and his faint, whispered 'thank you's' making Seokjin shiver all over. It wasn't fair for Yoongi to leave more scars on him as if the old marks he'd left – the taste of coffee and strawberry in Seokjin's mouth, the dull ache in Seokjin's jaw, the biting, stinging pain in Seokjin's chest – weren't enough already.

"But you're making me breakfast. And coffee. And kimchi jjigae, while you're at it," Hoseok whispers. He wraps his fingers around Seokjin wrist, tugs at it gently, and gives Seokjin's arm a light squeeze for insurance. Guides Seokjin inside his house like Seokjin doesn't have this place memorized like the back of his mind yet, but just in case, Jin, just in case. He doesn't trust himself to make smart decisions or to recognize places as an extension of home at eight in the morning. Right now, he isn't even sure if he trusts himself to give Hoseok an accurate account of what has been happening these past few months, of what has been happening between him and Yoongi from the time they ran into each other in the elevator until just this morning, but he can try. "Real talk, though: is he hot?"

Seokjin stops in his tracks and scoffs. "Does it matter?"

Hoseok laughs, rough and low. For a second, Seokjin thinks he sees something flash across Hoseok's features – surprise in the way Hoseok leans back a little, just enough to let Seokjin breathe a bit easier? A realization in the way he widens his eyes a little, parts his lips, sucks in a deep, violent breath? Seokjin isn't sure. All he's certain of is that he feels much warmer being in a familiar place, but nothing quite rivals the warmth that had seeped into his skin when he was tangled in the sheets with Yoongi earlier, their chests pressed so close together, their heartbeats falling into step with each other even as Seokjin fast caught up with the morning while sunrise lulled Yoongi into a deeper sleep.

"Well, if he wasn't hot the you probably won't be running to me at shit o' clock in the morning, but–" Hoseok shakes his head. He slides his hand south, resting it on the small of Seokjin's back, but even that feels so different from the way Yoongi had wrapped his arms around Seokjin only an hour ago and whispered again and again, voice muffled by the material of Seokjin's shirt, Make it stop. Please, make it stop. Make them go away— Seokjin shakes that off, though, and focuses on Hoseok's warmth, on the way Hoseok rubs slow circles on his back as Hoseok continues, "Whatever. And I wasn't kidding when I said you were going to cook for me, hyung. Not even my boss can call me up at eight and expect me to function at such an hour. And, well, the few times that he did, he bought me food."

Seokjin heaves a sigh. "But I'm you best friend," he argues. It doesn't faze Hoseok, though. If anything, it only lends Hoseok a twisted sort of courage, only makes Hoseok reach out to flick at the tip of Seokjin's nose. He stick out his tongue when Seokjin snarls at him in retaliation. "Which makes
me more important, right?" Seokjin groans after a while, "I don't have to, I dunno, prove my worth to you or anything just so you'll make time for me, right? I don't have to earn your respect or anything because I know I already have--"

"Cook," Hoseok says through gritted teeth, then offers Seokjin a tight smile. He heads to where the fridge is, taking out different ingredients that would probably excite Seokjin on a normal day, but this is not a normal day at all. His sense of time is so screwed and he has a presentation in an hour and yet he's exactly an hour away from his workplace. Great. You're doomed.

"And that was a legitimate question, by the way," Hoseok adds after a while, then reaches over to poke Seokjin's cheek, to snap Seokjin out of his trance and reel him back to the reality that he's been trying to decipher since the time he woke up in Yoongi's arms. "If that's too hard to answer then... was he that good with his words? You've always liked good conversationalists. Or, I dunno, did he do stuff to sweep you off your feet or something? Because hyung–hyung." Hoseok lets out a long and heavy sigh. "The last time this happened--"

Was when Jeongguk was still in Seoul, sitting right beside Seokjin as he drummed his fingers on his laptop's keyboard. Only physically, though, because his mind and heart were elsewhere. But then Seokjin couldn't blame him. The kid wanted to pursue his dreams. Opportunity was being presented to him and all he had to do was to reply to an email that Seokjin slyly, oh so slyly, kept Jeongguk from answering. If Seokjin were much more selfish and courageous then he would have told Jeongguk upfront, Oh come on, you don't have to fly all the way to Tokyo just to fulfill your dreams! You can do that right here, Jeonggukkie, right here. You just have to... search high and low for a good university that offers animation classes. You just have to try and work extra hard! You don't have to leave behind the people you care about, Kookie, so please. Please--

Don't leave me.

So to answer Hoseok's question: yes but no but yes. Yes, Yoongi's crazy attractive and has eyes that can pierce people's defenses, but no, that isn't how he got Seokjin so hooked. Yes, Yoongi's so, so good with his words, but no, he sucks at enunciating his innermost thoughts and his emotions. Yes, Yoongi has swept him off his feet, makes him feel like flying, has made him feel amazing again, but at the same time Yoongi questions his little bouts of mediocrity and challenges him to outdo his best performance, his best take. Yoongi keeps pushing him forward when he feels like slumping against the wall already and giving up.

Yoongi thinks – no, Yoongi believes in him. Yoongi might just be his biggest fan, and damn if that isn't the best thing that has happened to Seokjin since he handed in his resignation letter and left.

"Yes. To everything," Seokjin whispers after a while, then takes a deep, shaky breath. He drops his gaze to the ingredients in front of him, to the empty bowls waiting on the counter, to a stove that's so familiar to him already but isn't quite like the one he has at home, where Yoongi is. "But that's not the point."

It isn't until he's done cooking stew that he speaks up. More like, it isn't until all the ingredients are in the pot and swimming in boiling water that Hoseok starts shooting him curious glances again. Years of friendship have taught Hoseok that it isn't wise to shake Seokjin up when he still has knives and other tools on his side (and food; food is powerful, Seokjin knows this better than most). Years of friendship have ingrained in Hoseok that the only thing Seokjin likes better than food is companionable silence, as well. So while Seokjin busies himself with the stew and the side dishes and what else do you want, kid?, Hoseok takes it upon himself to make them a nice pot of brewed coffee. "I said, what else do you want?"

"I already cooked rice. And... I think I still have dried fish in the fridge? So I just have to take that
out and chop some yellow radish–"

Seokjin heaves a sigh. "I said," he grits out, pressing his lips into a thin, thin line Hoseok addresses him with wide eyes and a small, discerning smile."What else do you want?"

"For you to stop making frowny faces at the food because that will make the stew taste really bad," Hoseok mutters. Slowly, he pulls away from where he's just pressed the 'start' button on the coffee machine and settles right next to Seokjin, leaning against the counter. Their elbows brush, but it doesn't send jolts of electricity up Seokjin's arm. Or is his body just numb to flashes of pain now? Is it just too early in the morning for his body to be registering that Hey, you can react to other things, you know, just not the boy who's probably still sleeping in your bed and– Have you given him a wake up call yet? "Fine, fine, I'm caving. Who's the guy? I haven't seen you like this in years. Must be someone really special, huh?"

Seokjin snorts. "Special," he whispers, and shivers when he hears the bubbles in the stew popping. Jimin's special in that he's the only accounts executive Seokjin fully trusts (he will never let the others know, though; he has a reputation as a nice and fair supervisor to uphold). Joonmyun is special, as well, in that he's the only reason why Seokjin even considered being sucked into his hell hole of a job. And, well, maybe Namjoon and Heechul and Baekhyun and Taehyung are kind of special, as well, in the sense that Seokjin trusts them to deliver if and when needed, but Yoongi– "I wouldn't call Yoongi 'special', to be honest? Like, we do... normal stuff officemates would and I guess that doesn't make anything 'special' at all, but–"

"Wait. Yoongi? Min Yoongi?" Hoseok blinks a few times. He shifts in his position, leans in as if checking if Seokjin's telling the truth because You have a... standard bluffing face, hyung. Which means you suck at lying. Which probably explains why you don't even try to lie to people anymore. Which... should be good, really, except you won't be able to screw with people's minds when you need to. There's a violent upward tug pulling up at the corners of Hoseok's mouth, reaching his eyes and making them crinkle at the corners. If Seokjin only had enough sleep then he'd readily assume Hoseok's seconds away from cackling and bursting into laughter, but he doesn't trust his senses that much right now. Heck, he probably trusts his heart more than his mind at the moment. Or his gut. His gut never lies. "Min Yoongi as in... tiny guy with a resting bitch face? Min Yoongi... the creative who wears loose shirts and loose coats and silly hats all the time?" Hoseok laughs, scoffs, shakes his head. Twists his mouth until he's caught between scowling and smiling in disbelief. "He's back? For real?"

"People thought I was dead. Imagine the look on their faces when I showed up at work at 9 a.m. for the first time in months," Seokjin recalls Yoongi telling him last night. They were lounging in the couch then, Yoongi with his head on Seokjin's chest and Seokjin with his eyes flitting from the empty bottles in liquor on the table, on the bags of chips on the floor, on their reflection on the television where the fit of their bodies looked a bit more intimate than it should be, on everything that wasn't way Yoongi kept reaching for Seokjin's hand like he needed to hold onto it for dear life. A voice in his head kept urging him to ask Yoongi why he felt so, so comfortable melting into Seokjin's touch like this, but the more rational echoes in his brain kept saying, Do yourself a favor and just... take things for what they are. Stop reading between the lines. But if you really must, read 'em out loud so that Yoongi can hear you and answer that stupid question you've long been wanting to ask him. "And imagine Heechul-hyung's screeching when he realized he didn't have to do my work anymore and he could focus on doing just creative jobs again. It felt like Easter, man. It felt like... Christmas or something."

Seokjin had laughed, then buried his face in Yoongi's hair. If he sniffed hard enough, he would probably be able to smell the coffee in Yoongi's scalp, but right now there was nothing but sweat and alcohol and Seokjin. "I bet," he whispered, then closed his eyes. Pushed the strings of questions
threatening to spill from his lips to the back of his teeth and, instead, blurted out, *"It's always nice having you around."*

"Yeah. He... got back around the same time I started at BBDO. Or maybe a few months prior? He was still involved in a few pitches from two years ago, though," Seokjin answers after a while. He looks to his side, pulling away for a bit to stir the stew and add more gochujang, to still the thundering pulse at the base of his throat and in his chest. His palms are bit sweaty and his hands are shaking a little. He can always blame it on the lack of sleep. Alternatively, he can blame it on his mind that keeps relapsing to a few hours ago, back home, to Yoongi. *"The entire year before that, he was--"*

"On a long, long break, yeah. Everyone was talking about it. People even thought he was gonna retire already. He's young and all, around our age, but the guy *never stops working.* He's bound to burn out, somehow. *Not that I wish he never came back--"* Hoseok reaches up, brushing his knuckles against the curve of Seokjin’s cheek all of a sudden. The contact is light enough, but Seokjin can feel Hoseok trembling lightly, can feel the aftershocks of Hoseok's laughter spilling onto his skin. *"Chill, hyung,"* Hoseok begins, then he's giving Seokjin's cheek a light pinch. *"I glad he's still around, okay? He's an inspiration. And geez, I'm not taking your boy away from you. I couldn't even look him in the eye when he was my associate creative director back in Saatchi. He fried my ass every damn day--"*

*Your boy.* Seokjin gulps hard at the same time that his insides turn. It isn't the first time anyone has ever attached Yoongi's name to him – Jimin has done that at least a hundred times before, whenever he complains about Yoongi's inability to commit to deadlines that weren't set by Seokjin, *"I swear to God, hyung, if your CCD wasn't actually amazing, I'd have plotted his death already. By candies. Because he won't give me some even if I begged for them. I'm gonna stuff those candies in his mouth and--"* – but hearing someone he's known practically all his life call Yoongi his, hearing Hoseok put his and Yoongi's names alongside each other and tie them up nicely with a single possessive term– *"He was your ACD back in Saatchi?"

Hoseok cocks an eyebrow at him for a while. *Dodging, eh?* the gentle lift of his eyebrow is saying, but Hoseok shrugs off that comment, rolls his eyes, instead, when Seokjin frowns at him in retaliation. *"Only a few months. A lot of new brands came in and, well, y'know what happens to the good people. They get the brunt of the dirty work for new biz because, well, the bosses need to make sure that we give the new clients more reasons to stick with us even after their contract with us has elapsed."* Hoseok cracks his neck, then tilts his head in the direction of the stew. Seokjin shifts in his position in response, checking the red liquid in the pot that he'd added more vegetables to just a few minutes ago, then lets his eyes flit to his wrist watch. It's half past the hour now. Thirty more minutes and he will have to be in the office with Yoongi so they can enlighten everyone on how they had revamped the initial idea for the Innisfree project and– *"Aaand he got promoted to creative director really quick. No surprise, though – the man's got the mind of a crazy genius."

Hoseok sucks in his bottom lip, but a corner of his mouth curls up anyway. Seokjin knows this look. He recalls it from... the only time he ever let Hoseok visit his old workplace, when Hoseok took one look at Joonmyun and immediately knew that Seokjin may or may not have been harboring a small, innocent crush on his boss only two months into being employed and working with him. *"Mhmm. Makes sense,"* Hoseok had said out of the blue that time, and Seokjin's knee-jerk reaction was to stomp at Hoseok's foot so hard that it made Hoseok yelp and alarmed even Joonmyun *"I'm sorry promise I won't do it again I'm gonna stick to the fucking best friend code and--"*

*"He saw it, didn't he?"* Hoseok asks after a while. Seokjin blinks a few times. He can hear the stew boiling just beside him and he's concerned that the kimchi will end up getting soggy once overcooked and he's fast losing time the more he spends his minutes trying to dissect his own
emotions, but Hoseok's gaze is focused, discerning. If there's absolutely one look that Seokjin both loves and hates on Hoseok, it's this – one where Hoseok seems as if he's figured everything out long before Seokjin can even connect point C to D without seeking help from anyone. "You're not even emotionally constipated, hyung. You just like torturing yourself until you finally realize you're deserving of the things you've been working hard for, of the things you want," Hoseok had told him before, and for the longest time he took offense in that. Only now, when Hoseok gives him a gentle nudge, a soft smile, another pinch on the cheek, and a faint 'hey', does he realize that Hoseok wasn't really making fun of his inability to feel things, or his penchant for hurting himself.

Hoseok was actually trying to tell him that it was okay to want things, and to get what he wants.

"Well, I doubt you willingly showed him your drawings and designs, but I'm pretty sure you've worked with him a lot of times already. And as dead to the world as he is, he's not blind to talent. He knows it when he sees it, and he'll help you hone that until you're shitting good ideas the way he does. So!" Hoseok gives Seokjin one last pinch in his side, and that's when Seokjin lets out a low groan and twists his knuckles in Hoseok's stomach. "What? I'm just saying—Come on! You walk up to me at eight in the morning, saying, 'ah, Hobi, my boss and I kissed twice and I really liked it and whoops, he's actually Min Yoongi who doesn't even let people touch him unless he's completely comfortable with them!' and you seriously expect me to just wait for ten damned years for you to realize what that actually means?"

Seokjin huffs. Shoves his free hand, curled into a light fist, in Hoseok's stomach, in a weak, weak jab that might as well be a poor excuse for a pat on the tummy. "I'm not asking what it means. I'm asking why it has to mean something, Seokjin wants to argue, but soon Hoseok is saying, "Fine. If I have to take you through a step-by-step thing again, the same way that I did ten years ago, then here goes: do you want to kiss him again?"

Seokjin looks up. The small smile on Hoseok's lips has bloomed into a wicked grin now, one big enough that he fears it might just rip through Hoseok's features if Hoseok every decided to cackle or laugh. Hoseok's hand atop his own, though, pulling his clenched fist away, is warm, though, soft, almost gentle. It's as if Hoseok is telling him, We don't have to go through this thing in a rush, but we have to do it right now. So take deep breaths and just... Let's do step one first, okay? Step one: fucking answer my question. It's not that hard. Alternatively, Hyung, you already know deep in your heart the answer that you're looking for. You just have to say it out loud, to yourself. Then, when your thoughts stop stuttering, to Yoongi.

"If it means Ahreum harassing me or bumping into those evil guys again, no," he murmurs after a while. When Hoseok cocks an eyebrow at him, he says, "Our evil exes. Though Ahreum has a new boy now – I saw her the other day and—"

"Don't change the subject."

He grumbles. "I said 'no' already, okay? So—"

"So, do you want to fuck him?"

He leans back a little and furrows his eyebrows. Easy question, really – he can answer with a 'no' in a heartbeat – but he's suddenly hit with the realization that apart from maybe, maybe, maybe wanting to kiss Yoongi again and again, be it in his house or in the pantry or in the conference room where there isn't anything but sheets of Manila papers taped to the glass walls to shield them from the rest of the world, he's never had any desire to strip Yoongi of his clothes, get into Yoongi's pants, have Yoongi bend him over the desk and fuck him until he couldn't feel his legs anymore. In fact–

"That looks like a 'no'. Okay, then. Do you want to... I dunno, hold his hand? Curl up with him in
bed? Pull him in for a hug when he looks too glum and grumpy and tired? Do you want to... talk to him for hours and hours even if he sounds like the type who only talks when he wants to? Do you want to make him proud by actually picking up art again and, well, joining his team? By doing more creative things? By doing what you want? Tell me, hyung: do you want to be the reason he smiles every breathing moment?"

Seokjin gulps hard and sucks in a deep, shaky breath. The stew is already boiling violently and it's closer to nine in the morning now than eight and he has adult responsibilities to attend to, but his knees feel weak. His chest is heavy and his throat is dry and the only thing that registers in his mind now is yes, yes, yes.

"Do you want to make him happy?"

"No."

Joonmyun rolls his eyes and heaves a sigh. On a normal day, Seokjin would be feeling a bit guilty about having to turn down Joonmyun's request for help in about six or seven seconds, but he can still feel the last dregs of alcohol poking at his temples and agitating the pulse there, can still feel a dull ache in his joints and his ankles that he almost twisted in a rush to get to work from Hoseok's place. The stew was supposed to help him feel more energized to tackle his tasks for the day even with only two hours of sleep but dammit, he shouldn't have trusted Hoseok. He should have known better than to let his friend slyly con him into staying longer by making him cook his favorite food for his 'favorite person in the world' even if he was nursing a splitting headache and wailing voices in his head, screaming a familiar name. He should've– He should've probably just stayed at home and waited for Yoongi to wake up and--

"No. He gulps hard and presses his lips into a thin, thin line. And maybe he's doing something else with his face because Joonmyun's looking at him with worried eyes and a small frown on his lips, but whatever. He'll help out with the pitch for the entire Hyundai account and not just Hyundai motors, try to win BBDO one of the biggest businesses in the entirety of South Korea and secure them the Best in Business Performance award, but he will not sign up for another two, three months of very little to no sleep by leading the pitch. He'll offer his ideas and let himself be pulled into brainstormings, but no way in hell is he taking on the responsibility of making sure everything runs smoothly and that all the other pitch team members come out of the presentation alive. Heck, he'll even gladly off-load every single person in the accounts team of a few brands, but he will never ever agree to heading a pitch again. He's done with digging his own grave. All he wants to dig right now is he nails into his skin just to make sure that he hadn't reacted to Joonmyun's statement earlier wrongly.

He's not selling his soul again to the devil. Hell to the fucking no.

"Hey. Hey! Come on--" Joonmyun calls out after him, mimicking his actions and getting up from his seat, as well. Seokjin paces around the area, tries to walk backwards until he feels the foot of the stairs to the third floor against his ankles, but all he ever ends up doing is falling on his ass really hard. Not the best way to wake himself up. Definitely not better than waking up with Yoongi's face buried in his chest, Yoongi's lips leaving marks on his skin through his shirt-- "Look, it will be for your own good. Not everyone gets to handle a pitch as big as that--"
"Because not everyone is crazy enough to say 'yes' to his boss' weird ideas. Hyung, please—" Seokjin grunts as he pushes himself off the floor, the dull ache in his knees blooming into a nasty stabbing pain in his joints. *Fuck old age,* is his first thought; his second, *I'm never gonna let Yoongi drag me into any of his bad ideas again, ever.* "But thank you as always for the trust. It really means a lot and I'm glad you acknowledge my top-notch organization skills, but—"

Joonmyun reaches out, wrapping his fingers around Seokjin's wrists and pulling him up. It's just forceful enough to help Seokjin get back to his feet, but not enough to leave nasty burning marks on his skin. It doesn't make a weird, tingling sensation crawl up Seokjin's arm, either. If it had been Yoongi then Seokjin would probably be shivering already, but *dammit, Jin, focus on the task at hand. You're in the office and you just came from a rescheduled meeting and you're not supposed to think about whatever happens after office hours, back at home, with a certain tiny guy—"

"But just imagine, Jin. Imagine," Joonmyun begins. He gives Seokjin's arm a gentle squeeze when Seokjin doesn't budge, doesn't even make a sound or look up to meet his gaze. "You'll get to connect with more people, widen your sphere of influence, get to... interact more with the people you'll eventually be working with once you get promoted to account director for total Hyundai—"

Seokjin's body gives a violent jerk. *Nah, you're probably just dreaming,* a voice at the back of his head says, but there's no mistaking the small smile at the corners of Joonmyun's lips when they lock gazes, the gentle crinkles at the corners of Joonmyun's eyes when Joonmyun chuckles, Joonmyun's thundering pulse pressed to Seokjin's skin and tapping quick beats there like a song. "W...ait. Account director? Hyung, I think you're mistaken. You can't just promote me like that. I mean—" *I mean, it's too early, everything's happening too fast, and if you bump me up to account director then I'll be stuck with Hyundai for the rest of my life here in BBDO and—" Thank you for the offer, but why?"

"Here you are again with your why's." Joonmyun shakes his head, narrows his eyes, furrows his eyebrows a little, but the smile on his lips remains, lighting up his otherwise dark and weary features. "Why can't you just turn those into why not's?"

*Because nothing is supposed to be easy,* Seokjin wants to reason out. Sure, he's been working really hard, has been slaving all over projects for brands that aren't even assigned to him, but he feels he still hasn't learned everything there is to learn while he's still an accounts supervisor. At his stage... he's supposed to be taking directions from his accounts director – that doesn't exist, so he works directly with Joonmyun 90% of the time and works with himself and his executives the rest – and making sure that the plans are carried out neatly and properly. He's supposed to be guiding the account executives and reaching out to them to give their hands a light squeeze when they need help, guidance, assistance, someone to tell them if they're doing well or doing everything wrong. He doesn't... have ample experience making big decisions yet, making huge calls, maneuvering failing businesses back to the right track then to the path to success. So he still needs to improve, still has to go through many hardships before he can deem himself worthy of a promotion.

This isn't the right time yet. It won't be in a long while.

Joonmyun looks around for an audience. It's almost lunch time already and the creatives are arriving in trickles, passing by the accounts area, craning their necks, and heaving a sigh of relief when the accounts person they're looking for isn't around yet. The account executives who are in their seats – a rare occasion since they spend most of their time hopping from one meeting to another – are nose-deep in their work. Jimin's eyebrows are furrowed as he clacks at the keyboard of his laptop. Beside him, Minseok hasn't stopped drumming his fingers on his side of the desk, hasn't even eased the frown that has been pulling down the corners of his mouth for a good ten minutes now. If Seokjin were in his seat right now then he'd probably be nudging Jimin in his side and saying, *Relax. Your*
"You've spent the last few months outdoing yourself time and again, Jin, and you still think this is 'too soon'?' Joonmyun scoffs. He shuts his eyes, takes a deep, deep breath, and shakes his head before adding, "'Too soon' would be getting the promotion with you sitting there like a lame duck and not doing anything at all. 'Too soon' is you getting promoted when you've only been doing the bare minimum for all of your tasks. But that's not how you are, Jin. You're hardly anything like that. You've been consistently doing so well. You've shown that... you're willing to go the extra mile not only to get tasks done but also to help people out. And that's really important, because as an accounts lead, you need to be able to know when to lend a hand and do the dirty work with someone and when to just watch them from the sidelines and let your young executives learn on their own."

"But–" Seokjin gulps hard and balls his hands into loose fists. "But I don't know a thing about being an 'account director'?' His insides lurch. Even his gut knows he's bluffing, but there is an ounce of truth to it. He knows bits and pieces about making big decisions that he won't regret, but in the context of making money that can feel all one hundred employees of BBDO? He's... not too sure about that. "But I don't have enough experience yet? Hyung, if and when we do get the total Hyundai account, if you let me handle it, I'll be the joke of the century. Do I know shit about cars? Well, I know they're nice and pretty and functional because I've read a hell lot of brochures, but enough to actually sell them the way–"

"The way I do?" Joonmyun snorts. He heaves a sigh, shakes his head, then reaches up to pinch Seokjin's cheek. People seem to like doing that a lot when Seokjin's shying away from many different opportunities. Maybe it's his friends' way of telling him to wake the fuck up and get his act together. Maybe it's their way of telling him that not everyone was given... a boost of sorts up the corporate ladder, and that he was being stupid by dousing the flames and even taking pride in what he'd done. He was being stupid. But then people do a lot of crazy things when they're scared. "Look, kid: when I started out, I only knew how to start the engine. I didn't even have a car yet; I just had... my own train pass. I mean, the transpo system here is good so why buy a car, right? I didn't really feel the need to. But fuck, when Sihyuk-hyung made me accounts supervisor, then director, then business director, I realized that yeah, I had to learn about cars, and not just the Hyundai ones. I needed to know everything about them. I needed to love them. I needed to find a need for the product I was selling. So I studied them. Got myself a car. Drove it around even if I ended up in dead ends more often than not."

Joonmyun bites the inside of his cheek. "But that's the thing, Jin," he says, then drops his gaze to his feet. There's a small smile curled up at the corners of his mouth, bleeding onto his cheeks and pulling them up. It almost looks as if Joonmyun hadn't just come from an 8 a.m. client meeting. Then again, Joonmyun's mastered everything there is to know about client servicing already. If there's can only be one expert when it comes to figuring clients out and knowing exactly what they need, when they need it, it's got to be Joonmyun. "The fear of not knowing didn't keep me from taking an opportunity I could have passed on. I didn't let it ruin my chances of getting what I wanted."

Seokjin takes a deep, shaky breath. It's not even a question of whether or not he wants this anymore – it's obvious that he wants this promotion so badly. He isn't stupid enough to pretend that everything he's done is him being completely altruistic – he's been helping people out so that they may help him, in turn, someday. He's been doing more than what was required of him because he wants to show everyone, especially the bosses, that he isn't someone who'll settle for mediocrity, that he's someone whom they can depend on no matter what. So why not take the leap? he asks himself, again and
again until he hears a distinct enough voice in his mind, but to no avail – there's nothing but static in the sound, broken only by the low humming in his brain when he whispers, "Wow."

"You grab the opportunity even before it can run away," Joonmyun adds after a while. He slides a hand across Seokjin's shoulder and gives Seokjin's arm a light squeeze, just enough to jostle Seokjin out of his trance. "Then you make things work. You bend the rules to your liking then you make magic happen."

Seokjin laughs a little. He spent eight years in publish enforcing rules on people, making sure everyone stuck to their deadlines and to the process, and here Joonmyun is, telling him that process and timelines will inevitably fail so if Seokjin could just do his magic on insatiable, irrational clients, that would be great. Truth be told, Seokjin's pretty good at reworking the process until it works with the situation, but... Nah, you still need more practice, he tells himself. Maybe with a few more years of experience in the wonderful world of advertising, he will, but right now? He's more confident in taking creative deliverables into his own hands and creating a masterpiece out of something that would otherwise look like shit. He's more confident in giving helpful feedback to the creatives, in his ideas being stellar and groundbreaking, in him possibly having a bright future as a member of the creative department.

He snorts. Don't let Yoongi hear you or he'll have a field day or something. You can't give in just yet, he murmurs to himself, then clenches his fists. "Give it some thought," Joonmyun says after a while, voice as soft and gentle as the squeeze he gives Seokjin's arm, and the next thing Seokjin knows Joonmyun is already walking away, being dragged to some meeting he didn't know he was involved in and disappearing around the corner.

Some thought. Right. You know i'll be thinking about that the whole day. Thanks, hyung, grumbles a voice at the back of his mind. He heaves a sigh, drops his gaze to his wrist watch just to make sure that he has enough time to eat before his meeting at one in the afternoon, then looks over his shoulders when he hears footsteps approaching.

"Do I react or do I pretend I didn't hear a thing?" Yoongi asks, eyebrows lifted a little. His eyes are still thick with lethargy but, for the most part, he looks awake, alive. Too alive, too aware, too conscious of the very little distance between them. There's the ghost of a smile on his lips – too red, and it might just be from the leftover stew Seokjin left for him on the kitchen table, dammit – and his lower lip is trembling just a little and his shoulders are pulled back in that awkward tug of war between caution and concern. And Yoongi's too close that Seokjin doesn't even have to take a deep breath to catch the scent of his shampoo in Yoongi's hair, close enough that he can make out the fine difference between that one sweater they have in the same design – the way Seokjin's sweater, not Yoongi's, hangs loosely on Yoongi's shoulders, and the way the rest of the sweater accommodates by covering the entirety of Yoongi's arms, hands, his slender fingers, leaving only the tips of his nails peeking from the sleeves, teasing and taunting Seokjin to reach over and come closer.

"You pick." I pretend your mere presence doesn't do things to me, and you pretend you have no idea what's happening. Deal? Seokjin almost says, but he manages to bite down on his tongue and summon a smile to his lips. The pulse at the base of his throat is out of control, though, and so is the heavy thumping in his chest. It isn't the first time they've been this close – heck, they were tangled in each other's limbs earlier, and they've already kissed and gotten a bit carried away with it twice – but it's the first time he's seeing Yoongi in his clothes. It sort of... softens the hard angles of Yoongi's jaw, sort of makes the slope of his neck much more pronounced. It sort of makes Seokjin want to reach out and wrap his arms around Yoongi, bury his face in Yoongi's hair until all the can feel is the soft fluttering of Yoongi's hair against his skin, until the scent of strawberries and coffee and Yoongi fill his senses and take root in his body.
Someone shrieks. Seokjin shivers all at once, suddenly reminded of where and who they are, of how they should be – at least six inches apart, addressing each other with a curt nod even if all that Yoongi's eyes are saying at the moment is, *Forget they exist and just focus on me. C'mon, Jin, look at me. Look at me and tell me what you want*–

"You... deposit your stuff in your office. Then you come with me to the pantry," Seokjin whispers, giving in. He looks around for an audience, let out a loud exhale when he sees Jimin and the others still focused on what they're doing, then wraps his fingers around Yoongi's wrist in a soft, gentle curl. "*Right now.***

Yoongi scoffs, but he lets Seokjin pull him forward. His laughter is rough, low, almost bitter. His fingers, when he shucks Seokjin's hand off only to catch it in his own, are abnormally cold. The last thing Seokjin needs right now is for Yoongi to mess with his mind even more, make him feel strange and weird and queasy when their eyes meet and Yoongi stares longer than he should, but Seokjin needs someone who will listen. He needs someone who will shove the harsh reality of life in his face. He needs clarity and honesty.

He gulps hard when they bump into Namjoon on their way to the pantry, hands still linked with each other, already in a fit too warm and comfortable for them to disentangle themselves from it. Namjoon only addresses them with a cock of the eyebrow and, "Want me to push the alignment to 5?"

Yoongi nods at him in response, then tilts his head in Seokjin's direction. Seokjin offers Namjoon a small smile.

He needs Min Yoongi.

"Exactly how much of the conversation did you hear?"

Yoongi looks up from where he's blowing at his coffee and juts out his lower lip. It's been a good ten minutes since they've finally settled down in the pantry, a good ten minutes since Seokjin had tried to use his need for another cup of coffee as an excuse to spend at least a minute away from Yoongi and his discerning gaze. Yoongi hadn't questioned him at the slightest, didn't even cock an eyebrow at him, but he *did* offer Seokjin his very own cup of coffee, instead, and chuckled when Seokjin made a strange, gurgling noise at the back of his throat in response. Whether Yoongi did it to foil Seokjin's plans or because he just was feeling extra kind that day, Seokjin wasn't sure. Seokjin didn't have to know anymore, though, because soon a corner of Yoongi's mouth was pulling up into a sneaky, sneaky smirk.

"I'm more worried about the coffee maker right now. I don't trust you to operate the machine in your... zombie state. You're a mess," Yoongi had said. He got up from his seat, stretched his arms overhead, and threaded his fingers through Seokjin's hair to give it a light ruffle. "Glad you shampooed your hair. Would've been gross if you hadn't and I–"

*Didn't tell you to fluff my hair. Didn't even tell you to touch me.* Seokjin wanted to retort, but his throat was too dry and his tongue was frozen. All the voices in his mind were saying, *You didn't, but you totally wanted to.* And while he knew very well he was capable of making himself coffee even if he was already half-dead from pitch preparations and barely breathing, it was true that he was feeling a bit weak in the knees. And sharing coffee with someone was the ultimate display of concern, so he
wasn't about to take that away that opportunity from Yoongi. He was tired and without ample sleep. He wasn't an asshole. So instead, he kicked at the back of Yoongi's shoulder, scrunched up his nose, and said, *One teaspoon of brown sugar, please. Thanks. You're the best person in the whooole world—*

Yoongi looked over his shoulder, eyebrows lifted in wonder and eyes filled with... a peculiar glimmer Seokjin wished he'd never seen before because he was getting this... lurching sensation in his stomach again. He probably wouldn't have caught it if he hadn't been studying Yoongi's features for the past nine months, if he hadn't seen Yoongi's face up close, but– **Shut up, brain, just shut up—**

"Yeah, I know," Yoongi murmured in response, then laughed a little. He paused for a while, licked his lips, then reached for Seokjin's cup so he could fulfill Seokjin's request before getting himself a glass of water. *And so are you, if you'd just be a bit nicer to me sometimes."

"Honestly? 110% of it," Yoongi answers now, voice much smoother than before. Bless coffee, really, for making it a lot easier for either of them to speak, because if this Yoongi right in front of him is the same Yoongi Seokjin has been pitching with, has been winning awards and businesses and the hearts of clients with, if this is the same Min Yoongi whom he has spent the past few two in the mornings and afternoons with just talking about anything that crosses his mind or sharing a comfortable, companionable silence with, then he's pretty darn certain Yoongi will wait at least a few more minutes or at least for Seokjin to make a sound, shift in his seat, lean much closer to him over the table and clasp his hands together before bringing up the very reason he had pulled Yoongi away from his work and to the pantry. Yoongi takes another sip, much longer this time, and when he surfaces his lips look warmer, less chapped, a lot more inviting. Reminiscent of the same lips that Seokjin had kissed back in the elevator. *Don't make that face. I gave you the option of me forgetting the whole thing happened and you took the other one, so—*

Seokjin huffs. His voice catches in his throat, though, makes his breath hitch, and this time he knows it isn't from Yoongi doing illegal things with his mouth, *to Seokjin's heart.* "I haven't even said anything yet."

"You won't say a thing unless someone smacks you in the head or I actually start the conversation." Yoongi shrugs. When Seokjin narrows his eyes at him and snarls, he only offers a tight smile in response. "Or if you're drugged up enough with coffee. And you have mine now, so talk. Because you were just gaping at hyung earlier, the whole time, and all I could hear from you then was *but why, hyung? Why—*"

Seokjin... heaves a sigh. He'd groan at Yoongi again if he actually had something to retaliate with, but he knows all too well that Yoongi won't waste his words on lies. He speaks of the truth. The truth that hurts like a bitch, like the sharp, biting pain in Seokjin's ears when Ahreum screeched and yelled in the elevator, like the slap to the face that Seokjin had taken when he finally reconnected with Ahreum at the end of his meeting with Baekhyun. Or the beginnings of the stinging pain that gripped tightly at his chest the whole time Yoongi was talking to those assholes he met back in Itaewon – close to it, at least, because every scrunch of Yoongi's features that time felt like inching closer to the cliff, jumping off, and hitting rough lands and sharp rocks and the rushing water. It's the same truth that he needs right now, because if it were just him conversing with the walls in his flat then he'd keep pushing the thought of actually handling the advertising efforts of one of the biggest brands in the country to the very back of his mind until Joonmyun got swallowed up by other requirements, brands, commitments. Until Joonmyun just... forgot.

Joonmyun rarely ever forgets. It's tantamount to him giving up, and while Seokjin *knows* that it's only right for people to choose their battles and decide for themselves if the battle they've engaged in is worth every drop of blood and sweat, every missed meal and unfinished coffee and all the hours
they aren't able to spend in their workstations so they can actually answer emails from clients, comrades, people in need, he doesn't like people giving up on him. It's unsettling, disconcerting. It makes him feel restless and useless and weird.

It makes him feel less of what he can be. And the only way to make things right is to hang around Yoongi a little longer and find the missing pieces of himself again in conversations and pep talks he never knew he needed.

"It... freaks me out," Seokjin confesses. Yoongi stops midway through taking a gulp of his drink, peaking from the brim of his coffee cup and even lifting his eyebrows, then he's setting the cup down on the table and reaching out for Seokjin's fingers little by little, instead. Seokjin doesn't brush him away, doesn't even look around for an audience this time, and just lets their hands touch. "More about actually handling an account as big as that than anything else, to be honest, because what the hell? What the hell?" Seokjin shakes his head as he shuts his eyes. Flashes of the look of exhaustion in Joonmyun's features, of all the what's and how's and why is this happening now's in the way Joonmyun's shoulders automatically fell forward at Seokjin's first 'no', burn at the back of his eyelids. So he shakes off the feeling and cracks his neck when he feels the beginnings of a shiver crawling up his spine, pushes it to the pit of his stomach until he feels the tight knots in chest slowly, "I don't even think only one person should be handling total Hyundai. There should probably be... I dunno, two of us? I mean, other big brands to that. Samsung has more than one point-person for everything. Beauty brands have multiple people taking care of the whole... coordinating thing. And they're much more experienced people than me. So what--what--"

Seokjin sucks in his lower and takes a deep, deep breath. Little by little, it's beginning to occur to him that it... isn't even the brand involved. Of all the clients he's worked with, Hyundai is, by far, the most considerate and tolerable among the bunch. So more than just being burdened with the responsibility of marketing everything Hyundai right, more than him suddenly being thrust into this big role that he's only 95% sure he can take on, more than all those--

"What... What scares you, really?" Yoongi whispers. "The prospect of this big opportunity, of handling an account as big as this, changing your life forever, or the fact that if you do bite the bait, you won't be able to move to the dark side anymore and... make your dreams come true?"

Seokjin laughs. He squeezes his eyes shut, balls his hands into tight fists, but loosens them when he feels the quick shift of Yoongi's fingers between his own. "That," he says, breathing out, then he's looking up, meeting Yoongi's gaze, seeing himself – the realization punching him square on the nose, slapping him on the cheeks, making fun of him and sneering at him – in Yoongi's eyes. "And the fact that I'm only figuring this out now that I... don't really have a choice but to go with what hyung wants."

"But you do. You always have a choice."

Seokjin furrows his eyebrows. For a moment, he considers asking, what the hell do you mean?, but soon his phone is buzzing wildly on the table, making noise, demanding attention. So he gently, gingerly pulls away from Yoongi with one hand, keeps the other steady in the snug fit of their fingers, and swipes his finger across the screen to check what – who – the offender is.

He bites the inside of his cheek when he sees familiar characters, a familiar name, an old friend, reaching out, saying 'sorry' for not being able to get in touch with him sooner, that he's heading back to Japan in three days, and coffee sometime, hyung? :) - jk

You have a choice, rings Yoongi's words in his ears as he wiggles his fingers in the air before typing up a response. He shivers. You always have a choice.
Last free day is tomorrow before I head back to war, haha. Any later than that and you won't be able to catch me anymore~
Cheonggyecheon area? Your treat?

Two beats, then his phone buzzes again. Yoongi's hold on him tightens.

it's a date ;)

Seokjin peeps from the top of his laptop's screen and looks around. To anyone who's seeing him for the first time, passing by the accounts area fresh from a tough meeting or just walking by after buying food from the little stores outside, he probably looks ridiculous, out of his mind, a perfect fit in an agency filled with strange yet creative people, but to Jimin who's right beside him and chuckling as he shakes his head, the message is as clear as crystal – Seokjin's making sure nobody will catch him sneaking out of the accounts area and, eventually, the office at such an early hour. 'Early' being 7 p.m. instead of 10 or 11 when he could have clocked out an hour earlier since he came in before nine in the morning. 'Early' meaning he isn't rendering extra hours at work just to get things done or lend a hand to people in need. He'd approached Joonmyun about it earlier, saying, "Fine, I'll lead the pitch. I'll... give it a shot. Preps don't start until next week, right? So I can still go home early today? I'm... meeting an old friend..."

"Some's poaching you?" Joonmyun had narrowed his eyes, then cocked an eyebrow at Seokjin. Slowly, he inched closer as if searching Seokjin's features for clues, little cracks where he could see the real intent behind Seokjin's 'little request'. Seriously, hyung, do I look like I'm so eager to move to a new company?

Seokjin was tempted to say, but if he ever did then Joonmyun was about 95% certain to say 'no' and ask why Seokjin would take the leap if he was indeed thinking of moving agencies, and what was going to make him stay.

Yoongi had stepped out of the conference room after a long, long meeting, and cocked his head. He still had his laptop tucked in his arms and his body twisted a little such that he was both facing Seokjin's direction and looking at Namjoon while discussing something about silly campaigns and fucked up timelines and demanding clients who have a lot of money. Five more seconds and Yoongi was shifting his gaze, looking to his side until he was facing front already, meeting Seokjin in the eye with soft furrow of his eyebrows, the three, four feet between them coaxing them to move closer to each other but pushing them further apart. "Someone's poaching you, Kim?"

'Kim'. Wow. Since when did we call each other by our surnames? I thought we'd rather call each other 'cupcake' and other gross names than that? Seokjin almost blurted out, but luckily Jimin had accidentally nudged him in his side and twisted his elbow there until Seokjin's body was giving a powerful jerk. "Do early outs always have to meet secret meetings with prospective employers? Can't I just go out to meet--"

"You're going out with someone?" Yoongi pursed his lips. He took a step forward, just enough to give the people behind him room to wiggle out of the room and spare them from whatever was unfolding right in front of Seokjin's eyes, then took a deep breath. "You have friends other than us?"

Friends. We're friends. Right. Seokjin snorted and offered Yoongi a tight, jeering smile. Jimin kicked him in the ankle, made this small, gurgling sound at the back of his throat that sounded a lot like suppressed laughter, then slipped his headphones on when the silence became too thick and stretched
on for too long. Joonmyun... probably should have waved Yoongi off but, when Seokjin turned to
look at his boss, all he was met with was a sly smile and a peculiar glimmer in Joonmyun's eyes.
Curiosity, interest, mischief? Seokjin was pretty darn sure it was the third. And he was pretty sure
Yoongi was waiting for an answer because Yoongi was still staring at him, lips pulled down to a
cute little frown and his body stiff, rigid, walls up.

"We're friends?" he'd countered, smiling as he ended, confident in his answer. When the corners of
Yoongi's mouth curled up into a smile, he had to lean back a little, do a double-take, questioning
himself if he'd just dug an even deeper grave for himself or if he'd done the right thing.

"Right. I keep forgetting we're more than that," Yoongi had muttered, then pulled away without
another word. Beside Seokjin, Jimin was having a hard time pretending he was actually playing
music through his earphones. And deep inside Seokjin, a niggling feeling dropped to the pit of his
stomach, bloomed there, and clawed at his insides until his heart was racing in his chest. Half of him
was worried he was having heart burns again – it was normal for him now, had been normal when it
wasn't supposed to be since the time he started at BBDO – but half of him knew better than to blame
his body for something that Yoongi had caused. "Excited to spend time with me again?"

"Haha. Very funny," Seokjin had groaned, but his trembling hands were saying the exact opposite –
You have no idea how excited I am. Excited and scared and unsure. And I'm glad you don't. "You
wish."

Yeah, I do, Seokjin had thought he heard Yoongi say, but the next thing he knew Yoongi was
already making his way to the third floor, laptop clutched close to his chest. He'd left his fedora in the
room, though, a reminder of the encounter, a chance for Seokjin to have an excuse to barge through
the doors of Yoongi's office to say 'hi'.

And the question wasn't whether Seokjin would grab the opportunity or not. It was whether he'd
throw the fedora at Yoongi's face or if he'd place it on Yoongi's table, make himself comfortable in
the seat opposite Yoongi's own, and stay for a while for a chat.

"Joonmyun-hyung has a 7 p.m. with the bosses in the small meeting room at the lobby. Just-- Don't
pass by the back door," Jimin whispers now, reeling Seokjin back to the present. He looks around
for a bit, then slaps Seokjin on the arm when he realizes what he'd just done and lets out a low groan.
"I can't believe I'm actually helping you sneak out--"

Seokjin reaches and draws Jimin's hand to his chest. He softens his eyes a little, lets out a faint sigh
when the corners of Jimin's lips drown to a silent scowl, then croons, "Run away with me--"

"From you, you mean," Jimin grumbles, then yanks his hand free of Seokjin's grasp. He gives
Seokjin's nose a tiny, affectionate pinch, though. If it were anyone else, Seokjin would probably be
cocking an eyebrow already at said offender, but somehow Jimin makes the gesture sweeter than it
should be. "I swear to god, hyung, if all hell breaks loose tomorrow because of your date tonight,
you have to take responsibility."

"For what?" Seokjin scoffs and shakes his head. If Jimin's trying to mess with him then this isn't the
first time Jimin's going to suffer the consequences, but Jimin doesn't even look the slightest bit
amused at what might happen because of Seokjin heading out to meet Jeongguk for dinner for the
first time in more than a decade. He looks... sort of scared, but also a bit interested in how things
might pan out. And Seokjin knows for sure that Jimin is shit at trying to contain his emotions and
keeping them from spilling onto the sides of his mouth, the corners of his eyes, from controlling his
facial muscles until he's curled up on the floor in a fit of laughter, because the last time Jimin tried to
pull a prank on someone, he ended up cracking and submitting himself to laughter even before he
could say the lines that he and Taehyung had poured their blood and sweat into.
It's not a date, c'mon. And besides, even if it were, who would– Seokjin laughs to himself. Nobody would care or mind. Jimin's just getting better at this whole playing a prank on people thing. Stop thinking of anything else, he tells himself. It's seven in the evening, not nine in the morning or earlier. His brain's functioning at its prime and there's no excuse for him to relapse to a little under forty-eight hours ago, when he was curled up with Yoongi in bed, their limbs in a messy tangle that seemed to make sense, that felt right. It's seven in the evening and he has to take the first train to Garosu-gil now if he doesn't want to screw up his chances of–of– Finding out why Jeongguk stopped replying to his messages and letters and attempts at reconnecting so many years ago? Discovering why Jeongguk pushed him away all of a sudden and forced his way out of Seokjin life? Or of simply scoring free yummy dinner from a friend he hadn't seen in years? He isn't sure. All he's certain of now is that he's running late, and he hates it when he makes people wait for him.

He hates wasting time, especially since he's already wasted so many years trying to build a career he doesn't even want for himself.

"Whatever. I'm going," he grumbles as he stuffs his laptop inside his drawer, then fixes his things. To Jimin, he says, "Thanks for letting me know and don't stay up too late, okay? If I find out you rendered extra hours again, I'll–"

"What, twist my nipples?" Jimin snorts. "You know that won't work, hyung."

Seokjin groans. He gives Jimin's cheek a light pinch before picking up his bag, then ruffles Jimin's hair. "I'll tell Yoongi it's you who's been stealing from his stash. How 'bout that?"

Jimin gasps. It's exaggerated, doesn't suit Jimin's tone at all, but hey – at least the look in Jimin's features is familiar now. If Seokjin just spent more time studying Jimin and discerning how his teammate's mind works instead of focusing all of his efforts on Yoongi, then– "And he'll believe you. Of course, he will. You're his favorite, after all. Then he'll grill my ass and tell my creatives to not submit on time and he'll ruin my life–"

And I'll have to tell him to stop playing with you and that this is why some people are so scared of you, Yoongi, because shit– Jimin's right. For all of Yoongi's inability to digest instructions the first time they're said, he listens to people he trusts, no questions asked. Namjoon only has to say Yoongi's name or a faint, faint, 'hyung', to make Yoongi quiet down a little whenever he's talking to his creatives, giving them a lecture, telling them to never be contented with creating concepts that are anything less than amazing. Heechul only has to whisper his plea for help when the art directors under his supervision are being a huge pain in the ass, and Yoongi will talk to those people one-on-one to get things sorted out the same day. Joonmyun doesn't even have to say anything at all when the copywriters are being difficult and the art directors are consistently missing deadlines – all he has to do is to cock an eyebrow at Yoongi, offer him one of his corporate smiles, and mouth at Yoongi, thank you for your cooperation, and somehow that will get things done. Yoongi will drop whatever he's doing, talk to those under his care, to listen to them, to try to understand both what's being said and what isn't.

And on the off chance that Yoongi doesn't feel like paying attention, just wants to drown in silence so he can recalibrate, he'll curl in on himself and ask for a few minutes of respite. That's when Seokjin walks in, drags him to the pantry, with the promise of coffee at two in the afternoon and companionable silence at two in the morning. That's when their bodies align and Yoongi lets out the longest, loudest exhale.

Then Yoongi speaks up. It doesn't even matter if it's about work or his musical frustrations or some trivia about tiny animals that he'd seen on Google while he was unwinding; Seokjin just lets Yoongi talk about anything that crosses his mind because he knows that, at the end of it all, Yoongi will
always emerge feeling refreshed and reenergized. He will be the Yoongi everyone knows again, the one who has saved the agency from losing businesses far too many times already, the one who, despite all of his pushing at the creatives and all of his demands, is still idolized and respected by all. A lot like the Yoongi who keeps driving Seokjin crazy, but not quite. Seokjin can pretend he doesn't feel the slightest pang of pain in his chest when he sees Yoongi falling asleep on his laptop at three in the morning, but he can't pretend that the way Yoongi treats him, deals with him, is the same as how he would deal with Namjoon, Heechul, Joonmyun, and everyone else. He just loves torturing himself, but he's not blind. He's not stupid. He can choose to be from time to time, but right now–

*Maybe you're his new best friend,* offers a voice at the back of his mind. Seokjin laughs to himself. *Friends sleep in the same bed and kiss to get each other out of trouble right?*

"And you will *finally* learn your lesson and do overtime less. It's a win-win situation." He beams at Jimin, then almost jumps when he feels his phone buzzing in his pocket. *Relax, Jeon,* says a voice at the back of his mind. *Good things come to those who wait. And that means I'm paying for dinner. Only tonight.* "10 p.m., kid, I'm serious. Any later than that and I'll tell Joonmyun-hyung to state in your annual evaluation, 'doesn't know how to properly manage time'"

Jimin huffs. "Why are we friends?"

"Oh, are we?" Seokjin says in response, voice lilting, and turns on his heel just as he hears Jimin groan loudly. "See you tomorrow, kid!"

The ride to Garosu-gil takes only a little over thirty minutes. Thirty minutes of Seokjin at the edge of his seat, really, because hitting every stop feels a lot like a countdown to his untimely demise. *C'mon, Jin, you're supposed to be done with this shit already,* but then he and Jeongguk never did agree on what they truly were back then. They never really... ended things. All they were sure of was that they were both special to each other, enough that Jeongguk wouldn't mind sucking on Seokjin's tongue again and again and Seokjin wouldn't mind kissing Jeongguk senseless even if Jeongguk had a runny nose. But a *definition* of what they were? A label to go by?

Seokjin snorts. More than thirty years of age and he still doesn't know how to adjust to quick changes, how to accommodate. Years and too many bad experiences with him being unable to cope with change later and here he is, still resisting the tides. So if he ever slips into old habit later, if he ever makes the mistake of leaning in too close and staring at Yoongi's lips longer than he should–

"What?" He blinks a few times, then drops his gaze to his hand where his phone is buzzing wildly. He's pretty sure he was thinking of Jeongguk just now so how the hell did Yoongi– "Shit. Phone call. Right– Yeah, hello?"

"Hyung, you're not gonna make me wait here forever, are you?" comes a familiar voice on the other end of the line. Seokjin's chest tightens. "Wait, I *did* get the number right, didn't I– Hello, hyung? Jin-hyung?"

"Yeah, it's me," Seokjin breathes out, then thins his lips into a smile. When he feels the knots in his chest ease one by one, when the train comes to a gradual halt at Sinsa, he brings his phone closer to his lips, closes his eyes, and takes a deep, deep breath. "Almost there. I'm at the station now. What d'you want for dinner?"

They end up at a food stall just a few blocks away from the station, closer to the condotels and dormitories now than the train line, itself. It's more because of Jeongguk's paranoia at missing the last train than Jeongguk's lack of sense of direction. Seokjin understands, though – it has been more than a decade since Jeongguk was last in Seoul, and even then he hadn't really frequented the Gangnam area. He had always stuck to places that were either close to the campus or he already knew like the
back of his hand – the place that serves yummy ramyun about two stations away from the orange line, or the dumpling place near the small playground-slash-parking lot-slash-back door of the campus. Seokjin and Hoseok’s shared dorm room. Seokjin’s bed that could barely fit the two of them (so they had to move just a tad closer to each other to accommodate). Seokjin’s gangly limbs that he didn’t seem to mind having around him even in the warmest nights.

"I... actually got here at around... 4 p.m.?” Jeongguk begins, pausing to lick gochujang off his lips. Already an adult and he still hasn’t weaned off of his habit of eating messily. Ten years later and he still eats like he means to splash color on everything around him, Seokjin’s clothes included. Not that Seokjin minds, Jeongguk wreaking havoc in this little food stall they’d decided to claim – it makes the white noise much more bearable and feel a lot less like awkward silence. It sort of... lends him a twisted sense of comfort knowing that there are parts of this Jeongguk a few inches away from him that he still recognizes and knows like the back of his hand. "Went to the campus to visit and saw some of my old professors. Which I probably shouldn’t have done because they wouldn't stop talking! Ah...” Jeongguk shakes his head. "But... Remember– Remember Mr. Park? Crazy English teacher who made us watch–"

"Anime dubbed in English just so you’d learn, yeah," Seokjin finishes, the pops a few slices of tteok in his mouth. "You loved that class so much, man. Even asked if you could seat in in his other classes just so you could finish the series earlier than the rest of your blockmates." But Jeongguk cheated then, read the Korean subtitles instead of trying to understand the message being communicated through the English narration and dialogue. "Gives me an excuse to watch the entire series again," he’d reasoned with Seokjin before. Hoseok had rolled his eyes in retort and countered, voice thinning into that high pitch of his that made everything sound ten times more obnoxious, "It gives him an excuse to watch the series with you."

"Haha. Very funny." Seokjin had groaned the first time it happened, but then it wasn't. Jeongguk widening his eyes as if he'd been caught red-handed, Jeongguk parting his lips into a small and soft 'o' like he was trying, trying, trying to choke down panicked sounds and screeches resounding in his mind, Jeongguk sucking in a violent breath like he had already accepted to himself that there was nothing he could do but to agree with Hoseok because he speaks of the truth weren't funny at all. They were... too raw and too real. Scary. They freaked the fuck out of Seokjin.

"Competition junkie– But hey, were you ever able to finish Slam Dunk?” Seokjin swallows hard, shivering when he feels the stick slide of the tteok down his throat. It's still wicked hot and he should know better than to down spicy food like that, but it's been a while since he's last had street food. It's been a while since he's last clocked out of work at seven in the evening instead of ten or eleven. It's been years since he's last done this with Jeongguk and goddamn if he isn't going to let the strings of his past reel him back to the time when all he had to worry about was waking up the following day so he could get back to work on his thesis that he could have easily finished already had it not been for Jeongguk being such a great distraction. "Because last I heard, you're still stuck in the episode where Kogure–"

"You... actually remembered," Jeongguk whispers. A corner of his mouth quirks up into the most interesting curl. There's a glimmer in his eyes that Seokjin knows better than to breathe meaning into but come on, it's not as if he doesn't know Jeongguk. It's not as if he doesn't have every slope, curve, every wicked contour of Jeongguk’s mouth memorized even years after they've last seen each other, last held each other a bit too close, last touched parts of each other they kept concealed beneath layers of clothes on most days. It's not as if they're strangers; they aren’t, and they sure as hell aren't just friends.

We're more than that – Seokjin suddenly hears Yoongi's voice ringing in his ears. He shivers at the same time that the wind blows. Curse autumn for dragging winter with it too quickly. It isn't even
supposed to be this cold yet. Nothing's supposed to change just yet.

"I remember everything, just in case you've forgotten," Seokjin murmurs. He pokes at a slice of tteok, dips it in the sauce, then mouths at the lady opposite him, Broth, please? For the two of us. Thank you. And while you're at it, can you save me from this conversation— "Like, the time you bawled your eyes out at the ending of Fruits Basket, or when Nuriko—"

"Yah, we do not talk about episode 33—"

"How about... that episode when Ash, Brock, and Misty separated for real, huh?" Seokjin cackles when Jeongguk makes a face at him, a cross between frustration and disappointment, peppered with amusement. He recalls this from that same day they watched that moving episode, and Seokjin's first instinct then was to reach for a box of tissues with one hand and cup Jeongguk's cheeks, wet with tears, with the other. He recalls feeling Jeongguk tense at the touch, recalls the way Jeongguk had gasped and widened his eyes and whispered, h-hyung?, like he hadn't meant to do so, like his body had betrayed him all of a sudden and all he wanted was to curl up in a corner because he hated it when people saw him crying over anime, but if Jeongguk really meant to push Seokjin away then he would have done so minutes ago. If Jeongguk wanted to free himself from Seokjin's tentative grip then he would have shied away without a second thought. "Hyung, what are you—" "Or... that time when Ash saved Charmander—"

"The first time we had lunch together, what did we eat then?"

Seokjin gulps hard. What the hell are you up to, he wants to ask, but instead he answers, "A shitton of kimbap because you didn't like spicy food yet." Jeongguk nods. For a second, Seokjin thinks about asking Jeongguk why, but soon Jeongguk's cocking his head, grunting low, urging him to go on. "We were supposed to eat the kimbap you made but it turned out to be super salty so we just bought tiny rolls from the ahjumma's stall across the school and—"

"How about the first time we snuck alcohol in your dorm? What did we drink then?"

"Soju," Seokjin replies in an instant. Three bottles of soju, to be exact – one for each of them because Hoseok didn't want to share. Seokjin had wanted to turn down Hoseok's request then because Hoseok had the shittiest tolerance, but eh, little moments of surrender. Besides, it's not as if Hoseok made requests and asked for favors often. Hoseok never asked for too much, just hugs and sweet silence and a hand to hold whenever days were rough. "Lots of soju. Three bottles, two of which I drank because you two are such lightweights—"

Jeongguk smiles a little. "Just that?"

"And beer," Seokjin answers, heaving a sigh. Jeongguk beams at him. He doesn't have those fangs anymore. He... doesn't really look like the same kid Seokjin had taught Japanese years ago, back in university. Jeongguk... has much sharper features now – his jaw is more defined and his eyes are sharper and his lips look like they haven't been kissed in years, and a tiny, tiny voice inside Seokjin wants to ask if it's okay to lean in just a bit more so he can study Jeongguk better. Just that. The louder one yells in protest, screams until Seokjin is shivering, and reminds him, You promised to yourself, Jin, you promised you'll never go back to those dark days— "I introduced maekju to you then and Hobi introduced me to the concept of having a conscience because you were barely legal then—"

"First kiss," Jeongguk says now, voice dropping to a whisper, and that's when he inches closer until the tips of his shoes brush against Seokjin's own. Almost knocks over his cup of odeng broth into their shared platter of tteokbokki when he reaches over for a quick second. Soon, though, he's dropping his hand to his side, digging it in his pocket as he breaks the stick he'd been eating with
with the other. This time, it's Seokjin who stands frozen in his spot, holding his breath in an attempt to keep all the words and sounds and why the hell are you doing this, kid from spilling from the corners of his mouth. This time, it's Seokjin who widens his eyes and gulps hard and clenches his fists. This time, it's him thinking of running away even if his limbs are heavy and his heart is already thumping wildly in his chest. It's Seokjin who shivers, scared of falling back into the old swing of things and not being able to pull himself out of it when Jeongguk leaves him another time. "When?"

_Does it matter?_ part of Seokjin wants to say, but then Jeongguk won't ask unless it does. Honest to god, he can't recall the exact details anymore, but the important ones burn brightly at the back of his eyelids, at the back of his hands like the notes Jeongguk had once scribbled on Seokjin's skin because apparently, he studied better when Seokjin was around. Seokjin made things easier, whereas Jeongguk made every damn thing so hard for Seokjin to deal with. "When you... aced your Japanese exam. First exam you'd ever perfected, actually. I–" We were in shock, both of us, and you–"

"Where?"

Seokjin heaves a sigh. "Club room, three in the afternoon." He pokes at the lone piece of tteok on the plate with the stick, frowning when he leaves nothing but shallow indentations on it. If only the scars that Jeongguk has left on him are the same. If only he can ease the tightness in his chest right now, the same crippling sensation that urged him to rush out of his dorm room, of the campus, to take the first train to Incheon in the hope that he would still be able to catch Jeongguk before he got on that damned plane to Japan.

_But the train ran into some fucking engine trouble and that screwed everything and–_ And it doesn't matter now, _shouldn't_ matter anymore, but there's no denying the numbing pain slowly blooming in the cavity in his chest. There's no denying the way his throat tightens at nothing but words he cannot say. There's no denying that Kim Seokjin, chronic loser when it comes to letting go, hasn't changed a single bit whereas Jeon Jeongguk has.

Seokjin laughs to himself. _This is why you can't have good things_, he tells himself. _This is why you keep failing at the things you want to do._

"Don't ask how," he whispers after a while, then thrusts the stick right through the slice of rice cake. He'd pop it in his mouth if he could, but he can't even choke down the useless words stuck to the back of his teeth right now. He can't even breathe easily. "Actually, I'd tell you just to refresh your memory and make you squirm, but I'm _actually concerned_ about what _she'll_ think when she hears things."

Jeongguk laughs. It sounds more like a... cackle dropping to the floor, exploding into little bubbles of chuckles that are easily swept away by the blowing winds. It sounds... a lot like the laugh Jeongguk had made when Seokjin asked him years ago, after saying he'd gotten a scholarship in Japan and that he was one step away from turning his dreams into a reality, _"You're kidding, right?"_ It _feels_ a lot like the bitter laughter threatening to spill from Seokjin's own lips as he watches Jeongguk nod in thought, fingers, still wrapped around the stick he'd snapped, trembling where he's rested them on the counter.

"Thought you've already changed, but looks like you didn't," Jeongguk mutters after a while. He orders for another serving of tteokbokki and twigim, handing the used plates to the lady, then turns to Seokjin with an easy smile. "A little, maybe? Like, you joke around more now but you... speak differently. Too–"

"Serious?"

Jeongguk shakes his head. _Formal._
Seokjin snorts. *But I've always spoken like this*, he wants to argue, but there's an ounce of truth to what Jeongguk has just said. Sure, his mother trained him to be polite at all times, to always be at his best behavior even if there were no higher ups or authorities around, but Seokjin's pretty darn aware of the fine line between 'civil and polite' and 'formal'. And while the fine line has always been there, so carefully placed around him, it was made even thicker by all the years he's spent in client servicing, *training himself* to know the right words to say and when to say them. Not at all a surprise, though – when you spend eight years of your life dealing with people who know they're hella fucking rich and that they can get away with anything because their bank accounts as the best thing since sliced bread, when you spend nearly a decade of your life wearing the same smile on your lips, pulling your shoulders back in a way that always makes you look taller, more worthy of 'respect', when you've spent a good fraction of your life wearing the same mask day in and day out then, chances are, at one point, you won't be able to tell anymore if you're still wearing the hero suit, the armor, the mask, even if you're already off-duty. More and more, it will be hard to slip out of the perfect persona you've created for yourself, of the person you should be.

"I guess that's what happens when you've been in accounts for so long," Seokjin whispers, then offers the lady a curt nod once she hands them the refilled plates. "Eight years, man. Eight long years–"

Jeongguk furrows his eyebrows. "But I thought you were already in advertising?"

"Well–" Seokjin laughs. Now that he thinks about it, there are a lot of differences between his new work and his old one even if the nature of the jobs is similar. Back in publishing, they were required to be in corporate attire in the office at least twice a week, and on all other days they had to be in smart casual clothing. In BBDO, Seokjin gets funny looks from everyone whenever he wears a blazer and a bow tie. People ask him if he's going out for an interview when he wears a long-sleeved button down shirt. Joonmyun teases him about moving agencies whenever he slips into his leather shoes that he pairs with dark jeans. Even Yoongi gives him a curious gaze whenever he wears a white polo with tattered jeans as if the white polo, alone, looks formal enough to land him a job.

"Well, there are a lot of roles in the agency? Like, we're not all creatives but we're expected to come up with creative output of varying degrees. So, say, Baekhyun, one of our art directors, creates storyboards, while Yixing gives him a story to follow for his visualization. Taehyung... receives instructions from Jimin about how the brand should appear in the designs he comes up with, and Taehyung makes sure Jimin doesn't halfass the presentation deck because that happens sometimes. Rarely, though, because Jimin's almost always too hard on himself. There's also Kyungsoo who–"

"I don't care about the others, hyung," Jeongguk groans. "I only care about you."

Jeongguk stabs a slice of tteok with the new stick in his hand, no longer the thin piece of wood he'd snapped into two earlier, and plays with it his food for a while. On an ordinary day – *ten years ago*, Seokjin has to tell himself again and again, if it were an ordinary day ten years ago – Seokjin would probably be slapping Jeongguk's hand already, but it's been years since they've last spent time together like this. And no matter how much he tries to deny it, things aren't entirely the same anymore – Jeongguk is bolder now, braver, speaks with his lips instead of his hands. He isn't the same stuttering little kid Seokjin had met in his senior year anymore. Part of Seokjin wishes all the years hadn't breathed into Jeongguk a different brand of confidence, but he should have know on the onset, the moment Jeongguk said, *not asked*, that he'd take the offer and was planning to move in three months, that Jeongguk was well on his way to a brand new him. "I just don't understand why you never– I mean, I know that thing with your mom and that you love her and all but hyung, no one will judge you for trying to earn a living out of what you've always wanted to do."

Seokjin scoffs. He feels acid crawling up his throat, settling at the base before seeping into the rest of his mouth, then he's shivering all over. It isn't powerful enough to kick his senses into overdrive, but
it's enough to loosen him up, to coax a retort he'd otherwise be keeping to himself – "Tell me something I don't know." Jeongguk leans back a little at that, cocks an eyebrow at him, and Seokjin would try to explain the reason behind the decisions he's made in the past decade, but it's not as if he owes Jeongguk an explanation. Heck, he doesn't owe anyone anything. He owes himself and no one else the leisure of breathing easily despite the stresses and the little turmoils in his mind. He's already made his own life hard for himself for thirty-three long years; it's about time he cut back on his being a masochist. Maybe.

"Besides, it's not– Being in advertising is really, really close to what I want to do. Not quite there yet but really, really close? It's definitely a huge step up from my previous job, though. I get to... design stuff for my presentations and help the art directors improve their designs now. And they listen to me, which is really great because the creatives are the hardest bunch of people to deal with. I get to brainstorm with them and get a feel of how they think, how they... arrive at a great concept, how they even put all the boring information from clients together and come up with ideas. The exposure, alone, helps me build my own concepts. If I'm confident with them, I share them with the team during brainstormings. If not, well–"

"You try again?"

_I'd love to_, Seokjin wants to say, but it's not as if he has the opportunity to focus on building ideas and nothing else when he's involved in projects, presentations, pitches. When he's in big brainstormings and discussions, he's there as an accounts lead, as a liaison between the creatives and the clients and not the thin fibre between the brief and the big idea. He's there to keep people on track, on strategy, when their concepts and contributions veer from the right path. He's the regulator, not the instigator of ideas, and as much as he'd want to be the one sitting opposite Yoongi and defending the concepts he's come up with, he's the one right beside Yoongi, absorbing all the ideas and translating them into something that speaks to Yoongi on another level and helps Yoongi process things easier, better.

So maybe the ideas are a third his, a third Yoongi's, and a third everyone else's. Maybe this is step one to achieving his dream of becoming a creative director someday. Maybe... maybe he's already getting there, and all he has to do now is to keep immersing himself in all these creative activities so he can learn more.

Baby steps, baby steps–

"Yeah, I guess." Seokjin shrugs. He curls his fingers into loose fists, clenches them, and heaves a sigh at the same time that he splays his fingers on the counter. "If and when I can, at least. I mean, I'm an accounts supervisor before anything else so I have to do my job, not something that... isn't really expected of me–"

"Even if it's something you want so badly, hyung? You won't... give something up for that?"

_Pushing, pushing, always pushing_, grumbles a voice at the back of his mind. Back in the day, Jeongguk had been just as persistent, just as unrelenting when it came to urging Seokjin to do the things he wanted. That was how he ended up almost getting kicked out and disowned by his family – Jeongguk thought it would be nice if Seokjin stopped dodging questions about Seokjin's lack of interest in love, why he hadn't brought home any women yet, why he was rarely seen with girls at all, and actually tell them he was interested in men, _in Jeongguk_ – and how he somehow made a space for himself in the household again – Jeongguk convinced him to tell his parents that having a son who liked boys wasn't bad because _Have I killed anyone by being gay, dad? Have I? Tell me, am I worse than those guys who have zero respect for women and for people in general just because I'm gay? Does being that make me any less of a good son to you?_ And that was how Seokjin ended
up knowing when to fight for the things he wanted, for the people he knew he needed in his life.

Jeongguk just had stronger willpower to fight for his dreams and not look back at Seokjin when Seokjin called out, *Jeon–Jeongguk! Don't leave–*

"I'm *old*, Jeongguk. I can't—I can't afford to do that anymore," Seokjin reasons after a while. He fiddles with the stick he's holding, hoping he can transfer some of the... *whatever it is* that's making him shiver all over, but Jeongguk snatches the plate from him and challenges him with cocked eyebrows and a small smile perched at the corners of his lips. "Or I can, but I can't just rush into things, okay? I'm getting there. I'm slowly getting there. And I don't care if it takes me another decade—"

"You could have gotten there sooner, hyung."

"—just to get what I want—I *know that*, Jeon Jeongguk. You don't have to tell me that anymore. Nobody has to remind me that I was stupid for even listening to every damned command my parents yelled after me."

Jeongguk hangs his head low. All at once, Seokjin feels a rush of cold bloom at the back of his hands, feels his chest tighten and his throat go dry and the words retreat to the pit of his stomach. It's silly. It's stupid. It's *frustrating* that he can't even speak his mind without feeling so damn bad about shutting people up. *That's the thing, Jin – you're already old but you still haven't outgrown your bad habits,* a voice murmurs in his mind, but this time it isn't Jeongguk's or Hoseok's or even Joonmyun's. It sounds a lot like his own, except... younger, less hesitant, a lot more courageous. The same voice that Yoongi brings out in him at two in the afternoon or morning or – Seokjin belatedly realizes – at any time of the day. The voice that bears no fear in it and, instead, rings with nothing but the truth and courage and a thirst for life.

"Don't feel bad about making me feel bad. I *know* that's what you're thinking right now, hyung. Your face is a dead giveaway," Jeongguk whispers. Seokjin's body gives a powerful jerk, catches him by surprise and startles a sigh out of him, then his body resumes its normal procedure when he's feeling awful, guilty, remorseful — quick heartbeats, sweaty palms, a litany of 'how can I make things right again' running in his mind in endless circles. "And sorry for being an ass but hyung, you *have* to stop denying yourself all the good things. I mean *yeah*, I'm really glad you're finally in advertising and that you're doing some creative stuff now, but what about the manhwa that you finished in the past? What about—What about everything you've worked hard on in the past? Hyung, you were winning awards left and right for drawing contests, for *storytelling* contests. And sorry, your parents were complete asses for actually shaming you for getting those awards, but—"

Seokjin squeezes his eyes shut and gulps hard when he feels a familiar heat burn at the back of his eyelids. *Not here,* he tells himself, *not now,* but that's the thing with him – he keeps pushing things back instead of acting on things *right now* or letting things happen. He keeps delaying possibilities instead of grabbing opportunities. He keeps — Jeongguk's *right, dammit* — denying himself the things he wants the most – the chance to do the job of his dreams for the next five, ten years, and the chance to do it with people whom he knows can and will help him grow.

The chance to be happy, truly happy, for the first time in thirty damned years, and the chance to, perhaps, make someone happy as well.

So to answer Hoseok's question – yes. Yes, he wants to hold Yoongi's hand and curl up in bed with him and just hold him close. Yes, he wants to talk to Yoongi for hours and hours, and, yes, he wants to just sit in comfortable silence with him, as well. Yes, he wants to pick up art and design again, wants to engage in more creative projects not just because he wants to make Yoongi proud but because he wants to make *himself* proud. Yes, he wants to be the reason Yoongi smiles every
breathing moment. Yes, he wants to see the good things in himself that will allow him to look himself in the mirror without cringing and saying, *I don't know this person standing right in front of me but, man, do I want to be as happy as he is. Boy, do I want to feel just as fulfilled.*

Yes, he wants to make Yoongi happy. And yes, he wants to make himself happy, as well.

"Yeah, they're asses," Seokjin says after a while. Slowly, he opens his eyes and lets the tears roll down his cheeks – not in streaks, but in little droplets that leave burning scars on his skin. Jeongguk jerks a little, inches forward, but he doesn't reach out yet. All he does is let his eyebrows furrow and let his lips hang parted, a faint 'hyung' spilling from them when he breathes out. "And so are you. I guess I can't do anything about that but I promise, Jeongguk, I promise, I'll get there someday. I'll... become a creative director someday, publish my manhwa, maybe even animate stuff and share my ideas with the world, and it will take a long, long time, but when you reach the age of thirty and you're just discovering what you can do, the only way to go is--"

*Up,* he means to say, but Jeongguk pushes back the last few syllables when he reaches over and presses his thumbs to the corners of Seokjin's eyes. He brushes off the beading tears, laughs when they well up again at the corners, then drops one hand to Seokjin's cheek to give it a light pinch. Maybe ten years ago this would have prompted Seokjin to take the leap and lean in to kiss Jeongguk on the lips in front of a crowd, in front of friends and teachers and other people who know them, in front of his family as a final 'fuck you', but right now all it just urges him to do is to twist his knuckles in Jeongguk's stomach until Jeongguk's coughing out, "Forward. The only way to go is forward."

Seokjin laughs. His throat is still tight and dry and his chest still feels heavy, but not quite enough to keep him from saying the important things: *Since when have you been so wise?* when Jeongguk gives him a questioning look, *Exactly how much have you grown when you were away?* when Jeongguk frowns at him in retaliation and pinches him even harder. *Thank you,* when Jeongguk gives up on any chance of eliciting a protest from Seokjin and rests his warm palm on Seokjin's cheek, instead, and, *For the record, you were cuter when you were still in uni. Now you're just a grown up brat who slaps his favorite hyung with the harsh realities of life and other shit,* just as Jeongguk hums in what seems to be victory.

"I guess I'll just have to woo you again, then," Jeongguk singsongs, then snatches the last piece of tteok from their shared plate. "Do you want a repeat of uni days, hyung? As in, d'you want me to do the same Pepero confession I did before asking you out on an ice cream date--"

"Not a chance, kid," Seokjin whispers in response, then steals the tteok right back. "And, well, there's someone--"

Jeongguk widens his eyes and lifts his eyebrows. "As in, you two are--" He shakes his head, laughs at himself, waves his hands in front of him in the same way that he does when he's berating himself for even thinking of silly things. Seokjin recalls this from... from their first few conversations years ago, where half of their 'little dates' was spent coaxing Jeongguk to speak properly and not use anime references all the time, and the other half was spent lounging in the club room and watching anime, watching their hands gravitate towards each other until their fingers are threaded together. It would probably be nice to go back to those days and just revel in Jeongguk's warmth, but their story has already ended. The chapter has been closed. If there was any chance of them getting back together then Seokjin, in some random fit of courage, would have probably kissed Jeongguk on the lips earlier when they were already too close because Jeongguk isn't–won't ever be foreign territory. There are still some of the scars he's left on Jeongguk from years ago but he'd rather not map them out unless he really had to.

He's a changed man now. He won't ever look back anymore and will just, instead, keep moving
"Does he know you like him?"

Seokjin snorts. "Do I really have a reputation for keeping my feelings to myself?"

"Honest answer? Yes," Jeongguk replies, then thins his lips in what seems to be an apologetic smile. When the silence hangs around longer than usual, he shakes his head, tiptoes just a little so he can fluff Seokjin's hair, and tucks his hands in his pockets. "You can always change that, though."

Seokjin curls in his fingers and digs his nails into his skin. It's a bit weird to have the ghost of his past urging him to get rid of his old suit and slip into a new one so he can save more lives, make a difference, and make someone look his way, but hey – 'weird' is good. 'Weird' is a nice balance of the new and the familiar. 'Weird' is something he knows how to deal with.

Change is weird, as well, so maybe he can deal with that. He should. He will.

He holds the stick in his hand right in front of them and grins. "I can," he whispers, then clashes the stick against Jeongguk's own. Jeongguk whispers a soft cheers! in response.

"I will."
Whoever coined the term ‘false advertising’ must have had the harsh realities of life in mind.

Seokjin’s, specifically, because just as he settles into the habit of clocking out at seven in the evening on the days leading up to the start of the pitch preparations, work comes rushing in, washing over him and his supposed dinner dates with Jeongguk and Hoseok and ruining his carefully crafted plans. Part of him has seen it coming – he won't be able to work on his brands a hundred percent for the next few weeks, after all, so it makes sense for Joonmyun to want him to secure approvals and close running projects with many different clients before the start of the pitch season – and, honestly, he doesn't really mind, except the past few two in the mornings have felt oddly... monotonous, boring, routinary. Uneventful. Not that there's supposed to be something exciting about rendering extra hours at work, or that he should look forward to something other than crossing off items in his to-do list with every email sent, with every deck polished and perfected for presentation the following day, with every single task he accomplishes without a warm presence over his shoulder, but–

"He's in Busan for an ad conference and to receive an award, if you're wondering," comes a familiar voice, echoing in the empty accounts area and jolting Seokjin awake. Seokjin gulps hard, shifts his gaze from side to side, and curls his hands into loose fists. He and Jimin did their usual 1 a.m. checks earlier, just before Jimin left, and Seokjin's pretty darn sure they hadn't seen anyone else in the office that time. The production area was surprisingly wiped clean of people chugging down coffee like water or gasoline. The creatives area was free of breathing creatures as early as eleven in the evening – a feat that he and Jimin should probably fear because that usually meant some of the creatives decided to push back deadlines they hadn't set, which meant trouble for accounts people like them. The people in finance left at around twelve, but only because they had to made sure that the payroll system kicked in as soon as midnight hit. Otherwise, they wouldn't even stay past nine in the evening.

And the lights in Yoongi's office were still off. His desk was blessedly clean for the first time in months and there weren't sheets of bond paper with pitch notes and ideas taped to the glass walls of his office. His room was... empty. It's a bit unsettling, knowing that there was a time, just two years ago, when Yoongi had slipped out of the office unannounced and hadn't returned until weeks after. And Seokjin trusts Yoongi to not fall back into old habit after seeing Yoongi repel the very thought of it that fateful night in Itaewon, really, but–

But what's even more unsettling now is that even if Seokjin tries to make out the figure of the newcomer, all he gets are lines of motion, blocks and shapes, a blur of colors. Images familiar enough that, if he squints hard enough, he'll probably be able to make out the entire picture, but his eyesight is shitty at two in the morning. No, it's not an excuse to slide even closer to Yoongi whenever they 'bump into each other' in the pantry at such a late hour or way too early in the morning, even before they've had their morning coffee. His eyesight just messes up his perception of reality at the stroke of midnight, so he has to help himself the best way he knows how, the only way he knows.

He has to do everything to make sure he isn't dreaming, that he isn't making things up in his head. Imagination is dangerous sometimes. Imagination isn't always safe.

So when he looks over his shoulder, meeting Joonmyun in the eye, he says, "Huh?" and furrows his
"What? What made you think--" He shakes his head, heaves a sigh, and squeezes his eyes shut in an attempt to wipe away the thin white haze in his eyes. If he opens them to the sight of darkness and not of Joonmyun's figure hovering him then he's going to run the fuck away, screaming, maybe even crying desperately for help as soon as the realization kicks in, but if he doesn't then he'll have to face the consequences of his mistake, of letting down his walls at two in the morning when, on a normal day, it would be Yoongi gently pulling down his defenses with little questions, narrations, stories about the day that was. Soft, gentle tugs that feel a lot like the nudges Yoongi gives him when he's close to drifting off already while they're clacking at the keys of their laptops beside each other. Nobody else would dare pry him from his tight grip on focus at such an hour without even a hint of fear or remorse. Only Yoongi would have the balls to do that.

"Thought you went home already? Didn't your meeting end at eight or something?" Seokjin asks after a while, shifting his attention back to his laptop, to the ten unread emails in his inbox, to work. Never mind that his palms are sweaty and that his pulse is beating strongly in his palm – he's managed to finish a deck even with shaking hands before. Fighting off nervousness is easy. Lying to Joonmyun, well, he can at least give it a shot. "And don't tell me you went to the meeting in shorts, hyung. I'm gonna judge you so hard--"

"The big guys texted, asked me to check on the kids and on the office. Just doing my job," Joonmyun says in response, words muffled by the yawn that escapes his lips. He settles on Jimin's seat cross-legged, leans back for a while, then surfaces with a smile. "You, why are you still here? Didn't you say you were gonna try clocking out at seven while you still can? What happened to that?"

Seokjin snorts. "Ask the person who flooded my inbox with forwarded mails," he grumbles, but makes sure to curl his lips up into a smile. His frustration with Joonmyun usually lasts up to ten minutes and he knows Joonmyun's aware of that, but there's nothing wrong with assuring his boss that nope, he's really not looking for a new job and that he doesn't plan to anytime soon. Not unless Yoongi suddenly jumps ship and goes back to Saatchi or moves to Ogilvy or TBWA. Maybe then Seokjin would reconsider and start looking for ways to brush up on his Photoshop techniques, reacquaint himself with his drawing skills, pick up a past love and dust off the cobwebs that wouldn't have accumulated if he hadn't allowed them to. Maybe then he'd take the leap, but only if Yoongi extends a hand in his direction and asks him to. And maybe you should actually attach the files before you forget, Jin. How can you forget things like this when you can't forget people and moments easily? "Who's gonna handle Jimin's brands in the interim, again? I mean, during the pitch. We have to offload the kid or else he'll combust. And he can't do that now because he still has– Wow, he has five campaigns running at the same time. I didn't realize--"

Joonmyun laughs. "You really think Jimin will let someone else handle his precious brands? You know him – he gets attached to things easily."

"He gets attached to everything, hyung, even his seat. He yanked it away from me when he saw me using it. Totally not on purpose." Seokjin frowns. Joonmyun's response is a solemn pat on the arm but whatever, Joonmyun can't hold back the laughter bubbling on his lips. His face always gives him away. Or maybe Seokjin has just spent so much time studying Joonmyun and noting down his observations in his tiny pink notebook. He has a separate one for Yoongi – that one's the size of a regular notebook and he's almost up to his last page. So Seokjin just rolls his eyes, shakes his head, lets Joonmyun's soft laughter bleed onto his skin and ease the little knots in his chest, drapes Joonmyun's warm smile on his shoulders like a quilt. "He tries really hard not to let it show, though. Like, really, really hard--"

"Someone can learn a thing or two from him, then. I mean, when it comes to trying to be subtle."
Joonmyun tucks his chin on his clasped hands and hums. The corners of his lips are pulled up, his smile almost reaching the corners of his eyes and making them crinkle, but fatigue fights it, overpowers it and just highlights the dark circles under Joonmyun's eyes even more. Years and too many frustrations after and Seokjin still... gets this weird sense of comfort just having Joonmyun with him, his voice, calm and smooth, soothing the rough bumps in Seokjin's breathing, the tightness in his throat. 95% of the time, he wants to kick Joonmyun in the groin for giving him too much work and trusting him too much; the remaining 5%, he wants to kick himself in the butt, even more so when Joonmyun approaches him at such a late hour and says, “Enough, enough. Off to bed with you! Let me take care of the rest.” "Who the hell even goes through the attendance log every three hours just to check if a certain 'Min' has already come in?"

Seokjin gulps hard. Okay, maybe he wants to punch Joonmyun in the face for being perceptive 2% of the time, too. Or 3%, because when Joonmyun sees things, he doesn't stop at that. Instead, Joonmyun goes deeper, investigates, digs up information slowly and quietly until the subject of his studies is already opening up to him. "Finance does that," Seokjin mumbles, and Joonmyun's immediate response is a cock of the eyebrow. "What? You know I'm right. Finance is super particular about our time in–"

"Three times a day, Jin, three times a day."

"--and time out which makes a lot of sense because, y'know, some of the creatives actually stay in the office 'til one doing nothing at all and that means the company has to pay them for their unproductive hours-- What?" Seokjin widens his eyes, frowns when Joonmyun doesn't say a word, then leans back in his seat. "Whatever, hyung. I still have emails to send. And I don't know where you even got that idea but it sounds really, really--"

"Obvious. It's too obvious," Joonmyun finishes. Seokjin's breath hitches and the pulse at the base of his throat slows down for a bit, then it's quickening its pace again, drumming heavy beats on his skin, making it difficult for him to breathe. "You two aren't exactly the subtlest of people, you know. The kid comes in at 9 a.m. now. He smiles at people after your morning coffee... thingie, I don't even know what you two do at ten in the morning because he always looks so giggly after that. And regular 2 a.m. sessions?" Joonmyun scoffs. "Yoongi won't even look at Namjoon without looking like he's five seconds away from murdering him at 1 a.m.. So please, Jin, if you say you two haven't been up to anything at all then tell me what I'm supposed to think of a certain friend currently stuck socializing in Busan texting me out of the blue, asking how 'one of my kids' is and if he's doing well. Tell me what I'm supposed to think when I keep seeing you looking so glum in your seat at 2 a.m., what I'm supposed to think whenever I see you looking over your shoulder like you're waiting for someone to come over. Tell me: what am I supposed to think when I see Yoongi walking out of a meeting room wearing your clothes and you looking like you're this close to hugging him instead of yanking your sweater off of him? What am I supposed to think?"

Seokjin gulps hard. He curls his fingers into loose fists, tries to dig his nails into his skin in an effort to check if he is, indeed, not just imagining things. Did Joonmyun just-- He shakes his head. There's a huge chance that he's just making things up, but Joonmyun looks so calm and collected and completely sure of what he'd just said. So Seokjin whispers, "He asked about me?" syllables tumbling from his lips in a voice so soft, he could have just been breathing, but even then he still feels the thundering pulse at the back of his elbows and knees, still feels the loud thumping in his chest, all screaming the same thing – Min Yoongi, the asshole who keeps messing with my mind, had the balls to ask how I've been doing when he knows very well he's fucked up with my brain so badly? Is he fucking serious? "He--"

"So you are looking for him," Joonmyun says. He laughs, smiles, then leans back in his seat. "He says sorry for having his creatives pull you in for a brainstorming session, by the way, but not really
because he knows you'll have fun, anyway. And yes, he's been... asking on the regular. It's actually kinda cute." He stretches his legs in front of him and wiggles his feet. On a normal day, Seokjin would take it as an opportunity to kick Joonmyun away from him, but right now all he wants is to hear more about what Yoongi has been asking, what Yoongi has been telling Joonmyun. What Joonmyun knows. "He actually knows how to use his phone now other than for games–"

Seokjin snorts. "Should I be flattered?"

"Very. He bought a new phone for the first time in five years so he can play the cat game and so his phone won't die on him during long calls, not to send texts. You know him – he's very single-minded in his needs. And, well, he's a lazy texter. Can't even type anything than a 'k' when acknowledging emails, that ass."

And he'd rather not drive to places he doesn't know unless he's in the mood to or unless he feels like separating himself from his thoughts and pulling himself closer to a familiar warmth. And he's complete shit at sending corporate emails, would rather just send attachments with a curt subject title and a smiley than waste his time and effort crafting two blocks of text filled with nothing but reiterations of the script or visual or presentation he's sending over. And Min Yoongi doesn't share his candies with anyone at all and would torment anyone who attempts to steal them, except Seokjin has found candy with a note from Yoongi far too many times on his desk, his laptop, in his things. So many times already, in fact, that, by now, it almost feels weird not being greeted by pink sticky notes and caramel candies at any point of the day.

Seokjin laughs to himself. Of all the mistakes he's decided to make, he chose to weave habits out of moments he spends with Yoongi. As if Yoongi hasn't already been making his life difficult. As if the grave he's dug for himself isn't already too deep.

"You have to prepare me for these things, hyung," Seokjin whispers after a while, syllables tumbling from his lips without preamble. He'd press the back of his hand to his mouth if he could, try to take back what he'd just said, but his limbs are frozen right now. He can't even feel anything beyond the heavy thumping in his chest or the pulse at the base of his throat that keeps quickening by the second. He can't... think properly, and if Yoongi were here – in Seoul, in the office, right beside Seokjin instead of miles away – Yoongi would probably be heaving a sigh, thinning his lips into a tight, tight smile, and saying, Come on, you can do better than that. I know you can. Now, stop halfassing the brainstorming and put all of your energy into thinking instead of kicking yourself in the ass for not nailing the idea the first time around. Don't think of anything else. Focus on me. "Throw a project at me, sure, I can take it, but this? This?"

Joonmyun chuckles. He leans in, bucking his seat closer to Seokjin's own until their knees bump. Taking a deep breath, he reaches over, the pads of his fingers ghosting the soft skin of Seokjin's cheek, making Seokjin shiver all over. For a second, Seokjin thinks he's going to have to remind himself again that not everything he sees in Hoseok's favorite shoujo manga is real, that this boss right in front of him isn't the boss he wants to pull much closer and crash his lips into, but soon Joonmyun's fluffing the tuft of his hair, ruffling it, then saying, "You're a big boy now. I can't hold your hand through this anymore. Besides, I'm not the boss of your heart. Take it up with the real boss."

Seokjin wrinkles his nose. Boss and subordinate relationships seldom work out. If and when they do, it's in movies, TV series, in one of those silly anime that Hoseok loves so much. He's never seen anything like it blossom into a lasting relationship in the great soap opera called 'life'. Heck, he's never even seen office affairs evolve into real romance and not just two people dragging each other to the closest quiet place! He has no idea how that tryst involving one of Hoseok's officemates panned out, but he's thirty-three now and he graduated with latin honors in a course he regrets taking
and he isn't stupid enough to believe in a 'happily ever after' for something as real as life.

He's just silly enough to hope, though, and a small, small voice at the back of his head screams at him for even wishing that he might have his own Disney-slash-shojo manga kind of ending someday.

"'The boss of my heart–' I can't believe you, hyung," he groans after a while. He jabs at Joonmyun on the arm once, twice, thrice, until Joonmyun's giggling louder than he should instead of wailing like how most normal people being punched would be. Seokjin has always been drawn to the strange and the weird, though. His current favorite? The strange, fuzzy feeling he gets inside when the realization hits him in earnest – Yoongi hasn't just been asking about him; he's been asking about how the lack of them has been keeping Seokjin on the edge the past few days. "Now I know why you're in accounts. That would have been a really, really corny copy–"

"And yet you didn't deny a thing," Joonmyun says, interrupting, the corners of his mouth pulling up into the brightest smile. Seokjin scowls in thoughtless retaliation, but if he ever thinks of denying things now and brushing Joonmyun's allegations off, he doesn't. Instead, he kicks at Joonmyun's feet, frowns, sticks out his tongue, none of which spell out the word 'no' in big, bold characters. "You didn't even try."

In this dream, Seokjin should probably be making a beeline for his room and diving straight into his bed already. He'll lie flat on his stomach for a few peaceful minutes, just relishing the warmth seeping onto his skin from the comforters. He'll take deep, sharp breaths and hum at the sweet scent of fabric conditioner still thick in the sheets filling his nostrils. If he's lucky, he'll be awake enough to roll over so he's lying flat on his back and kicking the comforters over his legs so that he'll feel ten times warmer and cozier than before, but if not, then... he'll just fall asleep right there with his face buried in the thick comforters draped across his bed. Never mind that waking up with aching limbs and sore, sore muscles is the worst possible way to start the day – at least he got to sleep on a bed for three, four hours. Work has been hell the past few days, and the most rest he'd gotten recently is the hour-long sleep he managed to catch during the car ride from the client's office back to BBDO. Joonmyun had been kind enough to just let him snooze his way through the entire trip even if Joonmyun hated not having anyone to fill the silence with, and Seokjin replayed Joonmyun by buying him dinner the same day. "It's the least I could do, hyung," he'd said, then gripped Joonmyun by the shoulders and swerved him in the direction of their favorite restaurant. Joonmyun frowned in a really bad attempt at retaliating. "Let me pay you back for all the help you've given me–"

Something moves. Or at least something sounds like it's moving, because Seokjin's still about halfway through continuing his dream of rolling on his bed in his head and his eyes are still squeezed shut. He's pretty darn sure nobody else was around when he 'napped' in the conference room, though. Jimin and Taehyung had already gone home then, at around three in the morning, after finishing the storyboards and clearing them with Joonmyun because, "No way in hell are we working over the weekend, hyung. The pitch isn't even until a few more weeks after. Gotta save up on energy and effort!" Joonmyun had, too, around fifteen minutes after the two left the premises and disappeared around the block. "Go home. There's no use trying to finish that tonight when you keep drifting off, anyway," Joonmyun had said, then pinched Seokjin in the arm when Seokjin didn't utter a word. "Okay, that's it. I'm taking you home. Yoongi's gonna kill me when he finds out you're zoning out again–"
I'm gonna kill myself if I zone out again while working, Seokjin would argue, but he was too tired to even form coherent sentences, so instead he waved Joonmyun off, grumbled, then answered when he felt the cogwheels of his mind turning again, "I think I'll just stay in the morning. Can't even remember where my keys are anymore. I might just pass out in someone else's house if I go home like this. Or collapse somewhere, I don't know."

Joonmyun huffed. "I said, I'll drive you home--"

"Hyung, you live in the mountains. You're just as sleepy as I am. I'm not making you drive to my place like this." Seokjin stuck out his tongue when Joonmyun groaned, but reached out to give Joonmyun's hand a gentle squeeze, anyway. "Seriously, hyung, I'll be okay here. The doors are locked so nobody can get in. I'll text you when I get home tomorrow. You'll still be able to slave me around on Monday. I'll live."

And he is alive, but possibly not for too long. He can hear the person, the creature moving again, steps lighter and more spaced out this time. Seokjin shivers, insides lurching as he does so, and he opens his eyes wide, much wider than before, looking up little by little from where he's had his head tucked in his arms. The back of his eyelids burn and his nape aches so damn much that he feels his neck will snap into half if he tilts his head back a bit too much, so he moves in slow motion, takes in the details of everything around him like light sketches on rough canvas slowly coming together to form a more cohesive picture. Coaxes his mind to return to a more relaxed state so that the rest of his body won't jump into overdrive and make his heart race in his chest.

"Go back to sleep," comes a voice, familiar enough that if Seokjin closes his eyes, if Seokjin tries to drown out all the white noise around him with the sound of his even breathing and focuses on this familiar tone, then he'll be able to get a clear image of who this person is. Small frame, big presence. Dark eyes but bright smile. Rough words but a touch so soft and gentle, it makes Seokjin feel so scared of breaking in Yoongi's arms and crumbling against his warmth. Yoongi, just Yoongi, without the boss cape or the creative director coat he wears so often, but so dangerously close and holding up a jacket in a weird position. Min Yoongi, in the flesh, close enough to touch but not quite for Seokjin to be able to count Yoongi's eyelashes, the cracks on his chapped lips, the dots on his cheek before a blush of pink bloom on Yoongi's cheeks.

He blinks twice, then looks around him. The seats are blessedly empty. All his paperwork is scattered on the table, reminiscent of those tiring pitch preparations a few months back. And Yoongi's inching even closer, leaning in so he can drape the jacket on Seokjin's shoulder and smooth his palms down Seokjin's arms as he says, "Close your eyes and go back to sleep. You need it. I'll just wake you up before I leave--"

"Yoon...gi?" Seokjin breathes out, syllables tumbling and hitting a hump just before his breath hitches. Yoongi laughs, then, shoulders jumping, knees knocking against the chair Seokjin's made himself comfortable in, and boy, does that shake things up. All of a sudden, everything is ten times clearer than before. He can read the great wall of garbled text he'd typed in his sleep on the screen, can actually see the mess he'd left the table in before his body decided it was better for him to pass out on his laptop than to keep pretending he could still work at ass o’ clock in the morning. And Yoongi has one hand curled on his nape now instead of just rested on his shoulders, the other slowly, slowly, slowly sliding down to his chest like Yoongi means to check Seokjin for a heartbeat that's more normal than panicked. "How-- When did you get back?"

Yoongi laughs. His voice sounds rough. His eyes are still puffy. There's a small smile pulling up at the corners of his lips and lighting up his features a little, but there's no mistaking the fatigue in the dark circles under his eyes and the slump of his shoulders. It's... nine in the morning and he probably hasn't had coffee yet because Yoongi's too lazy to make himself breakfast at this hour, and right now
Seokjin wants nothing but to coax Yoongi to sit right beside him, offer him coffee, make him toast and eggs or even a traditional Korean breakfast just to breathe life back into his features. He wants to run his fingers through Yoongi's hair and untangle the messy tuft with soft and gentle flicks. He wants to... bury his face in Yoongi's hair and just breathe Yoongi in, all while memorizing the rhythm of Yoongi's fitful snoring against his skin and the way Yoongi's body fits in his when he wraps his arms around Yoongi's slender waist. *Sleep, sleep, you need it as much as I do,* he wants to blurt out, but he can't even find his words right now. Yoongi has snatched them away the moment he draped his jacket over Seokjin's shoulder like he's caged in on Seokjin with his warmth and said, *You can't escape from this. You will sleep and I will wake you up and maybe we can drive around for a bit because who wants to go back to an empty house at the start of winter? I don't, Jin, and I definitely know you don't like that, either.* "I took a plane then a cab home then drove here, that's how. And... I just got back, actually. Wasn't planning on come in today but I'm so behind on my timesheets so I have to work on those or else I'll be--"

*Locked out,* Seokjin hears Yoongi trail off, voice dipping to a whisper, but somehow the words get a bit garbled in Seokjin's mind. Yoongi brushes his thumb just behind Seokjin's ear, earning a shiver, a faint mewl, making Seokjin's stomach lurch, and Seokjin isn't sure which he should be more concerned about – the surprised look in Yoongi's features, or the way his insides keep turning, pulling him forward until he's crashing into Yoongi. But crashes aren't nice. They're messy. They cause a scene and Seokjin *knows* Yoongi hates drawing attention to himself unless it's for a presentation, for a pitch, for business purposes. Yoongi will poke and nudge and grab Seokjin by the wrist if he wants attention, but otherwise--otherwise--

"You look sick, geez--" Yoongi heaves a sigh. Slowly, he slides his hands down Seokjin's arms again and guides him back down so he can nap on the table. "Sleep for an hour then I'll... check on you or something. Actually, you know what? I'll just set up here and do my timesheets then just... wake you up once I'm done. No way in hell am I letting you go home like that. You look awful."

*You look awful.* Seokjin gulps hard. He drops his gaze to his hands, marred with nasty, red marks. Shifts it to his reflection on the screen and frowns at the keyboard marks on his skin, the pimples on his cheeks, the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes that aren't from smiling, the little white marks at the corners of his mouth, proof of him dozing off while working. A blink, then he catches Yoongi's reflection, as well, the way Yoongi's lips quirk up when Seokjin presses the back of his hand to his cheeks in an attempt to wipe off the keyboard dents on his skin, and the way Yoongi tries to hold back a giggle as he says, "I didn't mean that." But it *does* make sense – Seokjin... doesn't look presentation-perfect right now. He can't walk up to Yoongi in this state and spew whatever words have been stuck at the back of his throat for the longest time. Heck, he hasn't even rehearsed his lines yet! He knows the important phrases – 'sorry for being slow,' 'sorry for being the way I am,' 'you're cute but you're actually really beautiful but no, no, you're... wonderful and I want you to know that you have a very, very special place in my heart,' because he's too chicken to summarize that in just three words – but he hasn't had the chance to run through his lines in his head again and again until he's confident he won't screw things up.

He can't--he can't just grab Yoongi by the shoulders and *confess.* He'll stumble on his words and make a fool of himself. And he's a hundred percent sure that isn't the best way to impress Min Yoongi.

He's going to ruin *everything.*

So maybe it's the right time to run far, far away and never come back. Maybe he should pull up his resignation letter from a year ago and shove it in Yoongi's chest, apologize for how sudden everything is, then pick up his bags so he can leave. Or maybe he should just stand up and leave and not show up on Monday, Tuesday, for the next few days until he has already forgotten the way the
slightest touch from Yoongi makes his insides turn. Less words, less trouble, right? And he's good at staying away from trouble that doesn't come in the form of Min Yoongi. So he pushes himself up, off of his chair, and grips the edge of the table as tightly as he can, but his knees give away and soon he's falling forward, crashing face first into Yoongi's chest. Soon, he hears the loud thumping through Yoongi's shirt, feels Yoongi's pulse against the small of his back, feels Yoongi curling his cold fingers around his wrist. Soon, he feels Yoongi's warm breath blooming on his skin, Yoongi's face buried in his hair as he whispers, "Stay."

Seokjin shuts his eyes tightly and breathes Yoongi in.

Fuck his fucking life.

"Stay," Yoongi says again, louder this time like he hadn't heard himself the first time around. The syllables stick to Seokjin's skin like glue, sending shivers down his spine and warmth through his veins. Stay for what? Seokjin wants to ask, Why should I stay? To dig another grave for myself? To make my life even more difficult? To make it impossible to ever think of leaving again? Come on—but Yoongi's grip on him tightens, makes the words brimming on his lips rush back down to the pit of his stomach and claw at his insides until he's breathing out against Yoongi's skin. "Why did you even stay here 'til the morning? Why didn't you just go home with Joonmyun-hyung or— Why did you leave that night?" Yoongi asks, and Seokjin's knee jerk reaction is to bury his face in Yoongi's chest more, squeeze his eyes shut even tighter, and shake his head. "Why?"

You have the nerve to ask, groans a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind, but he pushes that further back until he can no longer hear anything but the loud thumping in Yoongi's chest. He clears his throat, balls his hands into tight fists, twists his knuckles in Yoongi's stomach as he tries to bring himself back to his feet, much stabler than before. He doesn't meet Yoongi's eyes yet, though. Instead, he keeps his eyes on his feet where the tips of his shoes brush against Yoongi's own. "I had to finish stuff. Didn't want to pass out in front of my flat's building in winter. Didn't want hyung to pass out, either," he answers, words spilling from his lips faster than his brain can process them, but he stops dead in his tracks at the last 'why'. C'mon, you already know the answer to that, he wants to say, but what if Yoongi doesn't? What if there are things that even Min Yoongi doesn't know and Seokjin has to slowly peel off his layers, himself, instead of waiting for Yoongi to reach out to touch? What if Yoongi has memorized all of Seokjin's actions, movements, gestures already, and all that he's waiting for are words, his cue, the 'go' signal, the green light? "And I– I realized I had stuff to do for work so I went to the office early and–"

"You came in late."

"The train came late."

"And I had to present part of the deck on my own because you got to the office halfway through the meeting already. Thanks,Jin, that was really nice of you. I appreciate it." Yoongi heaves a sigh. He risks a glance at Seokjin, looking up then at the distance between them, then whispers, "You know what? Never mind. Just--sleep. Talk to me again when you're awake already or something."

Yoongi pulls away. Now you've really ruined it, screams a voice in Seokjin's mind, and somehow that propels him to move forward, to reach out, to wrap his fingers around Yoongi's wrist in a tight, tight grip. Never mind that his palms are probably clammy and that his fingers are cold and that his hands are shaking – nothing shakes him up more than the sight of Yoongi retreating to the exit, moving away, all the space and distance between them keeping Seokjin from breathing easily instead of making it easier for him to breathe. Nothing shakes him up more than knowing Yoongi is just within reach but keeps resisting because he doesn't know how to use his words at the right time.

So say what you have to say now, whispers a voice in his head. It sounds a lot younger than it
usually does, but _hey_ – kids are wiser than adults sometimes. There are things that adults will always try to deny that only kids will _ever_ admit to.

"Yoongi–"

"Sleep," Yoongi mutters even before Seokjin can get another word out. He doesn't move, doesn't even try to shake Seokjin off, but he does hang his head low. The pulse in his wrist is quick, just heavy enough for Seokjin to feel a familiar rhythm on his skin, so Seokjin slides his hand down just a little, presses his thumb where Yoongi's pulse beats feel the strongest. It makes Yoongi's voice crack when he says, "Don't talk. Your breath stinks," but then it could have just been pure coincidence. It doesn't always have to be Seokjin making Yoongi do strange, funny things. It doesn't have to mean anything. "Just close your eyes and–"

Seokjin shakes his head. No, I won't. _It's now or never. You can't tell me what to do_, he murmurs to himself, then takes a deep breath before trying again, "Yoongi, I–"

"I _said_, just sleep–"

"Shut the fuck up, Min Yoongi. Just. Shut up. _Please_. Just _let me talk._" Seokjin breathes out, heavy and loud, and Yoongi slowly, very slowly, looks over his shoulder. His eyebrows are furrowed and his lips are parted into the smallest 'o' and his cheeks are the softest shade of pink. His chest is heaving in gallops, his shoulders lifting in accord. And he's turning around in earnest, facing front and looking at Seokjin straight in the eye. Part of Seokjin wishes he hadn't said the whole thing, wishes Yoongi isn't staring at him now with the most discerning gaze and the most peculiar glimmer in his eyes. He wishes... he'd done this earlier, much earlier, when there was nothing keeping them apart but a hitch of a breath, but _enough with wishes_. He's been holding back and holding onto hopes for so long already. Now is the time to make things happen.

Now is the time to _do something_ instead of just waiting, waiting, _waiting_ for the best to come.

"I–I made the mistake of keeping quiet about this whole thing when I knew for a fact that you _needed_–you _wanted_ to hear something. And leaving you back there? In my own house? Without a word?" He scoffs. "That was stupid. Silly and stupid. Sorry you had to see that. Sorry you–you had to go through all the shit I made you go through–"

"I _let you_ make me go through those things–"

"I said _shut up_, just let me talk," Seokjin grumbles. Yoongi chuckles and sucks in his lower lip, but the curious look in his features hasn't lifted yet. Instead, it softens just a little, eases the light furrow of Yoongi's eyebrows, teases the corners of his mouth up into a little smile. "Just let me explain."

Yoongi nods. He nibbles on his lower lips, twists his mouth, then inches closer. "Doesn't _count as_ talking, _right_? the smirk on his lips seems to say when Seokjin narrows his eyes and squints at Yoongi as if questioning his motives. _Not even making a sound?_ So Seokjin takes that as a sign to go on, to coax the shy words that have retreated to the back of his throat to rush to the surface for a clumsy enunciation. "I didn't–I didn't know why I left," Seokjin begins, pausing to suck in a violent breath. "Honest to god, I just... went with my gut feel and, that time, it told me to run away. Look for answers. Talk to my best friend to sort out my thoughts or something. I was... scared, I guess? Freaked out? Not by the thought of this, the thought of _us_, but–" He drags his gaze up, tracing the link of their hands, then meets Yoongi in the eye in earnest. Half of him regrets it, seeing how silly he looks right now in Yoongi's eyes, but half of him keeps telling himself there's nothing better he could be doing right now but this. Stuck in a conference room yet again, there's nothing better he could be doing but holding Yoongi by the hand and finally telling him all the ideas – good and bad – that have been brewing at the back of his mind for the longest time. "I guess I'm just not used to _not_
knowing so when things just... got out of control, I got scared. One minute, I was dying to get as far away from my ex as possible; the next minute, I was kissing a stranger, my boss. You were kissing me. One minute, I was being pulled into a pitch; the next minute, I was... actually brainstorming with people, sharing with them my thoughts, actually getting recognition for my ideas. One minute, I was thinking I already had everything I wanted – a great boss, great teammates, a job that pays well and is actually fun despite being crazy, but the next minute, I was realizing that I... wanted more."

That I wanted you, a voice in his mind echoes. He shushes that with soft laughter, a gentle shake of the head, and tells it, later. "I didn't realize what I really wanted until I... got to know you. Got to know you better, I mean. I didn’t... realize what I really wanted until you let me in."

Yoongi leans back a little. His lips fall open, letting slip a faint 'oh', then he's nodding, biting down on his lower lip, dropping his gaze to his feet and looking at everything but Seokjin's eyes. There's nothing but silence for a while, thick and deafening and menacing, and it makes Seokjin shake and shiver all over, makes him loosen his grip on Yoongi until Yoongi reels him back with a light jerk of his hand, when Yoongi shifts a little and threads their fingers together in a new yet snug fit.

"Did... Did it mean anything to you?" Seokjin asks after a while, sick of the silence, the standstill. When Yoongi doesn't answer he repeats, this time louder, "Did the kiss mean anything to you at all?"

"Do you want it to mean something?"

Seokjin scoffs. "Stop recalibrating to accommodate, he grumbles. "Tell me the truth, no holds barred." He laughs, trying to ease the tightness in his throat, but all he ever succeeds in doing is making his voice crack, his knees shake. All he ever ends up doing is tightening his grip on Yoongi all the more in an effort to stay on his feet and not lose his balance again. "C'mon, you know me. I can– Look: whatever you say, no matter what, I won't hold it against you. So shoot. I can take it. Whatever it is, I can–"

"Why does a boy kiss another boy who's in a heated argument with his ex-girlfriend?"

Seokjin furrows his eyebrows. That doesn't answer anything, he wants to argue, but Yoongi's tilting his head to the side, looking at him with the most peculiar gaze, smiling at him with a familiar quirk in his lips that Seokjin knows can only one thing – trouble. So he's probably missing--no. He's a hundred percent sure he's missing something. He probably shouldn't have stayed up until ass o'clock in the morning just to work. He probably should have gone home or taken Joonmyun's offer so he could have had the chance to rehearse his lines, this whole thing, and play out scenarios in his head, regardless of the kind of ending he's gunning for. Too late for that now, though, so he answers, "Uh, I don't know. Because his ears already hurt from all the girl's screaming?" Yoongi snorts, cackles, then he's sucking in his lower lip as Seokjin tries again, "Because he wants to make the girl shut up already? Is that it?"

Yoongi shakes his head. "Because the boy actually finds the other boy cute even if he stuffed-- I mean, come on, who even does that?" He chuckles and takes a deep, shaky breath. His grip on Seokjin grows even tighter as he inches forward, one small step for every three quick beats of his pulse on Seokjin's skin. With nothing but a few inches between them, his eyebags look ten times worse and his cheeks are flushed and he hasn't stopped worrying his lower lip every few seconds. He looks like he needs more sleep and rest than Seokjin and damn, all Seokjin wants to do right now is to hold Yoongi close, thread his fingers through Yoongi's hair, whisper against Yoongi's soft skin, so you look like shit and so do I so maybe--maybe we could-- But Yoongi's pushing the thoughts further back with the soft brush of his thumb on Seokjin's skin, with him reaching up and curling his fingers on Seokjin's nape, with the warmth of his tone as he whispers into the thinning space
between them, "And he wants to know if the other boy finds him cute, as well."

Seokjin inches closer. *I was expecting more from a top-class copywriter like you,* he wants to say, but he can't even feel his limbs anymore, can't feel anything beyond the thundering pulse at the base of his throat and the heavy thumping in his chest. It almost feels like his body is operating on autopilot, his hands finding a nice fit on Yoongi's waist and him tilting his head a little, just so, as Yoongi drops one hand to his shirt and balls his fingers into tight fists, but it *all makes sense.* It feels as if... they're dancing, choreography unrehearsed when they come a little too close and step on each other's toes, when their foreheads bump and the tips of their noses touch and their bodies collide. "Asshole," Yoongi grumbles, but he's smiling, laughing, shaking his head, pulling Seokjin close with little, tentative tugs. On a normal day, Seokjin would fight right back, shove a retort in Yoongi's face even before Yoongi can speak, but nothing is normal about this – the fit of their bodies, the way they align. This is *extraordinary.*

They're... *something.* They have something special, and *to hell* with anyone who tries to take that away from them. Seokjin won't go down without a fight. He'll fight for Yoongi, *with* Yoongi.

They'll go through every big pitch *together.*

So he kisses Yoongi. He leans in, pressing his lips to Yoongi's own, and Yoongi tilts his head back, smiles in the slide of their mouths, licks at the seam of Seokjin's lips in thoughtless response. Seokjin presses soft kisses to the the corners of Yoongi's mouth, licks the back of Yoongi's teeth like he's trying to find new things to unravel, to learn about Yoongi, and Yoongi parts his lips just as he sighs, opening up more, letting Seokjin in. Seokjin gives Yoongi's lower lip a light nip and sucks hard enough to bruise, and Yoongi balls his hand into a fist in Seokjin's hair, tugs at it in whispered permission, throws his head back even more, gasping out, *giving in.* There's no feeling around anymore, no testing waters or perimeters or limits, only two bodies moving in sync, so familiar with the rhythm of each other's breathing already. And none of this is make believe anymore; they no longer have to pretend. This is real – Yoongi's thundering pulse on his skin, heavy beats sending a shiver down his spine as Yoongi drops his hand to the small of Seokjin's back, Yoongi's fingers shaking when he slips them beneath Seokjin's shirt, the pads of his fingers leaving goosepimples in their wake and making Seokjin's insides turn. Seokjin can feel his knees weakening again as Yoongi backs him up against the table, all caution now thrown to the wind, can feel every part of his body shudder when Yoongi pulls away for a while before leaning back in to suck marks on the underside of his jaw, the slope of his neck, the jut of his upper lip, can feel himself fast losing control over every fiber of his being when Yoongi claims the corners of his mouth with gentle sucks and soft licks of his wicked tongue on the roof of his mouth, and if this is still Seokjin's imagination at work then *damn,* Yoongi's going to be so proud of him. If he's imagining things then Yoongi is the dream that keeps giving – in the way he licks, sucks, kisses Seokjin on the mouth, in the way he holds Seokjin with trembling hands like he's afraid he'll wake up from this make-believe reality any second now.

Yoongi is his dream, and now *they* are a reality.

It's familiar yet different all at once, the inelegant slide of their mouths, Yoongi digging nails into his skin and gasping out when Seokjin bucks his hips accidentally-on-purpose and grinds against him, and *him* letting out a choked moan when Yoongi sinks his teeth in the giving flesh of his neck as if in revenge, in response, *a challenge.* *Two can play this game,* Seokjin muses, so he licks Yoongi's earlobe, breathes out in a heavy exhale, and gives it soft, gentle nips until Yoongi's whispering his name like a mantra, a prayer, holding onto it like a lifeline and holding it close to his chest.

"That still doesn't answer my question," Seokjin murmurs when they part, then sticks out his tongue at Yoongi – Yoongi whose eyes are crinkled at the corners, Yoongi whose cheeks are flushed and
lips are swollen and pulled up into the craziest, most beautiful smile. Yoongi, *his Yoongi*, who's balling tight fists into his shirt again and pulling him close, close, *closer*, until their foreheads bump and the tips of their noses brush and until he can feel Yoongi's soft laughter bloom on his skin, tickling him, making him feel warm all over. "Seriously, I expected better–"

"You shut up," Yoongi whispers, then presses a soft kiss to the back of Seokjin's eyelids, the skin just above his mouth, the cut on his lower lip from where Yoongi had bitten down a bit too hard earlier. Never mind that it's probably inappropriate to kiss your boss again and again in the office – it's a Saturday and nobody should ever work on a weekend. Boss' orders. Surely, nobody will contest Yoongi on that. So Seokjin plays the 'boyfriend' card, leans back in, kisses the corners of Yoongi's mouth where the beginnings of a smile are blooming again, and breathes Yoongi in as Yoongi says, "It means *everything* to me."

「 bad, bad business 」

"Oh, you've *got* to be kidding me." Seokjin throws his head back in his seat, slumps in it until the dull ache in his lower back makes him shiver, and throws his hands up in the air. "I give up. I give up!"

"High five," comes Taehyung's voice, low and faint as the sound of their hands slapping against each other drowns it out. Seokjin doesn't even try to brush Taehyung off when he holds onto Seokjin's hand a little longer than he should, when he feels Taehyung shift, move closer, peer at whatever is flashed on his screen at the moment. It's almost normal now, having Taehyung hang around him, hovering, giving him a much needed nudge in his side when he's close to throwing a tantrum at account executives and clients and people in general. Seokjin has never lost it, though, not even once, but it's good to have Taehyung around to keep things light, *happy*. It's good to be where he is now. "Ah, the classic 'make the logo bigger' comment. Hyung, pro tip: try *super scaling up* the logo next time. Like, just before it gets cut off from the canvas. Around... five pixels from the edge. Or three. I'm telling you: it works."

Seokjin snorts. Taehyung seems unfazed, though, still nodding in thought and even giving Seokjin a solemn pat on the shoulder as he does so. Seokjin squints, then, studying Taehyung's features carefully, but *come on*, who is he kidding? If Yoongi's a tough cookie to crack then Taehyung's ten times harder to read. Probably not to Jimin – Jimin is, like, a weird, magical oven that turns Taehyung turn into soft, soft dough – but that doesn't mean Seokjin shouldn't keep trying. Familiarizing himself with new teammates is part of office life. Building friendships in new places is the real test in the workplace, not meeting deadlines and delivering quality output time and again. Forming strong bonds that stand the test of time is one of the greatest challenges ever.

He laughs to himself. *Whose stupid idea was it to move to creatives, anyway?* a voice at the back of his mind groans. He shushes it away even before he can murmur under his breath, *me*.

The big leap hadn't been easy. Joonmyun had already seen it coming, but he still wailed in *(exaggerated)* distress when Seokjin dropped the big bomb over lunch. Yoongi had insisted to tag along that time, tried convincing him to extend the calendar invite to his 'boss-to-be', but Seokjin said, "*No, I'll take care of this. Besides, if I take you with me, hyung will think I'm using intimidation*
tactics. And that's not what we're trying to achieve here, right?" Yoongi relented after a while, but Seokjin caught him and Namjoon spying on them, anyway, silly get ups and all. Yoongi didn't have to know that anymore, though. In the end, Joonmyun had relented, anyway, and waved Seokjin off with a frown, but yanked Seokjin into his arms by the wrist even before Seokjin could walk away.

"I'm happy for you," Joonmyun whispered in the crook of Seokjin's neck that time. Seokjin's first instinct was to chuckle; his second, to pretend that he hadn't choked up at Joonmyun adding, "I'm glad you're finally making this move. I couldn't be happier."

In exchange, Joonmyun asked Seokjin to look for a replacement. Which was hard and nigh impossible, in Seokjin's honest opinion – nobody would ever be willing to do what Seokjin had done for the company, for the people running it, for his boss. For people who weren't just his officemates – they were people he'd be willing to head into battle with. "Hyung, no one can ever replace me."

Seokjin had teased one time, but he did recommend to give Jimin and Minseok's designation a gentle push. So maybe he did have a hand in their promotion, even if he tried to deny it up until he had to move his things to the third floor already and Jimin threatened to trip him on his way up. Maybe Joonmyun wasn't able to keep quiet about it because Lord knew his alcohol tolerance was as good as none and he was a crazy talkative drunk. And maybe that's the reason Seokjin found a note on his table just a few days ago that said, 'Pantry, 2 p.m.. Come with you favorite fork. Your attendance is expected. (Who even says no to cake?) (And thanks.) (Really.) (We miss you T__T)'

"Not my idea," Yoongi had whispered from behind, then gave Seokjin's cheek a light pinch. "By the way, urgent request from client. Think you can send me... two studies for a cover photo design for the new Hyundai brand page by end of day? Actually, how about... before 2 p.m.? So you can turn your free cake into celebratory cake?"

Seokjin shook his head, then shivered when he felt the pads of Yoongi's fingers rubbing slow circles on the slope of his neck. This was the real intimidation tactic, he mused as Yoongi dragged his thumb up and brushed a long stripe at the back of Seokjin's ear.

"You look funny, hyung," Taehyung says now, snapping Seokjin out of his trance and reeling him back to the present. Taehyung's smiling, though, the corners of his mouth curled up in what seems to be an amused grin – something Seokjin had learned about just recently, when Seokjin powered through those two designs Yoongi had asked from him, grabbed Yoongi by the wrist when Yoongi passed by, and said, "How's that for 'before 2 p.m.'?"

Yoongi bit down hard on his lower lip as soon as the beginnings of a smile tugged at his lips. "Proud of you," he had whispered after a while, then leaned in just close enough to press a soft kiss to the crown of Seokjin's hair. To the rest of his team, he said, "If I start asking you to meet deadlines much, much earlier than usual, this is the guy you'll want to blame. I'm using him as benchmark, everyone. He passed his shit an hour before the 'surprise deadline'. Learn a thing or two from him."

Taehyung had groaned at him, and Baekhyun chucked a stress ball at him. Seokjin didn't–doesn't regret a thing, though. Every project is an entirely different challenge. Everyday is a new adventure to the unknown, something that scares him but allows him to discover things about his skill, his technique, himself. And now he understands all the shitty excuses creatives throw at the accounts people because coming up with fresh ideas on the regular is hard, tough, and can be draining, but–

"Hyung called. Said he wants you in his office," Namjoon mentions as he passes by, voice firm and resolute even as he gives Seokjin's arm a gentle squeeze, even as he gives Seokjin a jolt back to
reality and interrupts his brief respite. Seokjin sits up, rolls his shoulders back, and gathers a notepad, a pen, and the pitch brief Yoongi had dropped on his desk around three, four hours before, one that had a sticky note that said, ‘Bail me out of the dinner meeting, please. I don't want to see those clients anymore. :/’ “Aaand nope, you won’t be needing those. Just go.”

"But the pitch—"

"No need for those," Namjoon says through gritted teeth, but there's no mistaking the smile that surfaces on his lips before he turns on his heel to slip back to his station. "Now, go."

--but it's all fun, Seokjin muses as he steps inside Yoongi's office and Yoongi looks up from where he's been staring at his screen, mouthing at him, save mee— The white lights in Yoongi's office bring out the dark circles under Yoongi's eyes, the wrinkles at the corners of his mouth when he pouts, the fatigue written all over Yoongi's features all the more, so Seokjin drops his creative cape to the floor, pulls out the boyfriend card from where he's always had it tucked under his sleeve, and shuts the blinds in the room. Transition is hell--from accounts to creatives, from new hire to new pitch star to one of Yoongi's closest friends, his best companion, his boyfriend-- and he still has to handle a few brands until Joonmyun finds a worthy replacement, but hey it's all worth it.

He laughs a little when Yoongi throws his head back in his seat and flails his arms about. He gets to see this side of Yoongi more often, the one that has little to no walls built around him, gets to earn a living out of what he loves doing the most. He gets to be him now and no longer has to pretend so, really, it's all worth it. He'll gladly wake up every morning at the starting line, knowing that this is what's waiting for him at the very end. He'll gladly do it again.

"Not in the mood to work?" he asks as he saunters closer, guiding Yoongi's head forward until Yoongi's leaning on him, face buried in his shirt. On a bad day, Yoongi can be prickling hot, sometimes even scalding, but right now Yoongi is just the right kind of warm even as he makes a small sound of protest and groans in the material of Seokjin's polo. Yoongi can be saying, already part of creatives and you still dress like you have to go to client meetings every damned day, but nah, Seokjin knows this very well. This is Yoongi just wanting, needing time to rest, recalibrate. This is Yoongi wanting to breathe him in, knowing it will help him breathe easier later. "Or just in the mood for me?"

Yoongi snorts. "I'm always in the mood for you," he mumbles, then pinches Seokjin in his side. "Tired. Sleepy. Cuddle time--"

"But I have to work."

"But I'm your boss."

Seokjin heaves a sigh. He brushes Yoongi's bangs away from his face and juts out his lower lip a little, but it melts when Yoongi makes another gurgling sound, one that Seokjin has come to understand as, Stop being an adult for once and just be a kid with me. "But this is against company policy."

"But I am the company policy," Yoongi argues, chuckling this time, looking up. His eyes are still half-mast, but Seokjin can make out the little lights of mischief dancing in them, can make out the ghost of a smile pulling up at the corners of Yoongi's mouth. But when has he not been up to no good? says a voice at the back of Seokjin's mind and shit, that's right, but that doesn't mean Yoongi can't surprise him with the smallest things everyday. "Besides, I won't give you perfect marks for your appraisal just because I love you. I can be objective, you know."

Seokjin scrunches his face in an attempt to keep himself from grinning. He'll have to grow
accustomed to this, getting what he finally wants, having Yoongi within an arm's reach and, sometimes, even closer. He'll have to get used to all the nice things in his life sooner or later, no matter what. So he buries his face in Yoongi's hair, laughs and leaves little giggles on Yoongi's skin, making Yoongi shiver. Meets Yoongi halfway and leaves a trail of kisses from his forehead to the bridge of his nose to the space where bare skin meets soft, warm lips. He pulls away for a little, looking around for an audience, then leans back in to hover, just hover, his lips barely brushing against Yoongi's own like he's still... taking everything in, trying to convince himself that this is no longer make-believe, that this is real, that his daily struggle will no longer be getting up early after rendering extra hours at work but challenging himself to do better everyday as a creative, challenging himself to look away everytime he catches Yoongi staring, gaze fond and soft and disarming. "You're not waiting for me to issue a job order on kissing me, are you?" Yoongi teases, voice lilting, and that's when Seokjin rolls his eyes in response, leans in to capture Yoongi's mouth in a warm, heated kiss, tracing the wicked contours of Yoongi's mouth with his tongue, engraving on his skin the subtle shifts in Yoongi's muscles when Yoongi pulls him down, urges Seokjin to make himself comfortable on his lap, pulls him closer. Part of Seokjin keeps thinking that this is a bad idea, that they're a bad idea, but he doesn't care anymore – Yoongi is the best bad idea he's had in months, years, his entire lifetime.

He threads his fingers through Yoongi's hair and laughs into Yoongi's mouth when Yoongi hiccups, when Yoongi mutters the softest 'sorry' that melts into a bubbles of laughter, a blossom of giggles, shaking and shivering in the fit of their bodies. He should get a fucking award for this, so he kisses Yoongi again, and again, and again, and rewrites every bad idea into a good one worthy of every damn award there is in the world, into Min Yoongi. Into them.

"So," Hoseok begins, pausing only to wiggle his eyebrows. "Tough guy Min Yoongi, is it? Tough guy Min Yoongi?"

Yoongi snarls at Hoseok, kicks him under the table in thoughtless retaliation, and flinches a little when Seokjin's grip on his turns from soft and gentle into deadly. Never underestimate the power of Kim Seokjin, a voice at the back of his mind murmurs, again and again until it turns into high-pitched screaming, but maybe that's just him dying a little inside when Seokjin turns to him with bright eyes and even brighter laughter. Maybe that's just him gasping for help when Seokjin's leans in, face falling forward and finding a nice fit in the crook of his neck. Maybe that's just him croaking out little sounds of protest when the teasing look in Hoseok's features soften into... amusement, approval, happiness.

He laughs to himself. Tough guy in love, you mean, he thinks of telling Hoseok, but Hoseok probably knows that already. So instead, he shakes his head and rests it on Seokjin's own, burying his face in Seokjin's hair, breathing him in.)

Chapter End Notes
thank you so much for sticking with me ‘til the very end! dearest nini, i hope you enjoyed this as much as i did. let's fight the evil clients together, hoo-hah!

as a parting gift, here's a playlist for the fic, and a cute little ending song, or backing track for a commercial. yep. again, thank you so much and i hope you had fun reading. thank you, thank you, thank you. ♥

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