Summary

Jeon Jeongguk hated flying. So much so that when he was forced to board a flight to save his job, he did the only thing he could think of to not have a heart attack; he reached out to his soulmate for the first time in his life.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

No, actually, that was an understatement. Jeongguk loathed flying. The mere thought of it made the skin of his neck prickle and itch, always sending an unwelcome shudder down his spine and leaving him feeling like he somehow had to reassert his presence on the ground, the precious, solid, steady planet Earth, usually by staring at the pavement until he could safely tell himself he was, well, safe.

It wasn't quite working now. Because now, he was standing in an airport, hands clenched into fists and his heartbeat so loud he could feel it thundering in his ears as he tried to not look out the large windows at the even larger aircraft, which he was supposed to board within the next ten minutes.
“Fuck,” he muttered for the umpteenth time, breathing sharply through his nose. “Fuck, fuck, shit.”

How the other passengers could so casually, so willingly, walk onto the plane was nothing short of madness in Jeongguk’s mind. They were smiling politely, exchanging a few words with the staff as they showed their tickets and passports, and then they disappeared into the walkway, as if they couldn't wait to be trapped inside a metal submarine, a flying metal submarine.

His fear of flying had started in his early childhood, when he was four or five or something. It had been past his bedtime, but he had woken up thirsty and drowsily made his way to the living room to ask his mom for a glass of water. The TV had been on, his parents had been watching the news, and just as little Jeongguk had been about to raise his voice, the news anchor's professional voice had been switched out for hysterical screams.

Rather than the news studio, the TV now showed a poorly filmed video of an airplane flying dangerously low over some town, a roaring noise drowning out the panicky shouts, and then, right as the plane disappeared out of sight over the town's rooftops, an explosion burst into view, red and black and loud, much louder than the yelling of the one holding the camera as he fell backwards and the film went black.

4-year old Jeongguk had burst into tears, plopping onto his behind on the floor and screaming, flailing when his mom rushed over to pick him up. It had been so scary, the roaring of the crashing plane, the screaming of the onlookers, the colors of the explosion. It had been too much, and Jeongguk had cried through the night, unable to calm down even though his mom brought him to sleep with her and his father so he could find comfort in her embrace.

Since then, Jeongguk had hated airplanes. His parents had thrown away all plane-related toys and books, they had held him close and comforted him whenever a plane flew high above them when they were outside, and if they ever went on a trip, they took the train, or a ferry, or simply drove for hours and hours. It had gotten remarkably better over the years; it wasn’t like he burst into tears at the mention of an airplane now, when he was 20, but he still utterly rejected the idea of ever boarding one.

Thus it was the biggest struggle of his life to not turn around right now and run, run out of the airport and all the way home. Get your shit together, he told himself sternly, squeezing his eyes shut. This is your goddamn career on the line, Jeon Jeongguk! You are not going to back down now!

Three months ago, he'd gotten an email from a famous entertainment company in Los Angeles, America. It contained a possible job offer that would mean a leap in his career as a choreographer so massive, he would never have to even think about the possibility of having to substitute as an instructor for one of those dreadful Zumba classes for 60+ year olds. Once had been more than enough, and he looked forward to never having to do it again.
He had accepted it on the spot, his brain not fully realizing what it would mean before he'd sent the reply and set up an official face-to-face interview with the lead dance instructor. Jeongguk had called his best friend, Seokjin, to all but yell the news at him, and it wasn't until Jin asked him how he was going to handle going to America that it hit him.

He had spent the past two months convincing himself he was going to do this, two whole months of trying to psyche himself into being okay with flying. It hadn't started out well; there were apparently no existing movies where airplane rides were peaceful and non-problematic. Either they were full of snakes, or there was someone on board who could blow up the plane, or then the planes would just crash. For dramatic effect. And shock-value. And to fuse the flames of Jeongguk's trauma.

He never saw those movies, thankfully. Seokjin and his boyfriend, Namjoon, had done their best to help him get accustomed to the idea of flying, and that meant shielding Jeongguk from such scarring visuals. Instead, they sat through countless of movies and TV-series that included even just one scene on a plane, one peaceful, short, mundane scene where everything was alright and turbulence was not a word that existed.

Hoseok even took him to the airport twice, simply to walk around there for hours, listening to the sound of the engines and watching the arrivals and departures.

Jeongguk really had the best friends in the world.

Thinking about all the effort his friends had put into this trip made him steel himself, and so he didn't quite flinch when a soft voice over the speakers announced that “This is the last boarding call for flight 777-300ER to Los Angeles, California.”

Jeongguk exhaled sharply, hoisted his backpack into a better position, and steered his steps towards the walkway. Go time, Jeon Jeongguk, go time. A short, smiling woman took his ticket and scanned it, and wished him a pleasant journey, to which he responded with a stiff, “Okay.”

He marched through the walkway as quickly as he could, still not convinced he wouldn't turn around and bolt if he let himself waver. “Just get to your seat,” he chanted under his breath. “Just get to your seat, it'll be fine.” He wasn't sure how that would make anything better, to strap himself to the aircraft, but he tried to not think about that too hard.

Jeongguk came to a short pause at the threshold of the plane. There was still a short line, even though he'd dragged his feet until last boarding call, so he closed his eyes and stood still, hands clenched
inside the pocket of his hoodie as he silently repeated his chant over and over again. He thought of his friends, who had accompanied to the airport and wished him good luck in America, he thought of California and his dream job, he thought of dancing, his limbs twitching slightly as he went through his latest choreography in his head, and--

“Excuse me, sir?”

He was pulled out of his thoughts and blinked, pressing his lips together when he realized the queue had disappeared and he was now the only one who hadn't boarded yet. An air stewardess was standing in the doorway with a quizzical look, and so all Jeongguk could do was swallow his fear and force his feet to move.

It took all of his willpower to convince himself that the floor wasn't bending under his feet as he stepped over the threshold. *One step, two steps, three steps,* he counted to calm himself down, his eyes glued to the floor and not at all to where he was going. He almost bumped into someone, but came to a halt just in time, too busy cursing himself for the stiffness of his legs to notice the man he'd almost collided with.

“What's your seat number, mister?” a deep voice asked, and Jeongguk fumbled with his ticket for a moment before finding the number and showing it to who he assumed was a flight attendant, his eyes still focused on the floor. “23B, alright, down the aisle here until you see your number. Your seat's on the left side of the aisle.”

He dimly registered the man had gestured to his right, so he clenched his jaw (if it was possible to clenched it harder) and looked up, taking in rows upon rows of plain seats, just under half of them occupied. People dressed in blue uniforms were moving up and down the aisle, closing bag compartments and checking the passengers' seat belts.

*Downright terrifying,* Jeongguk's brain supplied unhelpfully.

“Are you oka-- I mean, is everything alright, mister?”

Jeongguk really would've loved to shake his head and slump onto the floor and just not go, but he knew he would regret that for the rest of his life. So instead, he nodded without looking at the flight attendant, inhaled sharply, and walked along the aisle until he found his seat.

He had the aisle seat in a row of two, having preordered it that way; what kind of madman would
want to look out the window and take in the thousands of miles that stretched between them and the ground? The window seat was empty, however, so after taking his seat and shoving his backpack in under the seat in front of him, he quickly reached over and pulled the blind down, blocking out the sight of the airport. “This is fine,” he whispered to himself as he strapped the seatbelt over his lap with the expression of someone signing their own death wish. “This is absolutely fine.”

Not minutes after he'd sat down, a soft chime echoed through the plane, causing his heart to lurch in panic before a voice started speaking, welcoming the passengers on board, first in Korean and then English. Jeongguk listened intently, leaning out over the armrest when they announced they would be demonstrating security measures. Jeongguk's ears blocked out the “in case of emergencies” part, his full focus on the stewardess, who was pointing out where all exits were.

Halfway through, he was distracted by the sound of a child giggling some rows behind him. Reluctantly, he tore his eyes away from the stewardess' demonstration of how to inflate the lifejacket and turned around, his eyes landing on a mess of orange hair, which, in a brief moment of clarity, Jeongguk thought fit extremely well with the blue color of the flight attendant's uniform. Like the sun and the sky.

The man had his back to Jeongguk, but he could still see him ruffle the hair of a girl who was sitting in a seat right next to him, straying from his safety demonstration to entertain the child. Jeongguk didn't know how to feel about the scene; it was adorable, so much so that he almost smiled, but then he remembered he's on a plane and this flight attendant should be taking security really damn seriously.

He jerked back forward when the plane suddenly started moving, slowly pulling away from the gate. “Oh god,” he breathed, his heart beating the drums of war in his throat. “Oh god, oh god, oh god, oh shit, fuck, dicks.” Somewhere in the back of his mind, he was so glad he didn't have anyone sitting next to him, because every single obscene word he knew was promptly falling from his lips in a hushed voice, none of them easing the tension in his chest.

When the aircraft pulled to a momentary halt, Jeongguk squeezed his eyes shut, praying and hoping that maybe they had already taken off and he simply hadn't felt it, that it had been as smooth as it had seemed in the movies. Then the roar of the engines escalated into deafening decibels, nearly scaring the living shit out of him, and the plane set into motion again, only this time, it was much faster.

Jeongguk could barely breathe, which might've been curtesy of him pressing both of his hands over his mouth, but if he lowered them, he knew he would be shouting in panic. The entire plane was rumbling, like a train loose from its tracks, and it was terrifying and paralyzing and Jeongguk squeezed his eyes shut and prayed to whomever could hear that it would all just stop before his heart would burst and he'd die.
He needed help, and in the deepest moment of his panic, he reached out to the only person he knew might hear him. Make it stop, he thought desperately, focusing so hard his head hurt. Please, please, please, make it stop, I can't handle this, I can't, it's too much, I--

I'm here.

The tension in his body lurched and his eyes snapped open, wide; he had heard it, just inside his ears, two words manifesting in his head, two words he definitely hadn't put there, and he was so shocked he didn't even feel the takeoff. He stared into the roof of the plane, his heart hammering against his ribs hard enough to crack them.

It's alright, it's okay, I'm here. You're okay.

Jeongguk looked around even though he knew he wouldn't find anyone there, but he couldn't help it; the words weren't his, yet they were in his head, and he knew what was going on, but it was still too hard to grasp. It felt like his brain was overloading from stress, and while the small voice was helping, it was also not.

There you go, that's it, relax. Breathe.

He whined into his palm but complied all the same, closing his eyes and lowering his hands so he could draw a trembling breath of air into his lungs, only to have it stack in his throat and cause him to cough. I can't, he thought, feeling almost like he would throw up. It's too much, I can't, I can't take a breath properly, it's too hard!

And then there was a soft shushing noise where the voice had been, and it was comforting and warm and made him feel like he was pulled into a warm embrace. Jeongguk's voice hitched and that put a stop to his coughing, after which he sucked in a lungful of air, which went straight to his brain and relieved the pressure, so much so that little stars danced before his eyes.

Good job, good, you're doing so well.

He nodded even though no one could see, least of all the owner of the voice, but he had to, for his own sake. He kept trying to breathe, not quite managing to fill his lungs with the thick air of the shaking airplane, and all he could do to make it better was to cling to the soothing voice in the back of his head.
The voice of his soulmate.

*I can't calm down*, he thought after multiple attempts to do just that. *It won't stop, it's shaking, it's, it's scary, I'm really fucking scared.*

*Where are you? Is there anyone around you? Can anyone help?*

Dimly, Jeongguk remembered the safety instructions and tilted his head back, squinting at the several buttons located above his head. With a trembling hand, he reached up and pushed a finger against the one that would summon the staff. Within seconds, there was someone at his side and he turned to tell them what was wrong, only to stop breathing altogether.

Jeongguk had never seen a more beautiful man in all his life, which was saying a lot, because his friends were some of the most attractive people he knew. But this man, he was just downright radiant.

It was the flight attendant he had seen tousle the little girl's hair before. His hair was the color of sunset, orange with a tinge of both red and yellow, and it fell low over his brow, stopping just short of brown eyes that were looking at him in expectation. A small smile tugged at the man's soft lips, and Jeongguk absently noted that he had never seen a jawline so... sculpted.

“What can I do for you, mister?” he asked in a voice much deeper than Jeongguk would've expected, and when Jeongguk couldn't find his own voice to answer, the flight attendant's smile slowly faded, concern taking over his features. “Are you okay?”

As if on cue, Jeongguk choked on his breath and turned away, coughing, rubbing at his throat to try and clear his airways, dread rushing against his chest once more like a freight train. “N-no,” he managed to press out when he turned back. “I, ah, I think I'm having a, a panic attack or something, I...” His voice trailed off for a moment and he swallowed hard, closing his eyes when the aircraft shook just a bit. “I'm scared of flying.”

“Oh. Okay, okay, ah, can you breathe properly?” The flight attendant leaned forward to get a proper look at Jeongguk's face, brows knitted in worry. “Try straightening your back and inhaling real deep,” he said, reaching for the small compartment in front of Jeongguk's legs and drawing out a paper bag. “Here, try breathing into this. That's it, slow and steady.”

Jeongguk blindly followed his instructions, taking the bag from his hands and bringing it to his lips,
closing his eyes as he tried his best to breathe. “Start with small breaths if big ones are too hard,” the flight attendant said encouragingly, one of his hands landing on Jeongguk's back to rub circles into the base of his neck. “Come on, you can do it.”

He nodded despite himself, dedicating all of his focus onto just breathing, breathing, breathing. The flight attendant’s voice was soothing, and somewhere in the back of his head, he could hear soft words of encouragement. Slowly but surely, Jeongguk actually managed to calm down.

“There you go, good job!” The hand that was rubbing soft circles into his back none too gently clapped him on the shoulder and he exclaimed weakly, too fresh from his panic attack to stop the sound. “Oh shit, sorry,” the flight attendant said, hurriedly sinking to a crouch to look at Jeongguk’s face, an over-exaggerated worry spreading over his face. “I mean, not shit, I'm not supposed to curse on the job, but shit, I mean...”

A wave of amusement rose up Jeongguk’s chest and he emitted a sound somewhere between a chuckle and a snort, and the flight attendant went silent. “Don't worry about it,” Jeongguk said, his throat sore and his voice thick. He tucked the paper bag back into the seat compartment and ducked his head for a moment, closing his eyes to just breathe, and then he straightened up again, a small smile finding its way to his lips as he looked up at one of the people who'd just helped him through hell. “Thank you, really, thank you so much for your help,” he said, and in the next second, he almost wished he hadn't.

The flight attendant's face broke into a smile, the most stunningly beautiful smile Jeongguk had ever seen. It was almost rectangular by shape, so goddamn endearing that it just threw Jeongguk completely off guard, and he was left to gape in awe as the flight attendant began rambling about something, something Jeongguk really couldn't focus on, he was so mesmerized.

At least until the man looked at him and inclined his head, his smile suddenly expectant. “A-ah, sorry, ah, what did you say?” Jeongguk asked, feeling heat rise to his cheeks.

“I said my name's Kim Taehyung,” the flight attendant chuckled, “and then I asked what yours is.”

“Oh. Oh.” Jeongguk nodded, for some reason needing a moment to remember his own name. “Ah, I'm Jeon Jeongguk,” he said, and it was impossible to not smile when the man's eyes crinkled in joy.

“Alright, well then, mister Jeon Jeongguk,” Taehyung said and straightened up, adapting an expression of mock professionalism, “Do let me know if there is any other way I can be of service.” He held that expression for all of two seconds before the smile returned to his lips and he added, “Seriously, if you start feeling bad again, just call me.” He winked down at Jeongguk, and then he
was gone, presumably back to his station.

For a few seconds, Jeongguk just looked at where Taehyung had been standing, lips slightly parted, somehow unable to pull himself out of whatever enchantment the flight attendant's presence had put him under. Finally, he exhaled slowly and lowered his gaze, feeling appropriately exhausted after the ordeal he'd just gone through. He leaned back in his seat and did his best to relax, but before he could even assume a comfortable position, the voice in his ear was back, though fainter this time.

*Sorry, I'm sorry, I had to go, I'm at work, there was an emergency. Are you okay? You feel calmer.*

Jeongguk wasn't quite sure how to respond to that. He felt calmer? Could soulmates tell when the other was distressed? Also, he was fairly certain he'd heard his soulmate's voice soothing him just now, so he wasn't sure what the voice meant by *had to go.* Either way, Jeongguk closed his eyes and focused on the voice, focused on the idea of his soulmate. *I'm better, yeah,* he thought, concentrating.

_Thank you. Someone came to help, I'm much better._

He hesitated, then added, *Really, thank you. I thought I was gonna have a panic attack so I reached, and you... you answered.* It felt weird to think those words and not say them, and to not know the face of whom he was saying it to.

His soulmate took so long responding, Jeongguk was beginning to wonder if his thoughts had actually made their way across. Then he felt a warmth he could only describe as pure and innocent happiness flood his thoughts, so intense his breath hitched.

*You're welcome. I'm glad you're okay. And I'm so, so, so very happy you decided to rely on me.*

That gave Jeongguk pause, his eyes widening. In his state of panic, he hadn't realized it, but this was the first time he had ever reached out to his soulmate. The first time he had ever acknowledged their connection. The thought made him feel guilty, and he didn't dare to respond, pulling up the collar of his hoodie as if he could hide his thoughts away in it.

Jeongguk had been ten years old when he'd first learned about soulmates. It was his mother who had come to his room and sat down on the floor next to his bed, smiling as she told him that someday soon, he might start feeling the presence of the one he was destined to spend his life with. She had explained that soulmates are bound to each other, and that this bond is so strong that sometimes, when you really, really tried, you could hear your soulmate's voice, no matter where you were or where they were.
Jeongguk had tried to understand, but the thought seemed weird to him. How could it be possible that he could hear the voice of someone who wasn't there? It should be impossible, unless you were crazy. Hoseok had once told him about people who heard voices, but the word *soulmate* had definitely not been included in those stories. So he dismissed it as something impossible, with some help from the juvenile nature of his young age; the thought of love and soulmates was gross anyway.

He had been thirteen when he'd first heard it. At first, he'd thought there was something wrong with his headphones, which should've been blasting the finest of hiphop music. There was a flicker of sound that definitely didn't belong to the fast-paced track, and he tapped his headphones a couple of times but the noise didn't stop, so he pulled them off to examine them, only to find the sound still remained.

It was faint, so faint, but it was *inside* his ear, not an external sound. He stuck a finger in his ear and twisted, but it still didn't go away. Then he realized it was a *voice*, that there were *words* sounding inside his ears, actual words. It was weird and not exactly welcome, but curiosity got the better of him and he closed his eyes to concentrate.

... *is stupid... some telepathy crap... way this works.*

Jeongguk frowned, knitting his brow in confusion. It was like someone was trying to speak to him through a veil of water. Muffled, unclear, but still there. He listened, but while the voice persisted for a few seconds longer, the words didn't become any clearer. Finally, it went silent, leaving a confused Jeongguk to wonder what on earth had just happened.

He didn't realize what it was until he came home. He heard his mom on the phone, speaking to someone, and when she mentioned the word *soulmate*, it clicked for Jeongguk and it dawned on him his soulmate might've been trying to reach out to him. It was a weird thought; Jeongguk hadn't even been able to tell if it was a boy or a girl, the voice sort of just *there*, the words imprinted on his mind without an identity.

After an evening of going back and forth, Jeongguk decided to leave it be and not try to respond. First of all, he had no idea *how* to go about responding, and secondly, he wasn't even sure what his soulmate's intentions were. Had they meant to reach out, or had his thoughts just somehow ended up in Jeongguk's head. It was a possibility, and if that was the case, he didn't want to freak his soulmate out by intruding on his thoughts.

The second time, Jeongguk was almost fifteen. He was at Hoseok's place together with Seokjin, and in the middle of a movie, the voice had exploded in his ears, making him jump up from the couch with a startled shriek.
Helloooooo, soulmaaaate! Can you heeeeeeear meeeeee?

Jeongguk fell over the coffee table and onto the floor, painfully hitting his shoulder and smacking his head against the floor, leaving him a groaning mess, clutching his ears to try and block out a voice that was inside his ears.

Jiminnie told me you should definitely be able to hear me like this! If I close my eyes and yell inside my head!

Jin and Hoseok crouched next to him in horror, asking what the hell was going on and what they should do, but Jeongguk couldn't hear them. He was too busy being innerly deafened.

Hear me, soulmate! Through the power of love and friendship and all that shit, hear me!

Jeongguk had been incapacitated for the entire ordeal. With tears prickling his eyes from the pain and with a lust to rip his own ears off, he had curled up and just held on, trying to remain sane until the voice finally quieted down.

He was almost ready to sit up when he heard it again, but this time, it was completely different.

Or not. Maybe you can't hear me. Or maybe you don't want to hear me.

As Jeongguk lay in his bed later that night, he thought it was an incredibly unfair thing of his soulmate to say. Or think. After almost breaking Jeongguk's eardrums, they blamed him for not responding. He frowned into his pillow, trying to push away the guilt that gnawed at the back of his head. I'm not at fault here, he thought stubbornly. Deep down, he hoped his soulmate didn't hear it.

After that, he had been visited by the voice every now and then. Sometimes once a week, sometimes months apart. It seemed to find its way to him depending on his soulmate's mood. He heard things like, Fuckin' shit, it's not fair, or, Noooo, not my favorite character! or, I can't believe this shit's finally over! See you never, high school!

Jeongguk never responded. He wasn't even sure why he didn't. Sure, there was still the unwelcome guilt from the time his soulmate almost deafened him, but the longer he went without responding, the harder it became. He considered it, when he turned nineteen, to reach out, but decided it would be too awkward. Years of silence, and then he would just pop into a stranger's head and say what?
Hello? It's me? Nice to meet you?

No. he definitely didn't want to do that. So he settled for listening to whatever random spontaneities popped into his soulmate's head, and wondered every now and then if his soulmate could hear him when he was angry, sad, happy. If they did, they were quiet about it.

So here Jeongguk sat now, having just interacted with his soulmate for the first time in his life. Thinking back on their almost non-existent history, he wondered how loud he'd been just now, practically screeching for help in his thoughts. Was his soulmate in the same state he'd been when he was fourteen, incapacitated and almost rendered deaf?

He hoped not. Then again, his soulmate hadn't seemed angry, or even remotely upset. They'd seemed... warm. Soft. Kind. Wonderful.

Jeongguk cut himself off before he could list every adjective that could in any way suit his soulmate's voice. He huffed, burying his face into the collar of his hoodie to hide the warmth of his cheeks, though there was no one around him to see. He felt strange, having spoken with the one he was destined to be with. A good kind of strange. He grimaced; the thought was involuntary and unwelcome. Or at least he tried to convince himself it was.

Four hours into the flight, he wasn't nearly accustomed to being in an aircraft. It was loud, shaky, uncomfortable, and more than just slightly claustrophobic, but he managed. He managed to stay as calm as was physically possible for someone who feared flying, closing his eyes and breathing deeply whenever it started to feel overwhelming.

Every now and then, Taehyung walked past his seat, walking to and fro the front of the plane, and whenever he passed, he would smile at Jeongguk, exchange a few words, or grimace at him in an attempt to make him laugh. He succeeded more than once, but when Jeongguk closed his eyes, he felt a familiar gnaw of guilt; he had spoken with his soulmate and he felt something about that, but then there was Taehyung, towards whom there was definitely a feeling of something, too.

It felt almost like cheating.

Once every hour, the voice in his ear piped up to ask him how he was doing, if he was okay. By the fourth time, it made Jeongguk smile almost shyly, and he realized he'd been waiting for it. Hoping for his soulmate to reach out again.
He wondered why they never asked to keep talking. After confirming that Jeongguk was doing okay, the voice would fade, leaving a sense of warmth in its wake. At first, Jeongguk didn't think much of it, but when the connection had disappeared for the fourth time, he frowned, wondering why his soulmate didn't want to have a conversation. They'd been so keen on it a few years ago.

_That's probably why_, Jeongguk realized as he tried to make himself comfortable in his seat when the lights of the plane had gone out. It was nighttime outside and the passengers were given the chance to sleep, something Jeongguk figured was highly unlikely with his nerves so on edge, but he grabbed his blanket and pillow and pushed down the backrest of his seat and tried to relax. _They wanted to talk to me, they made an effort, but I didn't even meet them halfway. I didn't even try._ He frowned, cursing his younger self. _What an ass._

With the thought that maybe this could be a new beginning, Jeongguk slowly drifted off, exhaustion forcing his eyes shut.

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He woke up to darkness, a groan making its way past his lips. His neck ached from sleeping upright, the muscles straining as he slowly turned his head, groggily trying to find what it was that had woken him. He couldn't see anything, his eyes unaccustomed to the darkness of the cabin, but just as he was about to dismiss it, he felt it.

A rumble went through the airplane, so strong the whole cabin shook. A startled sound found its way past Jeongguk's lips, followed by a moment of silence, and then the aircraft quivered again, violently, and Jeongguk's heart almost stopped. Every cell in his body screamed in panic, terror gripped at his throat, his heart went from steady to machine gun fast in a matter of seconds.

He had never been this afraid in his entire life.

He didn't know how or when he had moved, but next thing he knew, he was bent forward, his hands gripping the armrests so hard his knuckles went white. The plane shook again, and he clenched his jaw so hard he could almost hear his bones creak. He couldn't think, he couldn't breathe, he couldn't speak, he couldn't do anything, not even realize the lights had turned on and a voice was flowing through the speakers, informing the passengers of turbulence and reminding them to stay in their seats.

_Help me_, Jeongguk begged, tears blurring his vision as he struggled to stay sane as another rough current made the plane rattle. For one second, a second that felt like an eternity, he was weightless, the aircraft's gravity shifting. His stomach lurched and he convulsed, though nothing found its way
past his lips. *Help me, help me, help me, please, help me, please, help--*

“Jeongguk!”

He heard the familiar voice both outside and inside his head and felt two hands clamp down on his arm. “Hey, okay, hey, Jeon Jeongguk!” From the corner of his eyes, he saw someone crouching next to his seat, but he couldn't turn his head, his muscles were straining taut, and he couldn't breathe. “Jeongguk, listen to me, listen to my voice! Concentrate for me, really concentrate on my voice!”

*Taehyung,* his thoughts cried out. *It's Taehyung, Taehyung, help me, Taehyung, please!*

He felt a hand move to his neck, steady and firm. “I'm here, Jeongguk, I'm here, listen to my voice, concentrate,” Taehyung said loudly, trying to get a hand under Jeongguk’s chin to raise it, to get him to straighten up so he could recover, but Jeongguk was stiff as a statue, refusing to budge. “Jeongguk, listen to me, you gotta sit up, you gotta let me help you, alright, you gotta listen to--”

“*Kim Taehyung,* get back to your seat! You can't walk around like that during--”

“*Shut the shit up!*” Jeongguk flinched and exclaimed, the voice exploding against his eardrums. “Sorry, I'm sorry, Jeongguk, sorry.” Taehyung's lips were pressed against his temple now, speaking quickly and urgently, but in some miraculous way, his voice was still warm and soothing. “There you go, you're alright, come on, take a breath for me,” he urged, hissing curse under his breath when the plane shook again. “Goddamn it, alright, okay, Jeongguk.”

Jeongguk was vaguely aware of something shifting against his back, and suddenly, Taehyung was on his other side, having climbed over him and into the window seat, and he all but pushed himself flush against Jeongguk’s side, one hand remaining on his neck while the other found its way under his hoodie and to his chest, where it felt for the ultra rapid heartbeat.

“Hey, Gukkie, you know what?” Taehyung was speaking directly into his ear now, the warmth of his body enveloping Jeongguk tightly. “You know what, it’s my best friend flying this plane,” he murmured softly, his hand rubbing circles into Jeongguk’s neck. “Yeah, my best friend, Yoongi, he's the pilot, and he's the best. We’re in the best hands ever, because Yoongi's like a superman when it comes to taking care of his passengers. You know Superman, right? No amount of wind's gonna take down Superman, which means no amount of wind's gonna take down Yoongi.”

His voice was deep and smooth and strong enough to find its way through the currents of dread and
panic thrashing around Jeongguk's mind. He listened, listened with everything he had, clinging to the voice that was both outside and inside of him.

“And, and think about where you're going,” Taehyung continued without pause. “Los Angeles, Jeongguk, America. It's gonna be so fun, isn't it, Jeonggukkie, it's gonna be so sunny and warm, you can walk along the beach, you can get more ice cream than you could eat in a lifetime. Well, that's just not true, but you can get a lot of ice cream.” He chuckled against Jeongguk's temple, and the sound was like a lifeline in a raging ocean, and Jeongguk managed a shuddering breath. “That's right, Jeongguk, you'll be able to do whatever you want in Los Angeles, yeah? Doesn't that sound like just the best?”

He began to raise his head, his muscles surrendering just enough to let him rise a few inches before the plane rattled once again, but this time, Taehyung's hands were cupping his face before he could do more than emit a startled cry. “Hey, okay, hey, Jeon Jeongguk.” He tried to bury his face in one of the hands, but they firmly held him in place, thumbs stroking tears away from his cheeks. “Look at me, come on, I know you can,” Taehyung urged gently. “Listen to my voice, please, and look at me.”

And Jeongguk did and his heart, his heart that was beating a frantic, panicky mile a minute, stuttered to a halt. Taehyung's face was mere inches from his own, his eyes trained on Jeongguk's, a sunny smile stretching his lips, and suddenly Jeongguk could just breathe, even in the thick air of the shaking cabin.

The flight attendant was sitting on his knees on the seat next to Jeongguk's, leaning over the armrest to get access to as much of Jeongguk's personal space as possible. A sense of security all but radiated off of him, and Jeongguk was dizzy and lightheaded and nauseous, but he was breathing and he felt he could begin to relax.

Slowly, Taehyung's hands left Jeongguk's face, one going back to his neck while the other settled on Jeongguk's hand, fingers brushing over his knuckles and somehow managing to coax him into letting go of the armrest. “You're good, you're okay,” he said softly, his eyes never straying from Jeongguk's. “You're alright, we're alright.” His smile widened, and Jeongguk could've counted every single one of his teeth if he hadn't been distracted by the other's fingers, which were curling around his hand. “I'm here.”

Jeongguk’s mind was blank and cloudy, and whatever he would've wanted to say would have to wait; he tried to straighten up a bit, and his vision promptly went black as he passed out.
When Jeongguk woke up, the cabin was bathed in light, natural light. He squeezed his eyes shut against it, a throaty groan making its way up from his chest as the light pricked his eyes and made them water. He lay still for a moment; his body felt incredibly heavy, like someone had tied weights to his limbs. Vaguely, he registered that the plane was flying smoothly again.

He finally decided to sit up, but as soon as he shifted, he realized someone was holding his left hand, a thumb absentmindedly stroking his knuckles. Slowly, Jeongguk pushed himself up straight and blinked against the strong sunlight, and when his eyes had gotten used to it, he found Taehyung in the seat next to him, his elbow propped up against the opposite armrest and his chin resting in his hand as he looked out the small window, taking in the red sunrise.

“Tae--”

“You know,” he interrupted without looking away from the view outside the plane, “I didn't really think about it until after you'd passed out and I was sure you were okay. In the spur of the moment, I didn't notice it at all. I mean, there were more important things to focus on, but as soon as I had time to think, it made sense.”

Jeongguk parted his lips and closed them again, unsure of what to say. He had no idea what Taehyung was talking about, but for some reason, he understood the gravity behind it. It was almost as if he felt it himself.

“I thought it was pretty coincidental, you know, the timing,” he went on, his voice oddly thick. “That you reached out to me, and a second later, I'm trying to calm someone down from a panic attack.” He chuckled softly into his hand, and Jeongguk's heart twisted. “And then you called my name, my name, in your thoughts, and I heard you, and...”

His voice trailed off and silence stretched on between them, so long that Jeongguk was about to speak up when he heard it, the voice just inside his ears.

*Can I ask you something?* it said, and Taehyung turned to look at him, his eyes glistening, his fingers trembling around Jeongguk's. *Because I think I'm holding my soulmate's hand right now, and I need to know.* Taehyung's lips curled into a soft smile, and he looked like an angel, the purest and most beautiful being in the world. “Are you my soulmate, Jeon Jeongguk?”

He heard the question both from Taehyung's lips and inside his head, and it was like a flood of emotions crashed against his chest. Hope, warmth, joy, adoration, comfort, longing and several more Jeongguk didn't have the time to identify before all other thoughts disappeared and left him with one word. “Yes,” he breathed out, his voice trembling as he gripped Taehyung's hand and squeezed it,
And Taehyung laughed, tears spilling from his eyes as he leaned forward and pulled Jeongguk against him, locking his arms around his neck and burying his face against his shoulder. Overwhelmed, all Jeongguk could do was hug him back, smile stretching impossibly wide as he embraced his soulmate, pressing his lips against the crown of his hair and chuckling, almost delirious.

When they broke apart, Taehyung's face was glistening with tears and Jeongguk's cheeks were aching from smiling so widely, but they both laughed. “Come here,” Jeongguk said when he sobered up and raised a hand towards Taehyung's face so he could wipe away the remaining tears with his sleeve. “I can't believe I found you.”

A fresh wave of laughter bubbled past Taehyung's lips at that. “You're lucky, Jeon Jeongguk,” he said and made an attempt at a cheeky grin. “After all, I'm quite the catch.” Jeongguk laughed and Taehyung followed suite, only to make a sound of mild frustration as more tears spilled from his eyes. “Ah, shit, come on, it's like I'm a leaky faucet,” he complained, smile never faltering. “Here, Jeonggukkie, gimme back your sleeve, I need to wipe this snot off my face.”

Jeongguk laughed harder at that and complied without hesitation, bringing up both hands to rub at Taehyung's face until his soulmate shoved him away, raising his own hands in defense and sputtering that, “Death by overzealous rubbing would look so wrong on a gravestone!”

It took them a long time to stop laughing, and even longer to stop grinning like idiots. They spent the remainder of the flight talking about everything and nothing, learning as much as they could about each other, though when the pilot announced they were about to land, Jeongguk was fairly certain he'd only had time to learn a fraction of the human ray of sunshine that was his soulmate, Kim Taehyung.

The descent was scarier than takeoff, but Taehyung took Jeongguk's hand in his and spent the entire ordeal whispering encouragingly, throwing in a less than innocent joke every now and then and managing to make Jeongguk chuckle nervously.

When they'd landed, Taehyung jumped up from his seat, climbing over Jeongguk's lap and to the aisle, leaning over to press a quick kiss against his cheek before chiming, “Gimme a minute, I'm gonna have a word with the pilot.” He all but danced towards the cockpit, leaving a blushing Jeongguk alone to gather his things.

His cheeks were still on fire when he rose from his seat to move towards the exit, preferring to wait there, but he'd barely taken a few steps when the door to the cockpit was flung open and Taehyung
burst out, laughing as he wildly gestured for Jeongguk to hurry up. “Come on, quick, Yoongi's in a bad mood, we gotta go right--”

“You haul your ass back in here, Kim Taehyung!” A man emerged in the doorway to the cockpit, dressed in a much more formal uniform than the flight attendants. His hair was unbelievably blonde and messy, as if someone had just given it the biggest tousle of its life. He looked positively livid as he reached out to grab the collar of Taehyung's shirt, but he only danced out of reach. “I swear to god, you can't just announce that you're taking the day off,” he barked, “you're a flight attendant, it doesn't work like that!”

“You're taking the day off?” Jeongguk asked when he reached the two, looking at Taehyung in cheery surprise. “You can do that?”

“No, he can’t,” the pilot, Yoongi, said loudly, but Taehyung nodded enthusiastically and moved up next to Jeongguk, sliding an arm around his waist.

“When you and Jimin found each other, you didn't show up to work for three weeks, Yoonman,” Taehyung snorted, waggling his eyebrows and grinning at the fuming pilot. “If I wanna take the day off, I'm taking the day off.”

Jeongguk tried to feel sorry for the man, he really did as he watched him press the palms of his hands against his eyes, but his full attention was on the sensation of Taehyung's body pressed flush against his, his hands playing with the hem of Jeongguk's hoodie.

“Look, Taehyung, I get it, okay, I fucking get it,” Yoongi said in a forcibly calm voice. “You wanna get outta here and root like rabbits, I get the picture, but I'm not your boss and I can't do shit if they decide to fire you! You get that, right?”

Jeongguk’s breath caught in his throat at the comment, which made Taehyung emit a bubbling laughter, which in turn did very little to ease Yoongi’s frustration. “Ahh, I hear you, I hear you, Yoongi-hyung,” he mused, his smile impossibly wide. “Trust me, there's a higher chance of me getting fired if I stay on this plane and pine after my soulmate day in and day out. Or do you wanna put up with that, me walking into the cockpit at random and telling you how amazingly good-looking my soulmate is, how his voice makes my knees weak, how he's so adorably shy, I mean, just look at him, he's blushing--”

“Please stop,” Jeongguk pressed out meekly, hiding his face in his hand and missing Yoongi's feigned gagging. “You're killing me, Taehyung.”
“Only in the best way possible, Jeonggukkie!”

“Alright, get off this plane,” Yoongi said loudly, having had more than enough of the atmosphere that practically reeked of sugar and sweetness. “Go and take this sickening pink cloud with you before I choke on it and die.”

“You're the best, Yoonmoon!”

With that, Taehyung grabbed hold of Jeongguk's arm and pulled him out of the plane, onto the safety of the walkway. “Wait, hold on a second,” Jeongguk protested and yanked Taehyung back, untangling his arm so he could offer him his hand instead. “Are you sure this is okay? You leaving work?”

His soulmate's smile was almost shy as he slid his hand into Jeongguk's, their fingers entwining. “Yeah,” he said softly, his cheeks a pretty pink color. “Really, I wouldn't be able to concentrate if I flew back now. I... I wanna get to know you, Jeon Jeongguk. Properly.”

Jeongguk's cheeks were already hurting, but his smile widened tenfold at the sight of a suddenly shy Taehyung, and before he could stop himself, he leaned forward and pressed his lips against the corner of Taehyung's, almost a proper kiss. Almost.

“Alright then,” he said softly when he straightened up, feeling heat rush to his face as Taehyung stared at him with comically wide eyes, lips parted in surprise. “Let's get to know each other, Kim Taehyung. Properly.”

And they did. They walked along the sandy beaches in Los Angeles, hand in hand, they shared more ice cream than Jeongguk deemed healthy for a human being, they did whatever they felt like in the foreign city.

Taehyung's “day off” casually turned into five days. Within an hour of leaving the plane, he made the decision to stay with Jeongguk until his return to Korea. Jeongguk didn't protest, only muffled his laughter into his arm when Yoongi called on day three asking where the flying fuck Taehyung was. “The person you're looking for is busy rubbing suntan lotion into his soulmate's very, very tight abs,” Taehyung had sung into the phone, descending into a hysterical fit of laughter when Yoongi promptly hung up after a string of curses.
In reality, Taehyung had called his boss and asked to use five of his vacation days now, but telling Yoongi that wouldn't have been as fun, apparently.

On the fourth day, Jeongguk went downtown for his official interview with the entertainment company. He met with the lead dance instructor while Taehyung waited in a Starbucks close by, and came stumbling into the coffee shop two hours later, winded and grinning and without a single care in the world for their surroundings, he pulled Taehyung into a soul-searing kiss, which he didn't break until the manager clears her throat and awkwardly tells them to leave.

“So, um, I'm guessing you got the job,” Taehyung said breathlessly once they were outside, raising a hand and rubbing at his glistening lips, his cheeks flushed with heat. He looked over at Jeongguk and found him grinning so widely it looks almost painful, but Jeongguk laughed and hugged him, and Taehyung peppered his face with kisses and congratulations.

Truly, getting on that plane had been the best idea Jeon Jeongguk had had in all his life.

End Notes

This is sugarier than the jar of Nutella I ate while writing it.

My first TaeKook fic, though! Actually, my first ever BTS fic. Ahhh, so exciting! I have not stopped smiling since I sat down to write this, and I skipped school and wrote for like 7 hours straight and it's DONE!

I kid you not, I wrote “Taekook” instead of “Taehyung” SO MANY TIMES. THIS SHIP IS SO REAL.

I'm thinking short sequel of Jeongguk's return flight and -cough, cough- hanky panky in the airplane bathroom -cough-

Leave a comment and tell me what you think! <3 And come yell at me on Twitter; Misster Maia

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