

A Gilded World

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A Gilded World

by [smiles](#)

Summary

Jeon Seokjin has exactly four weeks to stop the impending engagement of his younger brother, doomed to a loveless marriage. The only way to stop it is to make a better match, more advantageous, more lucrative for the Jeon family. It's impossible. It's his only option.

Min Yoongi does not want, will never want, will never ever even consider, marriage. It's not in the cards. He's stubborn enough to achieve the total ban on marriage talks. Except maybe his grandmother is a little more stubborn than he is, and maybe she's determined to see him march down the aisle.

The chaebol arranged marriage au that exactly one and a half people asked for.

Notes

OKAY. SO. This is a kdrama. Don't expect anything deep. I have NO OUTLINE, which is weird for me, so IDK where this is going. Be afraid.

I'd like to thank Z for starting this idea to begin with, and bribing me with \$10 on more than one occasion to pen it. I'd also like to thank L for being my sounding board and being so INVESTED in this silly au that I became obligated to write it.

A Min Who Can't Marry

"I'm going to tell her."

"You're not going to tell her."

"I'm going to tell her," Yoongi repeats, his lips thinning in mulish determination.

"He's totally going to tell her," Taehyung pipes from beside Yoongi, shifting in his seat to grin at the occupants of the front seat through the rearview mirror.

"Taehyung, love, you're not helping," Mikyung says, and Yoongi can hear her patience waning. Her voice pitches a little higher, her words expel a little sharper. He supposes he should be sympathetic to his aunt's plight. It isn't her fault Yoongi's grandmother is hell-bent on seeing him married within the year. It isn't her fault Yoongi is just as hell-bent on thwarting every single one of his grandmother's marriage candidates. Like she so very often likes to remind him, she doesn't want to be in the middle of this war.

"Sorry, auntie," Taehyung says with a grin, leaning forward until his seatbelt snags and stops his trek. "How would you like me to help?"

"You could start by explaining to your cousin," Mikyung says, arching a brow in the rearview mirror, staring at Yoongi, "that perhaps coming out to his grandmother during Chuseok, with a house full of guests and select members of the media present, is not exactly the best solution to his problems."

"Wait, why is the media invited for Chuseok?" Taehyung frowns.

"Because Uncle Seongho decided to make an ass of himself on camera and we're in desperate need of some good press." She releases a long-suffering sigh. "Yoongi, have a little mercy and *don't* give them a story."

Yoongi shrugs and glances at the passing scenery outside his window, unmoved.

Taehyung stares at Yoongi for a moment, frowning, before he turns back to Mikyung. "I think he's going to tell her."

"I'm going to tell her," Yoongi repeats.

"Yoongi, please," Mikyung says, exasperated. She turns in her seat to grab at Yoongi's hands, nearly elbowing their driver with the movement. Her seatbelt catches on her shoulder but she ignores it, clasping Yoongi's hands in hers tightly, desperation in the squeeze of her fingers. "I support you coming out to Mom. I do. Just could we do it when there's a few less strangers in the house?"

Yoongi narrows his eyes, trying to ignore the cool press of his aunt's hands in his, and the furrow of worry in her brow. He feels his resolve softening, feels his fondness for his aunt eroding his better judgment. He frowns. "I don't want another marriage date."

"I'll talk to her," Mikyung promises quickly.

"If she mentions one word of another date-"

"She won't, I promise!" Mikyung squeezes Yoongi's hands again. "I just want one Chuseok that

doesn't descend into chaos."

"If you're referring to the chicken protest last year-" Taehyung says defensively, straightening in his seat.

"I am one-hundred percent referring to the chicken protest you staged last year," Mikyung replies, her sharp eyes flicking to Taehyung and narrowing. "And the year before when you let the dog loose in the kitchen and he ate everything. And the year before-" Mikyung cuts herself off, her lips slamming together suddenly and her eyes shifting away quickly. She clears her throat and releases Yoongi's hands, settling back into her seat, tension etched into the set of her shoulders.

The year before that. A breath shudders in Yoongi's throat and he swallows it down, turning his gaze back to the passing scenery. He doesn't want to remember it, spending Chuseok in the hospital, watching his grandmother lie in the private VIP room, weak and frail and unlike the woman he knew. He can still taste the heady hospital stench of disinfectant and anguish in his mouth, can still feel the pressure of his hands raking his hair, praying, hoping, wailing *I've lost too much already, too much, don't you dare fucking take her, don't you dare*.

He supposes it's in that same hospital bed where his grandmother formulated the idea that Yoongi had to get married, sooner rather than later. Something about settling things up when she was still alive to see it, she told him one day after the fourth date he had endured. She had affected a mournful, melodramatic voice, insinuating his lack of a spouse was sending her to an early grave. He scowls at the passing streetlights and blurring rice fields. It has to end.

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The Min estate is much like the family name, historic and grandiose, etched and weaved into history and reaching it's tendrils to the end of the Joseon period. The main building is a modern adaptation of the traditional hanok structure, surrounded by manicured gardens and gravel walkways. Every tree branch, every roof shingle, every ornamented door tells stories of wealth and prestige. Every step through the grounds reminds the visitors of a privilege and class that cannot be bought, earned, or stolen.

Today, the estate buzzes, the smell of food wafting with the cool September breeze, low levels of indistinct chatter like a humming murmur in the background. Yoongi cannot even recognize more than six people mulling around. There are groups of older men and women in traditional hanboks, deep in serious conversation, turning to look up and frown around them occasionally. Dozens of smartly uniformed men and women rush through the garden, carrying flower bouquets and piping hot plates of food.

"Are you sure we're related to all these people?" Taehyung asks, wide eyes scanning the bustle.

"You're not related to any of them," Yoongi says, trying to ignore the scrutinizing eyes of his distant relatives as he makes his way to the front door.

Taehyung gasps, affronted. "I'm your cousin, hyung!"

"On my mother's side, Tae." He turns to Taehyung and reaches a hand up to pat his cheek condescendingly. "It's okay, we'll keep you around."

Taehyung opens his mouth to reply with something he probably thinks is *scathing* but will only cause Yoongi's amused smirk to widen. Instead, Mikyung sniffs loudly and lets out an annoyed scoff.

"Who let them wander around without an escort?" she asks, frustrated.

Yoongi arches a brow and glances to where his aunt looks, face firming into a blank and disinterested expression. The "them" in question are a young man with trendy glasses, holding a small, handheld voice recorder. Behind him follows another man, camera in hand. He bites back a scowl. Reporters.

"I'll take care of this," Mikyung says under her breath. "Go greet your grandmother." She steps deftly away from Yoongi and Taehyung and approaches the reporters with a wide, welcoming smile. "Ah, Mr. Kim. Welcome to the Min estate. May I give you the grand tour?" She takes Mr. Kim's arm and leads him further into the garden.

Yoongi bites back a laugh as he enters the house. His aunt is the hidden gem of their family.

"Granny, I have arrived!" Taehyung calls out, skipping into the sitting room.

Yoongi follows considerably more slowly, hands clasped loosely behind his back. He finds Taehyung sidled next to his grandmother, playing with the fabric of her hanbok and asking about her health.

"I'm *fine*," she sniffs, and her eyes zero in on Yoongi. Her lips twist into a frown that has been part of her expression since before Yoongi was even born. "Ah, this couldn't possibly be my grandson. He looks similar but Yoongi never visits. Never calls," she says, arching a cold brow.

Yoongi sits on the couch opposite his grandmother and nods in greeting. "Nice to see you too, Granny."

She turns to Taehyung and whispers loudly so Yoongi can hear, "Who is this stranger? Did you let him in?"

Yoongi ignores her and glances around the house at the bustling uniformed decorators in the hallway trying and failing to pretend they aren't watching. He turns back to his grandmother and tries to say politely for the benefit of the staff, "The place looks very nice."

"It's old," Yoongi's grandmother complains, shrugging in distaste. "There's always something that needs repairing. Half our profits go into this crumbling thing."

"Did you do the calculations yourself?" Yoongi replies, keeping his expression serious.

"Yes, I did it right now in my mind."

"Ah, you calculated it right now, down to the very won."

"Down to the very last won. Exactly fifty percent."

"You made a small mistake. It's actually fifty-two point one percent of our profits," Yoongi says, eyes locked with his grandmother, daring her to laugh first. He shrugs. "It's a small mistake, I can understand."

Yoongi's grandmother narrows her eyes, her eyebrows arched. "Don't challenge me, child."

A smile nearly cracks his lips. He frowns instead and sniffs, glancing around the room. "Is there a reason you invited half of Korea to Chuseok?" he asks, changing the subject.

"I invite them every year," she responds, batting away Taehyung's hands from her hanbok, her

patience finally ended. "It's just the vultures circling for a place in my will now that they know I'm dying."

Yoongi stiffens and swallows down a hysterical bubble of panic. His eyes darken and he scowls. "You're not dying," he says instead, reminding himself of his grandmother's tendency to exaggerate.

"I was unaware that I am aging backwards," she replies sharply, mirroring Yoongi's scowl, the wrinkles on her face deepening. "I'd like to see you married before I leave this world." She reaches for a folder tucked by her side, holding it out in Yoongi's direction. "This is chairman Yoo's grandniece, have a look."

Yoongi glowers. It has to end, he thinks. "You're not dying and I'm not going on another marriage date."

His grandmother waves the folder in his direction. "I'm older than you, child. Do as I say."

"Granny, maybe you shouldn't," Taehyung says gently, trying to deescalate the situation. He reaches slowly for the folder but she jerks it out of his hold and waves it more aggressively at Yoongi.

"I've already set the date," she continues.

"No," Yoongi says firmly, locking eyes with his grandmother, determination vibrating through his blood.

"Give me one good reason."

Yoongi hears the door to the sitting room click open and footsteps behind him.

"Ah, the whole family is here," Mikyung says cheerily. "Mr. Kim, Mr. Moon, perhaps now would be a good time for a family picture for the paper?"

"Auntie, not now," Taehyung starts.

"I'm gay," Yoongi blurts out, sharp and loud and triumphant. He has a brief moment of pity for his aunt, but it is short-lived when he sees his grandmother's eyes flicker.

"You're what?" she asks, mouth gaping.

"Gay. I like men. Exclusively." He shrugs, smug. "So there's no point setting me up."

Yoongi hears the camera shutter and Mikyung's forced laughter. "What a jokester our Yoongi is, ha. Gentlemen, maybe we should-"

"Oh please, Mikyung, I'm not ashamed of my grandson." Yoongi's grandmother waves the reporters in. "Take your photos, ask your questions." She throws the folder onto the coffee table in defeat. "You could have told me earlier and saved me the trouble," she says to Yoongi, glowering.

Mikyung sighs heavily behind Yoongi and he can hear her mutter about *just one peaceful Chuseok, just one*. He smirks and shrugs again, content that his grandmother's misguided matchmaking efforts are over.

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Seokjin thought there was nothing left that could wipe the carefully crafted blank expression from his face. He realizes too late that he was wrong, and somehow, life will always find a way to trip him.

He stares, aghast, eyes wide and blinking rapidly, mouth hardly responding to his commands. "Marriage?"

Chairman Jeon thins his lips into a straight line and glances up from his desk, eyebrows furrowed in annoyance. He stares at Seokjin, silent, disapproval evident in the lines around his mouth.

Seokjin tries to remind himself to stay calm, to find that mask of cool indifference he thought he had perfected.

Chairman Jeon sets his pen down on the table, the weight of it making a loud *click* through the room. He settles back in his chair, folding his hands over his stomach. "You have objections?"

Seokjin swallows and clutches his fingers by his side. *Stay calm*, he reminds himself. "Jeongguk is barely out of high school. Isn't it too early?" he says, managing to keep his voice even and strong.

"Half of his peers have already settled their engagements." Chairman Jeon clears his throat and somehow manages to convey all his disapproval and irritation with the sound.

"You should be happy, Seokjin," Seokjin hears from the other side of the room, his uncle Jeonghun's voice smug with victory.

Seokjin doesn't flinch, turning his gaze to his uncle. He prays silently that his anger and panic is hidden behind a neutral mask, even as his blood runs hot with adrenaline.

Jeonghun smirks and steps beside Seokjin, patting his shoulder condescendingly. "I facilitated the match myself. Prosecutor Oh's second daughter is a lovely girl, and the match is a good fit for Jeongguk's station."

Seokjin can't help the twitch of his eyebrows. "What station would that be?"

Jeonghun's smile turns sickly sweet. "As much as we've tried, Jeongguk's unfortunate birth is an open secret among our peers. We're lucky we found him such a distinguished family who will overlook it."

Seokjin fights to keep his expression blank, fights for the control he spent years honing. The words are harsh, and the insinuations cruel, but they are nothing new. Seokjin has heard them countless times over the years. He reminds himself to let them wash over him like rain water. Words aren't important. Jeongguk's happiness is the only thing that matters.

"He's too young, sir," Seokjin starts again, directing his attention back to the chairman.

The chairman makes a disapproving noise and folds his hands across his stomach. "You're smarter than that."

Seokjin presses his lips together. He is smarter than that. He knows what the gilded world is like. Marriages are not based on love, but on business and alliances. Engagements are settled early, and love and desire have nothing to do with it. He *knows* this, but he cannot let it happen to Jeongguk. He promised their mother, he promised himself. Jeongguk was going to have a better life than that. Jeongguk was going to have freedom and choice and most of all, love.

Seokjin tries a different strategy. "Shouldn't I be first? I'm older by five years. It's almost inappropriate."

Jeonghun scoffs. "Are you forgetting your place? A Jeon by name and not by blood, your marriage means nothing," he starts, but is interrupted by the chairman.

"Jeonghun be quiet." The chairman fixes his gaze on Seokjin, piercing and heavy. "You have a proposition?"

Stay calm, stay calm, Seokjin reminds himself, mind racing to find a solution, any solution. "What if I could do better?" he asks suddenly, the words leaving his mouth before he has even thought them through. "What if I make a match, more advantageous than Jeongguk?"

Jeonghun laughs, loud and mocking. "I sincerely doubt you could."

Seokjin's expression hardens and his lips press together, flicking his gaze to his uncle. "I'm not asking if it's possible. I'm asking, if I can marry better than Prosecutor Oh's second daughter, will you drop the idea of Jeongguk's marriage?"

"Impossible," Jeonghun states, but the chairman smiles at Seokjin, wry and amused.

"I would," he finally says.

"Father!"

The chairman ignores Jeonghun's protests, hand reaching for the cane leaning by his desk. "Jeongguk will attend the marriage date in four weeks." He stands shakily, fingers gripping at the top of his cane for balance. "By then, I don't want to hear a word of protest from you or the boy. You'd better talk to him. I won't tolerate his insolent attitude in front of the girl or her parents."

Seokjin nods. "Thank you. He won't have to attend."

The chairman makes a disapproving noise in the back of his throat, but says nothing, shuffling out of the den.

Jeonghun takes a moment to scowl at Seokjin, his lips twisting into a deep frown. "Whatever you're planning, it's useless."

Seokjin forces a smile, the same one he practiced for years until it was nearly natural on his lips. "I guess we'll see in four weeks."

Jeonghun hums, sending Seokjin one last glare before leaving the room.

Seokjin deflates, sinking into a soft leather armchair. He slumps his shoulders over his knees and runs a hand through his hair. Four weeks. Four weeks to find and secure an engagement better than the daughter of an influential prosecutor. He closes his eyes and takes several deep breaths. He is an idiot, he should never have proposed the deal to the chairman.

He curses in his head, fingers tightening in his hair. It's a stupid power play on his uncle's part. A few years ago, Jeonghun didn't care one bit about Jeongguk's marriage or future or anything, really. He was just the illegitimate son of his deceased brother that they fed and clothed and sent to school. Seokjin was no better than his caretaker. They lived in something close to peace, not quite loving but quiet. Not quite safe but stable. Until Jeongguk turned his attention away from art, and put his considerable talents into a single focus on excelling in business. Suddenly the chairman's eyes were trained on Jeongguk and he became a potential heir. More importantly to Jeonghun, his nephew became a *threat* to his succession.

Jeonghun was trying to marry Jeongguk down, give him alliances that would do nothing to help him climb to the top of the Jeon throne. Seokjin wants to scream. He doesn't know why Jeongguk abandoned art and focused on business, but he knows Jeongguk doesn't care about the Jeon fortune. As soon as Seokjin can gather the funds and resources, he's going to take Jeongguk as far away from

this toxic family as possible.

He sighs and removes his hands from his hair, fingers fussing with the strands to set them back in place. He still needs more time, more funds, more preparation. Their mother is still finishing her treatments. He needs one year at the soonest and all he has is one month. He needs to find a new plan.

"Hyung!"

Seokjin startles from his thoughts and blinks his eyes open. Jeongguk skips around his chair and plops into the sofa next to him, a large, boyish grin on his lips.

"Hyung, I found you! Where'd you go?"

Seokjin smiles and reaches a hand up to smooth out the wild strands of Jeongguk's hair. "I'm hiding from the ladies. They kicked me out of the kitchen." Seokjin makes a disgruntled face.

Jeongguk laughs. "They're jealous 'cause your cooking is better than theirs."

"Right?" He clears his throat. "Hey Jeongguk. About tomorrow-"

Jeongguk's face falls and his wide eyes blink at him. "What's wrong? What happened? Are you in trouble?"

Seokjin jerks, startled. "What?"

"Something's wrong, I can tell. What happened?" Jeongguk's eyebrows furrow and his eyes narrow.

"Ah, it's not a big deal. I can't go to Busan with you, something came up at work," Seokjin lies easily.

"Hyung, it's Chuseok!"

"Sorry, kid." He ruffles Jeongguk's hair, messing up the strands he just smoothed. "Next time."

"But you were going to drive me down," Jeongguk protests.

"There's something called an airplane."

"Jimin is waiting for us."

"Jimin can see me when you guys come back to Seoul."

"It's not the same, hyung."

"I know." Seokjin makes an apologetic face. "I'm sorry. Next time."

Jeongguk frowns. "You swear it's just work?"

Seokjin laughs. "Jeongguk, I'm not having a midlife crisis."

"You're old enough for one," Jeongguk says, sulking.

"Cheeky," Seokjin scolds, hitting Jeongguk's arm.

Jeongguk finally grins, wide and toothy and Seokjin can only see his brother as seven years old again, small and scared and clinging tightly to his crooked fingers. He clenches his hands into fists.

He'll find a way, he promises himself. He'll find a way to protect Jeongguk. He always has.

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Being Yoongi's self-proclaimed best friend since early childhood, Hoseok is no stranger to the Min household. Taehyung flipping *adores* him, Auntie Mikyung refers to him as the son she never had, and Granny Min would adopt him if she could. He knows he's loved by the entire family, so he's not surprised when Granny Min invites him for lunch without Yoongi.

It's not until halfway through lunch, when Granny Min has stopped pretending she has any interest in the meal on her plate, that Hoseok clues in that there is something *suspicious* at foot. He leans back in his chair and narrows his eyes, pursing his lips. "Why am I here?" he finally asks, wary.

Granny Min folds her hands calmly on the table and flicks her eyes up and down over Hoseok, like she's evaluating him or something. Hoseok suppresses a shiver and crosses his arms over his chest.

"You are aware that my grandson is gay," Granny Min says, more a statement than a question.

Hoseok laughs. "The whole world is aware of it, Granny. It was on all the news stations." He makes a wide gesture with his hands. "Even made it to CNN." He leans his elbow on the table and rests his head in his hand. "Yoongi-hyung is good at making a fuss."

Granny Min makes a face, lips twisted into a sour frown that Hoseok suspects is more fond than she would like to let on. "It has also come to my attention that you're gay."

Hoseok tilts his head, confused. "Yes?"

"What do you think about marrying my grandson?"

Hoseok coughs, hacking bursts of air that tear at his throat. He clenches an arm around his stomach and blinks his eyes to clear the sudden formation of tears. "I'm sorry?" he manages to wheeze out some time later, stifling another cough.

Granny Min ignores Hoseok's impending death by coughing and shrugs. "You two have been friends since childhood. Our family is on good terms with your family. Yoongi is obviously very fond of you." She eyes him again and arches a brow. "You don't seem to have many prospects since your older sister is taking over the company. It's a perfect match."

Hoseok coughs again, disbelieving. He never thought he'd see the day when Yoongi's grandmother offered Yoongi to him for marriage. He can't help it, he laughs. Rolling giggles, loud and clear. "We're not like that, Granny," he starts.

She waves a hand in dismissal. "You never tried, that's all. Should I ring your dad, set up a family meeting?"

Hoseok shakes his head. "No, no, no. Granny, Yoongi really doesn't see me that way. I swear." Granny Min makes a face so Hoseok continues hastily, "And I'm in a committed relationship right now. With Kim Namjoon. You know him, the designer?"

"Hmm," she says, displeased. She leans closer. "Is it a very committed relationship?"

"Three years," he replies, a soft smile on his lips.

She purses her lips. "You could break up."

Hoseok gapes at her.

"It happens to the best of couples. And who better to heal your wounds than my loving, adoring grandson?"

"Granny."

"Fine, my prickly, adoring grandson."

Hoseok pouts at her. "Granny, no."

She sighs, defeated. "I'm an old woman, Hoseok. I'm dying. You can't do me this one, small favor?"

Hoseok frowns. "First of all, Yoongi-hyung assures me you are not, in fact, dying."

She sniffs loudly in scorn.

"And marriage isn't a 'small favor'."

"There's no respect for the elderly these days."

Hoseok sighs. "What if I compiled a list of eligible, gay bachelors for you to torture hyung with?" He leans his head in both of his hands and blinks cutely at Granny Min. "Would that make you feel better?"

She brightens immediately and Hoseok has a feeling he's been played from the very beginning. "Good family, good looks, kind, family-oriented. Someone who can actually get Yoongi to listen for once."

Hoseok pouts. "I have a feeling this is what you were aiming for from the beginning."

She arches a brow. "You could always break up with that Kim boy."

"I'll get you the list by nine tonight!"

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By the time he hears Namjoon open the door to their shared apartment later that night, Hoseok only has four names on his list. He frowns at the pad of paper in his hand, then turns to frown at his phone's contacts list.

"It shouldn't be this hard," he says to himself.

"I sincerely hope that's not your way of telling me 'welcome home, let's have sex'," Namjoon says from behind him.

Hoseok laughs, tilting his head back against the sofa cushions to grin at his boyfriend. "It wouldn't be the first time."

Namjoon sighs and approaches the sofa from behind, leaning down to press a quick kiss on his lips, hands sliding down to pat at Hoseok's chest. "What're you working on?" he asks, lips pressed to Hoseok's temple.

Hoseok sighs and leans into Namjoon's touch. "I had the strangest lunch with Yoongi-hyung's grandmother today."

"What happened?"

"She asked me to marry Yoongi-hyung."

Namjoon chuckles into Hoseok's hair.

Hoseok frowns. "You don't sound surprised."

He can feel Namjoon's smile against his cheek. "There've been some whispers going around. You're the logical first choice for hyung. What did you say?"

Hoseok brings his hand to his chest to pat reassuringly at Namjoon's hands. "I told her there was no way I could part with my dear, dear boyfriend's massive dick, but if hyung was interested in a threesome, then he should hit me up."

"You're ridiculous," Namjoon says, but there's a tinge of fondness in his tone and Hoseok smiles, letting Namjoon's hands go so he can join him on the couch.

Namjoon plops beside Hoseok, slumping down to lean his head awkwardly on his shoulder. "So what's this?" Namjoon frowns as he scans the notepad. "Is it a list of eligible bachelors to marry Yoongi-hyung?"

Hoseok jerks back and stares at his boyfriend. "Sometimes I forget how smart you are."

Namjoon smiles, the dimples in his cheeks deepening, and Hoseok takes a moment to capture the sight in his mind. Namjoon slides the notepad out of Hoseok's slack hands and grabs a pen, jotting down a few more names. "Mm, what about Lim Changkyun?"

Hoseok makes a face. "He's a baby."

"He's literally two years younger than us."

"A *baby*," Hoseok repeats in a baby voice.

Namjoon cringes. "I thought we agreed not the voice."

"Baby," Hoseok continues, grinning.

"Fine, fine, point taken. Lee Jihoon?"

Hoseok scrunches his face in judgement. "That's incest."

"I keep telling you, Yoongi-hyung looks nothing like him." Hoseok continues to stare at his boyfriend before he sighs and nods. "Okay, not Lee Jihoon. Jackson Wang?"

Hoseok grabs the notepad from Namjoon's hands and shuffles away from him on the sofa. "What, so Yoongi-hyung and I can watch him flirt with you for the rest of our lives?"

"He doesn't flirt-"

"I'm watching you," Hoseok says, gesturing with two fingers between his eyes and then flicking them towards Namjoon.

Namjoon leans his head against the sofa cushions and smiles at Hoseok. "I love you, bae."

"Hmm."

Namjoon scoots closer to Hoseok, pressing his lips to his neck. "My one and only."

Hoseok tries to keep his lips in a firm line, but he leans into Namjoon's touch and lets out a sigh. "I'd better be, asshole."

Namjoon manages to snuggle under Hoseok's arm and they ponder the small list together. Finally, he says, "I'm surprised you didn't put Jeon Seokjin on the list."

Hoseok blinks and pulls back to stare incredulously at Namjoon. "Jeon Seokjin is *gay*?"

Namjoon frowns and straightens. "Technically he's bi, but-"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, Jeon the-most-beautiful-man-on-the-planet Seokjin is gay? That Seokjin? He's into guys?"

"Why are you freaking out about this?"

"If I had known that three years ago, we would have a very different living arrangement, is all I'm saying."

Namjoon opens and closes his mouth in shock. "Did you just imply-"

"I'd jump him in a heartbeat, yes."

Namjoon stands. "Okay you know what? Consider this," he gestures to his crotch, "closed for business."

Hoseok gapes at him as he storms to their bedroom. "I was joking, Joonie! It was a joke!" he calls out. "Mostly. Nearly half of it was in jest." He waits for a response but all he hears is overly loud rustling. "Babe?" He stands from the sofa and inches towards the bedroom. "Come on, bae, reopen the candy shop. Let me lick the lollipop."

There's silence for a moment before Namjoon opens the door to their bedroom and scowls at him. "I really hate when you quote hip hop in an effort to seduce me."

Hoseok grins. "But it worked didn't it?"

Namjoon hangs his head in defeat.

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Seokjin spent the week Jeongguk was in Busan networking with as many families as he could. He went to lunches and dinners and gallery openings and committee meetings. He laughed and entertained and flirted and they were all happy to see him. Of course they were happy to see him, he had spent *years* using flattery and favors and friendly conversations to survive in the gilded world. But that was all. Just happy to see him, not happy to discuss a possible marriage, not happy to permanently join into an alliance. At the end of the day, no matter how fond everyone is of Seokjin, he is still only a Jeon in name and not in blood.

If the circumstances of Jeongguk's birth are unfortunate, Seokjin's are downright tragic. His mother was an ordinary girl from an ordinary suburb of Seoul, living an ordinary life. She met the wrong boy, and they made the wrong decisions, and nine months later Seokjin was born and his father was no where to be found. Her family kicked her out, wanting nothing to do with an unwed mother and her unwanted son.

But his mother was strong, and more importantly, she was beautiful. She worked in clubs and bars, attracting high class clients who paid just for the pleasure of her company. It was there that she met the youngest son of the Jeon chaebol group, they made some right decisions, and nine months later, Seokjin had a brother named Jeongguk.

Seokjin understands. Marrying the illegitimate son of a mistress and the youngest son of a chaebol group was one thing. Marrying said son's half-brother who came along for the ride was another matter entirely.

He sighs, holding his champagne flute by his thigh between his thumb and ring finger, ignoring the mutter of party-goers filling up the usually empty gallery. He frowns at the painting, a stylized rendition of a black crow in flight. He wants to fly like that. He wants to fly away from the Jeon family and responsibilities and life. He tilts his head, considering the angle of the wings.

"Is it supposed to mean something really deep, or is it just a bird flying?"

Seokjin doesn't startle when Jeongguk slings his arm around his shoulder, just adjusts his stance to accommodate his brother. "What does a bird in flight mean to you, Gukkie?"

Jeongguk tilts his head against Seokjin's shoulder. "Freedom?"

Seokjin smiles. "I guess it's a painting about freedom, then."

Jeongguk makes a low whistling noise. "Can you write my art history paper?"

"No." Seokjin pokes Jeongguk's side and peers at him. "You like art history."

Jeongguk makes a dismissive noise in the back of his throat, and Seokjin can't help but think it sounds like his grandfather. "I like my business classes more."

"You used to like art history."

Jeongguk shrugs and reaches for the champagne flute in Seokjin's hands. "Can I have this? Thanks."

Seokjin makes a face and snatches the flute back. "You're too young."

Jeongguk rolls his eyes. "I'm an adult now."

"Nope, I didn't give my permission yet. You're still my cute baby brother." Seokjin grins, taking a large gulp of the champagne, enjoying the look of disgust on Jeongguk's face.

"Jeon Seokjin?"

Seokjin turns around at the voice, expecting to find one of the extra gallery attendants they hired for the event. Instead he's greeted by a prim-looking woman, dressed in an understated but expensive suit. He bows slightly. "Yes?"

The woman smiles politely and bows. "My name is Park Gyuri, I'm Chairwoman Min's personal secretary. If you would come with me, the chairwoman would like a word."

Seokjin's brows furrow. "Chairwoman Min? As in the Min Group?"

"Correct."

Jeongguk steps in front of Seokjin, his shoulders rigid and mouth turned down into an intimidating frown. "What does she want with my brother?"

Seokjin places a hand on Jeongguk's shoulder and tugs him back, handing his glass to his brother. "It's fine. I'll be right back."

Park Gyuri keeps a professional smile on her face, watching them expectantly even as Jeongguk scowls at her.

Seokjin taps Jeongguk's shoulder one last time in reassurance, a wide, friendly smile on his face masking his confusion. They did send the Min Corporation an invitation to the exhibit opening, but it was more out of courtesy than any real expectation of attendance. The gallery Seokjin works in is established and respectable, but small and not prestigious. Even if the Min Corporation decided it was in their interests to attend, to have the chairwoman herself come is far beyond Seokjin's reasoning.

He follows Park Gyuri through the small crowd and up the stairs to the offices. He keeps the friendly smile on his face when he asks, "It's not the director that the chairwoman would like to see?"

Park Gyuri shakes her head. "It was Jeon Seokjin I was sent to retrieve."

Seokjin laughs to dispel his nerves. "What does Chairwoman Min want with me?"

Park Gyuri makes a dismissive noise. "That's for the chairwoman to divulge." She stops at the door to the director's office and gestures, bowing slightly. "If you will."

Seokjin narrows his eyes at the gesture, as if this was Park Gyuri's home office and not Seokjin's place of work, but he keeps his mouth shut and enters. He's greeted by the director sitting in the visitor's chair and an older, refined woman sitting in the director's chair. She glances up at him as he enters, sharp eyes narrowing and flicking up and down rapidly. He has the distinct impression that she's pulling him apart and piecing him back together, testing his edges, peeking under his masks. He smiles and bows, keeping his hands flat against his sides.

"Ah, this is Jeon Seokjin, Chairwoman," the director says, standing and coming toward Seokjin.

Seokjin sends her a questioning look but the director's expression is just as confused as his. He turns his attention back to the chairwoman and smiles. "An honor to meet you."

The chairwoman tilts her chin up and the side of her lip twitches into a small smile. "Likewise." She gestures to the chair opposite her. "Please, have a seat."

Seokjin glances back at the director but she offers no help. He carefully sits opposite the chairwoman, keeping his shoulders straight and placing his hands on his knees.

"Secretary Park, that will be all," the chairwoman dismisses, and Park Gyuri escorts the director out of the office, shutting the door lightly behind them. The chairwoman flicks her gaze back to Seokjin, eyes still narrowed and searching.

When it becomes apparent that the chairwoman will not so easily divulge her purpose, Seokjin smiles and takes the initiative. "I hope the exhibit is to your liking," he says congenially. "The participants were hand-picked by the director."

The chairwoman nods, folding her hands on the desk. "It is an excellent collection. I particularly like the portrait of a young man with colorful tears."

Seokjin brightens and leans forward, "It's called *Begin* and it's by a promising young-"

"How long have you worked here, Seokjin? Ah, may I call you Seokjin? I'm old, so I forget how to

be polite at times."

Seokjin's smile wavers in confusion, but he quickly recovers. "Seokjin is fine. I've been at this gallery for two years."

"Do you enjoy your work?"

"I do."

"What's your five and ten year plan?"

Seokjin blinks hard, still trying to grasp the situation. "I'm sorry?"

"Will you stay here? Venture into the family business?" The chairwoman arches a brow. "Perhaps your own gallery?"

Ah, Seokjin thinks, relaxing as the situation clears in his mind. Chairwoman Min is probably opening up her own gallery and is recruiting. He doesn't know how his name came upon the list, he isn't the most sought-after in his profession, and he's still a novice by many accounts, but he supposes the Jeon name does hold a small weight. Most gallery employees do not come from a trueblood chaebol group.

He smiles gently and says, "If you've come to propose a job offer, I'm sorry but I have to decline. I'm happy where I am, and have no intentions of leaving."

The chairwoman pauses, eyebrows lifting and lips pursing. She's silent for a few moments before she says, almost curiously, "And if I offered you five times your current salary?"

Seokjin's eyes widen and his heartrate jumps. With five times his current salary, he could have enough money to leave with Jeongguk in mere months instead of a year. It's tempting, so tempting, but his mind wanders to the director and how kind she's been to him. How they worked together to get the gallery up and running from the very beginning. How he promised himself he would find and train a replacement for his position before he left.

He smiles regretfully and shakes his head. "I'm sorry, I really won't leave."

The chairwoman taps her fingers on the desk and her lips tug slightly to the side in a small smile. "Loyal." She shifts in her seat, leaning her arm on the table. "You have a brother, correct?"

Seokjin's eyebrows furrow. "Yes." He isn't quite sure where this is heading anymore and it makes him nervous.

"Are you close?"

"Extremely."

"If he told you to quit this gallery, would you?"

"In a heartbeat." Seokjin leans forward, "I'm not quite sure where this-"

"Are you still close to your mother? The biological one, of course, not the one in the registry."

Seokjin freezes, a frown forming on his lips. He leans back from the desk and folds his hands carefully on top of his knees. "There is a line, Chairwoman," he says coolly, suppressing the heat of offense flowing through his veins. "Lines that even you should not cross."

She arches a narrow brow but finally a small smile tugs at her lips again. "I was worried you didn't have a backbone."

"I'm easygoing, Chairwoman. Not a doormat."

She nods in acknowledgement. "I've been informed you are bisexual, am I wrong?"

Seokjin furrows his brow again. "I'm not sure that's pertinent information."

The chairwoman ignores him and continues, "I've also heard whispers that you are searching for a spouse. Again, am I wrong?"

Seokjin blinks rapidly.

"I have a grandson, who just so happens to be single, available, and in desperate need of a husband."

Seokjin can't stop blinking. He thinks he couldn't have possibly heard right. "You want me," he starts, voice quiet in his confusion, "to marry Min Yoongi."

"Yes."

"*Min Yoongi*," Seokjin repeats, incredulous. "Sole heir to your vast empire."

The chairwoman shrugs. "If I don't murder him before I die, yes." She narrows her eyes and peers at him. "Is this disagreeable?"

Seokjin slumps back in his chair and takes a deep breath. It's too good to be true. If the Jeon family is a king among men, then the Min family is an emperor among kings. It's too high of a match, it's too perfect, too much. It's not possible. Not even a full-blooded, legitimate Jeon heir like Jeongguk's cousin could possibly hope to aim for the Min family.

He smiles nervously and says slowly, "You are aware of my true background."

The chairwoman stares at Seokjin with boredom. "What, your mother was a mistress and your father's identity is unknown? Why should it matter? You are on the Jeon family register, it makes you a Jeon." She shrugs. "When you marry Yoongi, you'll be a part of the Min family regardless. Why should I care what you were before?"

Seokjin gapes at her, unable to fully comprehend. He tries to still it, but relief begins to work through his mind, working down his spine, relaxing his shoulders. Relief, strong and intoxicating. He can put off Jeongguk's marriage indefinitely with an alliance to the Min family. He could even extract Jeongguk from their power. He would have leverage, power, a voice. It's too sweet, the temptation too heady, clogging his mind. He can't think clearly.

"Why," he manages to voice, blinking rapidly again, "why does Min Yoongi need a husband so desperately?"

The chairwoman sighs, a genuine expression of worry creasing her eyebrows. "You are aware of our family situation, I assume. Yoongi lost his parents when he was ten years old. It was a terrible time for us all."

Seokjin nods, recalling the story he'd heard, whispers murmured in voices devoid of sympathy, greedy for a story.

"I'm growing old. Before I leave this world, it's my responsibility to make sure Yoongi is not left

alone. I will not fail my grandson a second time. He will marry, whether he agrees with me or not." She thins her lips into a firm line. "Well? Your answer, child."

He glances up and contemplates the chairwoman, searching her face for answers she cannot give him. He feels like he's standing at a diverging road, the signs faded and unreadable, and his map crumbled and lost miles behind him. Finally he asks, "Not to sound ungrateful, but why me? I'm sure you have more appropriate candidates."

She shifts back into her chair, crossing her legs. "I could lie to you and say your answers here today impressed me, or that the general opinion of your person is favorable. But I despise lying. The honest truth is I liked your face the best."

Seokjin grins and leans forward. "Me too. I like my face the best too." He winks before he can stop himself.

The chairwoman stares, stunned at him for a moment before she lets out a startled laugh, a full grin overtaking her lips. "I like that arrogance even more," she finally says, winking back at him.

&&&

When he looks back on it, Yoongi will realize there were several, glaring, obvious warning signs. The first being Taehyung's suddenly request to go to Zeus Hotel for lunch on a Thursday afternoon when he should probably be in class.

He says as much to his cousin. "You have class."

"Nuh-uh, it was cancelled this week. The professor's sick."

"Somehow I don't believe you," Yoongi says, flipping through a report. He wedges his phone between his ear and his shoulder, reaching for a pen to make an annotation. "I'll take you this weekend."

Taehyung gasps in outrage over the speaker. "No, they have a special menu and it's over by the weekend. We have to go Thursday."

Yoongi frowns, glancing up from his report to glare at the empty space of his office. "Zeus Hotel doesn't have special-"

"I'll meet you at your office, we can drive over. Bye, hyung!"

Yoongi blinks and quirks his lips to the side, his now silent phone still wedged between his ear and shoulder.

His second sign is when Taehyung actually shows up in his office on Thursday during the worst wind and rain storm Seoul has seen in years.

"Hey," Taehyung says, slightly out of breath as he steps into Yoongi's office, brushing wet strands of hair away from his face. "Ready to go?"

Yoongi glares and purses his lips. "Ready for what?"

"Lunch!" Taehyung folds his arms across his chest and taps his foot impatiently. "Did you forget?"

"It's a storm outside, Tae."

Taehyung nods, eyes wide, anticipating the rest of the sentence. When Yoongi remains silent, he

prompts, "Yeah, and?"

"It's the worst storm in years," Yoongi says, enunciating his words slowly as if it will help get his point across.

"Okay, I don't get your point."

"I'm not going out. I'm staying here, with my coffee and my heating, and my emergency generator when the power inevitably goes out."

Taehyung rolls his eyes and trudges to Yoongi, pulling him out of his chair by the arm. "There's coffee and heating and generators at Zeus Hotel. Let's go."

He pushes Yoongi to the door but Yoongi resists, twisting out of Taehyung hold, and smacking him lightly on the head. "Ya."

Taehyung flinches back, rubbing his head. "You should see someone about that violent streak."

"I'll let my secretary know." He heads back to his desk, satisfied the conversation is over.

Except Taehyung sighs heavily and plops onto one of the armchairs in Yoongi's receiving area, hooking his legs over the arm. "Okay, the way I see it, hyung, you have two choices."

Yoongi arches a brow and leans his hip onto his desk, silent.

"First," Taehyung says, holding up one finger, "you could be a good hyung and take me to Zeus Hotel for lunch as you promised."

"I never prom-"

"Or second!" Taehyung holds up two fingers. "You can attempt to work while I stay here *all afternoon*, distracting you." Taehyung turns his head to grin mischievously at Yoongi. "The choice is yours."

Yoongi rolls his eyes and settles back into his desk, pulling out the drawer of his desk for his earphones. As long as he has those, he can ignore anything Taehyung – wait, where did they go?

"Looking for these?" Taehyung's grin grows wider as he holds up a pair of expensive earphones.

"How did you even get those?"

Taehyung shrugs, smug. "So. Lunch?"

&&&

The clouds are so thick and dark that even at one in the afternoon, it seems closer to night than day. Yoongi and Taehyung make it to the hotel in one piece despite the heavy rain. Taehyung leads the way to a private dining room and as the door swings open, Yoongi realizes it's an ambush.

Seated at the table is his grandmother and a tall, elegant man he knows he should recognize but cannot quite place.

He stops short and glares at Taehyung. "You lied."

"Technically not a lie, just" - Taehyung waves his hands in the air - "an omission of sorts."

Yoongi's grandmother stands and waves him over. "Yoongi, stop standing there like an idiot and come join us."

Yoongi scowls but Taehyung takes his elbow and delivers him to the table. He sits, glaring at his grandmother.

"Yoongi, this is Jeon Seokjin," his grandmother says, gesturing to the man across the table.

Yoongi flicks his gaze briefly to Seokjin, taking in the tailored suit, the artfully styled brown hair, the cool, polite smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes. He recognizes the name and the face now. He crosses his arms over his chest and turns to his grandmother. "This is a fucking marriage date," he seethes, anger boiling from his stomach.

His grandmother seems unperturbed, arching a brow. "I raised you better than that. Greet our guest."

He scowls. "You didn't raise me."

"Manners."

Yoongi flicks his gaze back to Seokjin, and nods in acknowledgement. "Sorry you had to get caught in the middle of this but I *distinctly* recall telling my grandmother no more marriage dates."

His grandmother sniffs derisively. "If you think that tantrum will dissuade me, then you're stupid as well as stubborn."

"It must run in the family."

Seokjin looks nervously between the occupants of the table, polite smile waning but still present through the exchange. "I'm sorry, this must be a shock to you," he tries, but Yoongi scoffs and rolls his eyes. It's the last time Yoongi acknowledges anyone's presence through the entire meal.

Yoongi admits to himself that Seokjin tries, very hard, to mediate the situation, but he remains stubbornly silent and sullen through the lunch, glaring whenever Taehyung or his grandmother attempts to pull him into conversation. Finally his grandmother sighs in frustration, throwing her fork onto her plate.

"You're impossible, Yoongi," she says, frustration sharpening her tone.

He shrugs, standing and slipping his hands into his pant pockets. "It seems like we're done here." He peers briefly at Seokjin. "Sorry for the lunch. I'd say I'd make it up to you, but we won't be seeing each other again."

Seokjin blinks rapidly at him, his mouth slack and shoulders rigid.

Yoongi lifts a hand in farewell and saunters out of the room, heading to the valet in the front to fetch his car. He squints up at the sky from under the awning, trying to separate the dark grey blanket into individual clouds. He shivers as a gust of wind whips past him, icy fingers clawing down his neck. He tightens his jacket around his frame and lifts his shoulders to block the wind.

"Min Yoongi!"

Yoongi frowns and turns to the sound, eyes widening in slight surprise to see Jeon Seokjin jogging to catch up to him. He swallows a frustrated sigh.

"Can we talk for a moment?" Seokjin asks when he finally reaches Yoongi. The wind whips through

his hair, disrupting the styled strands into a lopsided mess of tangles. Yoongi thinks fleetingly that somehow Seokjin still manages to look handsome.

Yoongi's frown deepens and he turns back to look at the street. "I made myself clear. I'm not marrying you." He shrugs. "Nothing personal, I'm not marrying anyone."

"Your grandmother seems to think otherwise."

"My grandmother doesn't have to stand before the judge and say 'I do'."

"Can we please just go inside and talk, for a minute?"

Yoongi glares up at Seokjin, a scowl twisting his lips. "No."

Seokjin takes a step closer to him and Yoongi backs away.

"For fuck's sake," Yoongi grumbles, stuffing his hands deep into his pants pockets and walking out from under the awning and into the rain. He scowls when the rain hits his head, icy cold drops stinging at his skin.

He doesn't expect Seokjin to follow him, calling out, "What's so terrible about marriage? You have to do it eventually. I'll be a good husband."

"You sound desperate," Yoongi says, turning on his heel to glare at Seokjin. He's darkly satisfied to see Seokjin's hair awkwardly plastered to his face.

"I am," Seokjin says, blinking against the rain. "I am desperate. I need this marriage."

Yoongi rolls his eyes, looking up at the sky, rain blurring his view of dark grey clouds. "Are you going to beg me?" he says, scorn heavy in his voice.

"Yes!" Seokjin replies, desperation thinning his voice into nothing more than a rasp of air. "Yes, if it will work. I'll get down on my knees right here and beg you."

Seokjin moves to kneel but Yoongi catches his arm by the elbow, pulling him upright and closer. "I don't want you to fucking beg."

"I need you," Seokjin confesses, arm twisting in Yoongi's hold so his hands can grasp Yoongi's forearm.

Yoongi looks down at Seokjin's hand on his arm, a deep frown etched on his mouth. Seokjin's fingers grip tightly at the rain-darkened material of his jacket, slender and crooked and *wrong*. Seokjin's hands don't belong on his arm, Seokjin's breath doesn't belong in his air, Seokjin's voice doesn't belong in his ears, pleading and frantic. Yoongi is meant to be as he is, with few friends and fewer family. He doesn't want to change. He refuses to change.

Seokjin's voice gets stronger with his hand on Yoongi's jacket, his words penetrating. "I need you," Seokjin repeats. "I need you so desperately, you can't even imagine." His grip tightens, neat nails disappearing into heavy denim. "One year, Yoongi. I need you for one year, and then you'll never see me again."

Yoongi frowns and lifts his gaze, locking eyes with Seokjin. For what feels like the first time, he really looks at Seokjin. Large caramel eyes widened in desperation, round cheeks, red lips, wet strands of hair clumped to the side as the rain and wind attacks them both. He feels his fingers tighten on Seokjin's arm, the action out of his control. He didn't even know he was still holding Seokjin.

"One year," Seokjin repeats, and Yoongi thinks he hears warning bells sound off in his head. He's going to regret this.

Marriage Contract

Chapter Notes

Wow, hello, there seems to be a lot more of you reading this than I expected. Hi? Thank you for your interest and enthusiasm! Hopefully you enjoy the ride ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

From what Seokjin had heard about Min Yoongi, he expected that Yoongi might be adverse to the idea of an arranged marriage. He was prepared for this. He was ready to charm and persuade and seduce, to soften Yoongi's edges and appeal to him until Seokjin walked out of that lunch with a firm marriage arrangement. Seokjin did not expect Yoongi to be vehemently hostile to the idea.

Seokjin sits at the table, fingers gripping tightly at the edges of his plate, blinking rapidly as Min Yoongi storms out of the room, taking with him every hope and dream and promise Seokjin ever made to himself. Every step Yoongi takes is Seokjin's failure, failure to secure a marriage, failure to protect Jeongguk, failure to keep his promise to their mother. His stomach turns, there's a bitter taste of acid at the back of his throat.

"Secretary Park," the chairwoman calls, rubbing a hand tiredly at her temple. Her secretary slips through a back door and stands attentively by the chairwoman. "Get me a room, I need to lie down."

Taehyung stands suddenly from his seat, rounding the table to help the chairwoman stand. "Granny, are you okay?" he asks, sliding an arm around the chairwoman to support her.

She bats away his hands, scowling at him. "I'm not okay. I'm going to die soon and have to explain to Yoongi's parents why he turned into such a jackass." She pushes at Taehyung. "Now move."

Taehyung slips his arm under the chairwoman's elbow and walks her to the door, "I'll help."

"I don't need your help, I need a better grandson."

Taehyung peers over his shoulder at Seokjin and smiles apologetically. "I'll be right back, I'm sorry!"

They shuffle out of the room, the chairwoman complaining loudly, but Seokjin stops listening, the roar in his ears drowning out all other sounds. He can't let it end like this. He can't let his only hope walk out the door without a fight.

Seokjin stands quickly and runs to the entrance, praying fervently that Yoongi is still there, still somewhere Seokjin can reach. *Please*, he thinks, *please, please, please*.

Relief is shift and heady in his chest when he sees Yoongi through the large glass windows of the lobby, shoulders hunched and jacket wrapped tight around his frame, hair tossed from the strong wind. He pushes through the revolving doors outside and only realizes as the first sting of wind hits the skin of his neck that he forgot his coat inside.

He ignores the shivering that snakes down his spine and jogs forward, lifting his voice to the wind, calling out, "Min Yoongi!" He is eternally grateful his voice carries even against the sharp hiss of air around them.

Yoongi turns, eyes widened slightly. His lips twist in frustration but Seokjin doesn't care. Yoongi stopped and that's all that matters.

"Can we talk for a moment?" Seokjin asks when he finally reaches Yoongi. Another gust of wind rushes around them, icy fingers threading through Seokjin's hair, stinging at his cheeks. He presses his fingers against his thighs to stop from shivering, keeping his attention focused solely on Yoongi.

Yoongi's frown deepens before he glances away from Seokjin, looking out to the street with narrowed eyes. "I made myself clear. I'm not marrying you." He shrugs. "Nothing personal, I'm not marrying anyone."

Seokjin thins his lips together and reminds himself he needs to get Yoongi on his side. "Your grandmother seems to think otherwise."

"My grandmother doesn't have to stand before the judge and say 'I do'."

Seokjin reaches up a hand to sweep his fringe from his eyes, fighting the wind as it whips around his frame again. "Can we please just go inside and talk, for a minute?"

Yoongi finally turns back to look at Seokjin, a scowl twisting his lips. "No."

Seokjin takes a step closer to him and Yoongi backs away. "For fuck's sake," Yoongi grumbles, stuffing his hands deep into his pants pockets. He walks swiftly out from under the awning and into the storm, heedless of the rain that drenches him within seconds.

Seokjin wants to scream, wants to head back inside to the warmth, wants to forget this stupid, ridiculous idea. He wants the luxury of a fate of his own choosing, not one balanced precariously on the decisions of others. He swallows his dissatisfaction and reminds himself of the destiny placed on his life since birth. He steps out from under the awning, following Yoongi. "What's so terrible about marriage?" he asks, frustration threading under his tone. "You have to do it eventually. I'll be a good husband."

Yoongi turns on his heel, his eyes narrowed against the rain, lips turned down in a now-familiar scowl. "You sound desperate."

"I am," Seokjin blurts out, the blunt words rushing out before he can frame them in flattery and sycophancy, dripping with sweet phrases like honey. "I am desperate. I need this marriage."

Yoongi rolls his eyes, unmoved, and Seokjin can feel anxiety claw at his throat, threatening to choke his breath from his lungs. "Are you going to beg me?" Yoongi asks, disgust heavy and cutting.

"Yes!" Seokjin replies, the words squeeze out of his throat, thin and raspy and scared. Fuck, he would beg for days, here in the rain, freezing and starved and humiliated if it meant Jeongguk would be safe, if it meant he could keep his promise to his mother. "Yes, if it will work. I'll get down on my knees right here and beg you."

He moves to kneel, moves to bend to Yoongi but is surprised when Yoongi reaches forward and grabs his arm, tugging him up. He stumbles, trying to regain his balance, stepping closer into Yoongi's space, stopping inches from Yoongi's face. He blinks, rain blurring his vision, a hazy outline distorting the shape of Yoongi's nose, the shade of his dark eyes. Yoongi's fringe is plastered to his forehead, rain sticks to his dark eyelashes, and his hand is firm on Seokjin's elbow, warm through the thin, rain-soaked material of his shirt. Everything stops, the whirring of a hundred voices of doubt in his head, the panic clawing up his throat, the fear churning his stomach. Seokjin draws in a deep breath, the warmth on his elbow a heavy anchor.

"I don't want you to fucking beg," Yoongi says, alarmed, and Seokjin twists his arm so he can grasp Yoongi's forearm, needing to draw closer to his warmth, closer to an anchor he didn't know existed.

"I need you," Seokjin says quickly, even as Yoongi frowns down at their entwined arms. Seokjin grips tighter, his nails sinking into the heavy denim of Yoongi's jacket, trying to sink further to skin and blood and bone. "I need you," he repeats, voice stronger, steady and firm. "I need you so desperately, you can't even imagine. One year, Yoongi. I need you for one year, and then you'll never see me again."

Yoongi flicks his gaze back up and they lock eyes. Seokjin's eyes are wide, pleading. His hand tightens on Seokjin's elbow, warmth spreads down his arm to his fingertips buried in Yoongi's jacket.

"One year," he says again, and watches as Yoongi's eyes waver, the frown on his lips softening for a moment. Seokjin steps closer, his breath stilled in his lungs, waits for Yoongi's answer.

Finally Yoongi scowls and pushes Seokjin's arm away, stepping back. "I'm not getting married," he says firmly, lips thinned and hard.

Seokjin takes a step back and feels all the air rush out of his lungs. He's cold and wet and the wind keeps cutting into the skin of his neck, but it doesn't phase him. Not until the valet pulls up with Yoongi's car, and Yoongi slips into the driver's seat, shaking his head to flip his fringe out of his eyes. Suddenly the chill hits Seokjin, and he wraps his arms around his chest for warmth, his fingers unconsciously grasping at the elbow Yoongi once held.

Yoongi spares him one last look, eyes flickering almost sympathetically, before he pulls out of the driveway and out into the rainy streets of Seoul.

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Seokjin huddles in his car, fingers numb and shoulders trembling. He turns the heat up but he can't feel it penetrate his skin. He feels like he's falling apart, his heart rate too fast, his breathing too stilted, his mind too hazy. He wonders vaguely just how much he can take before his body gives out. He grips his hands around the top of the steering wheel until it hurts, until he finally feels something tingle at the tips of his numb fingers.

Seokjin takes a fortifying breath and lifts his head, reaching a hand up to wipe the rain water from his face. He pulls out his phone and dials a familiar number. The phone rings and rings and rings. Seokjin thinks the call will go to voicemail when a soft, tired voice answers.

"Hello?"

Seokjin lets out a small breath, happy to hear his best friend's voice. "Wendy."

She makes a sleepy sound and says, words a little slurred, "Did you forget about time zones again?"

Seokjin lets out a small laugh, brushing rain water from under his eyes. "I'm sorry, what time is it there?"

"Before six in Paris." He hears rustling. "Is everything okay?"

Seokjin smiles wearily and blinks rapidly. "No," he says, finally feeling the pressure of the past two weeks weighing heavy on his shoulders. The moisture he wipes from under his eyes is no longer remnants of rain water. "No, it's all falling apart and I don't know what to do."

"What happened?" Wendy's voice is sharper, alert and careful.

“They’re going to marry Jeongguk off,” he says, slumping over his steering wheel, his forehead pressed to the top of it. “I can’t do a thing to stop it.”

“He’s barely out of high school,” she says with righteous indignation.

“Do you think they care?” He takes another deep breath. “Can we speed up the passports?”

“How fast?”

“Two weeks.”

Wendy makes a distressed noise. “Impossible. Jinnie, I’m sorry. I have connections but two weeks is barely enough time. At the fastest I think six months.”

He sighs and rubs a hand through his wet hair. “I don’t have six months. Could we use our current passports? I don’t have enough money saved up but we wouldn’t starve, and I could find a job.”

“If you use your old passports, the Jeons will find you in less than a day. Then what will you do?”

“I can’t just sit here and let them destroy Jeongguk’s future.”

“Okay, worst case scenario,” Wendy ventures, tone careful, “Jeongguk gets married. He can get divorced later.”

“It won’t stop there and you know it.” Seokjin lets out a shuddering breath and leans back into his seat. “What am I going to do?”

“I’ll make some phone calls, okay?” Her voice is gentle, calming. It reminds Seokjin of when he meet her years ago, thirteen and terrified in a house with too many eyes and not enough love. She was the housekeeper's daughter, and the only welcoming face in the entire Jeon household. “It will be okay, we’ll figure it out.”

Seokjin doesn’t quite know if he believes her, but he doesn’t have much of a choice. He has to do something, and if Min Yoongi isn’t the answer, then he’ll find another way.

&&&

Min Yoongi is a genius. Genius business prodigy, genius photographer, genius fashion icon of the chaebol world. Genius grandson of the trickiest, slyest woman that has ever breathed the thick air of Korea. He's more than prepared for his grandmother's attack. He knows it's coming. She won't just let him walk out on a marriage date she orchestrated, arranged, and attended herself. He is *prepared*. He called his associates, secured his alliances, shored up his funds. He's ready to be cut off, for his position to be threatened in the company. He's prepared for the battle of disinheritance and he's ready for the long fight.

He realizes, quietly and internally, for his thoughts only, that maybe even geniuses are susceptible to bouts of stupidity.

He is not, in fact, ready for her first attack. It is unthinkable, unfathomable, cold-blooded, cruel. It's brilliant. He should have seen it coming.

He scowls at Taehyung, his cousin sprawled over his sofa, long legs flung over the arm, pouting. "Care to repeat that?" he says slowly, voice terse.

Taehyung shifts, hugging a throw pillow tight to his chest, pout deepening. "I *said*," he says

petulantly, "that Granny got me kicked out of university."

"She can't do that."

"She did."

"You paid your tuition. *I* paid your tuition."

Taehyung huffs and turns to stare at the ceiling, kicking his legs against the arm of the sofa. "Yeah, well, they said they'll refund you."

"This is fucking ridiculous, she can't get you kicked out for no reason."

"It's not for no reason." Taehyung turns his head again to glare at Yoongi. "It's your fault."

Yoongi scowls and stands abruptly from his armchair. "I'm calling the school and I'm getting you back into your classes. This is unethical. It's possibly illegal."

Taehyung snorts. "Since when have the upper echelons of the Republic of Korea been concerned about ethics and legality?" Taehyung gestures with his hand. "It's all about money, my bro. No justice for the working class."

Yoongi scowls, holding his phone to his ear. "Since when the fuck are you working class?"

"A chaebol heir like you just wouldn't understand," he sighs mournfully, pulling out his *new iphone*. Yoongi opens his mouth to point out the paradox but Taehyung is saved an impromptu lecture when his call connects.

Yoongi spends twenty minutes talking to the president of Taehyung's university ("Former university!" Taehyung supplies unhelpfully about five minutes into the conversation), before the president finally sighs deeply and says, "Mr. Min, let me be perfectly honest with you. We will not be readmitting Mr. Kim under any circumstances unless the chairwoman gives us a direct order."

Yoongi scowls. "So she just has to make a donation to add a wing to your library and you fall likes dogs to her bidding?"

"It isn't a wing, Mr. Min. It's an entire building."

Yoongi blinks. "I'm sorry, what?"

"The chairwoman has generously donated enough for an entire multi-storey building. Frankly, Mr. Min, I would sell my own mother for the chairwoman. I'm afraid our conversation is over."

Yoongi huffs out a frustrated breath and tosses his phone onto the coffee table.

"Wow that went so well, I'm so glad you have my back, hyung," Taehyung deadpans, phone held above his head as he plays a game.

"Shut up, Tae."

"I always said, that Min Yoongi is a genius, he can handle any problem."

Yoongi throws a pillow at Taehyung but misses. He snatches his phone back up from the coffee table and dials his grandmother's number. It goes straight to voicemail and he pulls his phone back, frowning.

"Granny blocked our numbers," Taehyung explains, still tapping at his game. "You fucked up big time."

"I didn't fuck up."

Taehyung shifts his eyes briefly to Yoongi, glaring, before returning calmly to his game. "Fucked up."

"I'm not getting married."

"And I'm not getting an education."

Yoongi groans and stands, grabbing his keys and searching for his jacket. "I'm going to see Granny."

"Okay, good luck or whatever," Taehyung says, lifting a hand to wave farewell.

Yoongi throws another pillow, and smiles contentedly when it finds its target.

&&&

It proves more difficult than anticipated to see his grandmother. Yoongi is actually *stopped at the door* and told he is not permitted to enter. He finally pushes his way through and storms into the sitting room, where his grandmother is in her usual place, idly flipping through her ipad. She doesn't even spare him a glance.

"Grandmother," he says, teeth clenched in anger, breathing harshly from the fight at the door.

She arches a brow but continues to ignore him, finger sliding in an exaggerated motion on her screen.

"Grandmother," he says again, louder.

"I don't know who you're talking to," she says, still not looking at him. "I'm not a grandmother. I don't have a grandson. Only an unfilial, cold little human who used to live here and sucked all my youth from me, leaving me here alone and dying without a grandson-in-law or great-grandchildren." She finally lifts her head to lock eyes with him. "Oh look, he's here."

Yoongi's mouth twitches into a scowl. "How long have you been thinking that line up?"

"How'd you get in here?"

"This is my home, Granny."

"I'm not dead yet, it's still mine."

Yoongi scoffs. "The way you talk, I'll only have to wait five minutes."

She shrugs. "I left it to Jeon Seokjin in my will. Just signed the papers."

Yoongi lifts a hand to the bridge of his nose and squeezes, trying to ward off a headache. "I sincerely hope you're joking."

She places her ipad on the table and folds her hands on her lap. "If you came here to discuss inheritance matters, I can get my lawyer."

"I didn't fucking come here to discuss your fucking will."

"What did you come here to," she arches her brows, "'fucking' discuss?"

Yoongi cringes. He brings his hand down from his nose and places it on his hip. "This fight is between you and me. Leave Taehyung out of it."

She scoffs. "Agree to marry and I'll let Taehyung back into university."

"I get that you're upset, but Taehyung is an innocent party to this."

"Do you think I brought this company from the brink of bankruptcy to one of the most powerful groups in Korea because I played nice?" She leans forward. "I targeted Taehyung because I know you. I know you would starve and sleep on the streets and *thrive* on the righteousness of your pride. You're a hard man."

Yoongi inclines his head. "It's a hard world."

"Yes, well. I know your weakness."

"You would ruin Taehyung's entire future out of spite?"

She shrugs and picks up her ipad again. "It's really your decision. Oh, and, it doesn't end with Taehyung. I'm pulling my support for Kim Namjoon's show."

"The fuck are you."

"I booked a flight for Mikyung to Australia. She'll be there for six months."

Yoongi's mouth drops open, his fingers clenching in anger. "She's your own, blood-related daughter."

"I'm sure you figured out I blocked your number. When you're ready to concede, have Jeon Seokjin call me. Secretary Park can supply his number."

"Grandmother!"

She glances up and frowns. "You should go before I have to get the police to escort you out. Though it would be interesting to make it onto CNN twice in a month."

"This isn't over," Yoongi promises, storming out.

He doesn't think his mood can get worse until he arrives back at his apartment and finds Taehyung still on his sofa, take-out containers sprawled in a messy pile on the coffee table and spilling onto the floor. "What are you still doing here?" he asks, slumping to an armchair and scowling at Taehyung.

"Granny sold my apartment, too."

He sighs and leans his head wearily back, closing his eyes. "Of fucking course she did."

&&&

"Hyung, look over here," Jimin says, angling his phone on the breakfast counter, playing with the settings of his camera to capture Seokjin *just right*.

Seokjin half turns, wooden spatula still in hand, and offers a cute smile. "Kimchi," he says, tilting his head.

Jimin laughs, snapping several shots in a row before Seokjin turns back to the stove. "Hyung, do an ugly face next."

Seokjin sighs with affected regret. "Impossible. I was born with this inescapable handsomeness."

Jimin shakes his head, but a bright smile remains on his lips. "Ah, what am I going to do with this hyung?" he mutters to himself, flipping through his gallery, satisfied with the collection. Just today he already accumulated shots of Seokjin cooking, Seokjin laughing at his own terrible joke, Seokjin scolding Jeongguk for something he can't even recall anymore, Seokjin gazing gently over the lens to Jimin behind the camera. Jimin pauses on that one, his smile mirroring the gentle slope of Seokjin's lips. That one is going to be his lockscreen.

"Aren't you bored just watching me cook?" Seokjin asks, eyes focused on the pot in front of him, hand lightly tapping seasoning in. "Go play with Jeonggukie, I'll call you when it's ready."

"Uh-uh," Jimin replies, pouting at Seokjin's back. "I haven't seen you in weeks." He pauses, biting his lip and gathering his courage. "I missed you," he confesses, watching for Seokjin's reaction carefully.

Seokjin doesn't flinch, doesn't hesitate, doesn't pause. He just turns to smile at Jimin like he always does, and lifts a spoonful of soup to Jimin. "Here taste. Ah." He pulls the spoon back and blows on it lightly a few times before bringing it back to Jimin's lips. "Okay now taste."

Jimin places a hand over his mouth, eyes scrunching in sudden shyness. "Ah, hyung, you're embarrassing," he whines.

"So I've been told." Seokjin smiles, still holding out the spoon. "Come on, taste."

Finally Jimin lowers his hand and opens his mouth, letting Seokjin feed him. He closes his eyes and sighs happily. "I missed your cooking," he says, leaning his cheek on his hand.

Seokjin winks, returning back to the pot. "I missed your compliments."

"I lost my appetite," Jeongguk groans, shuffling into the kitchen, pushing past Seokjin to the fridge. "Jimin-hyung wouldn't shut up about you the entire time we were in Busan. 'What's hyung doing?', 'Do you think he's eating?', 'We should send a selca to hyung.'" Jeongguk grabs a bottle of banana milk and makes a face. "I had a headache the entire trip."

Jimin stands on his stool and leans over the breakfast counter to slap at Jeongguk's head. "Brat."

"Ah, hyung!" Jeongguk winces and rubs his head, tousling his dark hair in the process.

Jimin would reach over and hit Jeongguk again, but Seokjin is laughing, that happy, squeaky kind of laugh when he drops his worries for a few moments. Jimin smiles and settles back into his stool, reaching for his phone to take another picture.

"I'm sorry," Seokjin says, laughter trailing off, "I'll make it up to you. Should the three of us go to an amusement park this Saturday? My treat?"

Jimin's smile widens and he nods eagerly, but Jeongguk's expression darkens and a frown etches on his lips.

"Hyung, are you forgetting?" he starts, eyeing Seokjin warily.

"Hmm?" Seokjin blinks at Jeongguk. "Forgetting?"

"Grandfather told me we have an important family lunch on Saturday." Jeongguk's frown deepens. "He didn't tell you? You're not invited?"

Seokjin's eyes widen. "This Saturday? He said you have a lunch *this* Saturday?"

Jeongguk nods slowly.

"No, no, I still have," he sucks in a frantic breath, "I still have a week. I thought." He brings a hand to his forehead and rubs.

Jimin frowns, sliding off his chair, worry creeping up his spine. "Hyung, is everything okay?"

"Huh? Yeah, yeah," Seokjin says almost absentmindedly. "Yeah, it's fine."

"It's not," Jeongguk says, voice loud and accusing. "What's going on?"

Seokjin shoots Jeongguk a firm look. "Nothing, just some work-"

"Bullshit!"

"Watch your language!"

"I'm not a child anymore, hyung."

Something flickers in Seokjin's eyes and he says, "I'm well aware of that. Believe me, I am."

Jimin slips around the counter and steps between Jeongguk and Seokjin, placing a gentle hand on Seokjin's arm. "Hyung-"

Jimin is cut off by the shrill sound of Seokjin's phone, the vibrating against the counter grating and intrusive.

Seokjin reaches for his phone, letting out a long sigh. "Hello?" He frowns. "This is Jeon Seokjin." His eyes widen and he almost stumbles. "Yeah, yes." A pause. "Yes, I have time right now, where would you like to-" He nods, already dashing away from the kitchen and into the entranceway to grab his coat and shoes.

Jeongguk sends an alarmed look to Jimin and they both move in unison to follow Seokjin.

"I know where that is. Yeah. Yeah I'll see you soon." Seokjin slips his phone into his back pocket. He struggles to get his coat and shoes on at the same time.

"Where are you going?" Jeongguk asks, the pitch of his voice higher with concern.

"You just got here. We're going to have dinner," Jimin says, reaching for Seokjin's coat. The soft material slips through his fingers just as he tries to grab it.

"Sorry, something really important came up." He adjusts the collar of his coat and breathes out a sharp puff of air, his lips tilting up in a smile. "I'll call you later."

Jeongguk and Jimin stand in the entryway, watching the door close on Seokjin. Jimin bites his lips and glances up to Jeongguk. "Hyung would, he would tell us if something was wrong, right?"

Jeongguk scowls and grabs his jacket, stuffing his arms into the sleeves with more aggression than necessary. "No, he wouldn't."

"Where are you going?" Jimin asks, alarmed.

"To see my asshole grandfather," Jeongguk yells, storming out and slamming the door behind him.

Jimin sighs heavily, slinking back into the kitchen to turn off the stove. He leans against the counter and stares blankly at the simmering soup, trying not to feel like he lost something he hasn't even touched yet.

&&&

Seokjin has an odd relationship with hope. He's seen too much, been through too many disappointments to rely on hope to get him through. He needs plans and back-ups and real, firm, practical solutions to all the troubles fate taunts him with. He knows he has much to lose, and he knows he can't control it sometimes. He knows there is going to be a time where he has to sacrifice something he is not prepared to lose. It's a question of when, not of if. Hope will do nothing for him when that happens.

And still. Still he finds himself clinging to it, to that glimmer of gold when lightning cracks a stormy sky, to that sparkle of a star in the too dark night. It's stupid, and it's naive, and it will only give him cuts and bruises, only open his wounds wider, and still. Still. When Jeongguk tells him their grandfather scheduled a special family lunch, a lunch Seokjin knows nothing about, one week before the marriage deadline, it was hope that Seokjin sought out. His mind was racing, thinking dulled with adrenaline and panic, and the only thing that kept his heart beating was stupid, naive, unrealistic hope.

Hope that something would happen, something he didn't count on, something he didn't know of, something he would never have been able to predict. He reached out his arms and stretched out his fingers, trying desperately to reach that hope, to clutch it tightly to his chest.

And by some miracle, his phone rang. By some unfathomable wonder, it was a voice Seokjin never thought he'd hear again. By some strange phenomenon, when Seokjin turned to hope, hope reached out for him.

Hope, somehow, brings him here, to the second floor of a nearly empty cafe in Gangnam, hands warmed by his untouched cup of coffee, staring across the table at Min Yoongi. He blinks, fingers tightening around his cup, watching Yoongi struggle with what he wants to say. *Don't mess this up*, he thinks, hope beating in sync with his heart.

Yoongi frowns at his own cup of iced coffee, playing with the straw. He clears his throat awkwardly, and finally looks up, saying, "You said one year."

Seokjin straightens in his seat. "Yes."

"You want to stay married for one year and then..." Yoongi trails off, eyebrows raised.

"Divorce. Clean and cut. I won't ask for a settlement. Just sign the papers and part ways." Seokjin watches Yoongi's reaction carefully.

Yoongi purses his lips and nods. "Why?"

Seokjin blinks, confused.

"Why do you need to marry me? Why for one year?"

"Ah," Seokjin hums, turning his coffee cup in his hands. "I need the time. I plan to," he pauses,

unsure how much he should trust Yoongi, how much he should keep to himself. Yoongi watches him with focused eyes, cutting through, edging away his pretences. "The situation in my family isn't good," he finally says slowly. "I need the year to sort things through until I'm ready to take my brother and leave."

"Leave?"

"At the end of a year, I'll be gone. You'll never see me again."

Yoongi frowns. "Where are you going?"

Seokjin locks eyes with Yoongi. "Does it matter?"

Yoongi stares at him, eyes unwavering, focused and intense. Seokjin tilts his chin up almost unconsciously, matching Yoongi's gaze with his own, just as focused, just as concentrated. Finally Yoongi seems satisfied and nods. "Fair enough." He reaches to the side of the table and pushes the call button for the waiter.

Seokjin frowns, but Yoongi ignores his confusion.

"I'll be upfront with you," he says, taking a sip of his iced coffee. "My grandmother is stubborn, cruel, and ruthless. She has me cornered. I'm only doing this because I have no other choice. This is a marriage of convenience only. I'm not going to woo you, I'm not going to be a good husband, and I am *not* going to love you."

Seokjin's eyes widen, and his heart skips a beat. "You'll-" He breaks into a wide smile. "You'll marry me?"

Yoongi shrugs, taking another sip of his coffee. "Yeah, I don't have a choice."

Seokjin can't help the laugh that escapes his lungs, chest suddenly light, that heavy burden that weighed down his shoulders lifted. He laughs, squeaky and hiccupping and he feels so light he thinks he could fly. When he finally catches his breath and can swallow the bubbles of laughter, he finds Yoongi staring at him strangely, eyes flickering, mouth nearly tipped up in a smile. Seokjin smiles wide, feels the edges of his eyes crinkle.

Yoongi clears his throat and looks away, frowning as he hits the call button again.

"Thank you, Yoongi," Seokjin says, still smiling. "I know this isn't going to be a real marriage, but I'm grateful."

"It's mutually beneficial for both of us," Yoongi replies, eyes lighting when he finally sees the waiter approach them. He beckons the young boy to their table with a flick of his wrist. "I need a blank piece of paper and a pen," he tells the waiter, sending him off again.

"Paper?"

"A contract," Yoongi says, settling back into his seat. "We should make things clear from the beginning."

Seokjin nods. "Sure. That's fine with me." He finally lifts his cup in his hands and brings it to his lips, taking a long, slow sip of coffee, letting it warm his throat. When he puts his cup down, he finds Yoongi staring at him again. He quirks his head to the side, but before he can say anything, the waiter returns with a legal notepad and a fountain pen.

Yoongi snatches the items and shoos the waiter away, uncapping the pen. He starts writing, and from what Seokjin can tell upside-down, it looks like it says *Marriage Contract between Min Yoongi and Jeon Seokjin*.

"First," Yoongi says, writing a large number one on the paper, "the marriage lasts one year, from the date of the wedding." He peers up at Seokjin. "Agreed?"

Seokjin nods, tapping his fingers on his cup. "Agreed."

"Two," Yoongi continues, as Seokjin watches the way Yoongi's hands gracefully glide the pen along the paper, "all assets, all possessions, all accounts and money remain as they are at this moment. We do not merge, we do not exchange stocks, we do not join finances in any way. At the termination of the marriage, you will have no holdings in the Min Corporation, and I will have no holdings in the Jeon Group." He looks up again. "Agreed?"

Seokjin smiles. "Agreed."

"Third, we are free to associate with anyone we please, and pursue relationships, but they must be discrete." Yoongi looks up. "I won't dishonor my family with news that my husband is cheating on me."

"That's fine."

"Fourth," Yoongi continues, "no sex."

Seokjin coughs, a hand coming up quickly to cover his mouth.

Yoongi straightens, staring at him.

"Is that," Seokjin wheezes, coughing again, "is that necessary to put in writing?"

"I like to have all my bases covered." He arches a brow. "Are you planning to have sex with me?"

"No!" Seokjin coughs again, hitting his chest to regain control of his breathing.

"Then it doesn't matter if I write it down."

"Yeah, fine, okay."

"Hmm." Yoongi eyes him suspiciously, but he returns his attention to the paper, pen gliding smoothly over the surface. "Fifth, we stay out of each others' personal lives."

"Sounds great."

"Anything else?" Yoongi asks, finishing off the last item.

Seokjin stares into his coffee cup and taps his fingers on the sides. "I have one condition."

Yoongi straightens and blinks at Seokjin. "What is it?"

"My brother, Jeongguk," Seokjin starts, unsure how he should frame this. He sighs and lifts his eyes to lock with Yoongi's. "My brother is very protective of me. And he's not going to be happy to hear I'm getting married."

Yoongi frowns. "Your point?"

Seokjin tilts his chin up and says, "He needs to believe this is real. That you love me, and I love you, that this is a love match."

Yoongi scoffs. "You're fucking with me."

Seokjin frowns. "I'm serious."

"I have to play act like a lovesick idiot-

Seokjin rolls his eyes. "Just pretend you actually like me for the twenty minutes you'll interact with him. Maybe hold my hand. Not hard." Seokjin reaches over the table and grasps one of Yoongi's hands, holding it lightly in his own. "See? Not hard."

Yoongi scowls at their hands and pulls his back.

Seokjin sighs and leans back into his seat. "It's my only condition."

Yoongi purses his lips. "And if he doesn't believe us?"

Seokjin arches a brow. "My brother is petty and stubborn, and when he sets his mind to something, I have never seen him fail."

Yoongi raises a hand to rub at his temple. "I want to be a rock." But he grabs his pen again, and writes on the paper. "Okay, I agree to *act* in front of your brother."

Seokjin smiles. "Thank you."

"Hmm." Yoongi reads over what they agreed on, then signs at the bottom. He turns the paper toward Seokjin, placing the pen near Seokjin's hand.

Without a moment of hesitation, Seokjin grabs the pen and signs his name at the bottom of the contract, sealing his fate. He smiles at Yoongi, relief singing through his veins.

Yoongi reaches across the table and slides the pad back to him, tearing the paper off the pad. He folds it sharply in half, and in half again, tucking it into his back pocket.

"Can I borrow your cell phone?" he asks when he's done.

Seokjin furrows his brow, but he pulls his phone from his coat pocket, handing it over to Yoongi.

"Thanks," Yoongi says, fingers sliding over Seokjin's when he takes the device. He taps a number into the screen and Seokjin brings his hands back to his coffee cup, ignoring the tingling at his fingertips where Yoongi's brushed his. Yoongi sits back in his seat, frowning as the phone rings. Finally he says, "Grandmother, it's me."

Yoongi listens for a moment, rolling his eyes. "I didn't fucking steal his phone. He's with me right now." Yoongi flicks his gaze to Seokjin. "Fine." He holds the phone to Seokjin. "She wants to talk to you."

Seokjin blinks, but takes the phone warily, careful to avoid contact with Yoongi's hand this time. He brings the phone to his ear. "Hello, Chairwoman," he greets.

"I hope that delinquent grandson of mine agreed to marry you," she says, forgoing any greetings. "Otherwise I don't want to hear a word either of you say."

Seokjin smiles, eyes wandering to a scowling Yoongi. "Yes, we're engaged."

"Ah!" Suddenly the chairwoman's tone is delighted. "Have you eaten yet? You boys should come over for dinner."

"Oh, um." Seokjin leans forward, putting a hand over the speaker of the phone to say quietly to Yoongi, "She wants us to come over for dinner. Now."

Yoongi smirks and leans forward until his face is only inches away from Seokjin's.

Seokjin freezes, his breath caught in his throat, the world around him blurring for a moment, slowing, quieting. Yoongi's eyes are darker than he remembers, when the rain blurred his vision. He can see clearly now, the gentle slope of Yoongi's nose, the surprisingly long eyelashes, the way his fringe falls just over his eyebrows. The light, nearly invisible dusting of freckles just at the bridge of his nose. Seokjin has a sudden urge to count them, one-by-one.

Seokjin feels a tug on his fingers and he lets them go slack, hardly noticing when Yoongi pulls the phone from his hands.

"We'll be right over," Yoongi says into the phone, a smug smirk curving his lips upward. He leans back and stands from his chair, hitting the end button. He tosses the phone back to Seokjin, staring at him expectantly.

Seokjin blinks hard, trying to clear his vision from his sudden daze.

"Well? You coming?" Yoongi finally asks, tilting his head.

Seokjin takes a long, uneven breath and nods. "Yeah, yeah, I'm." He closes his fingers over his phone and carefully exhales. "I'm coming."

For the first time since this entire marriage thing started, Seokjin wonders just what he's gotten himself into.

Chapter End Notes

The marriage contract cliché yessssss.

Save the Last Dance for Me

Chapter Notes

It has been strongly suggested to me to name every chapter after an actual Kdrama. So that's what I'm doing.

I'm sorry it's been so long for an update ;; I meant to write more for this chapter but ahhh, life. I hope this will be satisfactory.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Seokjin follows Yoongi in his car to the Min estate, breaking out into spontaneous bouts of laughter throughout the drive. He's drunk on relief, lightheaded and delirious. Jeongguk is safe, Jeongguk won't have to get married. Seokjin has time to process their passports, time to shore up more funds, time to extract Jeongguk and their mother from the family and finally, *finally* leave. He squeezes his fingers around his steering wheel, giddy at just the thought of precious freedom.

When he arrives at the Min estate, he hardly has a chance to take in the breathtaking gardens, the beautifully maintained traditional architecture. Yoongi exits his car, stepping out and waiting for Seokjin to finish parking, arms crossed over his chest. Seokjin quickly puts his car into park and hops out, coming to Yoongi's side.

"This way," Yoongi says, pointing to the main house, and sets off walking.

Seokjin falls in step with Yoongi, hands sinking into his coat pockets. It's dark, the sun long ago set while Seokjin signed his life away to Yoongi in the cafe, but there's enough artificial light for him to see towering pines and the grandiose hanok roofs, the crunch of gravel sounds as they walk to the front door. Seokjin turns to Yoongi. "It's a nice place," he says, breaking through the silence.

Yoongi shrugs. "It's old."

Seokjin hums and tilts his head. "Okay. Or you could say 'thank you'."

Yoongi turns to look at him, frowning, eyes narrowed and giving nothing away.

Seokjin bites back a sigh and looks away, stepping up the stairs to the front door. "Or say it's old, that's fine too." He's just about to place his hand on the doorbell when Yoongi stops him, fingers firm on his forearm. He furrows his brow and looks at Yoongi expectantly.

Yoongi frowns down at his hand on Seokjin's arm, finally saying, "I don't think I have to tell you this, but just in case. Don't tell my grandmother about the contract." He looks up at Seokjin. "She needs to believe I'm giving this an honest try."

"Of course." Seokjin grimaces, imagining the chairwoman's reaction if she found out about the contract. "I don't think she would be too pleased with either of us."

Yoongi scoffs. "I don't care if she's happy with us. She's never happy. But if she knew, she would find a way to glue us together." He hits the doorbell and shuffles back, waiting to be let in.

The door swings open, and they are greeted by a chic older woman with a cool smile on her face.

She arches her brow, eyes flicking up and down Seokjin, and he has the impression that he's being evaluated again. Seokjin smiles politely, and bows in greeting.

"Good evening," he says, a little uncertainly.

"Yes, hello," she says, voice low and cool. She steps back, allowing Seokjin and Yoongi to come through.

Yoongi smiles and comes to the woman's side, giving her a quick half-hug. "Auntie, this is Jeon Seokjin. Seokjin, this is my aunt Mikyung."

"It's nice to meet you," he says.

Mikyung nods and smiles back politely, though it doesn't reach her eyes. "Likewise," she says, coolly. She places a hand on Yoongi's shoulder and pushes him forward. "Mother is in the sitting room waiting for you." She peers over her shoulder to Seokjin. "Both of you."

Seokjin follows, trying not to think too much about Mikyung's cool reception.

Dinner consists mostly of the chairwoman discussing her plans for Yoongi and Seokjin's wedding, pausing only momentarily to give the impression that she's actually listening to either of their opinions.

"I hope you don't mind," she says offhandedly to Seokjin, "I called your grandfather and set a date."

Seokjin stills, food halfway to his mouth. He nods slightly, surprised. "Ah, it's fine."

"It was a bit of a shock to the old man," she sniffs, straightening in her chair. "You must not have told him about our chat." Seokjin opens his mouth to answer but she continues. "Granted, Yoongi was an ass, I wouldn't have told my family about him either."

"I'm right here," Yoongi grumbles, glaring.

The chairwoman reaches over her left hand to pat idly at Yoongi's. "Yes, yes, we're so lucky you've deigned to grace us with your presence. Mikyung," she reaches to her right, grabbing Mikyung's attention, "you *must* remind me of this day, when my grandson was so gracious to eat dinner with his own grandmother."

Yoongi sighs, low and annoyed and Seokjin bites his lip to stop the smile that threatens to bloom on his face. Yoongi turns to glare at him but, but Seokjin manages to put on a neutral expression.

What? Seokjin mouths, playing innocent.

Yoongi's mouth twists into a frown. *I see you*, he mouths back, staring pointedly at Seokjin.

Seokjin winks at Yoongi before he can stop himself and Yoongi's mouth twitches, quirking up into what Seokjin suspects is a smile for a split second before he scowls in disgust and turns back to his grandmother.

"Did you set the date?" Yoongi asks, leaning back into his chair.

The chairwoman beams. "The last weekend of October."

Seokjin blinks in surprise. That would give them an engagement of over a year. He brightens, sitting straighter in his chair. He won't even have to marry Yoongi, just attend some events, do some photo ops as an engaged couple. Jeongguk will be far easier to reason with if he knows the engagement is

long. He can handle this.

Yoongi, however, destroys all of Seokjin's optimistic hopes by holding up a hand and narrowing his eyes. "October of which year?" he asks slowly, as if he already knows the answer but doesn't want to admit it to himself yet.

"This year, of course," the chairwoman says, derision heavy in her tone, like it's the most obvious answer in the world.

Seokjin coughs suddenly. "This, this year?" he manages to squeak out.

"You can't plan a wedding in one month," Yoongi protests, leaning forward.

"I can," the chairwoman says, sniffing.

"Says who?"

"Says the people I pay to tell me what I want to hear," she bites back.

Yoongi scowls. "This is ridiculous."

"Now, living arrangements," the chairwoman continues, ignoring Yoongi.

"Sorry," Seokjin says, lifting his hand to interject. "I agree with Yoongi, one month is hardly enough time to prepare a wedding."

"I'll tie you two up and fly you to Las Vegas if I have to," she replies.

Mikyung sighs and rubs at the side of her temple. "Don't push her on this, boys," she says. "She's already booked the hall."

"Who did you kick out to get it on such short notice?" Yoongi asks, lulling his head against the back of his chair.

The chairwoman bites back a smirk. "The Jeguk Group."

Yoongi's lips twitch into a smirk and his eyes brighten. "Did you really?"

The chairwoman arches a brow. "I won't be trifled with."

Yoongi smiles, wide and gummy. Seokjin can't help but stare in surprise. Yoongi looks young, boyish. It surprises Seokjin, and he finds his breath is caught in his throat for a millisecond, just enough that his breathing pattern is disrupted, shifted, altered. Just enough that he has to reinstate the pace of his exhales, just enough to reset the rhythm of his lungs. He glances away from Yoongi, flicking his gaze to the chairwoman and Mikyung across the table. He blinks when he finds Mikyung frowning in his direction.

"Would you like a new apartment, or is Yoongi's suite still fine?" the chairwoman charges forward, her tone firm and brisk, like ticking items off a list and not making decisions that will affect Seokjin's life for the next year.

Right, he thinks, eyes shifting quickly back to the chairwoman. Living arrangements. He'll have to live with Yoongi once they marry. He smiles uncertainly. "I didn't really think about it."

Yoongi glances at Seokjin briefly, crossing his arms. "My apartment is fine. I'm not moving."

The chairwoman stares at Seokjin. "Is this agreeable?"

Seokjin nods slowly. "It's fine."

"I've already contacted the media, your engagement will be announced in tomorrow's articles. I've booked a tuxedo fitting with Kim Namjoon-

Seokjin jolts when his cell phone vibrates in his pocket unexpectedly. He quickly smiles and bows his head in apology. "Sorry."

The chairwoman shrugs and gestures to Seokjin. "It's fine. Go ahead, answer."

Seokjin fishes his phone out of his pocket, frowning when he sees Jeongguk's name on the display. He presses the silence button and places the phone face down on the table. "It's okay, I can answer later." Whatever Jeongguk has to say, he doesn't want to hash it out now, in front of his new in-laws and fiancé, temporary as they may be.

"Are we done here?" Yoongi asks, pushing his chair back to stand.

"Not yet," the chairwoman scowls, but Yoongi is already heading out of the room. "You have a waltzing lesson in four days!" she calls out. She sneers at Yoongi's retreating back and makes a gesture as if to hit something. "That brat."

Seokjin's eyes widen. "Waltzing?"

"For the wedding," Mikyung explains.

"Why do you look so terrified?" the chairwoman directs at Seokjin.

"I've never waltzed before," Seokjin confesses.

"It's just walking to music," the chairwoman dismisses. She stands, apparently also done with dinner. "Mikyung will see you out, Seokjin." She leans over and lightly pats Seokjin's hand. "Good luck with my grandson."

Mikyung regards him coolly as the chairwoman leaves, an apathetic smile on her lips. "Welcome to the family," she finally says dully.

Seokjin huffs out a distressed laugh.

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Once Seokjin gets back into his car, his mind still racing with a hundred different thoughts, he redials Jeongguk's number. Jeongguk answers on the first ring.

"Where are you?" Jeongguk demands as soon as the line picks up.

"I'm heading home now," Seokjin says, frowning.

"Grandfather says you're getting married."

Seokjin freezes, his heart jumping to his throat. He clutches his fingers around his phone and exhales slowly to stop the sudden course of adrenaline in his blood. He had wanted to tell Jeongguk himself, with the proper context and gentle words and firm assurances.

"It's not true, right, hyung?" Jeongguk asks, voice bright and hopeful. "I told him it wasn't true."

Seokjin presses his lips together and straightens his spine, hardening his resolve. He pastes a smile on his lips and hopes it conveys through his voice. "It's true-"

"They can't make you do this," Jeongguk says quickly. "I'll stop them, don't worry."

Seokjin's fingers clench again. "You will do no such thing," he says firmly. "This is my decision. It was what *I* wanted."

"Bullshit."

"Jeongguk-"

"You don't even know Min Yoongi," Jeongguk accuses, his tone sharpening.

"We went to school together," Seokjin starts, mind reeling for a plausible explanation. It isn't a lie, Seokjin and Yoongi did attend the same school in different grades for one year before Yoongi was pulled out and sent to Daegu. Seokjin honestly doesn't remember much about Yoongi way back then, he was thirteen and struggling to fit into a new world, while Yoongi was twelve and always getting into fights.

Jeongguk scoffs and Seokjin can just imagine his eye roll. "That was over a decade ago."

"We recently reconnected." Seokjin runs his free hand over the leather of his steering wheel, praying his acting skills are enough to fool his brother. "We've been dating for a few months now."

"You never said a word."

"I didn't want to make a big deal of it. You were graduating high school and-"

"You never. Said a *word*, hyung," Jeongguk repeats forcefully, anger evident in his voice.

Seokjin sighs and closes his eyes. "I'm sorry. I should have told you."

"What did Grandfather threaten you with? You don't have to do this," Jeongguk says again, almost desperately.

"This has nothing to do with Grandfather or the family, and it has nothing to do with you," Seokjin says, spitting out the words he doesn't want to say. He hopes Jeongguk will forgive him, later. But for now he doesn't need forgiveness, he needs this plan to succeed. "I love Yoongi, and I'm going to marry him. Because I *want* to."

Jeongguk is quiet for a moment, and Seokjin thinks he may have convinced him, until he says through clenched teeth, "Have you told Mom?"

Seokjin's eyes widen, and he feels a bubble of panic shoot through his veins. "Not yet-"

"I'm telling Mom. You swore to her. You *promised* her you wouldn't do this."

Seokjin's fingers tighten painfully on the steering wheel. He also promised their mother that he would protect Jeongguk. "I love Yoongi," he repeats. "I'm not breaking any promises to Mom."

"I'll find out the truth," Jeongguk says before all Seokjin hears is the click of a disconnected call.

Seokjin sighs and tosses his phone to the passenger's side seat, leaning back against his headrest.

"That could have gone better," he says to himself. He reminds himself to remain positive. Things are going to be okay. He nods and sits back up, starting his car. At least it was over with.

Jimin can summarize his childhood into three parts. A stretch of loneliness, a beautiful window of happiness, and a series of waiting to return to that all-too-short happiness. He was an only child, and both his parents worked long hours. He was tossed between babysitters of varying degrees of skill and care. Sometimes there wasn't anyone, just a dark room and a cold dinner waiting on the table.

His mother would wake him up before the sun even had a chance to rise, dress him and feed him a breakfast he was too sleepy to chew. They would walk hand-in-hand to the playground just across from his school. She would kneel and fuss with his jacket before placing a long kiss on his cheek. *"Do you remember the way home?"* she would always ask, and Jimin would always nod. Yes, he knew the way home. Please don't worry. He would be okay.

He loved school, loved the chatter and the bustle and the feeling of being, just being with others. For a few hours a day, he could watch and play and interact. He didn't talk much, too shy to initiate conversation, but his classmates liked him and they got along well until the dismissal bell sounded. He would linger as long as he could at the playground, ignoring the rumbling in his stomach because he didn't want to face another dinner alone.

But the thing about life, Jimin knows, is sometimes it grants wishes, wishes that are buried so deep in his heart he forgot they aren't a part of his body. One day, the Kims move in next door. They keep mostly to themselves, no one knows where they came from. All Jimin knows is Mrs. Kim is beautiful, and her sons Seokjin-hyung and Jeonggukie are kind and funny. They're wary at first, Mrs. Kim politely declines most invitations from the neighbours, preferring to stay in her apartment with her sons most evenings.

Jimin is too young to understand how it all happens, but he learns later that Seokjin noticed him coming back alone most days, and asked Jimin's mother if he could walk Jimin home. Suddenly Jimin walks home every day from school, his small left hand enclosed in Seokjin's bigger one, warm and firm. Walking home turns into staying at the Kims' for dinner, turns into walking Jimin to school every day, turns into playing together after school, doing homework together sprawled on the living room floor, teaching Jeongguk how to use the proper Busan accent.

Suddenly Jimin has two brothers and a caring aunt, suddenly Jimin has a hand to hold and someone to smile at. Suddenly Jimin isn't so alone, and he knows what happiness means.

Life, though, takes as often as it gives, and Jimin is ten when Jeongguk tearfully tells him he has to move away. Jimin doesn't understand, he's still too young to comprehend it all. All he knows is Mrs. Kim is sick, really sick, and there's been strange men coming to their apartment. He knows that he isn't allowed over anymore. He knows that Seokjin's been crying, eyes rimmed red and puffy everyday. He knows things are falling apart and he has no idea how to keep them together.

The strange men take Jeongguk away, and he's kicking and screaming and yelling for his mom, for his hyung, for Jimin, for anyone. He asked Seokjin days later, why did Jeongguk have to leave, why did he go alone, why was it happening. He regretted it immediately after the words left his mouth, because for the only time in his life, he witnessed Seokjin cry. Face scrunched, shoulders hunched, looking so much younger than his impressive thirteen years. Jimin feels powerless, helpless, hopeless. He doesn't know how to comfort Seokjin, so he does the only thing he knows, he puts his arms around Seokjin and holds on tight.

Three weeks later, Seokjin comes to him, eyes wide and breathless, like he ran all the way. He rips Jimin's world apart, and says he's moving to Seoul to be with Jeongguk. Jimin doesn't want to admit it, but he knows in that moment he felt an ugly greediness, a desire to grab hold of Seokjin and keep him here in Busan. He needs Seokjin just as much as Jeongguk. He wants to reach out and hold on,

but Seokjin looks so happy, so relieved, that all Jimin does is smile.

Seokjin asks him a solemn favour before he leaves. *"Please take care of my mom"*, he says, blinking rapidly. *"She's really sick, and she's going to be lonely."*

Jimin knows about lonely. He knows the way it eats away at the heart like a disease. He promises very seriously to look after Seokjin and Jeongguk's mother, to see her through her sickness. He promises she'll be better soon, promises that Seokjin and Jeongguk can count on him.

It's hard, but he manages to stay close to the brothers, even if they are cities apart. Seokjin calls frequently, to check on his mother, to see how Jimin is doing, to ask how his dance lessons are going. Sometimes they talk about serious things, Jimin's feelings of incompetency and his doubts about dancing, Seokjin's worries about being able to protect Jeongguk, his troubles fitting in at his new school. Sometimes it's fun, Seokjin telling joke after joke until Jimin can't breathe, laughter bubbling uncontrollably from his chest. Sometimes Seokjin is able to sneak Jeongguk onto the call.

It's still lonely, but Jimin can manage. He visits Mrs. Kim frequently, plays board games with her, helps her cook. She's different, a little more subdued. Jimin doesn't know if it's the illness or because her sons are kilometres away, presumably never to return. Jimin tells her she can adopt him, he doesn't mind having two moms. She laughs, and it reminds him of Seokjin so much it hurts.

He waits, and waits, and waits for the day he won't be lonely. It pays off. One day, when Jimin is fourteen, Seokjin manages to arrange for a visit to see his mother. Jimin is over the moon. He's going to see Seokjin and Jeongguk again, they're going to hang out in all the places they used to go, the all-year ice rink, the snack shop that still sells the best ice cream in town. There's a park next to the beach now, Jimin can't wait to show them. His *brothers* are back and he couldn't be happier.

When he sees Seokjin and Jeongguk, waiting for him outside the school gates, his breath stops in his lungs and he falls in love for the first time in his life. Seokjin is tall, and broad, and beautiful. Seokjin's hug is warm and gentle, his eyes sparkle, his voice makes goosebumps form on Jimin's arms. Jimin doesn't want to be Seokjin's brother anymore, he wants more.

He asks Jeongguk later, when they're alone. *"Is it okay if I like Seokjin-hyung?"* he asks.

Jeongguk stares at him, wide eyes searching and judging and far too intimidating for a twelve-year-old, until he finally answers, *"Only if you treat him like the most precious person in the world."*

Jimin agrees readily. He vows to grow up and be a person that can protect Seokjin, be a person that can care for him and give him anything he desires.

Jimin waits. Waits to grow up, waits for the day when he can be with Seokjin and Jeongguk again, waits for his dreams and hopes. He spends his days practicing, honing his dancing, determined to get a scholarship and move to Seoul to be with them again, determined to be a success.

Miraculously, he gets a scholarship to the college of his choice. Miraculously he is able to pursue his dream of dancing. Miraculously the scholarship also pays for his dorm room and his moving expenses and his meal plan.

He learns later that it isn't a scholarship at all. It's Seokjin, perfect, caring, loving Seokjin who pays for everything, who frames it as a scholarship, who acted genuinely *surprised* and elated when Jimin first told him the news.

Jimin is devastated. It isn't supposed to be like this. He's supposed to be the one providing for Seokjin. He wants to refuse it, wants to throw it in Seokjin's face, tell him that he can make his own

way, that he'll figure it out by himself. That he'll be the one to protect and provide. But Jimin is realistic, and he knows he can't afford to act selfishly. He pretends he doesn't know Seokjin is paying his scholarship, and Seokjin pretends Jimin deserves it.

Jimin is still waiting. Waiting for the day he can pay Seokjin back, waiting to grow up, waiting to be the man that will care for and protect Seokjin. Until that day, Jimin keeps his feelings in check. He has time, they're both young. He never thought. He never imagined.

He never saw the end of his world coming, when Jeongguk calls him and tells him, voice shaking and almost accusatory, "Seokjin-hyung is getting married."

Jimin doesn't remember how he replied. All he feels is the crushing isolation return to squeeze his heart, to remind him that he'll always be alone. Jimin waited too long.

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Seokjin doesn't mean to make Jimin teach him how to waltz. He really doesn't. It's just that Yoongi texted him to say he didn't have the time or desire to spend hours practicing for one waltz. *Just wing it*, he texted, and Seokjin's mind immediately went to the worst possible outcome, bruises and broken bones on their wedding day in front of a room full of strangers. No, Seokjin is not going to "just wing it".

He asked Jimin if he could use the studio at his university to practice so he doesn't have to make a fool of himself. Jimin is too kind, too generous, too willing to help whenever he can, he insists on helping Seokjin.

"It's okay, I want to help," Jimin says, smiling.

Seokjin frowns and thinks the smile doesn't reach Jimin's eyes, doesn't scrunch them up into half-moons, doesn't lighten his tone. It looks hollow and it isn't a sight Seokjin likes to see.

Jimin hits the music and generic waltzing music starts to play. He approaches Seokjin and holds his arms out. "Are you leading or following?" he asks, already transformed into teaching mode.

Seokjin suppresses a shudder. "Following, most definitely following."

Jimin smiles again, and this time it's genuine, amused and affectionate. "Okay, hyung. I'll lead you."

He steps close to Seokjin and slides an arm around his waist, hand settling just at the small of his back. Seokjin blinks, surprised at the strength in Jimin's hold. It's subtle but firm, stronger than he thought Jimin was capable of.

"The waltz is a simple three-beat rhythm," Jimin says, placing Seokjin's hand on his shoulder and slipping their free hands together. "We're just going to walk in a box, okay?"

Seokjin gives Jimin a sceptical look but nods. "Okay."

"Right foot back," Jimin says, advancing and guiding Seokjin with a hand pressure. "Good, now left foot to the side. Bring your right foot next to your left."

Seokjin follows, peering down at their feet, following Jimin's steps slowly and carefully.

"Hyung, don't look at your feet."

"If I don't look at our feet, you're going to leave here with bruises," Seokjin quips, frowning at their

feet.

Jimin's hand presses more firmly into the small of Seokjin's back. "The waltz is about trust and communication. Look into my eyes, they'll tell you where to go."

Seokjin makes a face but lifts his head to look at Jimin. Almost immediately he loses his rhythm and steps on Jimin's left foot.

Jimin does his best to suppress the wince, but it's obvious.

Seokjin slides his hand from Jimin's shoulder and rubs his arm in apology. "Sorry."

"Ah, no, it's fine," Jimin says, smiling and getting back into position. "Let's try again. Watch my eyes, I'll tell you where to go."

They continue, and Seokjin misses his step, or goes in the wrong direction. Jimin keeps his arm strong against Seokjin's back, and quickly learns how to avoid Seokjin's missteps, but by the end of an hour, they're both worn out.

"I think we're done for today," Seokjin finally says, sliding against the mirrored wall to sit on the floor.

Jimin lets out a little sigh but nods, switching the music off and grabbing two water bottles from the cooler he keeps in the studio. He hands one to Seokjin before sliding down to sit thigh-to-thigh with Seokjin. He plays idly with his bottle, unscrewing and re-screwing the lid, biting at his lip like he wants to say something.

Seokjin peers at him from the corner of his eye, taking a large swallow of water and wiping the excess off his lips with the back of his hand. He places the bottle on the floor and leans his head back against the mirror, tilting his head to look at Jimin fully. "What do you want to say?"

Jimin jumps a bit, surprised. He reaches a hand up to scratch behind his ear, frowning at the floor.

Seokjin nudges him with his shoulder, smiling reassuringly. "Come on. I don't bite."

Jimin smiles and lets out a short huff that could be a laugh. He taps his bottle on the floor lightly, eyes still transfixed away from Seokjin. "Hyung," he starts. "About the." He stops, frowning again. He finally looks up and locks eyes with Seokjin. "Why are you getting married?"

Seokjin swallows a sigh and sits up properly, prepared to recite the same explanation he told Jeongguk.

Jimin shifts forward, brushing his knees on Seokjin's thighs, hands reaching for Seokjin's. "Just wait a little longer, hyung. Whatever they're making you do, find a way to delay it. I'll help you-"

Seokjin pulls his hands free from Jimin's grasp and says firmly, "Jimin, stop." He's not an idiot, he knows what's next. Jimin has been very obvious for many years about his feelings for Seokjin, the longing gazes, the delighted smiles, the stolen back hugs. Seokjin had thought it was only puppy love, that it would fade in time, but it never did.

He's been avoiding this, Seokjin admits. He's been trying to ignore it, wanting to believe he wasn't giving Jimin false hope, wanting to believe Jimin loves him only as a friend, only as a brother. He wants to be selfish, wants to hold onto Jimin's friendship even if it's causing unnecessary pain to Jimin. He tries to set clear boundaries, but still, Jimin grabs at his hand sometimes, and it's warm and loving and fills an empty spot in Seokjin's heart so he can't pull away.

The thing is, Seokjin doesn't know if he has feelings for Jimin. He knows he loves him, but he doesn't know in what manner. He can't see the lines between platonic and romantic, can't distinguish from wanting to be a part of someone's life forever, and claiming them as his person. He thinks that maybe, in a different life, he could have known. Maybe if he was free to do as he pleased. Maybe if Jeongguk's father never died and the Jeon family never came for them. Maybe if his mother never got sick and was able to hide them away in Busan forever. Maybe if he wasn't constantly playing protective older brother, dutiful son, compliant heir.

Maybe if Seokjin could be Seokjin, he would find himself in love with Jimin. But that wasn't his life and he has no easy answers for Jimin.

He pulls back and smiles sadly at Jimin. "Jimin, I'm getting married to Yoongi at the end of this month. I hope you can wish me happiness."

Jimin stares at him, a frown etched on his lips and eyes unblinking. "You don't love him," he finally says, conviction making his voice strong.

Seokjin blinks and shakes his head. "You don't know that."

Jimin's frown deepens. "I know you better than you like to admit."

Seokjin sighs and leans his head back against the mirror, frowning. "I love Yoongi," he says again, the lie dry in his mouth.

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Yoongi has only been engaged a week, and already his world is being disrupted far too often for his own liking. Seokjin calls him up and arranges for him to meet his younger brother. Which is fine, expected, part of the deal he made with Seokjin. What he's annoyed at is Seokjin's insistence that they meet beforehand to prepare.

Yoongi frowns and shifts his phone, "We don't need to prepare."

He can hear Seokjin sighing in frustration and Yoongi pulls his phone back to glare at it. *He's* the one who should be frustrated. "Where are you now? I can come over. Twenty minutes, half-an-hour tops," Seokjin says, his voice tiny and far-away sounding because of the distance of the phone from Yoongi's ear.

Yoongi wants to say all the variations of the word *no* he knows, in all the languages he can recall, but Seokjin is already saying, "You signed the contract. You agreed to make Jeongguk believe we were the real deal, and I'm telling you, we need to *prepare*."

"Fine," he sighs, resigned. "I'm at the office, you know where it is?"

"Yeah, I do. I'll be right over."

Yoongi hangs up and scowls at his desk and the endless piles of graphs and reports he has to go through. He's not sure who he's more annoyed at – Seokjin, for barging into his life like this and disrupting everything, or his grandmother for ensuring he has someone to barge into his life and disrupt everything. "I don't deserve this," he says to himself, but he is only met with silence.

True to his word, Seokjin arrives quickly, bringing with him a drink tray full of what smells like heaven.

"Is that coffee?" Yoongi asks, brightening considerably, as his secretary shows Seokjin into his

office.

"I didn't know what kind you like, so I brought a variety," Seokjin answers, placing the tray on Yoongi's desk.

"I like coffee, period. Whatever kind," Yoongi says, reaching forward and grabbing the first cup.

"Ah!" Seokjin says, suddenly reaching for the cup, fingers brushing over Yoongi's.

Yoongi blinks and glances up at Seokjin, questioning but not removing his hands from under Seokjin's.

Seokjin smiles apologetically and pulls the cup out of Yoongi's grip. "Sorry, this one is mine." He points to the side where a tea bag label hangs out from under the lid. "Tea."

"Oh." Yoongi nods, his fingers lax on the desk where they fell when Seokjin took the drink. His hand feels warm and he thinks it must have been the tea, even if the warmth is concentrated on the back of his hand where Seokjin's palm brushed his.

"Unless you like tea?" Seokjin asks, uncertainly when Yoongi doesn't reach for another cup. He holds his tea out for Yoongi.

Yoongi snaps out of whatever trance he was in and shakes his head. "Oh, no, no, I hate tea." He waves his hand and makes a face. "What's the point, really?"

Seokjin's lips quirk into a half-smile and he sits opposite Yoongi, shrugging. "Some people like to be soothed."

Yoongi grabs the next cup and pops the lid, breathing in the unmistakable scent of coffee, his eyes closing for a moment to savour the feeling. "Coffee is the only thing keeping me conscious."

"Noted."

They sit in silence for a few moments, Seokjin staring at his drink, fingers tapping at the paper cup. Yoongi takes note for the first time of the unique shape of Seokjin's hands, the neat trimmed nails, the impossibly smooth skin, the delicate way they curve around his cup. Yoongi has a sudden urge to photograph them, to try to capture the shape and hue and energy of them. He frowns and blinks his gaze back to Seokjin's face.

"You said we needed to prepare?" he prompts, uncomfortable with how comfortable their silence had been.

Seokjin straightens. "Yes, right." He clears his throat. "I'll be honest with you, Jeongguk did not take the news of our engagement well."

Yoongi shrugs and takes another sip of his coffee, unperturbed. "He'll get over it."

Seokjin frowns. "He won't. He's going to interrogate you."

Yoongi raises a brow. "I'm sorry?"

"He doesn't believe we're marrying for love." Seokjin taps at his cup with his fingers again and Yoongi is starting to wonder if it's a nervous twitch.

"What did you tell him about us?"

"We knew each other in school."

Yoongi frowns. "We did?"

Seokjin narrows his eyes. "Yes, we attended the same school for a year."

"When?"

"The year before you went to Daegu," Seokjin says. "I was one year above you."

Yoongi furrows his brow, trying to remember but drawing a blank. "I don't remember you."

Seokjin rolls his eyes. "I can see that. Just pretend we had a friendly relationship then. We met up again a few months ago and hit it off. One thing lead to another and we were getting serious when your grandmother found out. She suggested marriage and we agreed."

Yoongi stares at Seokjin, his lips curling into a scowl. "That is the worst love story I've ever heard."

Seokjin frowns. "It's plausible."

"It's boring. No wonder your brother didn't believe you." Yoongi sits back in his chair and scowls. "Who in the world would believe that?"

Seokjin raises a brow and straightens. "I don't see you offering me any alternatives."

"Whatever I could come up with would be better than that."

Seokjin closes his mouth and tilts his chin up, staring at Yoongi in terse silence.

Yoongi frowns at him, uncomfortable under his intense gaze. "What?"

"Are you done or would you like to continue? I can wait."

"I was just saying."

Seokjin raises both brows sceptically.

Yoongi swallows and looks away. "Yeah, I'm done."

Seokjin hums and pulls out his phone. "I prepared a list of things you should know about me to pass Jeongguk's inevitable questions. Can I email it to you?"

Yoongi sighs. "Yeah, sure."

"You should send me one, too. Just the basics," Seokjin suggests. "I'll go over it before dinner tomorrow with Jeongguk."

Yoongi waves a hand in dismissal. "Jeongguk doesn't know me. Just make some stuff up, I'll go with it."

Seokjin scoffs. "You're okay with me making up anything I want?"

Yoongi shrugs, returning to his coffee. "I don't care what you say about me. I'd rather not delve into my past, if that's okay with you."

Seokjin blinks and looks up at Yoongi, peering at him, his eyes searching for something. Yoongi clears his throat and looks away, shaking his head to get his fringe out of his eyes.

"Is that a problem?" he finally prompts when Seokjin doesn't look away.

"No," Seokjin says, slowly as if coming to a realization. He pockets his phone, still holding his gaze steady on Yoongi. "You're a very private person, aren't you?"

Yoongi furrows his brow, unsure how to respond. He's been accused of a lot of things. Being rash and stubborn, being harsh, mean, cold, angry, wilful, incorrigible. Only two people have ever told him that he is reserved. Taehyung under the heavy influence of alcohol, flopping over Yoongi's couch and whining that he never lets anyone into his cold, beautiful heart. And his aunt Mikyung, her eyes worried and words slow like Seokjin's, realization and concern painting her tone.

It bothers him. Bothers him that Seokjin, a complete stranger, has seen through him so quickly. It bothers him that Seokjin can so easily slide into his life, so easily win over his grandmother, so easily make himself a fixture in Yoongi's world. If he's being honest, Seokjin bothers Yoongi. Yoongi doesn't like how comfortable he is in Seokjin's silences, how Seokjin's hands wrapped around his tea fascinate him, making him itch for the camera he has stashed at home. He doesn't like how all his no's turn into yes's for Seokjin.

Oblivious, Seokjin nods seriously and stands. "I'm sorry, this all must be very uncomfortable for you."

Yoongi jerks out of his thoughts. "Ah, it's not-"

Seokjin smiles, his eyes crinkling with the movement. "Don't worry, I'll do my best to stay out of your past. And your present, as much as I can. I'll make up something nice to tell Jeongguk."

"Make sure it isn't boring like our love story," Yoongi blurts out, unable to stop the words.

Seokjin laughs and shakes his head. "I'll make you a sky-diving, swash-buckling adventurer. Does that sound okay with you?"

He sneers but Seokjin is already heading out the door, and all Yoongi has left is the smell of coffee and a hint of bergamot from Seokjin's tea lingering in the air, an aroma of home Yoongi had long ago forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

Yes, Seokjin was Kim Seokjin while he was in Busan and is now Jeon Seokjin. More of Seokjin's backstory will come out...eventually.

Stars Falling from the Sky

Chapter Notes

You guys have been so lovely with comments and messages, I'm so grateful, thank you ;_ ; Sorry I don't update quickly OTL

I'd like to thank Z for supplying endless photo inspiration and S for making me rewrite the last scene :D Also L for literally always ALWAYS being available to hear me complain and give me suggestions. ILY ALL.

If you're wanting to get the full effect, you should listen to kdrama osts while reading, especially any ending scenes. <3 Thank you~~

"Did you go over the email I sent you?" Seokjin asks, matching his strides with Yoongi's as they approach the restaurant.

"Yes, I read all nine pages of it," Yoongi replies monotonously. He read the All-About-Seokjin email, with its pages and pages of information. He knows Seokjin's favourite color, knows Seokjin's favourite song, favourite movie. He knows Seokjin likes to cook, knows Seokjin majored in art history, knows all the details down to where Seokjin likes to buy his clothes. Yoongi frowns and peers down at his arm where Seokjin's fingers are clutching again. He also knows that Seokjin has developed a bad habit of holding onto him when he's nervous.

"Wait," Seokjin says, halting in front of the entrance to the restaurant. "You're sure, right? We can reschedule this, pretend you're sick or something."

Yoongi rolls his eyes and shakes Seokjin's hand off his arm. "Whether we do this now or later, I'm still going to need to meet your brother."

Seokjin sighs and nods. "You're right. You're right." He shakes his arms as if trying to shake off his nerves.

Yoongi watches in surprised amusement as Seokjin's demeanour changes in a matter of seconds. He goes from nervous and unsure, to confident and radiant. Seokjin breathes out slowly and turns to smile at Yoongi.

"Shall we go, Yoongichi?"

Yoongi's jaw drops. "The fuck did you call me?"

Seokjin reaches down to take Yoongi's slack hand in his. "I make cute names for people. Jeongguk will expect one."

Yoongi scowls, curling his fingers against Seokjin without much thought. "Make a different one."

"Like what?"

Yoongi shrugs. "Genius Yoongi?"

Seokjin laughs, his eyes crinkling and his teeth showing. "Come along, Yoongichi. Jeongguk is waiting for us." He opens the door to the restaurant and tugs Yoongi inside. "You should call me 'hyung'," he says as an after thought, stopping in front of the maître d'.

Yoongi scoffs. "I'm making up a nickname for you. It's going to be disgusting."

Seokjin laughs and nudges him with his shoulder. "Just don't do 'poopface'. Jeongguk's already claimed that for me."

"You're not serious."

Seokjin hums noncommittally and turns to the maître d'. "For Jeon-Min."

They are taken to their private dining room where Jeongguk is already seated. The boy looks up when they enter, arms crossed over his chest and a frown already etched on his lips.

"Did you wait long?" Seokjin asks, detaching his hand from Yoongi's and slipping into the seat opposite his brother.

Yoongi stays standing for a moment, realizing with a start that they had been holding hands the entire time from the entrance to the room. He shakes his head to clear it and takes the seat beside Seokjin, nodding in greeting to Jeongguk.

"I just got here," Jeongguk says, smiling at Seokjin before narrowing his gaze on Yoongi. "Hello," he says, tone icy and unwelcoming.

Yoongi returns Jeongguk's icy stare with his own.

"Jeonggukie, this is Yoongi, my fiancé. Yoongichi, this is my little brother," Seokjin says, introducing them.

Jeongguk blanches. "Yoongichi?" he asks, lips curling in disapproval.

"It's a cute nickname, right?" Seokjin smiles and reaches a hand over to brush Yoongi's fringe lovingly from his forehead. Yoongi blinks and stares at Seokjin's nose to avoid eye-contact, reminding himself this is pretend and there is absolutely no reason to feel a flutter in his stomach.

"It's gross," Jeongguk says, scowling.

Seokjin shrugs, unbothered. "Yoongi likes it. Isn't that right, Yoongichi?" Seokjin smiles at Yoongi, clearly amused, daring Yoongi to refute him.

Yoongi's lips quirk and he raises his eyebrows. "Of course. Anything Jinnie Jin makes up is cute." He smirks and tilts his head at Seokjin, daring him to call him out.

Seokjin's smile wavers and his eyes narrow, but he remains silent.

They order and Seokjin tries to make a conversation flow, but all of Jeongguk's responses are terse and sarcastic, and all of Yoongi's are short and disinterested. When the food arrives, Jeongguk fiddles with his dishes while Yoongi falls into complete silence, focusing more on chewing than actual conversation. Finally Seokjin sends a pleading, pouting look to Yoongi and mouths *a little help?*

Your brother, Yoongi mouths back, but Seokjin nudges him under the table with his knee. Yoongi sighs and turns his attention back to Jeongguk to find him watching them closely with narrowed

eyes. "Jinnie tells me you go to Seoul University," Yoongi starts, "Do you li-"

"Stop calling him Jinnie. It's hyung. Seokjin-*hyung*, he's older than you," Jeongguk says, scowling.

Yoongi fights the urge to sneer. He's affronted for no real reason. It's not like he actually has a nickname for Seokjin, it's an act for Jeongguk's benefit. Yet somehow, Yoongi will be damned if some brat is going to tell him what to call his fake fiancé. "Should I call him Jinnie-hyung?"

Seokjin sighs and closes his eyes. "Is this really the topic of conversation we've landed on?"

"Hyung's right. Let's get down to the point. I want to know what the hell is up with this engagement," Jeongguk says, placing his chopsticks down on the table with a decisive *thunk*.

"Jeongguk," Seokjin starts but Jeongguk ignores him.

"Don't you think it's strange that you've been dating for months, and I only hear about it now, weeks before a *wedding*?" Jeongguk stares accusingly at Yoongi.

Yoongi quirks his lips to the side and sets his chopsticks down as well, shifting to lean back in his chair. "No," he replies coolly. "I don't."

Jeongguk scoffs.

"Is your brother obligated to tell you about every facet of his life?"

"I expect to hear about his boyfriend, yes."

"Why? I'm not marrying you, I'm marrying Seokjin."

Jeongguk sneers. "Because I'm hyung's *family*."

Yoongi shrugs. "Your opinion wasn't needed."

"I know this is an arranged marriage. I hear the rumors. Your grandmother has been trying to send you on marriage dates for months," Jeongguk retorts smugly, as if he'd delivered a killing blow. It's sort of cute, Yoongi thinks, but Jeongguk is too young to be a match for him.

"I've been avoiding them because I was dating Seokjin. My grandmother only found out recently and suggested marriage." Yoongi raises an eyebrow. "Satisfied?"

"Hardly. Hyung would never willingly marry someone like you," Jeongguk spits out before turning to Seokjin. "Hyung, call off the wedding."

Seokjin sighs and places his hands on the table. "I'm-"

Yoongi scoffs. "He's not going to call off the wedding."

Jeongguk glares at Yoongi. "He will if I ask him."

"Your sense of entitlement is through the roof, kid." Yoongi shifts forward, folding his elbows on the table. "Let me make it loud and clear: you have nothing to do with this marriage, so accept it and move on."

Jeongguk rolls his eyes. "You think you're more important to hyung than I am? His only brother in the world?"

"Enough!" Seokjin stands abruptly, pushing his chair back and throwing his napkin onto the table. "All I wanted was a nice, awkwardly silent meet-and-greet between my brother and my fiancé and all I'm getting is a headache. I'm going to take a walk, and when I get back, I expect the conversation to be civil or non-existent. You can pick whichever you prefer."

Jeongguk moves to stand up. "I'm going with you, hyung."

Seokjin points a finger at Jeongguk and he freezes, half-way out of his chair. "You, stay!" He turns to point at Yoongi. "You, stay and try to remember you're the older, more mature adult in this room."

Yoongi glares at Seokjin but remains seated, watching until Seokjin walks out of the room. He turns with a sigh to face Jeongguk and they glower at each other for a moment in terse silence.

"You handled that really badly," Jeongguk finally says.

"You're a brat," Yoongi replies, scowling.

"Don't marry my brother and you won't have to deal with it."

"It's not negotiable, kid."

"You're a bad fit. Seokjin-hyung should be with someone warm and caring, not," Jeongguk makes a motion with his hand at Yoongi, "not you."

"Well, he's stuck with me, and we're stuck with each other, so find a way to accept it. This world isn't going to listen to whiny brats with entitled opinions."

"What do you even like about Seokjin-hyung?"

Yoongi shrugs.

"Wow, you're doing such a great job convincing me to let you marry my brother," Jeongguk deadpans, crossing his arms.

"I distinctly recall not needing your permission."

Jeongguk stands. "You can't even think of one reason why you like Seokjin-hyung, and you think I'd be okay with this marriage?"

Jeongguk steps around the table and Yoongi frowns, staring at the uneaten food. He's not marrying for love, and he's not marrying for life, but Jeongguk doesn't know that. He barely knows Seokjin, but what he has learnt about him is that Jeongguk is the most important person in Seokjin's life. He promised to convince Jeongguk, Yoongi reminds himself. It was Seokjin's only stipulation in their marriage.

He's doing it for the contract, Yoongi tells himself when he opens his mouth and blurts out the first words that flash through his head. "His hands," he says, still staring at the table.

Jeongguk doesn't turn back but he doesn't walk forward, slowing to a stop. "What?"

"I like his hands." Yoongi frowns down at his own palms, splaying his fingers and wondering just what he's talking about. "They feel like," he says, curling his fingers closed again, "like they'll hold on for a long time." He finally shifts to look at Jeongguk, arching a brow.

Jeongguk frowns, but his eyes flicker, uncertainty crumbling his stubborn resolve.

"Am I wrong?"

Jeongguk's frown deepens. "Hyung's hands...." He seems to gather himself again, straightening his spine. "I still don't believe you. I'm going to stop this wedding."

Yoongi lets out a tired sigh and shrugs. "You can try."

Jeongguk sends him one last scowl and leaves, slamming the door behind him.

Seokjin returns to the room five minutes later, frowning when he sees Jeongguk's seat empty. "Did Jeongguk leave?" he asks, sliding back into his seat beside Yoongi.

"Your brother's a brat," Yoongi says, ignoring Seokjin's question.

"So are you," Seokjin says, picking up his chopsticks and reaching for a side dish.

Yoongi jerks back in his chair, arching a brow at Seokjin. "Excuse me?"

"You disagree?" Seokjin asks, a hand covering his mouth as he chews.

"Vehemently." Seokjin shrugs, unconcerned, and reaches forward for more food. Yoongi furrows his brow, watching Seokjin chew, his cheeks puffed out with too much food. "Why are you still eating?"

"Food shouldn't be wasted." He picks up some kimchi and places it on Yoongi's bowl of rice. "Eat, it's already ordered."

Yoongi stares at his rice bowl and frowns, a strange, warm feeling spreading uncomfortably in his chest. He flicks his gaze back up to Seokjin, wondering again why this man bothers him so much.

Seokjin tilts his head and blinks at Yoongi. "What?"

Yoongi flinches and clears his throat. "Nothing. I just remembered," he says, searching his mind for some explanation for staring at Seokjin. "I just remembered my cousin Taehyung wants to host a bachelor party for us this weekend. He rented out a club. You should bring Jeongguk, he said."

Seokjin nods, still chewing. "Sounds fine. We can try to be more civil with each other this time, hmm?"

Yoongi scoffs but Seokjin ignores it.

"Not eating, Yoongichi?" he asks, swallowing.

Yoongi huffs out breath and suppresses the smile that unexpectedly threatens to spread on his lips. "What Yoongichi, we're alone."

Seokjin smiles and clicks his chopsticks. "It's fun."

Yoongi scoffs and rubs his lips to keep a straight face. He picks up his spoon and reaches for the kimchi on his rice. "I'm eating." He peers at Seokjin and adds, "Jinnie."

Seokjin laughs and Yoongi stuffs his mouth to stop from reciprocating.

&&&

Namjoon makes a low, whistling noise, hands smoothing the shoulders of Seokjin's tuxedo. "I outdid

myself," he says, grinning.

Seokjin smiles and turns slightly to look at his profile in the mirror, fingers fiddling with the button of his tuxedo jacket. "You really did. As expected of RM."

Namjoon chuckles. "Hyung, I told you to call me Namjoon."

Seokjin tilts his head and turns again to see the front of his tuxedo again. "I like RM. It encompasses you as a person, and you as a designer." He tugs at the lapels. "I can't believe you made an entire tuxedo in such a short time."

Namjoon smooths the fabric at Seokjin's waist one last time before stepping back, humming. "To be honest with you, Yoongi-hyung's grandmother commissioned his tuxedo two years ago. I just adjusted the design for your stature."

Seokjin's hand falls from his jacket and he blinks at his reflection. "Yoongi and I will be matching?"

Namjoon nods, stepping around Seokjin and eyeing his pants. "Opposite colors. Yoongi's is black with white accents to compliment your white with black." He grins. "Sort of fitting, isn't it?"

Seokjin snorts. "What, that we're polar opposites?"

Namjoon pauses and looks up at Seokjin, a small frown appearing on his lips. "No, that you complement each other."

Seokjin frowns. "Oh," he says, wondering what Namjoon sees. As far as Seokjin is concerned, Yoongi can't be more different than him. Stubborn, rough, grumpy, difficult, a severe and troubling lack of humor. He's not sure what part of that is supposed to complement him.

"Hyung, is this marriage...." Namjoon frowns, gathering his thoughts. "Should I be concerned about this marriage? I have to admit, I was surprised to hear about it. Hoseok and I thought you guys might start dating, but marriage so quickly. You hardly know each other."

Seokjin pastes a reassuring smile on his lips and shakes his head. "You don't need to worry. We're good. I know what I'm getting into."

Namjoon's frown deepens. "Hyung, marriage shouldn't be 'getting into' anything. You're practically strangers."

Seokjin raises his eyebrows. "Is there something worrying about Yoongi that I don't know? Is he a bad guy?"

"No! No, he's a really good person. I've known him for years, he's one of the best friends I've ever had."

Seokjin nods. "Is there something about my character that you're concerned about?"

"It's not that." Namjoon sighs and scratches at the back of his neck. "You're not in love with Yoongi-hyung. And he's not in love with you, right?"

Seokjin nods in affirmation. "As far as I can tell, no, he's not."

"Well, isn't marriage supposed to be built on a firm foundation of love?"

Seokjin turns to look at his reflection again, taking in the sharp black lapels contrasting with the pure white of the jacket. He reaches a hand up to adjust his bowtie, smoothing a hand over his heart in the

process. "Sometimes there's more important things than love."

Namjoon frowns. "Like what?"

Seokjin smiles sadly. "Peace. Trust. Safety." He unbuttons the jacket and slips it off, turning to hand it back to Namjoon. Yoongi is not the love of his life, but he's the anchor Seokjin needed when the winds hit, the shelter from a storm Seokjin could not brave alone. Yoongi is his miracle, and Seokjin isn't expecting anything more from him than a signature on the marriage license and a year of smiling for the public. "We'll be okay, Namjoon," he says. "Trust us. We know what we're doing."

Namjoon takes the jacket and sighs, nodding. "I just don't want to see either of you get hurt."

Seokjin smiles genuinely this time. "We won't," he says, certain that he and Yoongi will never progress past the impersonal business relationship they agreed to. There's no way.

&&&

Jimin doesn't know how Jeongguk convinced him to come to the bachelor party for Seokjin's upcoming wedding. He doesn't belong there, he knows it. Jimin is still just a lost boy with wide eyes, still awed by the wonders of Seoul, still grappling to find his way. He doesn't know about luxury brands, doesn't know about summers in Paris or Milan. He's only seen the sea, his eyes have never touched an ocean. His world is so different from the gilded life of chaebol heirs and self-made multimillionaires. He has no bearings here, where everyone knows each other, where their eyes size him up and dismiss him within seconds.

"I shouldn't be here," he says to Jeongguk, edging closer to him as they make their way through the club, loud music pulsing around them.

"Hyung wants you here," Jeongguk says, eyes scanning the room. "You have to stay close to him, Min Yoongi is a parasite."

Jimin huffs out a short breath. "This isn't the place."

Jeongguk suddenly stops and spins on his heel, grabbing Jimin's forearm and staring him dead in the eye. "You asked me if you could love hyung, years ago. I gave you my permission. Was I mistaken? Do you not love Seokjin-hyung?"

Jimin's eyes widen. "Of course I do." He shoves at Jeongguk. "I love him with my entire being."

"Then it's time to *fight* for him."

"I *have* been," Jimin retorts. "Hyung doesn't want to hear it."

"Try harder. Or you're not the only one who's going to lose him." Jeongguk bites his lips. "If this wedding goes through, we'll both lose him. Are you with me?"

Jimin draws in a deep breath, trying to find courage somewhere in the depths of his stomach. He's scared. Scared of losing Seokjin, scared of confessing, scared of never letting Seokjin know his feelings. He's scared of doing and scared of not doing and he's caught in the middle, paralyzed, unable to move.

"Hyung, are you with me?" Jeongguk repeats, fingers tightening on Jimin's arm.

Jimin nods shakily, settling his resolve, anxiety hot in his blood. "Yeah, yeah."

Jeongguk smiles briefly, before lifting his eyes to scan the room again. "Seokjin-hyung is by the bar. Go, get him alone and confess. I'll find Min Yoongi and keep him away." He makes a fist and pumps it in the air. "Fighting!"

"Fighting," Jimin repeats back weakly. Jeongguk shoves him in the direction of Seokjin and heads further into the club in search of Yoongi. Jimin takes a fortifying breath and steps forward, eyes on Seokjin leaning against the bar counter and sipping on a bottle of beer.

Seokjin smiles when he sees Jimin, straightening and waving him over. "Jiminie!"

Jimin smiles, eyes scrunching up. "Hyung," he says, sliding into place beside Seokjin, close enough to feel his warmth.

Seokjin throws his arm around Jimin's shoulders and gives him a half-hug. Jimin lets his eyes wander down the silky black material of Seokjin's shirt with the movement, watching the fabric cling to Seokjin's curves. He's glad the lighting is dark to hide the blush that he feels heating his cheeks. "Glad you could make it," Seokjin says, smiling.

"Ah, I almost didn't come," Jimin confesses, glancing up at Seokjin. He makes a small gesture to the room. "Not really my crowd."

Seokjin grins. "Thank you for coming anyway. It's not really my crowd either."

That's a lie, Jimin thinks. Seokjin was not born into the chaebol world, but he melded and adapted to it. He can flow wherever he is, mingle and smile and speak with ease, and everyone accepts him. Jeongguk, too. He doesn't try to fit in, he just excels at everything. He's a chaebol from blood, exuding class and stature and prestige with every breath. It's only Jimin that's out of place, only Jimin that's left behind, watching the friendships he treasured so dearly for so long stretch and fray with time and distance. He swallows around the lump in his throat, fingers reaching for Seokjin's waist, for an anchor he doesn't want to lose, can't imagine being without.

"You want a drink?" Seokjin asks, oblivious.

He shakes his head, panic giving him the courage he needs. He has to confess, has to grab onto Seokjin now. He doesn't care if it's greedy anymore, doesn't care if he doesn't deserve Seokjin. He can't lose him again. "No, no, I'm fine. Hey hyung, can we go somewhere more quiet? I have something I want to te-"

"Seokjin."

Jimin's words dry up in his mouth, cut short by an unfamiliar voice. He blinks, tearing his gaze from Seokjin. He feels his shoulders slump, the courage knocked out of his chest. Min Yoongi stares him, a frown etching his lips and his eyes narrowed, watching Jimin with intense scrutiny.

"Hmm?" Seokjin blinks his gaze to Yoongi. "Oh, Yoongi, this is Jimin, a very old friend of mine. Jimin, this is my fiancé Yoongi."

Yoongi nods at Jimin, eyes still scrutinizing, his mouth pressed into a thin line. "Nice to meet you."

Jimin shifts closer to Seokjin, arms coming to wrap around his back. He has an urge to step between Yoongi and Seokjin, to tell Yoongi he was here *first*. That thanks for the interest, Seokjin is great, he knows. He gets the attraction, he really does, but Seokjin belongs with Jimin, with Jeongguk. With memories of Busan and soft laughter and a din of chatter that Jimin wishes to return to someday.

Except Yoongi angles his head and nods to the club, saying to Seokjin, "There's a few people that

want to meet you. Can we...?"

"Ah, yes," Seokjin says, placing his beer on the bar counter and steps away from Jimin, slipping from his hold like water.

Yoongi's lips quirk into a smug smile and he nods at Jimin again. "See you around, Seokjin's old friend," he says, heading back into the club.

Seokjin sends Jimin a small smile and waves. "I'll be back. Go mingle."

Jimin slumps against the bar counter, watching Seokjin walk away, loneliness creeping up from the depths of his heart again, threatening to choke him. He shakes his head and straightens, making his way through the crowded space. He has to get out of here. He needs some air, needs to anchor himself again, needs to-

Jimin is jarred from his thoughts, stumbling as a speeding body bumps into him. His reflexes kick in before his mind catches up to what's happening. His arms shoot out, fingers grab onto the falling body, and he pulls against the momentum until he's standing flush with a strange boy. He waits until they stabilize before he unclenches his fists and lets his arms fall, looking up to see wide eyes staring at him in awe.

"Are you okay?" he asks softly, tilting his head to peer up at the boy.

The boy nods slowly, his fringe shifting with the movement, mouth lax and hanging open. He's still standing flush with Jimin, and Jimin wonders if the shock was too much for him.

Jimin smiles at him, eyes curving into crescents. "Where were you going in such a hurry? It's dangerous." He points his finger at the boy and says in mock sternness, "No running indoors, understand?"

The boy nods again, eyes widening even more.

"Good." Jimin steps back and clears his throat, wondering when the boy will stop staring at him like that. He can feel his cheeks flush and he rubs his neck awkwardly. "Well, then, I'll...." He gestures to the crowd and steps back another foot, turning to leave.

"Wait! What's your name?" the boy calls out.

Jimin turns to face the boy again and smiles. "Park Jimin."

"Park Jimin," the boy repeats slowly, almost reverently. "I'm Kim Taehyung."

Jimin smiles. "Nice to meet you, Kim Taehyung." He waves and steps back into the crowd. "Be more careful. Bye."

"I'll see you around," Taehyung calls again.

Jimin chuckles and turns around. "Sure," he says to himself, certain he'll never see speeding Kim Taehyung again. He steps through the dance floor and disappears into the crowd.

&&&

Hoseok is going to become a serial murderer tonight. It's not the direction he thought his life was going to go in, but who is he to tell fate how to do her job? He thinks his sister will be able to get him off with little to no jail time, too. She has the best lawyers on retainer. There's not even a judge in the

land that would convict him. He is the *victim* here.

Besides, he's pretty sure Yoongi's going to kill someone too if the way he stormed off toward Seokjin and his friend was any indication. Hoseok isn't the bad guy here.

He'll start with Jackson. Obviously. That brat had it coming for years. For the record, Mark was *Hoseok's* first love. They were perfect for each other. It was a pure, beautiful love and Jackson, flirty, touchy, sexbomb Jackson, had to come in and steal him away.

Fine, fair enough. Hoseok isn't bitter. He knows first love doesn't last. He got over it, put Mark in his past.

Namjoon, however, is his future and he will be *damned* if Jackson pulls a repeat performance.

He glares across the dance floor, shooting daggers with his eyes as Jackson makes Namjoon dance with him. Namjoon never dances for Hoseok, he thinks bitterly. Namjoon can't dance, doesn't like to dance, refuses to even look at a dance floor. But in comes Jackson to manhandle him and suddenly Namjoon is a flaying dancing machine.

Jackson's first, Hoseok thinks again, crossing his arms. Namjoon is next, obviously. Hoseok cannot abide disloyalty like that.

Then he's going to kill Taehyung for even inviting Jackson to this bachelor party of doom, and finally he'll kill Yoongi for getting engaged in the first place and giving Taehyung a reason to throw worst party of the century.

He nods to himself, his lips turned down in a firm - and what he hopes is permanent - frown. He will be a bitter, angry little man from this moment forward, but he's going to get his sweet revenge.

"Hyung," Taehyung says, trotting up to Hoseok and grabbing his shoulders. His eyes are impossibly wide and he's speaking so fast Hoseok can hardly decipher the words as he blurts out, "I just saw an angel on Earth, hyung, it was magical, do you believe in love at first sight?"

Hoseok shoots a lethal glare at Taehyung and contemplates rearranging the order of his hit list. "Love is dead," he says.

Taehyung holds up a finger and continues, unperturbed, "His name is Park Jimin, which is almost as beautiful as he is, but he's so strong too, really cute, but manly, he literally saved my life, I'm going to marry him."

"Not if I kill you first," Hoseok threatens, crossing his arms.

Taehyung frowns and huffs, annoyed. "What got into you?"

Hoseok points at the dance floor. "I believe I specifically told you not to invite that flirt."

Taehyung whips his head around, eyes narrowing in the direction Hoseok pointed to. He sighs. "They're just being bros, hyung."

"He is literally feeling up my man on the dance floor."

"You're overreacting."

"I'm murderous, is what I am."

Taehyung shrugs and spins around again. "Have you seen Yoongi-hyung?" he asks, changing

topics.

"Not since he stormed off in a huff. Why?"

"I promised Granny I'd send her some pictures from the party, I want a kissing shot with Seokjin-hyung." Taehyung wiggles his eyebrows. "Also blackmail material for the lovebirds."

Hoseok frowns, flicking his gaze to Taehyung. "You realize this is an arranged marriage? They don't know each other."

"Yet," Taehyung says with strong emphasis. "They don't know each other *yet*. It's only a matter of time."

Hoseok raises his eyebrows. "You think Seokjin-hyung can chip away at Yoongi's defences?"

Taehyung smiles, wide and excited. "I got a feeling. If anyone can do it, Seokjin-hyung can."

Hoseok frowns again. "Taehyung, not everything is like the movies. Sometimes people don't fall in love, they just. Exist together."

Taehyung hums dismissively. "Trust me, hyung. This is a good thing bound to happen." He pats Hoseok's shoulder. "Good luck with Namjoonie-hyung."

Hoseok frowns as Taehyung skips off in search of Yoongi, his eyes returning to Namjoon and Jackson. "You're so dead," he mutters to himself.

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It's raining.

Yoongi blows out a long breath, and leans his arms on the rail of the balcony, watching the rain fall steadily, making *pit-pat* noises as it falls to the street below. He can't see the clouds, the night sky too dark, a black ink painting the horizon.

He clasps his hands together, his fingers icy and on the verge of shivering. It's too cold to be outside, but he could not stand the party anymore. He knows it's part of the act they have going, he knows it's part of deal with an arranged marriage, but for a moment he wanted out.

His mind is clouded and uncertain. He hates forcing a smile when his friends come up to him to congratulate him on his upcoming wedding. He hates having to introduce Seokjin as a part of his life, as a part of his family. He has to remind himself it's fake, it's temporary. One year, and he can wash his hands of this whole marriage thing. One year, and he won't have to hear the word husband, lover, family. As far as he's concerned, his family starts and ends with Taehyung, Granny, and Aunt Mikyung.

And yet, oddly, somehow, he had felt a pang of jealousy. He doesn't want to admit it, but he didn't like to see Seokjin huddled with his Very Old Friend from Busan. He didn't like their proximity, didn't like the way Jimin smiled at Seokjin like he carried the world on his shoulders. Yoongi didn't like the way Seokjin shifted into Jimin, easy and comfortable, and like they had a belonging that Yoongi didn't know he wanted.

His fingers grip together tighter and he leans further on the balcony railing, remembering the vow he made years ago in front of his parents' remains. No amount of meddling from his grandmother, no amount of fake play-acting with Seokjin, no amount of time or attention or affection will ever break him down. His heart is closed. His misplaced jealousy was just that, misplaced and temporary, an

unexpected side-effect to the play he is acting with Seokjin.

He sighs again, looking up. There's nothing in the black ink of the sky, but he thinks the raindrops look a bit like falling stars, the water reflecting the streetlights and sparkling for a moment. He wishes he had his camera. He'd like to remember this, how the rain turned to stars.

"Yoongi?"

Yoongi blinks but doesn't turn when he hears Seokjin's voice, still watching the rain. "Hmm?"

"You okay?"

Yoongi smiles to himself. "I'm fine. Why?"

"It's cold out here." He hears Seokjin shuffle closer and he can see him settle beside Yoongi in his peripheral vision. "Are you smoking?" he asks, scandalized.

Yoongi chuckles. "No. But if I was, it would be none of your business."

Seokjin snorts. "I have to live with you for a year, it's sort of my business."

"Did you want something?"

Seokjin shifts closer, bumping his shoulder with Yoongi's. "Taehyung is looking for us. Says he wants to do a photo op to send to the chairwoman." He lets out a huff of breath and mutters, "It's so cold out here, what are you even doing?"

"Watching the rain."

"Oh," Seokjin says, drawing the word out like he understands.

Yoongi snorts. "What 'oh'?"

"It's pretty. Like falling stars," Seokjin says.

Yoongi jerks and finally turns to look at Seokjin, his profile illuminated by the lights from the party inside and the streetlamps down below. The black silk of his shirt shines, clinging to his waist. His eyes flicker, watching the rain falling, a quiet breath escapes his lips. For a moment, just a split second, Yoongi thinks Seokjin looks like one of those imaginary falling stars, bright and ethereal and glowing, not quite real, but close enough that he thinks he could reach out and touch.

He clears his throat and steps back, stuffing his hands into his pockets to warm them. "Let's go inside and give Taehyung his photos."

"Hm? Okay," Seokjin says, taking one last look up at the sky before following Yoongi back into the club.

Taehyung grabs Yoongi and Seokjin by the arms almost as soon as they step inside, dragging them to a corner where their friends are gathered. "Finally found you two!" He lifts his camera to his face and takes three giant steps back. "Time for a photo op. I request a kiss!"

Yoongi rolls his eyes. "How about no?"

"Aw, hyung, don't be shy," Taehyung whines.

Yoongi huffs, well aware of the eyes on them. He can see Jeongguk, the brat, watching them with

suspicious and glaring eyes. Hoseok's clapping in encouragement, chanting, "Kiss, kiss, kiss!"

Seokjin bends to whisper quietly to Yoongi, "Jeongguk's watching. Just, it'll be over quick. Okay?"

Before Yoongi can react, Seokjin steps into Yoongi's space, chest brushing his arm. Seokjin's lips press against his cheek, heat blooming in the spot. His fingers curl into fists and his breath stills in his lungs, but Seokjin already pulled back and is smiling at Taehyung.

"Aw, hyung," Taehyung whines, pouting. "Kiss on the lips!"

"Ya!" Seokjin scolds. "That's not for children's eyes."

Yoongi frowns. It bothers him. His lips twist down and he resists the urge to rub at his cheek where Seokjin had kissed him. He's not sure why it bothers him. Whether it is the unexpected gesture, Seokjin crowding into his personal space like it's normal, whether it's Jeongguk glaring at them from across the room, doubt and suspicion heavy in his gaze, whether it's the fact that it just happened within the blink of an eye and Yoongi had no time to understand what was happening, no time to experience. Whatever the reason, Yoongi isn't too concerned about it, he just knows he's annoyed and the only way he can shake the feeling is to take control of the situation.

He turns to Seokjin and catches his eye. He brings his hand up to rest at the back of Seokjin's neck, applying a light pressure, enough to suggest the movement but not enough to force it. Seokjin keeps his gaze, questioning but not apprehensive. Yoongi quirks his brow, index finger tapping lightly at Seokjin's neck, urging him to bend.

"A kiss on the lips, he said," Yoongi says, smirking.

Seokjin arches a brow, amused. "You do everything your cousin asks?"

Yoongi shrugs. "I like to indulge him." He taps his finger on Seokjin's neck again. "Hmm?"

The corner of Seokjin's mouth quirks up, and he bends, letting Yoongi's hand guide him until their lips press together.

Soft, is the first thing Yoongi thinks when Seokjin's lips press into his, chaste and closed. Softer than he expected. It feels nice against his, warm and gentle. He runs his thumb up into Seokjin's hair, fingers elongating over his neck. He steps closer, not enough to stand flush with Seokjin, but close enough to feel the warmth radiating from his chest. *It's nice*, Yoongi thinks, preparing to step back again, aware of Taehyung's loud cooing, the shutter of his camera, Hoseok's teasing *whoop whoop* breaking through the thumping bass of the music pouring through the speakers.

Yoongi is prepared to step back, his left foot already going through the motions, until Seokjin shifts his head, angling, lips sliding and slotting perfectly against Yoongi's. It's still just a press of closed lips, still chaste and soft and warm, but Yoongi's other hand comes up to slide over the curve of Seokjin's waist, fingers curling over the silky shirt. He can almost taste the cocktail Seokjin has been drinking, something sharp and minty. Seokjin's hand comes up to lightly cup Yoongi's cheek, fingers ghosting over the shell of his ear.

The thumping bass dulls until he cannot differentiate it from the beat of his heart. His eyes flutter closed, spots flickering behind his eyelids. He can't hear Taehyung's camera or Hoseok's teasing, can't sense Jeongguk's piercing gaze. He can't feel or hear or see anything, he can't even think properly anymore. The last coherent thought he registers is *more*. More of Seokjin's hand hot against his cheek, more of Seokjin's lips soft against his, more of Seokjin's minty breath ghosting over his mouth. More, more, *more*.

His fingers tighten on Seokjin's waist. He angles his head, pressing harder into Seokjin's lips, parting them, anxious to confirm the taste of Seokjin's breath. *More*, drums through his veins. He traces the line of Seokjin's ribs, crawling up until the ribbon tie of Seokjin's shirt brushes against his fingers. He twists it through his fingers, wrapping it around his hand and pulling down. Seokjin stumbles under the pressure, crashing into him, chest to chest, lips sliding against his, open-mouthed and wet.

Seokjin makes a soft sound at the back of his throat, quiet, subtle, but it pierces through Yoongi's ears, ringing. For a moment, Seokjin shifts closer, his fingers sliding over Yoongi's ear to pull him just a bit. *More*.

Before Yoongi can push further up, before he can manoeuvre Seokjin to a more comfortable position, Seokjin pulls away, breaking the kiss and stepping back. Yoongi stares at him, mouth slightly parted, drawing in a sharp breath, fingers still twisted in the black silky ribbon of Seokjin's shirt. He's dazed, disoriented. Taehyung's cackling about something, scrolling through his camera, Hoseok's still whooping idiotically, Jeongguk's still staring at them, though now with a furrowed brow and a confused tilt to his frown. The bass still thumps, the party still continues, the world still appears to be the same. The only evidence to the contrary is the red splashed on Seokjin's cheeks, and the lingering heat pulsing on Yoongi's lips.

He clears his throat and turns to Taehyung. "Is that enough photo ops?"

Taehyung grins and nods. "Yes, thank you hyung."

Yoongi nods and clears his throat again. "I'm getting another drink," he says, not bothering to look at Seokjin, and heads straight for the bar. He orders a whiskey on the rocks, tapping his fingers impatiently on the bar counter. When he's finally served, he downs it immediately. It stings his throat as he swallows, but his lips still tingle with an unwanted heat.

The Greatest Marriage

Chapter Notes

Oh heyyyyy, so. What's up guys. Here's an update. I'm a little overwhelmed with the response I'm getting for this fic, you guys. Seriously. Thank you. Thank you. ;;
THANK YOU.

Among my thank yous, I'd like to again, point out Liz who alwayssssssssss will talk to me about this fic. ALWAYS. Also gives great advice. Zeph who provides SO MUCH inspiration. ;; Reeza who literally gave me word count/time goals to get this finished, she's actually amazing.

ALL MY AMAZING twitter peeps who encourage me greatly. All the wonderful people who comment here and message me on my tumblr to encourage me, I love all of you ;; You guys have no idea how much those comments mean to me, and how much they keep me going <3

Finally, hey, omg, dreamydxze made fanart? from the last chapter. and I'm still screaming about it. [Here](#).

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Seokjin blows out a deep breath and grips his hands tighter around the box he's holding. It's no big deal. He's just moving some things into Yoongi's apartment, the apartment he'll live in for the next year. No big deal that Yoongi will be there, is there. Yoongi with his wandering hands and hot lips and tongue-

Seokjin blinks and inhales sharply. It was just a kiss, he reminds himself. One of many they will have to share over the course of the year. It's part of the whole arranged marriage deal. It's a business necessity. He's like an actor. Besides, he's probably just making a big deal out of it in his head. It's not like Yoongi was affected by it. Maybe it's been too long since Seokjin was kissed. He nods, agreeing with his hypothesis, feeling the ease of relief work through the tense set of his shoulders. Yes, it was just that he can't remember the last time he was properly kissed, and Yoongi just so happened to properly kiss him – really *really* properly - so his emotions were temporarily confused.

Next time Yoongi kisses him – properly, with hands and lips and tongue - Seokjin will be able to handle it indifferently without the flush to his cheeks and the rapid heartbeat in his chest.

Feeling more confident, Seokjin straightens his back and shifts the box in his hands, reaching out a finger to ring Yoongi's doorbell.

He hears shuffling before the door opens, revealing Yoongi as Seokjin has never seen him. He has a black beanie pulled down over his head, hiding most of his fringe so only a part of Yoongi's black locks peek out. His hands are stuffed into the front pocket of his black hoodie, his shoulders hunched up as if to ward off the cold from the hallway. Seokjin's eyes briefly pass over the ripped jeans but he quickly focuses back on Yoongi's face, not needing to see just how nicely they cling to his thighs. Yoongi looks, dare Seokjin even think it, approachable, soft, cozy.

Yoongi looks like he's as comfortable in a well-worn hoodie and fuzzy slippers as he does in tailor-

made suits and branded watches. It shifts something in Seokjin, reminds him of a world he tries not to think about anymore. One that didn't smell of money, but of honey citrus tea and laundry detergent.

He shakes his thoughts from his mind and smiles, tilting his head in greeting. "Hi," he says.

Yoongi blinks, face a blank mask of indifference. "Hey," he replies, stepping back to let Seokjin into the penthouse suite. "Is that all you brought?"

Seokjin shakes his head, shifting the box in his hands again to regain a better grip. "No, I have a couple boxes in the car downstairs. Thought I should have a tour first before bombarding you with my stuff."

Yoongi hums, closing the door. He slips past Seokjin, slippered feet shuffling on the hardwood floor. "Your room is this way," he says, not looking back.

"Ah, wait," Seokjin says, quickly toeing off his shoes and following after Yoongi. He stares as they advance into the penthouse, taking in the classic decor. The penthouse has an open plan, the kitchen and dining room flow to the living room, floor-to-ceiling windows allow natural sunlight to illuminate the area. Seokjin thinks he sees a small reading nook around a corner. Mahogany pieces and tasteful area rugs bring the word *expensive* to mind, not that Seokjin is surprised. What captures his eyes, though is a breathtaking spiralling staircase with wrought iron railing that leads upstairs.

Seokjin cranes his neck to admire it, and Yoongi must notice because he says, "That leads to exactly two rooms. My bedroom, and my studio. Both are off-limits."

Seokjin blinks and shifts his gaze back to Yoongi. "Did I ask?"

Yoongi sniffs. "Your eyes asked."

Seokjin scoffs. "My eyes asked?"

"Yes."

"You can read my eyes now?"

"Apparently."

"We know each other well enough for telepathy?"

Yoongi stares at Seokjin for a moment, considering. His eyes blink slowly and his lips tilt into a small frown. "No," he finally answers. He shifts his head to peer more closely at Seokjin, frown deepening, a sigh escaping his lips. "No, we don't, but somehow," he trails off, his sentence open-ended and hanging in the air.

Seokjin clears his throat and hopes the flush he feels working its way up his neck isn't noticeable. He doesn't like the way Yoongi's stare brings a burst of warmth to his cheeks. He doesn't like the way he enjoys Yoongi's gaze, the intense attention just a little too addicting. Finally he says, "My room?"

Yoongi jerks and nods, shuffling backwards. "Yeah, this way." He turns, breaking eye contact with Seokjin and leads the way to a small corridor.

Seokjin takes in a deep breath and follows, shifting the box in his hands again for a better grip.

"It's the guest room but it's not bad," Yoongi says, opening the door to an airy bedroom, furnished

with a large bed, fluffy blue duvet tucked carefully into the corners and two matching pillows adorning the head. "You have your own ensuite bathroom." Yoongi shuffles around the room, sinking his hands into his pockets. "It's just a year, but feel free to furnish it as you'd like. I don't mind as long as you don't compromise the structure of the room."

Seokjin places his box slowly on the white desk situated by the large floor-to-ceiling window and shakes his head, smiling. "No, no, it's great. I like it." The bedroom is larger than the one he currently has at the Jeon household. Maybe it's the sunlight streaming through the window or the bright photographs of flowers adorning the walls, maybe it's the fact that Yoongi gave him free reign to change whatever he'd like, but somehow, it feels more like home already than the Jeon household has for the last twelve years.

He turns to smile at Yoongi. "Thank you."

Yoongi rubs the back of his neck. "Yeah, sure." He makes a gesture to the door. "Did you have more stuff in your car?"

"Yeah, but I can get it myself."

Yoongi is already walking through the door. "I'll help."

Seokjin smiles and jogs after him.

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"What do you want your passcode to be?" Yoongi asks, bending by the front door, playing with the menu on the pinpad lock. They unloaded all his luggage and settled Seokjin's possessions sooner than Seokjin estimated it would take. But then again, he thought he would be doing it alone.

Seokjin thinks for a moment before saying, crossing his legs and leaning against the wall by the door, "One-two-zero-four."

Yoongi reaches up a hand to press it in before he pauses and shifts his head to stare at Seokjin. "It's not something stupid like your birthday, is it?"

"No!" Seokjin says quickly, affronted. Yoongi continues to glare at him so he looks away and shrugs. "Yes. Why, I can remember it easily."

Yoongi scowls. "I have owned this place for five years, and for five years I have successfully kept my cousin Taehyung from entering without my permission. I'm not giving up that record because you're the weak link. It's the first number Taehyung will guess."

Seokjin frowns. "Fine. Zero-nine-zero-one."

Yoongi turns to the pad again but pauses once more. "Is that your brother's birthday?"

"Well I don't know what you want from me," Seokjin huffs, crossing his arms.

"Something not obvious," Yoongi says, annoyance in his tone.

"One-zero-one-three," Seokjin spits out.

"Who's birthday is that?"

"An old friend's."

Yoongi flicks his gaze to Seokjin. "An old friend from Busan?"

"It shouldn't be a problem. Not like your cousin knows my friend's birthday." He smiles. "And I'll always remember it."

Yoongi scowls. "No."

Seokjin huffs. "Why not?"

"It's too obvious. Taehyung will guess it right away."

Seokjin arches a brow. "Does Taehyung even know Park Jimin?"

Yoongi stands and slams the door shut, sighing loudly. "You can use my code. Zero-eight-one-four."

Seokjin scoffs. "That's obviously a date. Whose birthday is it?"

Yoongi's expression shutters and he moves past Seokjin back into the apartment.

Seokjin kicks off from the wall and follows, shuffling behind Yoongi and bending to try to look at his face. "Whose birthday is it?" His eyes brighten. "Your first love?"

Yoongi scoffs, walking into the kitchen and throwing open a cabinet. "Want some coffee?"

Seokjin hums, hopping up to sit on one of the stools lining the breakfast bar. "Have any tea?"

Yoongi's face appears from around the open cabinet, his eyebrows arched and a disapproving tilt to his lips.

"Right, sorry, I forgot tea is an insult to your taste buds. Coffee is fine." Seokjin settles back in his seat, fingers drumming on the marble countertop as Yoongi's face disappears behind the cabinet again. "So whose birthday is on August fourteenth?"

Yoongi closes the cabinet, a bag of coffee grounds in his hand. His lips are in a thin line and he doesn't look at Seokjin. He carefully measures the coffee into his coffee maker. "It's not a birthday," he finally says, pushing the buttons by habit and stepping back to watch it brew.

Seokjin rests his chin on his hand. "What's the significance of the date, then?"

Yoongi frowns, still staring at the coffee maker. He takes a short inhale of breath, mouth opening, hesitating. Finally he looks at Seokjin, eyes unreadable, expression closed. "It's just a series of numbers," he says softly.

Seokjin wants to ask more, but Yoongi is already opening another cabinet and grabbing two mugs. He swallows the surprising disappointment that rises to his throat when the topic drops and straightens when Yoongi sets a stylish blue mug in front of him.

"Cream or sugar?"

"Both," Seokjin says.

Yoongi nods and opens the large stainless steel fridge, pulling out a carton of milk. He sets it on the counter by Seokjin's mug, glancing at the pantry a few steps away. "I usually take my coffee black. I might have some sugar in the pantry."

Seokjin shakes his head. "Ah, no it's fine." He reaches out a hand and places his fingers lightly on

Yoongi's wrist to stop him. "I don't need sugar. The milk is fine. Sit."

Yoongi stares at his wrist and Seokjin realizes he should probably take his hand back. He should probably keep his hands and lips and thoughts to himself, but somehow he finds himself reaching out for Yoongi. Somehow, he finds his fingers itching to rest on the cool skin of Yoongi's wrist, finds his lips sliding to deepen what was supposed to be a chaste kiss. He finds he can't stop talking, can't stop asking, can't stop trying to see through the veil Min Yoongi shrouds himself in.

The pads of Seokjin's fingers lightly pass over the sharp bone of Yoongi's wrist. He intends to end it there, to lift his hand and bring it back to himself, but Yoongi twists his hand until Seokjin's fingers rest on the soft skin of Yoongi's inner wrist. His skin is nearly translucent here. Seokjin wants to trace the blue veins, travel Yoongi's bloodlines up his arm and through his chest to his heart.

The coffee maker sounds, a bright chime letting them know the coffee is ready. Yoongi jerks back, stepping away from the counter and lifting a hand to rub at the back of his neck. Seokjin's hand falls to the cold marble countertop. He curls his fingers into a loose fist and brings his hand back to his lap, resisting the urge to feel if the heat in his cheeks is imagined or real. He blinks and cranes his head to glance around the apartment, willing himself not to look at Yoongi.

He wants to travel Yoongi's veins to his heart? Seokjin squeezes his eyes and grimaces. He can hardly recognize his own thoughts.

"See something you like?" Yoongi asks, slightly amused, and much, much closer than Seokjin would like.

Seokjin opens his eyes and turns back to look at Yoongi, leaning on his elbows with his coffee mug cupped between his hands, an amused smile on his lips.

"The photos," Seokjin blurts out, grasping onto the first not-Min-Yoongi's-face thought he has.

Yoongi lifts his eyebrows, confused.

Seokjin gestures to the framed photographs adorning the kitchen and dining nook. "You have a lot of photographs." The style of them is similar to the flowers in Seokjin's bedroom, though the kitchen area is decorated with landscapes. "Are they all by the same photographer?"

Yoongi's eyes widen and his lips quirk into a small, almost shy smile. Seokjin takes a hasty sip of his coffee and tries not to think about words like *cute*. "Yeah, they are. How'd-"

Seokjin shrugs, a confident smirk overtaking his lips. "It's my job, you know."

Yoongi's eyes light in recognition and he laughs, nodding. "Right. I read about that in the memoir you made me memorize."

"Who's the artist?"

Yoongi ducks his head and smiles, bringing his cup to his lips and taking a slow sip. "Me."

Seokjin's eyes widen and he fumbles his cup down to the counter. "You're serious?"

Yoongi nods. "They're good, aren't they?"

Seokjin laughs, turning to peer at the one closest to him. It looks like northern Europe, a waterfall of some sort, the cascade of water looks like still moving. Seokjin thinks he can hear the crash of the downpour as it hits the rocks below. "They're amazing."

Yoongi briefly smiles into his coffee cup before it fades, indifference replacing the pleased curve of his mouth. Seokjin is a little disappointed, and unsure why.

"My grandmother wants us to do a pre-wedding interview for KBS," Yoongi says, changing the subject. He shifts to lean against the counter, his elbows resting on the marble. "It's in a couple days, but if you don't want to do it, I can cancel it. It's an exclusive, so we won't have to do any other ones."

Seokjin shrugs, fingers closing around his cup, absorbing the warmth from the ceramic. "It's fine. Just pretend to be a happy, loving couple for an hour or two." He grins. "It should be fine unless we have to kiss again."

Yoongi flinches, his cup clattering to the counter.

Seokjin blanches. "I mean, not that kissing you was terrible. It was great! I mean, not *great*."

"Maybe you should stop," Yoongi says.

Seokjin straightens, his chin tilting up. "We'll pretend it never happened."

Yoongi frowns but nods, hands slipping into his hoodie pockets.

Seokjin sips his coffee, the silence heavy between them but not as uncomfortable as he expects. He thinks he can get used to this. The quietness of Yoongi's apartment, freshly brewed coffee and sunlight streaming through the windows, warming the space. He glances at the photographs again, wonders when Yoongi took them, where he was, who he was with. Seokjin wonders if he'll get the answers sometime over the course of their year together.

"About the wedding," Yoongi says, breaking the silence and bringing Seokjin's attention back to him. Yoongi frowns at his feet, fiddling with his slipper. "I noticed your mom isn't on the guest list. Your real mom, I mean."

Seokjin stills and carefully places his mug back on the counter.

Yoongi looks up and meets Seokjin's gaze. "You can invite her, you know. Granny wouldn't mind. And even if she did, I'll take care of it."

Seokjin sends Yoongi a quick, appreciative smile. "Thanks, but it's not needed. My mother won't attend."

Yoongi frowns. "It's her eldest son's wedding."

Seokjin's smile wavers. He told his mother about Yoongi and the marriage. He was truthful but vague. He told her he wanted to marry Yoongi. It wasn't a love match but it was what he wanted. She didn't ask anything further. She never does. From the moment he left Busan at the age of thirteen, he only told her half-truths, conveniently omitting anything that would trouble her. She never presses for more information, and he doesn't know if it's for her peace of mind or his. He can't help but wish she would sometimes see beyond the image he carefully paints for her.

"It's not exactly a real marriage," Seokjin finally counters, closing the conversation.

Yoongi blinks, taken aback. He shoves off from the counter, nodding to himself. "Right. Yeah." He takes his mug and shuffles past Seokjin to the spiraling staircase. "I have some work to do. You can leave your cup in the sink when you're done."

Seokjin doesn't say anything, just watches Yoongi ascend the stairs. He wonders why he feels chilled suddenly, and why the coffee tastes bitter in his mouth.

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The interview for KBS consists of a photoshoot for promotions, an interview with Yoongi and Seokjin together, and individual interviews to post as extras on the KBS website. By the time Yoongi arrives and is out of make-up, Seokjin has already completed his interview and is waiting on the set for the couple photoshoot.

Seokjin is chatting with the staff members, laughing sporadically, covering his mouth with his hand before sobering and nodding his head in apology. The staff looks like they've fallen in love with him. Yoongi feels his mouth quirk into an almost smile.

He clears his throat and steps into the bright set to make his presence known. Seokjin turns to him and sends him a small smile, waving. Yoongi tilts his head in answer and comes to a stop by Seokjin.

Before Seokjin can greet him, the producer approaches them, beaming. "Excellent, we have both of you here," she says, flicking her gaze over them. "We're going for an approachable, loving couple concept. Down-to-earth, you know? We'll start with some photos, just act natural." She steps back and waves them further into the set. "Pretend we aren't here."

Yoongi takes a look around the set. There's a kitchen that he highly doubts is functional, and a bright living room with a white couch and loveseat, presumably where their interview will be shot. He turns to Seokjin and inclines his head to the kitchen area. "Kitchen?"

It doesn't go well at first. Seokjin is stiff, unused to photoshoots and always mindful of the room full of cameras. Yoongi has had years of photoshoots, for magazines and television specials, the young face of the Min empire. Yoongi has never had to do a shoot with another guest, though, let alone a fiancé. He's not comfortable with skinship and posing in close proximity with someone else. Especially when that someone happens to be Jeon Seokjin with his broad shoulders and full lips. Lips that Yoongi can still remember kissing.

He makes a face at his own thought process and hears a weary sigh from the photographer.

"Okay, uh, why don't we take a break?" the photographer says, clearly trying to hide his frustration.

"Sounds great," he says, stepping away from Seokjin quickly and heading off set, grabbing a water bottle on his way. He hears footsteps trailing after him and he doesn't even have to look to know who is behind him.

Yoongi sighs and turns around abruptly to face Seokjin, scowling when Seokjin nearly runs him over. "You're too awkward," he says without preamble, opening the bottle and pausing to take a long sip.

"You're giving me nothing to work with," Seokjin responds, exasperated. "You're avoiding me."

Yoongi scoffs.

"It wouldn't kill you to hold my hand. Or stand closer than four feet from me."

"Maybe if you weren't as stiff as a board, I might feel inclined to," Yoongi says, sneering. "You need to relax."

"I am relaxed!" Seokjin exclaims, voice pitching higher.

Yoongi arches a brow but says nothing.

Seokjin sighs and takes a step forward and for a split second, Yoongi thinks they're going to kiss again. His breath catches in his lungs and he steps back.

"What are you doing?"

Seokjin gives him a strange look. "I wanted some water."

Yoongi's lungs restart and he clears his throat, looking away. "Oh." He holds out the bottle. "Here."

Seokjin takes it but keeps his gaze steady on Yoongi's face, studying him. "What did you think I was going to do?"

Yoongi frowns. "Nothing."

Seokjin's eyes narrow before they light in recognition. "You thought I was going to kiss you!"

Yoongi scowls and sputters. "It wouldn't be the first time."

Seokjin rolls his eyes. "Is that why you're avoiding me?"

"I'm not avoid-"

Seokjin reaches forward, his hand settling on the back of Yoongi's neck. He pulls and suddenly Seokjin's lips are on Yoongi's, soft and warm just like he remembered.

Before Yoongi's mind can catch up, before he can even close his eyes, Seokjin releases his hold and steps back.

"There, I kissed you again, and you didn't die." Seokjin places the water bottle on the refreshment table and takes Yoongi's hand in his own. "You won't shrivel up from hand holding either. Let's go."

Yoongi presses his lips together and lets Seokjin tug him back to the set.

The rest of the shoot goes exceptionally well. Seokjin and Yoongi play act like a loving couple, bumping shoulders in the kitchen, smiling and apparently appearing convincing enough for the photographer to beam at them when they finish. Yoongi doesn't want to admit it, but Seokjin's quick peck broke down any reservations they had, and they flowed well together afterward.

The couple interview is straight-forward. Yoongi was sent the questions beforehand, but even if he hadn't been prepared, they are predictable. How they met, what quirks they had, what the wedding will be like. They answer with practiced ease, and Yoongi muses that in retrospect, Jeongguk's interrogation was a lot more fun. It isn't until the journalist starts to ask questions decidedly *not* on the pre-screened list that Yoongi lets his polite public smile drop from his face.

"I'm not the only one who has expressed surprise at the speed of engagement," the journalist says, smiling widely and leaning forward slightly. "There wasn't any news of dating beforehand, not even rumors."

Seokjin stiffens beside Yoongi and Yoongi nudges his knee, silently trying to tell Seokjin he will handle it.

Yoongi smirks and leans back, arching an eyebrow. "It's not my fault your media was looking for a heteronormative narrative to document. Would anyone have even snapped a shot if they saw me with Seokjin?"

The journalist isn't deterred, pushing forward. "The marriage arrangements have also been made in a rush. It leaves questions."

Seokjin straightens his back and smiles, wide and cold and honestly a little terrifying, Yoongi thinks. He's glad that smile isn't directed at him. "Forgive me, I'm not sure what you're implying?" Seokjin says, challenging the journalist to confront them, to utter the words *arrangement*, *business merger*, *sham marriage*.

It's too ridiculous, to be disrespected in an interview they willingly agreed to. He never would have asked Seokjin to attend if he knew it would turn like this. He's more than certain his grandmother will be furious when she finds out. It's all a little too much, so he cannot really hold his tongue when he says, "You're right, it's exactly what you're implying."

Seokjin turns sharply to look at Yoongi, his eyes wide and fingers doing that bad-habit thing where they clutch at his arm.

Yoongi ignores him and smirks at the delighted journalist. "It is a rushed, because it's a shotgun wedding." He gestures to between him and Seokjin. "I'm pregnant."

He expects the confused expression on the journalist's face. He expects the crestfallen sigh from the producer in the wings, no doubt hoping for the story of the year. What Yoongi doesn't expect is the sudden, trilling laugh from beside him, and the hard slap on his arm. He turns to look at Seokjin, eyes scrunched up with laugh lines and a hand in front of his mouth as he tries to subdue his laughter.

Yoongi finds himself smiling and leans back, shrugging, contentment settling in his chest. He takes Seokjin's free hand and intertwines their fingers, flicking his eyes back to the journalist. "Anything else?"

The journalist presses his lips into a thin line and looks down at his notes for the next question.

Seokjin's shoulders still shake against Yoongi's, laughter slowly subduing.

&&&

11:56 at night. Jimin's phone flashes the time in bright white lettering, his finger still hovering over the home button. In four minutes, the day will change and it will officially be Seokjin's wedding day. In four minutes, the deadline Jimin gave himself to confess to Seokjin will end. He hugs his knees to his chest, resting his cheek on them, and wonders what the stroke of midnight will bring.

After the failure of the bachelor party, Jimin has been trying to work up the nerve to confess to Seokjin. He calls, he texts, he even met up for lunch with Seokjin. Every time, the words stuck in his throat, nausea and fear forcing him to swallow them down into the pit of his stomach. He knows he's running out of time and chances. He gave himself a deadline. Don't do it on Seokjin's wedding day, he told himself. Do it before. He has to.

He clutches his fingers on his knees. He has to. He already feels regret clawing its way through his blood, already cannot shake the chill of loneliness that snakes down his spine.

He reaches for his phone and hits the home button. 11:58. He's running out of time.

He unlocks it with a quick swipe and opens his contacts, finding Seokjin's name with an ease that only comes from habit.

It'll be okay, he tells himself. Nothing scary. Nothing to be afraid of. This is Seokjin. The same boy who cheered at Jimin's first real dance performance. The same boy who tells him stupid jokes just to

hear him laugh. The same boy who reaches out a hand to massage the back of Jimin's neck when he's feeling too stressed, too tense, fear ebbing away with the stroke of Seokjin's fingers. Seokjin loves him, he knows this. He does.

His fingers hesitate.

You really don't know.

Jimin's hands shake, his fingers don't cooperate with his commands.

"I know," he tells himself, trying to feel sure, but that pervasive thought endures.

Seokjin-hyung already knows. He knows how you feel. If he really loved you, wouldn't he have acted on it by now?

Jimin draws in a shuddering breath and lets his phone's screen lock. There are two warring voices in his head, and only one of them is telling the truth. He doesn't know which one to believe, and the panic of the unknown answer is building in his chest, tightening around his lungs until he can't quite remember how to breathe properly.

Seokjin likes Jimin, but Seokjin likes everyone. Jimin has never done anything to protect Seokjin. He has never done anything to take care of Seokjin. He has never done anything to deserve the love Seokjin gives to him, freely and earnestly.

There are two voices in Jimin's head but one of them is lying. In Jimin's experience, the truth is usually the one that hurts the most.

He lets his phone drop to the floor and watches with blurry eyes as his preset alarm goes off. Midnight and out of chances. He can already feel the solitude clogging his lungs.

&&&

The night before his wedding, Seokjin spends the evening at home. Dinner is normal, silent and non-congratulatory. Seokjin doesn't know why he expected anything more. His uncle is still sulking, his plans to thwart Jeongguk's future marriage prospects lay in ruins by his feet, and now Seokjin has gained a powerful ally to aide his brother. Seokjin wants to laugh and tell his uncle to cheer up. It's only a year, just wait it out. But he's also enjoying the entertainment of watching his uncle suffer.

The chairman doesn't say much, just asks if Seokjin is ready for his marriage tomorrow, and giving him a firm pat on the back after dinner. It is the most affection Seokjin has ever received from the Jeon family, and it makes his neck tingle unpleasantly.

Jeongguk comes over to spend the night in a last-ditch effort to persuade Seokjin to forgo the wedding. Seokjin shuts the conversation down quickly, and Jeongguk must accept the futility of further argument because he nods sadly and heads to the room they still keep for him.

12:04. Seokjin holds his cell phone up in the air, snuggling further under the comforter of his bed. He's getting married today.

He blows out a slow breath and drops his arm back to the bed, laying his cell phone face down on the comforter. Anxiety is building in his blood, he can feel it sting like acid through his veins. The past month and a half were hectic, a dash between crises and worst-case-scenarios. It is only now, in the dead silence of the night, that he has time to think about what he's doing, and what he's gotten himself into.

It's the last night he'll spend in this mansion, last night he'll sleep in the bed he called his own for twelve years. He's not sad to leave it behind, but rather he's scared. The Jeon household never held any love for him, but it was stable. There's a special kind of comfort to be found in stability, and he's having a hard time letting it go.

It's for Jeongguk, he reminds himself, fingers curling into fists over his comforter, fighting back the bubble of unease.

He's getting married to a man he hardly knows. A man with a blunt personality, who doesn't think twice about the words he says. A man who left him out in the rain the first time they met. A man with surprising bouts of humor, and strong hands that feel gentle in Seokjin's grip. Seokjin presses his lips together, staring at the ceiling.

There's no point debating it, he reminds himself. He's getting married because he has to. He's marrying Yoongi, because he's the only way Seokjin can protect Jeongguk.

For a moment, Seokjin wonders what his life would be like if he was free. If he didn't have to protect Jeongguk, if he could be selfish for a little while. His breath stutters in his chest, his stomach churns. He doesn't know what it would be like. He doesn't know what job he would have taken if Jeongguk had not been interested in art. He doesn't know what city he would live in, if Jeongguk wasn't rooted in Seoul. He doesn't know what boyfriend he would have, but he knows it would never be Min Yoongi. The thought makes him sad and he sighs, too tired to discern why.

A soft knocking at his door jars Seokjin from his imagination. He frowns, sitting up as the door slowly opens. He can see Jeongguk's messy bedhair from the illumination flooding in from the hallway.

"Hyung," Jeongguk whispers, poking his head into the room. "You still awake?"

"Yeah, come in," Seokjin says, already scooting over in his bed to make room for his brother.

Jeongguk slips in, closing the door quietly behind him before climbing into bed beside Seokjin. He shuffles under the covers, tugging Seokjin's pillow over to lay his head down, hands underneath his ear.

"What's wrong?" Seokjin asks, reaching a hand up to run through Jeongguk's hair.

Jeongguk leans into Seokjin's touch but frowns. "What, besides you marrying an asshole?"

Seokjin flicks his finger on Jeongguk's forehead. "Ya."

Jeongguk flinches and makes a face, rubbing his hand over his forehead. "Ow."

Seokjin hums, unconcerned, and threads his fingers through Jeongguk's hair again. He smiles, remembering when he used to fall asleep petting Jeongguk's hair. It was finer back then, thin and soft. He likes Jeongguk's hair better now, voluminous and wild. Healthy.

"Hyung," Jeongguk says after a few moments of silence, turning his face up to peer at Seokjin. His tone is pleading and Seokjin sighs.

"I'm not calling off the wedding," he says, tone bored.

"I wasn't going to ask that," Jeongguk responds, pouting.

Seokjin laughs softly. "Then what?"

Jeongguk looks down, focusing on nothing. "Why Min Yoongi? Why is it him?"

Seokjin's fingers pause in Jeongguk's hair and he blinks, wondering how to answer. Why Min Yoongi.

Yoongi who came in like a whirlwind, Yoongi who rejected him only to swoop in and save him at his most desperate hour. Yoongi who was a miracle Seokjin didn't think he could believe in anymore.

"Because he likes coffee and I like tea," Seokjin says, smiling at Jeongguk's obvious confusion. "Because his hands are cold and mine are always too warm." He retracts his hand from Jeongguk's hair and gently pushes at the crinkle in Jeongguk's brow. "Because he gave me what I didn't have, when I needed it."

"I don't think he appreciates you like he should," Jeongguk retorts.

"And how should I be appreciated?"

Jeongguk's frown deepens. "You gave up your entire childhood for me. You should have whatever you want."

"How do you know I don't want Yoongi?"

Jeongguk flicks his gaze up to Seokjin, wide-eyed and serious. "Do you?"

Seokjin hesitates, the words faltering on his lips. He takes a deep breath and says with a smile, "Yes." He's not sure why his heart beats so fast when the words rush past his lips.

"Hm." Jeongguk turns over, facing away from Seokjin. "I still don't approve, just so you know."

"It's been noted."

Jeongguk is silent after that, and Seokjin thinks he may have fallen asleep until he asks in a whisper, "Hyung, things won't change, between us, right?"

Seokjin smiles fondly and drapes his arm around Jeongguk's shoulders. "Of course not. You're still my number one."

Jeongguk's shoulders straighten. "Thought so." Seokjin can hear the smile in his voice.

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Chaos, Yoongi thinks, staring at his reflection in the mirror and trying valiantly to ignore the commotion around him, the busy din of bickering he probably should have gotten used to by now. It's his fault, he admits. He shouldn't have let Hoseok, Taehyung, *and* Namjoon into his changing room all at the same time, but he had other thoughts preoccupying his mind when he opened the door. Thoughts like what the actual fuck he was doing, getting *married*. The reality of his impending nuptials set in when he woke up in the morning, and he's been coasting on the edge of panic all day.

He's strangely grateful for the chaos of his closest friends. Their squabble is so loud it drowns out his thoughts, and he feels almost calm for the first time since he woke up.

"Let me just set one thing straight," Hoseok says, crossing his arms and narrowing his eyes at Taehyung. "The only reason *you're* best man is because I *let* you."

Taehyung scoffs and rolls his eyes. He doesn't bother to move from his chair, which he is tipping

precariously against the wall. "I'm hyung's *blood relative*."

"And out of *respect*, I conceded my rightful spot as best man. I am Yoongi-hyung's best friend." Hoseok pauses. "From childhood. I have seniority."

Taehyung laughs derisively and cocks an eyebrow. "We're the Daegu Boys, you can't even dream of beating me."

"You haven't lived there in seven years," Hoseok says, throwing his hands up in exasperation. "You don't hear me going on and on about Gwangju."

"You kind of do," Namjoon says from his spot on the sofa and Hoseok shoots a sharp glare at him.

"Loyalty, Namjoon," he warns, mouth turned down into a harsh frown. "Whose side are you on?"

Namjoon shrugs. "Yoongi-hyung's."

Yoongi smirks and turns to face the chaos. "That's sweet but I've been zoning out this entire argument. What are we bickering about?"

"Hoseok-hyung wants to *disrespect* me in front of all our closest five hundred friends and family," Taehyung says petulantly, still tipping against the wall.

Hoseok scoffs. "I have been nothing but compromising this entire wedding. I let you do the bachelor party, which by the way, you fucked up."

"The party was the best thing to ever happen to me," Taehyung counters. "I met an actual angel."

"And invited the devil."

"I thought we talked about Jac-" Namjoon starts.

"Don't say his name," Hoseok says hurriedly at Namjoon. "If you speak it, he'll appear."

"Your boyfriend has a jealousy problem," Taehyung says to Namjoon.

Namjoon just rubs his temple tiredly.

"Yoongi-hyung, can you please, just, explain to your cousin that as your best, closest, most treasured friend," Hoseok says to Yoongi, smiling sweetly at him, "I have earned the right to deliver the first speech."

"Nuh-uh," Taehyung protests. "This wedding wouldn't even be a thing if it weren't for me."

"I'm the one who put Seokjin-hyung's name on the list."

"I put in all the work. Who dragged Yoongi-hyung out? Who did Granny use as blackmail? Me. It's always me." He turns wide, pleading eyes to Yoongi. "Hyung, I worked so hard for this wedding. It's mine."

Yoongi purses his lips and nods seriously. "I see."

"Don't let him sway you, hyung," Hoseok says. "I have the most amazing speech prepared, it's hilarious."

"Why is it so noisy in here?"

The boys jump and everyone turns to see Yoongi's grandmother glaring at them from the doorway.

Hoseok beams at her. "Granny!" He skips over to her and takes her arm, escorting her into the room. "We were just talking about how I'll be giving the first speech at the reception."

"He's *lying* to you, Granny. I'm giving the speech," Taehyung nearly shouts, glaring at Hoseok.

Yoongi's grandmother sends Taehyung a look. "Sit up straight, you're not a child."

Taehyung immediately corrects his posture, the chair slamming down hard on the floor.

She takes a seat gingerly on the sofa and pats Hoseok's hand in thanks. Hoseok sends Taehyung a smug smile until she says, "What nonsense, as if I'd let either of you speak publicly." She smiles sweetly at Hoseok, then Taehyung. "No speeches from either of you."

Taehyung whines loudly. "But Granny."

"Now get out," she says, shooing them with her hand. "I want to talk to my grandson alone."

Namjoon stands and smiles, taking Hoseok's arm. "Come on, babe."

"Joonie, you heard my speech. It was really good," Hoseok says, letting Namjoon tug him out of the room.

"It was great," Namjoon says, bending to place a soft kiss on Hoseok's cheek. "You can tell us at the after party."

Taehyung sighs and follows them. "At least I'm still the best man." He closes the door quietly behind him, leaving Yoongi and his grandmother alone.

Yoongi leans against the vanity, crossing his legs at the ankle.

Yoongi's grandmother smiles at him. "You look very handsome," she says.

Yoongi smirks and shrugs. "I know."

"You get that from your father's side."

"The looks or the arrogance?"

She smirks. "Both." She stares at him for a moment, her smile fading into something soft and wistful and completely foreign on her lips. "I wish he could be here to see this."

Yoongi stiffens, his face hardening. "There's a lot of things he should have seen but he's dead. No point wishing it away."

She sighs wearily. "Your father didn't want to leave you."

Yoongi frowns and looks away, biting his cheek to keep silent. His parents didn't want to die, but they did. He's not ten years old anymore, he's accepted the fact that they're gone and never coming back. People leave, no matter their desires.

He flexes his hand. People leave and there's nothing he can do about it but prepare.

He sniffs and looks up again, arching a brow at his grandmother. "There was something you wanted to say to me?"

His grandmother pats her hanbok and twists her lips, formulating her words. "Regardless of your initial feelings to marriage, I wanted to give you some advice."

Yoongi arches a brow.

She narrows her eyes at him. "Don't destroy this like I know you want to. Seokjin will be good for you, if only you'd let him in."

Yoongi feels a spike of dread shot through his blood. That's exactly what he doesn't want to do. He spent years keeping everyone away and protecting his heart. *People leave*, he reminds himself, *no matter their desires*. Jeon Seokjin is no exception.

He blinks at his grandmother. "It's not like he can magically save me."

"No. But he can support you. That's what a marriage is."

Yoongi frowns. This marriage is a lie, he reminds himself, tugging the ends of his sleeves. One year of pretend, without feelings or attachments. Then Seokjin can disappear to wherever he's running away to, and Yoongi can go back to his former life.

In peace. And alone.

&&&

Seokjin frowns at the sharp knock on his dressing room door. He's pretty sure Jeongguk isn't back after going to find his spot just five minutes beforehand.

He stands and opens the door, eyes widening in surprise to find Yoongi's aunt on the other side.

She smiles coolly at him. "May I come in?"

He blinks and nods slowly, stepping back to let her in.

She steps through the doorway and makes her way to the sofa, her hanbok swishing with the movements. She sits and arranges the material around her before glancing up and making a gesture to the seat opposite her. "Please, sit. I have a few words I'd like to say to you."

Seokjin smiles tentatively and sits, keeping his posture straight, hands folded on his lap. He's not sure what Yoongi's aunt wants to say to him, but he's not certain it will be something he wants to hear.

She flicks her gaze over him, lips twisted into a frown. Seokjin gets the distinct impression that she's evaluating him again, trying to see past all his masks. He widens his grin. Many have tried but few have succeeded.

Finally she says, "I've been thinking about how I should phrase this for a while." She frowns, fingers tapping against her hanbok. "I'm afraid I haven't worked them out the way I'd like, so forgive me if I'm blunt."

Seokjin can't help the chuckle that escapes his lips. "I think I'm getting used to the Min family bluntness."

She narrows her eyes, something flickering in them. "My mother is a strong-headed and stubborn woman. Once she set her mind on this marriage, there was no way out. Regardless of my own opinion."

Seokjin raises his eyebrows. "You don't approve of the match?"

She glances at him pointedly. "My opinion doesn't matter. The wedding is happening whether I try to stop it or not."

Seokjin tilts his chin up. "I won't apologize, if that's what you're getting at."

She smirks. "I'm not. Whatever arrangement you've made with my nephew, it's none of my business. I am aware there is no love in this marriage. That isn't my concern."

"What is your concern?" Seokjin asks, apprehensive and wary.

She glances away and remains silent for a moment, gathering her thoughts. "My nephew," she starts, glancing back to Seokjin, "has spent many years cultivating the walls around his heart. It was a very long and painful process, one that he barely managed to survive." She presses her lips together. "Your marriage is yours alone, but I have a request."

Seokjin blinks.

"Please don't break down those walls unless you can promise to stay and protect Yoongi's heart." She holds Seokjin's gaze as if to pierce the words through. "He's had enough heartbreak in his life."

Seokjin's heart stutters and his fingers clench against his knee, guilt thick in the back of his throat. He wonders if he should tell Mikyung about the contract, the time limit. He doesn't want to mislead Yoongi's family. He is in no danger of hurting Yoongi, but he cannot tell Mikyung the details. "You don't need to worry," he finally says, swallowing against the lump in his throat. "I'm not the one who can break those walls down."

Mikyung presses her lips into a tight line and regards him with intense eyes. "I wonder." She stands, that cool smile back on her lips. "Thank you for your time, Mr. Jeon. I'll see you in the hall."

She leaves, the door clicking closed behind her, and Seokjin frowns, staring into blank space as too many thoughts spin through his mind.

For the first time, he considers Yoongi's side in this marriage debacle. Yoongi didn't want to get married. He didn't choose Seokjin. This entire thing happened against Yoongi's wishes and desires. Seokjin was pushed into Yoongi's life and he just had to accept it. And still, Yoongi's been willing to play along for Jeongguk. Still, Yoongi welcomed Seokjin into his home. Still, Yoongi accepted Seokjin when all Seokjin knew was rejection.

He doesn't realize how much time has passed until an attendant knocks on the door, informing him the wedding has started.

He nods quickly and stands, straightening his pants and hurriedly puts his suit jacket on, following the attendant out of the dressing room.

He slows when he sees Yoongi, hands in his pockets, waiting patiently at the doors leading into the hall. Yoongi glances up and straightens when he sees Seokjin.

"You ready?" he asks, voice low and drawling, a small smile gracing his lips.

Seokjin holds his breath in his lungs, staring at Yoongi. He wants to commit this moment to memory, remember it long after their marriage is over. He wants to remember what it's like to have someone support him. He's grateful to Yoongi, for giving Seokjin something no one would. For giving him time and peace, for taking a chance on someone he doesn't even know. For making it possible to keep all his promises.

He makes a vow in his heart. No matter what happens, he's going to make sure Yoongi doesn't regret this marriage.

He smiles at Yoongi and steps forward, offering his hand to him. "I'm ready."

Yoongi glances at Seokjin's hand, then flicks his eyes back up to Seokjin's face.

"Let's get hitched, Yoongi," Seokjin says, smile widening.

Yoongi huffs out a small laugh and shakes his head. He turns to the door but reaches his hand out for Seokjin's, intertwining their fingers. "Sure."

Seokjin squeezes their fingers and thinks Yoongi's hands feel nice. Strong and gentle and cool, and his for one year.

Chapter End Notes

One day, I will write a kiss from Seokjin's POV. Today is not that day.

~~lowkey trying to see if I can get a kiss in every chapter~~

Lie to Me

Chapter Notes

Ah, hi, I didn't abandon this. Thank you all for your patience, the response has been so wonderful ;;

Who do I thank? Everyone. There's been so much support for me, and my endless complaints. I'm so grateful. As always Liz. The amount of time and energy she lends me is insane, and I love her ♥♥♥

SO many people gave me lit's of encouragements this month and I'm so grateful thank you!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If Hoseok were to choose another line of work, he would go into the wedding business. A planner, or wedding singer. He briefly wonders if there is such a thing as a wedding dancer.

"Maybe I'd be a florist," he says, idly lolling his head in consideration. He hears Namjoon chuckling lightly beside him but doesn't turn to see it. "You don't think I could be a great florist?"

Namjoon slides his arm around Hoseok's shoulders. "I think you'd be the best. But there might be a problem."

Hoseok finally turns to frown at his boyfriend. "What?"

"People wouldn't be able to distinguish you from the flowers." Namjoon grins, dimples appearing on his cheeks, and dips his head almost immediately, shy from his own words.

Hoseok makes a high-pitched squealing sound and grabs Namjoon's face, smushing his cheeks together. "I don't know whether to kiss you or hit you."

"How about letting go of my face?" Namjoon suggests, words mumbled by Hoseok's restricting hands.

Hoseok scrunches his face in distaste. "But you need to be punished for being so greasy. You're lucky we're at a wedding. I forgive you." He gives Namjoon's cheek one last pat before withdrawing his hands. He turns back to watch the head table, grinning wickedly at Yoongi and Seokjin sitting awkwardly together.

"Aren't you a little concerned?" Namjoon asks. Hoseok can *hear* the frown that's on Namjoon's lips, the one that he gets when he's been thinking too much and not doing enough. It's the same frown he wore for the five months it took for Hoseok to woo, catch, and secure him.

Hoseok resists the urge to roll his eyes, only out of respect for the wedding, and says, "You're doing that thing again."

"What thing?"

"That thing where you start conversations like we're in the middle of them and I have no idea what

we're even talking about." Hoseok turns to look at Namjoon and arches his brow. "That thing. You're doing it right now."

Namjoon's frown deepens.

"I don't know what I should be concerned about," Hoseok elaborates. "The florist thing? Are we out of milk? Is there a snake poised to attack me? Wait, strike the last thing, I don't even want to think about that." He shudders.

Namjoon looks like he wants to say something about the snake thing, but he lets it pass and instead nods to the head table. "Yoongi-hyung and Seokjin-hyung. They just got married after like three weeks of dating. Aren't you, I don't know," Namjoon pauses and makes a wide gesture with his hands, "worried about their future?"

Hoseok shrugs. "Nope."

"Yoongi-hyung's your best friend."

Hoseok holds up his index finger. "Hyung is a grown man and can make his own decisions."

"His grandmother coerced him."

"Still a choice."

"They're going to get hurt."

Hoseok crosses his arms. "Good."

Namjoon stares at him, eyes widened. "Good?"

"Yoongi-hyung thinks he's a walking, talking block of ice without a heart." Hoseok shakes his head slowly in disapproval. "If he gets hurt, that means he's finally opened up to someone. Love and pain, it's life." His lips lift into a sad smile. "I'd like to see hyung live again."

Namjoon smiles again, his dimples reappearing, and reaches a hand up to boop Hoseok's nose. "You're a really good friend, babe."

Hoseok scrunches his nose. "I'm the best friend anyone could ever have. One might even say I'm the best *man*."

"Babe, let it go."

"My speech is epic, Joonie."

Namjoon pulls Hoseok closer and smiles, patting his shoulder comfortingly. "I know."

"Next time Yoongi-hyung gets married, I'm going to be the best man," Hoseok sulks, frowning at Taehyung from across the room.

"It's usually not couth to talk about next marriages at the current marriage's wedding."

"It's usually not couth for the best friend to get snubbed at his best friend's wedding but here we are."

Namjoon sighs and finally says, "You want a drink?"

Hoseok smiles sweetly at his boyfriend. "Something bitter, like my feelings, please."

It shouldn't be this hard to find one person, Yoongi thinks, frowning around the hall. Granted they had five hundred guests, but it's not like Seokjin is easy to overlook. Tall, broad, striking. It should be like a coffee stain on a white sheet. Apparently he's the only one with the Where's Waldo problem, because Hoseok zooms in on Yoongi almost immediately, grabbing his arm and hustling him to a semi-quiet corner by the stage.

Yoongi knows that look on Hoseok's face, the pinched lips, the wide eyes, the raised eyebrows. Hoseok wants to vent and if he's come to Yoongi to do it, that means it concerns Namjoon. "Have you seen Seokjin?" he asks before Hoseok can even start to rant about whatever exaggerated relationship problem he's imagined.

"Yes, you guys exchanged vows and got married, it was great," Hoseok says quickly, lips twisting in annoyance. "You were there."

Yoongi rolls his eyes. "I mean lately. Like within the last five minutes."

Hoseok sighs heavily. "Yeah, he was hanging out with some extraordinarily good-looking people. Not important. Do you know what Jackson Wang just said to me?"

Yoongi frowns. "What good-looking people?"

"He comes up to me, right, smiling," Hoseok continues, ignoring Yoongi's disinterest. "He hugs me, like we're *friends*, and he says, and I quote, 'How's it going? How's the semi-married life?'" He pauses, gauging Yoongi's reaction.

Yoongi stares blankly at him, lips pursing. "Okay," he finally says slowly.

Hoseok scowls. "He's trying to see if there are any weaknesses in my relationship with Namjoon," he elaborates, clearly annoyed that he has to spell it out for Yoongi.

"Alternatively, he's asking how you are," Yoongi supplies, already looking over Hoseok's shoulder around the hall again.

"Why is everyone dismissing my deep concerns?"

"They're not that deep. They're hardly concerns."

Hoseok's scowl deepens. "I can't wait for the day Seokjin goes off with his lover and you come to me for support. Which I won't provide."

Yoongi snaps his gaze back to Hoseok. "Seokjin has a lover?"

Hoseok's face brightens and he grins teasingly. "Oh, oh, what's this?" He bends and peers at Yoongi's face. "Already feeling possessive over your new husband?"

Yoongi scoffs. He's not. He's *not*. It's just that, if Seokjin has a lover, he thinks he has a right to know. It doesn't bother him. They agreed it was fine as long as it was done with digression. But Yoongi deserves to know. He thinks he's entitled to that much, as Seokjin's legal husband.

He absentmindedly spins the gold wedding ring on his finger and sighs. "Where did you see Seokjin?"

Hoseok pinches his lips together but his shoulders drop in resignation. "They were by the chocolate

fountain." Yoongi moves past Hoseok and heads for the general direction of the sweets table, ignoring Hoseok calling after him, "You're *welcome*."

Yoongi had suspected that Hoseok was exaggerating, but he's frustrated to find his friend's description is accurate. Seokjin is talking animatedly with a group of extremely good-looking people. A group of extremely good-looking, extremely physically affectionate people. One in particular, a woman with a stylish haircut and a striking face, keeps hugging Seokjin and laughing, patting him on his shoulders and smiling up at him.

Yoongi frowns, a churning feeling in the pit of his stomach. It's not jealousy, he assures himself. It's discomfort. Seokjin can act how he likes, but this is their wedding with five hundred, extremely gossipy guests. Some decorum is expected.

He steps forward, easily sliding into the group and slipping in beside Seokjin. Seokjin catches his eye and smiles, ignoring the frown etched on Yoongi's lips. "Yoongi, these are my classmates. We went to the same university."

Yoongi nods politely to the group. He's introduced to Lee Jaehwan and Lee Junghwan, but he's most interested in the striking face that keeps clinging onto Seokjin despite his husband standing *right here*. He raises a brow at her in expectation.

She grins and extends a hand forcefully, her other hand still placed on Seokjin's shoulder. "Ahn Heeyeon, but my friends all call me Hani." Yoongi reluctantly takes her hand and shakes, surprised at her firm grasp. She leans forward, hand still firmly gripped, and says with a smile, "You're lucky to snag Seokjin. Treat him well."

Yoongi smirks and cocks a smug eyebrow, fingers gripping hers harder at her indirect challenge. "Thank you for the marital congratulations." He slips his hand under Seokjin's arm and tugs him closer. "You'll have to excuse us, we have to start the opening dance."

Seokjin sighs beside him and Yoongi can feel him sag slightly against his side. "We'll catch up later, guys," Seokjin says, waving to the group before Yoongi tugs him back to the stage. He turns to frown at Yoongi, and Yoongi can't help but think he looks a little sulky. "I was hoping we could skip the whole dance thing."

Yoongi shrugs and slips his hand from Seokjin's arm. "I don't mind."

Seokjin brightens, pausing and reaching out to stop Yoongi. "Seriously?"

Yoongi nods, lips pursing. "Sure. You just have to explain to my grandmother why her only grandson's only wedding won't have a waltz." He gestures to where the orchestra is set up, his grandmother talking to them animatedly and making large motions with her arms.

Seokjin follows Yoongi's gesture and frowns, brow furrowing. "What is she doing?"

"Telling them how to do their job." He breaks out into a smile and tilts his head. "Go ahead and tell her we decided not to do the dance."

Seokjin scowls. "You're terrible, Min Yoongi."

Yoongi's smile widens and he waves at his grandmother to get her attention. "Granny!" he calls out. "About the dance-"

Seokjin grabs his arm and pulls him close against him, fingers tightening painfully on his arm in warning. "We're ready!" he calls out, shoving at Yoongi and smiling insincerely.

Yoongi laughs even as Seokjin's fingers pinch his arm and his grandmother watches them with hawkish eyes. A small smile tugs at the corners of her mouth as she waves them to the center of the room.

Yoongi takes Seokjin's hand from his arm and slides their fingers together, guiding him to the center. The room quiets down and the lights dim, a spotlight brightening over the two of them. The host starts to make his opening remarks, but Yoongi's attention is on Seokjin frowning down at their feet.

"You okay?"

Seokjin presses his lips together. He glances at Yoongi and frowns. "If I step on your toes, you have only yourself to blame."

"You can't be that bad." Yoongi places his hand on Seokjin's back and Seokjin grips tightly on Yoongi's shoulder, laughing without any humor.

"You have no idea."

Yoongi manages not to wince as Seokjin's fingers squeeze tight over his own. He locks eyes with Seokjin, frowning. "If I knew you were this nervous, I would have taken the damn lessons with you."

"I *did* take lessons," Seokjin grumbles, glancing down at his feet again, shuffling and trying to position himself properly.

"What did you learn?" Yoongi asks, ignoring the applause of the guests as the host finishes his speech and the orchestra starts to play the beginnings of the waltz.

Seokjin moves his left foot back, expecting Yoongi to start but Yoongi keeps his position, his hand firm against Seokjin's back. Seokjin looks up, frowning.

"What did you learn in your lessons?" Yoongi repeats.

Seokjin blinks, eyes locked on Yoongi, his brow furrowed. Finally, he says slowly, "The waltz is about trust."

Yoongi flexes his hand in Seokjin's grip and keeps his gaze focused on him. "Do you trust me?"

Seokjin's eyes flicker, his fingers loosen on Yoongi's shoulder. "Should I?"

Yoongi keeps his hand firm on Seokjin's back. "It's up to you," he says, taking the first step forward slowly.

Seokjin follows Yoongi's lead almost instinctively, stepping back and tracing the steps with him. Yoongi goes slowly, squeezes his fingers in Seokjin's hand in time with the rhythm they follow. It works fine until Yoongi tries to turn them and Seokjin stumbles at the change of direction. Yoongi's arm pulls back him into place, correcting their position almost instantly but Seokjin still winces and breaks eye contact with Yoongi, glancing back down at their feet.

Yoongi frowns and pulls Seokjin a little closer, wanting to bring Seokjin back to the dance and away from their feet. The movement disturbs Seokjin's rhythm and he jerks forward, catching Yoongi's right foot. They stumble and Yoongi thinks he can hear Seokjin curse under his breath, a red flush washing over his ears.

Yoongi can admit to himself that a flustered Seokjin is undeniably cute. He kind of wants to reach up

and touch his ears. But he also realizes that Seokjin probably doesn't find the experience cute, especially in front of a room full of judgmental strangers. He dips his head, trying to catch Seokjin's eyes again.

"Hey," he says, hand traveling further over Seokjin's back, fingers curling into the fabric of his suit jacket. "You won't be able to do anything watching our feet. Look at me, hyung."

Seokjin's eyes flicks back to Yoongi abruptly, widening. His mouth opens slightly like he wants to say something but hasn't quite found the words.

Yoongi smiles. "There, that's better. Just look at me and follow." Yoongi steps forward again slowly, leaning into Seokjin's space. "One. Two."

A smile forms slowly on Seokjin's lips, tugging at the edges as he steps with Yoongi. "Three," he finishes for Yoongi.

Yoongi huffs out a short laugh. "One," he starts again, letting his voice blend with the flow of the orchestra. He feels the tension in Seokjin's back ebb and his hands relax on the curve of Yoongi's shoulder. He doesn't want to think about why that is so satisfying.

&&&

Jimin did not sleep last night. He watched miserably as his clock turned to midnight, out of time and out of chances. He told himself he would give Seokjin up. He told himself he never had a chance with him anyway.

He tried to sleep, but every time he closed his eyes he saw Seokjin slipping away. He tried to breathe slowly and evenly, but his lungs stuttered with unreleased sobs. He tried, so hard, so long. He tried to be the man Seokjin could love. He tried to be patient, and strong, and brilliant. He tried.

He failed.

Somehow he made it to morning. He managed to get up and shower and dress. He managed to make it to the wedding hall without a breakdown. By some miracle, he made it through Seokjin's vows, watched him recite the words, ordinary and prosaic. By some unknown willpower, he made it through the meal, the food like ash in his mouth and lead in his stomach.

He wonders woodenly if it's because he never got this far in his fantasies. Even in his imagination, he never thought of marrying Seokjin. It was too sacred, too grand, too much for Park Jimin to even contemplate.

It isn't until the first dance that Jimin feels his nausea spike, feels like crumbling into a dark corner and never emerging again. He watches, eyes stinging with unshed tears, as Min Yoongi takes Seokjin in his arms, watches them flow with the lilting music. His heart throbs in his chest. He knows what that's like. He knows what it feels like to have Seokjin in his arms, staring at him with concentrated eyes. He knows the rhythm of Seokjin's breathing, how it quickens with the steps of his feet. He knows the squeeze of Seokjin's hands, strong and anxious and *trusting*.

Seokjin stumbles and Yoongi catches him, whispers something and smiles. Jimin blinks and turns away. He can't watch this anymore. He's not strong enough to endure this. He needs to stop loving Seokjin but he doesn't know how.

He heads quickly to the bar and orders the strongest liquor they have. It's probably not a good idea to get drunk at Seokjin's wedding, but he knows with a certainty he won't be able to make it through otherwise.

He's halfway through his third glass, a welcome buzz finally starting to dull his surroundings, when someone settles into the stool beside him. Jimin doesn't turn to look, fingers toying with the rim of his glass, wet with condensation.

"Park Jimin," a deep voice says.

Jimin frowns at his glass and jerks his gaze to the source of the sound. He blinks at the handsome boy, vaguely familiar. He tries to remember where he's seen him before, but his mind keeps circling back to a blank. The boy is grinning at him, his fringe flopping adorably over his eyebrows as he tilts his head at Jimin.

"Hi," the boy continues, bringing his hand up to rest his chin on. "We meet again."

Jimin smiles apologetically, bringing his hand up to rub at his ear nervously. "Sorry, I'm not quite..." He trails off, mind too muddled to find a polite way to tell the boy he has no idea who he is.

The boy's eyes light in understanding and he sits up straight in his stool, dropping his arm to the bar. "Ah, we met at the engagement party last week. You saved my life."

Jimin's brow furrows, and his mind finally conjures up the memory of the boy – Taehyung, he thinks – tripping and Jimin catching him. Jimin laughs, surprised, and shakes his head. "I don't think that would qualify as saving your life."

Taehyung shrugs, unconcerned. "Difference of opinion."

Jimin stares at him, a confused but amused smile tugging at his lips.

"So," Taehyung says, edging forward and leaning his chin on his hand again. "Are you groom's side or groom's side?" Before Jimin can even think of how to answer, Taehyung's expression turns pouty and he says, "Don't tell me you're a plus one."

Jimin shakes his head and looks back to his glass, a sardonic smirk on his lips. "No, I'm just a one. That's the problem."

"Ah," Taehyung draws out, like he understands. Jimin flicks his gaze back to the boy, almost certain that Taehyung does *not* understand. No one does. "Let me buy you a drink, then."

Jimin laughs, and reaches over to pat his hand patronizingly on Taehyung's. "It's an open bar."

"Guess I'll have to buy you one another day. How's this Thursday sound?"

Jimin pauses and takes a moment to consider Kim Taehyung. It has been a long time since someone flirted with Jimin, let alone blatantly asked him out on a date. He's not interested. Not in anyone but Seokjin, but still. It feels nice. It's nice to have someone's eyes on him, trained and focused and flashing with an undertone of desire. It's nice to be the center of someone's attention. It's nice to be wanted.

He glances towards the dance floor for the first time since he slumped over to the bar. It's full of couples in varying degrees of drunkenness. He scans the entire area but it seems like Seokjin and Yoongi have finished their one and only dance. He huffs out a relieved breath.

He turns back to Taehyung, back to his wide smile and hopeful eyes and the adorable flop of his fringe over his brows. Jimin smirks and tilts his chin to the direction of the dance floor. "Dance with me and I'll consider it."

He knows it's a mistake, to indulge in something he's not prepared to pursue, but the alcohol was doing its best to dull his mind and he is doing his most to forget the reason he's at this stupid wedding to begin with. He dances with Taehyung, Taehyung's hands holding onto his waist and then hips, dragging down to his ass. Grinding, holding, *moving* against each other, Jimin feels an addictive sort of freedom. The kind that only comes when music flows through his limbs, his mind emptying of all thoughts.

It's probably because his mind is empty and he's making decisions solely on feelings that Jimin slides his arms around Taehyung's neck and peers up at him seriously, saying, "You want to take me home tonight, don't you?"

Taehyung stills, eyes widening, mouth opening in surprise. He's silent for a moment before his hands settle into the small of Jimin's back and tugs him even closer. Jimin has to rise on his toes to keep his balance, almost toppled over by Taehyung's presence encroaching on his space. "Yes, if you want to."

Jimin rolls his head back, hands flexing on the back of Taehyung's neck. He shouldn't, but Taehyung's hands feel nice on his back. He shouldn't, but Taehyung's gaze feels nice on his skin. He shouldn't, but the attention feels nice, even if it isn't from the person he wants. "Why? Convince me. Why do you like me?"

Taehyung brings one of his hands from Jimin's back to gently stroke Jimin's cheek, eyes intense and concentrated on his face. "Because I think you're made up of constellations and I dream of touching the stars."

Jimin feels a flush a heat warm his chest. He inhales sharply and leans his weight on Taehyung's chest. "Okay," he says softly.

It's wrong, but he wants to be important, wants to keep that addictive attention trained on him. It's wrong, but Taehyung feels nice, and Jimin wants to know what it's like to be wanted, if only for one night.

&&&

Seokjin jerks awake, breath caught in his lungs, chest momentarily still as he tries to remember how to exhale again. He squeezes his eyes shut and forces out the breath slowly through his mouth. He takes a long inhale, feels his chest expand, counts in his head like he's learnt. He can feel the adrenaline wane, and he finally blinks his eyes open again.

He turns to look at the clock on his nightstand out of habit, even though he knows with a certainty what time it is. He only jolts awake at three in the morning, a silent alarm ingrained in his bones, a reminder that the dead silence of the night is a precursor to the fallout he cannot control.

He sighs and rubs a hand over his eyes, sitting up, groggy and discomfited. He wishes he could lay back down and fall back asleep, his muscles already protesting the movement as he swings his feet off the bed to touch the floor. He knows it will be a long night, bringing himself back down to an emotional level where he can trust himself to sleep without stumbling into nightmares.

He presses his fingers into the comforter and tries to shake off the echo of his mother's voice, fourteen years younger and laced with fear.

Seokjinnie, we have to go. Get up, sweetheart.

He stands and frowns, gazing around the unfamiliar room for the first time since he jolted awake.

Ah, that's right. It's Yoongi's apartment, and Yoongi's guest bedroom. He runs his thumb over his ring finger, spinning the gold wedding ring there. He wonders if it's a bad omen, that the first time in months that he's had an episode is merely hours after he married Yoongi.

The precursor to the fallout, he thinks bleakly before shaking his head.

Whatever the cause, he's up and all he wants is a hot cup of tea to lull him back to sleep. He shuffles to the door and opens it cautiously, careful to dull any sound of the knob clicking open with the palm of his hand. He pauses, straining his ear to see if there is a hint of disturbance from upstairs, but Yoongi's room remains dark and silent.

He quietly heads to the kitchen, hitting the hot water option on Yoongi's espresso machine. He reaches for a cabinet but frowns, realizing that he hasn't had time to go grocery shopping yet. Yoongi doesn't have tea, he remembers from when he moved in. He sighs, running a hand through his hair. Caffeine will keep him up but he will have to settle for coffee. Maybe if he makes it weak enough, he wonders.

He opens a cabinet and finds dishes. He tries the next one and luckily it is filled with various bags of coffee beans and flavored extracts and spices. He reaches up a hand to see if maybe, by some miracle, Yoongi accidentally bought a decaf variety, when he sees one small, unopened box of tea.

His fingers freeze and his eyes widen. He blinks at the box, still sealed in plastic wrap and sitting innocuously on the shelf. It's not his brand, and it's not his favorite type, but it's tea that was certainly not there last week.

He shifts his gaze to the direction of Yoongi's room. He's not sure what this is. This unspoken, secreted, unacknowledged consideration that is completely foreign to Seokjin. It's just a box of tea, minuscule and unimportant, but it's a box of tea Yoongi bought for Seokjin, without his prompting, because he knows Seokjin prefers it.

He finally takes the box in his fingers and opens it quietly, smiling softly when the scent of black tea hits his nose, the waning adrenaline in his veins forgotten.

&&&

It's supposed to be a quiet day at the gallery. Their major exhibition ended and they are in the early stages of planning a new one. The director went out for the day to meet with another gallery director and negotiate an exchange, leaving Seokjin in charge for the remainder of the afternoon.

It should have been mindless paperwork, meticulous and mundane, allowing his mind to wander. He doesn't expect to have the gallery intern to run into his office, out of breath and frenzied at fifteen minutes to gallery closing.

"Team Leader!" the intern half whispers, half cries, clinging to the door jam of his office.

He looks up and raises an eyebrow at her, lips pursing in question.

"Yoo Rachel is here."

Seokjin's mouth opens, jaw slack. "Yoo Rachel? But, the director-"

"Isn't here, I know."

Seokjin understands why the intern is frenzied now. Yoo Rachel, heir to RS International, married to the heir of the Choi household, and highly influential in the chaebol world on her own, is not their

usual caliber of client. She should be frequenting larger, established galleries.

He stands, slowly closing his laptop. "The director isn't here," he says dumbly.

"I told her but..." The intern trails off, eyes wide and begging for rescue.

Seokjin nods, straightening his jacket and gathering any and all confidence his body possesses to face her. Yoo Rachel is known to be powerful, cold, and most of all, petty. "I'll take care of it."

The intern sags in relief against the door jam. "You're the best Team Leader."

Seokjin spares her a smile and makes his way to the waiting room. He reminds himself that if he can handle Yoongi's grandmother, he can handle anyone in the chaebol world. He straightens his back and pastes a smile on his lips, opening the door to the waiting room.

Yoo Rachel sits on the plush white couch, legs crossed and frowning down at her nails. She swings her gaze up when she hears him enter, eyes flickering over him in quick judgment.

He bows in greeting. "Ms. Yoo." He extends his hand to shake. "I'm-"

"Jeon Seokjin, I know, I was at your wedding."

Seokjin bows again. "Ah, yes. Thank you for attending."

Rachel shrugs. "Not really a choice."

His smile twitches but he manages to keep a cool demeanor. "I apologize but the director is absent at the moment."

"I'm looking for a painting for a new room I'm decorating," she says, speaking over him. "Something soft, with pastels probably. Can you help?"

Seokjin's brow furrows. Their higher-end clients all insisted on dealing with the highest authority at the gallery. It is almost seen as an insult for him to personally assist them. But Yoo Rachel is already standing and waiting impatiently for him, so he smooths out his features and offers his arm to give her a tour around the gallery.

Rachel selects an abstract painting with strokes of soft yellows and pinks and purples, her face softening as she gazes at it. She smooths her hand over her hips to her stomach and smiles. "This will do nicely." Her lips tug into a smirk and she turns to look at Seokjin again. "You're not too bad at your job."

Seokjin laughs and smiles back. "Thank you."

"Hmm." She crosses her arms and considers him. "Honestly, I was curious, but I think I understand now."

Seokjin blinks, his eyebrows raising in confusion. "Pardon?"

Her eyes flick over him again, icy cold and assessing. "Frankly I wanted to know about Min Yoongi's husband."

The surprise must show on his face because Rachel smirks.

"In our circle, marriage means merger. It's business. But your levels." She huffs out a sardonic scoff. "They don't match." Seokjin's lips twist at the slight affront but she continues, unconcerned. "A love

match, though. That's nearly unheard of. Especially for that little brat Yoongi."

Seokjin opens his mouth to defend his marriage, automatic and instinctual but the words still when he sees Rachel's mouth soften into a smile again.

"A love marriage is a good thing," she says, fingers slipping down to her stomach again.

Seokjin frowns, an uncomfortable feeling settling in his stomach and a heavy weight on his ring finger.

By the time he finishes the paperwork and sees Rachel off, he's ready for home and a good dinner. He isn't expecting to open his office door and find Yoongi's grandmother sitting at his desk, sharp eyes assessing every nook.

"Chairwoman?" he asks, gaining her attention.

She smiles at him and waves him over as if it's her office and not his that she's invaded. "Ah Seokjin, come in, come in. I was just in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop in, see how married life is going. Is my grandson treating you well? You look thin, have you been eating?"

Seokjin smiles and takes the visitor's seat opposite the chairwoman. "I've been well, thank you. How's your health."

She grins. "Excellent." She slides a small flat box towards him. "I brought you a small present."

Seokjin takes the box and shakes his head. "You really didn't have to."

She waves a hand in dismissal. "It's my pleasure."

Seokjin carefully unties the red silk ribbon and lifts the cover of the box, bursting out into laughter when he sees the contents. It's a framed picture of Yoongi, making a sulky face to the camera. He looks back up at the chairwoman, grinning. "Thank you?"

"It's for your desk." The chairwoman reaches over and pulls the picture from Seokjin's hands. She flicks her eyes over the desk, eyes brightening before she sets it prominently slightly to the side. "This is perfect." She taps the glass over Yoongi's nose and smiles fondly. "That brat. I miss his stupid face."

Seokjin's smile dims and he feels a pang of sympathy for the chairwoman. She loves Yoongi dearly, and despite her rough exterior, he thinks she misses him deeply. He leans forward, an idea forming in his mind. "Ah, Chairwoman-"

"Call me Grandmother or Granny, you're family," she corrects, a prickly frown etching into her lips.

Seokjin smiles uncertainly. He's not used to this closeness to family. He doesn't even address his adoptive grandfather any way but *Chairman*.

The chairwoman cocks an eyebrow and narrows her eyes. "You won't?"

"Grandmother," Seokjin says slowly, testing out the word on his tongue.

She smiles, expression transforming immediately.

Seokjin laughs. "Grandmother, I was just heading home to make dinner. Would you like to join me? Yoongi should be home soon."

The chairwoman's face brightens and a genuine smile spreads over her lips. "I'd love to."

&&&

Seokjin insists on cooking dinner alone and after a small fuss, the chairwoman finally sits at the breakfast bar with a cup of espresso. Seokjin bites back a remark on how similar she is to her grandson, smiling as she watches him with narrowed eyes.

"You're skilled," she comments, sipping from her cup.

Seokjin smirks, and rolls his arms back confidently. "I like to cook."

"I noticed your mother was absent from the wedding," she says, completely switching topics.

Seokjin's chopping falters and he looks up at her, trying to catch up to the change in subjects. "Pardon?"

She arches a brow. "I wanted to meet your mother but she was absent."

Seokjin places the knife down carefully on the chopping board and straightens his shoulders. "I believe I told you there are some lines that shouldn't be crossed."

She scoffs. "I can't even mention her? Am I supposed to pretend you don't have a mother? Please tell me the miracle of your motherless birth, child."

Seokjin sighs. "Grandmother."

"Fine, fine." She holds her hands up in surrender. "How is my grandson? Should I book him off work for a honeymoon or are you two going at it just fine after work hours?"

Seokjin chokes on his own spit and has to brace his hands on the counter to remain standing. He feels a flush work up his neck and onto his cheeks. "Granny!"

She rolls her eyes. "I've been married, Seokjin. Even had two children. I know how this works, dearie."

Seokjin inhales slowly and rubs the back of his hand over his cheeks, trying to cool them down. Finally he finds the strength to look at the chairwoman again, though not directly in her eyes. "Yoongi and I are taking it slow," he says, choosing his words carefully.

"Oh no, don't do that. Yoongi makes his best decisions impulsively. His father was just the same. It's how he married Yoongi's mother to begin with." She leans closer to Seokjin, eyes brightening. "You know I sent Dohyun to Daegu for a simple, ordinary, no-bumps-in-the-road contract and he came back with a wife."

Seokjin smiles, leaning his hip on the side of the counter. He hasn't heard much about Yoongi's parents. By the time he entered the chaebol world, they had already passed away. There was gossip, but it mostly centered on the chairwoman and Yoongi's erratic behavior, rumors that the company would fail, that the family was falling apart. He finds he's just a little interested to know about before, when things were good. He's heard and seen too much tragedy in his own life, he likes to see the happy memories in others' lives.

"Go on," he says, tilting his head.

The chairwoman sits back, waving her hand. "It was the simplest of deals. I could have sent

Mikyung, and she was still in high school at the time. But I thought, Dohyun is going to take over the company some day and he should learn. A practice, if you will. Well," she huffs. "I get a call. He says to me, 'Ma, I'm going to stay in Daegu for a bit. When I come back, I'm bringing a wife.' And then he just hangs up!"

She smiles fondly. "What could I do? He came back three weeks later with Jihye. Best decision of his life, it brought us all great happiness. She was good for him." Her smile wanes and she reaches forward to pat Seokjin's hand. "Thank you for listening, I haven't talked about them in a while. Yoongi doesn't like to hear it."

Before Seokjin can respond, the door chimes and clicks open.

"Speak of the brat," the chairwoman mutters, but Seokjin can see her suppress a smile.

Yoongi shuffles past the kitchen, freezing when he spots his grandmother. He frowns, eyes narrowing.

"Welcome back," Seokjin says. "I invited Grandmother for dinner."

Yoongi's frown deepens, his shoulders rigid. "Granny."

She arches a brow. "Child."

"You two look cozy," he says slowly, something Seokjin can't quite make out in the undertone, lending the words a weight they don't should not have.

She shrugs. "Should I be silent and taciturn with my favorite grandson?"

Seokjin laughs. "Granny."

She smiles at him. "Look at that face, so handsome."

Seokjin grins and winks at her before glancing back to Yoongi. "Why don't you get changed? Dinner should be ready soon."

Yoongi's eyes flicker for a moment, and catches Seokjin's gaze, a heavy weight settling in his stomach as they stare at each other. Yoongi presses his lips together and nods, heading to his room without another word.

Seokjin watches him go, not sure what to do with the disquiet he read in Yoongi's eyes.

&&&

Yoongi wishes he could say he is surprised to find Taehyung and Hoseok lounging in his office like it's their personal home, but he's walked into this situation more times than he cares to count. He shrugs out of his suit jacket and waves a hand in greeting to them even as they ignore him. In his own office. During working hours.

"I'm not playing, hyung, give me the list," Taehyung says, creeping over to Hoseok on the leather couch, brow furrowed in seriousness.

Hoseok shrugs, not concerned. "Get it yourself, best man."

"Would you let it go, I didn't get to make my speech either."

"But you were going to. You were *going to*."

"Hyung, please," Taehyung begs, bringing his hands together and rubbing them in supplication.

Yoongi raises his brows and sets his ipad on his down, leaning his hip on the corner of the desk. "Do I want to know what's going on?"

"Your cousin hooked up with a guest at your wedding but lover boy vanished by morning," Hoseok supplies, grinning.

Yoongi smirks and crosses his arms. "Were you that bad?"

Taehyung scowls at him and sticks out his tongue.

"Aw, be nice," Hoseok says. "I'm sure Taehyung was a good lover. Lover boy probably just doesn't like Tae."

"Wow," Taehyung says, flopping back onto the couch. "I come here in good faith and all I get is bullying."

Yoongi lets out a short laugh and pushes away from his desk, coming over to ruffle Taehyung's hair. "Does this surprise you?"

"Please, I just need the guest list from the wedding. I have a name, I just need a number." Taehyung turns hopeful eyes to Yoongi, rising on his knees and clambering into Yoongi's face. "Do you have it?"

Yoongi places his index finger on Taehyung's forehead and presses down, forcing Taehyung away from his personal space. "No, I don't."

Hoseok smirks. "I have it. And I'm not giving it," he sing-songs.

"Hyung!"

Hoseok lunges forward and starts to tickle Taehyung's sides. "Say I'm the best man."

Taehyung giggles under Hoseok's assault, lips open in a wide grin. "Yoongi-hyung, help," he pleads on an exhale, barely able to pronounce the words, still laughing and squirming to avoid Hoseok's hands.

Yoongi shrugs. A knock interrupts whatever further nonsense was about to transpire. Hoseok stops tickling but maintains Taehyung's captivity.

"Come in," Hoseok says, and Yoongi scowls.

"This isn't your office, Hoseok," he says, a comment rather than a serious scolding.

"And I wasn't your best man, so we're even I suppose."

"Hyung keeps grudges for a long time," Taehyung supplies needlessly.

"Am I interrupting something?"

The three of them glance at the voice and find Seokjin with raised eyebrows staring at them in bemusement.

Hoseok releases Taehyung and glances back at Yoongi, smiling teasingly. "Oh, no, nothing important. Came to see the bae?"

Seokjin laughs. "Something like that?"

Yoongi ignores Hoseok and walks around the couch to Seokjin. "Is something up?" he asks, wondering why Seokjin showed up at his office.

"I brought you coffee," Seokjin replies, handing the cup to Yoongi and glancing back at Hoseok and Taehyung. "Sorry, I didn't know you'd be here, otherwise I would have brought one for everyone."

Taehyung grins, eyes twinkling at Yoongi. "He brought you *coffee*, hyung."

Yoongi rolls his eyes and sighs.

"Come on, Tae, let's leave the newlyweds by themselves." Hoseok pats at Taehyung's hip and they clamber off the couch and to the door. Hoseok pauses when he reaches Seokjin. "Oh, I was thinking of having a 'meet-the-friends' get together. Your friends, your brother, Yoongi's friends. Well. The two he has. How's Friday night sound?"

"Oh, I don't know if Jeongguk has plans-"

Hoseok waves his hand in dismissal. "I'll work it out."

Seokjin glances at Yoongi before looking back to Hoseok. "Sure. Sounds fun."

"Great!"

Taehyung hangs back for a second as he passes Yoongi, leaning in to say in a whisper, "Remember, this is a place of business. Not an opportunity to explore your office kink."

Seokjin chokes on a breath, face going red as he tries to swallow his laughter.

"Just go before I have to commit murder," Yoongi deadpans.

"Bye, hyungs!" Taehyung waves, closing the door behind him.

Seokjin presses his lips together, chest still hiccuping with unreleased laughter. "Are they always like that?" he asks when he composes himself.

Yoongi scowls. "Yes." He takes a sip of the coffee and closes his eyes, the caffeine a warm and welcome presence on his tongue.

"Your grandmother called," Seokjin starts.

Yoongi's eyes snap open, an instant panic shooting through his blood. If it's serious enough that Seokjin had to personally come find him during working hours, his mind conjures up several situations. "Is she okay?"

Seokjin smiles uncertainly. "She's fine. She wants to have dinner tonight with both of us at the estate." He blinks at Yoongi, eye brows furrowing. "I tried to call but you never pick up your phone."

Yoongi frowns, pulling his phone from his pocket to check. Sure enough, he missed two calls from his grandmother and one from Seokjin. "I keep it on silent."

"Oh." Seokjin slips his hands in his pockets. "So do you want to go together, or separately?"

Yoongi's frown deepens. "Where?"

Seokjin sighs and rolls his eyes to the ceiling. "Granny's. For dinner."

Yoongi's eyes flick over Seokjin. He doesn't like it. He doesn't like Seokjin calling his grandmother *Granny*, doesn't like watching them banter over dinner, doesn't like how Seokjin's edging his way so easily into Yoongi's family, like he *belongs* there.

He doesn't like how all the boundaries he thought he had are crumpling like ash and sand under Seokjin's advancing tide.

"I have work to do. I'll be staying overtime. Thanks for the coffee," he says, dismissing Seokjin and the conversation at the same time.

Seokjin purses his lips but finally nods. "I guess I'll just go alone then."

Yoongi blinks. "Without me?"

"Yeah." Seokjin makes his way to the door. "Don't stay too long. I'll see you at home later."

Yoongi doesn't reply back, watching Seokjin leave with a discomfort settling in his chest.

&&&

Jimin thinks he's a masochist. It's the only explanation of why he agreed to come out drinking with Seokjin and *Yoongi*. Someone named Hoseok had called him up, said he was doing the official "meet-the-friends" for Yoongi and Seokjin. He doesn't know how Hoseok knows he's one of Seokjin's closest friends, but it's a nice feeling. To know that others acknowledge their connection. That when Hoseok thought of Seokjin, he thought of Jimin. It's small, and it's insignificant, but it's something. Jimin is used to grabbing for somethings, anything to keep his head above the water.

He arrives late, and most of the group has already gathered in a private room. He's taken to the room by an attendant, and he slips in, eyes zeroing in on Seokjin immediately. Jimin feels his lips stretch in a grin, watching Seokjin tell joke to Jeongguk by his side, slapping his brother's chest at his own punchline.

His grin dims when he sees Yoongi tucked into Seokjin's other side, face blank and bored, but his arm casually slung over the back of Seokjin's chair, fingers trailing down to brush at Seokjin's shoulders. Jimin takes a deep breath, tries to remind himself that he's giving up on Seokjin. It doesn't stop the acid in his stomach from rising to his throat.

"Jimin!" Seokjin calls out, smiling when he spots him. Seokjin waves him in excitedly.

He forces a smile on his lips and steps forward.

"Park Jimin?"

Jimin freezes, recognizing that unmistakably deep voice. He turns wide eyes to the rest of the table and feels his knees go weak when he locks eyes with Kim Taehyung. He feels his cheeks warm immediately, remembering the last time he saw the boy.

Taehyung grins, his eyes sparkling. "If this isn't fate-"

Before he can finish his sentence, Jimin lunges forward and grabs Taehyung's arm, pulling him from his chair and tugging him out of the room, panic muddling his mind. This can't be happening. This *cannot* be happening.

Kim Taehyung is, well, a mistake. A lapse in judgment. Kim Taehyung was a one-time, make-me-forget-my-name thing. Waking up next to him the day after Seokjin's wedding, hung over and sore, Jimin only had one thought.

Regret.

He had gathered his clothes as quickly and quietly as possible and escaped before he could look back, vowing to forget the entire thing. He was never supposed to see Kim Taehyung again.

He finally stops at the end of the corridor leading to the bathrooms and lets go of Taehyung's arm.

"I've been trying to find your number. I never thought I'd meet you again like this," Taehyung says, smiling, fingers reaching out to play with Jimin's sleeve.

Jimin pulls his arm away and stares at Taehyung. "What are you doing here?"

"Hmm?" Taehyung tilts his head. "Yoongi-hyung's my cousin."

Jimin's jaw drops. "Your *cousin*?"

Taehyung nods, smiling.

"This can't be happening," Jimin mutters to himself, bringing both his hands up to cover his face. This is his worst nightmare. He doesn't want to deal with his one-night stand, and he most certainly does *not* want Seokjin knowing about it.

"I was wondering," Taehyung starts but Jimin can hardly hear him from the roar in his ears.

Jimin grabs Taehyung's wrist and looks up at him earnestly. "Listen. I would really, really appreciate it if what happened between us stays between us."

Taehyung stares at him, brow furrowing. "Of course, I'm a gentleman."

Jimin sighs in relief, sagging against the wall. He lets his fingers fall from Taehyung's wrist. "Right? It wasn't even a big deal, just a one-night stand. Not like we're going to start dating."

Taehyung frowns. "Just a one-night stand," he repeats slowly.

Jimin doesn't like the look on Taehyung's face, the crestfallen set of his mouth, the way his eyes won't look away from Jimin. It reminds him of how he looks at Seokjin. He feels a seed of guilt in the pit of his stomach and tries to remind himself that he never promised Taehyung anything. It *was* just a one-night stand.

Jimin steps away from the wall and shifts his eyes from Taehyung. "I'll. We should." He points his hand to the room. "Head back."

Taehyung stares at him, lips still tilted in a frown, but he nods slowly. "Yeah."

When he returns to the room and settles beside Jeongguk, Seokjin leans over and asks quietly, "Do you know Taehyung?"

Jimin looks away from Seokjin and shrugs, hoping his face isn't as red as it feels. "I met him at the wedding." He reaches forward for a glass of soju, throwing his head back and downing the bitter liquid in one shot.

He thinks he'll need a lot of hard liquor to make it through the night.

Yoongi should have known this was a huge mistake, but he's weak to Hoseok's suggestions. He should have just refused the meet-the-friends idea before it ended in this, he thinks.

It falls apart from the very beginning. First that very old friend from Busan shows up, and he supposes he should have expected it, but Yoongi isn't exactly happy to see him. He doesn't know why, but he doesn't like the way Jimin looks at Seokjin. It stirs a fire in his blood that he has a hard time stamping down.

Next, Taehyung decides to forgo his usual strawberry juice and reaches for an entire bottle of soju, his lips pressed together in determination.

Which of course made Hoseok think the night was for hard partying, and Hoseok with anything more than one shot of soju in his system is a disaster waiting to happen.

The absolute worst part, though, was Jeongguk slamming a shot glass in front of him and glaring. "I challenge you," Jeongguk had said. "If I win, you have to divorce hyung."

Seokjin had tried to dissuade them both, but Jeongguk was stubborn and Yoongi was petty and finally Seokjin sighed in annoyance and told them to act like children if they felt like it.

Yoongi really felt like it.

That's how they end up like this, Taehyung and Jeongguk passed out and reeking of alcohol, Seokjin rubbing his temple in irritation as he surveys the table.

"What a mess," Seokjin huffs out, turning to glare at Yoongi, as if this is his fault.

Yoongi blinks blurrily at him, the alcohol finally beginning to take an effect. He wants to tell him that at the very least, Namjoon took Hoseok home an hour ago, otherwise this would be a very noisy mess. He doesn't say anything, though, not sure if he can properly express how grateful Seokjin should be. Instead he glares at Jimin across the table and points at him.

"Why do you keep staring at me like that, kid?" he asks, wanting to vent his irritation on someone.

Jimin frowns, wavering back and forth in his seat, eyes unfocused but glaring in Yoongi's general direction. "I'm not ready to give up Seokjin-hyung yet," he slurs out slowly. "And I don't think you're ready to keep him."

Yoongi's eyes widen and his jaw clenches.

Seokjin sighs and stands on surprisingly steady feet. "Okay, I think it's time to get you both home." He turns to Yoongi. "I'll get them both back, can you take care of your cousin?"

Yoongi doesn't say anything, but glances to his left where Taehyung is passed out, face smushed against the table.

Jimin shakes his head and scrunches his face in distaste as Seokjin approaches. "I'm not ready to go."

Seokjin hums dismissively and pulls him up by his armpits. "Let's go."

Jimin sighs and slumps against Seokjin's chest as they shuffle out of the room. Yoongi's teeth grind together. He wonders if Jimin really is Seokjin's lover.

He wonders why it bothers him so much.

&&&

Seokjin is exhausted by the time he wrangles Jeongguk and Jimin into Jeongguk's apartment. Their limits might be high, but they still overdid them, drunkenly complaining as he hefts them into bed. He's not really in a mood to lend a sympathetic ear. They're both going to get a very severe scolding as soon as they sober up.

He briefly considers just staying over, but Jeongguk's bed is already crowded with both Jeongguk and Jimin, and Seokjin doesn't particularly want to sleep on the couch, so he gathers the rest of his energy and calls another cab.

He's expecting a dark and silent apartment when he gets home. He's expecting to toe off his shoes, wash his face, and fall straight into bed. He doesn't think he'll see Yoongi sitting in the living room, sitting cross-legged and arms folded over his chest, a deep frown etched on his lips.

Seokjin pauses on his way to his bedroom. "You didn't go to bed yet?"

Yoongi glances over, eyes narrowed. He takes a moment to just stare at Seokjin before glancing back to the wall, shrugging. "I couldn't sleep."

"Okay, well, I'm going to-"

"How long have you been dating Park Jimin?"

Seokjin freezes, caught off guard by Yoongi's sudden question. He sighs heavily and rubs a hand through his hair. "Jimin was drunk. We've never been like that."

Yoongi lifts a shoulder, seemingly indifferent. "You don't have to hide it, we have an agreement." He peers at Seokjin, tilting his head. "You should probably let him know this is a fake marriage."

"Whether this marriage is fake or not won't change anything between me and Jimin. It's just a little childhood crush, nothing more. He'll grow out of it."

Yoongi doesn't seem convinced. "Yeah? How long has he been 'growing out of it'?"

Seokjin clenches his jaw. He knows he has nothing to say to that. He had hoped Jimin would grow out of his feelings, had hoped he wouldn't have to have that conversation with him. He had hoped to spare Jimin's feelings, but maybe he was just being a coward. Still, he doesn't appreciate Yoongi pointing out his flaws, not when he's still slightly drunk and exhausted.

"I'll handle it," he finally says, voice clipped and annoyed.

Yoongi shrugs again, blasé. "Whatever. Not like it's any of my business."

"Then why are you making it your business?" Seokjin snaps, anger giving him a spurt of energy.

"What does it matter if Jimin loves me? What does it matter if I return his feelings or not? You don't need to know. We have an agreement."

Yoongi turns to glare at him, scoffing. "Yeah, we do, I'm surprised you can remember it."

"Excuse me?"

Yoongi uncrosses his legs and stands. "You're supposed to mind your own business, not start getting all chummy with my grandmother."

Seokjin cannot believe the pettiness, rolling his eyes, anger fuming. "Is this because I had dinner with

your grandmother?"

"Without me. It's a little weird."

"I married her grandson, Yoongi. I have some obligations to her."

"You don't!" Yoongi nearly yells, lips twisting into a deep scowl. "You won't *be* here next year, Seokjin. You won't be anywhere near her next year, so how will you take responsibility when you leave? Don't make her love you and rip it all away."

Seokjin blinks, taken aback, the anger fizzling quickly out of his chest.

Yoongi glares at him, his lips pressing into a thin line. "She's already lost her son. Don't give her a grandson just to take it away from her again."

Seokjin's face falls and he takes a shuddering breath. "I-"

"Just." Yoongi looks away and sighs, rubbing his forehead with his hand. "Can we just agree to go by the contract? I'll stay out of your business and you'll stay out of mine."

Seokjin nods numbly. "Yeah."

Yoongi doesn't look at him again, heading up the stairs and closing the door to his bedroom firmly behind him.

Seokjin sighs, slumping onto the loveseat. He frowns down at his hands, at the gleaming wedding band on his ring finger, and tries to remind himself that he didn't just lose anything. They're just going by the contract. He doesn't know why his stomach churns at the thought.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not going to apologize.

Full House

Chapter Notes

The amount of beautiful comments and messages people have been giving me, thank you so so so much. It's because of those words that I can write more and keep motivated. ;;

Please please please check out [glea's](#) twitter. She does AMAZING art and she made me another fanart for this fic [here](#). GO SHOWER HER WITH COMPLIMENTS.

Yoongi did not realize how quickly Seokjin had integrated himself into his life until suddenly it stops. After Yoongi's - admittedly slightly inebriated but still completely valid – outburst, Seokjin had done exactly as they agreed. He stayed out of Yoongi's business.

Yoongi didn't realize he was already used to the sound of the washing machine running when he came back home. He didn't realize he had just accepted the patter in the kitchen in the mornings as he brushed his teeth. He didn't know when he started to expect the humming in the reading nook in the evenings.

Ever since that night, Seokjin has withdrawn. He leaves early in the morning and returns late at night. No more surprise coffee runs to Yoongi's office, no more unexpected phone calls. The only reason Yoongi still knows they're living in the same apartment is the small evidences of breakfast in the sink when he heads to work, and the chime of the door when he returns too late in the evening.

This is why you put a stop to it, he tells himself firmly, frowning at Seokjin's closed bedroom door. Seokjin will be gone, in eleven months. He knows he shouldn't get attached. He thought he was stronger than that. His frown deepens, eyes narrowed on the thin strip of light under the door, the only indication of Seokjin's presence in the apartment.

People leave. People *leave* and it's better not to expect anything else from them.

He stuffs his hands in his hoodie pockets and backs away from Seokjin's door, heading up the stairs to his studio. He did the right thing by putting a stop to it, but the knowledge does nothing to soothe the ache in his chest.

&&&

Avoiding Yoongi isn't hard, it's just exhausting. Seokjin has started leaving early in the mornings and staying out late into the night to ensure there won't be any run-ins with his roommate. He is aware that Yoongi *probably* did not intend for "let's mind our own business" to mean "let's never see each other again", but Seokjin is petty and likes to take things to extremes.

At first he goes out with friends, and it's nice, catching up and having fun. He doesn't remember the last time he allowed himself a night out with the sole purpose to have fun. But there's only so many times he can occupy Sandeul's evenings, and soon his other friends demand him back.

"They're very possessive of me," Sandeul had said to Seokjin, a delighted grin stretched over his lips.

Seokjin opts instead to stay late at the gallery, playing more games on his computer than getting any

actual work done. Seokjin has died – again, completely unfairly, it was the glitchy internet – when his phone lights up with Jeongguk's face, indicating an incoming call from his brother.

He smiles and answers. "Yes, Jeongguk?"

"What's your password, hyung?"

Seokjin frowns at Jeongguk's question. "For what?"

Jeongguk huffs out an annoyed breath like the answer should be obvious. "For your apartment. I already tried everyone's birthday."

Seokjin blinks, panic spiking somewhere in his stomach but still muffled under the far more prevalent confusion. "You, what?"

"I already tried everyone's birthday, and the anniversaries. I even tried *that* man's birthday," he replies, and Seokjin can *hear* the sneer in his tone.

"Start over, *where* are you right now?"

Jeongguk sighs again and Seokjin would slap him if he could physically reach him. "I'm outside your apartment, standing here with my luggage like an idiot because my hyung decided he suddenly wanted to use passwords that aren't birthdays."

The panic starts to override the confusion and Seokjin stands, quickly gathering his things and reminding himself to stay calm. "I'm still missing some details, like since when and why do you have luggage?"

"What, I can't stay over at my hyung's? Is this what marriage has done to you? You said nothing would change."

Seokjin scowls. He knows Jeongguk is baiting him. He doesn't mind Jeongguk staying over, even if his brother's motivations are clearly to spy on the new couple. He missed Jeongguk over the last few weeks. The problem is that he cannot let Jeongguk into their apartment right now, when all his possessions are in the *guest bedroom* and it's obvious the happy couple is not happily sharing a room.

"Nothing changed Jeongguk," he says, grabbing his coat and keys and locking up the gallery. "My battery is running low, the code is zero-" Seokjin hangs up the phone and quickly blocks Jeongguk's number so he will not connect when he tries to call back. He finds Yoongi in his contact list and presses the connect button. He's completely certain that Jeongguk is standing in front of the door, punching in every possible four-digit code starting with 0-0-0-0. He only has eight hundred and fourteen tries before he succeeds and Seokjin needs a solution before that happens.

Of course Yoongi doesn't pick up, that I-put-my-phone-on-silent jerk. Seokjin's face scrunches up in frustration as he slips into his car. He has the urge to throw his phone when Yoongi's voicemail kicks in.

If Jeongguk gains access to the apartment before Seokjin can clear the guest room of all his things, then Jeongguk will find out Yoongi and Seokjin are keeping separate rooms. The entire marriage will unravel under Jeongguk's relentless investigation.

Seokjin scowls at his phone and types a short text to Yoongi: *I'm going to sue you for breach of contract.*

He throws his phone into the passenger's seat and exhales sharply, trying to sort through the panic to *think*. He needs to get Jeongguk away from the apartment for twenty minutes, tops. He can't ask Jimin, that would only create more questions, not to mention the fact that he has been trying to avoid the inevitable Talk he'll have to face with him.

Most of his friends are busy or out of the country at the moment, and he's not sure if Namjoon and him are on emergency-favor basis yet. He squeezes his eyes in a hard blink and an idea hits him in the clarity.

He reaches for his phone and finds a newly added contact. It rings less than once before the call connects.

"Hyungie!"

Seokjin smiles at Taehyung's enthusiastic greeting. "Taehyung, I don't have a lot of time, and a favor to ask."

Taehyung is silent for a moment before his voice drops and he says slowly, "I'm listening."

"My brother is outside my apartment right now and for reasons I'd rather not delve into, I need him to not be there for like thirty minutes. Are you able to head over and take him for dinner or something?"

Taehyung hums in consideration. "I don't know, hyung. I *just* sat down and I was going to re-watch *Weight Lifting Fairy*. I love that drama. It's my happy place."

Seokjin's eyes narrow. He knows that tone. It's the same tone Jeongguk uses when he wants something. It's the hyung-wheedling tone. "What do you want in return?" he asks.

Taehyung makes a protesting noise. "It's not like I *want*-"

Seokjin drums his fingers on his steering wheel, impatient. "I don't have time, what do you want?"

"Park Jimin's phone number."

Seokjin's fingers grip on his phone and he frowns, a protective instinct rising up in his stomach. "Why do you want Jiminie's number?" he asks, wary.

"It's nothing bad, hyung! I just. I." Taehyung sighs and takes a deep breath. "I may have messed up my first impressions with him and I really didn't mean to but I want to fix it and I promise I'm not going to bother him, I just want to try." Taehyung trails off, voice quieting by the end of the sentence.

Seokjin taps his fingers on the steering wheel, weighing his options. He presses his lips together, making a decision. "Deal. Text me when you get Jeongguk out of the building."

"Yes, hyungnim, I will!" Taehyung says cheerily, keys clinking in the background. "You can count on me."

Seokjin hums noncommittally and hangs up, sighing back against the seat. He should probably feel bad about selling Jimin out like that but he squashes the feeling down and sets his mind on the task at hand.

&&&

Seokjin clears the guest room and connected bathroom in record time, grabbing his things

haphazardly and tossing them onto Yoongi's bed and on the floor by the bed. He takes a moment to look around the room when he realizes he's never actually been in it before. It is minimalistic and clean like the rest of the apartment with a gray and navy color scheme. On the walls there is a striking absence of the photographs Yoongi took. Instead there are several small, what seems like amateur photos decorating wall opposite the bed.

Seokjin stills, letting his armful of sweaters drop to the bed as he tries to get a better look. He recognizes a picture of Namjoon and Hoseok, Hoseok's head leaning on Namjoon's shoulder in a booth, both of them smiling widely, the flash of the camera washing out the background. Seokjin smiles and steps closer, clasping his hands behind his back. There's a picture of the chairwoman and Mikyung standing on either side of Yoongi, several years younger. Yoongi's wearing a graduation cap and gown and has a forced smile on his lips.

Seokjin laughs, scanning over the photos. He freezes when he catches sight of two faces he doesn't quite recognize. The features are familiar enough, pale complexion, dark squinted eyes, a cocksure set of lips. The man is taller, his arm slung around the woman's shoulders, holding her hat in his other hand, stretched far above his head. She's scowling at him, he's smiling teasingly down at her. The picture is older, the quality significantly worse than modern photos.

"Ah," he says softly, breathing out the sound on a long exhale. "He looks like you." He frowns and leans closer to whisper, "He would probably hate that I'm even seeing this. We'll keep this a secret between us?" He smiles and taps the frame. He should probably hurry and pick up Jeongguk before Taehyung says something he really shouldn't. "We'll talk again," he promises the photo and heads out.

&&&

The pork belly restaurant is crowded and noisy, full business men and women trying to wind down after work. Seokjin finds Taehyung and Jeongguk with their heads huddled together, discussing something in earnest. He approaches and taps Taehyung's shoulder. "Hey."

Jeongguk's head shoots up and he raises an eyebrow. "Oh. You finally made it."

Seokjin makes a face. "Yeah, I finally made it." He sits opposite Jeongguk and picks at the food the boys didn't finish yet.

"It's kind of weird," Jeongguk continues, watching Seokjin carefully. "Your phone dying like that."

Seokjin shrugs, shoving a mouthful of rice past his lips.

"You have like two powerbanks and a charger for your car."

"I have one powerbank that I forgot to charge and I couldn't find my charger in the car." Seokjin stares directly at Jeongguk, daring him to question him further.

Jeongguk glares but presses his lips together, apparently dropping the topic.

Taehyung hums from beside Seokjin and pats the table. "As much as I'd love to stay in this weirdly aggressive atmosphere, I have some phone calls to make so I'm just gonna go now." He stands. "It was nice eating with you Gukkie." He holds out his fist to Jeongguk.

Jeongguk hits Taehyung's fist with his and they both make a badly imitated explosion sound. "Same, catch you around, hyung."

Seokjin gapes at them, eyes flicking between Taehyung's retreating form and Jeongguk.

"What?" Jeongguk finally asks, reaching his chopsticks for a side dish.

"Nothing. I just didn't expect you to be so close to Yoongi's cousin so quickly."

"Taehyung's cool, unlike your future ex-husband," Jeongguk says, chewing.

Seokjin lets out a startled laugh. "Did you just call Yoongi my future ex-husband?"

"There's no shame in divorce, hyung," Jeongguk says seriously, but he's staring at Seokjin with his cute eye, looking like a puppy, and Seokjin cannot help but smile.

"Is this why you were so docile at the wedding?" he asks.

Jeongguk shuffles closer, eyes brightening. He brandishes his phone and holds it out to Seokjin.

"Hyung, look. There are articles about how your marriage is obviously fake. If even strangers can see it, you have to admit it."

Seokjin frowns and takes Jeongguk's phone, scanning the article.

"It'll be okay. We can get through this together," Jeongguk continues.

Seokjin's lips quirk to the side. "Jeongguk this is a blind item gossip site. I don't even know which item is supposed to be about me and Yoongi."

"It's the third one down! A and B's short-lived romance might be mediaplay."

Seokjin fights to keep his expression serious to match Jeongguk's. "I think they're talking about actual celebrities."

"No, look!" Jeongguk huffs in annoyance and grabs his phone, scrolling down with an intent expression. "There are *comments*. Here!" He hands the phone back and Seokjin takes it reluctantly.

The comment Jeongguk wants Seokjin to read says, *"It's so obvious #3 is about that ridiculous marriage between Min Yoongi and Jeon Seokjin. Damn chaebols, making a mess of things like usual. Anyone can tell they don't even like each other. Who even marries in a month? Businesses merging with businesses and using marriage as an excuse, what bullsh*t. I feel bad for that Jeon Seokjin though, he probably didn't even want to do it."*

Seokjin narrows his eyes and purses his lips. "The username is nochu," he says, flicking his gaze up to Jeongguk.

"Did you read it? Really insightful, I thought," Jeongguk replies, trying to be nonchalant.

"Don't you use the username nochu when you play games?"

Jeongguk jerks and shifts his gaze away from Seokjin. He reaches out to grab his phone back. "No." He pockets his phone and picks at the food. "I don't know why you're so resistant to the idea of divorce, it's totally common now."

Seokjin rolls his eyes and wants to laugh. Jeongguk is pushing so hard for a divorce, he's tempted to tell him to wait a few months. "I haven't even been married a month," he says instead.

"It's called a starter marriage. Everyone's doing it. You know, get married, test it out, divorce and never see each other again."

Seokjin smiles. "Jeongguk."

"We could call a couple lawyers? Just for fun."

Seokjin finally laughs. "Divorce lawyers aren't fun, Jeonggukie."

Jeongguk smiles, a flash of teeth and bright eyes. "But you're laughing, hyung."

"Eh," Seokjin reaches out to boop Jeongguk's head. "Let's go home you brat."

&&&

Yoongi checks his phone after what feels like hours in a meeting and finds one missed call and a text from Seokjin. His eyes shift over his phone, and his heart does a weird little bump-bump. After a week of silent treatment from Seokjin, Yoongi's not *excited* about being contacted, but he can admit he's not exactly indifferent. He just doesn't like to be ignored, he reasons, unlocking his phone to read the text message.

I'm going to sue you for breach of contract, it reads, and Yoongi doesn't even think to stop the amused laughter that escapes his lips. He doesn't know what he did to rile Seokjin up, but he's looking forward to finding out.

He pockets his phone and reaches for his coat, hurriedly telling his assistant that he's done for the night. He ignores his assistant's bemused expression and heads down to his car, humming absentmindedly on the way. He realizes halfway home that he could probably have just called Seokjin back, but somehow his thought process went right to finding Seokjin, seeing Seokjin.

When he arrives back home, he is greeted by loud yelling. He quickly toes off his shoes and rushes to the source of the sound. In the living room, he finds Seokjin and his younger brother playing a video game on the television. Seokjin pushes at Jeongguk, exclaiming something about *respecting your hyung*, cheeks dusted pink with excitement. Jeongguk is undeterred, eyes focused with frightening attention on the screen, his fingers expertly moving over his controller.

"There are no hyungs in Mario Cart," he says to Seokjin, his lips lifting in amusement as Seokjin's character spins and veers off course.

Seokjin yells, switching his attention back to the screen but it's too late, Jeongguk's character crosses the finish line.

"Yes!" Jeongguk throws his controller down and stands, raising his hands in victory.

Seokjin glowers and hits Jeongguk's thigh. "One more round."

"You're on." Jeongguk plops back down.

Yoongi clears his throat.

Jeongguk and Seokjin finally turn to look at him. Jeongguk's face falls and his brows furrow into a glare, but Yoongi barely glances at him, focusing in on Seokjin.

Seokjin meets his gaze and smiles quickly, a wide spread of lips and teeth that doesn't match the glint in his eyes. "Hey baby, welcome home."

Jeongguk gags. "'Baby, hyung? Really?'"

Yoongi chokes back a cough at the sudden nickname but Seokjin's eyes dart between him and Jeongguk and Yoongi gets he's supposed to *act*. Somehow he manages to smile and says, "I didn't

know we were expecting company."

Seokjin's shoulders relax faintly and he says, "Jeongguk decided he wanted to pay us a visit. He'll be staying for a few days."

Yoongi's eyebrows raise. "Days? Plural?"

Jeongguk smirks and throws his arm over the back of the couch, tilting his head at Yoongi. "Got a problem with it? *Hyung?*"

Yoongi's lips thin to a sour line, eyes narrowed on the brat. He has no desire to tolerate that kid's disrespect for longer than it takes to eat a meal but he knows he cannot just kick him out unless he wants a fight on his hands. Jeongguk is tenacious, he has to admit that. The boy has no limit to how far he'll push to get what he wants.

"I put him in the guest room since it was empty," Seokjin says, and there's an undertone in his voice that Yoongi doesn't understand, like he's trying to tell him something between the words.

Yoongi ignores him and scowls at Jeongguk. "Any idea how many days, plural, you'll be staying?"

Jeongguk shrugs, smirk widening. "Ideally until the divorce papers are signed-"

Seokjin smacks his shoulder but Jeongguk hardly flinches, either from high pain tolerance or sheer force of will. Jeongguk pouts at Seokjin. "Ah, hyung, what?"

Yoongi sighs and rolls his suddenly aching shoulders. "Enjoy your stay, I guess," he mutters and heads up the stairs to his room and some peace. He can practically feel Seokjin's eyes follow him up the stairs but he's too bewildered at the home invasion to think too much on it. Until he opens his bedroom door - *his* bedroom door, as in Min Yoongi's room, as in the room Min Yoongi and Min Yoongi alone occupies.

Scattered by the side of the bed sits open luggage bags full of lotions and skin products, piles of books, and he even thinks he sees some Mario figurines. Yoongi's bed is covered in Seokjin's clothes, oversized sweaters, frayed jeans, and that stupid black silk shirt with that ridiculous useless tie.

He blinks at the *stuff*, the littering of Seokjin all around his room, a frown etching onto his lips. He lets his bag drop from his shoulder to the floor and spins on his heel, heading out to the landing. He leans down over the railing overlooking the living room and calls out in a saccharine sweet voice, "Jinnie, baby."

Both Seokjin and Jeongguk look up at him, Jeongguk's eyes narrowed and a scowl on his face. Seokjin raises an eyebrow and says in an overly sweet voice, "Yes baby?"

Yoongi fights the urge to glower and twists his lips into a forced smile. "Can I have a word? Privately?"

Seokjin smiles back. "Of course." He heaves off Jeongguk, managing to disturb him on the couch, laughing at his younger brother's disgruntled *aw, hyung*, and heads up the stairs, two at a time.

Yoongi reaches for Seokjin's arm without much thought and shuffles him into the room, shutting the door behind them firmly before he lets his smile drop into a glower. "What is this?" he asks, gesturing to the room.

Seokjin glances over. "I had to clear out the guest room in a hurry, I'll clean it up soon."

Yoongi rolls his eyes. "Why is your stuff in my room to begin with? I made it very clear from the very first day you moved in that this room is off limits."

Seokjin's expression hardens and he says in a clipped tone, "And I made it clear from the moment we signed the contract that Jeongguk will never find out about this arrangement. What kind of happy, newlywed couple sleeps in separate bedrooms?"

Yoongi opens his mouth to reply but he knows he has nothing to counter with. Seokjin is right. They can't exactly throw Jeongguk out, just like he would not be able to throw Taehyung out. Jeongguk expects them to share a bedroom, like any reasonable couple would. He sighs and lifts a hand to rub his temple. "I don't like to share my space."

"I'm well aware. I'll be mindful." Seokjin's gaze softens. "It'll be a few days and then we can go back to ignoring each other, okay?"

Yoongi frowns. That's not what he meant, he doesn't really want to go back to ignoring Seokjin. More importantly, he doesn't want to go back to Seokjin ignoring him. He doesn't have the words to explain it to himself, let alone Seokjin. He sighs and looks away, back to the evidence of Seokjin scattered around the room. "Yeah. Sure. Just a few days."

&&&

Yoongi locks himself in his studio and tries to ignore the bickering and yelling and laughing coming from the living room. It's strangely different from the times he lets Taehyung stay over. Taehyung is loud, but he's loud on his own. Random noises and bad rapping and bizarre thumps in the night followed by his *"I'm okay just don't come in for a bit!"*. With Seokjin, things are quiet, peaceful. He never thought adding Jeongguk would create the havoc. It's boisterous and busy and he's trying to find it in himself to be annoyed. He wants to be irritated so he has a reason to push Jeongguk out, but the din is a comforting sort of white noise, warm and enveloping.

Sometime around midnight the noises quiet to a murmur. He thinks he hears Seokjin tell Jeongguk not to stay up too late before there is the sound of footsteps on the spiralling staircase. Yoongi's eyes flick to his closed door and his breath holds in his lungs involuntarily. It's a stupid reaction. Seokjin is going to bed, of course he's going to come up here. It's just that he's not used to anyone invading his personal space. He's just uncomfortable.

He clears his throat and looks back to his computer screen. He tries to concentrate on the photograph he's working on but his ears still try to catch the sound of Seokjin opening the bedroom door. It doesn't come.

He blinks at his screen, tilting his head just slightly closer to the door, listening intently. He closes his eyes to concentrate better.

A knock on the studio door makes him jump in surprise and he bangs his knee on the underside of his desk. He curses and rubs his knee.

"Yeah?" he calls out, scowling at his knee.

The door opens and Seokjin's face appears slowly, his fingers wrapped around the edge of the door. "Hey," he says softly. He glances behind him for a second. "Can I come in?"

Yoongi nods and gestures him in.

Seokjin smiles and slips in, closing the door quietly behind him. He takes a moment to look around the room, eyes roaming over the space and Yoongi shifts uncomfortably, wondering why he's

suddenly so self-conscious. Seokjin finally settles back on Yoongi and smiles again. "Sorry, about Jeongguk. He still has classes so he shouldn't be in your way too much."

Yoongi shrugs. "It's fine. Part of the deal, right?"

"Yeah." Seokjin nods, looking awkwardly around the room again.

Yoongi watches him for a moment before saying, "Is there something else?"

"Hmm?" Seokjin looks back at Yoongi, a slight pink dusting his cheeks. "Just. Wondering when you're heading to bed. I'm easily disturbed when there's jostling so if it's anytime soon then I'll just wait."

Yoongi's mouth falls open slightly, his eyes widening. He takes a moment to try to find words, eyes blinking at Seokjin's calm face, like he didn't just say the most ridiculous thing in the world. "I'm sleeping here," he finally manages to say.

Seokjin balks. "What?"

Yoongi lifts a hand to gesture to the leather couch at the side of the room. "I can crash here, you take the bed."

Seokjin sighs, heavy and frustrated, a hand coming up to pinch the bridge of his nose. "You're absolutely hopeless."

Yoongi straightens, affronted. He opens his mouth to retort but Seokjin approaches him with three quick steps, hands pulling the chair he's sitting in away from the desk.

"My brother is downstairs right now watching with his cute, all-seeing eyes, waiting to catch us in a lie. We're sleeping in the same bed." He bumps the chair, trying to shake Yoongi out of it.

Yoongi gapes, fingers clutching to the armrests of the chair. "I don't see why that's necessary--"

"I'm going to sue you for breach of contract and take the entire Min empire down and Granny is going to kill you for lying to her," Seokjin starts, mouth running quicker than Yoongi has ever heard him, annoyance and anger coloring his tone. "For what? Because you're immature and can't even share a bed for one night. I'm not going to even touch you, it's a bed. I've shared beds with dozens of people in my life."

Yoongi's eyes narrow and he turns sharply to glare at Seokjin. "What kind of dozens?"

Seokjin rolls his eyes. "Up." He shakes the chair.

Yoongi stands, grumbling, "I haven't shared a bed in years."

Seokjin scoffs, rolling the chair back into place and placing his hands on Yoongi's shoulders, nudging him to the door. "I find that hard to believe."

Yoongi sighs but doesn't try to get out of Seokjin's hold, warm hands firm on Yoongi's shoulders.

"What about your boyfriends?" Seokjin asks.

Yoongi almost shrugs but somehow he doesn't want to displace Seokjin's hands just yet. He settles for tilting his head and pursing his lips and reaches for the doorknob, swinging the door open. "Never let them stay the night."

"You're joking."

"Hmm." Yoongi peeks over the railing at Jeongguk and huffs out a laugh when he sees him watching them. "Goodnight Gukkie," he says, waving, a smirk tipping his lips up at Jeongguk's disgusted scowl.

Seokjin slaps him on the shoulder. "Don't tease him."

"Ow!" Yoongi turns to glare at Seokjin. "Do you know how hard you slap?"

Seokjin raises an eyebrow and lowers his hand to slap at Yoongi's ass. "Keep moving."

"I really didn't want to see that," Jeongguk yells up at them.

"Go to bed, Gukkie," Seokjin replies back, finally getting Yoongi into the room and closing the door.

Yoongi glances around the room. "You cleaned up quickly," he notes, the bed clear and Seokjin's mess of *stuff* neatly arranged in a corner of the room.

Seokjin doesn't answer, walking past Yoongi to the bed. He reaches to throw back the cover but pauses, his fingers hovering over the comforter. He blinks and glances at Yoongi. "Do you sleep on the left or right side?"

Yoongi stares at Seokjin, then glances at the sofa he has never used at the other side of the room. "I'll take that couch."

"I don't think you're fully grasping my brother's tenacity. He will, at one point, 'accidentally' walk in here."

Yoongi rolls his eyes. "We'll lock the door."

"He'll 'accidentally' pick the lock."

"What kind of criminal did you raise your brother to be?"

"Just choose a side, Yoongi," Seokjin nearly yells, exasperated.

Yoongi glares at Seokjin, unappreciative of the attitude. "I don't know, I usually sleep in the middle."

Seokjin frowns, turning to the bed. He throws the comforter back and slips into the left side. "You can take the right side." He settles back against the pillows, hands patting at the fluffed-up duvet.

Yoongi stands awkwardly, staring at him. It's weird. It's weird to see Seokjin in his bed, smooth cheeks dusted pink and full lips pursed, hands arranging the comforter like it belongs to him. Like he belongs there. In Yoongi's *bed*.

"Are you sure we have to share a bed?" he asks again, mouth going dry.

Seokjin nods. "Yes." He looks at Yoongi, sighing. "I'm not going to eat you."

"Why would you even say that?"

"Just get in bed, Yoongi."

Yoongi scowls. "I'm going to wash up first."

Seokjin shrugs and slips down further into the covers. "Okay."

Yoongi disappears into the bathroom and tries not to think too much about the man in his bed. It's not a big deal, just like Seokjin said. He doesn't even roll around much in his sleep, they won't touch. It's only for a few nights. It's nothing. It's a consequence of their contract.

When he gets back to the bedroom, Seokjin has turned off the lights and has disappeared into a lump buried somewhere under the covers. Yoongi can see a tuft of soft hair peeking out from the comforter, the only evidence that the lump is Seokjin. Yoongi frowns and steps next to the right side of the bed, hands hovering over the sheets.

It doesn't mean anything. It's not significant. It's a bed, the one he's slept in for years, with one extra occupant. They won't even interact.

He shakes his head and slips into the cool sheets, tucking the covers around his chest. He stares at the ceiling and pretends his heart isn't racing.

He turns his head to look at the tuft of hair again, his fingers clenching into fists as he represses the unexpected urge to reach out.

&&&

Jimin does not quite know whether he's been dreading or hoping for Seokjin's next call. After his – stupid, stupid, stupid – drunken lament, he hasn't heard from Seokjin. All at once it's a relief mixed with underlying and building dread. He has to fight down a wave of nausea every time he checks his phone. His fingers reach for his phone first thing every morning, heart choking in his throat when he sees the notification light blinking at him.

He wishes Seokjin would just call him and get it over with. Scold him, reject him, let him go, let him breathe. Jimin doesn't remember what it's like anymore, to escape from the chains of hopeless love. Still, he holds on tight, thinks maybe. Maybe Seokjin realizes his feelings. Maybe. Still, he holds on tight to hopeless love because the alternative is too terrifying.

Loneliness is a mass of dark shadows, looming and taunting, childhood monsters he never grew out of. He will continue to cling onto the first spark of light Seokjin gave him, terrified to let it blow out and plunge him back into darkness.

He fishes his phone out of his bag after dance practice, stuttering to a halt in the hallway when he sees the blinking notification light. He blows out a shuddering breath and holds the phone to his chest, counting in his head. It's fine. Maybe it's a classmate, or Jeongguk. Maybe it's Seokjin and he never wants to see him again. Maybe it's Seokjin and he wants to leave Min Yoongi.

Stupid, Jimin thinks. His mind is so stupid.

He shakes his head and unlocks his phone to find one missed call from Jeongguk and four texts from an unknown number. He frowns, dismissing the missed call and opening his texts. His brow lifts in surprise when he reads them.

Hey, it's Kim Taehyung.

Sorry to contact you out of the blue. I got your number from Seokjin-hyung.

I think we may have gotten off on the wrong foot. Or I guess had a misunderstanding? I'd really like to meet you and talk, if that's okay. I don't have any other motives, I really just want to talk. I can meet you at your university somewhere, or a cafe.

Please.

Jimin stares at his phone, thumb running along the side. He should say no. He made it clear he didn't want to see Taehyung again. He doesn't. He knows better than to mess with a one-night stand after the fact.

Okay, he texts back, because Taehyung said please. He texts yes because part of him is curious what Taehyung has to say.

He texts yes because he's stupid.

&&&

Jimin gets to the cafe on time, peeling down his scarf from his nose as he steps into the warm air. He heads to the order line and tugs his phone out of his pocket. He notices a new message from Taehyung.

I'm here.

Want me to order you something?

I ordered, I'm in the back corner.

Jimin's head pops up and he steps back from the line, bowing in apology to the person behind him. He scans the space and finally spots Taehyung, bundled in a puffy black coat and a hot pink beanie. Jimin blinks, a small smile gracing his lips at the bright pop of color.

Taehyung spots him and stands, waving wildly with both arms.

Jimin flushes in embarrassment as nearly the entire cafe turns to look at them. He rushes over and slides into the seat opposite Taehyung. "I'm here, you can sit down," he says quickly.

Taehyung smiles and plops down, leaning his elbows on the table. "Hi."

Jimin glances away, self-conscious. "Hey."

"I bought you a coffee," Taehyung says, sliding a drink forward to Jimin. "I don't know what you like but I thought you'd probably like something sweet?"

Jimin reaches for the cup, wrapping his fingers around it. He lets the warmth penetrate his skin and leans forward to breathe in the warm steam. He smiles. "Yeah, I like sweet things."

Taehyung beams at him and Jimin feels an uncomfortable disturbance in his stomach. He straightens in his chair. "You wanted to talk?" he says, keeping his voice level.

Taehyung stares at him, eyes large and wide. Jimin wonders how much he can see with those eyes, how many layers down into Jimin's heart Taehyung can steal into. Taehyung's brow furrows and he says, "I like you. *Like* like you."

Jimin chokes on a cough, his hand coming up to cover his mouth. He bends over, coughing to catch his breath, a flush working up his cheeks. There were many things he expected, but a confession was not one of them.

"I think we had a slight misunderstanding at hyung's wedding," Taehyung continues, completely unbothered that he just confessed. "I meant that night to be the start of something, not the end."

Jimin regains his composure and straightens again, watching Taehyung. He opens his mouth. "I'm sorry-"

Taehyung closes his eyes and shakes his head. "No, it's totally fine. You didn't want something more. That's on me."

Jimin frowns down at his drink. "I'm not....You don't want to like me, you just don't know it yet."

Taehyung shrugs. "That's not really something someone can just decide. I know my own feelings. I like you."

Jimin's brow furrows but Taehyung continues.

"I get that you don't feel the same. I'm okay with that. I just." He drums his fingers on the table and quirks his lips. "I don't want it to end just yet. If that's okay."

Jimin's mouth opens and he says slowly, "I'm not looking for a relationship-"

"Friends! We can be friends, right? No pressure for anything else," Taehyung says hopefully, eyes lighting with keenness. "We can get to know each other a bit better. See where it takes us. Maybe you start to like me too, maybe you don't."

Jimin remains silent, trying to process his response.

"It doesn't have to be anything more than friends," Taehyung says, shoulders dropping slightly under Jimin's stare.

Jimin should say no. Taehyung has feelings for him, feelings he never intends to reciprocate. It isn't fair to Taehyung. He should make a clean break, thank him for his sincerity but decline the offer.

Jimin should, but he doesn't. Because Taehyung is offering him a flicker of light in the darkness of loneliness. It's not quite a spark, and it's dim and wavering, but Jimin is greedy and desperate. He absorbs all the light around him, hoarding it, burying it deep into his chest in hopes that it will shine through one day.

He tightens his fingers around his coffee cup, swallows the burnt sugar sweetness in a deep breath, and nods. "Okay, friends," he says, ignoring the thump of guilt in his heart as Taehyung beams at him in delight.

I'm so stupid, he thinks again.

&&&

Living with Jeongguk in the apartment turns out to be strangely easy and unexpectedly comfortable. Seokjin starts coming back at his usual times again, and the space is always full of the sounds of living – dishes clattering in the kitchen, humming in the reading room, banter in the living room. Yoongi finds himself coming back earlier from the office, sometimes even bringing the work he didn't finish just so he can make it in time for dinner. The dinner that Seokjin makes is a forgotten taste he hasn't had since he left his aunt's house in Daegu, and it's oddly addicting.

Yoongi even starts to enjoy the bickering he inevitably falls into with Jeongguk, like sharpening his knife-like wit against a stubborn rock.

Yoongi doesn't really mind Jeongguk staying over. He's even completely, one-hundred-percent fine with sharing a bed with Seokjin at night. Seokjin is quiet and Yoongi doesn't move around much, it

hardly feels different at all. Except for the way Yoongi's heart stops – waits, holds, recovers – every time he slips into the cool sheets. Except for the lullaby-like sound of Seokjin's soft breathing at half-past two in the morning. Except for the bundle of warmth an arm's length away that he has to remind himself is not his to touch.

Yoongi is not affected though. He's *fine*.

Until one morning, eight days - *eight days* - after Jeongguk decided to move in with them, and Yoongi is jostled awake by a strong arm around his waist, manhandling him so that he's curled into a solid and immovable chest. Yoongi blinks blurrily, trying to sort through the fog of sleep still pulling at his mind.

"Wha-" he starts, voice croaking from lack of use. His hands find purchase on the arm but Seokjin's fingers find their way into his hair and Yoongi stops moving, a shiver working up his spine.

"It's Jeongguk, just give it two minutes," Seokjin whispers, voice thick and deep with sleep.

Yoongi furrows his brow, but now that he listens, he can hear the lock on their knob click and the door swing open.

"Ah-ha! Oh." Jeongguk sounds disappointed, a sigh heaving at the end of his *oh*.

Seokjin leans up on his elbows and says, "What the hell are you doing?"

"I thought I heard a burglar."

"You thought you heard a burglar," Seokjin repeats, voice clearing slightly with use.

"Yeah."

"At four in the morning. In the bedroom where both Yoongi and I are sleeping."

"I'm getting the impression that you think I'm making things up."

Seokjin sighs and falls back into bed, throwing up arm over his eyes. "Of course, no, it's perfectly reasonable to barge into a locked bedroom at four in the morning."

Yoongi heaves himself up, opening one eye to blink at Jeongguk's blurry form, a frown dragging his lips down. "This has all been really enlightening but you need to shut up or die, I don't care which one you pick."

"Hyung, he's being mean again," Jeongguk pouts, but Seokjin just weakly waves his hand in Jeongguk's general direction.

Yoongi takes that as a sign to sleep again and he lets his head drop down, pillowing on Seokjin's shoulders. He's too tired to move and honestly, Seokjin's shoulders are hard to miss so the man can't blame him for utilizing them.

Jeongguk mutters something under his breath but the door clicks closed and Yoongi can feel Seokjin relax, the rigid form of his shoulders melting into something softer and warmer.

"I told you he'd pick the lock," Seokjin says quietly.

Yoongi wants to be astounded. He desperately wants to be stunned at the lengths Jeongguk will go to prove his point, but he's not. When he thinks about it, if it were Taehyung, he would have picked the lock within three days. Jeongguk showed great restraint by waiting over a week.

He huffs out a laugh and says against Seokjin's shoulder, "If it were Granny, she would have done it on the first night."

Seokjin's chest shakes with silent laughter. "Somehow I think she'd blockade the door and keep us in here."

Yoongi groans. "You're right."

Seokjin's fingers find their way back to Yoongi's hair. "Go back to sleep, Yoongi," he says, words muffled with a yawn.

Yoongi lets his eyes flutter shut again, drifting back to sleep while Seokjin's fingers card through his hair.

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He doesn't know how this happened.

Logically, Seokjin knows how this all transpired, but somehow he still can't wrap his head around it. He had to stay one day - *one day* - at work and the first thing Yoongi told him when he came home was they had to go on a date. Because apparently Jeongguk insinuated that Yoongi was a bad husband and did nothing with Seokjin.

"It wasn't insinuation," Yoongi said, glaring at the ceiling as he snuggled into his pillow. "You should teach him some manners."

"How did the two of you even end up at a lamb skewer restaurant?" Seokjin asked, still not quite understanding, staring at Yoongi's form beside him.

"We're going to the Han River this Sunday. All three of us. And you and me are going to be sickeningly in love. It's a matter of pride. Goodnight."

That's how Seokjin ends up walking in Hangang Park, sandwiched between Jeongguk and Yoongi, absolutely freezing cold. Seokjin raises his shoulders as a cold snap of wind wheezes past, shivering for a moment. He wonders why he was even necessary for this trip. Yoongi isn't paying attention to him, too caught up in his camera and capturing shots of the river. Jeongguk keeps trailing off to look at whatever peaks his curiosity.

Jeongguk pats Seokjin's back and says distractedly to him, "Hyung, I'll be right back." He jogs off without looking back at Seokjin.

Seokjin narrows his eyes and watches as Jeongguk runs right to a large golden retriever, bowing politely to the owner, presumably asking if he can play with him for a moment. Seokjin shakes his head. A puppy playing with a puppy.

He turns back to look at Yoongi, trailing a few steps in front of him. Yoongi has his camera trained on something in the park. He makes a face and jogs into the camera line, making a V shape with his fingers.

"Take a picture of me," he says, smiling. "I'll even pose." He changes his pose, pulling his turtleneck slightly over his chin and arching a brow.

Yoongi lowers his camera and scowls.

Seokjin sighs and straightens. "I thought you and I were supposed to pretend to be 'sickeningly in

love'," he says, making a face.

Yoongi glances at Seokjin and then at Jeongguk in the distance before settling back on Seokjin. "Your brother isn't even paying attention."

"I'm bored," he whines, lips turning down into a pout.

Yoongi rolls his eyes and lifts his camera again, pointing it away from Seokjin.

"You should at least talk to me," Seokjin calls out as Yoongi steps away again.

"So talk," Yoongi replies, not looking at him.

Seokjin huffs, craning his neck to stare up at the sky, filtered through autumn leaves. He supposes he understands why Yoongi is enthralled with the landscape. It's like splashes of paint, orange and red and the bright blue of the sky. He smiles, a forgotten joke surfacing in his mind.

"Hey Yoongi," he says, still staring at the leaves above him. "Yoongi, why is Humpty Dumpty's favorite season autumn?"

Yoongi is silent for a moment and Seokjin bites his lip as the punchline floats in his head. Finally he hears Yoongi say, "Is this some kind of lame joke?"

"Because," Seokjin continues, ignoring Yoongi's response, laughter making it hard to speak clearly. "Because Humpty Dumpty had a great fall." He lets the giggles overtake him, shoulders shaking, mouth open wide, eyes crinkled up. He slaps his own thigh, and shakes his head.

When he finally regains his composure, he finds Yoongi staring at him, camera lowered to his chest, deep brown eyes focused on him. Seokjin swears he can see amber flecks reflected by the sun in Yoongi's eyes as they focus on him. He freezes, blinking. He has a strange feeling that Yoongi is looking *into* him, past the defences he has raised for years.

He pastes a neutral smile on his lips and blinks to clear his expression. "Yoongichi?"

Yoongi doesn't react, fingers lax by his side, eyes flickering with unknown words.

Seokjin shifts and opens his mouth to press further but Jeongguk takes that moment to run up, hooking his arm around Seokjin's neck.

"Hyung, let's get sweet potatoes. I saw a stall just up ahead."

Seokjin breaks eye contact with Yoongi and smiles at Jeongguk. "Should we?"

"This way," Jeongguk says, sliding his arm from Seokjin's neck and jogging ahead. "Your future ex-husband can buy!"

Yoongi sighs and falls into step beside Seokjin.

"If I hear you say the word 'brat'-" Seokjin starts.

"I didn't say anything!"

"You were thinking it."

Yoongi shrugs.

Seokjin shakes his head. "I can't even imagine how you two survived an entire lamb skewer dinner together."

"He's a lot cuter when his mouth is full of food."

Seokjin grins. "It's a family trait."

Yoongi laughs and glances away.

Seokjin thinks they'll settle back into the silence that seems to define their non-relationship until he feels a tug on his hand. He glances down to see Yoongi slips his hand into Seokjin's, entwining their fingers. He flicks his eyes up to Yoongi in question.

Yoongi isn't looking at him, instead focused on the river. "My hands are cold," he mutters, shrugging.

Seokjin makes a noise in acknowledgement and stares down at their fingers. It feels nice. Their hands fit together, Yoongi's surprisingly large than his, enveloping his, thumb grazing over the back of his hand.

A shiver works down his spine, but this time he knows it has nothing to do with the cold wind. It's because he thinks he might want to hold on to Yoongi's hand for a while yet.

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"Yoongi, it's time to get up."

Yoongi scrunches his eyes tighter and tries to make a weak noise of protest that fades before it even pushes past his throat. He shifts, chasing the warmth that rapidly escapes from under the comforter as Seokjin throws the duvet back and stumble out of bed.

Yoongi ignores him, fingers grabbing for the blankets and resituating himself in a nest of warmth and sleep and not moving. He vaguely hears Seokjin staggering to the bathroom, the sound of running water muffled through the door acting like white noise and lulling him back into the sweet seduction of sleep.

He doesn't know how much longer he was unconscious, but he's jostled awake again by Seokjin's hand hitting the general area of Yoongi's ass under the fluff of the duvet.

"Yah, up," Seokjin says, voice clear and awake. Yoongi groans and cracks his eyes open, frowning blurrily at Seokjin. "I'm going to make breakfast," Seokjin says, not even giving Yoongi a chance to properly glare at him before leaving the room.

Yoongi sighs and pushes his face into the pillows for a moment, wishing he could lay there all day, before he finds the motivation to stumble up and out and into the bathroom to wash up. He's halfway through brushing his teeth, staring blankly in the mirror, when it occurs to him that he hasn't used his alarm clock in over a week. Ever since Seokjin started sharing his bed, he's been woken up with a jostle or poke or – more common in the last few days – a solid whack to his duvet-covered ass.

He stops brushing his teeth, lets the toothbrush hang there, limp and awkward, and stares at himself.

This is...okay, he thinks. It's not a bad thing. He doesn't mind sharing an apartment with Seokjin. Doesn't mind coming home early to eat dinner together, doesn't mind holding hands, doesn't mind brisk afternoons on the Han River trying to capture accurately the way Seokjin's face lights up when he laughs.

Yoongi frowns, the toothbrush nearly tumbling out of his mouth. He reaches up to catch it and resumes brushing. He doesn't mind Seokjin. It's a good thing. It means the next eleven months will go by pleasantly.

It's a good thing, he tries to tell himself, ignoring the way his stomach flutters and his blood rushes through his fingers.

He leans forward to spit out the toothpaste and scrubs his face more aggressively than necessary. His fringe gets caught in the spray, the strands half-wet and clumping against his forehead. He sighs, fingers trying to brushing them aside. He really should just not think this early in the morning.

He shuffles out, making his way down the stairs by habit. The subtle sounds of Seokjin cooking and the fragrant smell of food draws Yoongi to the kitchen.

"What are you making?" Yoongi asks, sliding against the counter and leaning over Seokjin's elbow to peer at the stove.

"Soup," Seokjin replies, not looking away from the pot.

Yoongi rolls his eyes, an action largely unappreciated by Seokjin who is still not looking at him. "I can see that. What kind of soup?"

Seokjin doesn't respond, just dips a spoon into the pot and gathers some of the broth. He finally turns to face Yoongi and holds out the spoon. "Ah," he says, opening his mouth in demonstration.

It's cute, Yoongi thinks involuntarily. It's cute, with Seokjin's eyes still red from sleep, with Seokjin's lips formed into an open "o" shape, with the smell of Seokjin's aftershave drifting between them – a dim type of scent, understated and comfortable.

"Ah," Seokjin repeats again, more forcefully, smiling when Yoongi's mouth drops open wide enough for Seokjin to feed him the broth.

Yoongi swallows around the spoon, drinking down the broth. It needs salt, he thinks vaguely, eyes still firmly on Seokjin.

"So? How is it?" Seokjin asks, eyes lighting in anticipation.

Yoongi licks his lips, tasting the residual broth on them, eyes scanning Seokjin. He was wrong. It's not that he doesn't mind Seokjin staying in the same bed, waking him up, cooking breakfast. It's not that he doesn't mind Seokjin. It's more than "doesn't mind", something much more that he's too afraid to name, but the force of it still works down his spine, still makes his heart stutter in his chest.

"It needs salt," he hears himself say, spacing out, too focused on the rising blush on Seokjin's neck to properly form his thoughts.

Seokjin pouts, full lips pursed.

He wants to kiss Seokjin. He wants to feel those lips against his again, wants to see if they're as soft as he remembers. He wants to pull Seokjin in again, wants to mark his neck, feel his soft locks run through his fingers. He wants to kiss him and he has absolutely no excuse. They aren't out in public, there isn't a camera trained on them, Jeongguk isn't even up yet. It's just Yoongi and Seokjin, alone in their kitchen, soup bubbling on the stove and Yoongi wants to kiss him.

He probably shouldn't. There's probably a hundred reasons not to, but Yoongi just woke up and his fringe is still wet from washing his face. His best decisions are made without thought anyway.

"It's healthy," Seokjin is saying, but Yoongi steps into his space until they're chest-to-chest and Seokjin trails off.

Yoongi's eyes scan Seokjin's face, watches his eyes widen at their proximity, watches that faint flush work its way up Seokjin's long neck, watches the way Seokjin's lips part, his tongue peeking out to wet them.

Without another thought, Yoongi lifts himself up on his toes and presses his lips to Seokjin's, letting his eyes shut. Seokjin makes a surprised noise, muffled between their closed lips. Yoongi's hands curl loosely into Seokjin's t-shirt as he pushes up just slightly more. Seokjin's lips are soft and warm, just like he remembered. Yoongi swipes his tongue across them, tasting. They even still have the same sharp taste of mint like they did at the engagement part. Yoongi wonders vaguely if it's toothpaste or if it's a taste inherently *Seokjin*.

Yoongi thinks Seokjin will pull back. He's already overstepped his boundaries. He lets his fists uncurl from Seokjin's t-shirt and drops his heels back flat on the floor.

He doesn't expect Seokjin to follow, to bend with him, hands reaching to grip at Yoongi's forearms. He doesn't expect Seokjin's lips to part and an exhale to fan over his mouth.

Yoongi trails his hands down, gripping at the waistband of Seokjin's sweatpants, stepping forward and pushing him back against the stove. He slots his lips with Seokjin's, opening his mouth and tentatively letting his tongue swipe past Seokjin's lips. Seokjin makes a noise, abrupt and aborted but Yoongi thinks it might have been the beginnings of a moan. Yoongi wants to hear it again, wants to hear it in its entirety, long and drawn-out.

Yoongi slides his tongue further into Seokjin's mouth, tasting the mint, his thoughts blurring and melting until it comes back to that one word again. *More. More, more, more.*

He digs his fingers into Seokjin's waist, trying to step further into his space. He has Seokjin pushed flush against the stove, their legs entangling as Yoongi shifts.

Seokjin's hands travel from Yoongi's forearms to his biceps to his shoulders. Warm fingers spread, digging under the collar of Yoongi's hoodie to press into the skin at the top of his spine. Yoongi makes a soft noise, escaping from his throat and rumbling between their lips. Seokjin bends further over Yoongi, his thumbs rub against the bottom of his neck, pulling him impossibly closer.

"More," Yoongi gasps, pulling back to readjust against Seokjin's mouth, chasing that addictive mint taste. He bends Seokjin, fingers slipping past his t-shirt and grazing against hot skin.

One of Seokjin's hands leaves Yoongi's neck, reaching back to steady himself.

Yoongi is so caught up in Seokjin, his taste, his heat, the labored sound of his breath, that he hardly registers the loud clattering sound.

Seokjin pulls back, sucking in a sharp breath, turning to look behind him at the stove. Yoongi's hands follow the movement, firm on Seokjin's stomach under his t-shirt. He presses his face into Seokjin's back and exhales, labored and fast, his heart thumping hard in his chest.

"Shit," Seokjin mutters just as the smoke detector goes off, shrill, piercing alarms penetrating Yoongi's muddled mind.

Yoongi jerks away, throwing his hands to his sides and slumping against the breakfast bar. He blinks and Seokjin quickly turns off the element, grabbing a dishtowel and clearing the smoke.

"What's wrong, what's going on?" Jeongguk nearly yells, skidding to a stop at the kitchen. His hair is a mess, matted and wild.

"Nothing!" Seokjin says quickly, turning to look at Jeongguk. "Some soup just boiled over, no big deal."

"Why's your face so red? Did you burn yourself?" Jeongguk demands, stepping closer to peer at his brother.

Seokjin's hands come up to feel his cheeks. "I'm fine," he says, pointedly ignoring Yoongi and turning back to the stove.

Jeongguk frowns and flicks his eyes to Yoongi, eyes narrowing.

"What?" Yoongi says, frowning.

"You look a little red too," he says slowly, brow furrowing like he's trying to piece a puzzle together.

Yoongi's eyes flicker and he clears his throat, walking past Jeongguk to sit at the breakfast bar. "It's hot in here."

Seokjin makes an aborted sound, like a laugh turned into a cough, his shoulders trembling with the force of it.

Jeongguk glares between them, but before he can figure anything else out, Yoongi says, "You have to leave today." He needs Jeongguk to leave so he can stop pretending to be in love with Seokjin in his own home, so he can stop holding hands with Seokjin and calling him *baby*. So he doesn't have to sleep with Seokjin in his bed. This kiss was the product of too much pretending and he doesn't want a repeat performance.

Jeongguk rolls his eyes and scoffs.

"Yoongi's right, you need to go," Seokjin says, somehow finding composure again and setting two bowls on the bar.

Jeongguk gapes at Seokjin. "Hyung, I just got here!"

"You've been here nearly two weeks," Yoongi grumbles, grabbing his bowl and pointedly avoiding Seokjin's eyes.

"Hyung," Jeongguk tries again but Seokjin shakes his head.

"Today," Seokjin says firmly.

Yoongi lets out a deep breath and tries to convince himself that the flutter in his stomach is relief.

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After Jeongguk moves out and Seokjin moves back to the guest room, things settle into a quiet kind of normal. Yoongi doesn't always come back home at a decent hour, but sometimes he does. He will even text Seokjin to let him know whether to put aside dinner for him or not. Thanks to Jeongguk, they discover a comfortable existence, something almost like friendship, Seokjin thinks. Contrary to his intentions, Jeongguk's little visit brought Seokjin and Yoongi closer, erasing the awkward tension between them.

Seokjin smiles thinking about it as he flips the page of his book. He's curled up on the sofa in the

reading nook, a single reading lamp casting light in the dark room. He spares a glance at his phone when he hears the door chime open, singling Yoongi's arrival back home. He frowns. It's close to midnight, but at least Yoongi didn't stay until two in the morning again.

He expects to hear Yoongi's footsteps on the stairs but instead he hears them approach the nook.

"You still up?" Yoongi asks, peeking his head into the room.

Seokjin glances up and tilts his head. "You just got in?"

Yoongi nods and slips into the room. He stuffs his hands into his dress pants. His tie is gone and the top three buttons of his shirt are undone, the sleeves rolled up to his forearms. He frowns and removes a hand from his pocket, gesturing to the space beside Seokjin. "Can I sit?"

Seokjin raises his brows and bites his cheek. He almost wants to remind Yoongi that this is *his* apartment and the sofa belongs to him as well. He doesn't quite know why Yoongi is acting so docile and awkward but it's kind of cute. Seokjin smiles and closes his book, laying it on the arm of the sofa. He tilts his head to the empty space to his right. "Go ahead."

Yoongi nods and settles on the sofa, keeping some space between them. He folds his hands on his knees and frowns at them, silent.

Seokjin doesn't quite feel like helping Yoongi along so he leans his head on his hand and waits expectantly for Yoongi to say whatever it is he wants to say.

Yoongi takes a deep breath and finally glances at Seokjin. "What I said before. About Granny." He reaches a hand up to scratch his earlobe. "I may have been a bit harsh."

Seokjin raises an eyebrow and stares at Yoongi. He doesn't quite believe what he's hearing but he thinks Min Yoongi is trying to apologize. It's kind of cute, how uncomfortable Yoongi looks.

Seokjin thinks Yoongi did have a valid point, but his pettiness squashes the thought quickly and he scoffs. "You think?"

Yoongi makes a face. "I'm trying to apologize here."

"You're not doing a very good job."

Yoongi scowls. "I don't have a lot of experience apologizing."

Seokjin's lips twist down into a sardonic frown. "Is that supposed to make me sympathetic?"

Yoongi sighs, frustrated, and rubs his temple. "No." They stare at each other, silent, before Yoongi huffs out, "You're not going to make this easy for me, are you?"

Seokjin shrugs, indifferent.

"I'm sorry I overreacted about my grandmother," Yoongi says quickly, petulant.

Seokjin swallows a laugh and considers Yoongi. "Call me 'hyung'," he finally says.

Yoongi's brow furrows. "What?"

"Call me 'hyung' and I'll forgive you." Yoongi just continues to stare incredulously at him and Seokjin rolls his eyes. "We're going to be in each others personal space for a while now. I'd feel more comfortable if you could just call me 'hyung'." He tilts his head. "You did at the wedding."

Yoongi frowns. "I did?"

"Mm. When we waltzed." He reaches over to pat Yoongi's knee lightly. "Come on, you can do it. H-y-u-n-g."

Yoongi's lips twitch and Seokjin thinks he's trying to suppress a smile.

"Say it with me," Seokjin starts again.

"I got it already." Yoongi purses his lips and locks his gaze on Seokjin. "Hyung," he says, soft and low.

Seokjin doesn't expect his cheeks to warm at the word, but it sounds somehow different coming from Yoongi. Reverent and visceral, weighted down with an intimacy Seokjin is a stranger to. He clears his throat and looks away, rubbing his thigh absently. "Thanks. That's. That's fine."

He hears Yoongi's low chuckle but doesn't turn to look back at him.

"Hey hyung," Yoongi says, and Seokjin tries very hard not to let his ears go red.

"Yeah?"

"You're usually asleep by now. Why are you up?"

Seokjin smiles fondly and nods to his phone on the coffee table. "I'm waiting for a call."

Yoongi's brow rises. "At midnight?"

Seokjin's smile widens. "It's my birthday in –" he leans forward and presses the home key on his phone to check the time – "two minutes." He looks at Yoongi. "I don't quite remember when it started, but there's a tradition. Jeongguk and Jimin like to compete and see who will be the first to wish me a happy birthday." He leans back and laughs. "It's gotten pretty cutthroat through the years." He leans over to mock-whisper. "Last year Jeongguk got through first and Jimin walked around with bright orange hair for two weeks."

Yoongi stares at him, not laughing, not glaring, just staring. Seokjin shifts and glances away, uncertain what's going through Yoongi's mind.

Thankfully, Seokjin's phone lights up with an incoming call. Seokjin's face brightens and he looks back at Yoongi, excited. "Oh. Let's see who won this year." Seokjin leans forward, reaching out to take his phone, but Yoongi's hand appears, covering it completely. Seokjin stops and flicks his gaze to Yoongi, frowning in question. "Yoongi?"

Yoongi stares at him, deep brown eyes with those flecks of dark amber, scanning, seeing, piercing through the defences Seokjin doesn't know if he needs anymore. His mouth is slightly open, the way it is when he's really concentrating on something, focused and intense. His long fingers tighten around Seokjin's phone as it buzzes, vibrations harsh against the wood of the coffee table.

"Hyung," he finally says, voice thick and low. "Happy birthday."

Seokjin's breath catches in his throat, lungs frozen, heart thumping painfully against his ribs. For a moment, before Seokjin can remind himself not to, before he can remind himself of who he is and who he is not, what he can and cannot have, he wonders what it would be like to have Yoongi. He wonders what it would be like to call Yoongi his, to always have those eyes on him, to always have that low, rumbling voice in his ears.

He wonders what it would be like to wake up every morning like he did, beside a snuggled-up Yoongi, button nose scrunched as he's woken up. He wonders what it would be like to go out every Sunday, walk along the Han River, Yoongi taking pictures and refusing to laugh at Seokjin's jokes. He wonders what it would be like if that hand that covers his phone belonged to him, fingers fitting between his own, interlaced and tight.

His breath is still caught in his throat, chest still as he stares at Yoongi and thinks he might be in deeper water than he realized.

Will it Snow for Christmas?

Chapter Notes

Okay hey hi, hello, wow there's so many of you here now ;; Thank you for liking this story. Thank you for all the amazing and kind comments and encouragements you've sent me. I hope you continue to like the story as it unfolds!

I would like to thank 3 (THREE!!) amazing fanartists who made the most unbelievable (UNBELIEBUBBLE!) art for the last chapter. I'm still in awe of what they made. Thank you SO SO SO much.

[Glea](#) made [this](#) ishvg'aoboidoiearfdvo hvadf PLEASE SHOW HER LOTS OF LOVE
[Rayne](#) made [THIS THAT MADE MY BREATH CATCH IN MY THROAT](#), like thank you for making this fic an actual manga I'm still shaking.
[Veronica](#) made [THE CUTEST AND FUNNIEST](#) strip and I'm still cackling, thank you so so so oajoshafioadifhb much.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The thing about Taehyung is he's nearly impossible to dislike. He's energetic and enthusiastic about any mundane thing. Outgoing and welcoming, he grabs onto anything and everything Jimin says and expounds on it, uses it as a launching pad for a dozen conversations. Every word Jimin says - softly, quietly, faint and easily dismissed – Taehyung listens to them intently, brings them forward, amplifies them, gives them weight and purpose.

It's addicting, the way Taehyung smiles at him, bright and unapologetic and wild. It's addicting, the way Taehyung says his name, deep and rumbling and like a fervent prayer. It's addicting, the way Taehyung touches him. His hands are large and strong, and he's always mindful to keep them appropriate. A small pat on Jimin's shoulder, a brief touch to his bicep, a gentle brush against his back. It's friendly, and not more than what Jimin experiences from his other friends. Yet somehow, each touch has the ghosting memory of that one night, hushed voices, firm hands, labored breathing, and the knowledge that Jimin was wanted, for a moment.

Jimin knows he should set clear boundaries, knows he should be careful of how much time he spends with Taehyung. He can see the way Taehyung looks at him when he thinks Jimin isn't looking. It's wide-eyed and resolute and brimming with a longing that Jimin knows all too well. It's not right for Jimin to let Taehyung fall like this.

It's not right, but it's addicting.

Before he knows it, Jimin is spending more time with Taehyung than he is with Jeongguk. They meet up for lunch, Taehyung picks him up after dance practice, they spend weekends studying together at the library. Jimin still doesn't understand it, why Taehyung seems to like him so much. He's asked him, but Taehyung shrugs and says a person can't just explain something like that.

"It's in the soul, Jiminie," Taehyung says seriously. "You can't just say it in words. It's in an entirely different language."

Somehow Jimin allows himself to be convinced to go to the movies with Taehyung, to go out for a

run in the park, to go eat over-priced cake in a themed cafe. He doesn't even remember the last time he indulged in something just for the fun of it. He's either studying or practicing or crashing at Jeongguk's and making sure he eats something other than ramen. Taehyung has a talent of convincing Jimin to do things he's denied himself before.

Like now, visiting an arcade in the middle of the day when he could be pouring over textbooks he's read through three times already. It's a strange feeling, leaving his worries for a while, letting himself go, letting himself enjoy something trivial and stupid. There's something about Taehyung that puts him at ease, something that lets him detach from his thoughts and just be. Maybe that's the reason he's accepted all of Taehyung's invitations to hang out.

"Ahh!" Taehyung exclaims in distress as he fails to win a stuffie from the claw machine for the tenth time. He turns to Jimin excitedly and points to the glass case. "I was close this time, right, Jimin?"

Jimin smiles and shakes his head, leaning so his head presses against the machine, a spot of cool against his head. "Not even in the ballpark." He grins at Taehyung's exaggerated pout.

"You know, they rig these things," Taehyung says instead, stepping back from the machine and eyeing it with suspicion. "No one can win it, that's how they get rich. The world is a terrible place."

Jimin laughs, his head dipping down at Taehyung's ridiculous conclusion. He pushes away and lightly taps Taehyung's arm. "Move, I want to try."

Taehyung moves fluidly under Jimin's direction, throwing an arm over the top of the machine casually, effectively blocking Jimin's right side. Jimin peeks at him for a moment, the presence of *Taehyung* in his peripheral view overpowering and inescapable.

Jimin clears his throat and ignores the way his fingers tingle. He turns his attention back to the claw machine. "Which one do you want? Kermit?"

"No!" Taehyung says loudly. "I want the Eevee." Taehyung grins at Jimin, wide and brilliant, eyes scrunched closed.

Jimin smiles fondly and thinks Taehyung is cute. He has a sudden desire to cuddle him. He looks back to the pile of stuffies. "Okay, Eevee it is."

Taehyung cheers and claps his hands. "Go Jimin, fighting!"

Jimin laughs, eyes focused on the closest Eevee. After three failed attempts, he finally manages to win the doll and Taehyung explodes in excitement.

"Jiminie, you're amazing," he says, tugging Jimin into a sudden hug, long arms wrapping around Jimin's shoulders. Jimin hesitates for a moment in Taehyung's arms. Taehyung must notice it, because he immediately releases him and steps back, hands palm-side up. "Sorry, I got a little excited."

Jimin puts a smile on his lips. "No, it's okay." He steps forward, opening his arms for Taehyung, a little regretful with how he reacted. "Come on."

Taehyung smiles and shakes his head. "I'm good, it's okay. I told you I won't make you do anything you're not comfortable with. I'm fine."

Jimin shifts, unsure how to react, but Taehyung breaks the awkwardness by pointing to the Eevee still in Jimin's hands.

"That's mine, right? You won it for me?"

Jimin looks down at the stuffie, then back at Taehyung and smiles, relieved to move on. He thinks again that there's something about Taehyung, something that eases his worries, and smoothes out his rough edges. He holds out the toy for Taehyung. "It's yours."

Taehyung's wide grin returns and he snatches the doll, hugging it close to his chest. "Thank you."

Jimin laughs and shakes his head. "You're like a kid."

"It's the secret to a long life," Taehyung responds, petting his doll. "I'm naming it Jeevee."

"Don't tell me that's a mash-up of my name and Eevee."

Taehyung shrugs. "Okay then don't ask."

Jimin's head falls back with laughter, his hand coming up to cover his mouth. He trails off when he feels his phone vibrating in his back pocket. "Ah, sorry," he says to Taehyung, slipping his phone out. A spike of adrenaline rushes through his blood when he sees the caller ID, dread and hope and anxiety all balled into the pit of his stomach. His smile drops and he grips his phone tightly.

It's Seokjin.

He glances up briefly at Taehyung and steps away, muttering, "I'll be right back," to him quickly before disappearing outside the arcade to someplace less noisy. With shaking fingers, he answers the call, drawing in a deep breath and hoping his nausea subsides. He pastes a bright, fake smile on his lips and prays it translates into his tone. "Hey hyung," he answers brightly.

The other line is quiet for a moment before Seokjin replies, "Jimin. How are you? Are you doing well?"

"Yes, yeah, I'm good."

"Classes are okay? How's the dance routine?"

Jimin bends his head and watches his feet, shuffling them on the ground. "Classes are good. Exams are coming up so I've been studying a lot. Dance is good. Everything, everything's good, hyung."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Jimin closes his eyes and listens to the way Seokjin's voice reverberates through the line, warm and familiar and strong. He missed Seokjin's voice.

"I know you're busy with exams," Seokjin continues, "and this probably isn't a good time, but I think..." He trails off, sighing. "I think we need to have a talk. Whenever you're free."

Jimin freezes, blood rushing through his ears loudly. His fingers grip his phone tightly as familiar dread works up from his stomach. It was inevitable, but he had hoped. He always hoped. He squeezes his eyes shut and takes a fortifying breath.

Face it, he tells himself. Like a band-aid..

"I have time now. If. If you'd like," he manages to say, quietly, voice fading at the end of his sentence.

He can hear Seokjin draw in a deep breath. "Okay. Um. The usual cafe? In half an hour?"

Jimin nods, swallowing down the lump in his throat. "Okay, hyung."

He drops the hand holding his phone to his side and leans against the wall, drawing in a shaky breath. He can do this. He can face this. It was bound to happen. At least now he won't shake with dread every time his phone rings, every time a text comes through.

He pushes himself from the wall and heads out to the subway, belatedly remembering Taehyung back at the arcade when he steps onto the platform. He curses in his head and quickly types out a text to him.

Something came up, I'm really sorry. We'll hang out again sometime else.

He doesn't wait for a reply, switching his phone on silent and slipping it into his pocket. He has enough worries as it is.

&&&

Jimin works himself into a frenzy by the time he reaches the cafe. He plays through arguments, scolding, scenarios that will never happen. Seokjin saying Jimin disgusts him, Seokjin saying he never wants to see Jimin again, Seokjin telling him their friendship is over. It's self-destructing, it's not even worst-case scenarios, but he can't seem to stop his thought process. Seokjin would never abandon him like his imagination seems to suggest, and yet that snake-like voice inside him keeps whispering *what if?*

What if Jimin loses Seokjin? What if Jimin loses Jeongguk too? What if Jimin will always be alone, lost in a darkness he won't be able to escape from?

He rushes to the bathroom as soon as he enters the cafe, straight to a stall to throw up. He heaves, eyes watering, choking on the acrid taste in his mouth. His fingers curl on his thighs, the fabric of his jeans stiff against his hand.

He can do this, he has to. He has to face it. He straightens and takes a long breath in, heading to the sink to rinse out his mouth.

He lets the cold water cool his heated face down and pats himself dry. He stares at himself in the mirror, blinking, and gives himself a tentative smile. He can do this. He's done it before. It won't change anything. He's always been alone anyway.

He heads out to the cafe, scanning the tables. He spots Seokjin's form by the window and he hopes Seokjin wasn't there the entire time, watching Jimin rush to the bathroom.

He presses his lips together and forces himself forward.

"Hey, hyung," he says softly when he reaches Seokjin, sliding into the chair opposite Seokjin.

Seokjin looks up and smiles softly back at him. "Hi. I didn't see you come in."

Jimin shrugs. "I was here earlier." He places his hands on the table and shifts his gaze away from Seokjin, away from eyes that look a little too worried. Jimin knows he won't like what Seokjin has to say. "Should I order?"

Seokjin points to the buzzer on their table. "I already did."

"Oh."

"Look, Jimin," Seokjin starts, and Jimin wishes the buzzer would go off so he had an excuse to leave, so this conversation couldn't even start.

Jimin has never been that lucky.

Seokjin speaks slowly and softly, like he's weighing his words, selecting them with care and precision. "That night. When we all went drinking. You said some things-

Jimin leans forward quickly. "I was drunk, hyung! I hardly remember what I said. It, it was nothing." His eyes widen, trying to convince Seokjin. He wants to drop the subject. He can't even confess now. He lost his chance, he knows that. He doesn't want to lose his hope as well. If at all possible, he wants to keep things the way they are. Not quite good but not quite bad. He doesn't want an end. He hasn't even had a beginning.

Seokjin frowns, eyes narrowing. "It's not just that night, Jimin, and you know it."

Jimin shakes his head. "Really, I-" He stops when he catches the look Seokjin gives him, regretful but determined. He presses his lips together. "Hyung, please."

Seokjin's frown deepens, and he looks to the table at his hands folded neatly on the surface. "You've never properly said anything, so I thought it was okay if I didn't either. But that's not right, Jimin." He looks back up at Jimin. "I should have discussed this earlier, much earlier. It's all my fault."

Jimin feels his eyes watering again and he blinks hard to keep his composure. It's not new, he didn't expect anything else, but still. He hoped.

"I love you, Jimin. You're a very precious friend," Seokjin continues. "A friend I didn't want to lose, so I selfishly ignored what was right in front of me."

"Hyung," Jimin stutters out, voice wavering on the single word. He doesn't want to hear the rest.

"You deserve someone who can devote their full attention to you. I love you as my important friend. Do you understand?"

Jimin doesn't say anything but nods slowly. He can feel hope, and that one spark of light in his life fade out, shrouded by the looming shadow of loneliness.

"I don't want to lose you, but if it's hurting you to see me, I think it's best if-

"Hyung, no!" Jimin jerks forward and finally meets Seokjin's eyes again. "Hyung. I'm not." He sighs, unable to gather his words, unable to choose them like Seokjin can. His stomach churns. If he messes this up, he really will be alone, with not even Seokjin's friendship to soothe him.

He sighs and flicks his gaze down to the table again, staring at it.

"I don't want to be alone," he finally says, settling for honesty. "I don't want to stop talking to you."

Seokjin looks doubtful. "Are you sure this won't hurt you in the end?"

Jimin wants to laugh. He's already hurt. He's always been too far gone. Losing Seokjin's friendship would just be the final nail in the coffin of his unfulfilled life.

Instead he shakes his head. "I'm sure." He forces a smile to his lips. "I'm stronger than you think."

Seokjin blinks, contemplating him. "You're stronger than you think, too."

Jimin shifts his gaze away and clears his throat. This is why he fell for Seokjin. The easy way he had with compliments, the way he built Jimin up. The way he lit Jimin's dark existence. He reminds himself that Seokjin is still here for him, a small flame instead of a bright sun, but it will be enough. It has to be.

"Hyung, can I ask a question?"

"Mm." Seokjin nods.

Jimin takes a fortifying breath and says, "Did I... Was there ever a point where it would have been possible for us?"

Seokjin's eyes flicker and he frowns. He looks down at his hands. "Love was never in the cards for me."

"What about your husband?"

Seokjin jerks, eyes widening in surprise.

"How did Min Yoongi become the exception?"

Seokjin blinks slowly, glancing out the window, his gaze far away. "Yoongi's like gravity."

Jimin's brow furrows, trying to decipher Seokjin's meaning. Before he can ask, the buzzer on the table sounds and Seokjin grabs it like a lifeline, heading to the cafe counter before Jimin can ask more.

He sighs, a shuddering breath he feels from his lungs to his lips, and blinks his eyes. He will be okay, he thinks. Alone, but okay. He didn't lose Seokjin completely, just the small bloom of hope in his heart.

It's not an unfamiliar feeling.

&&&

Something is wrong with Seokjin.

Yoongi frowns, stealing glances at him as often as he can while still keeping his eyes on the road. He wishes Seokjin would stop looking out the stupid window and make it easier for Yoongi to peek at him. Instead, Yoongi catches quick glimpses of the back of Seokjin's head, the tense slope of his shoulders, the stray hair at the back of his head that Seokjin somehow missed when he prepared to go out this evening. That's probably the most telling give-away that Seokjin isn't okay. Yoongi cannot remember the last time Seokjin presented himself as less than perfect. Especially when they go to see Yoongi's grandmother. Seokjin seems to believe his looks will make him Granny's favorite. Yoongi hates that he's sort of right.

The silence between them is frustrating, heavy and almost melancholy. Yoongi can *feel* Seokjin's mind, the barrage of thoughts and emotions, the whirling torrent they create, but he can't *understand*. Yoongi wonders just how many layers Seokjin has, how many defenses and counter-defenses, locks and gates and secret passageways. Yoongi has the impression that very few people know exactly what is going on in Seokjin's mind, and that's the way Seokjin prefers it. Yoongi probably shouldn't want to press in further than the newish, comfortable existence they've established. Yoongi shouldn't, but there are moments where the veil lifts and he thinks he sees Seokjin entirely.

It's too brief, too quick, a flash of stars as they fall from the sky. It's silly, but Yoongi wants to chase

those stars, catch them, hot and blazing in his hands before they peter out.

He steals another glance at Seokjin, left hand flexing on the steering wheel.

"You want to talk about whatever's bothering you?" he finally says, unable to stop himself.

Seokjin jerks, turning to look at Yoongi.

Fucking finally, Yoongi thinks, glaring at the road.

"What?" Seokjin asks, blinking innocently, a calm mask of indifference on his face.

"You're bothered by something." Yoongi turns at a light and spares another glance at Seokjin. "Want to talk about it?"

Seokjin stiffens in his seat and brings his hand to rest on his thigh. "I'm fine."

"You're really not, but it's up to you." Yoongi shrugs, hoping his tone is nonchalant and casual. "I'm willing to listen, if you want to. Or not. Again, it's your choice."

Silence stretches between them, and Yoongi fights to keep his eyes ahead of him and not to Seokjin at his side. He flexes his hand on the steering wheel again. It was a stupid idea anyway. He doesn't know why he wants to get closer to Seokjin. He's close enough as it is. Any more will be dangerous.

He taps his index finger on the wheel and brings the car to a halt at a red light. Falling stars are just fire, his hands already have too many burn scars.

"I talked to Jimin today," Seokjin says, voice breaking the silence.

Yoongi's eye twitches but he keeps his face impassive and cool. He tilts his head in what he hopes is an indifferent way, and says, "Oh?"

Seokjin scoffs beside him and Yoongi has the distinct impression that he wasn't as successful in fooling Seokjin as he'd like to believe. "Yeah, oh."

"About what?" Yoongi tries, drumming his right hand on the gear shift idly.

"We discussed whether it would snow for Christmas," Seokjin says, sarcasm dripping in his tone.

Yoongi scowls and breaks his gaze from the road for a second to make sure Seokjin can see it properly.

Seokjin sighs and looks back out his side window. "Sorry, I'm still a little tense."

"I kind of gathered that," Yoongi snaps back. "We don't have to talk, you know. I like it quiet."

Seokjin remains silent for a moment and Yoongi thinks they've dropped the subject.

"Jimin's a really important person to me," Seokjin starts, voice low and faraway.

Yoongi brings his right hand up to the steering wheel and grips the top, shifting up in his seat. He doesn't like the way his chest squeezes at Seokjin's words.

"When we - I, me and Jeongguk and our mom - moved to Busan, it was. It wasn't a good time. For any of us." Seokjin sighs. "It was really scary."

Yoongi presses his lips together and glances back at Seokjin. He wants to say something, some kind of words of comfort or understanding, but he cannot. He doesn't know. He doesn't know anything about Seokjin's past, just the vague rumors he always tuned out. The thought is unsettling.

"Jimin was young and kind." Seokjin laughs softly. "He was so sweet. Still is. And so lonely. There wasn't much I could do for him, but I could be there for him. That was enough, for all of us. We had a happy existence in Busan." Seokjin's voice softens. "I miss it."

Yoongi exhales slowly and tries not to think about those happy bubbles of time in his childhood, tries not to remember. Tries to stave off the inevitable cold pit of emptiness that opens when he lingers on it too long.

"When I came to Seoul with Jeongguk, my mom was sick."

Yoongi flicks his eyes to Seokjin. "I'm sorry to hear that."

Seokjin shrugs, avoiding eye contact. "She's still not fully recovered, but she's doing better. Back then, I had to choose, take care of my mother or my little brother. It was impossible, but Jimin, he stepped up. He let me go to Seoul and took my place by my mother's side. I owe him a lot. He'll always be important to me."

Yoongi swallows hard and nods, fingers tight on the wheel. He's being illogical, unreasonable. He's wishing he could have been there for Seokjin, he's wishing he could permeate Seokjin's life the way Jimin did. He doesn't know what's wrong with him.

"I knew for a while that he'd developed feelings for me," Seokjin continues. "I ignored it because it's so much easier to hope he grows out of it than facing it. That was my fault, I never thought he'd continue after the wedding."

Yoongi frowns. "Sounds like he's really far gone on you. You can't just expect him to give that up suddenly." He clears his throat. "You could tell him about our, uh, agreement." He glances quickly at Seokjin. "The time limit."

Seokjin shakes his head. "It's better this way. Clean. Jimin can move on."

Yoongi drums his fingers on the wheel and debates whether he should ask what he really wants to know. Finally, he exhales sharply and asks, "What about you? Did you ever feel the same about Jimin?"

"No," Seokjin answers easily, without hesitation. "Maybe, if things had been different. But life turned out the way it has, and Jeongguk has always been my priority. Romance and dating, those are luxuries. My family comes first."

Yoongi shakes his head a little. "You're amazing." Seokjin shoots him a sharp look and Yoongi smiles. "It's not sarcasm, hyung. I mean it." He turns to smile briefly at Seokjin. "I've never met someone as self-sacrificing as you. It's amazing."

Seokjin's eyes flicker, focused on Yoongi with an intensity he isn't used to.

Yoongi clears his throat and turns back his attention to the street.

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Yoongi doesn't remember the last time he saw his grandmother look so pleased with herself. Probably around the time he stepped into her role at the company. She's practically *beaming*, he

thinks the wrinkles on her face might crack from the pressure.

She watches Yoongi and Seokjin on her side at the table all throughout dinner, urging both of them to eat more. Seokjin does, Yoongi does not. She hardly even complains like usual about his birdlike eating tendencies.

"He eats a lot at home, Granny," Seokjin says to Yoongi's defense, patting Yoongi's thigh lightly with the words. "Don't worry, he'll survive." And then he fucking winks at Yoongi's grandmother.

Yoongi scowls, but his grandmother's eyes light with barely contained glee. He can't help but think they're a diabolical combination. He sighs and stretches his arms back. He doesn't even realize he settles his left arm across the back of Seokjin's chair until his grandmother gives him a significant look and smirks.

Yoongi purses his lips and curls his fingers, but does not remove his arm. Before his grandmother can say anything, Yoongi opens a topic of conversation to preempt her. "What do you want to do for New Year's, Granny?" he asks, fingers dipping down to softly touch the fabric of Seokjin's shirt, light enough that Seokjin doesn't feel it.

"You'll be here, of course," Granny says, like the question was inane to even ask. "It's my first year with my new grandson." She pauses to smile at Seokjin again. "You can have Christmas by yourselves. It's a lovey-dovey holiday anyway."

Yoongi feels Seokjin stiffen and he flicks his gaze to him, frowning. "What?" he asks quietly, leaning in close to Seokjin's ear.

Seokjin looks at him and forces a smile to his lips. "Ah, no, it's nothing. I haven't thought about New Year's celebrations yet. I've always attended them at the Jeon residence."

"They've had you for years," Granny says, sniffing. "I've barely had you for two months. You can tell your grandfather to stop acting like a child."

Seokjin smiles at her. "It's fine, he won't make a fuss."

Yoongi's frown deepens. He doesn't understand the tense set of Seokjin's shoulders, the way his smiles are disingenuous - a tilt of lips but no laugh lines creasing his face. From what Yoongi has gathered, Seokjin's relationship with his adoptive family is strained at the very best. He should be happy to spend a major holiday out from under them.

Realization hits him suddenly, and he straightens in his chair, his hand slipping from its position to land on Seokjin's shoulder. "Ah," Yoongi says, turning back to his grandmother. "Of course Jeongguk will have to come too. You've hardly met him, it would be a good opportunity to get to know him."

Seokjin jolts and Yoongi can feel his heavy gaze on him, but Yoongi keeps smiling at his grandmother.

Granny purses her lips, staring at Yoongi, questioning. It is nearly unheard of, to take a potential heir from his own family celebrations to visit his brother's in-laws. Yoongi holds her gaze and arches his brows. Finally she nods. "Of course, I assumed Jeongguk would be attending with his brother here. It's silly for you to even mention it."

Yoongi smiles gratefully at his grandmother. Her only response is to shrug her shoulder and loudly wonder what was taking dessert so long.

Seokjin reaches a hand down to squeeze Yoongi's knee. Yoongi turns to look at him again, and his breath catches in his throat on an exhale. Seokjin smiles at him, soft, warm, eyes radiant. He's stunning, and for a moment Yoongi's heart flutters with something too dangerous to name.

What?, Yoongi mouths.

Thank you, Seokjin mouths back, giving Yoongi's knee another squeeze.

Yoongi shrugs but he feels his lips tilt into a smug smile.

Seokjin snorts, but there's a genuine humor in his eyes again, and Yoongi is satisfied with that.

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Jimin wakes up to a throbbing headache. His head feels like it weighs fifty pounds, his eyes hurt just blinking them open. He groans and pushes his face further into his pillow. He wants to stay here, cocooned. He wants to go back to blissful unconsciousness, but his throat is on fire and bright light is streaming in from somewhere, burning his eyes behind their lids.

He groans again and finds the strength to sit up, bringing a hand up to his temple and slowly coaxing his eyes open. He knew he drank too much last night, but he really couldn't stop himself. He wanted to forget. He wanted to drown in the alcohol and forget that he was Park Jimin - only child, dance major, alone and scared and needy.

He probably should have stopped when Jeongguk started nodding off into unconsciousness, but even through the blur, Jimin could still remember. He could still hear Seokjin's voice, calm and gentle and rejecting him. He could still see the dark shadows at the corners of his vision, closing in on him. He could still remember that he will never be enough.

He finally gets his eyes open and freezes in panic. This isn't his place. This isn't Jeongguk's place. He clenches his fingers on the black leather sofa he's sitting on. He doesn't know where he is or how he got here.

He whips his head around, ignoring the dizziness that ensues, eyes wide and frantically looking for Jeongguk. His breath shudders through his lungs in relief when he sees the younger boy, curled up on a section of the sofa, a large duvet covering most of his body.

At least they were safe.

He leans back and stares at the ceiling, trying to remember last night.

He had made Jeongguk go out drinking with him. Neither of them had been much help to each other, taking shots and egging each other on. Somewhere along the way Jeongguk had passed out. And then.

Jimin squeezes his eyes shut and groans, letting his face fall into his hands in embarrassment. And then he called Taehyung. He doesn't quite remember much after that but it's enough for the shame to creep up him spine.

He is so stupid, so so so stupid. He shouldn't have called Taehyung. He should not have let Taehyung see this pathetic side of him. He had been sad and lonely and wanted some comfort. It should not have been Taehyung he called.

Jimin sighs and stands, stepping away from the living room quietly to search for his host.

Sure enough, he finds Taehyung in the kitchen, sipping from an oversized mug.

Taehyung's eyes widen when he sees him and he places his mug on the counter, smiling widely at Jimin. "You're up. How are you feeling?"

"I'm really sorry," Jimin says in a rush.

Taehyung's smile drops and his brow furrows.

Jimin steps closer, wringing his hands together. "It was really rude of me to call you when I was drunk, and you came all the way over and picked us up and we're not even that close yet-"

"Jimin." Taehyung's voice is low and rumbling.

Jimin's words falter on his tongue and he stares wide-eyed at Taehyung.

"It's okay. I was happy you trusted me enough to call me."

Jimin blinks, trying to puzzle Taehyung out. Trying to figure out why Taehyung was like this - supportive and welcoming, like the spring sun peeking out from clouds after a long winter. He's not used to this. "It was rude nonetheless."

Taehyung shrugs. "I wasn't bothered." He steps closer and reaches for one of Jimin's hands, squeezing it lightly in his own. "Nothing you've ever done has upset me, Jimin. It's okay. We're friends, right?"

Jimin nods hesitantly, relief and something else that feels exhilarating and frightening at the same time working through his blood.

"You can call me whenever you'd like. Even if it's two in the morning." Taehyung grins again and releases Jimin's hand. "Do you want breakfast? Something to drink? I think it'll be a bit before Jeonggukie gets up."

Jimin watches Taehyung's back as he rummages through the fridge. "Taehyung," he starts slowly, frowning, mind still picking up vague recollections from the previous night.

Taehyung pops out of the fridge and offers Jimin a yogurt drink proudly. "Hmm?"

Jimin licks his lips and stares down at the drink, reaching for it slowly. "Did I...say anything weird last night?" Jimin can see the hesitation in Taehyung's face and he groans, shutting his eyes quickly. "What did I say?"

Taehyung sighs leaning against the counter and staring at his slippered feet. "It wasn't much. You cried some." He frowns.

"What else?" Jimin grips the yogurt drink in his hand. He doesn't want Taehyung to know about him and Seokjin. Something inside of him is pleading that Taehyung doesn't know, doesn't see it. He thinks it's because Taehyung is Yoongi's cousin, but it doesn't quite make sense. Yoongi already knows. Seokjin already put an end to it. Still. Still, he prays Taehyung doesn't know, that Jimin can keep this last shred of dignity in front of the other boy.

Taehyung scratches his cheek. "I gathered that you're in love with someone."

"I didn't say who?"

Taehyung shakes his head. "No."

Jimin exhales in relief.

"Jimin."

Jimin's gaze flicks to Taehyung and he freezes under the intensity of his stare.

"I know that you like someone else, and we're just friends. I know that." Taehyung's brow furrows.
"But is it still okay if I like you?"

It's not okay. It's only asking for pain and rejection and hurt. Jimin knows firsthand. Knows he should be the grown up here, just like Seokjin had been with him. He should reject Taehyung, set the boundary, and put some distance between them. That's the right thing to do.

But even just thinking about that makes Jimin's chest thump painfully, his heart erratic against his ribs.

Everyone says he's kind and generous, but deep down, he knows that's not true.

He locks eyes with Taehyung and says clearly, "It's still okay."

Deep down, he knows he's selfish.

&&&

Yoongi is a really great friend. Hoseok should try to appreciate him a bit more. It's not every friend who agrees to go to the department store on Christmas Eve to pick up their boyfriend's Christmas present. It was Yoongi who was responsible for Hoseok snagging the ever oblivious Namjoon to begin with. A little *thank you* every once in a while would be nice. Maybe a cup of coffee. Or maybe Hoseok could stop being a nosy brat, too. Yoongi's a simple man. He doesn't ask for much.

"Come on, hyung, just tell me," Hoseok whines leaning back with his elbows on the glass counter, sparkling diamonds and shiny silver gleaming under the strong lights.

Yoongi scoffs, and idly looks at the display by Hoseok's right elbow. "I didn't agree to help you pick up Namjoon's gift to be interrogated."

"I'm not interrogating. Who's interrogating? I'm just wondering how far you've gone, is all," Hoseok says innocently.

"We're not in high school, Hoseok."

Hoseok grins at him. "That's why I think you went a little further than the kiss at the engagement party. Hmm? Hmm?"

The attendant finally arrives from the back, carrying with him the piece Hoseok had commissioned for Namjoon's Christmas present. Yoongi nods to him. "Your thing."

Hoseok turns around and excitedly drums his fingers on the glass countertop. "Oh, oh, it's brilliant, I can already tell from here." He leans over a bit to get a better look.

"Hmm." Yoongi slips his hands into his pockets and wanders through the jewelry displays as Hoseok inspects the piece. There are thick chained bracelets that catch his eye, but somehow he thinks it wouldn't fit a delicate wrist.

He freezes and blinks. It wasn't his wrist he was picturing the bracelet on. He frowns. He didn't even think about whether he's supposed to get Seokjin a present or not. Probably not. They weren't dating

or anything. Yoongi's sure Seokjin hasn't bought him anything.

He purses his lips and taps his finger on the counter, walking down the display. He passes by more bracelets and necklaces and watches. He doesn't like any of it. He nods to himself. That settles it, he won't get anything for Seokjin. He'll wait for Hoseok to finish up his transaction, grab a cup of coffee, and head home empty-handed. Like he always does. Because he's not *dating* Seokjin. They're basically roommates.

He walks further down the display to the earrings and pauses. He recalls Seokjin has an unused piercing hole in his left ear. He leans over the display to inspect the earrings. He's not going to buy anything, but he might as well look since Hoseok is still occupied.

A single earring catches his eye. A small loop attached to a long, slim dangle. It's simple silver, no diamonds or sapphires or garnets. Somehow Yoongi thinks it might look nice on Seokjin.

He taps his finger over the display. Seokjin never wears earrings, though. He frowns. It's not hard to see the reason. The Jeons are traditional and strict. They would have forbidden Seokjin to wear something like this. Yoongi's lips twitch into a smirk. He suddenly wants to ask Seokjin how he even got his ear pierced to begin with. He wants to see what Seokjin was like in that moment of rebellion. He thinks it might be fun to bring that side of him out again.

Yoongi looks up and waves an attendant over. "I'd like this one."

The attendant smiles politely at him and removes the earring from the display. "Would you like it gift wrapped, sir?"

Yoongi nods in assent.

He's paying for the item when Hoseok slides up to him, a smug grin plastered on his lips. "Oh? Last-minute Christmas shopping for the hubby?"

Yoongi ignores him and takes the small bag from the attendant.

"It's so cute," Hoseok coos from behind him.

"Let's go, Hobi."

Hoseok slings his arm around Yoongi's shoulder and starts humming *All I Want for Christmas is You*. Yoongi laughs but doesn't dislodge Hoseok's arm.

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Yoongi's not *nervous* about how to give Seokjin his gift. It's just that he doesn't quite know how to do it. He didn't anticipate the little impulse buy. He just doesn't know how to do it without it being awkward and more significant than what it is.

Yoongi frowns as he makes his way down the hallway to his apartment.

If he's being perfectly honest, he likes Seokjin. He likes his personality, his loyalty, his dedication. He likes the way Seokjin's voice sounds when it's calm. He likes the way Seokjin's voice sounds when he's agitated. He likes Seokjin's presence in the apartment, likes to hear his footsteps in the morning downstairs, his quiet humming when he reads. He even likes the sound of Seokjin brushing his teeth and Yoongi doesn't quite know what that says about him.

He will also admit, quietly and to himself only, that he's attracted to Seokjin. More than a little. He

has to actively resist the urge to reach out and kiss him again. He has to stop his mind from wandering too much, when it goes down that dangerous road of exactly what Seokjin's waist looks like under his clothes.

Isn't that better than hating him? he wonders, punching in his code on the keypad and swinging the door open. He nods to himself. It's good that he likes Seokjin. They have to live together for many months still. They're both reasonable adults with surprisingly complementary personalities. Of course they would get along. Of course Yoongi would like Seokjin.

It doesn't have to be anything. He can play this game. They already know the ending anyway. Anything he does between the divorce papers and now won't matter.

He doesn't find Seokjin immediately when he enters the apartment, but he hears shuffling upstairs in his bedroom. Yoongi runs up the stairs and peeks his head into his room. Seokjin has a large bag of cosmetics by his feet, two bottles of what looks like moisturizer in his hand, but he's staring vacantly at the wall with Yoongi's photo frames.

"Hyung?"

Seokjin turns to look at Yoongi and gives him a small smile. "Hey. Sorry."

Yoongi shakes his head in dismissal of the apology and pushes into the room, dropping the small shopping bag on his nightstand. "Something up?" he asks, nodding to the luggage.

"Jeongguk's coming over tomorrow for Christmas, so I was just clearing out my room again." Seokjin laughs when he sees Yoongi's face. "Relax, he's not staying for more than one night."

"Hmm."

Seokjin places the bottles on the nightstand on his side of the bed. Yoongi wonders when he started labeling it Seokjin's side. "I talked to my grandfather today," Seokjin says, frowning slightly. "He's willing to forfeit Jeongguk for New Year's..."

Yoongi raises his brows as Seokjin trails off uncertainly. "If?" he prompts, because there's always an "if" in their world. There's always a give and a take.

Seokjin sighs and sits on the bed, fingers playing idly with the duvet. "You don't have to agree. We put it in the contract, I really don't expect you to have to-"

"What is it, hyung?"

Seokjin sends him a sharp look. "You shouldn't interrupt me."

Yoongi rolls his eyes.

Seokjin straightens his back and seems to gather his confidence. "My grandfather wants you to come over for dinner one night to 'talk business'."

Yoongi isn't quite surprised but he's not entirely looking forward to it.

"I realize we agreed that no business would be exchanged, so that the divorce can be clean," Seokjin says. "You can say no."

Yoongi crosses his arms across his chest. "Is this the only way we can get Jeongguk for New Year's?"

Seokjin nods.

Yoongi blows out a frustrated breath. "Your grandfather is a pain." He nods, dropping his arms to his sides again. "Okay."

"Okay?" Seokjin repeats, eyes widening slightly.

Yoongi nods. He knows Seokjin well enough, knows he would fret the entire day if Jeongguk had to face the Jeon family alone. He doesn't want to cause Seokjin more worries if he can easily avoid it. If he's completely honest, he also doesn't want Jeongguk to face the wolves alone. The boy might be a brat, but he has a good heart. From what he knows about the Jeons, it would not be a pleasant and warm gathering.

"Okay," Yoongi confirms.

Seokjin beams at him, eyes flickering with something that makes Yoongi's stomach flutter. "Thank you, Yoongi. You're a really good person."

Yoongi shrugs and looks away. Uncomfortable under Seokjin's stare, Yoongi clears his throat and walks to his closet, stepping into the room more to avoid Seokjin's eyes than anything else. Seokjin has laid his clothes neatly at the side, not bothering to rearrange Yoongi's stuff from the armoires lining the walls. He shrugs out of his blazer and grabs a soft hoodie and sweatpants. "You can hang your stuff up," he calls out to Seokjin.

"What was that?" Seokjin asks, walking into the closet just as Yoongi slips his button-up off. Seokjin's mouth parts slightly and his cheeks are pink again, his eyes trailing down Yoongi's chest. "Sorry, I didn't know you were changing."

Yoongi arches a brow when Seokjin doesn't move, eyes still trained on Yoongi's stomach. It's probably not a great idea to close the five steps between them and kiss Seokjin again. He should probably stop thinking about kissing Seokjin. That would probably be a good thing to do. He can't exactly remember why, but he supposes he has a great reason. With a large amount of willpower, he turns and pulls his hoodie on.

It's apparently enough to break Seokjin out of his trance, because he huffs out a breath and says, "Sorry, I didn't catch what you said?"

He gestures to Seokjin's pile of clothes. "You can hang them up. There's room."

Seokjin shakes his head and smiles. "It's only for a night, it's fine." He backs out of the room and calls out, "I'm going to finish up and then watch Christmas movies downstairs. You can join me if you'd like."

Yoongi ruffles his hair, trying to bring the stray strands back into control after his hoodie mussed them up. His lips twitch into a subtle smile. "Sure hyung," he calls out. "Sounds like fun."

When he's finally finished washing up, Seokjin is already downstairs. Yoongi grabs the gift bag from his nightstand and descends the stairs. He heads to the living room but frowns when he finds it empty. There are throw blankets strewn over the back of the sofa and the television is looping the menu screen for Home Alone.

"Hyung?" he says, placing the bag on the coffee table and craning his neck.

"I'm making hot chocolate. You don't have a say in it, you have to drink it," Seokjin calls out from the kitchen.

Yoongi smirks and flops down on the sofa, pulling down a blanket to cover himself.

Seokjin appears from the kitchen holding two mugs. He laughs when he sees him, wide-mouthed and crinkle-eyed, choppy, squeaky giggles erupting from his lips.

Yoongi frowns. "What?"

Seokjin regains his composure and shakes his head. "Nothing." He places the mugs onto the coffee table and settles beside Yoongi. "You just look kind of cute when you're cuddled up in a blanket."

Yoongi scoffs but Seokjin still laughs and reaches for the remote. He thinks he should probably give Seokjin the earring now, but he can't seem to work out the timing. He glances up at him, Seokjin's shoulder leaning onto his, and feels a warm flush at the back of his neck. Later, he thinks, switching his attention to the television screen. He'll give it to him later.

&&&

Sometime before Macaulay Culkin nabs the bad guys, Yoongi falls asleep, his eyes fluttered closed and his head lulled heavily onto Seokjin's shoulder. Seokjin thinks he should wake him up and get him to bed, but the blankets are warm and Yoongi feels nice against his side, a solid weight tethering him. Seokjin leans his head against Yoongi's and closes his eyes, letting sleep claim him too.

When he wakes up again, the sun is breaking, streams of sunlight filtering through the windows. Seokjin breathes in deeply, the air fresh with the pine scent from the Christmas tree. Seokjin shifts, and feels a heavy weight on his right side. He blinks and peers down, finds Yoongi still lost in dreams.

In this moment, Yoongi looks almost boyish, mouth parted as he breathes slowly and steadily, shoulders hunched under his throw blanket, feet curled under his legs. His eyelashes are dark and long, a stark contrast against his pale skin. At this distance, Seokjin can see the faint scattering of freckles over the bridge of his nose. Seokjin has the urge to reach out and trace them with the tip of his finger.

He's been having a lot of thoughts like that lately, and he knows he needs to stop. He sighs and eases slowly out from under Yoongi, placing a hand gently under his head to lower him to the sofa softly. His hand lingers in Yoongi's hair, the strands thick and soft between his fingers.

Get a hold of yourself, Seokjin, he admonishes himself. It's fine enough if he finds Min Yoongi attractive. It's fine enough if he gets along with him, surprisingly and so easily that it feels like they've known each other for years. It's fine enough to be Yoongi's friend, of a sort, and to pretend in front of their relatives and friends. That's where it needs to end.

Seokjin cannot allow himself to be pulled in by Yoongi's gravity, cannot get lost in the swirling thoughts of *I wish* and *what if* and *maybe*. He's leaving, in less than one year. Packing up, taking his mother and his brother and starting the life he always wanted, free, fresh, new. He can fall into warm feelings and heart flutters then. He can't get greedy yet.

He stumbles into the kitchen and hits the coffee machine to brew a batch of coffee for him and Yoongi. He checks the time and determines that Jeongguk will probably arrive within the hour. He yawns and heads to the refrigerator, grabbing ingredients for breakfast and setting them on the counter. He spins around and stops short, yelling in surprise.

Yoongi scrunches his nose at him and blinks his eyes blurrily. "What?" he croaks, voice thick with sleep still.

"Make some noise when you move around," Seokjin says, hand coming up to his heart, trying to soothe it back to a regular beat.

Yoongi shrugs. He shuffles to Seokjin and presses something into his chest. "Here."

Seokjin furrows his brow, hands reaching automatically to catch the item. He peers down and frowns at it, a small, velvet box from a high-end brand he recognizes. "What's this?"

"Merry Christmas," Yoongi says, almost too quietly to hear, stepping away to the coffee machine.

Seokjin flicks his eyes up quickly, mouth open in shock. "I didn't, uh, sorry, I didn't get you anything."

Yoongi doesn't look at him, peering closely at something at the other end of the kitchen. He scratches the back of his neck and lifts his shoulder in a small shrug. "I don't want anything." He sniffs and gestures to Seokjin. "Just open it, it's not a big deal."

Seokjin looks down again at the box in his hands, warmth spreading from his heart through his blood, tingling at the tips of his fingers. He grips the box and snaps it open, finds a simple silver earring. He blinks hard, his eyes suddenly moist.

"If you don't like it, it's okay-"

"I love it," Seokjin says, still staring at the earring, his thumbs running over the velvet of the box. "Thank you."

"Merry Christmas, hyung."

Seokjin presses his lips together and nods, not looking up at Yoongi. *Don't get greedy*, he tells himself.

His heart throbs against his ribs and he finally looks back up to Yoongi. He wants something he can't have. *Don't get greedy*.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so first of all, I apologize to Jinmin shippers. Sorry.....

Second. I'm sorry to Jinmin shippers.

A Gentleman's Dignity

Chapter Notes

You'll notice that the rating has changed. I did tag this as eventual smut, so here we are, at eventual.

I do realize some people are not comfortable with smut and did not start this story with it, so to give those people an option, I have marked the start of the smut scene with "####" and marked the end of it with "&&&&". If you want to skip that scene, once you see "####", do a find search for "&&&&" and it will bring you to the end of the scene and onto the rest of the chapter.

That being said, since smut does happen, discussion of that also occurs later on, so there is non-explicit sexual discussion all throughout this chapter.

If and (when, definitely when) I post another chapter with a smut scene, I will be doing the same thing. I will post a reminder for all such scenes.

Thanks guys :)

New Year's at the Min household feels strange. It's busy and grand, with enough food to feed an army. It drips with wealth and festive spirit and yet there's an underlying warmth that Seokjin hasn't experienced for years. It reminds him of New Year's too many years ago, when his mother had a bright smile and Jeongguk was learning to talk.

He expects there to be tension. He knows it won't be overt, but Jeongguk hasn't exactly been pleasant with Yoongi, and Mikyung has already expressed her wariness of Seokjin. Somehow, though, it all flows smoothly, and by the end of the day, Seokjin almost thinks the two families fit together, merge and adapt together naturally.

Seokjin almost doesn't realize how natural it is when Yoongi gets up yawning at the end of the night and mumbles that he's going to bed. Seokjin almost doesn't notice that he's dozing off himself in the living room, listening to Jeongguk and Yoongi's grandmother banter over a game of Go, like he's listened to the same warm bickering for years. Jeongguk lost the first round and seems determined to win at least once tonight.

Seokjin smiles when he hears Granny *tsk* at a move Jeongguk starts to make.

"I didn't realize you wanted to end the game so quickly," Granny says.

Jeongguk makes a sudden noise. "I'm not done my move."

"Hmm."

Seokjin blinks his eyes open in the answering silence and sees Jeongguk watching Granny with wide eyes. He can see Granny suppress a smile.

"Of course, you'd place one there," Granny finally says, gesturing to a place on the board.

Jeongguk sets his piece down quickly where she gestured. “It’s obvious, isn’t it?”

Granny laughs softly under her breath and Jeongguk smiles at her.

Seokjin’s chest warms. They never had much affection from grandparents before. It’s nice that Jeongguk can receive a little from Granny, even if it’s only temporary.

He frowns at the thought, a chill spiking in his blood. He shakes his head and stands. He’s thinking useless thoughts again.

“I’m heading to bed,” he says instead.

““Kay, good night hyung,” Jeongguk murmurs, eyes focused on the Go board.

“Sweet dreams, love,” Granny says, smiling sweetly at him before her gaze sharpens on Jeongguk. “Child, watch and learn.” She places a piece with a loud *thunk* and Jeongguk makes a distressed noise.

Seokjin smiles, grabbing his mug and heading to the kitchen to place it in the sink. He slows as he nears the kitchen, brow furrowing. He’s almost certain he heard Yoongi’s distinctive low drawl.

“I’m worried about you.”

Seokjin stutters to a stop outside the kitchen at Mikyung’s voice, hushed but still clear. He has no reason to feel like he’s eavesdropping. He should just step forward and make his presence known. He shifts his foot but freezes when he hears Mikyung continue.

“You don’t open up easily but when you’re with Seokjin...”

“When I’m with Seokjin, what?” Yoongi asks, not quite defensive but close.

Mikyung sighs. “You don’t need me to say it. You know it better yourself.”

Seokjin presses his lips together. He has no business standing here. He should leave. He curses in his head and leans his ear closer, trying to catch Yoongi’s rumbling words.

“You’ll have to be more specific,” Yoongi replies, challenging.

“You’re being obtuse.”

“Runs in the family.”

“What is Seokjin to you?”

Seokjin blinks, waiting, breath caught in his throat. He shouldn’t be here, shouldn’t even want to know the answer to the question. His heart thumps loudly in his ears, too loudly. He can’t hear Yoongi’s reply, just the indistinct reverberation of his voice.

He shakes his head and berates his curiosity, pushing away quietly from the kitchen and tip-toeing to his room. He’s ashamed of himself for trying to eavesdrop on a private conversation.

He tries to tell himself that the heavy regret in his stomach has nothing to do with missing Yoongi’s answer.

Yoongi's going crazy. He swallows hard and tries to shift his eyes away but he can't. He's going *crazy*, he doesn't know how much longer he can stand this.

Seokjin wanders around their apartment getting ready to go out, dressed in what he probably thinks is a suitable outfit for dinner with his family. Yoongi narrows his eyes, following Seokjin's form. He shifts on the sofa and tries not to crane his neck when Seokjin goes just out of view.

Yoongi supposes, on a different person, the outfit would be fine. Tight, form-fitting black pants that follow exactly the curve of Seokjin's surprisingly full hips, and a silky white v-neck, pleated at the collar running too far down Seokjin's chest. Yoongi almost doesn't know where he wants to look more. Seokjin's long, thick neck, Seokjin's collarbones and that bit of defined chest that peeks out from the v-neck, Seokjin's thighs hugged tightly by the black material of his pants, or Seokjin's waist, the tiny curve of it accentuated unnecessarily by the ribbon tied around it.

Yoongi just wants to know why Seokjin owns so many silk shirts, and why all of them happen to have useless, superfluous ribbons on them. At least on this shirt the ribbon is tied around Seokjin's waist, but somehow Yoongi thinks it's worse. He wants to tug on it, draw Seokjin closer slowly until their hips are flush. He wants to follow the loop around Seokjin's waist, tracing the fabric, fingers dipping underneath it. He wants to feel the texture of it on his fingertips, wants to see how much he can pull on it before the knot gives.

Yoongi jolts from his thoughts when Seokjin comes back into view, head tilted to the side as he puts on the earring Yoongi gave him for Christmas. He presses his lips together and curses himself. That earring was a mistake. A Mistake. The worst decision of his life. Seokjin has no business wearing that earring. It was Yoongi's fault, but Seokjin honestly doesn't need to rub it in his face so much. Seokjin can just lose the damn thing.

"Yoongi!" Seokjin says, frustration evident in his voice.

Yoongi blinks and parts his lips. "What?"

Seokjin sighs and rolls his eyes. "One day you'll need to teach me the art of sleeping with my eyes open." Seokjin steps closer to Yoongi and bends at his waist to get to his eye level.

Yoongi's eyes drop to Seokjin's chest and he swallows around his tongue. He's going crazy.

"I'll repeat it one last time," Seokjin says. "Are we taking your car or mine?"

Yoongi blinks and tells himself to stop staring at Seokjin's chest. He successfully manages to lift his eyes, but they falter on Seokjin's neck instead. "I'll drive," he answers Seokjin's throat.

Seokjin nods and straightens. He checks his watch and steps away, disappearing into his room again. "We'll leave in twenty minutes?"

Yoongi tosses his head back and stares at the ceiling, trying to remember why making a move on his husband is a very bad idea. He probably knew the answer, once.

"I must be crazy," he mutters to himself.

&&&

Seokjin is nervous about the dinner with his family for various reasons, and each one comes with a very separate and exclusive set of anxieties.

He's worried about what the chairman wants from Yoongi, worries that it will be pushing the

boundaries too much. He worries that Yoongi's patience will dry up, and Seokjin will be torn between the scorn of two households. He worries that Jeongguk will act up and create a scene during the dinner if their grandfather or uncle is less than careful with their words. Jeongguk is always quick to attack when he feels his brother has been slighted.

He's worried about the ever-present tension in the Jeon household, the frigid way they talk to each other, the severe and obvious lack of affection between them. Yoongi might think he acts cool to his grandmother, and he might complain that she's ice cold to him, but there's an underlying warmth and love between them. They care very deeply for each other, and they know it. There is no such love in the Jeon household.

It's silly, but he doesn't want to expose that part of his life to Yoongi, doesn't want Yoongi to see the indignity of how he grew up. He doesn't want Yoongi to think any less of him because of where he's from. It's so stupid. It's not as if there's anything romantic between him and Yoongi, despite the kisses they refuse to talk about. They're a business deal, right down to the contract. The play-acting for Jeongguk and their friends and the media just got a little too comfortable. Seokjin just needs to take a step back. This isn't a real marriage, this isn't a real relationship. It's a play he has to perform for a few months to earn his freedom.

Except if Seokjin's being perfectly honest, it's more. He likes the way Yoongi shuffles downstairs in the morning, sleepy-eyed and slightly grumpy until he gets a hot mug of coffee into his large hands. He likes the way he catches Yoongi's eyes on him sometimes, likes the little thrill that shoots down his spine under the unshifting gaze. He likes Yoongi's hands, large and veined, strong fingers that move with purpose. He likes the freckles on Yoongi's nose, dusted and nearly absent, visible only when Seokjin's close enough to hear Yoongi's breathing.

He likes the quiet way Yoongi seems to care about him, even if Seokjin tries to remind himself it doesn't mean anything. Tea stocked in the cupboard, an unexpected Christmas present. Even this dinner. Yoongi didn't have to agree to it. He probably would have preferred to be rid of Jeongguk for the holiday, and yet he acquiesced almost immediately.

Seokjin glances at Yoongi by his side - eating quietly and listening with polite deference to the chairman - and wonders. Wonders if there's something more. Wonders if he even wants something more. Wonders if it's wise to play with fire when he already knows the end.

He shakes the thoughts from his mind and focuses back on the topic of conversation. Chairman Jeon has only hinted at business dealings, probably waiting until at least dessert before getting to what he really wants to discuss. It doesn't surprise Seokjin; the chairman has always been calculating and careful.

The chairman tries to engage Yoongi in conversation, but Yoongi's answers are short and precise, leaving no room to elaborate. Seokjin's lips tilt into a small, amused smile. Yoongi may have agreed to come to the dinner, but he didn't agree to make it easy for Seokjin's grandfather. He has the urge to pat Yoongi on the back and coo *good job, good job*. He has to swallow a laugh imagining Yoongi's scowl if he did.

Finally the chairman gives up momentarily on Yoongi and turns his stern expression to Jeongguk. He asks without feeling, "How are your classes?"

Jeongguk straightens in his chair and tilts his chin up. "I made the dean's list."

The chairman smiles. "As expected of a Jeon."

Seokjin catches his uncle's scowl from the corner of his eye but he ignores it. He feels a proud smile

spread on his lips. "Tell the chairman what your art history professor told you," Seokjin says to Jeongguk, smile widening.

Jeongguk shoots Seokjin a sharp look, frowning.

Seokjin ignores him and turns his eyes to the chairman, straightening his shoulders. "He said Jeongguk has an affinity for art, and he shouldn't let his talent go untended."

The chairman scoffs. "What does an art professor know?"

"Hyung, I'm interested in business," Jeongguk says, but Seokjin thinks it's not the exact truth. Yes, Jeongguk enjoys his business classes, but he fills his notebooks with sketches and intricate drawings. Seokjin doesn't want his brother to lose what he loves for the sake of his duties.

Seokjin shrugs. "Balance is good, though. A few art classes that could work as electives."

The chairman makes a long, disapproving noise in the back of his throat. "Jeongguk isn't interested in frivolous pursuits." He arches a brow at Seokjin. "You know better than to encourage this."

Seokjin clenches his jaw. He should let it go, but he doesn't want to. He doesn't want Jeongguk restricted and manipulated. He wants Jeongguk to pursue any area of interest he has, not chained down to the duties and responsibilities of this family. "You let me take art," he says, challenging. He feels Yoongi's eyes on him, questioning. He belatedly remembers he had wanted to keep Yoongi ignorant of his household's strained relationship. He forgot to keep his mask in place around Yoongi again.

Seokjin hears his uncle snort, but the chairman narrows his eyes dangerously, lips etching into a deep frown. "You forget yourself, Seokjin," he says sternly. "Jeongguk is Jeon blood."

Jeongguk slams his chopsticks onto the table, his jaw clenched and eyes wide. "And what's Seokjin-hyung?"

The chairman turns his gaze to Jeongguk and says easily, "Charity."

Adrenaline spikes in Seokjin's blood as he sees anger bubbling up in Jeongguk, the veins in his neck almost popping. He needs to deescalate this. "Jeongguk," he starts, but stops when he feels a strong grip on his knee. He turns to look at his side to Yoongi, confused.

Yoongi's muscles are tense, his shoulders rigid, his spine a straight broomstick. His eyes blink slowly and there's a sharp tilt to his lips. "Chairman Jeon," he drawls, deceptively lazy and languid.

The chairman switches his attention from Jeongguk to Yoongi, waiting for him to continue.

Yoongi takes his time, flicking his eyes across the table, smiling sharply and without any humor. "I think there's been a misunderstanding," Yoongi finally says, eyes sharp and voice low, threatening.

Seokjin blinks, eyes trained on Yoongi. He's never seen him like this, voice pointed like a sword and brandished for a kill.

"That kid over there," Yoongi nods in Jeongguk's direction, "that's your grandson." He reaches for Seokjin's hand without looking, arm reaching out, fingers elongating. Seokjin moves his hand to Yoongi's out of instinct, sliding into place, naturally and without thought. "This man here is *my* husband." Yoongi leans close to the chairman, voice dropping impossibly low. "I expect a certain level of respect when you address him."

Something sparks to life inside Seokjin, a flutter of his heart against his ribs. It's unfamiliar, but warm and pleasant, electricity flickering through his blood. He isn't used to someone standing up for him. He isn't used to having a firm shoulder to lean on. He doesn't wonder what it's like to have Min Yoongi anymore, doesn't wonder what it would feel like to call him his. He thinks he knows now. It's firm ground after years of rollercoasters. It's a quiet warmth, steady and secure, knowing he has a place, knowing that he's wanted and accepted. It's being loved, silently, without much show or flurry, steadily, consistently, devotedly.

He folds his fingers with Yoongi's and stares at their hands. He wants to hold on, just for a while, he thinks. Just for a little bit, he wants to call Yoongi his.

Yoongi stands, scraping his chair against the floor and tugging Seokjin up by their clasped hands. "Let's go, hyung."

Seokjin stands and follows Yoongi as he tugs him out of the house to Yoongi's car, eyes fixed on their hands. He flicks his gaze up to Yoongi's face, still tense and fuming. Seokjin bites the inside of his cheek to keep from smiling.

Just for a little bit, he promises himself. He just wants to be greedy for a little while.

###

Yoongi knows he's fuming, but the knowledge doesn't help him calm down. He grips the steering wheel too hard, steps on the gas pedal too hard, takes the turns too hard. He cannot believe how the Jeons treat Seokjin. He cannot believe Seokjin lived there, grew up there for more than ten years. He knows with a seething, leaden certainty that if that's how they speak to Seokjin in front of *guests*, then the words behind closed doors must cut deep wounds.

He spouts out little bursts of anger the entire drive home, *I can't believe them*, and *they're out of their fucking minds*, and *the fuck do they mean* charity, *when you're the one doing everything for them*. Seokjin doesn't say much back, just calmly replies *I know*, Yoongi in a placating tone that Yoongi doesn't want to admit works.

Seokjin's eyes don't leave Yoongi the entire drive home, and follow him on their silent ride up the elevator and down the hallway to their apartment.

Yoongi kicks off his shoes, not bothering to set them nicely by the door, storming into the kitchen for water.

"They're fucking assholes," he says when Seokjin saunters in after him.

Seokjin smiles and shrugs, hands in his pants pockets, making his pants tighten over his groin.

Yoongi's eyes flicker and he clears his throat, shifting away to the refrigerator to grab a bottle of water. "You lived with them for ten years, how did you not go insane?" He slams the refrigerator door shut and scowls at Seokjin. "Why are you so calm about this? Why am I the only one pissed off?"

Seokjin opens his mouth to speak but Yoongi raises the hand holding the water bottle, stopping him.

"And don't tell me you're used to it, or it's not that bad. Don't give me that bullshit."

Seokjin leans against the counter opposite Yoongi, legs crossed at his ankles, smile still crinkling the lines around his eyes. "I wasn't going to."

Yoongi swallows a swig of water and gestures to him with the water bottle. "Well?"

Seokjin tilts his head to the side, contemplating Yoongi, eyes roaming up and down and settling on his face. He pushes away from the counter and steps into Yoongi's space, fingers reaching for Yoongi's water bottle. He leans forward, Seokjin's chest brushing against Yoongi's shoulder as Seokjin sets the bottle onto the counter behind them.

Yoongi's breath catches in his throat, his heart stutters against his chest. Heat pools in his stomach as he catches a whiff of Seokjin's scent, woody and sweet. Yoongi's hands come to rest lightly on Seokjin's waist, not out of habit but certainly without his direct thought, drawn like a magnet. Seokjin's shirt is silky smooth under his fingertips and he rubs along the line of ribbon that ties around Seokjin's waist.

Seokjin pulls back just enough to look carefully at Yoongi. His hand reaches up and pushes Yoongi's fringe back from his forehead, bringing what hair he can behind Yoongi's ear. His fingers linger on the shell of Yoongi's ear and Yoongi represses a shiver that works up his spine.

"I was going to say thank you," Seokjin finally says, voice warm and liquid and washing over Yoongi.

Yoongi stares dumbly up at Seokjin, his fingertips still running along the ribbon on Seokjin's waist. "For what?"

"For standing up for me. For caring." Seokjin smiles, his hand dropping from Yoongi's ear to his neck. "Thank you," he says again, bending.

Yoongi's eyelids fall closed as he feels Seokjin's lips press into his. He rises on his toes, pushing up into the kiss, fingers curling around the ribbon on Seokjin's waist. Seokjin's hand is hot against his neck, massaging, pulling, angling. His thumb brushes over Yoongi's jawline.

Yoongi's lips part, breathing out into Seokjin's mouth. His mind empties of everything but the heat of Seokjin's stomach radiating through the silk of his shirt and the press of his plush lips against Yoongi's. He wants Seokjin's tongue in his mouth, wants to taste him and drink him down. He wants Seokjin's fingers in his hair, tugging the strands. He wants to press his hands into every part of Seokjin, indenting into the skin. He wants Seokjin and he can't even remember that he's not allowed.

He closes his teeth over Seokjin's lower lip, slowly, gnawing lightly enough so he doesn't draw blood. Seokjin's breath shudders between them and Yoongi tugs at his lip more insistently. He slides his thigh between Seokjin's, hip pressing into Seokjin's groin and against the hardening outline of his cock.

All the blood in Yoongi's veins seems to rush down to his cock and he pulls hard on the ribbon in his hand, making Seokjin stumble into him until they're crushed against the refrigerator door. One of Seokjin's hands flattens on the door to steady them. Yoongi angles his head to press their lips together again, slipping his tongue into Seokjin's mouth.

Seokjin groans, muffled between their mouths, thumb pressing into Yoongi's pulse point on his neck. The pressure is firm, a spot of fire on Yoongi's skin. He wants more of it. More of Seokjin's fingers trailing blazes, more of Seokjin's groans in his mouth, more of Seokjin's hips grinding against his, friction that makes his head spin in the most pleasant way. He wants more of Seokjin, always more of Seokjin, never enough. His greedy fingers claw at Seokjin's stomach, pulling insistently at the ribbon.

Instead of more, though, Seokjin pulls back, breaking the kiss, and all Yoongi can do is chase after

him. He's confused and desperate, needs Seokjin's tongue back on his lips, needs to breathe in the heady scent of Seokjin.

He tries to pull Seokjin back but Seokjin lets out a breathy chuckle, thick and arousing. His fingers flex on the ribbon still in his hand.

"Yoongi," Seokjin manages, breath labored. He keeps his hand firm on Yoongi's neck to keep him in place.

Yoongi blinks, stares hazily at Seokjin, his red, kiss-swollen lips, his dilated pupils, the red flush on his cheeks and down his neck and even down to his collarbones. Yoongi licks his lips. He wants to bite along the red path, wants to follow it down to Seokjin's stomach, to Seokjin's cock. He can't remember a time he's been this aroused.

He flicks his gaze back to Seokjin, mouth parted to take in a large breath. "What?" he asks, fingers busy untying the knot on Seokjin's ribbon. He smiles a little when it comes loose, falling to the side. He curls his hand into Seokjin's shirt and tugs it out of the waistband of his pants.

"Section four, Yoongi," Seokjin says, leaning forward again for a quick kiss, lips lingering on the side of Yoongi's mouth. "We can't."

Yoongi pulls back, frowning. He narrows his eyes. He doesn't understand what Seokjin is saying. "What?"

"Section four, Yoongi."

Yoongi's brow furrows, confused. He licks his lips again and tilts his head. "Is that what you call your dick, because I'll be honest, that's usually a turn-off but I can roll with it."

Seokjin stares at him for a split second before his eyes crinkle and he bursts out in laughter. He buries his face into Yoongi's shoulder, giggling, chest rumbling with it.

Yoongi frowns, his hands coming around to Seokjin's back, holding him steady, smoothing up and down.

Seokjin pulls back, still smiling with laughter. "Yoongi, section four of the *contract*."

Yoongi stares blankly at Seokjin.

"The marriage contract." Seokjin tilts his head, amused. "No sex."

Finally it clicks, and Yoongi's eyes widen in realization. He hates himself. He fucking *hates* his past self, that stupid fucking *fuck*. He didn't need to put the no sex clause into the contract. Seokjin even told him it was unnecessary. He blows out a long breath and drops his hands from Seokjin, trying to bring his heartbeat down to a normal level, trying to ignore the more pressing issue in his pants. He leans his head against the refrigerator and closes his eyes.

"Right. The fucking contract." His hands feel cold now that Seokjin's warmth isn't in them. Regret washes over him. He hates past Yoongi so much.

Seokjin smiles at him, licking his lips. His fingers reach for the beltloop on Yoongi's pants and he tugs him close again until their hips are flush. "We could amend it."

"Fucking yes, yes, let's do that," Yoongi breathes out quickly, hands coming up to cup Seokjin's face and pulling him into another kiss.

Seokjin laughs into his mouth and steps away, linking their hands together and pulling him to the stairs. "Where do you keep it?" He takes the stairs two at a time, tugging Yoongi behind him. "Your studio?"

"No, the wardrobe room," Yoongi says as they reach the second floor, pulling him into the bedroom. "Grab a pen," he says, letting their hands finally disentangle, and trots into the wardrobe. He quickly reaches the middle island that holds his ties and watches, pulls out a drawer and slips the contract out. He flattens it on the countertop and steps back, quickly shedding his jacket and unbuttoning his shirt.

Seokjin steps into the room, waving a pen in his hands.

Yoongi smirks at him and nods to the contract on the counter, shrugging out of his shirt and heading for his stash of lube and condoms.

"Just cross it out?" Seokjin asks, uncapping the pen.

"Yeah," he says, grabbing a condom and a bottle of lube and heading back to Seokjin. He drops the items on the counter and runs his hand over the small of Seokjin's back. Seokjin shivers but doesn't move to dislodge his hand. Yoongi leans over and presses his lips to Seokjin's neck.

"Yoongi," Seokjin says, breathy and strangled.

"Hmm?" Yoongi bares his teeth and scrapes them lightly down Seokjin's neck. Seokjin hunches over the counter and moans, head lulling to give Yoongi better access.

Seokjin pushes the contract over to Yoongi. "Initial," he breathes out, shoving the pen into Yoongi's hand.

Yoongi glances at the contract, scrawling his initials beside the crossed out line. He spins Seokjin around to face him and draws his head down for another kiss, tongue slipping into his mouth.

Seokjin's hands smooth down Yoongi's chest, nails scraping over his skin until his fingers catch on Yoongi's waistband. He unbuttons Yoongi's pants and tugs them down.

Yoongi pulls back and kicks them off and Seokjin takes the opportunity to strip out of his clothes. Yoongi has to swallow the build-up of saliva in his mouth at the sight. Seokjin is broad, of course he's broad, he knew that. But it's one thing to know and another thing to *see*.

"You're really hot," Yoongi says, mouth moving without much thought.

Seokjin laughs and peeks at Yoongi through his lashes. "So are you, you know."

Yoongi smirks and tilts his head. "I know." He steps up to Seokjin and smiles up at him. He lifts up to peck him once, twice, three times until Seokjin gets frustrated and slides his hand into Yoongi's hair, angling him for a deeper kiss, intense and burning.

Yoongi's fingers tingle to touch, and he does. He slides his hands over Seokjin's ribs, trailing down, kneading into the firm flesh. He backs Seokjin up against the counter, thumbs rubbing over his sharp hipbones.

Seokjin reaches his hand down and palms Yoongi's cock, making a loose fist and tugging. Yoongi groans and thrusts up into his hand. Seokjin smiles against his lips and asks, "You gonna just fuck my hand, or can we both do something fun?"

Yoongi hisses. "Turn around," he says, hand already reaching for the lube.

Seokjin readily acquiesces, bending over the counter and pushing his ass up for Yoongi.

Yoongi's eyes widen and he stares for a moment, taking in the sight. "You're really flexible," he mutters, trailing a hand down Seokjin's spine and over his hips. "It's really hot."

Seokjin chuckles and glances over his shoulder. "I know."

Yoongi snorts, but before Seokjin can comment, he slips a lubed finger into Seokjin. Seokjin makes an aborted sound, something between a whimper and a moan. Yoongi leans over Seokjin and scrapes his teeth over his shoulders. He wants to hear that sound again.

"Can you handle a second finger?" he asks, lips still working all over Seokjin's back.

Seokjin swallows a gasp and nods. "Yeah."

Yoongi slips a second finger in, scissoring them. He bites lightly between Seokjin's shoulder blades. Seokjin's back arches.

Yoongi presses his lips to the top of Seokjin's spine and slips in a third finger. Seokjin moans, pushing back, trying to draw Yoongi's digits in deeper. "Fuck, that's so hot, hyung," Yoongi says, watching his fingers slide in and out of Seokjin, watching how they catch on Seokjin's rim with every thrust.

"It would be even hotter if you'd put your cock in already," Seokjin complains, small whimpering noises accentuating his need.

Yoongi hisses and drops his forehead to Seokjin's back. "You've got a dirty mouth, hyung." He slips his fingers out of Seokjin and grabs the condom on the counter, rolling it on quickly. "You okay?"

Seokjin nods. "Yeah, I'm ready."

Yoongi wraps one hand around his cock, guiding it to Seokjin's rim. His other hand holds Seokjin's hip steady as he pushes in, his cockhead slipping in slowly.

Seokjin moans, pushing his hips back and drawing Yoongi in further.

"Shit, hyung," Yoongi moans, pushing all the way in. It's hot and tight and feels so fucking good. He has to squeeze his eyes shut to keep still and allow Seokjin time to adjust. "You feel really good, hyung," he says, hands trailing up to knead Seokjin's lower back, the sides of his waist.

Seokjin wriggles in Yoongi's hold, making small, circular grinding motions with his hips. Yoongi has to bite his bottom lip to keep still. "You can move now," he says.

"Fuck, thank you," Yoongi says before he can stop his mouth. Seokjin laughs, his shoulders shuddering with the sound, and Yoongi can't help the smile that spreads on his lips. He runs his fingers over Seokjin's side, thumb massaging into his back, and pulls out shallowly. He pushes back in experimentally, fingers gripping Seokjin's waist. "Feels okay?"

Seokjin groans, hips moving with Yoongi's thrusts. He nods his head where it rests on the counter.

Yoongi builds to a faster pace, strong, swift thrusts that ram Seokjin against the counter with each inward push. Seokjin's legs spread to steady himself from the momentum. Yoongi keens at the movement, his cock sinking deeper into Seokjin. "You're really fucking flexible," he pants.

"Why are you so talkative during sex?" Seokjin grumbles, his fingers gripping the edge of the

counter. "Focu-," he admonishes, voice strangling into a moan at one particularly hard thrust from Yoongi.

Yoongi smiles and flattens his chest over Seokjin's back, one hand coming up to the counter to give him leverage. He angles his hips, hoping to find Seokjin's prostrate.

"You good?" he huffs against Seokjin's neck, lips nibbling on the skin.

"Fuck, yes, good, good, Yoongi," Seokjin answers, hips pushing back insistently. Yoongi's hands push down on Seokjin's lower back, arching him so Yoongi's cock drives in at a new angle. Seokjin makes a sudden, strangled sound and Yoongi smirks against his neck.

"Found it," he whispers into Seokjin's ear, pulling back to thrust in again at the same angle.

Seokjin gasps out a sharp breath. "I'm not going to last long if you keep doing that," Seokjin manages to moan out.

"That's the point," Yoongi replies, lips trailing down the shell of Seokjin's ear to his lobe, mouthing at Seokjin's earring. His breathing is labored and he feels his orgasm building. His fingers tighten on Seokjin's hips. He reaches around and wraps his hand over Seokjin's cock, jerking it in rhythm of his thrusts.

Seokjin tightens around his cock and comes onto Yoongi's hand, crying out. He trembles with the aftershocks, shoulders sagging against the counter.

"Fuck," Yoongi groans into Seokjin's ear, letting go and spilling into the condom, still thrusting while he rides his orgasm. Seokjin makes small noises with every thrust, blissed out and content, squeezing tight around Yoongi's cock, milking his orgasm. He finally stills, dropping lifelessly against Seokjin's back, mouth wide open and trying to catch his breath. He can feel Seokjin shuddering under him and he runs his hand down Seokjin's side. "Are you okay?"

Seokjin sighs. "I'm *so* okay," he says, voice absolutely *wrecked*. He turns his face to peer at Yoongi over his shoulder and sends him a wink.

Yoongi laughs and lets his cheek rest between Seokjin's shoulder blades, catching his breath. He hears a heartbeat, strong and fast and soothing to his ears. He can't distinguish if it's coming from him or Seokjin. He smiles and squeezes his hand on Seokjin's hip.

&&&&

Seokjin paces around his room, phone pressed tight to his ear. "Pick up, pick up, pick up," he whines, frustrated as the call keeps ringing. He thinks it might go to voicemail until finally the other line answers.

"Jin?" the voice yells, music loud and interfering in the background.

"I have a crisis," Seokjin says immediately, still pacing around his room, grabbing an outfit from his closet for work.

"Wait, let me just," Wendy says. Seokjin can hear her excuse herself from whoever she's with and the music eventually fades. "Sorry, I'm out. What's wrong?"

Seokjin tosses his clothes to his bed and sighs. "Okay, your honest opinion. How bad, on a scale of one to ten, is it to start a 'some' relationship with your legal-but-contracted husband?"

Wendy is silent on the other end for a beat. "I must be drunk, because that didn't make any sense."

Seokjin makes a face. "This isn't a time for jokes."

"Make some sense then?" Seokjin whines and Wendy sighs. "Start from the beginning."

Seokjin pauses, feet coming to a stop, his toes curling into the soft area rug. He wonders what the beginning was: last night when he slipped out of Yoongi's bed to tiptoe to his own room, muscles pleasantly sore and a languid contentment in his blood; weeks ago when Yoongi stepped into his space, sliding closer than Seokjin thought he would allow, mouth insistent on his, fingers digging into his waist, *more* in his breath; or maybe that first day, wind icy cold and howling, rain pelleting like knives, and his only anchor was Yoongi's arms gripped tightly in his hands.

He frowns and answers Wendy, "I slept with Yoongi."

Wendy makes a noncommittal sound and he can almost imagine her nodding. "Okay but you did that before when Jeongguk stayed over right?"

Seokjin pinches the bridge of his nose. "No this was the other kind of sleeping."

Wendy is silent for a moment before she gasps. "You mean you-"

"Yes."

"And he-"

"Yes."

She lets out a disbelieving laugh. "How?"

Seokjin flops down on his bed and recounts the dinner to her. She makes understanding and encouraging hums.

"So what do I do?" Seokjin asks when he finishes.

"I guess that depends on what you want to do?" She sighs. "I'm not going to say it's a good idea because it's not. But if you want to pursue it, as long as you're realistic in your expectations, I think you can manage it." She pauses. "What do you want to do?"

"I don't know," Seokjin says, the lie dry in his mouth. He knows what he wants to do. His hands are cold and he wants to touch the blazing fire. He wants to have Yoongi.

Only for a little bit longer.

&&&

The problem with altering a contract on impulse is that neither party really thinks through the consequences. Contract alternations should be put through rigorous drafts after many weeks of discussion. Yoongi knows this. He was just a little preoccupied with other, more pressing matters at the time. Like how fast he could get Seokjin out of that white silky shirt.

Yoongi frowns at his iced Americano and ignores Hoseok's positively gleeful grin from across him.

"Can you repeat that, I'd really like to hear it again," Hoseok says, leaning almost half his body over the table, eyes sparkling.

Yoongi twists his lips to the side. "I want advice."

Hoseok shakes his head, still grinning. "No, the other part."

"How do I tell if it was a one-time thing or not?"

Hoseok makes a gesture with his hand for Yoongi to continue. "The first part you told me."

Yoongi rolls his eyes. He regrets coming to Hoseok for advice. "I slept with Seokjin-hyung."

Hoseok's eyes light with excitement and he straightens, clapping his hands together.

"Congratulations, hyung! I knew there was something magical there." Hoseok winks and Yoongi wonders if his eyes will fall out if he rolls them any harder. Hoseok ignores him and puts his elbow on the table, leaning his chin on his hand. "So?"

Yoongi stares blankly at Hoseok. "What?"

Hoseok smiles smugly at him. "How was it?"

"I'm not sharing that," Yoongi says, arching a brow.

Hoseok's face drops. "Ah, hyung, you can't do this to me. I've been wondering for years, okay. Way before you came into the picture."

"That really isn't a valid argument."

"I tell you all about Namjoon's dick," Hoseok pouts.

"I never wanted to hear about it in the first place!"

Hoseok huffs out an annoyed breath. "This is what best friends do. Share. Care. Talk about how their boyfriends are in bed." He leans forward again, both elbows on the table. "So. How's Seokjin-hyung in bed?"

Yoongi stares at Hoseok in disbelief. "I want advice, not to relive my sexual experiences."

Hoseok just blinks and smiles expectantly at Yoongi.

Yoongi blows out a long breath, resigned. "He's," Yoongi starts reluctantly, wondering what he can say to satisfy Hoseok without sharing too much detail, "flexible."

Hoseok's eyes widen and his mouth parts, a long, low sound escaping. "Flexible how?"

Yoongi thinks back to that night, his blood running hot under his skin at just the memory. He remembers bending Seokjin over, how pliant he was under his hands. He swallows hard and frowns. He holds his forearm up, flicking his wrist to try to imitate the way Seokjin's hips bend, the way his back arches beautifully. "He can bend. More than I thought possible."

Yoongi looks back to Hoseok when he makes a high-pitched keening noise, whiny and tortured. Hoseok collapses onto the table, head hitting it with a *bang*. "I want to die," Hoseok moans. "That's so hot, I want to die."

Yoongi scowls at the crown of Hoseok's hair. "Stop imaging my husband. You have Namjoon."

"I hate Namjoon," Hoseok replies quickly, voice laced with acid.

Yoongi arches a brow. "What now?"

Hoseok's head pops up quickly and he leans closer over the table, a feat Yoongi thought impossible. "He wants to go to couples' therapy."

Yoongi stares blankly at Hoseok. "Isn't that a good thing?"

"Not! When the therapist is recommended to you by public enemy number one," Hoseok sneers.

Yoongi tilts his head, confused. "Who?"

Hoseok curls his lips in judgement. "Jackson. Jackson Wang. Why don't you know this by now?"

Yoongi nods. "No, you're right, I should have known."

"Hmm." Hoseok twists his lips into a frown but lets it go. "He's probably got listening devices set up all over the therapist's room, just waiting to find a way into my man's bed." He narrows his eyes dangerously.

"Jackson isn't after Namjoon," Yoongi says, and he feels like a broken record at this point, repeating the phrase so often he's lost track of how many times he's voiced it.

"How do you know? Namjoon is fucking sexy, everyone wants him," Hoseok says, like it's an unarguable truth.

Yoongi purses his lips. "I came here for advice, not for made up stories."

Hoseok sighs and leans against the booth, taking his drink and sipping from the straw. "What exactly is your problem? You're getting laid by the most beautiful man on this planet who is – " Hoseok pauses and raises his voice to a higher pitch – "'very flexible'."

Yoongi scowls. "I don't know if it was a one time thing or not."

Hoseok leans close, setting his drink back on the table and whispers, "Hyung. Listen to me closely, because this is so radical, it's going to blow your mind." Yoongi arches a brow but Hoseok continues, unperturbed. "There's this thing that can solve all your problems. It's called *communication*."

Yoongi glares at Hoseok.

Hoseok nods, satisfied, and leans back again. "Now. Can we move back to my more serious issues?"

Yoongi sighs and leans back as well. "I don't know, why don't you take your own advice and try communicating?"

Hoseok's mouth drops open and he blinks at Yoongi.

"What?" Yoongi finally prompts after Hoseok remains silent.

Hoseok frowns, lips tilting down drastically on his face. "That's so crazy it might actually work."

&&&

Yoongi thinks he's being subtle.

Seokjin pauses chewing and flicks his gaze to Yoongi across the dining room table. Yoongi looks

down at his plate, pushing food around and pretending he wasn't just staring at Seokjin. It would be cute if Seokjin wasn't already frustrated with the awkward atmosphere they've been ignoring for three days.

Okay, Yoongi's still a little cute, regardless of the atmosphere, Seokjin admits to himself.

Since that night in the closet - the closet of all places, they couldn't even make it to the bed like civilized people - they both danced around each other, lingering gazes and aborted conversations. Seokjin feels like screaming; the tension is making his life miserable.

He supposes this is why Yoongi had insisted on including section four in the contract to begin with.

Seokjin swallows and reaches for his glass of water. "Are we ever going to address that we fucked or are we going to pretend it never happened like all the kisses?" he asks bluntly, patience finally expended.

He hears Yoongi's cutlery clatter to his plate. "What?"

Seokjin's fingers run along the top of his glass and he flicks his eyes to Yoongi's face, taking in his widened eyes and his mouth parted in surprise. "Are we going to talk about how we had sex three days ago?"

Yoongi shifts in his chair and shrugs, seemingly nonchalant, but Seokjin sees the twitch at the corner of his eye. "Sure."

Seokjin blinks at Yoongi, waiting for him to start.

Yoongi clears his throat and finally looks back at Seokjin. "So we had sex three days ago."

"In the closet," Seokjin adds.

Yoongi's eyes narrow. "Is the location important?"

"Yes. At least for me." Seokjin frowns. "It was uncomfortable."

Yoongi raises his eyebrows and his lips tilt into a subtle smirk. "I didn't hear you complaining."

Seokjin ignores the flush he feels spreading on his chest and hopes it does not creep up to his neck. "I felt it in the morning."

Yoongi's eyes flicker and darken but his expression remains neutral. "Do you want an apology?"

Seokjin hums. "No. But the bed would be nice."

Yoongi's lips stretch into an amused smile. "Are you offering a do-over?"

Seokjin hesitates, the flush finally working up his neck and up to the tops of his ears. He flattens his hand on the table to suppress his sudden jitters, and swallows. Wendy's words ring through his head. *What do you want to do?*

He wants a repeat performance. He wants to hold hands with Yoongi and walk down the Han River, he wants to kiss the tip of Yoongi's nose when it flushes red from the cold, he wants to hear Yoongi's rumbling voice in his ear, whispering and addicting. He wants to pretend he can be something other than Jeongguk's caretaker, something other than his mother's protector, and the Jeon's charity case. He wants to forget he's Jeon Seokjin, wants to feel like Kim Seokjin. He wants to pretend he can have what he wants.

He looks directly at Yoongi and says, “Yes.”

Yoongi’s eyes widen and his mouth falls open. “You mean we can, ah-”

Seokjin tries to shrug casually. “If you get some paper, we can make a proper amendment-” He cuts off and smiles when he sees Yoongi push back from the table and jog to his study for paper. Yoongi can move very fast when he likes to, Seokjin realizes with amusement. He sighs and leans back in his chair. It’s not fair that Yoongi is both cute and hot.

Yoongi reappears with a fresh sheet of paper and a fountain pen. He smiles triumphantly and sets it on the table, pushing their plates aside. “Amendment one: we are free to pursue the sexual component of our relationship for as long as both of us are agreeable to it.” He looks up to Seokjin. “Agreed?”

Seokjin nods and smiles. “Agreed.”

Yoongi’s hands glide over the paper, long fingers curled around the pen. “Two, we will practice safe sex and always use condoms.” He looks up. “Agreed?”

“Agreed.” Seokjin leans forward. “Who’s responsible for supplying the condoms?”

Yoongi waves his free hand in dismissal. “I’ll do it.” His hand moves over the paper, long strokes of black ink. “Amendment three: we will endeavor to keep activities to the bed.” He looks up again and smirks at Seokjin. “Agreed?”

Seokjin is fairly certain his ears have turned red but he manages an unaffected smile. “Any other soft, comfortable surface is also acceptable.”

Yoongi stares at him, blinking slowly, his throat bobbing with a hard swallow. “I’ll make a note,” he says, turning back to the paper.

Seokjin laughs and leans back in his chair, watching Yoongi jot down their agreement. He thought a marriage contract is strange enough, but a sex amendment is beyond bizarre.

Yoongi’s hand comes to a stop. He taps the pen on the paper, leaving three black dots in his wake. Seokjin raises his eyebrows and waits for Yoongi to look back to him, but Yoongi frowns at the paper and finally asks, “Is it exclusive?”

Seokjin’s hands clench into fists and his heart rate spikes, suddenly hyper aware of the firm set of Yoongi’s lips and the way he won’t look at him. He takes a slow breath in, his lungs expanding with it, pressure in his chest that does nothing to distract from his heart.

“I want it to be exclusive,” he finally says, pushing the words out, unfamiliar with voicing his own desires.

Yoongi looks up, his lips stretching into a wide, beaming smile. “Agreed.”

Seokjin exhales, lungs contracting almost painfully. He thinks not for the first time that he’s playing a dangerous game that he doesn’t know how to win. For the moment, looking at the way Yoongi smiles at him, he doesn’t quite care enough to stop himself. Right now, he isn’t Jeon Seokjin but Kim Seokjin; young, charming, good looking, and a man who can hold on to what he wants.

Liar Game

Chapter Notes

LISTEN LISTEN. A very amazing artist named Jansku went and did [this fanart](#) for this fic and I'm IN AWE PLEASE WHO WHAT HOW THANK YOU.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Just to be clear," Jeongguk starts, arms crossed over his chest and glaring at Yoongi across the table. "I only agreed to come because I was hungry."

Yoongi shrugs, unconcerned, and nods to the large bowl in front of Jeongguk. "So eat."

Jeongguk eyes him warily. "And just because you stood up for hyung one time doesn't mean I suddenly approve of this marriage. I'm still completely against it."

Yoongi sighs. "I don't know how many times I have to tell you, kid, but I don't need or want your permission."

"You're really annoying," Jeongguk says, eyes narrowed.

"So are you," Yoongi throws back. He gestures to the food on the table again. "But I'm still buying you food, so either eat or leave."

Jeongguk glares at him for a moment but eventually he reaches for his spoon, his expression loosening into delight when he swallows his first spoonful.

Yoongi's lips lift into a smirk and he leans forward to take a sip of his soup as well. He watches Jeongguk eat and thinks not for the first time that the kid is a little cute. He didn't see it before, but he can see parts of Seokjin in Jeongguk. The large eyes that say more than their mouths do, the broad build that Yoongi is certain can throw him halfway across the room, the way they talk about each other like they would die for the other to be happy. Yoongi smiles fondly and pushes the side dishes closer to Jeongguk.

Jeongguk pretends not to notice, reaching for a side dish and avoiding Yoongi's eyes. Yoongi doesn't laugh, but it's not easy.

When Jeongguk is nearly done his meal, Yoongi finally says, "I want to know, in detail, exactly how your family has treated Seokjin."

Jeongguk stops chewing and glares at Yoongi, setting his utensils back on the table and scowling. "I knew there was a catch."

Yoongi shrugs. "Nothing in this life is free."

Jeongguk scoffs and crosses his arms, leaning back in the booth. "Why don't you ask hyung yourself. You guys are both so close."

"We're not 'close', we're married," Yoongi says and Jeongguk rolls his eyes. Yoongi sighs. "You of all people should know that hyung will never tell me everything. He likes to pretend things aren't as

bad as they really are."

Jeongguk frowns. "When did you start calling him hyung?"

"When it stopped being fun annoying you."

Jeongguk glares at him but pushes at his spoon in the bowl, contemplating.

Yoongi purses his lips and keeps his expression neutral. "It's fine, I'll just ask hyung. Let him re-live those memories."

Jeongguk scowls at Yoongi. "Fine, I'll tell you! At least you'll understand why you're not fit to be hyung's husband."

Yoongi shrugs and makes a gesture at Jeongguk. "So tell me how much I don't deserve hyung."

Jeongguk's brow furrows and he stares at his unfinished bowl of soup. Yoongi remains silent, waiting for him to find the words. Finally, Jeongguk says slowly, "I was really young when the Jeons took me. I didn't know them. My father died before I had any memories of him. All I knew was my mom and hyung and Jimin-hyung, and the aunties that lived in our building. That was my family."

Jeongguk stirs his spoon idly in his bowl and still doesn't look up.

"I tried to run away," he continues. "Several times." He laughs, mirthless and short-lived. "I really thought I could find my way back to Busan. Then one day, Seokjin-hyung showed up. I guess I was pacified." He frowns, etching deep into his face. "They didn't treat hyung the same way they treated me, though. I didn't realize it at first. They were cold to me, dismissive. They talked badly about my mother and my tainted blood. But hyung was..." Jeongguk's brow furrows. "To them, hyung was less than a person. His whole existence was to take care of me, and keep me in line."

Yoongi's jaw clenches and his shoulders lock, rigid and tense, but he remains silent as Jeongguk continues.

"Anything I wanted, I got. Video games and clothes and toys." Jeongguk lets the spoon slip from his hands and watches it drop into the bowl, fingers clutching into fists. "Hyung had just enough to look presentable to the outside world." He finally looks up and locks eyes with Yoongi. "They spent more on the dogs than they did on Seokjin-hyung."

Yoongi bites back a curse, his expression darkening.

"You want to know the worst part? Hyung never said a word. He always made sure to look extra happy for me. Sometimes he'd scrape some money together, I don't know where from, and take me out. He called it a date. Treated me to street food instead of treating himself." Jeongguk scowls. "He's like that. Thinks he has to sacrifice himself for others. It's bullshit."

Yoongi remembers Seokjin on the day they met, rain beating down on them, hands gripping a stranger in desperation to save Jeongguk. He bites down his teeth, an ache starting in his jaw from the pressure.

"I started skipping classes and got into some things I shouldn't have." Jeongguk shrugs. "I was mad, mad at the world and my grandfather and at hyung. It was all a mess. But I never got into trouble. I was never stopped or talked to. It was like I could do whatever I wanted." Jeongguk's voice trails off and he looks away, eyes distant and regretful. "I wish I hadn't."

Yoongi doesn't like the feeling starting in his stomach, boiling up. "What happened?"

Jeongguk swallows and doesn't look up. He takes a breath and says, "I came home and heard yelling in my grandfather's study. Seokjin-hyung was begging, on his knees, for them to forgive *me*. I found out that every time I messed up or made a mistake, they took it out on hyung. They brought him from Busan and let him live with me, but the cost was complete supplication."

Yoongi's blood runs hot, anger coursing through his veins and making his thoughts hazy and disjointed. He can still feel the way Seokjin's weight had shifted that first day, moving to kneel and beg Yoongi to marry him.

"Seokjin-hyung gave up everything for me. On that day I promised I would make it up to him." Jeongguk leans forward suddenly. "I'm going to take over the company, and I'm going to give Seokjin-hyung everything he ever wants."

Yoongi forces himself to place his hands calmly on the table, trying to rein in his anger. He knew it would be bad but he did not expect the fury to be quite so strong, thrumming through his veins.

Jeongguk brings Yoongi back, saying, "Yoongi-hyung, you're unnecessary in the equation. You could never give Seokjin-hyung everything he deserves."

Jeongguk is right, but Yoongi doesn't want to admit it. He straightens in his seat and locks eyes with Jeongguk. "How long before you take over the Jeon Group?"

Jeongguk blinks and tilts his head.

"How long?" Yoongi repeats.

Jeongguk frowns and reluctantly says, "Maybe a couple years." Yoongi arches a brow and Jeongguk sighs. "Like five."

"So let me take care of him until then."

Jeongguk's eyes widen and he blinks again. "What?"

Yoongi shrugs and gestures to Jeongguk. "You have no power for at least five years. Stop being an ass and let me take care of your hyung until you can do something for him."

Jeongguk frowns, studying Yoongi closely, eyes flickering with too many thoughts. "I don't like you."

Yoongi snorts. "You don't have to," he says, shrugging.

"I thought my grandfather forced Seokjin-hyung to marry you."

Yoongi smirks. "Your grandfather can't make me do anything."

Jeongguk's lips twitch into an almost smile before he corrects himself and straightens his expression. "I still don't approve."

Yoongi sighs and rolls his eyes. "I don't ne-"

"-my permission, I know, you say it like every time I see you." Jeongguk stares at Yoongi, watching him intently. "Don't you dare ever hurt my hyung," he says finally.

"I won't," Yoongi promises, fingers pressing against the cool surface of the table, and momentarily

forgets that he doesn't believe in promises.

&&&

Seokjin generally does not come home from a long day of work expecting to find his cousin-in-law waiting outside his apartment. Taehyung, however, cannot be generalized, and Seokjin finds him sitting with his back against the door, thumbing through his phone. Seokjin frowns as he approaches him.

"What are you doing here?" Seokjin asks when he reaches Taehyung. "Yoongi won't be home for a while."

Taehyung looks up and shrugs, slipping his phone into his back pocket. "I'm here to see you."

Seokjin blinks in confusion. "You should have called. Or at least waited at the cafe across the street. How long have you been sitting here?"

Taehyung stands from the floor, dusting his pants off. He stretches his legs and bounces on his feet to get his blood flowing again. "Doesn't matter." He leans against the wall, hooking one of his feet around his ankle.

Seokjin reaches for the lockpad but pauses, remembering Yoongi's insistence that Taehyung never learn the code. He glances at Taehyung and makes a small twirling movement with his hand. "Turn around."

Taehyung frowns. "What?"

"Turn around, Yoongi doesn't want you knowing the code and I don't want to be the one responsible for giving it to you." Seokjin makes the gesture again. "Turn around."

Taehyung gapes at him and Seokjin reaches forward and grasps his shoulders, bodily turning him so Taehyung's back faces the door. "This is so unnecessary, hyung," Taehyung huffs.

Seokjin ignores him and reaches for the lockpad again.

"I already know what it is."

"Then why didn't you use it and wait inside?" Seokjin counters.

"Because I have basic human decency. I'd never use that code. I'm actually a little disappointed you're using it. Sort of insensitive."

Seokjin snorts, disbelieving, and reaches his hand forward, punching the zero. Taehyung is a good actor, he thinks. "If you know it, why don't you tell me?"

"Zero-eight-one-four," Taehyung recites dully. He turns around and raises his eyebrows at Seokjin. "I'm right."

Seokjin blinks, his mouth dropping in surprise. "How...did you know?"

Taehyung scowls and leans against the wall again. "Hyung is really obvious." He gestures to the door. "Put it in."

"You know it, you can put it in," Seokjin says, still processing the new information.

Taehyung's frown deepens. "I'm not putting that awful date in."

Seokjin frowns, finally inputting the code and opening the door, his fingers slow and mindful as he presses the numbers. "What date is it?"

Taehyung stares at him, aghast. "You don't know?"

Seokjin shakes his head.

Taehyung sighs and walks past Seokjin into the apartment. "I can't believe Yoongi-hyung had you using that and didn't even tell you." He spins around as he toes off his shoes and glares at Seokjin. "And I can't believe you never bothered to find out. What kind of relationship are you in?"

Seokjin rolls his eyes. "You could just tell me what terrible thing I've been doing."

Taehyung heads to the living room and plops down on the sofa, kicking his feet up onto the coffee table. "No, you should find out yourself. Like you should have done *months* ago."

Seokjin follows Taehyung, crossing his arms and leaning his hip against a loveseat. He's annoyed, annoyed that he doesn't know what date he's been using for months, annoyed that Yoongi never told him, annoyed that Taehyung knows and refuses to tell him. He wants to defend himself, wants to point out that the marriage is almost halfway over, the end date looming. He wants to tell Taehyung that he is trying to be mindful of Yoongi's walls and defences, trying to keep a semblance of balance because in eight months, he'll be gone.

Taehyung stares at him, wide eyes serious and all-seeing. "I know this marriage was arranged, and I know you didn't know each other beforehand, but I thought you were actually trying."

Seokjin arches a brow, his expression hardening. "If you came here to discuss my relationship with Yoongi, you can leave."

Taehyung keeps his gaze steady on Seokjin, unblinking. "I didn't, but I'm concerned now."

"It's not your business," Seokjin points out. "Why did you want to talk to me?"

Taehyung presses his lips together and considers Seokjin. He straightens on the sofa and clasps his hands together. "I wanted to talk to you about Jimin."

Seokjin keeps his expression neutral. "What about Jimin?"

"Are you in love with him?"

Seokjin coughs, taken aback at the blunt question. "Excuse me?"

"I know Jimin has feelings for you and I want to know where you stand on it."

A spike of protective defensiveness shoots through Seokjin's blood, and his shoulders tense. He takes a long breath in and reminds himself calm down. He forces his arms to uncross and he places his hands lightly on his thighs. "Have you talked to Jimin about it?"

Taehyung frowns. "Jimin doesn't want me to know about it. I'm pretending I don't." He stares at Seokjin. "But I really need to know."

Seokjin sighs and folds himself onto the loveseat, leaning back against the cushions. He's not sure if he can balance this, Jimin's dignity and privacy and Taehyung's need for reassurance. Finally he says, "Are you asking me as Yoongi's cousin?"

Taehyung shakes his head.

"As my friend?"

Taehyung shakes his head again.

"Then what?"

Taehyung looks down at his hands, flexing them together. "I'm asking as the man who fell for Jimin."

Seokjin's heart clutches in his chest painfully and he wonders how much more messed up his life can get. He frowns. "Are you and Jimin together?"

Taehyung shakes his head, still not looking up from his hands. "No, it's one-sided on my part."

Seokjin nods in understanding and leans forward, his elbows on his knees. "Taehyung, I'm not going to tell you what to do, but I want to caution you. Jimin has...Jimin is a very important person to me. He always will be. I don't want to see him hurt."

Taehyung's head pops up, eyes wide and upset. "I would ne-"

"I know," Seokjin interrupts him. "I know. But sometimes we can't stop it. Sometimes circumstances dig deep wounds." He reaches a hand out and pats Taehyung's knee. "Be careful."

"I won't hurt Jimin," Taehyung says, voice low and determined.

"I was talking about your heart," Seokjin says. "Don't give so much of yourself away that you have nothing left."

Taehyung's expression shutters and he blinks, looking away. He nods and stands. "Thanks."

Seokjin watches Taehyung step away and walk toward the hallway, wishing he could have said something better, wishing the circumstances were different. He blinks in confusion when Taehyung's feet stop and he turns back to look at Seokjin.

"Can I ask you something, as Yoongi-hyung's cousin?" Taehyung says, eyes focused on Seokjin.

Seokjin nods. "What is it?"

"Are you being careful with Yoongi-hyung's heart?"

Seokjin's fingers curl into fists. He thinks about the way he asks Yoongi for more than he should have, the way he sometimes finds himself wilfully forgetting their arrangement, the way he finds himself lost in the fantasy with no desire to escape. He swallows and knows he cannot truthfully answer Taehyung.

When Taehyung sees that Seokjin will remain silent, he prompts, "I won't ask if you love him, I know that takes a long time. But can you at least tell me if you like him?"

"Yes," Seokjin says before he can stop his mouth, the words slipping out heedless, unaltered. "I like Yoongi very much." Seokjin's chest squeezes painfully around his lungs as he breathes in deeply. He likes Yoongi more than he should.

&&&

Seokjin feels sick. He grips his fingers tight around his ipad and grits his teeth together. He wishes he had done a simple Naver search months ago, before he keyed in the door code daily.

August fourteenth, the day Yoongi lost his parents.

Seokjin is in a state of disbelief, unable to comprehend how Yoongi types in that code every day. How every time Yoongi arrives home, he reminds himself of all he lost.

He wants to yell at Yoongi, demand to know how he could do that to himself. He wants to hold Yoongi, comfort him, tell him that it's okay to move on. He wants to do all sorts of things, but his mind keeps bringing up Mikyung's words.

My nephew has spent many years cultivating the walls around his heart. Please don't break down those walls unless you can promise to stay and protect Yoongi's heart.

He sighs and throws his ipad on the cushion beside him. He can't promise to stay by Yoongi's side. He can't promise Yoongi anything. Still, he wonders if it's okay to break down just this one wall. Just one.

He pushes from the sofa and heads to the entrance door, a new idea in his mind.

Seokjin programs an additional code into the door. When he's done, he pulls out his phone to call Yoongi.

It goes to voicemail, of course it goes to voicemail. Seokjin swallows a sigh and says, "Hey Yoongi, it's hyung. I put in a new doorcode. One-zero-zero-seven. It's..." He stops, unsure if he should point out what day it is. It doesn't matter, really, he decides, and moves on. "It's not a birthday or anything. I don't think Taehyung or Jeongguk could figure it out, so the security of the apartment is fine." He pauses and readjusts the phone against his ear. "I'm going to be using this code from now on. You should, too. Don't stay too late at work. Make sure to eat dinner. Bye."

He hangs up and nods to himself. He may not be able to knock down Yoongi's walls, but he can give Yoongi the choice to take one down himself.

&&&

Seokjin is surprised that he hasn't been asked to attend an official Min event until now. He supposes if he really thinks about it, Yoongi's grandmother was more concerned about hitching Yoongi up to his groom than anything else.

He adjusts the collar of his black turtleneck and slings his long overcoat over his arm, heading out of his room. "Yoongi, you almost ready?"

"It's fucking freezing outside, I don't know why we have to be the ones that go to this ceremony," Yoongi grumbles, stepping out of his room. "It's an outdoors ceremony. In the middle of winter, ridiculous."

Seokjin swallows a laugh, watching Yoongi adjust thick-rimmed glasses as he descends the stairs. He wants to tease Yoongi for donning glasses as a fashion statement, but to be perfectly honest, Seokjin enjoys them.

"Granny just wants to show you off," Yoongi continues when he reaches Seokjin, a subtle pout on his lips. "And I have to pay for it. I hate winter."

Seokjin grins. "You can't really blame her, though. I'm worth being shown off."

Yoongi blinks at him, expression unmoving. "I know you think that's attractive but it really isn't."

Seokjin laughs and starts to put on his overcoat. "I talked to my grandfather," he starts and notices Yoongi tense, a scowl darkening his face.

"What did he want?" Yoongi asks, terse.

Seokjin shrugs, adjusting his coat over his shoulders. "He wants another dinner."

Yoongi snorts. "I'm not interested."

Seokjin presses his lips together to keep from smiling, a warmth bursting in his chest. "You don't have to be offended on my behalf."

"I'm not. I'm offended all by myself." Yoongi glares at Seokjin. "You should be too."

Seokjin hums. "It's nothing new."

"That's the damn problem," Yoongi mutters, shoving his shoes on his feet with more force than necessary. "You ever wonder why Jeongguk is so overprotective of you? It's that bullshit attitude of yours."

Seokjin hums again, content. He doesn't want to admit how much he likes it when Yoongi defends him. He doesn't want to admit how much he enjoys Yoongi's offended mutterings on his behalf. Instead, Seokjin reaches out a hand and holds it out to Yoongi. "Should we go?"

Yoongi looks down at his hand for a moment, hesitating, that strange tension they're prone to creeping between them.

Since they signed the contract amendment, nothing much changed. They slept together one more time that night in Yoongi's bed, and Seokjin snuck out to his own room before dawn broke. They've had a subtle sort of tension between them, both knowing they can advance but not truly knowing how far and how often the other would like to go. Seokjin is starting to think all these contracts are useless pieces of paper saying nothing in particular, but Yoongi seems fond of them.

Seokjin keeps his gaze steady on Yoongi, hand still outstretched, and Yoongi finally, slowly, reaches forward and entwines his fingers with Seokjin's. Seokjin smiles and squeezes his thumb on Yoongi's knuckles.

"Hey hyung," Yoongi says as they slip through the door into the hallway.

Seokjin peers down and tilts his head. "Hmm?"

Yoongi stares straight ahead, avoiding Seokjin's gaze, his fingers flexing in Seokjin's hand. "Do you have any plans for Valentine's Day?"

Seokjin's eyes widen and he feels a small smile spread on his lips. "Are you asking me on a date, Min Yoongi?"

Yoongi finally looks at him, rolling his eyes. He opens his mouth to say something but Seokjin stops him with a squeeze of his hands.

"How about I make us dinner?" Seokjin suggests. "You can bring a nice, overly expensive wine."

Yoongi clears his throat and tries not to let the smirk tugging at the right side of his lips show, unsuccessfully. "Sure. It's a date."

Seokjin hums and nods. "It's a date."

&&&

"What are your plans for Valentine's Day?"

Yoongi blinks, frowning at his phone that he *just* answered. "Hello to you too, Hoseok."

"Yeah, hi, what are you doing for Valentine's?" Hoseok says, unconcerned with the usual, standard preliminaries of a phone call.

"I have plans," Yoongi says, smiling a little thinking about it.

"Cancel them, I need you and Seokjin-hyung to come to my party."

"No."

"No, hyung, this is a big deal. I need the emotional support. I've actually invited *that* man."

Yoongi blinks, pursing his lips. "That man?"

Hoseok makes a garbled noise that Yoongi thinks is cursing but he can't quite make out the words.

"Wang! Jackson Wang, how many times do I have to go through this?"

"You invited Jackson to your party?" Yoongi repeats, feeling like he's missing a key point.

Hoseok huffs. "Yes."

Yoongi furrows his brow. "You hate Jackson."

"I decided to bury the hatchet, for Namjoon's sake. I am a saint. And that's why I need you to be there so I don't bury the hatchet into Jackson's back."

Yoongi laughs. "That's rather violent imagery."

"I haven't buried it yet."

Yoongi smirks. "The answer's still no, I have plans."

"You can bang Seokjin-hyung *after* my party."

"Hoseok, I love you. But I bought a bath bomb specifically for that night."

"Okay, fine, I get it." Hoseok says flippantly. "I'll talk to you later."

Yoongi blinks and stares at his phone when he hears Hoseok disconnect. That was easy.

His eyes widen. That was too easy.

He rushes out of his room just as he hears Seokjin's phone ringing downstairs. Yoongi curses and races down the steps three at a time, but he's too late. Seokjin is already in the living room on the phone, smiling.

"Ah, I did," Seokjin says, trailing off. "Oh I see. No, no, we'll be there, don't worry." Seokjin smiles again, the corners of his eyes crinkling. "Of course, it's what friends do. We'll see you then."

Seokjin pulls his phone away and lays it on the coffee table.

Yoongi frowns in what he is sure is *not* a pout. "Don't tell me that was Hoseok asking about a

Valentine's party."

Seokjin smiles. "I hope you have a outfit planned."

Yoongi hangs his head and sighs. "You don't have to be nice to my friends. You can be mean to them. You should be mean to them."

"Hoseok's my friend now," Seokjin says, amused. He walks past Yoongi and pats his shoulder lightly.

Yoongi scowls and pulls out his phone again, sending Hoseok a *scathing* text.

Hoseok replies back almost immediately with seven smiling emojis. Yoongi wishes he could stay mad at him, but the emojis are a little too cute.

&&&

He can do this. Hoseok nods to himself and shakes his arms, loosening his limbs. He got through high school calculus and that time he slept through his sister's convocation and that awful first time he met Namjoon's parents and had an allergic reaction. He's nearly invincible. He can *do this*.

He scans the private club he booked for the night, lights flashing and music thumping, bodies grinding on the floor, and zeroes-in on the most vile person in existence: Jackson Wang, swaying, dancing, smiling, being generally happy and carefree. Like he hasn't just caused Hoseok constant heartache and trouble for the last three years.

He bites the inside of his cheek and tastes blood. He can do this but he's going to need a lot of alcohol first.

He speed-walks to the bar, grateful when he sees the welcome and familiar faces of Yoongi and Seokjin. He rushes to them and steps into the space they left between them. He grabs one of Seokjin's wrists and one of Yoongi's. "I can't do this," he says quickly, squeezing tight around their wrists.

Yoongi doesn't react, just brings his drink to his lips to take a sip. A very delicate sip with his pinkie in the fucking air like he's a prince or something. Hoseok scowls at him. If they hadn't been friends already for two thousand years, he would have dropped Yoongi's nonchalant and cocky ass.

"You'll be fine," Seokjin says, drawing his attention.

Hoseok sighs forlornly and releases Yoongi's wrist, stepping closer to Seokjin and pouting. "I won't be. I'm going to kill tonight. I can feel it in my bones. It's fine, I have a lawyer on retainer for just this purpose. My sister has an escape plan for me. The Bahamas, she said."

Seokjin laughs, light and musical. Hoseok smirks when he glances over to Yoongi, watching the way Yoongi's eyes crease and his lips soften into a fond smile. They're so disgustingly cute, Hoseok wants to rub it in their faces. He lifts a hand and waves it in front of Yoongi's face.

Yoongi startles, eyes refocusing on Hoseok. Yoongi gives him a look, defensive and daring him to say something.

Hoseok curls his lips in disgust. He tips his chin at Yoongi. *I see you*, he mouths.

Yoongi ignores him, his face slipping back into a disinterested mask. *What?* he mouths back.

Hoseok's attention is brought back to Seokjin when he hits his shoulder repeatedly. "Hyung, ow-"

"Jackson's on his way over," Seokjin says quickly.

Hoseok grips Seokjin's arm tightly. "Don't leave me. I don't wanna do this. I hate him."

Yoongi settles comfortably against the bar, stretching his legs out. "This is going to be interesting," he says, smirking.

Seokjin huffs and removes Hoseok's hand from his arm. He gives Hoseok a solid pat on the back. "You're doing it for Namjoon." He steps away from the bar but pauses when Yoongi doesn't follow. He turns to look back at Yoongi, arching a brow. "You coming?"

Yoongi shrugs. "I kind of wanted to watch the show."

Seokjin rolls his eyes, taking three quick steps back to Yoongi and wrapping his arm around his waist, tugging him away from the bar and to the club dance floor.

Hoseok's eyes narrow, watching Yoongi suppress a smile. It's so gross.

"You can't dance," Yoongi says, voice fading as he lets Seokjin pull him further into the club.

"So just hold me and sway," Seokjin answers and Hoseok really wants to throw something at them. If he knew they'd be this gross, he would have kept Seokjin's name off the list.

Hoseok doesn't have much time to dwell on the thought. Jackson-Stealing-Your-Man-Wang slides up to him at the bar, grinning widely. Hoseok scowls and tries to remind himself why he agreed to this to begin with. He wants to wipe that smile off Jackson's face. He grabs the drink Yoongi left behind and downs the contents in one gulp. It burns down his throat.

"Hoseok!" Jackson greets cheerfully. He bounces on his feet and slings an arm around Hoseok's shoulders. "This party is great, thank you so much for inviting me."

Hoseok shrugs his shoulders, displacing Jackson's arm with more force than necessary. He beckons the bartender over. "A double," he orders. He needs so much more alcohol.

Jackson seems unperturbed, leaning against the bar and nudging Hoseok's shoulder with his own. "I'll have the same," he calls after the bartender, husky voice too close to Hoseok's ear.

Hoseok closes his eyes and counts to ten. "For Namjoon, for Namjoon," he chants.

The bartender, bless him, comes with two drinks and sets the glasses down on the counter in front of them. Hoseok grabs his, gulping down the liquid as fast as he can.

"Ooooooh, wow!" Jackson says with a hint of amazement in his voice. "You drink really well!"

Hoseok slams his glass down and grabs for Jackson's, tugging it out of the other's slack grip.

"Oh, sure, you can have-"

Hoseok tilts his head back and downs the liquid. When it burns down his throat and his eyes tear up, he thinks he may finally have enough alcohol in his system. He places the glass down on the counter as calmly as he can and turns to face Jackson. He frowns and sticks a finger up, pointing at Jackson.

"I just want to know," he starts, hiccuping as the alcohol tries to work back up his throat. He furrows his brow and tries again. "I just want to know why you're trying to take Namjoon from me."

Jackson's face scrunches up in confusion. He tilts his head. "I'm not-"

"You're always calling him. You're always hanging out together. You're always touching him." Hoseok tilts his chin up arrogantly and crosses his arms over his chest. "So what are you doing if you're not trying to take him from me?"

Jackson's mouth drops open and he waves his hands in front of him. "Oh, no, no, Hoseok, no, it's not that. I would never do that to you. I'd never do that to a friend."

"We're not friends," Hoseok says before he can stop his mouth.

Jackson freezes and his expression falls. Hoseok feels a punch in his gut but tries to ignore it. He said nothing wrong.

Jackson presses his lips together and nods, backing away a little. "I'm sorry, I did it again, I'm sorry. You're right."

Hoseok furrows his brow and sighs, guilt clawing up his throat with the alcohol. "I said it too harshly-"

"No, you're right. I do it all the time." Jackson smiles sadly. "I'm sorry."

Hoseok's stomach rolls and he reaches forward, stopping Jackson before the other can retreat into the club. "Explain yourself."

Jackson frowns and looks at his hands. "I get overly friendly with people and think we're close but in reality we're not even acquaintances. That's probably why I bother Namjoon so much. He picks up and actually agrees to hang out. I'm sorry, I should have known I was annoying you two." He looks up and smiles sadly again. "I won't do it anymore."

Hoseok gapes at him, indignation on Jackson's behalf working through his blood. "Who isn't close to you?"

"Everyone." He shrugs. "People just don't like me. It's okay. I'm used to it. Sorry to bother you."

Hoseok tightens his grip on Jackson's arm, not letting him leave. "The fuck are you saying? You're good-looking and athletic. You're smart. You speak ten billion languages. You're funny and nice. Why wouldn't people like you?"

Jackson blinks. "You don't."

"I'm a fucking idiot," Hoseok says quickly, shuffling closer to Jackson. "I was wrong. I'm stupidly jealous." He turns to the bartender and holds up two fingers. "Two more drinks please. For me and my friend."

Jackson tries to back away again but Hoseok hooks his arm around his shoulders. "You don't have to pretend, it's okay."

"Shut up." Hoseok makes Jackson sit on one of the plush leather stools and pats his knee. "You're going to sit here and tell me about your life. Because by the end of the night, we're going to be best friends."

Jackson stares at him for a moment, his mouth slowly, slowly lifting into a small smile. "You sure?"

Hoseok grins, sitting and leaning his elbow on the bar. "I'm positive."

&&&

It still hurts, Jimin thinks, eyes following Seokjin on the dance floor. The dim lighting and the pulsing, drumming music does nothing to distract him, still focused on Seokjin halfway across the hall.

He watches Seokjin wrap his arms loosely around Yoongi's waist, watches Yoongi look up at him and say something. Watches Seokjin laugh, eyes crinkling around the corners, the melodious sound lost by the time it undulates to Jimin's spot at the edge of the room.

It still hurts, Jimin thinks, but it's a different kind of hurt. It's duller, muted. He's still sad, blinking back the moisture in his eyes, biting his teeth together to keep composed. But it's not a searing kind of sadness. It doesn't rip through him, doesn't make his world tip upside down, doesn't shroud him in sudden darkness.

Yoongi's hands run up and down Seokjin's back and Seokjin leans into Yoongi, smiling. Jimin draws in a shuddering breath. He thinks Seokjin is happy. A kind of happy he never saw him experience before; light, trusting. Loved. Everything Jimin wanted to give him. He thinks, in time, he'll be grateful for it.

He blinks and looks away. Right now it still hurts.

He pushes away from the wall, weaving through the crowd, looking for a familiar tall frame, lanky and poised and a haven Jimin doesn't realize he's starting to depend on.

He finds him easily. Jimin *always* finds him easily.

"Taehyung," he says, placing his hand on Taehyung's arm to get his attention.

Taehyung turns to look at Jimin, tilting his head in question.

Jimin stares up at him, hand still on the solid weight of Taehyung's arm, watches the way Taehyung blinks at him, eyes wide and searching, trying to peel back Jimin's layer. He exhales a breath he didn't know he was holding, and says, "Taehyung, can you take me home?"

Taehyung nods immediately. "Yeah of course, let's-"

"Your home," Jimin says before he loses his nerve. The last time he was able to forget the pain in the left side of his chest was the night of Seokjin's wedding, locked in Taehyung's arms, Taehyung's voice whispering praises into his ear. He wants to forget again.

Taehyung's eyes flicker but Jimin keeps his gaze, doesn't look away, doesn't back down. He's greedy and selfish, his fingers clutching tight on Taehyung's arm.

Finally, Taehyung nods, hesitating and stilted but still acquiescing. Taehyung's arm slips around Jimin's shoulders as they leave, warmth settling over Jimin's back, relief singing through his veins. He'll be okay.

&&&

Taehyung never does what Jimin expects. Instead of heading to the bedroom when they get to Taehyung's apartment, Taehyung directs Jimin to the living room and the large leather couch. He makes sure Jimin sits down, hands him cushions and a throw blanket and a remote.

"Pick out something you want to watch," Taehyung says, giving Jimin a large smile, before he

straightens and skips to the kitchen. "I'll make hot chocolate."

Jimin frowns, staring at the remote in his hands, the blanket tucked up around his chest. He turns to look over the couch at Taehyung. He narrows his eyes, scrutinizing him, trying to find out what thoughts are bouncing around his head.

Taehyung seems unconcerned, looking up occasionally to smile and wave at Jimin. He finally finishes, bringing two large mugs with him and placing them carefully on the coffee table. He settles down beside Jimin, scurrying under the blanket and nudging their shoulders together. "What did you pick out?"

Jimin stares at him, confused. "Taehyung, this isn't...what I meant when I asked-"

Taehyung takes the remote from Jimin's hand and presses some buttons, selecting *Ponyo* on the screen. "I know what you asked."

The opening credits start playing but Jimin doesn't look away from Taehyung, still not understanding.

Taehyung peeks at Jimin briefly, frowning at him seriously. "You wanted to forget, right?"

Jimin nods, brow furrowed.

"And feel a little less alone?"

Jimin nods again with more confidence.

Taehyung presses his lips together and swallows a sigh. He slides his arm around Jimin's back and brings a hand up to lay Jimin's head on his chest. "There are other ways to forget. Ones you won't regret in the morning." His fingers run through Jimin's hair gently.

Jimin feels his eyelids flutter and he has to stop himself from closing them completely. He shifts, looking up at Taehyung. He traces with his eyes the peak of Taehyung's nose, the sculpted set of his brows, the pretty way his lips curve. He feels moisture in his eyes again. He blinks rapidly to dispel it.

It hurts, he thinks, staring up at Taehyung. His heart beats too fast, his cheeks are too warm, his tongue is swollen and useless in his mouth.

It hurts in a different way.

&&&

Seokjin smiles, humming as he walks down the hall to the apartment. He brushes Yoongi's arm, hooking his fingers into Yoongi's elbow.

Yoongi looks at him, lips tilting up to the left side of his face. "What?"

Seokjin shrugs. "Nothing. I'm happy. I had a good time tonight."

Yoongi smiles and lets Seokjin hook his hand around his elbow. "What was your favorite part? Almost tripping on the dance floor or Hoseok crying about how much he loves Jackson Wang?"

Seokjin laughs, remembering the moment when Hoseok stood on top of the bar counter and declared Jackson was his new best friend and anyone that hurt him could fight him. Seokjin leans against Yoongi, a pleasant warmth in his cheeks, a light buzz in his head from the alcohol. "That was

memorable. I hope you took a video."

Yoongi smirks. "Namjoon took the most." He stops at the door, sliding the lockpad open and pressing his fingers to the numbers.

Seokjin's eyes widen and his fingers clutch momentarily on Yoongi's elbow.

Yoongi looks up at him, an eyebrow arched. "What?"

Seokjin smiles and shakes his head. "Nothing."

Yoongi hums, unconvinced, but finishes the code, resuming with zero-zero-seven, and swings the door open.

Happiness blooms in Seokjin's chest, gratified Yoongi stopped using the other code and uses Seokjin's instead. The greedy part of him, the one that clutches onto Yoongi, the one that tells him to stay even when Yoongi doesn't ask, the one that says the contract is just a piece of paper, wants to ask if Yoongi knows what date October seventh is. He shakes the thought from his mind. There's only so far he should push things.

He releases Yoongi when they step inside, shrugging off his coat and toeing off his shoes.

Yoongi heads upstairs and Seokjin watches, wondering. He places his coat in the closet and arranges the shoes neatly, eyes on the landing where Yoongi disappeared. He wants to go up there too. He wants to slip into Yoongi's bed and smile against his neck and run his hands down Yoongi's back.

He frowns. Too greedy. They have an arrangement, but Seokjin still hesitates. He doesn't want to tire Yoongi out, doesn't want to push too far, too much. He doesn't want to lose the small space of happiness he found. It's enough as it is right now.

He wanders to the foot of the staircase, gazing up, and tells himself to be content with what he's been given. His fingers grip the railing, the cool metal bringing him back to reality.

Caution, he reminds himself, nodding and turning to head to his room.

"Hyung."

Seokjin pauses and spins on his feet, watches Yoongi descend the stairs. He's changed, dark grey sweatpants and a loose white tee, his hair dishevelled. Seokjin thinks idly that he likes Yoongi best like this, in his comfortable clothes, a little unkempt, a little bit softer, a little bit more like a Yoongi only Seokjin gets to see.

Yoongi stops when he's on the last step, beckoning Seokjin to him. Seokjin steps closer again. He has to look up to see Yoongi properly, and he smirks a little, amused at the reversal of their heights. "What? Miss my handsome face?"

Yoongi blinks, peering down at Seokjin, eyes roaming his face, his mouth serious and brows lowered in concentration. "No," he answers, a hand reaching forward to brush lightly over Seokjin's cheekbone. His fingers card through Seokjin's hair, thumb softly caressing Seokjin's temple. "You didn't go away, how could I miss you?"

Seokjin's breath sticks in his throat and he blinks owlishly, lips parting. "Yoongi," he starts, but he doesn't know what he is trying to say. All his thoughts have fled, his mind blanking until all that's left is the rhythm of his lungs as he tries to breathe.

Yoongi leans down, his lips gently sliding over Seokjin's, deliberate and careful, slow and purposeful. Seokjin's eyes close and he leans into the kiss, angles his head to draw Yoongi in closer, swallows the breath Yoongi exhales into his mouth.

It's like it always is with Yoongi, sparks of electricity singing through his veins, burning his blood, leaving a trail of smoke and kindling embers. He always wants more of it, more of Yoongi's electric touch, more of Yoongi's breath in his lungs, more of Yoongi. He tilts his neck, lets Yoongi deepen the kiss, lets himself get lost in the moment again, opening his mouth under Yoongi.

Yoongi pulls away slightly, sucks in a deep breath, thumb still caressing Seokjin's temple. "Stay with me tonight?" he asks, voice already gravelly and thick.

"Yes," Seokjin answers, leaning up for another kiss, breathing in Yoongi's heavy scent.

He wonders, fleetingly, what his answer would be if Yoongi asked him to stay, more than a night, more than a day, more than a contract.

He lets the thought fade away as Yoongi pulls him upstairs.

&&&

It's snowing.

Yoongi watches the flakes come down, large clusters of precipitation floating as they descend. The reflection of the streetlights on the falling snow casts a peculiar glow outside, illuminating what should be a pitch dark night. It shines dimly into the bedroom, a reddish orange hue covering the space, falling over Seokjin's sleeping form.

He follows the rumpled duvet at the edge of the bed with his eyes until it ends on Seokjin's shoulders, exposed, golden skin glowing in the dim light.

Yoongi's fingers itch for his camera, to capture the shape and hue and space of Seokjin sleeping peacefully in his bed. He lowers himself back down into the pillows, reaching a hand out and letting it hover above the crown of Seokjin's head.

His camera could never capture it right, he thinks, staring intently. It wouldn't get the golden hue of Seokjin's skin right, it wouldn't get the shape of his mouth, it would miss the curve of Seokjin's hand buried under his head. His camera could never capture the sound of Seokjin's soft breathing, the warmth that radiates off his skin, the scent of fig and woods that Yoongi has come to associate with Seokjin.

His camera could never capture the flutter in Yoongi's heart, the way it seizes against his chest, too large for his ribs. He lets his hand rest on the pillow beside Seokjin's head, gently running his hand over the smooth cotton.

In high school, after he finally accepted that things don't last forever, after he finally came out from the darkness that threatened to consume him, he became obsessed with photographs. He wanted to learn the art of immortalization. He wanted to hold moments in his hand, feel their physical weight, know they can never be taken away. He immersed himself in photography, learnt all he could, but he realizes now it doesn't mean anything.

For the first time since he picked up a camera, he realizes there are some moments he can never keep in the palm of his hand. He gazes at Seokjin and wishes.

For a little while longer, he wants to keep this moment.

Chapter End Notes

To that person who rightfully pointed out none of the kisses have been in Seokjin's POV: you were right. This was so much fun omg.

Ghost

Chapter Notes

According to my rough outline, we're about halfway done?
That being said, halfway done means 80k more words?????
I cry.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Seokjin flicks the element off and checks the time again, satisfied that the seaweed soup is done. He steps away from the kitchen and glances up the stairs to the still closed door of Yoongi's room. He smiles a little thinking about Yoongi swaddled in his puffy comforter, lips turned down into a pout.

He wipes his hands on a dish towel and heads to the stairs, creeping up the steps slowly, careful not to make a sound. He pauses at the door, leaning his ear on it to listen for any signs of life. He eases the door open and slips inside.

Just as he predicted, Yoongi is wrapped up in a cocoon of blankets, pillows kicked off onto the floor by the bed. The sun is just starting to break outside but the blinds are closed shut, a blue hue coloring the room. Seokjin slowly approaches the bed, holding his breath as he leans over and tries to catch a glimpse of Yoongi's face.

Yoongi's lips are in a small pout, his face relaxed in sleep. There's a light flush high on his cheeks, rosy and warm. Seokjin smiles and nearly lets himself reach out a hand to brush Yoongi's hair away from his eyes. He restrains himself at the last minute, curling his fingers back into a loose fist and bringing his hand back to his side.

He had originally planned to wake Yoongi up, determined to have breakfast with him. Yoongi has the day off, booking off from work in honor of his birthday. Seokjin was not able to arrange the time away from work, especially on the short notice he was given. If it hadn't been for Yoongi's grandmother informing him about Yoongi's birthday dinner, Seokjin would not have even known of it. Instead, Seokjin had hoped to have a morning meal with Yoongi, complete with homemade seaweed soup. Looking at Yoongi's peaceful expression, though, Seokjin can't find it in him to wake the other.

He steps away and out of the room as quietly as he can, slipping into Yoongi's study. He looks through Yoongi's desk, searching for a pen and pad of paper to leave Yoongi a note. Yoongi's desk is what Seokjin considers an organized mess. There is form and structure to it, items groups and stacked neatly, but the overall volume of them clutters the space.

He pushes a couple folders around, fingers coming to a halt as he lifts them and discovers an assorted mess of photos beneath it. His breath catches in his throat and he slowly sets the folders down to the side. He lowers himself into the chair and tentatively reaches forward a hand, lightly touching the photos.

A small smile spreads on his lips and he picks a small photo up, bringing it closer to inspect it.

The picture features Seokjin and Jeongguk sharing a sweet potato, both of their noses red from the cold. Jeongguk is grinning, that cute, bunny-like smile where his nose scrunches up and his eyes

narrow into crescents. Seokjin is chewing, cheeks puffed out and full. It's from November, he realizes, that day they all went walking along the Han River.

Seokjin can still remember the form of Yoongi's fingers as they curved around his camera, mistakenly assuming his focus was the skyline.

He lets out a quiet laugh, warmth heating his cheeks. There's a pleasant fluttering in his chest, the knowledge of Yoongi's attention on him is a heady drug he never anticipated. "So you did take my picture." He hums and sets the photo back down on the desk, replacing the folders over it. "So dishonest," he says to himself, amused.

Yoongi is an extremely private person, he knows this. But Seokjin thinks he's starting to gain a bit of access, the passcode to the walls around Yoongi's heart.

It's dangerous, but it's too addictive to stop. He wants to know more about Yoongi, wants to take more of Yoongi's attention, wants to fill his sight completely. He wants to peel back the layers Yoongi wraps himself in, down to the shadowy crevices of the heart he doesn't show to anyone else.

He should stop, but the flush on his cheeks is too warm, the flutter in his chest too lovely, and Yoongi's name on his lips too sweet.

&&&

Yoongi wakes up at the very decent hour of noon, the sun fighting its way into his room despite the closed blinds. He's satisfied when his eyes land on the bedside clock, content to have missed the morning completely. He stretches his arms over his head and points his toes, finally slumping out of bed and to the bathroom to wash up.

He makes his way downstairs when he's showered and slightly more bright-eyed than he's felt in a long time, and remembers why he allowed himself the luxury of sleep today. His birthday, another year tacked onto his life. He has mixed emotions about it. Too many years ago, when he didn't know the damage life could inflict on him, his mother used to make him seaweed soup and decorate the entire mansion with balloons and streamers. Later, when he was wallowing in darkness and furious pain, his aunt in Daegu would push him out of bed, slap a change of clothes to his chest and declare it an adventure day. He's finally settled into a routine now, a day where he lets himself do whatever he wants – sleep, eat, basketball, more sleep – and a subdued dinner at his grandmother's with presents he could have bought for himself. He doesn't expect it to change.

He probably should have known Seokjin would twist it upside down, like he has every area of Yoongi's life since that fateful day in October.

His feet falter when he steps into the kitchen for a cup of coffee. On the breakfast bar is a full breakfast, covered by a white linen napkin, a note centered neatly in the middle. Next to the breakfast is a wide white box, tied together with a blue silk ribbon. Yoongi has an absurd, fleeting thought that the ribbon must have come from one of Seokjin's ridiculous shirts.

His fingers tingle as he reaches for the note, unfolding it to see Seokjin's unique writing.

Yoongichi! I was going to wake you but you looked too peaceful. Be very grateful to me. Eat breakfast well. I'll be back early tonight. Happy birthday.

Yoongi sets the note on the counter and lets out a shaky breath he didn't know he was holding. He lifts the napkin, finding rice and side dishes and seaweed soup. They're cold by now. Seokjin probably didn't expect Yoongi to sleep until lunch. Yoongi sinks into the stool and just looks over

the display.

He turns his attention to the box, sliding it off the counter and onto his lap. He tugs the ribbon, suddenly anxious to unwrap the present. He lets the ribbon slide to the floor and flips the box open. Inside is a soft wool coat, baby blue and classy and something Yoongi would never choose for himself.

A small smile tugs at his lips and he lifts the coat out of the box, inspecting it. It's completely Seokjin's style, he thinks, thumb running back and forth over the wool.

He's not sure what to make of this. Seaweed soup and a present waiting for him, and a note hastily written complete with absurd nicknames and a simple birthday wish. He's not sure how he feels. This doesn't fit in with any of his birthday traditions – not the perfect, gilded memory of when things were too good to last; not the struggling, stumbling reality of when the world did its best to crush him; not the quiet, content flow of now, careful and wary.

Seokjin is an anomaly, a force that swept in and disrupted Yoongi's cautiously arranged life. He's the blip on the screen, the deviation, the irregularity that should be removed from Yoongi's calculations. Seokjin skews the data, obscures the averages. He's the random deviation that will never repeat, Yoongi *knows* will never repeat, knows he can't rely on Seokjin to stay constant in his life.

Yoongi's thumb strokes the wool. This is the year of anomaly, he thinks. He can enjoy it while it lasts.

&&&

"He's wearing color." Yoongi rolls his eyes and tries not to sigh as he steps into the foyer. His grandmother taps Mikyung's arm repeatedly and continues, her voice rife with pretend disbelief. "Mikyung, get my camera, my grandson is actually wearing color."

"And now I'm not," he replies, shrugging out of the coat and hoping they can drop the subject before his grandmother finds out the coat is a gift from Seokjin. He sends Seokjin a warning glare but Seokjin winks at him and smiles.

"It suits him nicely, doesn't it, Granny?" Seokjin asks, stepping forward to give her a quick hug.

Yoongi's grandmother squeezes Seokjin and pats his shoulder. "Was it your doing?"

Seokjin grins and nods, leaning close to whisper, "It's my present to him."

Granny grins and sends Yoongi a sly look. "Is that so?"

Yoongi clears his throat and walks forward to the sitting room. "Is dinner ready yet?"

He can hear his grandmother laughing.

Mikyung walks with Yoongi, bumping his shoulder and smiling at him. "Happy birthday," she says.

He hums and nods, a small smile mirroring hers. "Thanks, auntie."

"You look happy," she notes.

Yoongi shrugs and sits on the sofa, leaning back and making himself comfortable. "I guess I am."

Mikyung's lips purse and she looks like she's trying to form a question, bits and pieces of it flickering in her eyes. She glances over her shoulder when Seokjin and Granny enter the room, the question

fading from her face. Yoongi knows she'll formulate it sooner or later. He wonders what his answer will be when she finally poses it.

He turns his attention to his grandmother again, shifting on the sofa as Seokjin settles next to him. He throws his arm over the back of the sofa, his fingers dropping down to Seokjin's shoulder. "Where's Tae?" he asks, glancing around the room.

Granny sniffs loudly as she sits in her chair, her chin tilting up haughtily. "He says he'll be late. Had plans or something." She scoffs. "As if his cousin's birthday isn't the most important event today." She shrugs. "I told him his presence is unnecessary. We'll hardly notice he's gone."

"Granny, you didn't," Seokjin admonishes lightly.

"I did and I don't regret it."

"He's coming in about an hour," Mikyung interjects, always the voice of reason. "Don't worry, Seokjin, Taehyung is used to mother's brisk words."

"Are you implying I'm too hard on the boy?" Granny asks sharply. "I don't know what's gotten into him lately, but he's always running off to something." She frowns and blinks, an eyebrow arching. "Or someone?"

Seokjin shifts uncomfortably next to Yoongi. Yoongi flicks his gaze to Seokjin, frowning. His fingers squeeze lightly on Seokjin's shoulder and Seokjin settles back against him. "I'm sure it's nothing to worry about," Seokjin says.

Before Granny can reply, Yoongi interjects a new topic, hoping they can bypass whatever is troubling Seokjin. "The take over is going smoothly so far, Granny."

Yoongi's grandmother's eyes sharpen and she settles back into her chair, folding her hands on her lap. "I've been keeping my eye on it. You'll be able to announce it soon, I think?"

Yoongi nods. "Yeah, probably sometime next week, the media will get a hold of the story." He can feel Seokjin's eyes on him and he turns to face him. "We're taking over an old corporation that's been bleeding profits for years."

"The media's going to have a field day," Granny adds. "I hope you're ready for reporters camping outside your apartment." She frowns and leans forward. "Have you taken precautions, Yoongi? This is the first time our Seokjin will be subject to the hounds."

"I've hired supplemental security for the building." He frowns, thinking. "Ah, Jin-hyung, you should probably speak with your director and let her know. Reporters might try staking out at your gallery."

Seokjin's eyes narrow. "Will they go after Jeongguk too?"

Yoongi shakes his head. "I don't think they'll go that far."

Seokjin nods and shrugs. "That's fine, then. We'll just stay in for a few days until it blows over." He smiles at Granny. "They can take some pictures, I'm sure my face will sell a few papers."

Granny cackles and leans forward to smack Seokjin's arm. "You're a delight, Seokjin."

&&&

The first time Jimin brought Taehyung into his dance studio to watch him practice, his nerves were

vibrating faster than the beat of his music, and he found his feet twisting and stomping awry, his knees falling to the floor painfully. It would have been embarrassing, except it was *Taehyung*. Taehyung who still looked at Jimin like he was made of stars, even when he'd fallen flat on his face. Taehyung who made Jimin feel safe and cared for. Taehyung who has been nothing but kind and patient and perfect.

He doesn't deserve him. Jimin knows he should put a distance between them, but it's too hard. With a simple phone call, Taehyung comes running. With a tilt of his head, Taehyung is willing to lasso the moon and bring it down to Jimin. Jimin doesn't know what this feeling is, when he's with Taehyung, when he's thinking about Taehyung, but he knows he wants to keep it.

He leans heavily on Taehyung, more than he should. He calls him at one in the morning, waking him up so Jimin has someone to talk to as he travels the hour from his studio to the dorms. He takes all his free time, going to movies and arcades or just like now, sitting Taehyung down on the cold floor of the dance studio as Jimin practices his routine. There's something special about Taehyung's large eyes on Jimin as he dances, something that sends sparks of electricity up his spine and goosebumps down his arms.

"Jimin," Taehyung says, his deep voice breaking through the heavy beat of the music.

Jimin stops, bending over to catch his breath. He sweeps his hair away from his eyes and looks at Taehyung, smiling. "Hmm?"

Taehyung bites his lip and his pupils dilate. He clears his throat and shakes his fringe from his eyes. "I have to get going soon."

Jimin's expression falls and he slumps down to sit cross-legged on the floor. He nods. "Oh."

"I'm sorry, it's Yoongi-hyung's birthday..."

Jimin shakes his head and forces a smile to his lips. "It's fine, I'll see you tomorrow."

Taehyung frowns, eyes flickering over Jimin. Jimin shifts uncomfortably under his gaze and rolls his shoulders. "I can stay, a little longer."

"No, it's fine-"

"I want to," Taehyung interjects quickly. "I mean. If you want me to?"

Jimin doesn't even hesitate, his guilt at holding onto Taehyung long ago dulled into something merely inconvenient. "I want you to," he says firmly. He wants Taehyung to stay by his side and keep the looming shadows of loneliness at bay.

&&&

"I can't believe Taehyung never showed up," Yoongi grumbles, shrugging out of his coat and hanging it neatly in the entry closet. He pauses and looks over at Seokjin in alarm, eyes widened at a sudden thought. "You don't think anything happened to him?"

Seokjin frowns at the panic in Yoongi's voice. He reaches out and takes Yoongi's hand in his, tugging him to the stairs and up to Yoongi's bedroom. "I think *someone* happened to him," he says, slipping his hand up Yoongi's arm lightly.

Yoongi quirks an eyebrow. "You know something I don't? About my own cousin?"

Seokjin laughs, pulling Yoongi into the bedroom. "Is that really the most pressing matter you have right now? On your birthday? In your bedroom? With the hottest guy in South Korea?"

Yoongi scoffs and makes a face. "You ruined whatever seduction you were going for."

Seokjin pretends to pout and steps closer to Yoongi, sliding his hand around Yoongi's waist to rest on his hip. He bends to press his lips softly to Yoongi's neck, inhaling Yoongi's scent. "Guess I'll have to try again?" he murmurs against Yoongi's skin, opening his mouth and sucking lightly.

Yoongi's fingers come up to hold onto Seokjin's shoulders and Seokjin can feel the other draw in a quick breath. "You can try, but I'm not an easy man," Yoongi says, somehow managing to keep his voice level.

Seokjin smiles against Yoongi's skin and maneuvers them closer to the bed. "No? How hard are you?"

Seokjin feels Yoongi's chest shake with barely controlled laughter. "You're ruining it again, hyung."

Seokjin pulls back and smiles, placing his hands on Yoongi's chest and lightly pushing so that Yoongi falls with his back on the bed. "I'll make it up to you," he says, climbing onto the bed to straddle Yoongi's thighs.

Yoongi smiles up at him, eyes warm and fond. He arches his neck and places a quick kiss on Seokjin's lips. He pulls back and lays down comfortably, still smiling fondly at Seokjin.

Seokjin blinks, a warm flush creeping up his neck, suddenly feeling shy. He smiles softly and follows Yoongi down, placing his hands on either side of Yoongi's head. "Happy birthday, Yoongi," he whispers.

Yoongi reaches a hand up and cards his fingers through Seokjin's hair. He places gentle pressure on the back of Seokjin's head and pulls him down. "Thank you hyung," he whispers back against Seokjin's mouth, opening his lips and swallowing whatever reply Seokjin had on his tongue.

&&&

The shrill of his alarm wakes Yoongi up. He flinches, trying to burrow further into his comforter and block out the sound. He rolls over, hoping to hit Seokjin with the movement and make him turn the damn thing off. Yoongi frowns when he meets empty space. He opens his eyes and sighs, blinking blurrily at the other side of his bed, empty and cool.

He sits up and reaches for his phone, shutting the alarm off and tossing the device by his feet in the mass of comforters.

It bothers him, when Seokjin sneaks out sometime in the middle of the night to his own bedroom. It really shouldn't. They have separate bedrooms for a purpose, to keep their lives separate, to give each other space. To put a clear divide between them.

It still bothers him, though.

If he's being perfectly honest - and Yoongi is rarely perfectly honest, even with himself - he liked when Seokjin was forced to share a room with him. He liked waking up with Seokjin unceremoniously shaking him and demanding he get out of bed. He liked smelling Seokjin's shampoo in the shower. He liked the little evidences of Seokjin around the space, his clothes in the closet getting mixed up with Yoongi's, his moisturizer sitting next to Yoongi's aftershave on the bathroom counter.

Since they've progressed this far in their relationship, Yoongi thinks, they might as well share a room together. He's not opposed to introducing regular cuddling into their arrangement. Something has to be done, he tells himself.

A smirk twitches at his lips. He knows just what he needs to do.

&&&

"What are you doing here?"

Jeongguk looks up from his textbook and frowns at Seokjin. "First of all, that's so rude. I'm your only brother in the whole world. You'd think you'd be happy to see me."

Seokjin sighs and rolls his neck, looking up at the ceiling. "You can stop your nonsense now." He looks back to Jeongguk, feet on the coffee table, his school books taking up the entire sofa and part of the floor. "Why are you here now, setting up a library in my living room?"

"I have finals coming up," Jeongguk answers, the *duh* not said but obvious in his tone.

"Let me rephrase: why are you setting up a library in *my* living room and not your own, perfectly good apartment?"

Jeongguk shrugs. "That man came to my apartment and told me to stay over for a few days."

"Yoongi invited you," Seokjin says dully, disbelief making the words sound uncertain.

"Yeah, he drove me here."

"Yoongi did," Seokjin clarifies, still in a state of disbelief.

Jeongguk sighs heavily. "Yes, that man."

"Voluntarily."

"Yes."

"The Yoongi that lives here with me."

"Yes, hyung, yes! Your husband Yoongi," Jeongguk says, exasperated.

Seokjin blinks. "Why?"

"I have no idea, why don't you ask him?"

Seokjin nods. "I think I will." He heads up the stairs to Yoongi's bedroom. Yoongi isn't there, but he can see all his own possessions have found their way into the bedroom. He furrows his brow and peeks into the wardrobe room. All his own clothes are neatly arranged, hanging like they belong there next to Yoongi's pressed suits. He can hardly imagine Yoongi moving all of his things into the bedroom, hauling load after load of clothes and skincare products and Mario figurines.

He heads to the room next door, barely knocking before he enters Yoongi's study. "Yoongi," he starts, drawing the other man's attention.

Yoongi looks up from his computer screen. "You're here?"

Seokjin crosses his arms over his chest. "Why is Jeongguk here?"

"Hm?" Yoongi blinks innocently at him. "Oh, we're dropping the news of the take over tomorrow so we won't really be able to go out much. I thought you'd be bored, so I invited your brother over." He tilts his head. "Was I wrong? I could kick him out if you want."

Seokjin frowns, unsure. He was suspicious before but the thought of a few days with his brother does sound like fun. "No, it's not what I want." He pauses, trying to wrap his mind around the situation. "It was a really nice thing for you to do."

Yoongi shrugs and returns back to his computer screen. "Your brother's not too annoying."

Seokjin grins. "Aw, are you starting to like him?"

Yoongi scowls but Seokjin just laughs. "I ordered chicken," Yoongi says, talking over Seokjin's laughter. "It should be here soon."

Seokjin smiles and kicks away from the door. "Sounds good. Thank you, Yoongi."

Yoongi makes a vague noise in the back of his throat, his attention focused on his computer.

Seokjin leaves, closing the door softly behind him, and bounds down the stairs to join Jeongguk on the sofa.

Jeongguk barely looks up from his textbook. "Did you get an answer?"

Seokjin throws his arm around Jeongguk's shoulder and squeezes him in a half-hug. "I think Yoongi's fond of you."

Jeongguk gags, his face contorting in disgust. "No."

Seokjin releases Jeongguk and leans forward to examine all the textbooks. His eyes light up when he spots a sketchbook. "Are you drawing?" He reaches for the book but Jeongguk snatches it and tucks it on his other side.

"No," Jeongguk says quickly. "It must have gotten mixed up with my books."

Seokjin eyes Jeongguk for a moment, wishing he could impress on his brother that it's okay to pursue what he wanted. "You should talk to Yoongi about drawing."

Jeongguk scoffs. "Why?"

Seokjin gestures to the photos on the wall. "All these photos were taken by Yoongi."

Jeongguk's eyes widen and he looks around the room.

"I'm not saying you should dedicate your life to art, but I know you enjoy it. Yoongi found a balance between his passion and his business. Maybe he could give you some insight."

Jeongguk frowns, shrugging his shoulder and going back to his textbook. "It's not a really big deal."

Seokjin reaches over to run his hands through Jeongguk's hair. "I want you to be happy, Jeongguk."

Jeongguk's brow furrows and he glances at Seokjin. "I am happy." He pauses a moment, eyes flickering over Seokjin's face. "Are you?"

Seokjin's smile wavers on his lips. He quickly schools his features even as his mouth still falters on the words. He's saved from answering when the intercom buzzes. "Oh, chicken's here," he says,

getting up quickly and heading to the entrance.

Jeongguk's question still circles his mind on repeat. *Are you happy, are you happy, are you happy?* He's afraid of the answer that clung to the tip of his tongue before he swallowed the words down.

He was going to say *yes*.

&&&

Jimin knew something was wrong when Taehyung asked to meet him at their usual cafe. Taehyung always goes to where Jimin is, he rarely asks to meet somewhere in the middle. Jimin's suspicions are confirmed when he spots Taehyung at their regular table in the cafe, staring seriously at the two untouched drinks in front of him.

Jimin feels a wave of nausea and he pauses by the entrance, taking several short breaths until he has it under control again. He doesn't know why he's anxious, but he knows the set of Taehyung's brows and the deeply etched frown on his lips upsets him. He inhales sharply and forces himself to march forward, a smile he doesn't feel on his lips.

"Hey," he says, sliding into the seat opposite Taehyung. "What's up? Did you wait long?"

Taehyung glances up and stares at Jimin, those large eyes that see everything cutting through Jimin, as if looking for answers to a question he hasn't asked yet. Jimin shifts, feeling bare under Taehyung's gaze, but keeps his eyes steady on the other. Finally, Taehyung shakes his head and says, "No. I didn't wait long. I don't mind waiting."

Jimin smiles and reaches for his drink. "Thanks for ordering. One day you need to let me buy."

Taehyung's frown deepens. "I asked you to come. I should be the one to pay."

Jimin finds he has to fight to keep his smile in place, the tone of Taehyung's voice unsettling and sad. He opens his mouth to change the topic, to find something that will bring the vibrant light back into Taehyung's face, but Taehyung interjects first.

"I have something to ask." Taehyung looks away and down at his hands, tapping them on the table absentmindedly.

Jimin's smile fades. "Is it something difficult?"

Taehyung nods, eyes still focused on his hands.

"Is it something you're scared of?"

Taehyung hesitates before nodding again.

Jimin doesn't want to hear the question, doesn't want to face whatever it is. He wants to stay the same, comfortable and just the stable side of content. "Don't ask it, then," he says, desperation building in his lungs. "You don't have to ask it."

Taehyung's brow furrows and he finally glances up. "I have to. I think I already know the answer, but." He pauses, licking his lips and shifting in his seat. "But I have to be sure." He sighs and locks eyes with Jimin. "I know I don't even have a right to ask. I know you were upfront with me from the start. I know this is all my fault. I just need to hear it."

Jimin's stomach turns, nausea fighting its way up his throat, but he cannot look away from

Taehyung, from the intensity in his eyes. It's always like that, he thinks. Taehyung is always electric, the force of the wind as it whips through his hair.

"I like you a lot," Taehyung says slowly, measuring the words. "I like you more and more every day. I don't think there's a limit to it, it just keeps expanding like the universe."

Jimin's eyes flicker, his heartrate spiking, a warmth tingling at his fingertips.

"Is there a chance that you might feel the same way about me?" Taehyung finally asks, his voice resonating between them. Jimin swears he can feel the sound waves vibrate against his skin.

He blinks and looks away. He doesn't want to answer, doesn't want to lose Taehyung. He's only loved once, only loved Seokjin. What he feels for Taehyung is so different from what he felt for Seokjin. Seokjin was dreams and blue skies and the soft sand on Busan's shores. Seokjin was a beacon in the darkness, a lighthouse guiding him to a home he wished and wished and wished for. Taehyung is none of those things.

Taehyung is an inhale of cool air in his lungs at the top of a mountain, the sun blinding and casting the world in a golden light. Taehyung is summer winds and sudden thunderstorms. Taehyung is a winding path of brilliant flowers and hundred-year-old trees and Jimin doesn't know where it leads.

Jimin only knows what it's like to love Seokjin. He cannot even fathom what it's like to love Taehyung.

He takes a shuddering breath and looks out the window, pressing his lips together. "I'm sorry," he says quietly.

He sees Taehyung nod in his peripheral vision. "I know." Taehyung clears his throat and shifts. "I think I've been unfair to both of us. I haven't really been treating you like a friend."

"It's okay," Jimin says almost numbly, still staring out the window, blinking. He can't move, can't stand to look at Taehyung. He doesn't want to face this.

"I still want to be your friend." Taehyung voice trails off before he starts again. "I'm...going to start treating you like a friend. Like a real friend. I just need a little space for a while. I'm really sorry."

"It's okay," Jimin repeats.

"It's not okay," Taehyung says sadly.

Jimin squeezes his hands around his cup and tries not to feel like the world is flipping upside down. "It's okay," he says again, because it's all he can say, a familiar mantra, a lie he's well-versed in. *It's okay, it's okay, it's okay.*

A lie, a lie, a lie.

&&&

Yoongi knocks on the guest bedroom door and peeks his head in to see Jeongguk sprawled over his bed, playing on his phone instead of studying like he said he would. Yoongi smirks and leans against the doorjam. "I'm making ramen," he says to Jeongguk. "Want some?"

Jeongguk frowns at him, contemplating.

"I didn't poison it," Yoongi elaborates.

Jeongguk scoffs, climbing off the bed and following Yoongi to the kitchen. "What about Seokjin-hyung?" he asks as he settles on a stool at the breakfast bar.

"He's working late today," Yoongi answers, lifting the lid on the pot of ramen to check the consistency. "Get a towel," he says, carefully lifting the pot handles off the element.

Jeongguk grabs a dishtowel and sets it on the bar for Yoongi to place the pot on. He smiles when Yoongi sets the ramen down, inhaling quickly, nearly tipping from his seat to get closer.

Yoongi swallows a laugh and hands Jeongguk a pair of chopsticks.

Jeongguk claps his hands together and says quickly, "Thanks for the food."

Yoongi slips into the seat next to Jeongguk. They eat in silence, more concerned with chewing than conversation. It's a stark contrast to meals with Seokjin, jokes and laughter and random noises as Seokjin explains why something is delicious. Yoongi finds himself smiling while thinking about it.

When the pot is mostly empty and the noodles have disappeared, Jeongguk sits back and glances at Yoongi, his wide eyes hesitating.

Yoongi frowns as he cleans up at the sink, finally turning around to ask bluntly, "You have something you want to say?"

"No," Jeongguk answers, scowling, but he still keeps his gaze steady on Yoongi. Yoongi arches a brow and Jeongguk sighs, looking down at his hands. "Seokjin-hyung told me you took those photos on the wall."

Yoongi nods, crossing his arms over his chest. "I did."

Jeongguk studies his hands, frustration twisting his face as he tries to form his words properly. "I guess I was just curious."

"Curious?"

He shrugs. "How you balance work and," he gestures to the photographs, "that."

Yoongi's eyes light with recognition and he uncrosses his arms, leaning back against the counter. "The first step is to recognize that your art doesn't subtract from your work. It adds."

Jeongguk finally looks up, confusion evident on his face.

"You probably think it's a waste of time, right? Time you could be studying or working."

Jeongguk nods hesitantly.

"You won't be able to sustain yourself long-term on just work. You have to pursue your passions, too." He turns back to the sink, rinsing the pot. "When you take time for your art, your mind handles your work better. It's addition, not subtraction."

Jeongguk is silent but Yoongi can feel his heavy gaze on the back of his head. Yoongi hopes he said the right thing, hopes he can encourage Jeongguk not to abandon drawing. He's not sure if it's because he kind of likes Jeongguk or kind of likes Seokjin. Maybe he kind of likes them both.

"Yoongi-hyung," Jeongguk starts slowly, and Yoongi is surprised that he cannot detect any form of a derisive attitude in the word *hyung*.

Yoongi turns to look back at Jeongguk. "Yeah, kid?"

"You know how important Seokjin-hyung is to me."

Yoongi smirks and nods, wiping his hands on a dishtowel. "You've made it crystal clear."

Jeongguk purses his lips, wide eyes serious and measuring. "I can't just give him away to anyone."

Yoongi rolls his eyes. "I don't need your per-"

"Do you love him?"

Yoongi's mouth dries up, his words falter on his lips. He blinks at Jeongguk, silent.

Jeongguk frowns and splays his hands on the counter. "I can't give him to you if you don't treasure him."

Yoongi knows he needs to lie, knows he needs to uphold his end of the contract: convince Jeongguk this is a love match. Keep Jeongguk in the dark. Don't let Jeongguk know this is a formal agreement between two desperate people, set to end in less than one year. He opens his mouth and prepares to lie.

"Seokjin-hyung is special," he says.

He waits for the lie to reach his tongue.

"He's the most amazing person I've ever met," he continues, and waits for the lie.

Yoongi takes a deep breath and locks eyes with Jeongguk.

"I like him more than I know how to put into words," he says, still waiting for the lie that doesn't come.

Maybe it's the truth.

&&&

Seokjin glances up from the drama on his laptop when he hears Yoongi walk into the bedroom. "Hey," he says.

Yoongi nods in greeting to him, rubbing a small towel on his wet hair to dry it. "Hey."

Seokjin closes his laptop and sets it on the nightstand, settling back against the pillows piled high by the bedframe. "Going to sleep soon?"

"Yeah. You don't have to stop," he says, gesturing to Seokjin's laptop. "I don't mind the noise."

Seokjin shakes his head. "It's fine, I should sleep soon, too."

Yoongi nods and walks to his side of the bed, still rubbing the towel over his hair.

"Jeongguk said he'll go back to his place tomorrow," Seokjin says idly, eyes fixated on the soft glow of Yoongi's skin fresh from the shower. He wonders which soap Yoongi used today: the fig or the citrus. He hopes it was the fig.

Yoongi freezes, snapping the towel down to his neck, frowning. "Why? I've been nice to him!"

Seokjin laughs, amused. His eyes crinkle up and he waves a hand at Yoongi. "He's nineteen, Yoongi, I'm sure he wants to be alone." He tilts his head and grins. "Are you going to miss him?"

Yoongi scowls. "Don't be ridiculous."

Seokjin shrugs, a smug smile still on his lips. "No one is safe from my baby brother's charms, it's hereditary. Our family has lethal charms, don't feel bad."

"You're delusional."

Seokjin settles back against the pillows, shifting the comforter to allow Yoongi to climb onto the bed. "I have to work late tomorrow, do you mind if I keep my stuff in here until I can move it on the weekend?"

Yoongi's eyes flicker and he stares at Seokjin, dark eyes assessing him. Seokjin's smile fades into confusion under the intense gaze. Yoongi clears his throat and shrugs his left shoulder. "It's fine." He looks away as he settles under the covers, fiddling with his phone on the nightstand. "You could just keep them there. For a while."

Seokjin's eyes widen. He opens and closes his mouth, the implications of Yoongi's words falling heavily in his chest. "You want me to stay in this room? With you?"

Yoongi still doesn't look at Seokjin, scrolling through his email on his phone very seriously. "It's a hassle to move your stuff back and forth all the time. Besides, you never know when Jeongguk will pop in. He knows the code now."

Seokjin blinks, his breath caught in his lungs. He shouldn't say yes. He shouldn't give in to this fantasy, shouldn't let it creep into every area of his life. Their separate bedrooms was his final line of defense, a physical reminder that this relationship is temporary. He can play and pretend all he wanted, but in the middle of the night, he returned on his own to his room. Quiet and solitary.

It's getting too hard to remember life before Yoongi. It's too easy to get swept up in the flood. He needs to say no.

Don't, he tries to tell himself, but the voice is faint and muffled under the sound of his heartbeat in his ears.

"Okay," he says, watching Yoongi's profile, watching the way Yoongi's eyes widen momentarily, the way Yoongi's lips smooth into a curve that can hardly be called a smile.

It's a mistake, but Seokjin can't find it in himself to regret it.

&&&

Jimin punches in the familiar code for Jeongguk's apartment and enters the space, toeing off his shoes. "Jeongguk?" he calls out, coming to a stop in the living room.

Jeongguk looks up from his laptop, lifting a hand in greeting. "Hyung, you're here?"

Jimin places the black plastic bag he's carrying on the coffee table and flops down on the sofa next to Jeongguk. "Mm." He digs through the bag and retrieves a beer, snapping it open and taking a sip.

"I didn't know you were coming over," Jeongguk says, closing his laptop and setting it aside.

Jimin frowns at his beer, leaning back against the sofa cushions. "I didn't want to be alone tonight. If

that's okay?"

Jeongguk nods. "Course, it's fine."

Jimin hands a beer to Jeongguk in thanks. They sit side-by-side for a while, taking sips from the warm beer, listening to nothing in particular. It's not doing Jimin any good, his mind throwing him back to Taehyung's face and Taehyung's hands and the sound of Taehyung's voice saying he needed space.

Jimin bites his lip. "Talk to me, Jeongguk," he says, throwing his head back to drain his can of beer.

"About what?"

"Anything, I don't care."

"Can I ask about you and Seokjin-hyung?"

Jimin laughs derisively, throwing a hand over his eyes and rubbing. It's not exactly the best topic to make him feel better, but he supposes he doesn't deserve to feel better. He needs to stop avoiding the obvious and face what he's done. "Go ahead."

Jimin can feel Jeongguk's heavy gaze on him but he refuses to take his hand away from his eyes.

"Do you still..." Jeongguk trails off and sighs. "You wanted to marry him before. What about now?"

Jimin drops his hand to his lap and smiles sadly. "I let Seokjin-hyung go."

"Are you okay?"

Jimin shrugs. "I'm getting better." He leans forward, reaching into the bag for another beer. He snaps it open and cringes as the first sip hits his tongue. It's warm.

"Did you give him up because of Yoongi?" Jeongguk presses.

Jimin frowns, staring at the beer in his hands. "I guess. I don't know." He sighs. "No, that's not quite right. I gave him up for myself, too." He finally looks at Jeongguk and presses his lips together. "I'm sorry, I know I promised I would take care of hyung." He shrugs. "Hyung's really hard to protect. He doesn't let anyone take care of him."

Jeongguk's brow furrows in thought.

"But I think he's happy, Gukkie." Jimin smiles a little thinking about it, thinking about how wide Seokjin grinned at Yoongi, how happy he seemed. He always hoped it would be him that made Seokjin glow like that, but he's finding he doesn't mind too much who did it. He's satisfied that he was even able to see Seokjin like that. "You should give them your blessing. I think Seokjin-hyung really loves Yoongi."

"It was never hyung's feelings to Yoongi that I was worried about," Jeongguk answers, taking another gulp of his beer.

"What was it, then?"

"It was Yoongi's feelings to hyung." Jeongguk locks eyes with Jimin. "I think...I think I was wrong about them, hyung. I think Yoongi really does love Seokjin. He's just not obvious about it."

Jimin thinks back to Hoseok's party, to Seokjin and Yoongi swaying on the dance floor, completely

lost in their own little world, Yoongi tugging Seokjin down to whisper something in his ear. He nods. "Yeah, I think you're right."

Jeongguk sighs and settles back against the sofa cushions. "Still. It would have been nice."

"Hmm?" Jimin shifts until his shoulder knocks against Jeongguk's.

"You and hyung, together. The three of us moving back to Busan. Close to my mom. Your parents. Like when we were kids."

Jimin closes his eyes, thinking about the what-ifs that used to be his only hope. "Remember when you first got this place and you forgot your passcode?"

Jeongguk snorts. "You and hyung wouldn't let me back in until I sang and danced in the hallway."

Jimin smiles, remembering Seokjin's cascading laughter, remembering how he wrestled with him in front of the door, remembering Seokjin's firm hands wrapped around his waist as he moved him aside. He was happy, then, he realizes. He was happy and he didn't even know it. He had thought happiness was something he had to wait for, a when and an if, not a was. He kept waiting for happiness to come back to him. He was happy then. And he was happy with Taehyung and now he has neither.

Jimin feels tears he didn't know were building slip from his eyes suddenly and he sniffs, turning away from Jeongguk and covering his face with his hands.

"Hyung," Jeongguk says, concern vibrating in his soft timbre. He places a hand tentatively on Jimin's shoulder but Jimin just shakes his head, curling into himself.

He cries. He cries for the dream he lost, of him and Seokjin living happily together, of being the only one in Seokjin's heart. He cries for the years he lost, wishing and dreaming that dissolved like smoke before he even reached his hand out. He cries because Taehyung gave up on him, and because it's all his fault. He cries because he held on to an empty dream, because he walked through his life in a trance of maybes and never stepped forward into the light. He cries for all he has, for Seokjin's comforting friendship that he will never lose, for Jeongguk's solid presence that will always be a rope to pull him through. He cries for all he lost, a gentle hand carding through his hair and a deep voice whispering that he's brighter than all the constellations in the night sky.

"I fucked up," he manages to sob out, letting Jeongguk pull him into his chest. He curls his head low on Jeongguk's chest and lets go, finally and completely.

"It'll be okay, hyung," Jeongguk says, running his hand soothingly over Jimin's back.

"I fucked up," Jimin repeats, hating himself. He doesn't know how to live, he thinks. He destroys every good thing he's been graced with. "I fucked up."

Jeongguk makes comforting, shushing noises, his hand steady on Jimin's back. It does little to soothe him and he cries harder, finally exhaling the sorrow of his youth.

&&&

Seokjin is bored. He doesn't quite say it, but Yoongi can tell. The way his leg jitters under his book, the way he keeps checking his phone every two minutes, the way he sighs and stretches and settles back onto the loveseat every few minutes. He's getting cabin fever.

Yoongi closes his laptop and sets it on the coffee table. He lifts out of his chair and walks past

Seokjin. Seokjin looks up from his book briefly, eyes following Yoongi as he leaves the reading room, but he doesn't say anything.

Yoongi heads to his closet, changing into a nondescript pair of jeans and a generic black hoodie. He puts on a black cap, tucking his hair underneath it, and grabs a black mask before heading back to Seokjin.

"Hyung," he calls out.

Seokjin looks up from his book, eyebrows raised in question. "Hmm?"

"Wanna go out?"

Seokjin blinks at him. He's tempted, Yoongi can see it in his eyes. Seokjin wants to say yes, but there's a hesitation in his fingers as they tap the cover of his book. Finally Seokjin smiles in resignation and shakes his head. "There's still so many reporters outside, Yoongi." He sighs and returns back to his book. "Give it a few more days and we'll go back to normal," he says, as if he's trying to convince himself.

Yoongi's lips twist and he taps his foot. He doesn't necessarily want to go out. He likes staying at home, where it's warm and he has access to bathrooms and coffee and his bed. It's the ideal place if he's being perfectly honest. He could stay at home without a thought of going out for weeks. But Seokjin's not like him. Seokjin likes to breathe fresh air and see people and do things. Seokjin likes to move and flow and live.

Yoongi doesn't want to go out, but he knows Seokjin does, and he's doing it for him. Yoongi has a fleeting thought, wondering why he seems to always be doing things for Seokjin's sake. He wonders when it started, and when it'll end. He wonders just how far he'll go. He clears the thought from his mind before it can start to terrify him, before it brings up memories of lines he vowed he would not cross, before it dredges up the inky, acrid remains of his past he keeps locked up, tight and secure.

Instead he walks closer to Seokjin and pokes his shoulder. "Come on. We can go in disguise." He holds up his mask. "See? No one will know it's us."

Seokjin eyes him, considering.

"It's one afternoon."

A smile grows on Seokjin's lips and he stands up. "I'll get dressed."

Yoongi smirks and leans onto the arm of the loveseat, satisfied and more pleased than he probably should be. He hears Seokjin bounding back downstairs a few minutes later. He walks to the staircase and pauses when he sees Seokjin, warmth blossoming in his chest. Seokjin is wearing an oversized light grey hoodie, a black mask and a pair of large, round glasses covering most of his facial features. *He's cute*, he thinks, his fingers tingling to reach out and tuck Seokjin into his side.

Seokjin reaches a hand up to his hair, fingers threading through the locks. "I didn't have a cap, but my hair's not really out of the ordinary."

Yoongi clears his throat and steps onto the stairs to reach Seokjin's height. He takes the cap from his head and reaches up, placing it gently on Seokjin. He avoids looking at Seokjin's eyes and hopes the rapid, nervous beat of his heart is only audible to his own ears as he brushes Seokjin's hair away from his face. He tucks the errant strands into the hat, fingers sliding through silky locks, thumb running over the shell of Seokjin's ear.

When he's finally done, he lets his hands slide back down to his side and he steps off the stairs, clearing his throat. "We can buy you a cap while we're out."

He turns to walk toward the door and feels Seokjin slide next to him. Seokjin's hand reaches for his, fingers intertwining together almost naturally. Seokjin squeezes Yoongi's hand and tugs him closer until their shoulders are flush. "I want a pink hat," he says casually, like Yoongi's heart isn't threatening to burst out of his chest.

It's silly, for Yoongi to be so affected by such a little thing. Logically he knows this, but it does nothing to calm the racing speed of his heart and the fluttering in his stomach. It does nothing to mollify the wide smile hidden under his mask. Logic does nothing to explain why he's trying to hold on tightly to something he always thought he didn't want.

&&&

Seokjin jerks awake, his brow damp with sweat and his heart racing. He sucks in a short breath, feels it grate in his throat. He lifts a hand to his face and rubs, keeping his eyes closed for a moment while he tries to come back down from the instant panic.

Three in the morning again, he doesn't even need to look at the clock. He tries to count in his head like he's learnt, but the beat of his heart is too fast and his chest feels like it will collapse around his lungs. He glances over at Yoongi, making sure the other is still asleep and undisturbed, before he quietly slips from the bed.

He shuffles carefully out of the room and downstairs, focused on the task of making tea. It helps, for a moment, until he's in the kitchen, the kettle switched on, and his mind free of its errand.

His fingers grip the edge of the counter and he bends his head down, trying to control his breathing. It's a bad one tonight, he realizes. He doesn't know what triggered it. He thinks vaguely that he's gotten too comfortable, let his guard down too much. He's been too happy, he berates himself. He let himself relax too much, with Yoongi's hand in his as they strolled through Seoul in disguise, Yoongi's arm around his waist as he drifted off to sleep, Yoongi's smile and Yoongi's resonating voice and Yoongi, Yoongi, Yoongi.

His mind buzzes with his mother's voice. *Seokjinie, wake up.*

He makes a distressed noise and drops to the floor, pressing his forehead to the cabinets and squeezing his eyes shut. He wants to push the memories away, but they're clawing at the feeble guards he's built around them.

Seokjinie, wake up.

The kettle clicks off, but Seokjin doesn't hear it, already lost.

Seokjinie, wake up.

&&&

"*Seokjinie, wake up.*"

Seokjin scrunches his face and makes a small whiny protest. His limbs are heavy and the blanket is warm. He tries to roll over, the strong pull of sleep drawing him under again.

"*Seokjin you have to get up now.*"

It is only the edge of panic in his mother's voice that has Seokjin's eyes opening. He takes in a sharp breath. He sits up and squeezes his eyes shut against the blinding light when his mother switches his lamp on. He wonders why morning came so quickly.

His mother's warm hand gives his shoulder two urgent pats and she places his backpack in his lap. "Remember when we went to Disneyland?"

Seokjin brightens and his eyes open properly. "Yes!"

"Do you remember what I helped you put in your bag?" his mother prompts, swiping his fringe away from his forehead.

Seokjin nods and smiles widely, excitement building in his limbs. "Five underwear, five pairs of socks, two pants, two shirts. Only one toy so be very very sure it's the one I want." He looks at her seriously. "Because we're not coming back for another one."

His mother sighs in relief and leans forward to place a quick kiss on his cheek. "You're so smart." He beams at her praise. "You're going to do it again, okay? You're a big boy now, you can pack your own bag."

Seokjin scampers off his bed, clutching his bag tightly in his hands. "Are we going to Disneyland, Mom?"

His mother bites her lip and shakes her head. "No sweetie. We're not. Be quick okay? I need to get your brother."

Seokjin points his toes, edging down the side of his bed until his foot makes contact with the soft carpet. "Where are we going, Mommy?" he asks, setting his backpack on the floor.

His mother doesn't answer, heading out of his room hurriedly. Seokjin blinks, finally turning to the task at hand.

He hears Jeongguk wail, loud and distressed at being woken. Seokjin frowns and wrinkles his nose at the unpleasant, piercing noise. He can hear their mother make soft, shushing sounds to try to calm Jeongguk but it doesn't work.

Seokjin runs to his toy bins and looks around for Kiki. He grins when he finds the stuffed bunny, large floppy ears drooping over its face and a body that has long since lost its shape. It is his toy from forever ago, before he can even remember, but Jeongguk loves the stuffie even more than he does.

He runs out of his room to Jeongguk's room. His mother holds Jeongguk in her arms, bouncing her knees and patting his back soothingly.

"Shh, it's okay Gukkie, shh," she says softly.

Jeongguk continues to wail, his small hands fisted into her shirt and her hair, tears wetting his cheeks, lips curled in distress.

Seokjin runs up to him, waving the bunny in his hand, trying to catch Jeongguk's attention.

"Look, it's Kiki!" he says, reaching up a hand to gently pat Jeongguk's dangling foot.

Jeongguk hiccups and pauses momentarily, his face still contorted as if he will fall back into screaming at any moment. But his wide, tear-filled eyes settle on the bunny. He lets out a quieter

whimper and holds out a hand to the bunny. “Kiki,” he pouts, sniffing.

Seokjin smiles, wide and relieved, and stands on his tiptoes to hand the bunny to his brother.

His mother pats Seokjin’s head and smiles at him, relief letting her shoulders relax. “Go pack,” she urges Seokjin, fingers carding through his hair. “Thank you. You’re a good brother.”

Seokjin runs back to his room, satisfied and proud. He’s a good brother.

&&&

Seokjin knows a few key, fundamental facts at the hearty age of eight.

First, his mother is the most beautiful woman in the world. This is obvious. Her eyes sparkle like diamonds and her smile can light up an entire room. She has the softest hands and the most melodious voice. She is the most important person in the world.

Second, Jeongguk is his brother but not completely. It’s weird, but it’s been explained to him several times so he pretends he understands. Jeongguk’s mom is his mom too. That makes them brothers. But Jeongguk’s dad is not Seokjin’s dad. That makes them not brothers. He doesn’t know exactly how it works, but he knows when Jeongguk’s dad comes to visit them, he’s supposed to be very well behaved and not try to draw attention to himself. He’s supposed to be polite and quiet, and when Jeongguk’s dad takes Jeongguk and their mom out to play, Seokjin is supposed to stay at home with his babysitter.

It’s not so bad. Jeongguk’s dad is always kind to Seokjin, and always brings him a present when he visits. It’s just that sometimes Seokjin wants what Jeongguk gets: tickling and arms lifting him high above the ground on broad shoulders and a strong, gentle hand patting his cheek.

Sometimes, Seokjin gets jealous and doesn’t like his brother very much.

Lastly, Seokjin knows he doesn’t have a father. He doesn’t know why. He can’t understand why Jeongguk gets one, a nice one with a fond smile and many presents, and Seokjin doesn’t. He asks his mother, but she has no answers for him. He wonders if it has something to do with him. He thinks maybe that’s just who he is: someone without something.

That morning, his head resting against the cold glass of the train window, watching the sun start to rise, golden and shining, his fundamental facts are thrown upside down and rearranged.

First, his mother is still the most beautiful, most important person in the world.

Second, Jeongguk is still his brother but not completely.

Lastly, the change that makes his head hurt with too many thoughts. Seokjin does not have a father. And Jeongguk does not have a father either. Both of them are now just like that, brothers without something, lacking something, unable to acquire it no matter how hard they wish.

Seokjin looks at Jeongguk, fast asleep in his mother’s arms, face slack and peaceful. He scrunches his face and tries not to cry. He’s sorry he ever wished Jeongguk’s dad was his own. He’s sorry he ever wished he and Jeongguk were the same. He’s sorry and sure it’s all his fault, somehow.

He looks away, back to the sun painting pink and orange in the sky, a horizon he’s never seen before. He’s scared. He presses his fingers to his thighs and tells himself not to cry. He’s so scared.

&&&

Seokjin has always been Kim Seokjin, but when they arrive in Busan, Jeongguk stops being Jeon Jeongguk. Jeongguk becomes Kim Jeongguk and he and Seokjin are brothers, completely and entirely.

It's not until he's older that Seokjin understands what happened. He understands what his mother realized that day at three in the morning, what made her take her children and flee like a thief in the dark of the night. The death of Jeongguk's father left them vulnerable. No more luxury apartment in Gangnam, no more private school tuition, no more designer clothes and foreign cars. No more security.

Jeongguk's father never married, and his only child was Jeongguk. The Jeon family had let Jeongguk live away from them on the belief that a legitimate child would be born eventually. His passing meant that Jeongguk was his only heir.

Seokjin's mother knows she will not be able to win a custody battle. She did the only thing she could: she took her family and fled, starting a new life.

It's not easy. They trade their plush and spacious luxury apartment for a rundown one-bedroom. They sleep together on one futon in the living room. They don't have much food, and meat is a rarity.

It's happy, though. They have a roof and rice and each other. Seokjin no longer has to remind himself that Jeongguk is sort of his and sort of not. Now, Jeongguk is his brother, they share the same surname and the same mother and they both don't have anything else.

It's a stolen happiness, taken and secreted away, fragile and precarious.

Stolen happiness never lasts.

&&&

Seokjin's mother is sick. Not the type of sick like a fever or a cold, bedrest for a weekend and plenty of fluids to fix the issue. It's a different kind of sick, the worse kind, that starts off slow and is easily dismissed as fatigue, but eventually threatens to take everything he knows away from him.

She's too tired after work to cook anymore. Seokjin volunteers to take over meal preparation. It's fine, the kitchen isn't hard to work in, it's sort of fun actually. Jeongguk helps as best as he can with his little hands, clumsily stirring ingredients.

Then she's too tired to go to work everyday. She phones in sick and he leaves her a large mug of tea by her side before leaving for school. When he comes home, she's still there, the mug only half empty, as if the strength to even lift the cup had left her body.

They didn't have money to begin with, but now it's getting hard to even buy rice. Seokjin goes out after school to look for odd jobs, anything to earn a few won. He lies about his age, says he's fourteen, and gets a parttime job bussing tables in a small restaurant. It's enough to sustain them, for a little while. Seokjin thinks he can pick up some more shifts somewhere else.

He's always tired, falling asleep in class because he worked too late. He thinks he just needs to hold on a little longer. His mother will get better soon. Of course she will. The alternative isn't even a possibility.

Until he finds her hunched over the bathroom sink at three in the morning, coughing up red splotches of blood. And he realizes he really could lose his entire world.

It's Jimin's parents that save them, pushing an envelope of money into his mother's hand and urging her to see a doctor. Seokjin's mother agrees, tears in her eyes and a thank you stuck in her throat.

Seokjin feels his shoulders sag in relief. His mother will see the doctor and they'll fix her and she'll be okay again and they'll all be happy. That's what doctors do, they fix sick people.

It doesn't work.

And she doesn't get better.

&&&

"Seokjin."

Seokjin's eyes scrunch together but he pushes himself up on his hands, trying to shake sleep from his mind. It's still dark, night heavy and shrouding. Jeongguk is curled to his side, small hands buried under his head.

Seokjin turns to see his mother kneeling on the futon, a thick shawl wrapped around her shoulders. "What's wrong?" he asks, voice cracking with sleep. "Are you okay?"

Seokjin's mother reaches out and swipes Seokjin's fringe from his forehead, tucking it behind his ears. "Come outside, we have to talk."

Seokjin slips carefully from the futon, making sure Jeongguk doesn't wake from the disturbance. His brother doesn't even stir, locked in sleep and what Seokjin hopes are sweet dreams.

His mother hands him his jacket and he follows her outside their small apartment to the balcony outside. It's chilly out and Seokjin hunches under his jacket, shoving his hands into his pockets to keep warm.

His mother looks at him sadly as she sits, her hands twisting in her lap. "Seokjin, you know I've been very sick."

Seokjin's breath catches in his throat but he manages to nod slowly.

"I need to get very expensive treatment."

He nods again, already feeling tears well up behind his eyes. Nothing good happens in the middle of the night, his mind warns him. He shivers and clenches his hands into fists in his pockets.

"I can't..." His mother stops, her eyes suddenly watery. She blinks rapidly and looks away, her lungs shuddering with a labored breath. "I wish you boys could have met a better mother. I'm sorry."

Seokjin presses his lips shut, afraid of the sob that's choking his throat.

"Tomorrow," his mother continues, reaching a hand up to wipe a tear from her cheeks, "Jeonggukkie's grandfather is coming. And he's going to take Jeongguk back to Seoul with him."

No, Seokjin thinks, not Jeongguk. The world crumbles under his feet. Not Jeongguk, wide eyes and sweet smile and small hands holding tightly to his, calling hyung, hyung. He can't lose Jeongguk too.

Seokjin's knees give out and he falls to the ground, his legs cold from the cement and his mother's gentle hand on his shoulders.

"I'm so sorry," she cries softly into his hair, squeezing him tight as sobs wrack his body. "I'm so sorry. In your next life, please meet a better mother. I'm so sorry."

&&&

Seokjin will never forget the day they took Jeongguk away. Jeongguk is shy by nature, and spent the entire time the three men were in their apartment hiding behind their mother's back. Finally the oldest of the three, Jeongguk's grandfather, makes a long disapproving noise and says it's time to go.

He tries to grab Jeongguk's arm but Jeongguk skids away, running to Seokjin and clinging to his legs. Seokjin wants so badly to keep Jeongguk with them, safe and loved and part of his family. It goes against all his instincts to let the men wrestle Jeongguk away from him, goes against every cell in his blood that courses through his veins.

But Seokjin's not stupid. He knows their mother won't live without the treatments. Knows it's a matter of weeks before she's so sick that family services will come to take them away, knows he can't guarantee to stay with Jeongguk in an orphanage.

Jeongguk has a chance in Seoul with the Jeons. They're rich and powerful, and Seokjin tells himself they must love Jeongguk, even a little. It doesn't have to be much, just a little. Seokjin tells himself that his brother will be okay, even as his heart aches.

One of the younger men finally manages to detach Jeongguk from Seokjin and carries him out. Jeongguk is wailing, face completely red and wet with tears, his voice screaming.

"Mommy! Mommy!" Jeongguk's small voice pierces the apartment, pierces Seokjin's heart like a knife. "Hyung," he pleads, distraught and desperate. "Hyung! Hyung!"

Seokjin bites his teeth together, jaw clenched tight to keep from crying as Jeongguk's voice fades, as they carry his brother away forever.

He's left in an apartment that feels empty and cold, the only sound his mother's quiet weeping and the deafening muted thump of his own heart breaking.

&&&

By some miracle, some unfathomable wonder, three weeks later the Jeons call him up from Busan to Seoul. Maybe it was his wishing, maybe it was his fervent prayers, maybe he saved the country in some previous life. He doesn't know what it was, but he's given his brother back. He vows to never ask for more, gratitude a heavy weight on his shoulders. He knows he's used up all his wishes for the rest of his life, and he doesn't regret it.

It doesn't come free, though. He has to leave his mother behind, has to abandon her to solitude and loneliness. She urges him to accept. Jeongguk can't be alone with them, she says vehemently. You have to protect him. You have to be strong for him.

Seokjin packs one bag, by himself, just like he did when he left Seoul all those years ago. Five pairs of socks, five pairs of underwear, two pants and two shirts. One toy, and be very sure it's the one you want because we're not coming back for another one. He chooses his photo album - snapshots of him and Jeongguk and Jimin, of his mother, of his friends from school - and slides it carefully in the side of his backpack.

His mother's last words resound in his mind when he boards his train. Promise me, Seokjin. Promise me you won't let them shape your life. Promise me you'll keep Jeongguk safe.

He watches the scenery pass by, another sunrise of purple and pink heralding a new day, a new life. He will be strong, he tells himself. He will be strong for his mother and his brother.

He's going to be strong. He has to be, he repeats to himself, because there's no one that can be strong for him.

&&&

Seokjin bangs his head against the kitchen cabinet, his knees against his chest, his back stiff from his position on the floor. He inhales slowly, feels the breath shudder unevenly in his lungs. His fingers squeeze tightly on his knees, his knuckles turning white from the effort.

There's no one that can be strong for him, he remembers. He's been a fool to think otherwise.

Yoongi and everything he's given to Seokjin, it's all temporary, smoke that will disappear at the slightest puff of wind. He let himself get caught up in small smiles and long fingers intertwining with his and dreams he thought he'd buried. He forgot the reality, the cold truth, black ink on paper, the steady tick of time passing moment by moment.

He has to be strong on his own, he tells himself. There's no one else. There never has been, and he knows with certainty there never will be.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize to everyone. I'm so sorry.

Fated to Love You

Chapter Notes

I have been reliably informed by several people that I need to edit my tags lmao. Ok so in my defense, when I started this, it *wasn't* deep. But yeah, fine, I see your point, tags have been edited.

Twitter user [Danielle](#) has done [some sweet \(and so saddd\) fanarts](#) for this fic, please take a look!

Also! Exciting news~ This is officially the longest fic I've ever written. I'm actually crying though, haha.

Friendly reminder that smut scenes are started with "####" and ended with "#####" (however I suggest if you want to skip it, start reading that scene and then skip when it starts getting spicy because you might miss some developments otherwise.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Yoongi frowns at his phone, fingers curled around the back, thumb pulling his screen down to refresh it again and again and again. He's just bored. It's not like he's waiting for Seokjin to reply to his text. He's just bored.

Even when he has a desk full of work to get through and his assistant is currently glaring at him and clearing his throat, the sound rife with indignation and self-righteousness. Yoongi looks up from his phone to glare at his assistant.

"What?" he spits out, thumb pulling at his screen again. He flicks his eyes briefly down to his phone and back up to his assistant, sure he hasn't been caught.

He has but his assistant is smart enough not to roll his eyes. "If you'd like, I can come back after you've finished your little game."

"I'm not playing games," Yoongi says, scowling. He's not even waiting for a text or anything, he's just *bored*, that's all. He locks his phone and places it facedown on his desk, lifting his hands in front of him. "See? Not even touching my phone."

His assistant makes a face, clearly unconvinced, but apparently decides to let it go. He looks at his tablet in his hands and says, "As I was saying, I've made travel arrangements for next week to Macau. You have a full schedule during the day but there is some free time at night. I have advised the hosts that they need not entertain you per your usual request. Your room is in the Venetian. Have I missed anything?"

Yoongi frowns and shakes his head. "No, sounds fine." He flips his phone face side up on his desk, watching for the little notification light to come on. It doesn't. Maybe he blinked at the same time the light flashed. He presses the home button, the screen lighting up. His frown deepens when he sees no new messages.

"Feel free to go back to your games," his assistant says.

"I'm not playing games!" Yoongi calls out, but his assistant has already left. He huffs and swivels his chair, grabbing his phone from the desk and checking the signal strength. He scowls and throws his phone back on the desk, frustration and something far more serious coursing through his veins.

He's worried. Something is wrong with Seokjin, something significant but so subtle that Yoongi cannot even pinpoint when it started or what caused it. Seokjin has withdrawn, bit by bit, like he's trying to remove pieces of himself in such unperceivable quantities that Yoongi would not even notice. Maybe he wouldn't have, if only he wasn't so tuned in to Seokjin, if only he wasn't so focused on Seokjin that he can even detect the change in his breathing patterns.

He realizes for the first time since they met that every small peek into Seokjin's thoughts and feelings and personality was only permitted to Yoongi because Seokjin allowed it. He's starting to realize after weeks of Seokjin parading around with a mask of *I'm fine* and *nothing's wrong Yoongi*, that Seokjin is more skilled at acting than the actors he sees on the movie screens. It's frustrating, but more than frustration, Yoongi is afraid. His fingers itch to hold on, his heart starts to beat too fast in his ears when he thinks about it too much. At the end of their contract they'll part ways, it's not a surprise.

People leave. The familiar mantra whispers through his mind, a prickle in his ears, a pattern so ingrained in his body that he exhales it out with the breath stuck in his lungs. *People leave, protect yourself before they do.*

He wonders when Seokjin - his laugh, his voice, and the press of his fingers on Yoongi's skin, pillow-soft and fire-hot – began to drown out the voice in his own head. *People leave* whispers through Yoongi's mind but Seokjin's bubbling laughter rings louder in his ears.

They'll part ways, but not yet. Not yet.

He stands from his desk and heads out of his office to his assistant. "Minjoon," he calls.

Minjoon looks up from his computer, waiting expectantly for Yoongi's instructions.

"Make arrangements for Seokjin to join me on the trip to Macau," he says. Something has to be done. He doesn't know what's wrong with Seokjin. It doesn't matter. He'll fix it somehow. Seokjin is still his for a few more months. He has no intention of wasting any more time.

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Since the night when Seokjin realized what a fool he allowed himself to be, he's been careful. Careful with his touches, careful with his words, careful with his eyes that he always finds trail to Yoongi. He's been a fool. He's forgotten everything he knew about life, let himself get caught up in the fantasy of Yoongi and this life they're pretending to live. He let his feelings get away from himself. He let his emotions run unchecked, and it was only that night when he realized how far he'd fallen. It's terrifying. He knows how quickly life can rip away everything he holds close to his heart. He knows he used up all his hopes and wishes and luck on Jeongguk. He cannot afford to lose himself in a golden vision-like world, smoke and mirrors that will shatter when the clock strikes midnight.

The problem is that Yoongi is so easy to fall into. He shouldn't be. He has a hundred layers, all guarded under lock and key. He's closed off, private, grumpy, quiet, reserved. Seokjin should have no problems keeping his distance, keeping his heart. Except Yoongi is gravity, a force in motion, pulling Seokjin closer with every revolution. He's not falling down, he's falling *in*, closer to Yoongi's center, to his still beating heart that pulls him, the waves of the tide. Seokjin is the ocean, powerless against the pull, a magnitude he closes in on without thought, without reason, without recourse.

Seokjin is determined to put a distance between his heart and Yoongi's again. He needs to be practical. He needs to remember that he's pragmatic. He needs to prepare for the inevitable parting they will have at the dissolution of their marriage. If he has any hope of getting out of this contract unscathed, he needs to build a wall between them. He has no time for brick and mortar, desperate for some kind of shelter. He gathers the straw and planks in his heart, the flimsy excuses, lies and fabrications he makes up in his mind. Yoongi's smile means nothing, it's a natural reaction, Yoongi being nice. Yoongi's hands are like any pair of hands, five digits each, bone and flesh and skin that don't electrify Seokjin's entire being. Yoongi's gazes are out of focus, probably him just zoning out. They don't send a thrill through Seokjin's blood, they don't signify anything. Yoongi and Seokjin are in a business relationship, nothing more, nothing less.

He tells himself it's not too late, that he caught his feelings just in the nick of time. He tells himself he can recover from this. He tells himself to be strong, because Yoongi won't be here forever. Seokjin cannot let himself crumble like withered leaves when destiny rights its course.

He wishes Yoongi didn't make it so hard.

Seokjin arrives back home - *no*, he reminds himself. Not home. The apartment. Temporary and fleeting, a tether of thread worn thin. Seokjin arrives back at the apartment to the smell of fried chicken and the rustling, clanking sounds of someone in the kitchen. Seokjin frowns and places his things in the living room before making his way to the source of the sounds.

Yoongi's head is buried in a cupboard, searching for something, making a mess on the counter, pulling things down. Seokjin glances around the kitchen, sees the breakfast bar set for two, two boxes of fried chicken between the plates, side dishes scattered in a random array. Two tall empty glasses are set by the refrigerator, waiting for something.

Seokjin blinks. "Yoongi?"

Yoongi's head pulls out from the cupboard, his eyes bright and a happy smile on his lips. "Oh, you're home?"

Not home, Seokjin reminds himself, pressing his fingers into fists. Instead he nods and makes a small noise of affirmation.

"I didn't know when you'd be back, you never responded to my text."

"Oh." Seokjin looks away. "Sorry, I got busy at work and then I forgot."

Yoongi stares at him, heavy and focused, but finally shrugs, the topic dropped. "Doesn't matter. The chicken should still be warm, take a seat." He heads to the refrigerator, pulling out two cans of beer, pouring them into the waiting empty glasses. He turns to Seokjin when he's done, placing the glass in front of him and smiling widely. "Dig in."

Seokjin's fingers curl around the glass of beer, the surface cold against his fingers. It should jar him from his thoughts, but it doesn't. His eyes follow Yoongi, the way he slides into the seat next to him, the way he reaches for a leg of chicken, the way he peers over at Seokjin, his lips lifting in a lopsided smile, a little higher on the left than the right.

He misses Yoongi. He hates himself, hates his own weakness. He should be stronger than this. He's spent years being *stronger* than this. He misses Yoongi even when the other man is right here beside him, breathing and eating and being. Because Seokjin can't allow himself to reach out and run his hands over Yoongi's shoulders. Because Seokjin can't allow himself to lean his chin on his hand and stare at him. Because Seokjin can't lean over and whisper the words that keep trying to climb up his

throat, words that scare him and set his heart pounding too fast, too hard.

This is probably how Jimin felt, Seokjin realizes, his stomach churning at the thought. Helpless and immovable, unable to escape, unable to progress. Suspended, breath caught in his lungs, fingers dead at his sides, words clawing up his throat.

I don't feel anything for Yoongi, he lies to himself, trying to stop, restart his mind, wishing he could do the same with his heart.

"Hyung," Yoongi says, glancing over at Seokjin, eyes shifting over his face. Seokjin wonders how much Yoongi can read in his features, how far he's burrowed under his skin, how sharp his eyes are.

Seokjin raises his chin instead and says, "Hmm, what is it?"

Yoongi licks his lips and clears his throat. "I, uh. I was wondering if you could get a few days off work next week. Wednesday to Friday."

Seokjin blinks, tilting his head. "Why?"

Yoongi looks away and stares at his beer. "I have a business trip in Macau and," he pauses, sighing and reaching a hand up to scratch at his neck, "I was wondering if you'd like to join me. I'd have a pretty full schedule during the day but I'll be free at night. And we could stay over for the weekend, head back Sunday afternoon."

Seokjin's lips part, inhaling deeply. He needs to say no, a dozen excuses supplied by his mind. He can't get time off, it's too short notice. He has plans for the week, helping Jeongguk study. He doesn't like flying, hates airplanes. His Mandarin is rusty, his passport is expired, his neck pillow is missing. He needs to say no, take this opportunity to distance himself from Yoongi, take the gift fate has placed in his hands.

Yoongi looks back at him, eyes flickering. He shifts in his chair, closer to Seokjin, almost reaching for him but pulling back his hand at the last moment, a hesitation in his movements. He locks eyes with Seokjin and says, "Let me rephrase. I would really like it if you came with me on this trip."

Don't be a fool, Seokjin, he tells himself.

"I'll come," Seokjin hears himself saying, his heart gaining control of his mouth, his fickle, foolish heart.

Yoongi grins, wide and delighted.

Fool, fool, fool.

&&&

"Hyung, you should have told me you were coming over!"

Seokjin looks up from the clothing rack, the sleeve of a soft blue button-up sliding through his fingers. He smiles as Namjoon approaches him and lets the garment go completely. "I didn't want to disturb you."

Namjoon grins, a dimple dotting his left cheek, and shakes his head. "It's a good excuse for a break." He reaches Seokjin and waves him away from the rack. "Come on, you don't need to pick from here, I'll let you choose whatever you like from my workshop."

"I was just picking up a couple items," Seokjin starts, but Namjoon is already ushering him out of his boutique and up the stairs to his studio.

"You can pick a couple items from my studio, then," Namjoon answers easily.

Seokjin laughs and follows Namjoon into the studio. Namjoon's studio is wide and airy, floor-to-ceiling windows allowing natural light to infiltrate the space. There are large tables full of drawings and fabrics and scraps, a mess Seokjin can't even call organized. Sequins and scraps of velvet are strewn on the floor near the tables, fallen and apparently forgotten. Seokjin raises his eyebrows at Namjoon and Namjoon has the decency to look sheepish.

Namjoon bends to pick up some of the mess and tosses it haphazardly onto piles of fabrics on a table. "Sorry, I wasn't expecting company."

Seokjin nods, amused.

"Hoseok's always telling me to clean up after myself."

Seokjin smiles. "Is that so?"

Namjoon laughs and dips his head, embarrassed. "Sorry." He walks to the corner of the space where there are five or six racks of clothing stuffed tightly on the bars. "Here, my latest designs."

Seokjin turns his attention to the clothes, fingers brushing over the fabric. He pulls out a pair of jeans, zippered at the ankles and rips on the knee and high on the thigh. He turns the jeans on the hanger in his hand, examining it. "These are quite bold."

Namjoon laughs and says, "Take them, I think they'd suit you well."

Seokjin smirks and shakes his head. "It's not exactly what I was here for. I needed something formal."

Namjoon shrugs. "Take them anyway." He turns to the racks again and starts shifting through them. "What's the occasion?"

"Yoongi and I are going to Macau. I thought we might need something to go out at night."

Namjoon looks back at Seokjin, a slow, warm smile spreading on his lips. "Are you finally taking your honeymoon?"

Seokjin scoffs and shakes his head, putting the jeans on a nearby table and sorting through a rack. "Yoongi's going on business. I'm just coming along for..." He trails off, frowning. He's just coming along because he's a fool. Because he's weak to Yoongi's voice and Yoongi's eyes. Because he's gotten too comfortable, because he's forgotten the difference between reality and a fantasy. Because he stubbornly didn't want to face four days in an empty apartment, artefacts of Yoongi strewn everywhere but the space void of his presence. Seokjin clears his throat and tries to shake his thoughts from his mind. "I've never been to Macau so I'm tagging along," he finishes.

Namjoon steps back and turns to full face Seokjin. "Hyung," he starts, tone serious and eyes focused on Seokjin.

Seokjin smiles nonchalantly and keeps his face free of any concern. "Hmm?"

"You and Yoongi-hyung are..." He pauses and sighs, rubbing the back of his neck. "You guys are getting along, right? I mean, you don't regret the marriage?"

Seokjin looks away from Namjoon, pulling out a dark velvet blazer embroidered with gold along the lapels. "I don't regret it," he says, trying to stay calm as the words ring true. That's the problem, he hasn't regretted it, not for one moment. It's a slippery slope and he has a sinking feeling he's already lost his traction.

"I've known Yoongi-hyung for seven years," Namjoon continues. "I know he's not expressive with his words but his actions show his real feelings. You know that, right?"

Seokjin presses his lips together, eyes still focused on the blazer. He thinks about Yoongi's actions – the tea in the cupboard, Yoongi's hand covering his cell phone on his birthday, Yoongi using Seokjin's passcode for their front door. "I know," he says. He puts on a smile and turns to Namjoon. "I like this blazer."

Namjoon eyes him carefully, eyebrows furrowed in thought. "You can have it," he says distractedly. Seokjin opens his mouth to thank Namjoon but Namjoon stops him, saying, "I'm cheering for you two. I was worried for a bit since it was arranged so quickly, but I think you and Yoongi-hyung are a good fit." His eyes flick seriously over Seokjin's face. "I hope I'm not wrong?"

Namjoon is wrong, Seokjin wants to say. He and Yoongi are not a good fit. They're day and night and never would have even passed each other if not for the twisting machinations of fate. Seokjin wishes he could tell Namjoon that he's wrong, but that's the whole problem; he's not. Yoongi fits next to Seokjin like a puzzle piece, fitting into the jaggedly-edged space Seokjin had long ago given up hope on. Yoongi fits too well with Seokjin, to the point where he's afraid of when they'll part, afraid Yoongi has gotten so close that losing him will rip a part of Seokjin with him.

Seokjin's back straightens and he meets Namjoon's gaze, fully aware that Namjoon is analyzing him, trying to pick him apart and find the truth under his layers. He smiles gently and says, "You don't need to worry about us." The words burn on his tongue.

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Jimin sighs at his reflection in the mirror and adjusts his shirt, tucking the striped red and black t-shirt into the waistband of his black pants, trying to get the angle of it just right. After a few minutes of tugging and shifting, he gives up and pulls the shirt off, throwing it onto his bed with the rest of his discarded clothes. He scowls at the growing mess before turning back to his closet, surveying what was left over. He really has the *worst* clothes, nothing is good enough.

He doesn't remember the last time he was so nervous for an outing. He's not usually this easily excited, but Taehyung had agreed to go see the new action movie that came out last week and Jimin hasn't been able to control his nerves since he got the affirmation. He hasn't seen Taehyung for weeks, has barely talked to him on the phone. Even their text messages are short and sporadic. Taehyung said it was finals, last minute papers and all-nighters. Taehyung said it was finals but Jimin can't shake the feeling that Taehyung is pulling away, too far, too fast.

Jimin knows Taehyung needs space, needs to resolve his feelings. Jimin knows he can't cling onto him anymore. He's settled that fact in his heart. It doesn't stop him from missing the other. It doesn't stop the thoughts that run through his mind after midnight, thoughts of thunderstorms and deep voices repeating his name, thoughts that he used to understand but isn't quite sure anymore. It doesn't stop the feelings that flutter in his stomach when Taehyung finally replies to his messages, feelings Jimin is afraid he recognizes.

They're still friends, though. Jimin nods his head to himself and grabs a white woven shirt and a pair of khaki shorts. They're still friends, Taehyung had said so. Jimin is still important to the other and that's all that matters. Jimin will be happy with that. He never wanted anything more, anyway.

He stares at himself in the mirror again, turning to check his profile. White shirt and khaki shorts. It's a good look. Clean. Simple. Too simple, it's terrible, he looks terrible.

Frustrated, he kicks the shorts off and flings them to his bed. He literally has nothing to wear, this is a disaster.

He picks up his phone to check the time, his eyes widening in horror. "Shit," he says, rummaging through the haphazard pile and pulling out the least horrible outfit he tried on. He's late, he's so late.

He throws on the black pants and black t-shirt, grabbing a black blazer with white accents and runs out the door. In his rush, he forgets his cell phone, but he has no time to run back to his apartment to retrieve it. He drops his metro card on the subway and nearly twists his ankle on the stairs trying to retrieve it. He's in a whirlwind of shaking fingers and blurry thoughts. He doesn't know what's wrong with him. He's not usually this clumsy, not usually this absent-minded. Maybe he's getting sick, he wonders.

He finally arrives at the cinema and finds Taehyung waiting patiently in the lobby, leaned back at a table, legs crossed and expression cool. He looks like he belongs in the middle of a Gucci photoshoot, not waiting at the local movie theatres for Jimin. Jimin feels his cheeks flush with warmth. He must be getting sick.

"I'm so sorry I'm late," he huffs out when he reaches Taehyung. He places his hands together in apology.

Taehyung looks up, focusing in on Jimin. His eyes brighten and his mouth breaks into a wide smile. "Hi Chim Chim," he says, tilting his head. "It's okay, I didn't wait long." He stands, slipping his hands into his pockets and stepping next to Jimin. "Ready?"

Jimin blinks at Taehyung, inhaling his sharp, fresh scent, eyes flickering over Taehyung's messy fringe and boxy grin and long limbs. He missed him. He missed Taehyung *so much* and he didn't even realize it until now. He didn't recognize the emptiness in the pit of his stomach until this moment, Taehyung standing next to him and warmth bursting on Jimin's cheeks.

Oh, no.

Jimin inhales shakily, cool air hitting his lungs and the scent of thunderstorms surrounding him. He's so *stupid*. It's been there the whole time, moving through his veins for months, coursing from his heart to his fingertips. It's been so obvious but his stupid, muddled mind wouldn't understand it, wouldn't recognize it, wouldn't let him reach forward and grab onto the gift fate had blown his way.

He held onto a dead dream for too long and now his new one is out of reach, his fingers too short to grab hold of it, helplessly watching it pass over his head.

He's in love with Taehyung.

And he's too late.

&&&

"Explain to me again why my brother is driving us to the airport instead of, I don't know, any other alternative."

Yoongi makes a face and ignores the scowl Seokjin is sending him. He shifts, leaning tiredly against his luggage and stares at the road, watching for Jeongguk's car. "It's convenient," he finally answers, still avoiding Seokjin's gaze.

"Convenient would be driving ourselves and parking the car at the airport. Convenient would be taking a taxi. Convenient is not standing outside the apartment for ten minutes because Jeongguk is late."

"Maybe you should have taught him the importance of being punctual," Yoongi spits back.

"Maybe you shouldn't have agreed."

Yoongi scowls and leans too heavily on his luggage, the suitcase rolling with the pressure. He quickly straightens and clears his throat. He's not about to admit to Seokjin that when Jeongguk asked to drive them to the airport, he couldn't find it in himself to say no. Maybe it's Jeongguk's adorable face or the fact that he's becoming less of a brat and more of a dongsaeng, but Yoongi doesn't want to say no to him if he doesn't have to. He glances over at Seokjin and frowns. It all started with that man, when all his no's became yes's. Yoongi has a fleeting thought, wonders how far along Seokjin will drag him, how many traits Seokjin will change in him. He wonders why he doesn't mind.

His thoughts are interrupted when Seokjin exclaims, "Ah, he's here!"

Jeongguk's car pulls up the driveway and he hops out of the driver's seat, grinning widely at them. "Ready?"

Seokjin rolls his luggage over to Jeongguk, a slow smile spreading on his lips and Yoongi thinks this might be another reason why he agreed to Jeongguk's request. Because he wanted to see that smile on Seokjin's face, wanted to see that fond twinkle in his eyes.

Yoongi blinks and shakes his head, knocking his thoughts from his mind. He's having so many strange ideas lately.

Jeongguk ushers Seokjin into the passenger's seat and the brothers bicker the entire way to the airport, each trying to outdo the other by being ridiculous. Yoongi doesn't mind. He smiles, staring out the window, reclined in the backseat. It's been a while since he heard Seokjin let loose and relax. Something has been wrong with Seokjin over the last couple of weeks, and this just confirms it. Seokjin's coming back out of whatever wall he constructed. Yoongi's lips tug into a smug smile. This trip was a genius idea.

Jeongguk helps them into the airport because he lost whatever game he was playing with Seokjin, carrying Seokjin's luggage as punishment. He finally shoves the suitcase back to Seokjin when they stop in front of immigration.

Seokjin takes it back with a smile. "Thanks, Gukkie."

Jeongguk scoffs, but steps closer to give Seokjin a hug. "Come back safe."

Seokjin smile warms and his hand pats Jeongguk's back. "I will. Stay out of trouble."

Jeongguk scoffs again and steps back. "Sure."

Seokjin laughs and starts walking to immigration. Yoongi straightens and moves to follow but Jeongguk stops him with a hand on his arm. Yoongi raises his eyebrows in question but Jeongguk steps closer and wraps his arm loosely around Yoongi's shoulder in what Yoongi thinks is an attempt at a hug.

"You come back safe too," Jeongguk says before quickly stepping away again, slipping his hands into his back pockets.

Yoongi blinks, shock paralyzing his limbs. His lips part and he steals a quick glance at Seokjin, trying to gauge how he should react. Seokjin just stares at them with wide eyes, mouth open and a hand on his cheek.

"Okay, bye," Jeongguk says quickly, turning on his heel and walking briskly toward the exit.

Yoongi raises a finger and points at Jeongguk's retreating back. "Did your brother just *hug* me?"

"What the fuck," Seokjin breathes out, turning to face Yoongi. His lips crack into a smile and he starts to cackle, wide and open-mouthed. His hand reaches out to slap Yoongi's shoulder. "What the fuck, Yoongi, my brother likes you."

Yoongi blinks up at Seokjin. "Since when?"

Seokjin's laughter subsides into small giggles and he shakes his head, wrapping an arm around Yoongi's shoulders and ushering him to immigration. "I guess all those lamb skewers paid off."

"No, seriously, since *when*?"

Seokjin laughs again and tugs Yoongi into immigration.

&&&

Macau is thrilling. Crowds of people shuffling around, ruins and shopping and shows, food of all kinds to taste and savour. During the day, Yoongi is caught up in meetings and business and Seokjin has all the time in the world to just wander. He goes out with his phone and a hat, no plan, no map, just him and his feet. It's therapeutic. His feet start to ache, but his mind starts to clear and empty. Stress and worries from the last few weeks melt off with every step. He doesn't think about anything, just lets himself feel and be.

It's a rare treat, to let himself exist without purpose, without something to accomplish or figure out, without something to avoid or catch.

He walks and walks, and by the time he returns to the hotel that evening, he thinks he's cleared his head completely. No more heart fluttering at gummy smiles, no more reaching out for large veined hands, no more wishing for a fantasy he knows doesn't exist. He thinks he's solidified his resolve.

He spots Yoongi in their hotel suite, already changed from his work clothes into a pair of shorts and a checkered button down, a plain white t-shirt underneath. He looks up from his phone and smiles at Seokjin. "You're back?"

Seokjin nods. "Sorry, I didn't think you'd be back so soon, I would have returned earlier."

Yoongi shrugs and stands. "No big deal. Meetings ran long yesterday so I made sure to wrap up at a better time today." He stretches and smiles at Seokjin. "What do you want to do?"

"Did you eat?" Seokjin asks.

Yoongi shakes his head. "Not yet. Should I order room service?"

Seokjin smiles. "There's some really good street food, if you're up for a walk?"

Yoongi nods. "Let me grab my camera." He heads to the bedroom and returns shortly, a conical straw hat on his head and his camera in his hands.

Seokjin can't stop the laugh that bubbles out. "Where did you get that?"

Yoongi frowns. "What?"

Seokjin steps closer to Yoongi and bumps the hat, angling it on Yoongi's head sideways. "The hat."

Yoongi scowls and corrects the hat on his head. "I bought it in a traditional shop."

"A tourist shop?" Seokjin prods, eyebrows raised.

"It's a souvenir."

"Hmm. It's cute." Seokjin taps his finger on the hat once more. "Let's go," he says, reaching down for Yoongi's hand. He stops short, fingers faltering when he remembers himself. He shouldn't be reaching for Yoongi's hands anymore, he shouldn't be stepping into his space and teasing him about his hat. He's so caught up in the make believe world they created that it's become habit. Casual touches and small intimacies.

Yoongi doesn't seem to notice his hesitation, walking past Seokjin to the door. "Come on, I'm starving."

Seokjin blinks and swallows, following after Yoongi and trying not to feel the chill on his empty hands.

The walk to the street food isn't long and Yoongi ask questions the entire way, asking what Seokjin did all day, did he see that building, did he meet anyone interesting. Seokjin gets so caught up in their conversation he barely registers the way their shoulders brush as they walk, the way Yoongi will casually skim his hand on the dip of Seokjin's back occasionally. Seokjin tries to pretend the touch doesn't send a shiver down his spine. Seokjin thinks he's been pretending a lot lately.

They end up eating from nearly all the stalls, Seokjin heading from vendor to vendor and picking out what looks the best. Yoongi smiles at him, snapping pictures of the food and Seokjin. Seokjin wonders how many of the photos will end up in a messy pile hidden on Yoongi's desk, carefully edited and printed out and stashed away for quiet moments. Seokjin wishes his heart didn't thump painfully in his chest at the thought.

After they eat their fill, they stroll through the street market. Seokjin grins when he spots a straw fedora hat and walks over to it. He picks it up and turns to see Yoongi sauntering up to him. Seokjin holds the hat out for Yoongi to see and says, "This one suits you better."

Yoongi smirks and tilts his head, the conical hat looping around his neck by the string. "What's wrong with my hat?"

Seokjin grins. "You look like a corny father on vacation." He reaches forward and slips the hat off Yoongi. He places the fedora on Yoongi's head carefully, playing with his fringe until it sits just right. He steps back and smiles at his work. "There. Now you look like a father on vacation, but less corny."

Yoongi scoffs and rolls his eyes but he doesn't remove the hat. "I look good in anything I wear."

Seokjin shrugs and places Yoongi's farmer's hat on his own hat, raising his eyebrows and giving Yoongi a model look. "But I look better in this don't I?" Yoongi's mouth parts and his eyes blink at Seokjin. Seokjin laughs and winks. "Point proven." He steps into the stall to pay for the hat.

When he comes back out, he finds Yoongi smiling fondly down at his camera, going through his pictures. His eyes are scrunched up into half-moons, his teeth and gums on display with his wide smile, a shake to his shoulders as he laughs at a picture.

Seokjin blinks at Yoongi, eyes flickering over his features, heat blooming under his skin, feet taking him next to Yoongi without any thought, pulled in by his gravity again. He's having trouble with his breathing for a moment, the air suddenly full of Yoongi and his scent and his presence. His blood runs hot in his veins. He wants to cover Yoongi's hand with his own and intertwine their fingers together. He wants Yoongi to pull him close with a hand on the small of his back. He wants Yoongi to take his photo and print them out, wants Yoongi to fill their apartment with them. He wants to kiss Yoongi, he misses the taste of him on his lips. He wants to shake him awake in the mornings and fall asleep to his typing at night.

He wants so much.

He *wants*.

Seokjin wishes he was ignorant, that he could go back to the fantasy they spun, pretend marriage and pretend feelings and pretending to mean something to each other. He wishes he didn't realize how far he'd fallen, wishes he could continue in this dream, visions and smoke and mirrors that teeter on the edge of collapse. Time is speeding up, the end of this fantasy is coming, soon, soon, soon.

Yoongi looks up, dropping his camera down and turning his full attention to Seokjin. His smile remains in place, his eyes dark with flecks of amber. Seokjin swears he can count the freckles on the bridge of his nose. "Thank you, hyung," he says, pointing up at his hat.

Seokjin presses his lips together and tries not to let the panic climb up his throat as his resolve crumbles and his walls fall down with just the slightest huff of breath from Yoongi's lips. He's a fool.

This marriage and all that follows it is make believe.

He's a damn *fool*.

Somewhere along the way, Seokjin stopped pretending.

&&&

By the last day of meetings, Yoongi is done. Done, finished, at the end of his rope. All he wants to do is go back to the hotel and relax, sleep, and eat. He makes it as clear as he humanly can to the crew he's working with that he wants to wrap up all their work before the sun even thinks about setting for the day. He might offer his black, limitless credit card for a team celebratory meal as motivation. It's shameless but it works. The crew works faster than he's ever seen and by three that afternoon, everything is completely wrapped up and finished. The crew invites Yoongi out with them like it isn't *his* money they're spending, but he declines, already packing up his briefcase and heading back to the hotel.

The suite is quiet when he steps in, and he frowns, taking off his shoes and checking the rooms for Seokjin to no avail. He shrugs off his jacket, throwing it on the bed, and uncuffs his sleeves, preparing to change. He pulls his phone from his trouser pocket and dials Seokjin's number. He pauses and blinks, listening to the ringing on his phone and the corresponding tinkling ring of *Seokjin's* phone in the distance. He pulls his phone from his ear and follows the sound of Seokjin's Mario Theme ringtone. He's halfway to alarm that Seokjin is alone in a foreign city without his phone when he steps out onto the balcony and finds Seokjin, draped on the large hammock, completely asleep.

Yoongi quickly disconnects his call, watching to see if the ringing stirred Seokjin from his sleep. It hasn't. Seokjin still lays completely still, his arm hanging off the side of the hammock, a book tented on his chest. His face is relaxed, lips turned down into an almost-frown. Yoongi lays his phone on

the side table by the hammock, stepping closer to Seokjin, eyes transfixed. He rarely gets to see the other like this, sleeping and unguarded. Seokjin is always the first one up, shaking Yoongi awake, already washed and halfway through his morning routine. There's a certain kind of intimacy in watching someone sleep, watching them in their vulnerability, a quiet kind of trust that makes Yoongi's heart beat a little too hard in his chest.

He rolls up the sleeves of his shirt to his elbows and gingerly eases his way into the hammock, sliding next to Seokjin. He's suddenly exhausted, the constant strain of meetings and work without breaks catching up to him. The hustle of the city below them and the warm breeze flowing over the balcony are soothing, and Seokjin's chest is broad and warm and the perfect place to lay his head. He shifts and settles comfortably, his eyelids blinking heavily with the rocking of the hammock.

He doesn't know how long he drifts off for, but he floats back to consciousness with one of Seokjin's hands carding gently through his hair, the other wrapped around Yoongi's shoulder, still and heavy and warm. Yoongi makes a small noise, sleepy and barely coherent. He rubs his cheeks against Seokjin's shirt and sighs, still not opening his eyes. "How long have you been awake?" he asks slowly, his voice still thick with sleep.

"Not long," Seokjin answers. His voice rumbles into Yoongi's ear and Yoongi has to suppress a shiver.

"Do I have to get up now?" Yoongi asks and tries to tell himself he isn't whining.

Seokjin chuckles and Yoongi feels his head move, presumably to shake his head. "No. We still have an hour before dinner reservations."

Yoongi smiles and shifts more comfortably, throwing an arm around Seokjin's waist, content to enjoy the moment for as long as it will last. He missed this, missed being close to Seokjin, missed his attention, missed the easy way they seem to slot together. He doesn't know what has been troubling Seokjin, doesn't know how far he can probe, but Macau seems to have eased Seokjin's mind.

It's silent for a few moments, the sounds of the city muffled, Seokjin's fingers following a familiar path through Yoongi's hair. Yoongi nearly falls back into sleep again when Seokjin says quietly and slowly, like he's been formulating the words for a long time, "Yoongi, why did you invite me on this trip?"

Yoongi's eyes blink open and he frowns, staring out at the sky above the balcony. He brought Seokjin because he was troubled about something and Yoongi wanted it to stop. He brought Seokjin because he didn't like the idea of coming back to an empty room for half a week, didn't like the idea of Seokjin doing the same in Seoul. He brought Seokjin because he missed him. The thought scares him, too real, too raw, too much what he promised himself never to allow. He blinks and clears his throat, pushing the thoughts from his mind, curling his hand into a tight fist against Seokjin's hip.

"Probably the same reason why you agreed to come," he finally says, closing his eyes again, hoping to forget their conversation and drift back to sleep.

Seokjin's fingers stop in their track, still buried in Yoongi's locks.

Yoongi frowns and shifts, looking up and dislodging Seokjin's hand. He narrows his eyes at Seokjin. "What?"

Seokjin watches him carefully, eyes focused on Yoongi, shifting over his face rapidly like he's trying to see under his layers.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he prompts, frown deepening.

"I'm just wondering if that's true," Seokjin finally answers.

Yoongi looks away, back to the deep blue sky, thin clouds streaking the horizon. He closes his eyes and listens to Seokjin's heartbeat against his ear, and wonders why it sounds like his own.

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"You almost done?" Seokjin calls out, shrugging into his blazer, the velvet soft and warm against his back. Yoongi's only reply is a disinterested grunt from the bathroom and Seokjin hums noncommittally. He meanders to the foyer of their suite and the large round mirror. He smiles at his reflection, adjusting the labels of his jacket, his fingers running over the fine gold embroidery. He was lucky that Namjoon has outfits on hand for them. The casino attached to their hotel is most definitely an occasion to drape themselves in silk and velvet and absolutely reek of money.

He hears shuffling behind him and turns, the smile on his lips fading to surprise, eyes widening and lips parting. Seokjin's mouth goes dry and he feels that familiar pull low in his stomach, attraction hot and pooling.

Yoongi looks too good. His black hair is styled, artfully tussled. Seokjin's fingers twitch at his side, itching to card through the locks, to trace the layers and curls, to rearrange them to his will. Yoongi's neck and portions of his chest are exposed, the deep v-neck of his white silk shirt dipping low on pale skin, exposing new territory with Yoongi's every movement. His black blazer sparkles with innumerable sequins woven into the fabric, flashing and reflection in the light, glowing on Yoongi's skin. His black dress pants hug tight around his hips and over his thighs.

Seokjin blinks and tries to swallow, the only sound in his head a garbled mess of *want, need, miss him, miss him*. It's the last thought that makes him finally look away, back to the mirror. He vaguely recognizes the slight pink flush on his own cheeks, the dilation of his pupils. He wishes the feeling drumming through his veins was just lust, just attraction. He wishes he could pretend again, pretend that reaching out and holding onto Yoongi is something he can do.

His resolve is weakening, he can feel it crumbling under the pressure that is Min Yoongi and Seokjin's own growing greed. He tells himself to resist, to keep his head clear and cool, to stop listening to the thrumming beat of his heart in his ears. Min Yoongi is not someone Seokjin can hold onto.

"Ready to go?" Yoongi asks, pocketing his phone, long, veined hands slipping the device into his jacket pocket.

Seokjin swallows and nods. "Yeah, let's go."

They make their way down to the casino cashier and Yoongi purchases an amount of chips that makes Seokjin's eyebrows raise. Yoongi just shrugs and hands half of them to Seokjin despite his protests.

"Yoongi, no, I can gamble with my own money."

Yoongi drops the chips into Seokjin's hands and starts walking away. "I'm going to lose it all anyway, you might as well use it."

Seokjin stares at the chips in his hands, blinking at them. He presses his lips together and tries to gather his resolve again. Yoongi makes it so hard to keep his distance.

Yoongi stops and turns, frowning at Seokjin. "You coming?"

Seokjin jerks and nods, following Yoongi's footsteps, pulled by the tether he can't seem to break. "Yeah."

They try most of the table games but end up settling at the black jack table. Seokjin loses all of his hands, distracted from the game by Yoongi's fingers tapping on the table and the deep look of concentration on his face as Yoongi focuses on the dealer. Tired of losing and hoping to mitigate his losses, Seokjin removes himself from the game and stands behind Yoongi, watching him play.

Yoongi glances over his shoulder at Seokjin. "You want to try a different game?"

Seokjin smiles and shakes his head, settling a hand on Yoongi's shoulder. "No, I'm good. I'm enjoying watching you."

Yoongi smirks and clears his throat, focusing back on the game and Seokjin feels his heart squeeze with adoration for the other. His smug smirk and the confident shake of his shoulders, the slight blush of sheepishness he tries to hide, Seokjin likes it all. He keeps getting pulled in by Yoongi's gravity, orbiting closer and closer. It's not too late, Seokjin knows. He can still extract himself from Yoongi's force, but it won't be easy and he knows it won't be painless. It will require all his concentration and willpower to pull away from Yoongi, and an unknown number of nights spent mending the wounds to his heart. It's not too late, though. He can mitigate his losses.

He needs to remove himself from the game, cash in his chips, and move on. He needs to, but all he wants to do is gamble on Yoongi.

He squeezes Yoongi's shoulder and leans down to say in his ear, "I'm going to the washroom, I'll be back." Yoongi nods, eyes still on the table, and Seokjin walks away, an idea already formulating in his mind.

He makes his way to the cashier and purchases five chips with his own money, each one worth one-hundred thousand Hong Kong Dollars. He holds the five chips in his hand, seventy million won of his own savings, money he could use to pay for Jimin's next semester tuition, for a present for his mother, for an apartment in Paris. Seventy million won of his own savings that he'll toss up to fate and let her decide. He wants to fall further into Yoongi, fall deeper and harder, and he keeps looking for an excuse that lets him stay. Every step he tries to take away, Yoongi pulls him back, closer, tighter. He's been going in circles, spinning out of control, mind a dizzying mess of thoughts and desires.

He learnt a long time ago that he has no control over his own future. He can plan and hope and wish, but circumstances will fall without consulting his opinion. He'll leave it up to fate, he thinks, heading to the roulette table. If he wins, he'll stop resisting and let himself fall irrevocably into Yoongi, as far as he can go. If he loses, he'll leave the game, move out of Yoongi's bedroom and build a solid wall around his heart, remove himself completely from Yoongi's gravity.

He places one chip on the table and watches the ball spin around the wheel, crossing his fingers to win.

The bet loses and he watches the dealer rack the chips in.

He places the second chip on the table, a different spot, eyes focused on the wheel, the ball a blur as it races around.

He loses again.

He loses his third time and by the fourth loss, he knows how this will go. He grips the last chip in his fingers, his knuckles going white with the pressure. He inhales slowly and lets the chip drop onto the table, not even caring where it lands. It'll be a loss anyway, he knows, but he can't stop the small spark of hope in his chest. That spark of hope he hasn't been able to extinguish for years, the one that lies to him and tells him everything will work out okay.

Seokjin jumps when he feels a hand in the small of his back. He looks over his shoulder and sees Yoongi staring up at him, eyebrows quirked.

"I thought you were coming right back," Yoongi says.

"I got distracted," Seokjin replies, staring back at Yoongi. He can hear the dealer start to spin the wheel, can hear the ball enter into play. He can't look to the table, can only stare at Yoongi's dark eyes and the freckles on the bridge of his nose.

"I was done with blackjack anyway," Yoongi says, his hand sliding up Seokjin's back and curving around to his side. He nods to the table. "What's your bet?"

His bet is Yoongi, Yoongi's heart and Yoongi's presence and Yoongi, Yoongi, *Yoongi*. His gamble is his own heart, everything he wants and tried to deny himself. It's a bad bet, the odds are stacked against him, he's unlucky, it's foolish. And still, Seokjin wants to make the gamble, still wants to know where the lots will land. His eyes flicker and he realizes it doesn't matter where the ball ends up in the wheel, doesn't matter if he wins or loses, because he's already made the play. He's already fallen so deep into Yoongi and he has no desire to surface back to reality.

He reaches down and grabs Yoongi's hand, pulling him away from the table and towards the hotel.

Yoongi makes a sharp noise of surprise but lets Seokjin guide him to the exit, like he lets Seokjin do whatever he wants every time, moving with the smallest hint of Seokjin's command. It's maddening, it's driving Seokjin crazy. He wants to monopolize Yoongi, wants to devour or be devoured, he doesn't know which. All he knows is he needs Yoongi's hands on his skin and Yoongi's mouth on his.

"Hyung, you have a live bet on the table," Yoongi says, laughter under his tone, amusement laced with his words.

"It doesn't matter," Seokjin says, because it doesn't anymore. He's all in, placed his bet on Yoongi. The ball is already in play, circling and spinning, unpredictable, every possibility in its form. Seokjin hopes he can live through a few revolutions of the wheel before fate makes her choice. Seokjin grips Yoongi's hand tighter and ushers them into the elevator, punching the button for their floor before spinning Yoongi around and leaning in for a kiss.

Yoongi makes a sound of surprise but Seokjin presses in closer, lifting his hands to cup Yoongi's cheeks, slotting his lips over Yoongi's. He's going too fast, he knows he is, but his blood is on fire, urgency giving haste to his movements.

Yoongi reacts after a moment of surprise, hands slipping into Seokjin's blazer and gripping tight to his waist. He takes a step forward and shifts them, pushing Seokjin into the corner of the elevator. He angles his head, nipping at Seokjin's lips, urging them open to slip his tongue teasingly inside Seokjin's mouth. His knee slips between Seokjin's legs and he pushes closer until their hips are flush. Seokjin can feel Yoongi's growing arousal against his thigh and he makes an aborted sound, fingers slipping from Yoongi's face to grasp at his back.

Yoongi pulls back, hands running up and down Seokjin's side, eyes half lidded and pupils blown

wide. His gaze flicks carefully over Seokjin and he licks his lips, already rosy from their kiss. "Hyung," he starts, breathy and thick. Seokjin suppresses a shiver, his fingers flex on Yoongi's back. "Why..." He trails off, the words unsaid but Seokjin knows them anyway.

Why now, when Seokjin's been so distant for weeks. Seokjin doesn't want to say the words, they're too new, too raw. He hasn't even let them run through his mind, let alone fall off his tongue. He answers by leaning into Yoongi again, pulling him closer with his hands on his back, sliding his lips against Yoongi's and breathing the air from his lungs into Yoongi.

Yoongi melts into him, groaning into the kiss, hands creeping from Seokjin's waist to the small of his back, pulling him flush.

The elevator stops and they jerk as the bell chimes to signal their arrival. Yoongi laughs and slips his hand from under Seokjin's blazer to his hand, intertwining their hands. He smiles at Seokjin and nods his head to the hallway, pulling them out and to their suite. Yoongi guides Seokjin to lie down on the bed before climbing on top of him, his hands bracketing Seokjin's head. Seokjin leans up, his entire body flushed, urgency pushing him, desperately locking his lips on Yoongi's. He tugs at Yoongi's shirt, unbuttoning the material as quickly as he can.

Yoongi pulls back and trails a hand down Seokjin's chest, lips kissing a slow path from Seokjin's mouth to his ear. "Hyung," he whispers, voice gravelling and sending sparks down Seokjin's spine, "wait, I want to slow it down a little."

Seokjin bites his lip and lets out a shuddering breath, swallowing down a moan. Yoongi's lips suck lightly under Seokjin's jaw, down his neck to the juncture of his neck and shoulder. Seokjin tilts his head against the pillows to allow easier access, spreading his legs so Yoongi can settle more comfortably between them. Yoongi undulates his hips against Seokjin's and lets out a hiss. Seokjin inhales sharply at the friction, hands reaching between to grip Yoongi's hip, urging the movement again.

Yoongi's hands move to Seokjin's shirt to unbutton it, lips still sucking an impressive hickey into his neck. "Hyung, up," he urges, hands pulling Seokjin up a little to slip his jacket and shirt off. Seokjin sits up, taking the opportunity to discard Yoongi's top. He runs his hands up Yoongi's chest, over his ribs, trying to cover every area he can see, sliding around to pull him down on top of him again.

Yoongi's lips trail lower on Seokjin's chest, teeth grazing over his collarbones. His long fingers toy with the waistband of Seokjin's pants, thumb running back and forth between fabric and skin. He cants his hips, increasing the friction between them. Seokjin nearly whines. He battles between wanting to tell Yoongi to *get on with it* and letting Yoongi draw him out like a string until he breaks.

Thankfully Yoongi's patience seems to wane, and he moves to unbutton Seokjin's pants, pulling them off with his briefs and throwing them to the side of the bed. He leans over Seokjin, crawling over him to reach the side table, grabbing a condom and lube. Seokjin takes the opportunity to reach his hand down and palm Yoongi's erection. Yoongi makes a soft mewling noise and swoops down to take Seokjin's lips in another kiss. He can feel Yoongi smile against his smiles, a lubed hand lazily squeezing Seokjin's cock and stroking slowly up and down, occasionally running his thumb over the head, drawing the pleasure out of Seokjin at Yoongi's leisure, unhurried and thorough.

Seokjin pants against Yoongi's mouth and shifts his legs, sliding his thighs against Yoongi's hips. "Yoongi," he breaths, the sensations layering and stacking on top of each other. Yoongi's fingers on his cock, Yoongi's lips on his, Yoongi's hips trapped between his thighs, Yoongi's scent surrounding him.

When Yoongi finally slips a lubed finger inside Seokjin, Seokjin lets out a relieved sigh, his eyelids

fluttering, his fingers digging into Yoongi's shoulder blades. "You're doing so good, hyung," Yoongi breathes into Seokjin's ear, adding another finger and scissoring. He rubs against Seokjin's prostrate, teasingly and Seokjin jerks, moaning.

"Yoongi, get *on with it*," Seokjin whines, finally breaking under Yoongi's ministrations, overwrought and pulled so tight he feels like he might break if he doesn't get relief. He cants his hips up and rubs against Yoongi's still clothed erection. "Please."

"Yeah, yeah," Yoongi says, breathless. He removes his fingers and fumbles with his zipper, kicking his pants off and hurriedly putting a condom on. He braces his hands on either side of Seokjin's head and stares down at him.

Seokjin reaches down and lightly squeezes Yoongi's cock, guiding him to his rim.

Yoongi bites his lip, eyes locked on Seokjin's, and pushes in, his mouth falling open at the first thrust. Seokjin's hand reach up to grasp Yoongi's biceps and he spreads his legs wider, undulating against Yoongi as he sets a slow and careful rhythm.

"You feel so good, hyung," Yoongi pants, pupils blown wide, eyes never leave Seokjin's. He dips down and catches Seokjin's lips in his for a quick kiss. "I missed you," Yoongi says quietly against his lips.

Seokjin shudders against Yoongi, a hundred words dying at the tip of his tongue. It's too new, too raw, but one day, he thinks. One day he'll say them out loud to Yoongi. He reaches up, looping his arms around Yoongi's neck, hands threading into Yoongi's hair, and pulls him back down for another kiss.

It doesn't take long for Yoongi to burrow his face into Seokjin's neck, leaving open-mouthed kisses against his shoulder as he comes, hands squeezing Seokjin's thigh, thrusts stuttering as he rides out his climax. Seokjin follows closely behind, fingers tightening in Yoongi's hair and tugging hard as the shocks work up from his toes to his ears.

"Ow," Yoongi murmurs. "My hair, hyung."

Seokjin releases his grip on Yoongi's strands and trails down to cup his cheeks, pulling his face up to look at him. He smiles up at Yoongi and leans up for a chaste kiss. "Sorry."

Yoongi makes a face and reaches a hand up to brush Seokjin's hair away from his forehead. "You'll make me go bald."

"You can sue me when it happens," Seokjin says, grinning.

Yoongi's eyes crinkle and he laughs.

####

Yoongi wakes up to two hands trying to tickle him. He presses his lips together to keep from laughing and sets a scowl on his face, glaring up at Seokjin. Seokjin grins down at him, the bright sunlight from the windows making his hair glow almost golden, his eyes bright and crinkles with laughter. The sight knocks the breath out of Yoongi's lungs.

"You're up?" he asks innocently, like he didn't just jostle Yoongi from a well deserved slumber.

Yoongi's scowl deepens. "No thanks to you."

Seokjin shrugs, unconcerned. "Oops."

Yoongi growls and reaches up to grab Seokjin, tugging him down and trying to counterattack with tickles. Seokjin yelps with laughter, batting his hands away. Seokjin is stronger but Yoongi is quicker and he subdues Seokjin underneath him, the comforter bunching with the activity.

"What have I done to deserve this attack?" he asks between giggles, grabbing onto Yoongi's wrists and holding them still. His laughter subsides and he smiles softly up at Yoongi. "Good morning."

Yoongi melts, his hands relaxing, and he bends to place a small kiss on the corner of Seokjin's mouth. He missed this, missed Seokjin and his easy smiles and warm laughter so much. Yoongi doesn't know what changed, but last night he felt a shift in Seokjin, felt a shift in the invisible string that binds them together in whatever the hell they are. He's afraid to think about it too much, afraid of what it means if he looks too closely into it, so he settles for smiling back at Seokjin and saying, "Good morning, hyung."

"What time is our flight?" Seokjin asks, running his thumb on the soft skin on the inside of Yoongi's wrist.

"A little after noon."

Seokjin smiles and nods. "Want to go for a walk before we check out?"

Yoongi sighs and lets his body fall on Seokjin's, curling against him and closing his eyes. "How about we sleep some more?" Before Seokjin can disagree, the doorbell sounds. Yoongi frowns and lifts his head to the door of their suite. "Who-"

"I ordered room service." Seokjin starts to roll Yoongi off the bed, much to Yoongi's protestations. "You can get it since I did the hard part of ordering."

Yoongi tries valiantly to stay in the soft, warm sheets of the bed, but, again, Seokjin is strong, and Yoongi winds up falling to the floor with a loud *thunk*. Yoongi glares up at Seokjin

The doorbell rings again and Seokjin just makes a shooing motion with his hand, whispering, "Go, go."

Sighing, Yoongi stands and makes his way to the door, a small smile forming on his lips involuntarily. He lets the attendant in, wheeling a cart full of food. A few months ago, Yoongi would be surprised at the amount Seokjin ordered. A few months ago, Yoongi wouldn't even dream that he would be doing and thinking what he does now. The attendant grabs Yoongi's attention, handing him a thick envelope.

"Sir," the attendant says.

Yoongi frowns and looks at the envelope in his hands. "What's this?"

"The policy at the casino is to let an abandoned bet ride until its lost, but seeing as it was our VIP guest, we made an exception." The attendant gestures to the envelope. "That's Mr. Jeon's winnings from the roulette game last night." The attendant bows and excuses himself from the suite.

Yoongi smirks and makes his way back to the bedroom. Seokjin has made a throne out of the comforter and pillows, propping himself up comfortable on the headboard. He looks really adorable and Yoongi's fingers itch for his camera. Instead he tosses the envelope to Seokjin, watching it land heavily on Seokjin's lap.

Seokjin blinks and frowns at it, looking back to Yoongi and tilting his head in question. "What's this?"

"You won last night, hyung," Yoongi says, smiling. "Roulette."

Seokjin's eyes widen and his mouth drops open. He stares at Yoongi, still blinking rapidly.

"Your last bet, hyung," Yoongi elaborates when Seokjin seems to have trouble forming his words. "You won it. Those are your winnings." He grins. "I didn't know you were so lucky."

Seokjin's gaze drops to the envelope in his lap, a strange expression clouding his face. He reaches out to tentatively touch the package, opening it to confirm the contents. "I didn't either." Yoongi frowns, wondering what thought is spinning through Seokjin's mind, when Seokjin speaks again, softly, eyes still focused on the envelope. "Yoongi. How long do you think a lucky streak lasts?"

Yoongi shrugs. "I don't know."

Seokjin nods, fingers clenching into fists on the comforter. "Right? You just can't know."

Yoongi frowns, an uncomfortable pang in his chest. He wonders what he's missing, what secret thought Seokjin is battling with again. He wonders if he'll ever figure him out completely. Yoongi's frown deepens and he rubs absentmindedly over his heart. It shouldn't really matter.

It shouldn't.

But it does.

Chapter End Notes

Hmm, so here we are.

Looking at the events I have going on irl this summer, please don't expect more than one update a month. Sorry, but irl picks up at this time for me. Thanks for understanding, I really appreciate it <3

I'm Sorry, I Love You

Chapter Notes

Whoa, over 2000 kudos. ;;; Thank you guys so much. I don't know what to say. I'm so sorry I'm bad at replying to comments. I try to put my effort into more updates in order to make up for it. ;; I hope you feel my sincerity <3

THERE ARE. MORE ART??? I'M SPEECHLESS??

And [capichim](#) posted [the saddest Jinmin edit HOW COULD YOU.](#)

[YOR](#) POSTED [THIS RENDITION](#) OF THE FIRST KISS AND I YELLED AT HER A LOT.

[gulakuki](#) posted this [SOFT AND LOVELY](#) hammock scene from chapter 12. Thank you ;;;

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Seokjin's favorite time in the gallery is when they're run off their feet preparing for an exhibit. There's something special about it, new work coming in, art being rearranged. Invitations, solicitations, catering arrangements, advertisements. There's always a bustle, something lively and building, growing, expanding. He supposes he enjoys the making of it, how it feels like he's a part of the process, even if his fingers don't form the art itself.

They're doing a collection of modern art from maritime Southeast Asia, key pieces from Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines. It's an ambitious vision, taking over the entire gallery. The director told Seokjin if the exhibit is a success, she may be able to open a satellite gallery.

"I was thinking Busan," she had said, eyes twinkling, hopeful and full of dreams. *"You said that was your hometown, wasn't it?"*

She didn't say it directly, but he could hear the unspoken question. Would he like to open it up. Would he like to move back, back to Busan and his mother and a gallery to call his own. And for a moment, he felt a deep desire to grab hold of it, until her eyes flickered and she laughed, a little embarrassed.

"Ah, but you have Min Yoongi now, don't you? Sorry, I keep forgetting."

He has Yoongi, for now, for a few months at least. And suddenly he doesn't quite know what his future looks like anymore.

He's jarred from his thoughts when the summer intern, Seungkwan, rushes in carrying two large boxes stacked on top of each other.

Seungkwan notices him and attempts to bow in greeting. "Team Leader Jeon! Good morning!"

Seokjin laughs and waves his hands at the boy. "It's okay," he says, stepping close to keep the boxes steady. "Here, let me help." He takes the top box in his arms, holding it against his chest.

"Sunbaenim!" Seungkwan exclaims in gratitude. "Thank you." He beams at Seokjin and Seokjin finds himself grinning back.

He helps Seungkwan move the boxes to the basement storage room, conversing the entire way. It's a nice distraction, Seungkwan eager and boisterous, the chatter bringing Seokjin's mind away from his conversation with the director and his uncertain future. It only lasts the space of time it takes to walk to the storage room and back up to the gallery first floor where Seungkwan departs, off to run another errand. Seokjin sighs and decides to browse through the new works they've finished displaying. He walks up the stark white steps to the second floor, pausing at each piece to analyze it, reading through the notes and post scripts the assistants had put up.

There's one in particular that catches his eye, a massive canvas of gray filled with the stylized, faceless form of a mother and child. The mother is holding the child in her arms, hand protective over the child's head. There are no facial features, but Seokjin thinks the emotions are conveyed in the deliberate use of color, black bleeding to blue in the mother's hair, yellows and pinks blooming as her body draws nearer to the child. There's a burst of love in the strokes of paint, and Seokjin finds himself smiling.

His eyes trail down to the plaque underneath, a bold title of "MAMA" in capital letters. His mind wanders to his own mother, back in Busan, his chest seizing up with homesickness. He usually only gets to see his mother once a year, after he fulfilled his obligations at the Jeon household during Chuseok. He missed it this past year, busy finding a spouse to keep Jeongguk safe and unattached. It's strange, reflecting back on it. So much happened, so many things changed since then.

Seokjin changed so much since those days of panic and uncertainty.

His eyes trail to the post script, reading the words. *Mahal na mahal kita* with a translation beneath. *I love you very much.*

"*Mahal na mahal kita*," he says slowly, feeling out the words on his tongue. He misses his mom. He misses Busan. "*Mahal na mahal kita*," he repeats, more confident in the words this time, eyes fixated on the painting. He has so much he wants to tell his mom. He has so much on his mind that only his mother can help parse out and sort through.

He sighs and steps back, heading back to his office to work.

&&&

Seokjin's phone starts ringing as soon as he steps off the elevator into the hallway leading to his apartment. He shifts the paper bags in his hand, trying to balance the bags while he makes his way to the front door. He hums along to the tune of his ringtone, ignoring the prompting to pick up. Whatever it is can wait the ten minutes it will take to get into the apartment, get the groceries put away, and change out of his work clothes. The ringing stops when he reaches the door. He balances the bags in one arm as he slides the keypad lock up.

He jumps in surprise as his phone starts again, exclaiming loudly and nearly dropping his bags. He catches his breath, a shot of adrenaline coursing through his blood. He makes a whiny noise and grips his bags tightly.

"Nothing is that important," he scolds his phone, still buzzing in his pocket. He finally reaches forward and taps in his code on the keypad, his phone going quiet as he steps into the foyer.

Almost immediately it starts again and he huffs in annoyance. He dumps the bags on an ornamental stand by the shoe rack and struggles with his pocket, his vibrating phone slipping from his fingers to land face down on the floor. He winces and hopes the screen survived the fall.

The phone stops ringing again as he bends to pick the device up. He breathes a sigh of relief to see

the screen is intact. He unlocks the phone and frowns when he sees Wendy's name three times. He toes off his shoes and swipes his thumb clumsily across the screen. He tries to dial her number when her face appears on the screen and his phone starts vibrating again with the incoming call.

He swipes to answer and holds the phone to his ear. "Are you drunk or something?"

"You know, I'm in such a good mood that I'm not even going to respond to that," Wendy says, voice nearly smug. "But it's eleven in the morning here, Jinnie, how dare you?"

Seokjin smiles and shrugs off his jacket, awkwardly trying to hand it up in the closet with one hand. "Okay, what's so important that you called me four times in a row? I almost dropped my groceries."

"Guess!" Wendy starts excitedly and Seokjin can just imagine the wide, giddy grin on her face, cheeks rosy with happiness. "Guess what I just sent off by courier express to you!"

"Tell me it's those macaroons I love," Seokjin answers, closing his eyes wistfully.

"It's not food," Wendy replies, still gleeful. "It's something you've been really, really desperate for."

"I'm still thinking macaroons."

Wendy sighs, exasperated. "Passports, Jin. Real, authentic, under a new name passports for you and Jeongguk and your mom! It'll take your unending love and adoration now."

Seokjin's heart stops, stutters, struggles to find a rhythm again. Passports to France. The key to his grand escape plan. He'd forgotten. He'd forgotten all about it. His fingers tighten on his phone.

"Speechless?" Wendy ventures. "I know. I called in all my favours. Begged. Bribed. Threatened. But I'm a woman of extraordinary resources, as you know. Three beautiful, fresh from the presses passports are on their way to your awaiting hands."

Seokjin slumps against the wall and blinks rapidly. "Right," he manages to breathe out, mind whirling with so many thoughts. He can hardly process them all, let alone their meaning as they whiz through his mind.

Wendy makes a confused noise, seemingly finally tuning into Seokjin's distress. "Are you...okay? This is what you wanted, right?"

It was. It *was* what he wanted, the grand scheme he'd thought up when he was eighteen years old. It was what he wanted, setting the plan in motion, a hundred steps he took so slowly, so gradually that no one noticed. Enrolling Jeongguk in French language lessons, making connections to art dealers in France, sending his mother to Paris for holidays. Setting up a separate bank account the Jeons aren't aware of, depositing in it bit by bit until he had enough for the tickets, the house, the ongoing medical treatments for his mother. It was everything he wanted until it isn't anymore.

Until Min Yoongi came in to disrupt his life. To move him and sway him and turn everything he knew on its head. He doesn't want Paris anymore, stolen freedom and a happiness that takes its roots in bygones and days that disappeared like smoke, his lungs choking on the fragrance of it. He wants Seoul and dinners with Granny, Taehyung hanging off his shoulder when he stops by, Mikyung's steadily softening smile. He wants new beginnings and touches that already feel like a second skin, covering him, shielding him.

Seven months ago, Seokjin knew exactly what he wanted, what he needed, and what he was supposed to do. Now, he's not so certain.

He won't deny it, he wants to stay with Yoongi. Until the end of their contact, until Yoongi tells him to go. He wants to stay, wants to take his chances, try to hold on a little longer. They could extend the contract. They could rip it up entirely and forget the strange circumstances that threw them together in the first place. He wants to ignore his signature on the dotted line and continue just as they've been, waking up next to Yoongi in the morning and holding him close late at night.

What he wants isn't necessarily what he needs or what he should do. He learnt that the hard way and he'll never forget it. He has Jeongguk to think about, whether it's right to keep him attached to the Jeons, whether he needs to go through with the plan and remove Jeongguk from their grasp, regardless of his own selfish desires. Whether it's right to keep his mother tucked in Busan, comfortable but distant.

"I don't know," he finally replies to Wendy, slinking down to sit on the floor, the shoe rack to his left, ice cream in his grocery bag probably melting. He's spent so many years tunnel-visioned on one goal. Now that it's established, materialized into solid formation, he doesn't know what to do. He hasn't *thought* about it in so long. He's been doing and going through the actions to achieve it, but he hasn't thought about what it means.

He hasn't even told Jeongguk about his plan. His mother knows vague wisps of it, content to let him facilitate the moves and follow when requested.

"Well," Wendy says, sounding as lost as Seokjin feels. "What are we going to do?"

Seokjin sigh and leans his head back to look at the ceiling, his grip loosening on his phone. The first thing he needs to do is something he's been avoiding for years.

The first thing he needs to do is have an open, honest talk with Jeongguk.

He's not looking forward to it.

&&&

There are two voices in Jimin's head and one of them is a liar. Jimin frowns at his reflection, his entire body sweaty and exhausted, the dance studio floor hard under his legs. He leans his head against the wall and blinks at the mirror across the room. There are two voices in his head and the thumping music from the speakers does nothing to drown either of them out.

If he's going with experience, he knows the liar. The one that says it's okay, the one that says he should take a chance. It spins stories and ideas, fantasies and dreams his fingers are never able to reach. It says Taehyung liked him once and could possibly, maybe, like him again.

The other voice, the one he knows, the one he's lived with his entire life, tells him to stop hoping. He already messed up, he already missed his chance. It's a voice that has always been right, that predicts the disappointments in his destiny with a terrifying accuracy. He should listen to that voice, like he always has. It'll make it easier, he can move on faster. He'll be better off to stop hoping now. Listen to the voice of reason and stop living on wisps of dreams that can never sustain him.

Jimin makes a face at his reflection and points his finger to the mirror. He does his best to appear stern. "Stop it," he says, the words getting lost in the beat of the music. "It's too late," he assures himself.

It's too late to go to Taehyung. He misses his timing, hurt the other too much. It would be selfish to ask for more than what Taehyung has already given him. He's been too greedy, he should be good now.

And yet.

Jimin sighs and looks up at the ceiling, away from his own reflection. And yet lately, that small, hopeful voice has been getting louder and bolder. It starts spinning tales of love and affection, of second chances and brave steps. Somehow, Jimin finds himself leaning his ear to its pretty tones, finds himself drawn in to its warm promises.

He thinks maybe it would be okay to ask for a little more. He'd make sure to treat another chance with care and respect. He'd cherish Taehyung. He would be honest with himself, with his feelings, wants, and desires. He would learn from his mistakes, he would make the difference this time.

He pauses, blinking rapidly up at the ceiling. He messed things up with Seokjin, waiting and waiting and waiting. He had been waiting until he was worthy, until he was firm and sure he could take care of Seokjin. Thinking about it now, he supposes it was a good thing his dream never materialized. Seokjin is happy with Yoongi, in a way Jimin isn't sure he could have made him. And Jimin met Taehyung.

He met Taehyung and had a chance to fall for his eyes that see everything, through all Jimin's layers to his heart, his eyes that still look on Jimin with affection. He had a chance to fall for Taehyung's laugh, deep and rumbling and filled with such wonder and joy that Jimin feels his own worries melting off with the sound. He had a chance to fall for Taehyung's heart, sweet and gentle and completely unselfish, stable and caring and pulling Jimin in so slowly he couldn't even recognize it.

He had a chance to fall for Taehyung and he's so thankful, so grateful that he had the opportunity. He doesn't want to lose it before he fights. He doesn't want to miss this again because he gave up before the end.

He can be selfish one more day.

He brings his feet under him and heaves away from the wall, standing on shaky legs. He bends to rub his calves quickly before straightening and heading to the corner of the room where he stashed his book bag. He digs through the bag, trying to find his phone. In frustration, he dumps the contents on the floor and shifts through them until he finds his phone.

He opens his chatroom with Taehyung and types out a message before the doubting voice finds its power again.

Hey Taehyung. Can we get together soon? I want to talk to you about something.

He hits send, watching the screen, waiting for the pending "1" to disappear. It does, and like always, Taehyung sends a reply almost instantaneously.

Are you okay? Should I call you?

Jimin's fingers fly over his phone to reply. *No, I need to say it face-to-face.*

Taehyung replies back with a time, suggesting their usual cafe.

Jimin sends his affirmation and tucks his phone back into his bag, fingers shaking.

He tells himself to be brave.

He can be selfish one more time.

&&&

Seokjin shows up at Jeongguk's apartment, a bag of tteokbokki in one hand and a six-pack of beer in the other. He lets himself in and miraculously attracts Jeongguk's attention from his game of Overwatch.

"Finally leave Yoongi-hyung?" Jeongguk asks, tone disinterested, like the words are said out of habit rather than any real intent.

"What, I need an excuse to see my brother now?" Seokjin playfully knocks Jeongguk's shoulder with the beer cans. "I can't believe we're finally in your rebellious teenager stage."

Jeongguk makes a face at Seokjin, reaching to take the cans from him. "What's up?"

Seokjin nods his head toward the door. "Let's go for a walk. It's nice outside."

Jeongguk nods, grabbing his jacket and wallet and following Seokjin outside.

Yeouido Park is near Jeongguk's place and they make their way over by foot. Jeongguk keeps stepping ahead of Seokjin, leading the way. He turns back, walking backwards and grinning at Seokjin. "This way. I know a nice spot by the river!"

Seokjin is content to follow Jeongguk's lead. The air is warm, even as the sun dips down, hues of pink signally the end of the day. The waning light casts everything in golden tints, Jeongguk's hair reflecting bits of amber. A surge of nostalgia seizes Seokjin's lungs, his vision blurring with a remembrance of years ago, Jeongguk centimetres shorter, amber highlights in his baby hair, running ahead of him, giggling.

"Come on," Jeongguk calls out, disrupting Seokjin from his thoughts.

Seokjin smiles and jogs past his brother, slapping his shoulder as he passes and calling out, "You're it!"

They race to the river bank, climbing over a fence and through some bushes to Jeongguk's spot. Jeongguk naturally wins and Seokjin loudly complains that he let him.

They create a makeshift seating with logs and larger rocks, lumping them together into a semi-comfortable arrangement. Seokjin leans against the trunk of a tree and kicks his legs out straight in front of him, toeing at the loose rocks at his feet. He takes a beer can from Jeongguk and stares at the water. He watches the river, streetlamp lights reflecting off the surface, glistening like stars in the flow of the current.

They talk about small, insignificant things at first. Jeongguk's school and Seokjin's exhibit, the latest update of their favorite manhwas. Jeongguk keeps pausing at the end of their topics, watching Seokjin carefully, like he knows there's something Seokjin needs to say. He doesn't probe, allowing Seokjin more time to find his words.

Eventually, two cans of beer and an empty carton of tteokbokki later, Seokjin finally sighs and says slowly, parsing his words carefully, "There's something I need to talk to you about."

Jeongguk makes a low humming noise in response, stacking small flat rocks on top of each other, attempting to build a mini tower.

Seokjin furrows his brows, trying to grab the words whirling in his head. He has kept all these thoughts and plans to himself for so long, unwilling to burden Jeongguk with them, that he hardly knows what they sound like in any language but the one inside his heart. He kicks at the rocks and starts, "I had a plan. Before Yoongi. A plan to take you and me and Mom away from here, away

from the Jeons."

Jeongguk's rock tower collapses and he jerks his head to look at Seokjin, eyes wide. "What?"

"I was going to take us to Paris under false names and, presumably, never come back."

Jeongguk gapes at him, eyes widening even more and mouth dropped open. "Why?"

Seokjin scoffs and shifts against the tree trunk. "Why do you think?"

Jeongguk blows out a long breath. "You shouldn't have to do that, Hyung. You don't have to carry everything anymore. I'm older now." He throws a rock to the river and frowns. "I have a plan, too, you know."

Seokjin blinks, surprised. "What-"

"They treated you so badly, hyung, for years. You gave up your entire childhood for me. And they made Mom give us over to them. It's not fair." Jeongguk throws another rock, sending it further than the previous one. "I'm going to take over the company and make sure you and Mom will always be okay."

A surge of anger spikes in Seokjin's blood. "Is that why you stopped art?"

Jeongguk shrugs. "It's not important."

"It *is* important. I never wanted you to sacrifice for me-"

Jeongguk scoffs, derisive. "Like you didn't do the exact same thing for me."

Seokjin sighs. "It's different. I'm older-"

"I love you just as much as you love me, hyung." Jeongguk locks eyes with Seokjin, tone serious. "It hurts me the most when I see you struggle. I want to protect you, just like you want to protect me."

Seokjin's heart swells and he blinks rapidly, looking away to the river. His mind is a haze of all the misunderstandings and hidden agendas they've exchanged over the years. He lifts a hand to rub at his temple, a headache forming behind his eyes. "We've been really dumb."

"*You've* been really dumb," Jeongguk sulks.

Seokjin lifts a hand, punching Jeongguk's arm lightly. "Yah."

Jeongguk doesn't even flinch and shrugs.

"You should stop," Seokjin says seriously. "I don't want you giving anything up for me."

"I'm not." Jeongguk gathers pebbles in his hand, clinking them together. "Not anymore. I actually want to take over the company. For me." He smirks. "And to watch Uncle Jeonghun's face when I force him to retire."

Seokjin shouldn't laugh but he does, the thought a little too inviting.

"I enrolled in a couple art classes for the fall, hyung." Jeongguk watches Seokjin seriously. "I'm doing everything I want, don't worry about me anymore."

Seokjin smiles softly and nods, running his fingers through his brother's hair. "You're all grown up

now."

Jeongguk smiles and does nothing to remove Seokjin's hand from his hair. "And you have Yoongi-hyung now to take care of you. You don't still want to go to Paris, do you?"

Seokjin blinks at the question. "Would you go with me if I did?"

Jeongguk nods immediately. "Of course I would." He frowns. "Is that what you want?"

Seokjin takes in a slow breath and shakes his head. "No."

Jeongguk tosses the pebbles in his hand to the river bed, the rocks clinking with each toss. "What do you want, hyung?"

Seokjin gathers the words that have been coursing through his blood for months, circulating with every beat of his heart. "I want to stay with Yoongi."

Jeongguk smiles briefly before fixing a neutral expression on his face. "Does he make you happy?"

Seokjin's lips stretch into a grin he cannot hide, his mind wandering to Yoongi's cute pouty face when he sleeps, and Yoongi whispering *I missed you* against his lips. Seokjin nods and picks up a flat rock, rubbing his thumb over the smooth surface, the feeling it warm in his hand. "Yeah. Yeah, he does. I love him."

He feels giddy as the words escape his lips, a laugh tinkling at the end of his short sentence. He loves Yoongi.

He loves Yoongi.

He loves Yoongi and he wants to stay.

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Yoongi just wants to know when folding laundry became attractive. He had been complaining that Seokjin decided to do the laundry and forced him to participate rather than send it out like they usually do. Somewhere along the way, Yoongi's complaints grew quiet, little murmurs of garbled words that trail off mid-sentence. He finds his eyes fixated on Seokjin's fingers, quick, deft movements that result in crisp, clean lines of folded towels. He swallows thickly when Seokjin shakes out the large, fluffy material, his shoulders flexing with the motion.

His hands idly fold a pair of socks, eyes trained on Seokjin's movements. Maybe they should stop sending the laundry out. It's not that difficult. The experience is quite rewarding, actually. Builds character.

He tilts his head, contemplating the least amount of moves he would have to take to manoeuvre Seokjin off his feet and onto the couch. He jerks, pulled from his thoughts when Seokjin calls his name. "Hmm?" Yoongi sounds, straightening his back and focusing back on the socks in his hand.

"I'm taking Friday and Monday off from work," Seokjin says, eyes trained on the hand tower under his fingers.

Yoongi blinks, a small frown curving on his lips. Seokjin has an upcoming exhibit next month at the gallery. He's been working overtime, the extra workload keeping him busy for long hours. It's odd that Seokjin is suddenly taking time off. "Oh?" he prompts, expression still neutral, eyes trained on Seokjin, trying to capture every slight twitch and movement.

"I'm going to Busan to see my mother," Seokjin continues. He doesn't meet Yoongi's gaze, taking the last towel and shaking it out.

Yoongi feels a stone of fear form in the pit of his stomach. "Is everything okay with your mom?" He recalls vague bits of information he gleaned from Jeongguk and Seokjin about her. She was sick. He doesn't know with what or how bad, but it was bad enough that she had to send her children away. Panic tastes like bile in his throat for a woman he's never even met.

Seokjin smiles and finally looks back at Yoongi. "She's fine. I just haven't seen her in a long time. I miss her."

Relief is swift, rushing down his throat to his stomach. He nods and tosses the socks into his finished pile. "Oh. Yeah, of course." Yoongi presses his lips together to stop his mouth from releasing the words he wants to utter. He wants to ask to come along. To meet the woman who raised Seokjin and give her his formal greetings. He has no right to even think it, let alone ask. He's already crept so far into Seokjin's life, pushing the boundaries of their agreement. He shouldn't overstep his limitations. "You should take the plane," he says instead.

Seokjin laughs and shakes his head. "I was going to drive down."

"Take the plane," Yoongi says again, walking around to flop onto the couch, jostling the piles of clean laundry beside him. "I'm paying a guy to sit around and do nothing. Take the plane."

Seokjin frowns, his head tilting in consideration. Yoongi grins, sensing victory, and reaches out to tug on the belt loops of Seokjin's jeans, pulling him closer. He sits up straight and peers up at Seokjin, fingers still linked on Seokjin's belt loops. "Take the plane."

Seokjin's cheeks color, a pink darkening to rose that sits high on his cheeks. He bends at the waist and presses his lips lightly against the side of Yoongi's mouth. "Okay," he says, pulling back.

Yoongi breathes out slowly, a smile tugging on his lips, contentment sliding off the slope of his shoulders.

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Despite Seokjin's protests, Yoongi loads Seokjin up with boxes and bags of presents for his mother, luxury bags and expensive skincare products, designer dresses and electronics. Seokjin wants to ask Yoongi how he gathered all the items so quickly, but he's pretty sure all he has to do is breath the name Min and people come running to cater to his whims. Seokjin manages to convince Yoongi that he can't carry *all* of that and they compromise on one luxury purse and the skincare products.

"It's too much, Yoongi," Seokjin had said, laughing.

Yoongi had shrugged and said bluntly, *"It's your mom. I want her to be happy."*

Seokjin doesn't remember breathing for a long time after that, words he can't say choking his throat. It's getting harder not to say them, harder to keep them buried under his heart. He manages, somehow, and Yoongi sends him off to the airport with a quick kiss to his cheek and a wish to stay safe.

The plane ride is quick and comfortable and before he can even get a proper nap in, he's arrived in Busan. He feels an instant sense of belonging. The smell of the air different, salty and warm and fresh. The sound of the people is comforting, the lilt like music to his hears, a melody he has never forgotten. He's home.

His mother is expecting him but he didn't elaborate on the nature of his visit. She's curious, he could tell in her tone. But she's patient and did not press for answers.

He takes a taxi to his mother's apartment, a nice place in a decent area that he bought with his own money so the Jeons could never take it away from her. She's waiting outside the front lobby for him, long grey cardigan wrapped around her small frame, her cell phone clutched in one hand. When he alights from the taxi, her face breaks out into delight and she runs up to him, enveloping him in a hug so tight, he doesn't think she'll ever let him go.

It's okay, because he doesn't really want to let go either.

She looks good, he notices with relief. Her skin has a healthy glow and there's color in her cheeks. Her frame is slight but not sickly anymore. Her arms have strength and her voice carries weight to it. Her hand rubs his back like she used to when he was little and she laughs. "Welcome home, Seokjinnie."

Seokjin closes his eyes and dips his head into her shoulder, inhaling her fragrance. He melts against her, fading into childhood, worry and fear and uncertainty falling off his shoulders in her embrace. He clutches his hands around her waist and says, "I missed you a lot, Mom."

"I know, sweetie. I know."

Once they've settled in upstairs, he hands his mother the bag of presents Yoongi sent with him. She takes it, eyes wide in surprise, an amused smile on her lips. "What's this?"

"Yoongi sent it for you. He wanted to give you something special," Seokjin answers, cupping his cup of tea in his hands.

He watches, smiling softly, as his mother unpacks the presents one by one, her eyes bright and shining. She lets out a low breath when she sees the purse, running her hand over the surface carefully. "Not even Jeongguk's father bought me this brand," she says. Her eyes flick up to Seokjin and her expression dulls, a furrow in her brow. "I hope Min Yoongi doesn't believe he can buy affection."

Seokjin shakes his head immediately. "He doesn't, Mom. He really just wanted to give you something." Seokjin's smile widens and he leans closer to his mother. "He's really good to me."

His mother blinks at him, her mouth forming an "o" and the furrow smoothing from her brow. She puts the purse aside and shifts to hold Seokjin's hand. "Why don't you tell me about it."

Seokjin explains everything to her. His plan to move them to Paris, the chairman's arrangement to marry Jeongguk off, his desperate search for an answer. Yoongi, a beacon in the dark, an anchor that tethered Seokjin to safety in the storm, a miracle he didn't think he could believe in anymore. His mother listens without interjecting, letting Seokjin share what he needs to. By the end, both their mugs of tea are cold and the sun has begun to set.

"So why did you come?" his mother finally asks, eyes trained on Seokjin's face.

Seokjin presses his lips together and looks down at his hands. "I needed to know what you wanted to do. Do you want to stay in Busan? Do you want to move to Paris? Seoul?"

His mother makes a humming noise and leans back to rest against the couch cushions. "Busan has been my home for too many years to leave. I like it here. I have my friends." She makes a face and reaches up to brush Seokjin's fringe away from his eyes. "I miss my babies, though. You should come visit me more often."

Seokjin smiles and nods. "I will."

"Bring Yoongi next time."

Seokjin's chest swells and nods. He wants to. He wants to bring Yoongi and introduce his mother to him. He wants his mom to tease him, he wants Yoongi to insist on doing the dishes to impress her. He wants to see them interact like they've known each other for years, like they're family. He wants it so badly. "I will."

His mother smiles and stands. "Good. Jeongguk's told me all about him, I'd like to see this Yoongi for myself."

Seokjin eyes her suspiciously. "What did Jeongguk tell you?"

She narrows her eyes and leans forward conspiratorially. "That Min Yoongi has a heart of black. And possibly hypnotized you."

Seokjin doubles over with laughter, slapping his own knee as he giggles.

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Jimin arrives at the cafe an hour before the arranged meeting time. He hardly slept the night before, heart pounding and nerves clawing up his throat. He had to turn his cell phone off and fling it across his room to keep himself from succumbing to the temptation of cancelling his appointment with Taehyung. The night is the hardest to get through, he told himself. The night is the point where the darkness swallows up any ray of light and starts to lie.

It'll never get any better.

You'll never change.

The loneliness is a part of you, woven into the DNA of your soul, inseparable and inescapable.

There's a voice inside his head and it's a liar, a liar, a liar.

The sun eventually rises, and Jimin's starting to understand that his worst fears aren't always as big as he thinks.

It still doesn't stop the panic from rumbling low in his stomach, doesn't stop the nerves from jittering in his fingers. He dresses as soon as the sun comes up and heads out, walking around until he finds himself at the cafe far too early.

He wants to buy a coffee, sugary sweet and hot, to soothe his throat and warm his hands, but he thinks the caffeine might make his heart finally burst from his chest. He settles for a mint tea and hopes it calms his nerves. He hardly touches it, the tea cooling under his hands as he stares out the window, watching people pass by.

"You can do this," he says to himself, fingers clenching around his cup. "Just say the words." He breathes in slowly and sets his jaw in determination. He won't falter this time. He'll make a different choice, a better choice. Even if it is too late.

He's so caught up in keeping his nerves down that he almost misses Taehyung's entrance, strolling in quickly through the front door like a gust of fresh air. Jimin's heart stutters in his chest and his breath catches in his throat for a moment, blinking at the other. Taehyung is dressed in a striped casual shirt and ripped black jeans. His hair is tousled and slightly damp, like he showered and didn't have time

or energy to dry it properly. It should make him look sloppy but somehow he looks styled, artistic. Jimin has the urge to reach up and fix his hair. His fingers tighten around his mug painfully. He doesn't have that right anymore.

Taehyung spots him immediately and grins, bounding over and waving. "Hi! I'm late, sorry!"

Jimin shakes his head. "No, no, you're not. I'm early."

Taehyung frowns, pulling out the chair opposite of Jimin and sitting down. "Did you have to wait long? I would have come sooner if I'd known."

Jimin shakes his head again. "No, no, it's fine." Taehyung nods, staring at Jimin, eyes focused and unwavering. Jimin clears his throat and looks down at his cold mint tea.

"You had something you wanted to talk about?" Taehyung finally prompts, breaking the silence.

Panic spikes in Jimin's blood, adrenaline telling him to flee, forget this stupid idea. This is so *stupid*. But there's Taehyung's eyes on him, kind and supportive and waiting. And there's a voice in Jimin's head that's telling him to believe, just believe.

Jimin looks up, bravery and cowardice warring in the thumping of his heart. "Let me buy you a drink, first," he says, needing a reprieve, a moment to gather his thoughts.

"Ah." Taehyung shifts and moves to stand. "I can get my own, it's fine."

Jimin's hand shoots out across the table and grabs Taehyung's wrist, stopping him. "No, please, let me buy it for you. I owe you, anyway."

Taehyung blinks at Jimin's hand on his wrist, gaze flickering up to Jimin's face again. His lips turn down into a soft frown. "I wasn't counting," he says quietly, but he sits down again.

Jimin smiles at him, thankful for his acquiescence. "What do you want?"

Taehyung shrugs. "Anything you get me is fine."

Jimin nods and stands, heading to the counter to order. He takes several deep breaths, his fingers tingling from where they held Taehyung's wrist. He can do this, he can do this. Three small words. Just three small words and it'll all be over, good or bad.

I like you.

He repeats them in his head, gleaned strength from the mantra, like a magic spell.

He thinks he's ready until he brings Taehyung's drink back to the table and takes his seat. He thinks he's ready until Taehyung watches him closely and it's up to Jimin to say the words that terrify him, to take that leap he's been afraid of all his life. The chasm is too large, the difference between friends and lovers too far. Jimin doesn't think he can jump it by himself.

He has to try, he reminds himself. He can't let Taehyung go without a fight.

He takes in a shuddering breath and looks straight ahead at Taehyung.

"Thank you for coming today," Jimin starts.

Taehyung tilts his head and smiles. "It's fine. We're friends."

Jimin's brow furrows and he frowns. "That's," he starts and exhales slowly. "That's what I wanted to talk about."

Taehyung's eyes flicker and his face starts to fall, expression growing dim. "Oh," he says quietly. He sits up straight in his chair and keeps his gaze steady on Jimin. "I'm listening."

Jimin presses his lips together and glances away from Taehyung, down to his hands on the table. He folds and unfolds his hands, panic threatening to close up his throat, choking down the words. He blinks rapidly and gathers his courage, remembers that Taehyung is like a thunderstorm, lightning and winds that sweep under his feet, and an anticipation that makes him feel alive.

"You've been a really great friend," Jimin starts again, staring at his hands. "The best friend I could ever wish for. You've been kind and selfless and so supportive even when I didn't deserve it. I'm really grateful."

"It's not-" Taehyung starts but Jimin shakes his head.

"Please, I need to finish," he says, still not looking up. "I'm very grateful to have you as a friend." He takes in a sharp breath and steels himself. "But I don't want to be your friend anymore."

Taehyung is silent, but Jimin can see his fingers curl into fists on the table.

"I know it's selfish. And I know I don't deserve another chance. But you liked me, once. You said you liked me once and I." Jimin squeezes his eyes shut and forces the words to his lips, voice trembling with them. "I like you too, now. I'm sorry. I know I don't have a right but I like you. I want another chance." He finally lifts his gaze and stares at Taehyung. "Please."

Taehyung's expression is unreadable, face still and large eyes unblinking. Dread pounds in Jimin's chest and he fights to remain strong, to see this through until the end. He's so stupid, this was a mistake. He missed his chance, of course he did. He doesn't know how to live, and his misery is all his fault. He blinks rapidly, suddenly feeling moisture behind his eyes, and looks down again.

"Sorry," he mumbles, almost a whisper. He's lost Taehyung twice, once as a lover and once as a friend. He wants to leave and be alone in his wretchedness.

Taehyung's chair scrapes across the floor and Jimin can see in his peripheral vision that he stands. Jimin exhales shakily and stares at the darkening liquid of his tea, cursing at himself.

He nearly jumps from his seat when he feels Taehyung's hand, warm from his mug, gently cup his chin and lift his gaze. He stares wide-eyed at Taehyung, the wide smile on his lips, the twinkle of delight in his eyes, the way his fringe falls messily on his brow.

"Today's our first day, okay?" Taehyung says, leaning closer until his nose brushes against Jimin's.

Jimin blinks, confused for a moment. "What-"

Taehyung swallows up the words, lips slotting against Jimin's slowly, a soft pressure against his mouth. Goosebumps break out on Jimin's arms and legs, his heart stopping in his chest. He reaches a hand up to hold onto Taehyung's forearm, needing the assurance that this is real. That Taehyung is really here, kissing him, holding him, accepting him. This isn't a dream, this isn't a whisper of fantasy. This is real and solid and *his*, all *his*.

Taehyung pulls back to place a lingering kiss on Jimin's cheek, before he takes his seat again. He places his elbows on the table and holds his head in his hands, grinning happily at Jimin.

Jimin puts a hand on his cheek, feeling the warmth of a flush on his skin. He stares at Taehyung, slack-jawed and a little flustered. "That's it? That simple? I confess and we're dating now?"

Taehyung nods, still grinning. "Ah-huh."

Jimin smiles, bewildered. "Why?"

"Because I love you," Taehyung answers easily, the words flowing off his tongue like a sudden downpour.

Jimin giggles, embarrassed and warm and *happy*. He hides his face behind his hands and leans back in his chair. "You're so cheesy."

"I love you, Park Jimin," Taehyung repeats, sending more goosebumps over Jimin's skin.

Jimin can't say the words back to Taehyung, not yet. But he can cherish Taehyung, and one day he'll be able to say it, to mean the words with all his heart and mind and soul. Jimin lowers his hands and smiles at Taehyung, a shy giggle escaping his lips. He'll make sure to show Taehyung for the rest of his life.

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"I must be dreaming."

Yoongi sighs as his grandmother walks into the dining room to take her place at the table.

"Mikyung, wake me up," she continues, leaning to her right where her daughter sits, patting her repeatedly on the arm. "Or I'm hallucinating. I could swear that's my grandson."

Yoongi groans. "Granny."

Granny lets out a mock gasp, her hand flying to her chest. She leans closer to Mikyung. "It's speaking too."

Mikyung presses her lips together and swallows down the laugh Yoongi knows is bubbling up her throat. "Mom, Yoongi came for dinner."

"That's preposterous," Granny says. "Yoongi doesn't just come for dinner."

"Granny, I've been here every other week for dinner."

Granny sends him a sharp look. "With Seokjin because that boy drags you here. Besides, you came last week."

Yoongi frowns. It's true. He doesn't like coming to the estate much. It holds too many memories, prodding at open wounds that never healed. If he closes his eyes, he sometimes still hears his father's rambunctious laughter floating down the hallways. From the corner of his eyes, he sometimes catches a glimpse of his mother's reflection. It was too hard to face, easier to avoid it, avoid his grandmother and the house that used to be his refuge until it turned into prison.

Seokjin changed that. Or started to, at least. Seokjin drags him over every other week for dinner, reminding Yoongi that his grandmother is an old woman who loves and misses him, regardless of her sharp jabs. Somehow, with Seokjin's laughter next to him, with Seokjin's hand warm on his back and his voice filling the space, Yoongi's gotten used to visiting the house. Somehow, he's started to enjoy coming over, started to remember that this place is his home, his inheritance, and one day he'll

return to it as its rightful owner. And somehow, after spending Friday night alone in his apartment, Seokjin absent from the walls, Yoongi didn't want to spend another evening alone.

Of course, he will never admit it, so he shrugs and says to his grandmother, "I feel like you're telling me to leave." He moves to stand. "It's fine, kicked out by my own grandmother."

Granny *tsks* and waves at him to sit again. "You have no sense of humor."

Yoongi smirks and sits again. "I'm hilarious."

"Says who?"

"Says Seokjin-hyung."

Granny scoffs. "He's biased."

Yoongi smiles before he can stop it and shrugs, smug. "Can't really blame him."

Granny laughs, delighted.

After dinner when the plates are cleared, Yoongi helps his grandmother stand and she pulls on his arm, leading him to her study. "Come with me, I have a pamphlet I want to show you."

Yoongi raises his brows, helping Granny into the room and to her desk. "About what?"

"Adoption."

Yoongi chokes on his own breath, coughing several times. Granny sends him a glare.

"What's the matter?"

Yoongi clears his throat and straightens, leaning against his grandmother's desk. "Granny, we're not. Ah. We're not looking to adopt now."

"You'll have to eventually. Someone needs to inherit after you." She smiles up at Yoongi. "I think Seokjin would like having a little toddler running around. Maybe two."

"Granny, please," Yoongi says, already imagining the ways his grandmother will try to coerce her way. An image of Seokjin holding a baby flashes through his mind and he pushes it away almost immediately. It makes his stomach churn uncomfortably.

Granny shifts through the documents on her desk, looking for the pamphlet. "Relax, we're just in the discussion stages. There's nothing wrong with talking. Are you against talking now, too? I didn't raise you like that."

Yoongi sighs and watches his grandmother sort through her desk. He freezes, his eyes catching a glimpse of piece of paper with a familiar letterhead, a spike of panic instant in his blood. He reaches forward and snatches it before his grandmother can stop him, eyes scanning the results quickly. Anxiety is his first reaction, but anger follows quickly, easier and safer. "You went to the doctor?"

His grandmother pauses and has the decency to look sheepish for a moment before her face hardens and she reaches for the paper. "It was a routine check-up."

"You had a CT scan? And you didn't tell me?" Yoongi stares at her, aghast. It's happening again, he thinks. Again, again, *again*.

She sighs and grabs the paper, stuffing it into a drawer, out of sight. "The results are negative, I'm fine. No need to make a fuss."

"You didn't even *tell* me."

She scoffs. "What good would that do? Not like you can stop it."

"I have a right to know," he says, voice shaking. He can feel himself slipping, the years rewinding, a ten year old boy with no answers, no information, no idea that as he closed his eyes to sleep, his parents closed their eyes to this world. Anger bubbles up high in his throat. "You can't do this to me again, Grandmother. You can't fucking keep this from me again."

His grandmother arches a brow and considers him coldly. "And what exactly would you do if I was dying? What can you do? It's useless to worry."

"Grandmother!"

Mikyung rushes into the room, eyes wide in alarm. "Why are we shouting?"

"I'm old, Yoongi. I will die soon."

Yoongi clenches his jaw. "And you'll fucking leave without giving me a chance to say goodbye. *Again*. Don't do this to me. I can't handle it again. I won't be able to handle that again."

Mikyung makes her way to Yoongi and tentatively puts a hand on his arm. "Yoongi, calm down. It's nothing, Mother is fine. She'll live for years yet."

He sends his aunt a sharp look, betrayal choking his lungs. "You knew? You knew and you didn't tell me?"

"We wanted to make sure of the results before we worried you-"

"What would you do?" Yoongi's grandmother cuts in, her voice loud and angry. "You'll start beating people up again? You don't have any classmates to fight with now."

Yoongi shakes his aunts hand from his arm and storms out, anger and anxiety and dread mixing in his blood, a potent mix that makes him feel like he'll explode. He leaves the house as quickly as he can, slamming into his car and skidding away from the estate. His fingers flex on the steering wheel, his vision blurring with fury and, buried layers underneath that, fear, sharp and slicing like a knife to his gut. He can lose so much, so quickly, and he would never know it's coming.

He blinks rapidly, tears suddenly filling his eyes, making his vision hazy. He pulls over into a parking lot of some kind of convenience store. He can't even read the sign properly, his tears making it difficult to see anything. He reaches for his phone and dials a number quickly, putting it on speak and tossing the phone into the empty passenger's seat beside him. He presses the heel of his hands to his eyes and takes a shaky breath, listening to the phone ring.

"Yoongichi?"

Yoongi lets out a watery scoff and leans back against his seat, hands still pressed to his eyes. "What Yoongichi, we're alone," he says, the feeling of *déjà vu* on his tongue.

Déjà

Seokjin laughs, the sound crackly over the speakers. "It's cute, though. Don't you think it's cute?"

Yoongi lets out a sigh, the pressure behind his eyes still threatening to spill into more tears. "Yeah, it's cute," he admits, his voice shaking.

Seokjin pauses on the other end before saying slowly, "Yoongi, are you okay?"

Yoongi makes a small noise in the back of his throat and shakes his head. "Not really."

"I can come right back," Seokjin says, some shuffling sounding in the background.

"No, don't." Yoongi sighs and lowers his hands from his eyes. Seokjin hasn't seen his mother in months. He doesn't want to take that from him, no matter how much he needs to hug him right now, no matter how badly he wants to bury his face in Seokjin's neck and just breathe. "No, I'll be fine. I just. Can you just talk to me for a bit, hyung?"

"Of course." Seokjin pauses for a beat before continuing, "Do you want to talk about what happened?"

"No."

"Okay. What do you want me to talk about?"

Yoongi sighs and closes his eyes, his heart coming down to a reasonable pace, the pressure behind his eyes finally easing. "I don't know. Tell me about your day. Tell me a bad joke. Anything."

"Do you want to hear a joke about paper?"

"Sure."

"Nevermind. It's tearable."

Yoongi's lips tug into a smile, widening as he hears Seokjin laughing over the line. "Hyung, that was really bad."

"It was *tearable*," Seokjin reiterates and Yoongi can almost see his eyes crinkling up as he laughs.

Yoongi inhales slowly and finds the heaviness in his chest isn't there anymore, his shoulders relaxing and his eyes clearing. He blinks his eyes open and smiles, grateful. He should probably be scared at how easily Seokjin can bring him back down, how effortlessly Seokjin can center him, anchor him.

He should probably be scared.

But he isn't.

&&&

It's easier to wait for Seokjin to make his way from the airport back home. Seokjin drove himself there to begin with, his car is parked in the long-term parking area. Yoongi has to rearrange his schedule to leave early on Monday from the office, has to take a taxi over to the airport, has to jump over a hundred small hurdles. It's easier to wait for Seokjin to make his way from the airport back home, but Yoongi misses him.

That's how Yoongi finds himself lingering by the arrivals of Incheon Airport, black mask hiding his face and a black cap over his hair. He changed from his usual fitted black suit to a pair of ripped jeans and a green flannel shirt with a black hood pulled up over his cap. He's completely unrecognizable, thankfully, and he blends into the crowd of travellers bustling around him.

Yet still, when Seokjin walks out of the automatic doors, enveloped in an oversized white Puma sweatshirt and a pair of jeans, trailing his suitcase behind him, his eyes lock on Yoongi. Seokjin's feet falter and a grin spreads on his lips. He waves in Yoongi's direction and walks over quickly. "Yoongi," he says when he reaches him. "You didn't have to get me. I have my car parked here."

Yoongi takes a moment to take in Seokjin's face, eyes flickering over his features, drinking him in. A slow smile tugs his lips up. He shrugs and reaches for Seokjin's luggage, pulling it as they start to walk to the exit. "It's fine. I was bored."

Seokjin nudges his shoulder with his own. "Just admit you missed me."

Yoongi shrugs again. "I missed you, hyung," he says easily, smile widening under his mask. He stops when he feels Seokjin's hand on his wrist, arresting him. He blinks and looks back at Seokjin.

Seokjin stares at him, eyes wide and flickering over his face, trying to find something, trying to say something. There's a hundred different emotions that pass over his features, too quick for Yoongi to decipher, but all of them make Yoongi think Seokjin's about to say something from the depths of his heart. Seokjin's fingers squeeze around Yoongi's wrist, his thumb brushing up his arm. He says slowly, the words dripping off like rain, "*Mahal na mahal kita*."

Yoongi's brow furrows, staring up at Seokjin, confused. He reaches his free hand up to tug his mask down and tilts his head. "What?"

Seokjin looks away and hums, stepping ahead, a happy, shuddering breath exhaling from his lungs.

Yoongi frowns and lets Seokjin pull him along, belatedly grabbing the luggage again. "Hyung, what does that mean?"

Seokjin shrugs, thumb making small circles on Yoongi's forearm. "It doesn't matter. I just wanted to say it."

Yoongi's heart throbs in his chest. His frown deepens. He feels like he's missed something important, vital. He feels like he's missed astonishing, an explanation of why something just clicked into place inside of him that he doesn't quite understand. "Say it again," he demands, hoping that hearing the words again will give some clarity.

Seokjin smiles and looks back at him, shaking his head. "I'm hungry, why don't we go for sweet and sour pork before we head home?" Seokjin releases his hold on Yoongi's wrist and fishes in his pocket for his car keys, a soft smile on his lips and that happy hum vibrating off his lips.

Yoongi inhales sharply and wonders why he suddenly feels light-headed. He wonders why he feels the floor gliding under his feet, why pinpricks form on his arms and legs, and a flush of warmth floods his cheeks.

Mahal na mahal kita, he repeats in his mind, grabbing ahold of the words, writing them in ink so he won't lose them. He doesn't know what they mean but he thinks it's something good.

He smiles at Seokjin's face, glowing, his eyes crinkled with joy. Yeah, it must be something good.

Chapter End Notes

I spoke with three separate Tagalog speakers about the usage of *mahal kita* so I hope I

utilized it correctly. Please correct me if I'm wrong.

I would also like it noted that I had *mahal kita* in my outline MONTHS before Seokjin did it at the concert, he STOLE THE IDEA okay. I had it first. XD

Consider this my June update. Thanks guys. Happy Yoongi Day~

Faith

Chapter Notes

I'm literally always floored by the amount of love I have received on this fic. Thank you so much.

Special thank you to people actually putting effort into fanart and edits for this????
THANK YOU????

[pagdiwa](#) made [this beautiful fanart](#) of the *mahal na mahal kita* scene from last chapter.

Do you see my tears??

[prayfortaehyung](#) made [this amazing edit](#) for the fic in whole and will I ever be over the tiptoes picture? No. No I won't.

Have I mentioned my undying love for [Yor](#)? Because I have it. [SHE MADE A LITERAL DRAMA POSTER FOR ME.](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hoseok sips from his iced coffee, eyeing Yoongi suspiciously across the cafe table. Yoongi arches an eyebrow and tilts his chin up. "What?"

"I feel like you want something." Hoseok puts his cup down and leans forward, eyes narrowing. "And you're being very weird about it. What? What's happening? I have your back, hyung. You know I do." Hoseok hits his chest with his fist. "I'm ride or die."

Yoongi lets out a quick laugh and looks down, shaking his head. "Thanks but I'm good."

Hoseok puts his elbows on the table and links his hands together, resting his chin on his linked fingers. "But you do want something." He says it as a statement, already certain.

Yoongi frowns and shifts uncomfortably in his booth. He fiddles with his cup of iced coffee, eyes focused on the drops of condensation gathering on the side. He tilts his head and his frown deepens. "You know a lot of languages, right?"

Hoseok shrugs. "I know my fair share. Want to know how to talk dirty in Mandarin?"

"I already know that."

Hoseok throws his hand to his chest, a mock look of shock and indignation on his face. "And you never told me?"

Yoongi huffs out a breath and smiles at Hoseok. "You never asked."

"Okay but seriously, what do you want to know?"

Yoongi blinks, recalling Seokjin at the airport, his thumb warm and heavy on his wrist, his eyes bright and sparkling with something Yoongi thinks he should recognize. "What does *mahal na mahal kita* mean?" he asks, flicking his eyes up to Hoseok, the words weighted and careful on his tongue.

Hoseok blinks and his lips purse. "It means you're expensive."

Yoongi scoffs. "I'm being serious."

"So am I!" Hoseok exclaims, indignant. "*Mahal*. It's Tagalog for expensive."

Yoongi frowns sceptically, thinking about the way Seokjin said it, the gentle, deliberate vibrations of his tone, the flicker of unnamed emotions over his features, the way his eyes stayed on Yoongi long after the words were said, like he was trying to memorize Yoongi's expression. "I really don't think it means expensive."

Hoseok sighs and pulls out his phone, fingers tapping quickly on the screen. He flips the phone around and holds it up to Yoongi's face. The screen is open to Naver translate, *mahal* written in the text box and *expensive* written in hangul underneath. Yoongi's frown deepens and disappointment settles into the pit of his stomach. He doesn't know what he was expecting. Something more than that. Something that put a name to the way Seokjin looks at him. Something that could explain the fluttering in his stomach whenever he hears Seokjin's voice.

"You look so sad," Hoseok says, the righteous victory of being right dying from his tone. He pulls his phone back and Yoongi quickly puts on an indifferent expression. Hoseok taps on his phone and holds it up to his ear. "Don't worry, I got you hyung."

Yoongi shifts his head in question at Hoseok.

Hoseok ignores him and grins, eyes twinkling when the other line picks up. "Hey baby."

Yoongi sighs and leans back in his booth, preparing himself for the onset of one-sided gushing. *Namjoon*, he thinks. Hoseok is so grossly in love with him. Yoongi thinks idly that he should have gotten used to it by now, but he hasn't.

"Nothing much, just out with Yoongi-hyung," Hoseok says, tilting his head with his words. "I miss you."

Hoseok listens to the other end and laughs, open-mouthed and hysterical. Yoongi arches a brow at him and Hoseok clears his throat, straightening in his seat.

"Joonie, babe, I do have a purpose to this call, actually. What does *mahal* mean?"

"*Mahal na mahal kita*," Yoongi corrects, releasing the words as carefully as Seokjin said them.

"Sorry, my bad. *Mahal na mahal kita*." Hoseok smiles suddenly and says, "Aw, you too, baby." He blinks and the smile fades from his lips. His eyes narrow and he stares at Yoongi, alarmed. He places his hand over the microphone of his phone and leans across the table to whisper harshly to Yoongi, "Who the hell is telling you *mahal na mahal kita*?" His lips curl in judgment. "I thought you were loyal. You have a husband, you know!"

Yoongi scowls. "My husband said it to me." His mind flickers through a hundred thoughts of what the words could mean. "What's it mean?"

Hoseok looks stricken. "Didn't Seokjin-hyung tell you?"

Yoongi shakes his head slowly, frowning. "That's why I'm asking you." He sits up and reaches forward for Hoseok's phone. "Let me talk to Namjoon."

Hoseok throws himself against the back of the booth, cradling the phone protectively in his hands.

"Namjoon, you are forbidden from telling Yoongi what that means," he says quickly and hangs up. He shoots Yoongi a triumphant look.

"I can just ask someone else," Yoongi counters.

"No, don't!" Hoseok's lips turn down into a deep frown. "Let Seokjin-hyung tell you. He's the one who said it to you. He needs to be the one to interpret it."

Yoongi's chest flutters, remembering the words said in Seokjin's voice, the warmth and depth of them.

"Hyung, trust me. Let Seokjin-hyung tell you when he's ready."

Yoongi sighs and nods, picking up his coffee. "Yeah, okay." He can wait for Seokjin to translate the words. He can wait for Seokjin for a lot more than that.

&&&

"You're really not coming?"

Yoongi doesn't move from his place on the bed, phone cradled in both hands. His lips dip down into a frown and he narrows his eyes at Seokjin. "I'm not and you shouldn't either."

Seokjin resists the urge to roll his eyes and pauses in front of the full-length mirror, fixing his bangs.

"I thought you were supposed to be on my side," Yoongi continues to grumble, eyes following Seokjin across the room, body still unmovable on the bed. Seokjin has the impression that Yoongi looks like a cat, wary and judging and waiting. He also has the cutest little nose, but Seokjin doesn't think Yoongi will appreciate the thought.

He shrugs instead and moves to his bedside table to look for his glasses. He smiles when he finds them, slipping the horn-rimmed glasses on. "I'm not on anyone's side."

"What a lie," Yoongi gripes, sitting up against the pillows and dropping his phone by his side, eyes entirely focused on Seokjin. "You're taking my grandmother's side."

Seokjin sighs and sits on the edge of the bed, hooking one leg under him and one leg off the side of the bed. He fixes Yoongi with a stare and watches the other shift under his gaze.

"What?" Yoongi says with false bravado.

"Are you going to let me know why you've started a war with Granny?" Seokjin asks, trying not to let his exasperation seep into his tone.

Yoongi scowls anyway and shifts to lie back down on the bed. "I didn't start this. It's all her." He picks his phone up again and scrolls through it. "You're being unreasonable."

Seokjin balks. "*I'm* being unreasonable?"

"Yes," Yoongi affirms, eyes focused on whatever he's scrolling through. "I already told you I'm not talking to her and I expected you to support me on this."

"What about your aunt? Don't you want to see her?" Seokjin tries, hoping a different approach will give him some headway into Yoongi's stubborn resolution.

Yoongi huffs out an indignant laugh. "She was complacent in it." He flicks his gaze briefly back to

Seokjin. "Which is almost as bad. And you're apparently desperate to join the ranks of traitors."

"Maybe if you'd just tell me what horrible sin your grandmother committed, I'd be able to justify cancelling on her. Twice." He shifts to face Yoongi fully, crossing his legs under his and folding his hands in his lap. "Neither of us has seen her for a month." His lips tilt down into a pout and he angles his head cutely. "Hmm? What do you say? Come with me?"

Yoongi's face hardens. "No," he enunciates, clearly and firmly.

Seokjin groans, exasperated. "What did she do?"

Yoongi's expression shutters and his eyes dull. "Something unforgiveable. And she was going to do it again."

Seokjin blinks slowly, discomfort pooling in his stomach at Yoongi's tone and the fading light in his eyes, like some unknown memory surfaced in Yoongi's mind and Seokjin has no idea how to vanquish it. "This is really serious, isn't it?" he asks softly.

Yoongi meets his gaze, eyes locked. His head moves slightly, almost imperceptible, a tiny nod in affirmation, his lips pressed tightly together, his jaw clenched.

"Okay, I'll cancel," Seokjin says, pulling his phone from his pocket.

Yoongi sits up suddenly. "Really?"

Seokjin nods, finding Granny's number in his phone *Min Company Chairwoman*. "I trust you. If you say it's serious and you don't want me to go, I won't." He glances back up at Yoongi, gauging his reaction carefully. "You wouldn't lie to me."

He watches Yoongi closely, to see if there is a flicker of guilt or doubt in the other's eyes. There isn't, just the sag of relief relaxing Yoongi's frame and peace settling in his eyes. The discomfort in Seokjin's stomach grows to dread at the confirmation that smother very serious and bad happened between Yoongi and his family.

He shifts and slides off the bed, dialling Granny's number. It rings three times before she answers. "Is that brat of mine coming or not?" she says without preamble.

Seokjin winces and glances to Yoongi on the bed. "I don't think we'll be able to make it tonight, Granny."

Yoongi's grandmother sniffs loudly in disdain. "Tell him his sulking is ridiculous. And I don't miss his bratty face at all."

Seokjin hums noncommittally, pacing to the edge of the room, keenly aware of Yoongi's eyes following him. "Granny..." he says quietly.

"He's acting like a child," she continues. "Make sure you tell him that."

Seokjin hums and doesn't say anything.

"Tell her I can hear her posturing from here," Yoongi calls out and Seokjin rolls his eyes, sighing.

"I got to go. I'll see you at the exhibit," he says, ending the call. He sends a sharp glare to Yoongi. "Just to be clear, this is the last time I act as a go-between for you two. I'm not responsible for the Min inability to process complex emotions."

Yoongi wrinkles his nose and turns onto his side, lying his head on the pillow and promptly ignoring Seokjin.

Seokjin sighs again. He doesn't know how many times he's sighed in the last few days over the same issue. He disappears into the wardrobe room, changing from his blue button-down into a pair of shorts and a loose-fitting t-shirt. He returns to the bedroom and crawls into bed, sliding his front to Yoongi's back, an arm coming to loop around Yoongi's waist.

Yoongi makes a vague displeased sound in the back of his throat, eyes still focused on his phone. "Move over, you're too warm."

Seokjin tightens his arm around Yoongi's waist and presses his nose into the back of Yoongi's neck. "I gave up a steak dinner at your grandmother's for you. Let me have this."

Yoongi scoffs but adjusts to settle more comfortably against Seokjin. He drops a hand from his phone to rest on the one Seokjin has on his stomach, lightly running over the digits. "Thank you," he says hesitantly, so softly Seokjin almost doesn't catch it.

Seokjin doesn't make him clarify why he's thanking him, just hums and settles his chin over Yoongi's shoulder. "Welcome. She's still invited for my exhibit unless you can tell me what crime she's committed."

Yoongi's thumb runs over the back of Seokjin's hand. "No, I'll be okay by then. I won't let it ruin your big night." He turns his head to give Seokjin a quick, chaste kiss on his cheek. "Thank you, hyung. For trusting me."

Seokjin blinks, his grip tightening on Yoongi. He has to bite his teeth together to keep silent, to keep the words he wants to say from bubbling over and scaring Yoongi.

I love you, he thinks. I love you.

&&&

"We don't have to go as a couple tonight, you know," Taehyung says, eyeing Jimin carefully. He has finished changing, dressed in wide-legged dress pants and a pin-stripped blazer, a polka-dotted dress shirt underneath. It's a bold fashion choice and Jimin thinks only the other could ever pull it off.

The difference between them strikes Jimin again, and he remembers that Taehyung grew up wealthy – the kind of wealthy that's not inherently obvious to Taehyung. No private jet, but yearly trips to Australia and Europe and South America. No luxury sports cars, but branded clothes and expensive jewellery. No personal chef, but dinners out without a flickered eye on the prices listed on the menu.

Jimin feels out of his depth again, in a world where he doesn't belong. He'll have to have a deep talk about it with Taehyung sometime soon, about those casual remarks that mean no harm but put pressure on a sore spot in Jimin's heart. Taehyung had told him when they first started dating that he was in this for the long-run. For them to get there, Taehyung said they need to be honest and open with each other, regardless of if it will hurt when the subject is broached.

"The very last thing I want you to do is resent me for anything," he'd said.

Jimin looks away from Taehyung and focuses back on adjusting his hair. He'll bring it up, on another night, when he's organized his thoughts, not twenty minutes before they have to leave for Seokjin's exhibit.

"Jimin?" Taehyung says, stepping closer, hooking his sunglasses behind his ears on the back of his

head. "Did you hear me?"

"Hmm?"

"We don't have to go as a couple tonight if you don't want to." Taehyung slides his hands into his pant pockets. "If you need more time-"

"I really, really like you, Taehyung," Jimin interrupts, turning to face Taehyung fully. "I won't change my mind."

Taehyung smiles slowly, his grin turning boxy. "Can you say it again?"

Jimin stares seriously at Taehyung, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. "You don't believe me?"

Taehyung shakes his head. "I believe you. I just like to hear it." He steps forward and wraps his arm around Jimin's shoulders, bending down to whisper in his ear, "I love you."

Jimin laughs, partly embarrassed and partly delighted. There are flutters in his stomach, tickling and bubbling up, making his feet feel feather-light. He stands on his tiptoes and places a quick kiss on Taehyung's cheek. "Let me finish changing."

Taehyung steps back and tilts his head. "I don't mind staying to enjoy the show."

Jimin laughs again and pushes Taehyung's back, urging him out of the room. "Out," he says with mock sternness. "Pervert."

"I'm a lover of art!" Taehyung defends himself. "Who needs Seokjin-hyung's exhibit?"

Jimin kicks the back of Taehyung's calf in retaliation. "Out, out, I can't believe I'm dating such a cheeseball."

They arrive at the exhibit late for no reason but that Jimin couldn't stop styling his hair, running his fingers through it over and over again. Once Taehyung has parked and they have made their way to the gallery entrance, Jimin reaches down and places his hand in Taehyung's. He smiles up at the other. "Let's go."

The gallery is crowded, people bustling around with glasses of wine and flutes of champagne. There's a small orchestra somewhere on the second floor playing strings. It's all so fancy and high society, reeking of money and jewels and gold. Jimin doesn't remember any of Seokjin's other exhibits being this intricate and expensive, but he supposes the other has grown and expanded his sphere. He thinks if it was six months ago, he would have been devastated, a reminder of how far away Seokjin is from him. Now he can only smile, happy to be able to witness Seokjin's growth, secure in his spot in Seokjin's heart.

Taehyung pulls Jimin from his revelry with an excited tug on his hand. "I need to get my sketchbook," he says, eyes wide as they bypass the crowd to focus on the art work hanging on the walls. "I'll be right back."

Jimin nods and ventures into the crowd as Taehyung disappears back outside. He thankfully spots Jeongguk quickly and makes his way over to the other. "Jeongguk!" he yells over the loud din of the room.

Jeongguk smiles when he sees Jimin. "Hyung! I'm glad you made it."

"Is Seokjin-hyung around? I wanted to see him before he gets tied up with everything."

Jeongguk makes a face. "He's already been pulled away like seven times." Jeongguk scowls over his flute of champagne. "I think more people are here to flatter him than to look at the art."

Jimin hums in understanding, casting an eye on the crowd again. It's true. Most people are quickly skimming the words, their eyes flickering back to search the gallery every few moments. "But Seokjin-hyung must be happy about the turnout anyway."

Jeongguk sighs. "He's thrilled. Says even if they didn't intend to appreciate anything, it gives the artists more credit and influence."

Jimin smiles and starts to reply when Taehyung bounds out from the crowd, waving his sketchbook above his head.

"I found it!" he exclaims happily, stepping into the space beside Jimin. "Hi, Jeonggukie."

Jimin gives Taehyung a warm smile and reaches for his hand, turning his attention back to Jeongguk.

Jeongguk frowns, his expression darkening as his eyes trace Jimin's hand in Taehyung's.

"Jeongguk?" Jimin asks, concerned.

"What's this?" he responds, eyes still focused on their clasped hands, frown deepening.

"Ah..." Taehyung grins and squeezes Jimin's fingers. "We're dating now."

Jeongguk's eyes snap up to glare accusingly at Taehyung. "Since when?"

"For a few weeks-"

"Who gave you permission?"

"I did," Jimin interjects, frowning. "I don't understand the problem."

Jeongguk turns his attention back to Jimin. "He can't just come in and start dating my hyung without my consent," he says, a whine underlacing his tone.

Jimin gapes at him. "I'm not Seokjin-hyung."

"No, you're Jimin-*hyung*." He glares at Taehyung. "And I'm not sure I approve of this. No one even asked my opinion. *Again*."

Jimin blinks, mouth still agape in shock, but Taehyung steps forward and places his hands slowly on Jeongguk's shoulders. "I understand," he says seriously, voice low and gravelly. "Jimin is the most important person in this world. I'll treasure him. You have my promise."

Jimin's breath catches in his throat, those butterflies fluttering in his chest again. He doesn't know the depth of his love for Taehyung yet, he thinks, but he's starting to realize there may not be a limit to it, these overflowing feelings for him.

Jeongguk eyes Taehyung warily until Taehyung grins and takes a hand from his shoulder to pat Jeongguk's hair. "Can I date Jimin?"

"No," Jeongguk says clearly and knocks Taehyung's hand off his head.

Taehyung's mouth falls open and his shoulders slump. "Why not?" he sulks, nearly petulant.

"Because!" Jeongguk responds, just as petulantly.

Jimin giggles. He probably shouldn't. They're both reverting to elementary school levels of whining and he'll have to find a way to ease this unexpected bump in their changing dynamics. But for now he laughs because it's funny.

And because he's loved.

And because he's happy.

&&&

His grandmother is doing a terrible job of pretending to ignore him. It would be funny if Yoongi was not completely aware that he's doing the exact same thing. There's something to be said about heredity, he supposes, frowning across the gallery at his grandmother. She's watching him, glancing in his direction so often, she looks like a chicken. Whenever their eyes meet, she sniffs and looks away, tilting her chin up in defiance. He will need to be the one to approach her. He knew this and he's been dreading it. She's impossibly stubborn. He's not even sorry about how he walked out those couple of weeks ago. She was wrong. She *is* wrong.

He talked to his aunt and found out Granny had been through three rounds of intensive testing before she had been cleared. She would have gone in for surgery without telling him a word. He clenches his jaw at the thought. She was determined to take away his right to say goodbye. Again. Denying him the closure he never had with his parents.

A small voice in his head, the one that speaks in whispers that terrify him, the one that rang warning bells that first day with Seokjin in the rain, tells him that he's lying. He's not angry that his grandmother kept the truth from him. He's angry that she had to go in for testing to begin with. He's angry that she may be sick, that she may be dying. That she would abandon him to this empty world like his mother, like his father. He needed them, still needs them, and they left him, forsaken and cold. He doesn't know if he can forgive him.

He shakes his head, pushing the voice deep, deep into the dark recessed of his mind, wishing he could extinguish it forever. He sighs and looks around the gallery for Seokjin.

He scowls when he can't spot him. Probably pulled away. Again. He makes a mental note to avoid doing business with everyone who placed their hands on Seokjin's arm.

"I'm bored."

Yoongi's scowl deepens when he recognizes the voice. He arches a brow and glances at the tall man beside him. "Choi Young Do," he greets tersely.

Young Do smirks, his hands in his pockets, and tilts his head in acknowledgement. "Min Yoongi." Young Do leans on the wall, hooking his ankles together.

"What are you doing here?" Yoongi asks, leaning against the wall by Young Do. "You're not one for exhibits. Or anything that involves culture, to be honest."

"Ouch. You wound me," Young Do replies, placing a hand over his heart.

Yoongi snorts. "Did Rachel come?"

"No. That's why I'm bored."

"You're free to leave. Welcome to, even."

"I can't." Young Do sighs. "She won't let me back home until I secure *that* painting." Young Do gestures to the side of the gallery, to a large, stylized painting of a mother and child. "She looked it up online and says it looks like her."

Yoongi smiles. "Because of the baby?"

Young Do shrugs. "Who knows. She's wrong, in any case." He lulls his head to the side and smirks. "Nothing could ever capture her beauty. There's fire in her eyes."

Yoongi blinks at Young Do and shakes his head. "I know you've been like this for years, but I still can't believe how much you've become a fool in love."

Young Do seems unconcerned. "I lived five years thinking I lost her. I'll be a fool for the rest of my life if it keeps her by my side."

Something sparks in Yoongi's chest, that small voice that knows all the truths he cannot face, whispering through his mind. He doesn't want to find that out. He doesn't want to know what life will be like after Seokjin leaves.

"One year, Yoongi. I need you for one year, and then you'll never see me again."

Time keeps moving, a rushing train he cannot stop, and the end of their contract looms, dark and heavy over his head. He doesn't want it to end. His breath stutters through a shaking exhale, his fingers curl into fists. He doesn't want it to end and he has no idea what to do.

This isn't the plan.

This isn't safe and it isn't smart.

He's a fool.

His eyes catch Seokjin's tall frame climbing the stairs to their level, chatting excitedly with Jeongguk.

He wonders if Young Do's right. He wonders if it's better to be a fool in love.

&&&

There's something about the *MAMA* painting that Hoseok feels drawn to. He likes the title, bold and simple and shouting. *MAMA*. Not formal like mother, not prosaic like mom. There's an undertone of fondness and affection in the term. He thinks about his mother and smiles, tilting his head. He calls her mama, too.

He doesn't flinch when he feels arms wrap snugly and confidently around his waist, a warm chest at his back that he leans into.

"Hey baby," he says, leaning his head back for a kiss.

Namjoon presses his lips to Hoseok's for a quick kiss before ducking his head to rest his chin on Hoseok's shoulder. "Hey," Namjoon says back, linking his fingers over Hoseok's stomach. "Having a good time?"

Hoseok hums in affirmation. His fingers find Namjoon's forearms around his waist, stroking them

lightly. "Seokjinie-hyung did a good job. I really like this one."

"Hmm," Namjoon says, but he sounds distracted. "Hey babe-"

"Yeah, babe?" Hoseok replies, smiling. He shuffles to the side, trying to slowly move to the next painting while Namjoon is still attached to his back.

"Yoongi-hyung and Seokjin-hyung seem really happy," Namjoon continues, his words parsed and measured carefully, like he does when he's trying to ease Hoseok into something.

Hoseok would normally turn around in Namjoon's arms, take his boyfriend's face between his hands a little more painfully than necessary, and tell Namjoon to just spit it out. At any other time, Hoseok would have done that, but his eyes catch onto a small phrase in the postscript of the *MAMA* painting.

"We never thought Yoongi-hyung could make marriage work. At least I didn't. And he seems so happy and content." Namjoon presses his lips into Hoseok's shoulder but Hoseok's eyes are widening as he reads the postscript.

Mahal na mahal kita.

And underneath, like it's no big deal, the translation into Korean.

"So I was thinking it might be time for us to, I don't know, maybe start talking about it too. Mar-"

Hoseok slaps Namjoon's hands repeatedly. "*Mahal na mahal kita!*"

"Oh." Namjoon shifts against Hoseok, hugging him closer. "I love you too-"

"Not you! Joon!" Hoseok points at the plaque. "It says *malhal na mahal kita*. How could Seokjin-hyung just, just, just leave that out here? In the open? What if Yoongi-hyung sees it?" Hoseok gasps, horrified, and turns around in Namjoon's arms, grabbing his shirt collar and pulling. "What if he already has?"

Namjoon stares blankly at Hoseok. "You didn't hear a word I said, did you?"

"You're not listening." Hoseok releases one of his hands from Namjoon's collar and points dramatically to the general area of the plaque with the postscript. "Yoongi-hyung could just waltz right up and read this and *know*."

"I don't see what that's a pro-"

"Because for *some* reason, Seokjin-hyung isn't ready to tell hyung he's head-over-heels, I-want-to-have-babies-with-you in love – which, just for the record, is completely obvious – and we will *not* let hyung find out that monumental fact in a crowded gallery while reading a plaque. How would you feel if a huge moment in our relationship was thwarted?"

Namjoon purses his lips and says dully, "That must be awful, I can't even imagine."

"I don't know why you're pulling attitude with me right now, Namjoon. I'll let it go because we're in a crisis." Hoseok releases his boyfriend and nearly throws himself onto the plaque, trying with all his strength to pull the thing off. "Namjoon, help me with this, you break everything."

Namjoon sighs but dutifully steps beside Hoseok and tries to destroy the plaque. It must be made of some kind of super strength steel, the kind Iron Man uses or something, because it stays perfectly in place even after several attempts.

Hoseok whines and steps back, huffing from the exertion. He puts one hand on his hip and nods. "Okay there's only one thing to do." He looks at Namjoon. "You'll need to find Yoongi-hyung and make sure he stays at least twenty meters away from this. I'll go find Seokjin and get, I don't know, a marker or something to color over the hangul."

"Why do I get Yoongi-hyung?" Namjoon asks.

"Don't worry, babe, I believe in you. You can do it." He grins and pats Namjoon's chest in encouragement, getting distracted halfway through, his hands caressing more than patting. He clears his throat and steps back. "We have a mission. Good luck," he calls out, skipping into the gallery in search of Seokjin.

Yoongi and Seokjin have no idea how lucky they are to have him. He's their only hope.

&&&

The exhibit is a huge success. Seokjin can't stop smiling as he weaves through the crowd. The feedback is mostly positive, he sold many of the items already, and he just saw Yoongi chatting amicably with his grandmother, their feud presumably over. Jimin seems happy, too, his tinkling laughter hitting Seokjin's ears as he goes around the room with Taehyung. They're good together, Seokjin thinks. Jimin deserves to be happy and it looks like Taehyung knows how to make that happen.

It is, Seokjin thinks, a very good evening.

"Hyung, there is a *huge* problem," Hoseok pants, rushing to his side. Hoseok immediately grabs at Seokjin, his arm and hands and wrists and anywhere he can to grab his attention.

Seokjin's eyes widen and he glances to the side of the gallery where he last spotted Yoongi, thinking his feud with Granny escalated to an all-out war. But no, they're still talking nicely together and even trying to hide their smiles from each other. He turns back to Hoseok, frowning in concern. "What's wrong?"

"*MAMA*," Hoseok huffs out, swallowing hard to regain his breath, apparently still recovering from running all over the building looking for him.

"Is your mom okay?" Seokjin asks, distressed, fingers curling around Hoseok's hold.

Hoseok groans in frustration and shakes his head. "Not *my* mama."

"Who's mom? Namjoon's? Is she okay?"

Hoseok stamps his feet, shaking his head more violently. "No one's mom. *MAMA*. That painting you just, just, just put up for everyone to see."

Seokjin furrows his brow. "That's the purpose of an exhibit, Hoseok."

"Hey." Namjoon steps up to them, placing a hand on the small of Hoseok's back and smiling at Seokjin. "You did a great job on the exhibit, hyung."

Seokjin grins. "Thank you-"

"What are you doing here?" Hoseok interrupts, releasing Seokjin to grab onto Namjoon. "I told you to watch Yoongi-hyung."

Namjoon sighs. "He's with his grandmother, you expect me to hang around like a creep when they're talking?"

"Yes!" Hoseok releases Namjoon and turns in a swift circle, eyes scanning the room. He stops short, a panicked gasp strangling in his throat, his hands flying out to grab both Namjoon and Seokjin. "Worst case scenario!"

Seokjin follows Hoseok's gaze and sees Yoongi meandering by the paintings, approaching the *MAMA* painting that Hoseok seems obsessed with. "What-"

"We need a distraction," Hoseok says to no one in particular. He grabs a glass of wine from a passing waiter and makes an apologetic face to Seokjin. "You'll thank me later, hyung," he says before splashing the deep red liquid on Seokjin's suit jacket.

Seokjin yells in surprise, stepping back and examining the damage to his suit. "Hoseok, what was that?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Hoseok affects. "How clumsy of me. Look, Yoongi-hyung's got napkins."

Seokjin glances up just as Yoongi reaches him, handing him a stack of napkins. Seokjin doesn't even know how Yoongi acquired so many napkins so quickly, but he's thankful. He takes them with a smile and starts to dab at his jacket, hoping to get as much of the liquid out before it starts to stick.

"Hyung, you okay?" Yoongi asks, fingers reaching out to lift the bottom hem of Seokjin's suit jacket. He frowns. "Hyung, it got on your pants too."

Seokjin sighs. "It'll be fine. I have some wet wipes in my office."

"I'll come with you," Yoongi says, following Seokjin out of the gallery and through the hallway to the office spaces. "It looks like you spilled an entire glass of wine," he notes as they enter Seokjin's office.

Seokjin sighs, hitting the light switch on and removing his suit jacket. "It was," he says, moving to his desk to find the wipes in one of his drawers. He makes a sound of triumph when he finds the package of wipes, pulling them out and placing them on the desk. "I saw you talking to your grandmother earlier tonight."

Yoongi rounds the desk, handing Seokjin his discarded suit jacket. He reaches for the wipes and pulls one out, humming noncommittally. "Yeah." He doesn't look at Seokjin, his eyes trained on the wine stain on Seokjin's pants, trailing over his hip and down his pockets.

Seokjin smiles, dabbing at his suit jacket. "Have you two made up yet?"

"Hmm." Yoongi shrugs, focused on wiping Seokjin's hip clean.

He wraps one hand around Seokjin's waist to keep him steady, thumb just under his ribcage, grip firm but gentle. He's close, his scent enveloping the air around them, deep and heady and sweet undertones that remind Seokjin of plum blossoms and springtime. Seokjin breathes in slowly, letting Yoongi's scent penetrate his lungs, filter through into his veins, tainting him. Yoongi's eyes are downcast, focused on the stain on Seokjin's pants. His eyelashes are dark against his skin, fanned out as if by design.

Seokjin keeps his breath in his lungs, suddenly afraid to move, all too caught up in Yoongi and his scent and his presence. He can count the freckles on the bridge of his nose again. He thinks he's the only one to know their number, and the thought makes his chest squeeze almost painfully.

He wonders if Yoongi stumbled on the plaque that reads *mahal na mahal kita* yet. It's cowardly, but Seokjin hopes Yoongi sees it. He doesn't even know if Yoongi remembers what he said all those weeks ago, under the bright lights of the airport, his luggage heavy in his hands. He probably doesn't, but a little spark inside Seokjin hopes he's wrong. Hopes Yoongi kept those words and placed them under his heart. He hopes Yoongi finds the translation into Korean and writes it into his lungs so he exhales it with every breath.

It's cowardly. Seokjin should be saying those words out loud, should be sending them directly from his lips to Yoongi's ears. He's hesitant. He's afraid of pushing Yoongi too fast, too far. He wants to stay, stay until October, until November, until December, for Yoongi's thirtieth, fortieth, fiftieth birthday. He wants it so badly, he can't risk it messing it up. Not yet, he tells himself. He's patient. He can wait.

Seokjin puts his suit jacket down on his desk and reaches for Yoongi's hand that rests comfortably on his waist, sliding his fingers over Yoongi's. Yoongi stops dabbing at Seokjin's clothes and glances up, inquiring.

Seokjin can't say the words yet but he thinks he can show them. He places his free hand under Yoongi's jaw, thumbing over his chin, urging him closer. Yoongi's eyelids drop until they are half-lidded and he tilts his head up slightly, mouth parting minutely in invitation.

Seokjin closes the rest of the distance between them, sliding his lips across Yoongi's. It's firm but unhurried. There's a sense of urgency in Seokjin's kiss, pressure and depth and a hint of desperation, but there is no haste. He savours the flavour of wine on Yoongi's lips, dragging his tongue over them. Yoongi breathes in slowly, his fingers tightening on Seokjin's waist, fingers digging into his side.

Yoongi leans closer, his other hand trailing up Seokjin's chest, fingertips brushing over his collarbone, curling around his neck. He doesn't pull Seokjin closer, doesn't hold him in place. He just rests his fingers there, cool and steady. Seokjin's breath shudders and he lets out a soft sound from the back of his throat. He closes his eyes and presses deeper into the kiss.

Yoongi pulls back, sliding his lips against Seokjin's jaw and down the right side of his throat, quick, insistent nips at the sensitive skin there.

Seokjin sighs shakily and leans his forehead on Yoongi's shoulder, his hand sliding down to rest over Yoongi's heart. He thinks he can feel the beat of it, an echoed resonance of his own. "Yoongi," he whispers, turning his head to nose into Yoongi's shoulder, breathing him in slowly. "Yoongi," he repeats, like a prayer, like a wish, like a dream he doesn't want to wake up from.

Yoongi's hand is still firm on his waist. He presses his hand over Yoongi's, holding them together there. *Don't let go*, he pleads silently.

Don't let go.

&&&

As much as Yoongi would have liked to stay with Seokjin in his office, pressing kisses to every area of exposed skin his lips could find, someone eventually comes looking for them. Seokjin left with an apologetic smile and a quick peck on his cheek before he went back out into the gallery. Yoongi takes his time in Seokjin's office, slipping into Seokjin's desk chair and leaning back, swivelling back and forth with his feet planted on the floor. He tries to bring himself down from the high Seokjin placed him on, but his lips still pulse and his fingers still tingle where they held Seokjin.

He clears his throat and brings his fingers up to rub at his lips, trying to numb the sensation. He wonders when these flutterings will stop, when every look Seokjin throws him will cease to make his breath catch in his throat. He wonders when Seokjin's taste will dull in his mouth, the mint fresh and sharp on his tongue still.

He spins in the chair and stares up at the ceiling, his mind a jumbled mess of what ifs and maybes and idle wonderings that he knows he's not supposed to have. He sighs and shifts in the chair. He should probably head back out to the crowd and mingle. He lulls his head against the chair and reaches thoughtlessly for a stack of papers on Seokjin's desk. He's never been in Seokjin's office before and Seokjin's chair is comfortable. There's something comforting and warm about the office. Maybe it's Seokjin's decorating or merely the fact that it's Seokjin's space, but Yoongi feels relaxed, the edge of socializing dimmed and his mind at ease. He thinks he can justify a few more moments here.

He flips through the papers, a couple pieces of random doodles, a scribble of meeting notes, and the program for the exhibit. He turns the pages of the program, skimming the pages, pride and admiration for Seokjin's efforts making his lips tilt up in a smile. Seokjin worked hard on this and the results are amazing.

His fingers turn the pages steadily but he freezes when he thinks he catches a glimpse of something, the paper already falling to the next section. He flips backwards, eyes scanning quickly over the image of a mother holding her child, to the words that caught his attention.

He grins suddenly and thinks his patience has finally paid off. *Mahal na mahal kita*, it says, a postscript from the artist. His breath stops in his lungs when he reads the hangul that follows underneath. His grin drops and his eyes widen.

The program falls from his hands and he doesn't know how he's still conscious when his heart has stopped in his chest. His toes and finger and the tips of his ears tingle. He's hot and he's cold and he can't quite seem to catch his breath. This is everything he swore he would never fall into.

This is everything he wants to drown in, a flood he has no desire to defend against.

He bends over and places his head in his hands, his chest expanding with a sharp inhale. He shuts his eyes, but he can still see the words, gleaming and blinding and shimmering .

I love you very much.

Yoongi bites his teeth together, a storm shaking in the confines of his chest with every exhale.

He remembers the hundred emotions that flickered over Seokjin's face when he said the words, the press of his thumb rubbing circles on Yoongi's arm, his voice dripping like falling rain.

I love you very much.

He's scared. He's terrified. He's afraid of letting Seokjin love him.

And even more worrying, he's afraid of letting Seokjin go.

&&&

Yoongi doesn't sleep well that night, restless and fitful. He tries to drift off, tries to fall into the warmth and comfort of the bed and the rhythmic, soothing pattern of Seokjin's breathing. He closes his eyes and tells himself to empty his mind and forget. He wants to pretend he never discovered the meaning of those words, pretend he doesn't understand the weight of them as they passed carefully

from Seokjin's lips.

He gives up around three in the morning, turning on his side to watch Seokjin sleep. He's gotten used to this, Seokjin by his side, a warmth in his bed. He got used to Seokjin texting him when he stays too long in the office. He's used to Seokjin laughing at his own jokes, laughter filling up the barren spaces of his apartment, coloring the air in welcoming hues Yoongi didn't know he wanted.

He thinks back to the beginning of this whole thing. It was a contract, a way out of his grandmother's obsessive scheming. He should have been able to endure one year unscathed and unaffected. He shouldn't be having these thoughts, eyes unflinchingly focused on Seokjin's peaceful face. He's not ready to end their agreement. He's not ready to give up walks in the park with Seokjin and voicemails from him when Yoongi doesn't pick up his phone. He wants to be the first to wish Seokjin a happy birthday again.

"One year, Yoongi. I need you for one year, and then you'll never see me again."

Yoongi closes his eyes, the words Seokjin spoke all those months ago re-emerging and taunting him.

He doesn't know where Seokjin is planning to leave to. He doesn't know where Seokjin will run to. He doesn't know if he could find him again if he did truly leave.

"I swear I won't. I swear, just watch me." Yoongi's own words, uttered at the tender age of seventeen, angry and helpless and lost, echo through him, resounding off the edges of his ribcage, reminding him. He exhales shakily, his fingers curling into fists. He knows what he has to do.

He gets up at dawn, the sun seeping through the sky like water, diluting the deepest black to navy and royal blue, before the hues of pink and yellow and purple color the horizon bright and dazzling.

Seokjin stirs at the movement, face scrunching up in discomfort. He groans sleepily, his hand chasing Yoongi. "Wha-" he croaks, voice cracking with exhaustion.

Yoongi puts his knee on the bed and bends over Seokjin's form, tucking the comforter softly around him. "I have someplace I need to go," he whispers. "I'll be back soon."

Seokjin's brow furrows in disagreement but he drifts back into sleep quickly. Yoongi dresses and leaves the apartment as quietly as he can, heading down to his car.

It's early and the roads are nearly empty. It's an odd sort of isolation, a quiet in the usually bustling streets of Seoul. Yoongi usually doesn't pay attention to the drive. He always travels to this destination mechanically, mind heavy and burdened, a dark gloom on his shoulders. This time, he looks around, finds small cafes opening up for the business day, and pots of flowers hanging from the lamp posts. There's a park at the halfway mark and Yoongi wonders why he never noticed it before, trees and a field of grass bright and welcoming. He has a fleeting thought that it must look pretty in the spring, with cherry blossoms painting the trees pink. He thinks Seokjin would like to go. His fingers grip the steering wheel until his knuckles turn white.

The drive is short at this time in the morning, and he finds a parking spot right away. He frowns as he locks his car door and heads to the entrance of the large building. He should have bought flowers. His mom always like flowers.

He makes his way to the upper level, taking the stairs like he always does. His footsteps echo as they click on the glossy marble floor. He slows as he approaches his destination, a spot he knows well. He stops and shifts on his feet for a few moments, staring straight ahead at the two spots that hold all that's left of his parents, their urns shining and sparkling. Framed photos of his mother and his father

smiling take up most of the space. His father's favourite watch is in his niche, a diamond-studded Rolex. His father really never had any subtlety. His mother's niche is simpler, the only luxury is the pendant from her lucky necklace, a hollow silver heart, clean and prosaic.

There are flowers in a small vase in his mother's niche, not quite fresh. They are drooping a little, the beginnings of a wilt. Yoongi presses his lips together.

"I guess Taehyung came you visit you," he starts, nodding to the flowers. His voice echoes in the empty hall and he clears his throat, uncomfortable. He shifts and steps closer, lowering his voice so it won't bounce off the walls, hitting his ears with the loneliness of it. "Does he come by often?"

Yoongi reaches a hand up to rub at the back of his neck. He came here for a reason, he reminds himself. He flicks his eyes to his father's niche, that wide, teasing smile on his father's photo. They're almost the same age now. It feels wrong. His father was always a giant to him, several steps ahead, a goal to reach. It's wrong, he thinks. He shouldn't be catching up to his father like this.

He brings his hand down from his neck and fiddles with the ring on his left finger. "I got married." He tilts his head. "You know that. I told you that before." He frowns and looks down at his feet, shuffling his left foot idly against the dark marble floor. "I told you, before, I said it wasn't real. It wasn't real. It wasn't."

He inhales slowly and peeks up to look at his mother. "It wasn't supposed to be real."

His voice still echoes, hitting his ears on the rebound, repeating his words back to him. "He's supposed to leave, in two months. That was the plan. That was our agreement. He's supposed to leave and I never have to think about him again and life can go back to the way it was."

He presses his lips together. "He loves me, Mom." He blinks rapidly and looks up, throat suddenly thick, his words repeating back to him in echo, resonating into his chest with the beat of his heart.

He huffs out a short breath, frustrated, blinking to keep his eyes dry. He bites his bottom lip and finally gathers the words to the question that's been haunting him, for hours and day and weeks and months. "Do you think...do you think he'll stay?"

He's terrified. He wants Seokjin to stay. He wants it too much, the desire clawing at the edges of his ribcage. It's dangerous to need someone that much.

People leave. People can love and still leave. His mother and father couldn't promise forever with him. He can't expect anything more from Seokjin.

He can't expect more.

"I want him to stay," Yoongi whispers and wonders if he's been wrong for all these years. Maybe he can have expectations. Maybe he can fall in love.

Maybe Seokjin will stay.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really really sappy and if you haven't figured this out by now idk. Idk.

Secret Garden

Chapter Notes

You may have noticed I finally put a number of chapters up. I'm close enough to the end to know roughly what needs to be done. It *may* change by one more chapter depending on how writing goes, but ~generally~ this will be 20 chapters. /pew. We're almost there guys.

Thank you again, seriously, you're amazing. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Seokjin frowns, his hands pausing over his laptop. He looks up, craning his neck to look over the edge of the sofa towards the foyer. He thinks he just heard the front door unlock but Yoongi's not supposed to be home for hours, stuck in a full day of meetings. Seokjin sets the laptop from his lap to the coffee table and stands, stepping around the sofa and peeking out of the living room to the foyer.

"Oh, hey hyung," Taehyung greets, smiling almost sheepishly, one shoe off and the other halfway. "I thought you'd be at work right now."

Seokjin crosses his arms over his chest and cocks his hip. He tilts his chin in the direction of the entrance. "Since when did you figure out the new code?"

Taehyung shrugs and proceeds to kick his other shoe off. "It wasn't hard. What happened on October seventh?" He wiggles his eyebrows suggestively. "Anything fun?"

Seokjin thinks back to October seventh, meeting Yoongi in a cafe in Gangnam, a blank white page between them on the table and Yoongi's long fingers writing out the their beginning and their ending. Seokjin purses his lips, the reminder of the ever-ticking flow of time unwelcome.

He sighs and says instead, "Why are you here?"

Taehyung grins. "I have a fancy date with Jiminie and I wanted to borrow one of Yoongi-hyung's Rolex watches. The rose gold one with all the diamonds."

"Does Yoongi know this?"

"Of course not." Taehyung shakes his head in disappointment at Seokjin. "Why do you think I'm sneaking in?"

"So you're a thief."

Taehyung holds up a hand. "It's not stealing if you're related. And I'm bringing it right back."

Seokjin sighs again and uncrosses his arms, heading back to the work on his laptop. "Fine. Just don't make a mess. And I'm not covering for you if you get caught!"

Taehyung gives Seokjin a sudden and quick backhug before bounding up the stairs to the bedroom. "You're the best, hyung!"

Seokjin smiles, listening to Taehyung's random noises of appreciation, loud enough to travel from the closet to the living room.

"These jeans, hyung!" Taehyung calls down. "Scandalous."

Seokjin laughs and continues to type up his proposal. He doesn't realize it at first, but the rooms upstairs have suddenly grown strangely quiet. Seokjin blinks and strains his ear, but he cannot hear Taehyung's excited murmuring anymore. He frowns and shifts to look over at the staircase.

Taehyung walks slowly down the stairs, each step measured and heavy. His face is impassive, tension in the set of his jaw. Seokjin doesn't think he's ever seen Taehyung look so serious before.

"Taehyung? Are you okay?" he asks, but Taehyung doesn't look at him, eyes trained on a white sheet of paper in his hands. "Taehyung?"

Taehyung walks slowly into the living room, only looking up when he reaches Seokjin. He holds out the paper in his hand. "What's this?"

Seokjin furrows his brow and glances at the paper, heart stopping in his chest and a spike of anxiety flowing in his veins. He grabs the paper out of Taehyung's hand. "Where did you find this?"

"It was under Yoongi-hyung's watches. What the hell is it, hyung?" Taehyung's voice trembles and his face falls. "Hyung, it's a joke, right? You don't – you don't really have a contract with Yoongi-hyung."

Seokjin's expression hardens and he arches a brow. "It's none of your business."

"I thought you guys were real! I thought you were really genuine," Taehyung says, betrayal and disappointment thick in his tone.

"Forget you ever saw this," Seokjin orders, folding up the contract and slipping it safely into his pants pocket. Panic clouds his thinking. He never planned for anyone to discover the contract. He doesn't know how to explain it to Jeongguk. He doesn't know how to explain it to Granny. He presses his lips together. He had been hoping that the secrecy of their agreement would help Seokjin broach the subject of staying with Yoongi. He cannot predict the outcome now that Taehyung knows, and that unknown makes his fears grow three times as large.

"I knew you were strangers," Taehyung continues, eyes focused on Seokjin, voice insistent. "I knew this was all Granny's idea but I thought you were really sincere. I thought you were really making it work!"

"And I thought you had the decency to respect other people's privacy," Seokjin grits out.

"I *asked* you. I asked if you were being careful with Yoongi-hyung. I asked if you liked him and you said *yes*."

Seokjin's jaw clenches. "I didn't lie, Taehyung."

Taehyung scoffs and rolls his eyes.

"I didn't lie," Seokjin repeats, voice firm and authoritative.

Taehyung's expression flickers, doubt warring with his anger. "But you're going to divorce in two months," he says slowly, more a posit for affirmation than a question.

Seokjin swallows. "We haven't talked about it."

Taehyung sneers. "I see." He turns on his heel, heading to the door.

"You can't tell Jimin," Seokjin calls out almost desperately.

Taehyung glances over his shoulder at Seokjin. "I tell him everything."

"If you tell Jimin, he'll tell Jeongguk and the whole thing unravels. Taehyung, you can't."

"Maybe you should have thought about that before you wrote up a marriage contract." Taehyung shoves his feet into his shoes, not even bothering to put them on properly, stepping on the backs so they fold down. He storms out of the apartment, making sure the door slams behind him.

Seokjin inhales shakily, anxiety choking at his throat. Everything is crumbling and he doesn't know what to do. He acts on instinct, grabbing his phone from the living room and dialling a now familiar number. He paces the length of the room and lets the phone ring once before he realizes how ridiculous he's being.

Yoongi keeps his phone on silent.

Yoongi is in meetings all day.

Yoongi never picks up his calls.

Frustrated with himself, Seokjin hangs up quickly and runs a hand through his hair. He's always handled disasters on his own, without anyone's help. He always relies solely on himself. He doesn't know when his instinct changed, when his first response is to lean on Yoongi's strength.

His thoughts are interrupted with the sharp vibrations and twinkling music of his phone ringing. He jolts, eyes widening to see Yoongi's name on the call display. He slides the answer button and presses the phone to his ear.

"Are you pocket dialing me?" Yoongi asks, amusement evident in his voice. "You hung up after one ring."

Seokjin lets out a long, slow breath, the pounding in his head easing with just the sound of Yoongi's voice, a balm to soothe his frazzled mind. "Taehyung found the contract," he says without preamble.

Yoongi is silent for a moment before he says, "What?"

"Taehyung found the marriage contract and now he's going to tell Jimin and Jimin will tell Jeongguk _"

"Okay, it's okay Seokjin-hyung," Yoongi says, voice calmingly even. "Where's Taehyung right now?"

"I don't know, he just left." Seokjin sighs and collapses onto the sofa, rubbing his hand over his eyes. "How am I going to explain this to Jeongguk?"

"Are you home?"

"Yeah."

"I'm heading right over. Just hang on, we'll figure this out," Yoongi assures him.

"Okay," Seokjin says, focusing on inhaling and exhaling slowly, measured breaths that take his heart rate back to a proper beat.

"It'll be okay, hyung," Yoongi says before hanging up.

Seokjin lowers his phone to his side, unsure if he believes Yoongi or not.

&&&

Yoongi is nearly home when his phone lights up with Taehyung's name. He swipes to answer the incoming call quickly. "Where are you? Do you have any idea how upset Seokjin-hyung is?" he asks without any preamble.

Taehyung is silent for a moment and Yoongi opens his mouth to prompt again when Taehyung says slowly, "I think we need to talk."

"Where are you?" Yoongi repeats.

"I'm in a cafe near your place."

"I'll be right there," Yoongi says, hanging up and redirecting his route to get to the cafe.

He finds Taehyung in a booth near the back, frowning seriously at a large mug of coffee. Yoongi slides into the booth, sitting opposite of Taehyung. The other glances up, his brow lowered and mouth set, eyes searching over Yoongi's face as if trying to piece him apart.

"Is it true?" Taehyung starts. "Was it really a contract marriage?"

Yoongi presses his lips together and arches a brow. "It was," he says defiantly.

Taehyung sneers, shaking his head at Yoongi in judgement. "How could you do that? How could you lie to all of us?"

"It was easy," Yoongi responds, folding his arms across his chest. "When I was *forced* into a marriage without any consideration of my feelings. When you willingly helped Granny manipulate me."

There's a flicker of guilt in Taehyung's eyes before he says with bravado, "Seokjin-hyung has been good to you."

"It was still a marriage against my will. You think just because hyung is a good person, that makes it okay?"

"You didn't have to resort to a contract." Taehyung looks away, down at his mug again. "I really thought you were getting better. That Seokjin-hyung was good for you."

Yoongi sighs. "There was nothing wrong with me to begin with."

"You don't really believe that," Taehyung answers, running his finger along the edge of his mug.

Yoongi frowns and shifts in the booth. "Seokjin is afraid you'll tell Jeongguk about the contract," he says instead, avoiding Taehyung's observation.

Taehyung tilts his chin up. "He deserves to know."

"I'm asking you, as your blood-related cousin, to stay quiet," Yoongi says, meeting Taehyung's gaze.

He needs Taehyung's promise. He needs to fix this for Seokjin.

Taehyung scoffs and rolls his eyes. "It's September, hyung," he says.

"I know what month it is."

"It's *September*, hyung," Taehyung repeats. "I read the contract. It'll all be out in the open in two months. Isn't it better to stop lying now and just come clean?"

"It won't be over in two months," Yoongi says, ignoring the way his heart thumps in his chest as he puts his thoughts into words.

Taehyung blinks and tilts his head, confused.

"I'm going to ask hyung to stay," Yoongi continues, looking down at Taehyung's mug on the table, eyes transfixed on it. "Telling everyone about the contract will only make things difficult."

"You said you were forced into this marriage against your will."

"I was."

"Then why..." Taehyung trails off slowly, realization brightening his eyes. He leans close over the table. "Do you love Seokjin-hyung?"

Yoongi's eyes flicker and he presses his lips together. "I need your promise that you won't tell anyone about the contract."

"You haven't answered my question."

Yoongi frowns and looks back at Taehyung. "Because I'm not going to." He arches a brow. "So? Your promise?"

Taehyung considers him carefully, his eyes narrowing. Finally he settles back against the booth and nods. "I won't tell anyone."

Yoongi gestures to Taehyung. "Call Seokjin-hyung and tell him that." He gets up from the booth to leave.

"Do you think he'll stay?" Taehyung asks, arresting Yoongi's steps.

Yoongi inhales sharply and straightens his shoulders. "That's up to him," he says after a long pause, even as his heart beats *yes, yes, yes*, it's hopeful rhythm singing through his veins.

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Seokjin jerks awake, heart pounding, his breath coming in short pants. He squeezes his eyes shut and holds his breath, attempting to restart the rhythm of his breathing. He glances briefly at the clock even though he doesn't need to for him to know what time it is. Three in the morning.

It's not unexpected this time. The anxiety from earlier still runs through his veins, still churns in his stomach. Even after Taehyung called to tell Seokjin he would keep the marriage contract a secret. Even after Yoongi came home with three bags of Seokjin's favorite take out, putting on a movie and making stupid, silly chatter all night to bring Seokjin's anxiety back down.

Seokjin eases out of bed, letting Yoongi's hand on his hip slip back onto the sheets. He tiptoes out of the room and makes his way to the kitchen by habit. The kettle is already pre-filled and Seokjin hits

the on switch, the process of preparing his cup of tea cathartic. His heart beat is nearly under his control again.

"Make me one, too."

Seokjin jumps, startled, at the sudden voice, deep and gravelly and cracking with sleep. He shuts the cabinet door and glances at Yoongi with wide eyes. Yoongi doesn't meet his gaze, sleepily shuffling into the kitchen with eyes still half-closed. He reaches the counter where Seokjin is standing and shifts until he can jump to sit on the countertop, legs dangling over the edge.

Seokjin frowns. "Sorry, did I wake you up?" he asks softly, remorseful. He runs a hand soothingly on Yoongi's knee. "Go back to bed."

Yoongi leans against the cupboard and shakes his head, eyes closed. "Can't sleep when you're upset." He gestures weakly to the kettle. "Make me a cup, too."

"You don't drink tea."

Yoongi's nose scrunches in displeasure. "You make me do a lot of things I don't usually do." He lulls his head to the side and cracks his eyes open. "Tea, please."

Seokjin presses his lips together, blinking rapidly to keep his composure. His chest swells with love for Yoongi, for the way he cares for Seokjin in silent, subtle ways. For the way he probably convinced Taehyung to keep the contract a secret without taking credit for it. For the way he seems to know Seokjin's troubles before he can even build up the words. For the way he holds Seokjin's hand, like he doesn't want to let Seokjin go.

Seokjin blows out a shuddering breath and swallows down the words he most wants to say again. *I love you. I love you. I love you.*

He steps between Yoongi's dangling legs and bends his head to rest on Yoongi's chest, leaning into him.

Yoongi's arms come around his shoulders automatically, hands rubbing small circles in his back. "Are you okay, hyung?" he asks, voice still rough and sleepy.

"Hmm." Seokjin falls into Yoongi's strength and nods against his shoulder. "Yeah, I'll be okay."

Yoongi presses his lips to the crown of Seokjin's head, silent.

Eventually, Yoongi's hands stop making circles and Seokjin suspects Yoongi may have fallen back asleep until Yoongi says quietly, "Hyung. Do you want to meet my parents?"

Seokjin blinks and pulls back enough to see Yoongi's face. His eyes search Yoongi's, uncertain. Yoongi hardly speaks about his parents. Most of what he's learnt about them has been gleaned from Taehyung and Granny. Seokjin cautions himself on reading too much into Yoongi's offer, but he can't help the spark of hope in his chest. Yoongi trusts him enough to introduce him to his parents.

Yoongi frowns, looking away as Seokjin's silence stretches on. "I mean, it's not a big deal, if you don't want to--"

"I want," Seokjin says, smiling softly at Yoongi. "I want to meet them."

Yoongi hums and leans his head back onto the cabinet, closing his eyes again. "We can go tomorrow, if you like." He tugs Seokjin back into his chest, patting lazily on his back.

Seokjin smiles against the fabric of Yoongi's shirt. "Yoongi, are you going to fall asleep here?"

Yoongi makes a weak noise.

Seokjin wraps his arms around Yoongi's waist and lifts him down off the counter. Yoongi whines but Seokjin keeps his arms around Yoongi's waist and walks them out of the kitchen. "Come on. Let's go back to bed."

Yoongi yawns and nods, shuffling with Seokjin up the stairs.

Seokjin doesn't realize until morning that he never even made the tea, the adrenaline and restlessness already cleansed from his veins.

&&&

The mausoleum is large and impressive, marble flooring and a glass ceiling that floods all the floors with natural sunlight. Yoongi walks in front of Seokjin, steps sure and practiced, glancing back at Seokjin every once in a while to give him a small smile.

Seokjin smiles back at him, holding a bouquet of white lilies close to his chest. "Are they near?" he asks as Yoongi slows down.

Yoongi points to a small nook. "They're here."

They turn around the corner and Seokjin spots them before Yoongi can even point them out. It's Yoongi's cute nose on his mother's face, and Yoongi's gummy smile on his father's face, bright and sparkly, even through the photo. He recognizes them from Yoongi's bedroom and the few times Granny has given him some photos, smiling fondly at them.

Yoongi walks up to the niche and waits for Seokjin to stand beside him before he gestures to his side. "Mom, Dad. This is Seokjin."

"Ah, Yoongi, hold these," Seokjin says, handing the bouquet of lilies to Yoongi. He steps back and tugs up his pant bottoms slightly before he proceeds to perform a grand bow, folding himself onto the floor two full times and one half bow in formal greeting to Yoongi's parents. When he's done, he stands, brushing his pants quickly and taking the bouquet back from Yoongi. He smiles at the pictures of Yoongi's mother and father and steps forward. "Hello, my name is Jeon Seokjin, but I'm sure Granny has already told you all about me."

Yoongi snorts behind him.

"What? You think she hasn't? I'm her favorite grandson," Seokjin says, arching a brow at Yoongi.

"Just say hello to my parents," Yoongi replies, waving his hand to urge Seokjin to turn back to the niche.

"Your son is annoyingly tsundere sometimes," he says in a mock whisper. He lays the bouquet of flowers onto the ledge of the niche. "Yoongi told me you liked lilies. I hope these will last for a while."

He steps back and reaches out for Yoongi's arm, linking his around Yoongi's elbow.

"They were very beautiful, Yoongi," he says quietly, eyes roaming the photos and items on the shelf.

Yoongi's lips tug into an almost wistful smile. "Yeah."

"Do you get your love of Rolex watches from your dad?"

"I get it from Granny, actually. She must have shares in the company." He nods his head to his father. "Every birthday, she'd give him a new one. That one...." Yoongi trails off, frowning. "That one was from his last birthday."

Seokjin presses his lips together and nods. "I see." He tugs Yoongi's arm slightly and peers down at him. "Are you doing okay?"

Yoongi nods. "Of course. I'm fine. They've been gone for a long time. It's no big deal."

Seokjin frowns, not quite believing Yoongi, but he senses Yoongi wants to move on. His eyes catch sight of a simple heart-shaped pendant by Yoongi's mother's photo. "Is that from your mother's favorite necklace?"

"Hmm?"

Seokjin points. "The heart."

Yoongi frowns, silent, brow lowered and several thoughts flickering through his eyes. "Yeah. It was her lucky charm. She was wearing it the night she met my dad." Yoongi presses his lips together. "She wasn't wearing it that night. When she was in the accident."

"Are you sure you're okay to do this?" Seokjin asks, concerned.

Yoongi nods and sends him a small smile. "I'm fine. Really. It doesn't bother me anymore."

Before Seokjin can probe deeper, Yoongi moves on, changing the subject to work and Mikyung and Granny. Seokjin listens to Yoongi talking to his parents, and adds a few comments when he feels like Yoongi missed something pertinent.

Eventually Yoongi says his goodbyes and steps back, turning to leave. Seokjin doesn't move, still contemplating the photos. Yoongi stops and turns to look at Seokjin, questioning. "Are you coming?"

"Ah. I kind of wanted a word in private with them." He locks eyes with Yoongi. "If that's okay."

Yoongi blinks at him, his mouth parting slightly. He licks his lips and asks, "You want to talk to my parents alone?"

Seokjin nods. "If it's okay with you."

"What are you going to tell them?"

Seokjin smiles teasingly. "All your dirty little secrets."

Yoongi scoffs and slips his hands in his pant pockets. "Sure, it's fine. I'll wait for you outside."

Seokjin's expression softens. "Thank you, Yoongi."

"Un." Yoongi nods to himself and turns on his heel, his footsteps clipping along the marble floor.

Seokjin waits until he cannot hear Yoongi's footsteps anymore before he turns back to Yoongi's parents. He smiles shyly and leans closer to them. "Hi," he says softly. "We met before. At the apartment. Do you remember?"

He straightens and smiles at them. "Ah, I knew you would. I'm hard to forget." He pauses, his smile fading and his eyes growing serious. "I just wanted to thank you. For bringing Yoongi into this world. He's," Seokjin pauses again, glancing in the direction where Yoongi left. "He was an anchor when I couldn't hold on anymore."

He turns back to them and ducks his head sheepishly. "I wanted to tell you not to worry about him. He's doing great. Everyone loves him." He nods, satisfied with the conversation. "I hope..." He purses his lips and takes a deep breath. "I hope I'll be able to visit you again, next year. I'd like to. If Yoongi wants."

He places his hands by his thighs and bows in parting, only feelings slightly sheepish.

Yoongi is waiting for him outside the mausoleum, leaned against the building by the door, one ankle hooked around the other. He glances up when he hears Seokjin's approach. "What'd you talk to them about for so long?"

"I told them you never stack the dishwasher. Your father was so mad," Seokjin says, smiling widely.

Yoongi snorts, a laugh huffing out. He takes Seokjin's hand in his and pulls him forward, walking to the car. "Come on, let's go eat."

"Hey, Yoongi," Seokjin starts, eyes flickering over Yoongi's profile.

"Hmm?"

"You know how I told you I have to go to Busan for a few days for work and I'm going to spend Chuseok down there with my mom?"

Yoongi scrunches up his nose in displeasure. "Yeah, you'll be gone a whole week. Why?"

Seokjin takes a deep breath and pushes past the hesitation. "I'd like you to come."

Yoongi stops, his hand twitching in Seokjin's.

"To Busan. To meet my mom. If you want."

"Yes," Yoongi answers incredibly quickly.

Seokjin laughs, surprised at the speed of his reply. "Don't you need to clear it with Granny first?"

"It's fine, she'll be fine, she'll hardly notice I'm gone. I'm coming." Yoongi grins up at him. "I want to."

Seokjin smiles and links their fingers together. "Good."

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Yoongi cannot stop staring. It's not like he hasn't seen it before but somehow it's different. Enticing. Alluring. Indecent. Torture.

Yoongi purses his lips, watching the light play over the smooth, golden skin of Seokjin's thigh. Seokjin moves his leg, the denim shifting to reveal more skin, white frayed fabric acting almost like a frame.

"Stop staring, Yoongi," Seokjin says, his lips quirked in an amused smile, eyes focused on the road as he steps on the gas pedal a little harder, passing another slower moving car.

"I'm not staring," Yoongi lies, not moving his eyes from Seokjin's thighs.

"Such a liar," Seokjin teases.

"I'm not the one who forgot half his pants."

"It's hot," Seokjin reasons.

"Very hot," Yoongi agrees. "Who gave you those?"

"Namjoonie," Seokjin sing-songs. "He's brilliant, isn't he?"

Yoongi wonders if he is, or if he's a menace. Maybe both. He finally shifts his eyes from Seokjin's thigh to his face and scowls. "You're enjoying this."

"Immensely." Seokjin peeks over at him and laughs, wide-mouthed, the corners of his eyes scrunching up. "Do I look that nice, Yoongi?"

Yoongi scowls again. "You know that you do."

"Hmm." Seokjin smiles and takes one hand off of the steering wheel to grab Yoongi's. Yoongi spreads his fingers to entwine their hands, but frowns when Seokjin resists. Instead, he tugs Yoongi's hand over the center console to rest on his thigh, half on the denim and half on the exposed skin of the excessively large hole.

Yoongi's eyes widen and his fingers tighten automatically on Seokjin's thigh.

"Enjoy it while you can," Seokjin says and looks over to wink at Yoongi. "Because you can't feel me up at my mother's place."

"I wasn't planning on it," Yoongi says back, tone dull. He runs his thumb up the inner part of Seokjin's thigh, smirking when Seokjin jolts. Yoongi settles back in his seat, closing his eyes and letting his hand pat gently at Seokjin's thigh. "I'm going to take a quick nap."

"Hmm. I'll wake you up when we get there."

"Hmm," Yoongi replies, already closing his eyes. He doesn't quite fall asleep, just lingers in that otherworldly between of sleep and consciousness, like floating along with the current. He draws closer to wakefulness when he hears Seokjin start to whistle, low and subtle, the same few notes repeating, up, down, down hold hold. It's strangely hypnotizing, drawing him in and wrapping him tight in its embrace.

It's not until they arrive in the city limits of Busan and Seokjin stops whistling to talk to himself about the street signs that Yoongi realizes why he had been in a dreamlike state, suspended in Seokjin's tune. His mother used to hum something similar, her voice echoing down the hallways, a trail of notes that Yoongi used to follow her around the house.

He opens his eyes and watches Seokjin, listens to him talking to himself about the sashimi restaurant they pass. There's a bubble of self-awareness in the pit of his stomach and it's swirling around a panic and fear he hasn't had to deal with in years.

Yoongi thinks he might love Seokjin.

And even more terrifying, he thinks Seokjin is capable of being a family to him.

Yoongi shifts and turns to look out the window at the passing scenery, his heart in his throat. *"I*

swear I won't. I swear, just watch me," his own words ring through his mind to taunt him, clashing violently with Seokjin's soft voice dripping like rain, *"Mahal na mahal kita."*

He doesn't know which side will win in the end. He doesn't know if he'll survive the fallout either way.

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Seokjin's mother is beautiful. That's Yoongi's first thought when he alights from the car and sees her waving at them excitedly outside the lobby of her apartment building. Seokjin has her lips and her hair, the tall frame and the full smile. Yoongi thinks he could have identified her even without the photos Seokjin showed him.

He smiles nervously and gives her a bow in greeting, "Hello," he says, rather too formally, and he hears Seokjin laughing behind him.

She steps up to him and links her arm through his elbow, just like Seokjin always does, patting his shoulder. "No need to be formal, Yoongi. We're very casual here. You should call me Mom."

Yoongi blinks, eyes widening, not sure how to respond. He hasn't called anyone "Mom" in over ten years. The word is too strange, too foreign to his lips. It holds too many memories, holds too many tears. He glances at Seokjin, panicking.

Seokjin steps away from the car, leaving their luggage half-unpacked, and sidles up to his mother, giving her a half-hug. "Let's work our way up to that." He gestures with his chin to Yoongi. "Go get our stuff, Yoongichi."

Yoongi smiles thankfully at Seokjin and heads to grab the luggage. He can hear Seokjin chatting excitedly with his mother and he feels his shoulders relaxing. There's something about Seokjin's voice and Seokjin's presence that makes him feel at ease, despite the flood of memories he doesn't know if he'll ever be ready to face.

By the time Yoongi has emptied the trunk, he has completed three trips from the car to Seokjin's mother's suite. A wide array of department store shopping bags and boxes tied in fancy ribbons fill the living room and Seokjin's mother looks around at it, a little dazed.

Seokjin laughs and nudges her shoulder as they sit side-by-side, Yoongi still fussing with how to place the boxes. "I don't know if you'll believe me, but I actually held him back."

Seokjin's mother laughs and Yoongi thinks he sees the resemblance to Jeongguk now, the way her face scrunches up with the giggles, the low, chortling sound of it. "I feel like I'm being wooed," she says, winking at Yoongi.

Yoongi laughs, the gesture all too familiar. "You are," he answers, handing her a box.

Seokjin's mother looks at Seokjin, her eyes wide with delight. "Oh, I like him, Seokjinie."

Seokjin smiles softly. "Me too."

Yoongi looks away, embarrassed, a sudden flush on his cheeks.

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"I hate this," Yoongi grumbles again under his breath. He flails his arms out to his sides like a fucking third grader, trying to keep his balance.

Seokjin's mother had shooed Seokjin and Yoongi out of the apartment for a few hours, telling them to enjoy the warm weather. Seokjin had the bright idea that they could rent rollerblades and skate through the park near the apartment. It had *seemed* simple enough at the time.

It is not simple. Yoongi curses the asshole who invented rollerblades. He vows to look them up when he is on solid ground again. He's going to look them up and track down one of their descendents and he's going to *punch them in the face*. He smiles a little at the thought, but the small contraction of his face muscles sets him off balance and he flails again. "I hate this," he says, louder, so that Seokjin will hear him this time and appreciate his suffering.

Seokjin glides - *glides*, like he's an angel floating around – up to Yoongi, an amused smile bright on his lips. "You're doing great, Yoongi," he says, swooping around Yoongi.

Yoongi frowns down at his feet and wobbles, cursing. "I don't know why you subjected me to this torture, but I want you to know, I'm going to get my revenge."

Seokjin laughs and that's all Yoongi can take. He swings his hand at Seokjin's chest to hit him. He should have known he would never be able to maintain his balance while performing such a complicated action. His last thought as he feels the ground rushing up to him is he's taking Seokjin down with him.

He closes his eyes on impact, his shoulders hit the concrete and he lets out a loud *oof*, the muscles in his backside already throbbing. He's pretty sure there's going to be a bruise in the morning. Yoongi's only source of comfort is Seokjin falling down a split second later, cushioned on Yoongi's chest. He's heavy, the air knocks out of Yoongi's lungs, and before he can take in another breath, his eyes flutter open.

Seokjin is still laughing, eyes squinty and crowsfeet appearing at the corners. His mouth is open wide, squeaky giggles escaping, his fingers pressing into the hard planes of Yoongi's chest. He's gorgeous, and suddenly Yoongi doesn't quite mind the throbbing at the base of his spine.

Seokjin's laughter dies down and he pouts apologetically. "Sorry, sorry," he says lightly, patting at Yoongi's side. "You okay? I'll get up-"

Seokjin moves to stand but Yoongi grabs onto his forearm, pulling him down again.

Seokjin falls flat onto Yoongi's chest, exclaiming in surprise. His hands fall to the ground to bracket Yoongi's head, his eyes wide and blinking at Yoongi.

One of Yoongi's hands creeps up to hold Seokjin's waist, and he tips his head up to kiss Seokjin's full lips. He gets the angle wrong, missing half of Seokjin's lips to settle at the corner of Seokjin's mouth. Before he can correct the angle and go for a proper kiss, he feels Seokjin smile against his skin and plant a quick peck to the corner of Yoongi's mouth.

Yoongi frowns, but Seokjin dives in again, placing another quick peck to Yoongi's cheek. To the side of Yoongi's nose. To the top of Yoongi's upper lip. To the bottom of his jaw. Quick, wandering, giggling pecks all over Yoongi's face. Yoongi can feel Seokjin's chest rumbling with contained laughter.

He scrunches his nose up and complains during another onslaught of chaste kisses, "This wasn't what I was going for."

Seokjin stops and pulls back just an inch, grinning, eyes twinkling in delight. "What were you going for?"

Yoongi stares up at Seokjin, at his delighted eyes and wide, grinning mouth, and the way his fringe falls just so on his brows. Yoongi stares and takes it all in, that Seokjin is smiling for him, because of him. This man is here for Yoongi, happy to be here, would not want to be anywhere but here, collapsed onto the ground in a deserted park, smothering his husband with kisses. Yoongi's chest expands, something warm and foreign and forgotten blooming, like the first budding sprout after a drought, a hidden seedling breaking through a hopeless ground. Yoongi knows he doesn't want to be anywhere but here, doesn't want anyone but Seokjin, can't remember a life before him.

Yoongi's hand on Seokjin's waist tightens and he reaches his other hand to cup the back of Seokjin's neck softly. He pulls him down, slowly, gently, lifting his head to meet Seokjin halfway, slowly, finally sliding their lips together.

It's slow, Yoongi parting his lips just a bit, drawing Seokjin's upper lip between his own. He savors the way Seokjin's breath ghosts against his skin, the way Seokjin presses closer, pushing into Yoongi, the way his tongue slips out briefly to lick at Yoongi's lips.

It's slow and sensual and completely ruined when a trio of voices call out, young and childish and thick with a Busan accent, "Ewww, they're kissing."

Seokjin pulls away and ducks his face into Yoongi's chest, rumbling with laughter.

Yoongi sighs and lets his head drop back down to the ground, sighing up at the clouds above him, his hands running up and down Seokjin's sides.

He stays there for a moment, sun warm on his face as Seokjin pushes off of him and climbs back to his feet, wobbling on the rollerblades. His fingers tingle where they held Seokjin's waist, and he can still feel the ghost of Seokjin's lips on his. He looks up, sees Seokjin laughing down at him, holding out his hand.

"Come on," he says, wiggling his fingers. "I'll help you up."

Yoongi silently places his hand in Seokjin's, lets the other haul him to his feet. Seokjin's other hand comes around to steady Yoongi and keep him upright and Yoongi has a fleeting thought that this isn't the first time. This isn't the first time Seokjin pull Yoongi up from where he fell. He grips Seokjin's forearms, fingers tight and pulling on the fabric of Seokjin's shirt. He doesn't want to let go.

He draws in a careful breath, feet slipping, Seokjin moving to stop him from falling again.

He thinks he might, after everything he promised and vowed and told himself not to, he thinks he might love Seokjin.

And he doesn't want to let go.

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After Chuseok ends, Seokjin has to stay to view potential sites for the gallery and Yoongi has to head back to Seoul. Seokjin spends another five days at his mother's place in Busan while Yoongi's back home. It's the longest they've been apart since they married and somehow it makes Seokjin impatient. They facetime and message each other but Seokjin still feels empty, hollow. He misses Yoongi. It's so silly and trivial. He's a grown man who can take care of himself, but he misses being in Yoongi's presence. There is something comforting and right and secure about being with Yoongi.

"Are you almost packed?" Seokjin's mother asks, peeking her head into the guest bedroom. She leans against the doorjamb, a large mug of tea held by both of her hands.

Seokjin stops packing and smiles at her. "Yeah, there's not much. We came with a lot more than what I'm leaving with."

His mother laughs, her nose scrunching up like Jeongguk's does, and she tilts her head against the door. "Your Yoongi brought me an entire department store."

Seokjin's smile softens and he feels a slight flush warming his cheeks at his mother's words. *Your Yoongi*. His heart swells in his chest and he takes the words, letting them perforate through his skin and into his bloodstream.

"What is this?" his mother says, her voice light and teasing. "What's this little look on your face?" She twirls her finger at him. "You like calling him your Yoongi that much?"

Seokjin makes a small, embarrassed noise and turns back to his suitcase. "Yes," he says quietly, fingers deftly folding his clothes. "I do."

His mother is silent for a moment. She pushes off the doorjamb and walks to the bed, sitting gingerly on the edge. She holds her mug of tea in her lap and pats the space beside her. "Sit down for a moment."

Seokjin pauses, slowly placing his shirt into the suitcase and sitting down by his mother's side.

"I don't give you advice or guidance," she starts seriously, fingers tapping idly at the edges of her mug. "I haven't lived my life well, how could I think to guide you or Jeongguk?"

Seokjin shakes his head. "No, Mom, you did the best you could."

She smiles sadly. "It wasn't enough, sometimes." She reaches over to squeeze his hand. "Sometimes all your love isn't enough." She locks eyes with him, squeezing his hand rhythmically, her lips pressed tightly together. "I just wanted you to know that."

Seokjin frowns and looks down at their hands. He knows that. Logically, he knows that, and he went into his marriage with that exact warning ringing through his ears.

He turns his mother's hand over in his, feeling its weight and shape. He still remembers a time when her hand enveloped his, when her arms could pull him up and keep him safe and close to her heart. He thinks she's still trying.

"I know, Mom," he says, looking up to smile at her. "But it's too late. I really love him."

She nods and looks away, blowing out a long breath. "Okay." She takes her hand out of his and pats his knee twice. "Let's hope he's smart enough to see that, then. You need to have a talk with him about what you both want. Don't procrastinate it. Get it done and out in the open. Okay?"

"Okay," he repeats back and she smiles, satisfied.

She stands and heads back out of the room before she pauses at the door and turns back to Seokjin, a faraway look in her eyes. "I met his mother once, you know."

Seokjin's eyes widen. "When?"

"It was a long time ago." She falls into silence, thinking, a crease in the furrow of her brow. "She was....kind, in a moment when no one else was." She tilts her head. "Yoongi reminded me of her."

Seokjin wants to probe more, wants to know what Yoongi's mother was like, wants to know how

they met and what happened. He opens his mouth to ask but his mother shakes her head slightly. She won't tell him.

"Finish packing. You don't want to be on the road too late," she tells him, heading back out of the guest bedroom.

An hour later, Seokjin is in his car, trunk loaded to the brim with food his mother insisted he take back with him. He kisses her cheeks goodbye and heads back to Seoul. Just as he takes the exit onto the highway, he dials Yoongi's number and puts it on speaker.

"Un," Yoongi answers, voice crackly over the speaker. "You on your way back, hyung?"

"Yeah, just heading out." Seokjin taps his fingers on the steering wheel, his mother's talk replaying in his mind. "When I get back, let's go out to dinner. I have something I want to talk about."

"Is everything okay?" Yoongi asks, and Seokjin can hear the concern in his voice.

"It's good, everything is okay." Seokjin takes a deep breath, nerves fluttering in his stomach. "I think it's a good thing that I want to talk about."

"Oh." Yoongi remains silent for a moment before he says, "Okay, I'll make reservations. Get home safely, hyung."

Seokjin grins. "Yeah, I'll see you soon, Yoongichi."

Yoongi scoffs. "What Yoongichi."

"It's cute and you know it."

Yoongi makes a low noise in the back of his throat. "Hang up and focus on driving."

"Okay, okay. 'Bye." Seokjin waits until the line clicks, signalling that Yoongi has hung up, before he says quietly, "I love you."

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"What about this one?" Yoongi asks, eyeing the bracelet carefully.

"Yeah, it's great, get that one."

Yoongi narrows his eyes and glares at Hoseok. "You didn't even look at it."

Hoseok rolls his eyes. "I looked at like thirty bracelets already, hyung. They're all great. This whole shop is great." He brightens and claps his hands together. "Why don't you just buy Seokjin-hyung the shop? Then he can have anything and everything." He turns to the attendant helping them, grinning. "Right?"

Yoongi turns his attention back to the silver bracelet, frowning. He tilts his head and *tsks*. "Maybe he'd like a watch."

Hoseok whines and collapses against the glass display. "We've been here for over an hour. I'm hungry. I'm so hungry, I'm angry. I'm hangry."

Yoongi's eyes widen and he glances at his watch. Seokjin should have returned from Busan by now. He takes out his phone to see if Seokjin called, frown deepening when he sees a missed call from an unknown number.

He presses the speed dial for his voicemail, ignoring Hoseok's continued complaining.

"I don't know why you're even getting an anniversary present so early, it's like three weeks away," Hoseok gripes.

The voice in the message is unfamiliar, a professional, level-toned woman.

"Hello, this is a message for Min Yoongi, guardian for Jeon Seokjin. My name is Kim Minji, I'm calling from Seoul University Hospital. Mr. Jeon has been involved in a motor vehicle accident and admitted to..."

The phone drops from Yoongi's shaking hands, clattering onto the floor. His knees give out on him and he collapses to the ground, catching himself by his palms, eyes wide, breathing trapped in his throat, unable to inhale or exhale.

Not again, not again.

His mind swirls in a blurry, hazy mess of past and present.

It has been reported that Min Dohyun, heir to the Min chaebol group, and his wife Kim Jihye, have been involved in a motor vehicle accident. They were transported to Seoul University Hospital where they later passed away.

Not again, he cannot go through this again. Not again, not again, not again.

His ears are roaring, his head pounding, his chest seizing in pain.

Please don't take him, please, please, please.

He cannot lose Seokjin.

He cannot live through this again.

He never should have loved. He never should have trusted. He cannot survive, he will never survive this.

Not again, not again.

Please.

Chapter End Notes

Welcome. To the beginning of the end.

Heal Me, Kill Me

Chapter Notes

Very important: this chapter deals with minor character death and references to car accidents. Please proceed with caution if these upset you.

Um, okay, um, wow, thank you for the 3000 kudos????? That's????? THANK YOU.
I don't have words to express. ;;;;

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Yoongi hears a low whistling of appreciation followed by his father's rumbling voice saying, "I love what you've done with the place."

Yoongi scrunches his nose and looks up from his position at the coffee table, his back resting against the sofa and his legs stretched as far as they will go under the table. He still has his glue stick poised in his right hand, three fingers from his left hand holding down a photo. He opens his mouth to inform his father he is *not* redecorating and anyone with the slightest bit of intelligence would be able to see that, until he remembers, right, he's *ignoring* his father. He snaps his lips shut and sends his father the most scathing glare his ten-year-old face can manage.

His father is unperturbed, sauntering into the room, hands in his pressed black dress pants, cocking his head at the array of photos Yoongi has scattered across the coffee table and on the floor beside him. "Very groundbreaking. Photos on the floor. Walls are so outdated." He grins cheekily at Yoongi. "You get that innovation from me."

Yoongi scowls. "I'm not talking to you," he says tersely, making sure to pronounce the words carefully and correctly.

Yoongi's father nods understandingly. "I think you just did though."

Yoongi straightens his back in defense. "That was just to make you know I'm ignoring you."

His father hums, stepping around the coffee table and plopping onto the couch, careful to avoid the photos on the floor. "You just did it again, though."

Yoongi sputters and knows he's losing against his father *again*. He tries to find a good comeback, something to really show his father that he's tired of the teasing and he's old enough for it to stop. "I'm not gonna talk to you anymore," Yoongi says, the only thing that runs through his mind.

"Three times." His father shakes his head sadly. "This will never do."

Yoongi pouts and turns back to his project with a huff, biting his teeth together to stop from replying. He's going to ignore his dad. He's totally going to ignore his dad and then his dad will be sorry and Yoongi will be the winner.

"What are you doing?" his father prompts, leaning forward to leaf through the piles of photos.

Yoongi studiously does not reply, focusing instead on lining the backside of a photo with glue. Once he's satisfied with the coverage, he picks it up carefully with the tips of his fingers, the material sticky

on his skin, and turns it over.

"Oh, this was when you cried over the frog I put on your shoulder," his father continues, laughing at a photo.

Yoongi scowls and sends his father a brief glare before returning to his poster board, carefully, carefully placing the glue-sticky photo into its place. He presses it flat with the heel of his hand even as his father continues on and on with his pointless drivel.

"Hey, hey, Yoongi," his father says, tapping a finger on Yoongi's head, light but annoying. "What're you doing?"

"I'm doing my homework," Yoongi replies, giving up like he always does with his father. "I have to make a family tree in English."

"Oh," his father says, elongating the word. He slides off the couch and onto the floor beside Yoongi, grinning at him. "Do I get a cool English name?"

Yoongi scoffs and looks through the photos for a good picture of his little cousin Taehyung from Daegu.

"Like Maximus or Reginald," his father suggests. "Come on. Give me a cool English name."

Yoongi sighs. "Fine." He picks up his pen and writes down a name under his father's photo.

His father leans over his head, sounding it out as Yoongi spells the letters out. "Do Hyun Min." He stifles a laugh. "What is that?"

"Your name in English," Yoongi replies monotonously. He decides he might as well continue the theme with everyone and writes under his own photo carefully.

"Yun Ki Min," his father reads and bursts out in laughter before he slings an arm around Yoongi and pulls him in to ruffle his hair and squeeze him. "My patriotic boy."

Yoongi whines and flails his arm over his head to stop his father's pestering. "Stop."

His father relents, releasing Yoongi and turning his attention to the photos on the table. He's not silent for long, though. He never is, Yoongi thinks, wrinkling his nose when his father starts to pester him again.

"Yoongi, hey, look." His father holds a photo of his wedding in front of Yoongi's face, a little too close to focus on anything, really, and Yoongi inches his head back to see it properly. "There's me. Dashing as always. And your mom, the prettiest woman there." His father reaches with his free hand to point at the photo, a group shot of the wedding party lined in row after row, a hundred faces Yoongi cannot recognize. "And there's your auntie Mikyung and your auntie Jieun. Both your grandmothers. Your grandfather. Great uncle Seongho. *Everyone* was there."

Yoongi swallows a sigh and tilts his head to look expectantly at his father, waiting for whatever comment that's lurking behind the sparkle in his eyes. He's going to get teased again, he just knows it.

His father looks seriously at him, a mock stern expression on his lips but delighted humor in his eyes. "Where were you?"

Yoongi gapes at his father.

"My entire family came to my wedding except *you*. How could you do that to your dear father?" He slaps a hand over his heart as if he's wounded. "After all I've done for you?"

"Dad, I wasn't even *born* yet," Yoongi complains.

"That's hardly an excuse. I don't know how you're going to make this up to me."

"Dad," Yoongi draws out, whining and kicking his feet a little under the table. "I wasn't *born*."

His father shakes his head. "You're going to have to live with me forever, that's the only way you can ever make amends."

Yoongi makes a face. "I don't want to."

"Too bad, it's been decided." He lunges forward and starts tickling Yoongi. "You're stuck with me now."

Yoongi hiccups out laughter, trying to fight off his father's attack. "Dad!" he whines, flailing and trying to counterattack.

"Oppa, stop teasing him."

Yoongi and his father freeze and turn their heads to look at the newcomer in the room. Yoongi frowns as he watches his aunt walk in, tilting her head to put on a pair of earrings. Her hair is styled to the side, soft curls falling down her shoulder, and her wrists sparkle with diamonds. Her eyes are wider, her lips fuller, her cheekbones higher than usual.

Yoongi's father says in a mock whisper, loud enough for Mikyung to hear but low enough to pretend to be conspiratorial with Yoongi, "Why does your aunt look so fancy?"

"It's weird," Yoongi agrees, also mockingly hushed.

"It's really weird."

"Really, really weird," Yoongi repeats, swallowing a laugh.

Mikyung makes a face at them both. "I look perfectly normal."

"She doesn't," Yoongi says to his father.

Yoongi's father sits up and says loudly, "We don't think you do."

"You're wearing makeup," Yoongi supplies helpfully.

"I always wear makeup," Mikyung answers back, crossing her arms across her chest, arching a cool brow at them.

"Maybe she has a date," Yoongi suggests to his father.

His father gapes. "You think?"

Yoongi nods solemnly.

His father turns accusingly to Mikyung. "Do you have a *date*?"

Mikyung purses her lips. "Is that so surprising?"

"Concerning." His father leans forward to place his elbows on the coffee table. Yoongi follows him, glancing at his father several times to copy the pose correctly. "With who?"

"Yeah, with who?" Yoongi parrots.

"Kang Sunghoon," she says, straightening her back and eying the two of them with a narrowed gaze.

Yoongi's father bends to whisper into Yoongi's ear, "Do we like Kang Sunghoon?"

Yoongi shrugs. "I don't know who he is."

Yoongi's father straightens and says with determination, "We don't know who that is, but we don't think we like him."

"Are you being annoying again?" Yoongi's mother says as she steps into the living room, dressed in a formal evening gown. She shakes her finger at them. "Stop teasing your sister."

Yoongi's father sighs and looks back at Yoongi. "I'm going to have to tease you again, then."

"Mom, make him stop!" Yoongi pleads, entreating his mother.

"Honey, stop," she says to her husband bluntly before she smiles at Mikyung. "Here," she says, holding up what Yoongi recognizes as her lucky necklace, a hollow silver heart on a simple chain. "It's my lucky charm," she says to Mikyung.

Mikyung's eyes widen and she reaches out hesitantly. "Can I really?"

"Hm." Yoongi's mother nods and hands the necklace over. "I was wearing it the night I met Dohyun." She sighs wearily and glances over at her husband. "Maybe you'll be more lucky than I was."

"I feel like this is supposed to be a dig at me," Yoongi's father says, and turns to Yoongi. "Do you think they're making fun of me?"

Yoongi nods. "Yes."

"The nerve."

Yoongi's mother ignores her husband, walking over to Yoongi and kneeling beside him. She presses a quick kiss to his cheek that he recoils from.

"Mom, I'm ten," he complains.

"A mother is allowed to kiss her child, no matter how old," she retorts, running a hand through his hair, fixing errant ends.

Yoongi's father leans over Yoongi, presenting his cheek to his wife. "Me too," he requests, tapping his cheek.

Yoongi groans. "You guys are gross."

"Okay, well, I'm leaving," Mikyung says, backing away out of the living room.

"Take the driver," Yoongi's father calls out.

Mikyung frowns. "Weren't you guys going to get him to drive you to the gala?"

"I don't trust this Kang boy," he says suspiciously. "Take the driver. We'll drive ourselves." He smiles at Yoongi's mother. "It's like a date, then."

Yoongi's mother rolls her eyes but a smile tugs at her lips. "There's no arguing with him, Mikyung. Just take the driver."

She grins at them. "Thank you!"

Yoongi's mother turns to Yoongi again and smiles. "We won't be here to tuck you in."

Yoongi shrugs, used to his parents' busy schedule. They often miss evenings together but they make an extra effort to see him at breakfast, usually. He doesn't mind. He has auntie Mikyung and Granny in the house too. Besides, he's old enough not to need them around all the time. "I'm fine, Mom," he says, turning back to his project. "I'm ten years old, you know. I don't need you guys anymore."

Yoongi's father makes a dying noise and keels over, playing dead. "He doesn't need us, Jihye. My heart is broken." He rolls around the floor dramatically until he bangs his head on the coffee table, wincing at the impact. "Ow."

"Don't give him any sympathy," Yoongi's mother whispers to Yoongi, holding in a laugh.

Yoongi looks at his father then back to his mother, a small laugh escaping his lips. He doesn't really mind that they're so busy, because they still get moments like these.

&&&

Yoongi finishes his poster sometime after dinner, humming to himself as he pieces the last of his family together. It looks really nice, he thinks. His mother and his father, his aunts and uncles and cousins and his grandmother, her face stern and imposing in the photo. He complained at dinner with her that she never smiles in photos. She had leaned over and told him it's intentional.

"You get more done when people are intimidated of you."

"Then how does Dad get anything done?" he'd asked.

She had laughed and told him to stop being cheeky.

Satisfied with his project, he sets the poster board aside and decides to sneak in some television before someone clues in that it's past his bedtime. He lays on the floor of the living room, kicking his feet together behind him as he watches a show he's pretty sure he's not allowed to see. He has the volume turned down low, hoping no one notices quite yet.

His heart rate spikes when he hears a clamor in the hallway and he thinks for sure he's been caught. He quickly turns off the television and stands to his feet, walking to the door and ready to pretend that he was definitely just heading up to his room.

Except when he reaches the door, he sees his grandmother's secretary racing past the living room, completely ignoring him, and bounding up the stairs two at a time.

Yoongi frowns, peeking out of the doorway. It's strange. His grandmother doesn't work at the company anymore. She only shows up for board meetings and the occasional surprise visit to, in her own words, "remind everyone I'm not dead." She employs a secretary but he's usually only around for her social events or press releases. There's never anything urgent enough to warrant running in

the house.

Something's not right. Yoongi doesn't like this.

He slinks back into the room, eyes still watching the hallway, an uncomfortable feeling starting in the pit of his stomach.

Moments later, his straining ears hear more clatter and suddenly his grandmother is rushing down the stairs as fast as she can, taking them one at a time but not pausing in her descent. Her fingers grip the banister tightly and her secretary holds her elbow, helping her down.

"Has word gotten to the media yet?" she asks her secretary, huffing with the effort.

"We've managed to stop most of them, but by morning it will be all over the news," her secretary informs her as they reach the landing.

Yoongi's grandmother rushes down the hallway, past Yoongi's watchful eyes and into the foyer where she disappears.

Something is wrong. It's too late for his grandmother to leave, even if there is an emergency at the company. They should have got his father.

Yoongi wraps his arms around his stomach, feeling sick, a heaviness draping over his shoulders. Something is wrong and he's afraid. He gnaws at his bottom lip and walks back to the sofa, lying down on his side and bringing his knees up. He stares blankly ahead at the television, screen black and lifeless from when he turned it off. He hopes his mom comes home soon.

He lies there for a long time, blinking at the dark screen, running his hands idly on the pillow by his head. It feels like eternity until he hears some noise, the clinking of keys and the slide of the garage door opening. He perks, sitting up and sliding off the couch, running to the foyer to see his parents' return.

"Yoongi!"

Yoongi skids to a stop at the voice, his hope crashing as he recognizes it.

His aunt rushes through into the foyer, kneeling when she reaches him. She looks panicked, eyes wide and moving quickly, a sharp flush on her cheeks, her hands shaking as they hold his shoulders. "Are you okay?" she asks, and Yoongi can tell she's trying to control her voice, trying to force a sense of calm when she feels none.

"Where's Mom?"

There's a flint of something in his aunt's eyes, worry or despair or something complex that he hasn't learnt in his ten years of life yet. He has a very bad feeling that he will learn it, sooner rather than later. She smiles at him, and it's so forced and insincere that he wonders how her face doesn't crack from it. She reaches a shaking hand up to brush his fringe away from his eyes. "Your mom and dad will be out for a bit longer." She squeezes her fingers on Yoongi's shoulders. "They'll be back soon. Don't worry."

Yoongi frowns at her but she stands and pats his back towards the stairs. "Let's get you ready for bed. Did you brush your teeth yet?"

Yoongi lets her usher him upstairs, that sick, hollow feeling in his stomach growing. "Weren't you on a date? Why are you home?"

"It was a bad date," she answers, pressing her fingers into her stomach as if to soothe a pain there.

"Dad's right, then?"

"Hmm?" she says, distracted.

"Dad said he doesn't like your date." He pauses and looks up at her. "Dad is right?"

"Yeah. Yeah." She nods. "Your dad is always right."

"Auntie Mikyung," Yoongi says slowly, watching her carefully, trying to find the truth, trying to figure out what she's obviously keeping from him. "Mom and Dad...they'll be home soon?"

She looks stricken for a moment, a flash of doubt clouding her eyes, before she forces her lips into a smile and nods. "They'll be home soon, sweetie. They wouldn't leave you for long."

Yoongi wonders why she doesn't sound like she believes her own words.

Yoongi's stomach aches with that hollow feeling again.

He wonders why he doesn't believe her either.

&&&

Somehow, Yoongi sleeps. He doesn't think he will, tossing and turning in his bed, waiting for the telltale sound of his father opening his bedroom door to peek in on him, waiting for his mother's soft hand to stroke through his hair. He waits and waits for it, but somehow, somehow his body gives way and he slips into unconsciousness.

He wakes up with the sun streaming in through his window, all the worry from last night vanished with the new day. He stretches and slides out of bed, skipping down the stairs to the large kitchen, smiling. His mother is probably at the table, flipping through her papers while his father tries to feed her slices of fruit. Granny is probably back, too, and complaining about the temperature of her coffee.

He swings into the kitchen and stops short, the smile dropping from his lips, dread and worry crashing over him in an instant. He blinks at the nearly empty kitchen, devoid of household staff, devoid of his mother and his father and his grandmother. There's only his aunt, biting her thumb, pacing up and down the length of the counter, eyes transfixed on the phone.

"Where's Mom?" he asks, almost accusatory.

Mikyung startles, spinning to see Yoongi. She smiles shakily at him. "You're up early. Are you hungry? I can make you something."

Yoongi frowns. "You don't cook. Where's Chef?"

"He has the day off," she supplies, coming forward and ushering Yoongi to the breakfast table. "I can fix you some cereal, how's that?"

Yoongi blinks, staring at his aunt as she searches through the cabinets, opening all of them in search of cereal. If he thinks about it, the house is eerily quiet. He didn't see any of the housekeepers or the driver or the chef or the gardener. The house has been emptied completely. Something is very, very wrong.

"Where's Mom?" he asks again, setting his chin in determination. He wants answers. He needs

answers.

Mikyung lets out a shuddering breath and places her hands on the counter, her back facing Yoongi. She takes a fortifying breath and turns to smile at him. It's fake. It's fake, fake, fake, something is *wrong*. "She'll be home soon, sweetie."

"She's always home for breakfast."

"She had to pop out for a bi-"

"She's *always* home for breakfast," he repeats, loudly, anger and fear mixing in his veins. His eyes are watering and he doesn't quite understand why. Whatever is happening, he just wants it to stop.

"Please, Yoongi," Mikyung pleads, and the desperation in her voice, the shaking, lost sound of it, makes Yoongi close his lips together, eyes blinking away the tears he doesn't comprehend.

They both freeze when they hear the door to the garage open. Yoongi scrabbles out of his chair, racing from the kitchen to the foyer, a wide smile on his lips.

"Dad!" he calls out, rounding the corner into the room, only to skid to a stop and blink at his grandmother. "Granny. Where's Dad?"

His grandmother's face is ashen, and over the course of the night she seems to have aged ten years. The wrinkles in her face are more prominent, her body sags in exhaustion, and there are dark circles under her eyes. Her expression nearly crumbles when she sees Yoongi but she quickly regains her composure, walking over to him. She wraps her arms around his shoulders and hugs him tight to her, pressing her lips to his hair and kissing the crown of his head.

"Mom, what-"

Granny releases Yoongi and steps away, gesturing to Mikyung. "Come with me," she says seriously and Mikyung's composure finally breaks, tears slipping past her eyes.

"Is oppa-"

"Come with me *now*," Granny orders harshly, authority ruthless and strong in her voice.

Mikyung inhales a sharp breath and presses her lips together, wiping at her cheeks and following her mother. Yoongi moves to trail behind them but Mikyung stops him with a soft hand on his shoulder. "Wait here," she tells him, hurrying after Granny to her study.

His parents should be here. Something is wrong, wrong, wrong. There's a bubble of panic clawing at Yoongi's throat. He stands in the foyer, clenching and unclenching his hands, his teeth biting together until they hurt. He has half a mind to march into his grandmother's study and demand answers. He wants to, it seems like a good outlet for the building anger that's mixing with dread in his stomach, but he knows it's futile. His grandmother is a stone wall and he can't go against her if she doesn't want to tell him something.

He storms to the living room and grabs the remote from the coffee table, accidentally knocking his family tree poster from the surface with the motion. He plans to flip through the channels until he finds the news station. He knows their family is a big deal to the nation. He's been in front of the cameras of the press enough times to know that any minor incidence at the company will bring several stories into the headlines. If his grandmother had to rush out late at night last night, he thinks there's a pretty good chance the media has a story about it.

He doesn't even have to flip to the news station. There's breaking coverage on every channel, his family name blasted in bold print.

His fingers shake and the remote drops from his hands. It's a lie. It's a lie, it's a lie, it's a lie.

"For those of you just joining us," the anchor says, a primly dressed woman with a low, professional voice, reciting a nightmare in even, level tones. "It has been reported that Min Dohyun, heir to the Min chaebol group, and his wife Kim Jihye, have been involved in a motor vehicle accident. They were transported to Seoul University Hospital where they later passed away."

"It's a lie," he whispers to himself, his heart thumping painfully against his chest, his eyes blinking at the tears that start slipping down his cheeks, following the trail to run down his chin. "It's a lie," he repeats, stronger this time.

"It's a lie," he says again, growing louder, growing angry with every repetition. "It's a lie!"

He bends down to grab the remote, pulling his arm back and flinging it as hard as he can to the screen.

"Yoongi!" Mikyung rushes into the room, followed closely by Granny but Yoongi doesn't acknowledge them, shaking his head, his eyes blurred with tears.

His mom is fine. She's fine. She kissed his cheek yesterday and complimented his poster and told him she'd be back in the morning. His dad is coming home. He said Yoongi was stuck with him forever. Yoongi's supposed to live with him forever. They're coming back. They're coming back, it's a lie, a lie, *lies*.

Mikyung has her arms wrapped around Yoongi, trying to soothe him, and Yoongi doesn't know when he started wailing, shuddering, uncontrollable sobs wracking through his body. He can't breathe, he can't speak, he can't see. Everything is torn apart.

Please no, he thinks, rocking in his aunts arms.

Mikyung strokes her hand through his hair, but it's wrong, it's wrong. It's not his mother's hand.

Please don't take them.

He collapses against his aunt, but her arms aren't like his father's. They're weak and thin and wrong.

Please, I'll be good, I'll be a good son.

Mikyung is making shushing noises, but Yoongi's wails still drown her out.

Please, come back. I'm sorry. Don't leave me. I'll be good.

Please.

Please.

Please.

&&&

There's a funeral. Yoongi doesn't really remember much of it. Lots of people came and gave their condolences like that was supposed to mean something. It doesn't. His parents are gone. They left him. They promised to take care of him and they *left* him.

People leave, Yoongi realizes. He wishes he knew that before his heart was ripped out and the world became a dark, twisted place.

His grandmother goes back to her position at the company, taking the reigns and leaving him, too. She should be there for him, but she isn't. She's always working long hours, making overseas trips and is never, never home. She's left him, too.

People leave. It's better not to let them in.

He gets into fights at school. He doesn't particularly care if he wins or loses them. He likes the feeling of throwing a punch, or getting hit instead. It makes him forget the hollow, sick feeling inside stop for a few moments. It makes the ever building anger inside ease for a while, until it comes back, larger and stronger.

He's angry at everything. At his classmates for bragging about their parents, their mothers coming to volunteer for special events, their fathers coming to sports day. At his friends, for acting like he's supposed to be normal by now, as if he can ever go back to what he was before. At the media, for lurking around his school for the first month he went back, and the stupid programs they put on television, investigations into his parents' death as if they have any right to talk about it.

He's angry at his parents, for not staying like they should have. He's angry at himself for sleeping that night, for closing his eyes and drifting off into dreams when they struggled for their last breath.

He's angry at his grandmother, for stealing from him what can never be replaced. He knows the story now, pieced together by eavesdropping several conversations. His parents were rushed to the hospital and his grandmother was summoned. She stayed there the entire night as his parents fought to hang on. He should have been there, too. He should have *been there*, but she selfishly kept him at home, in his bed, sleeping as if his world wasn't crumbling.

He never got to say goodbye. And he hates his grandmother for it.

Months later, he realizes he hates his aunt, too. It's her fault, he thinks. It's an epiphany he has during math class, his fingers wrapping tight around his pencil.

He seethes all throughout the day until classes end and he finally makes it back to the house he used to think of as home. He rushes up to his aunt's room, knocking harshly on the door.

His aunt opens the door, smiling when she sees him but he pushes past her and into her wardrobe, frantically searching for his target.

"Yoongi," she calls, confusion and worry in her voice. "Yoongi, what are you doing?"

"You took it," he says, grabbing a box of jewellery and overturning it onto the floor. He throws it aside when all that tumbles out is sparkling diamonds.

"Yoongi, stop," Mikyung says, placing her hands on his shoulders to still him. "What are you talking about?"

Yoongi flinches from her hands, glaring at her. "My mother's necklace. It was her lucky charm and you *took* it." He grabs another box, overturning pearls and emeralds onto the floor. He throws the box hard against the wall, denting the surface with the force of it. "You took it that night and if you didn't, she would be *alive* right now."

He blinks, stupid tears forming in his eyes again. Stupid, stupid tears that do *nothing*.

"It's your fault," he seethes, shaking. "She would be here but you *took* it. I want it back! I want it back!" His face crumbles and he sinks to the floor. "I want her back!"

Mikyung tentatively reaches a hand forward, stroking his fringe from his eyes and he shakes away from her, curling up against the wall, tears hot and angry and unwelcome slipping down his cheeks.

"It's your fault," he says through hiccupping breaths.

"Yoongi," his aunt says softly, her voice trembling with her own tears. "I'm sorry."

"It's your fault," he repeats, even though he doesn't really believe it. It's no one's fault that his parents are gone. It's not the car manufacturers or the other car involved in the crash. It's not the doctors that couldn't save them. It's not his grandmother, or his aunt, or his parents' driving.

And it's not his fault, either.

It just is.

Anyone can leave, without warning, without reason, without a chance to say goodbye.

It's dangerous to love. It's too dangerous to love.

&&&

They just expect him to get better.

A year goes by. And then two. They expect him to get better, like he can just get over the death of his parents. Like he isn't a completely changed person.

He can see the strain in his aunt's face every time he skips a meal, he can see the worry in his grandmother's eyes every time she is called to school because of another fight. He can see it, but he can't bring himself to stop. He's still so angry and broken and lost. He knows he'll never be found again. It's time everyone else just accepted that.

Things come to a head in the fall of his twelfth year, after one particularly vicious fight that has Yoongi suspended from school for a week, despite his grandmother's large influence.

He spends the week zoned out in front of the television, lying listless and spiritless in his bed, unmoving except for when his aunt convinces him to eat.

By the end of the week, his grandmother summons him to her study.

"You have an aunt in Daegu," she starts as soon as he enters the room. "Your late mother's sister."

Yoongi blinks blankly at her. "So?"

Granny's face hardens and she presses her lips together.

It's odd, Yoongi thinks. She's hesitating. He doesn't think he's ever seen her hesitate in his entire life. He feels sick.

"You're going to live with her for a while."

Anger shoots through Yoongi's veins instantaneously. "You're sending me away."

"You have your cousin there, too. It'll be good for you."

"You're leaving me, just like everyone else," he seethes, clenching his hands into fists. "You can't do this."

His grandmother arches a brow, cold and immovable. "You're leaving tomorrow."

He shouldn't be surprised. Everyone leaves him in the end.

It's better not to love, he thinks again.

&&&

Daegu is strange. There's nothing to do and everyone has a thick dialect. It's too hot, too small, too boring. His aunt reminds him too much of his mother, the same smile, the same blunt speech pattern, the same lilting song his mother used to sing through the hallways of his childhood home.

Taehyung, too, is probably the strangest part of the whole thing. He's loud and energetic and he *always* argues with Yoongi. They disagree on everything, what food to eat, where to go on days off, what movie to watch. It's frustrating. It's annoying.

It's helping.

For all of Taehyung's differences, his persistence is his best quality. He never leaves Yoongi alone, never lets him sink into a downward spiral of despair and loneliness. He's always there, ready to drag Yoongi out in the heat of the summer. Even when they argue. Even when Yoongi yells and throws the harshest words he can think up at Taehyung, he's still there. Still steady and stable and loving.

And Yoongi gets better. Not all the way. He'll never be whole again, but he gets better.

He's not angry anymore. He's not self-destructive anymore.

He thinks he can find some pieces of happiness again.

He hates to admit it, but his grandmother was right. She usually is.

&&&

Yoongi spends five years in Daegu, from twelve to seventeen, until he's called back to Seoul, back to home. He brings Taehyung with him. They've grown close, like brothers, and Yoongi doesn't want to part from him yet.

His grandmother's house is still the same, the walls echoing the ghosts of his parents. His mother decorating still painting the halls, his father's presence still lingering in the air. Sometimes Yoongi thinks he could catch a glimpse of them, if he turned his head fast enough.

He never can. They're gone and they're not coming back.

The first weekend of Yoongi's return to Seoul, he makes his way to the mausoleum that holds his parents' remains. His footsteps clip-clip-clip as he makes his way to his parents' niche, his lips set in determination.

He doesn't bring flowers, even though he knows he probably should. Part of him doesn't want to, still holding onto the flame of anger in his heart.

He reaches his parents and gives them a formal bow before standing, hooking his hands behind his back and contemplating their photos.

"I'm back," he starts, his words echoing through the space, bouncing off the walls and startling him with the hollow, tinny sound of his own voice. He clears his throat and starts again. "I'm back in Seoul. For good."

He tilts his head, frowning at them. "Did you miss me?"

He presses his lips together, anger bubbling up his stomach. "I missed you. I missed you a lot. It hurts." He sighs heavily, blinking and staring up at the ceiling to dry his eyes. "It's not right, you know. Leaving me like that. It's not right. You left me." He sighs again. "You left."

He swallows around the lump in his throat, curling his fingers into tight fists.

"I'm not going to let it happen again," he says when he feels like he's regained his composure, his eyes dry and narrowing at his parents. "I'm never going to live through that again. You taught me well, one last lesson, I guess. I won't get married. I won't have kids. I'm never going to love again."

He hardens his heart, his resolve forming a wall around his chest, a thick layer of brick and mortar, the protection soothing and cool. "I swear I won't. I *swear*, just watch me," he says, vehemently.

People leave.

It's better not to love in the first place.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, did you think the angst would resolve or that I'd deal with anything I left hanging last chapter?

The Time We Were Not in Love

Chapter Notes

I'm overwhelmed at the amount of amazing art that's been created of this fic? I'm so grateful, thank you. Thank you ;;;

[ap DID MORE EDITS](#) WHY HURT ME

[DwongN](#) drew [these lovely pieces](#) omg thank you

[Karina](#) drew [the softest](#) art thank you

[ethereal mochi](#) made an angsty edit for [chapter 15](#) AND [for chapter 16](#) ;;

/intense sobbing [Mas](#) drew [this](#) and [this heart-wrenching art](#) for chapter 16 DON'T TOUCH ME.

Also, thank you guys so much for being super patient and supportive. We're almost done. <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Later, much later when Yoongi has finally returned to himself, when his lungs aren't contracting erratically, when his eyes can see what is in front of him again and not the ghosts and shadows of the past, he will realize just how much Hoseok saved him at that moment. A sharp voice that pierced through the ringing in his ears, two hands that gripped his arms too tight and hauled him to feet he didn't know he had anymore. And words of hope, foreign and sweet lies but the only thing that kept Yoongi from tipping off a dark precipice.

Maybe years in the future, when the memory doesn't stab low into his belly and spew bile into the back of his throat, he might be able to ask Hoseok about the edge of panic in his eyes and what put it there. If it was fear for whatever made the color in Yoongi's face drain or if it was the spark of recognition making Hoseok's eyes widen. Because Hoseok had seen Yoongi like that before, and it was not a version of Yoongi anyone wished to return.

Hoseok grabs Yoongi's phone from the ground, the screen shattered, and replays the voicemail, his color draining and expression hardening. He grabs Yoongi's arms with purpose and drags him into a standing position, letting Yoongi lean his weight on him.

"Hyung, listen to me," he says, voice sharper than Yoongi's ever heard it.

Yoongi doesn't look at him, still pleading in his mind *please not again, not again, please don't take him*.

"Seokjin-hyung is fine. We're going to get to the hospital and you'll see. Stay with me, hyung."

Yoongi doesn't remember much after those words, comforting and sweet and so tempting to hold onto. Hoseok gets both of them out of the shop and into Yoongi's car, speeding down the streets of Seoul to the hospital. He can't get there fast enough, every ticking second a torment. Yoongi squeezes his fingers into tight fists on his knees and realizes vaguely that he can't even feel the pain of it, like his senses have been numbed. The only thing that remains is *not again, not again, please don't take him*.

Yoongi doesn't remember Hoseok parking and he doesn't remember opening the car door to scramble out. He only recognizes his surroundings when he's halfway to the emergency room and he realizes he has no idea where to find Seokjin. His ears roar, rushing blood and ringing that won't stop. It doesn't matter. He will tear the entire building apart to find Seokjin.

It's not too late, it can't be too late. It can't be. Not again, not again.

It's Hoseok that saves him again.

"Hyung!" Hoseok runs up to him, panting, and grabs his wrist. "He's on the fifteenth floor. Come on."

They find an elevator and Hoseok keeps his grip on Yoongi's wrist the entire way up, an anchor, a safety line, a reminder that this is real life, not a dream.

Not a nightmare.

"What room?" Yoongi manages to say, his first words since the phone call that changed his life. He clenches his jaw. Life can change in an instant. He knew that. He *knew* that. He's stupid, foolish. He lied to himself for too long, fell into Seokjin too readily, and now he's lost it all again.

Hoseok presses his fingers tighter around Yoongi's wrist. "1521. Hyung, it'll be okay."

Yoongi shakes his head and tugs to get his hand free. It's a lie, it's a lie. Anything can be lost, ripped away, stolen. There's no promise of a happy forever. "You don't know that."

"I do-"

"You don't know that!" Yoongi nearly yells and breaks Hoseok's hold on his wrist.

Hoseok's lips turn down into a deep frown but he lets Yoongi go and steps back, frustration evident in the set of his shoulders.

As soon as the elevator doors open on the fifteenth floor, Yoongi runs into the hall, bypassing the nurses' station and hurriedly reading the numbers on the room doors. He hears some commotion from the staff, presumably because he's in the VIP section of the hospital looking like a deranged madman. He can hear Hoseok explaining the situation to the staff but he doesn't give a fuck, counting the room numbers out loud. *1503, 1505, 1507.*

He skids to a stop when he reaches 1521, Seokjin's room. He stretches his hand forward slowly, hesitantly. He's scared. Scared he'll find Seokjin with his eyes closed, still and unresponsive. Scared he's too late. Scared that he won't survive this again.

He gathers the last of his strength and pulls the door open, footsteps heavy as he enters the room.

Yoongi's breath chokes in his lungs and his knees wobble. He holds onto the wall to steady himself, eyes going blurry with unshed tears.

"Yoongi?" Seokjin asks, glancing up at the noise. He's sitting up on the hospital bed, legs over the edge, as a nurse redresses the wound on his brow. He's still wearing his regular clothes, pinstriped button down shirt with the sleeves rolled up until his elbows, dark navy slacks scrunched up at the ankle, and checkered socks covering his feet. He's okay. The only visible injury is what Yoongi can only assume is a cut above his left eye, bandaged in a small white patch.

He's sitting and breathing and speaking and he's *okay*.

All the life and strength and fight break off from his body and his shoulders sag heavily with relief. He slumps against the wall, knees finally giving way, and he slides down until he's sitting on the cold laminate floor of the room.

"Yoongi!" Seokjin bounds off the bed, rushing to him, eyes wide and searching. He kneels in front of Yoongi, takes his shoulders in his hands and tilts his head to the left, to the right, trying to find what's afflicting Yoongi. "Yoongi, talk to me, what's wrong?" He turns over his shoulder to beckon the nurse. His hand reaches to feel at the apex of Yoongi's neck and shoulder. "Nurse-"

Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut and tips into Seokjin's chest, hands scrambling up to cling tightly to his shirt. "You fucking idiot," he manages to mumble, pressing his face into Seokjin's shoulder, breathing in his scent, letting it permeate his lungs. "You fucking asshole."

Seokjin's hands slip to grip at Yoongi's back, holding him close. "Yoongi, what-"

"How dare you." Yoongi brings a hand to punch weakly at the space over Seokjin's heart. "I thought you were gone." He shoves against Seokjin and pulls him close, rocking between the conflicting motions.

Seokjin lets out a shuddering breath, one of his hands coming up to smooth comfortingly into Yoongi's hair. "Shh, I'm fine, Yoongi."

"How *dare* you," Yoongi grits out, trying to bring Seokjin closer. He doesn't dare open his eyes, afraid of the tears that will flow, unstoppable and unbidden.

"I'm sorry," Seokjin soothes into his ear, holding Yoongi, arms enveloping. "I'm okay, it's okay. It's okay."

Yoongi squeezes his eyes tighter together, tears leaking against his will. He swallows down a sob and desperately tries to bring Seokjin closer, but it's not enough. It's not close enough.

"It's okay," Seokjin keeps saying, repeating softly in his ear.

It's not okay.

Yoongi's been an idiot. Yoongi did the exact thing he vowed never to do: he fell in love and the universe reminded him of the consequences of it today. People leave, in the worst possible ways. He knows with a certainty that he will not survive if he loses Seokjin, if Seokjin's lungs stop breathing and his heart stops beating. Yoongi can't make it through that again.

A different kind of panic starts to bubble in the depths of his stomach. It's rash and stubborn and spins poison in his blood. He has to get out before it's too late.

People leave.

A sob escapes his lips and he burrows into Seokjin's warmth.

The only way to protect himself is to leave first.

&&&

In the days following Seokjin's accident, Yoongi becomes unexplainably cold and distant. He stays out all night, returning back to the apartment only to grab his essentials when Seokjin isn't home. He doesn't return Seokjin's calls and stops responding to his text messages. Seokjin doesn't understand. There is no reason, no logic to Yoongi's sudden change. It's like they've backtracked to the day they

first met. They're nearly strangers.

Seokjin is worried. He can't read Yoongi's thoughts anymore, can't reach out for him. He feels like he's lost him in the blink of an eye, without a chance to fight.

He tries talking with Taehyung about Yoongi's behaviour, but Taehyung is just as clueless as he is. Every day that passes, the anxiety in Seokjin's stomach grows, larger and heavier, pulsing through his veins with the beat of his heart. It replaces the warmth of Yoongi's touch with cold nights and the all-too familiar knowledge that things will never be the same, that he's lost something he can never replace.

He doesn't know what to do, doesn't know if he should cling onto Yoongi or leave him alone to handle whatever it is that has happened.

The answer comes in the form of Hoseok, quietly knocking on Seokjin's office door. "Hi," he says, a small smile on his lips that somehow doesn't extend to his eyes. "They said I could find you here."

Seokjin stands and gestures for Hoseok to enter. "Come in, sit."

Hoseok slips into the seat opposite Seokjin and folds his hands over his stomach, his smile turning down into a frown.

"Is everything okay?" Seokjin starts, brow furrowing.

Hoseok purses his lips. "I don't think so." He sighs and straightens, locking eyes with Seokjin. "Look, it's none of my business what goes on in your marriage, but I feel like –" Hoseok waves his hands in the air, frustrated. "I saw something in Yoongi the day you had the accident. I'm worried about him."

Anxiety spikes in Seokjin's blood. "There is something wrong, isn't there? What is it?"

Hoseok's expression shutters. "I don't know for sure. You need to talk to hyung about it." He looks down at his hands. "I hope it's nothing. I really hope it's nothing."

Seokjin presses his fingers into his thighs and tries not to let his fears speak in his mind, whirling and taunting and overwhelming.

He used up all his wishes years ago when he followed Jeongguk to Seoul. He doesn't know if fate will allow him another miracle.

As soon as Hoseok leaves, Seokjin pulls out his phone and sends Yoongi a message.

I would really appreciate it if you come home for dinner tonight.

He stares at the screen, tapping it every few seconds to keep it from locking, waiting for the small "1" beside his message to disappear. It doesn't.

It's very important, he writes. Another "1" appears beside his new message. He clutches the phone tightly in his hands and tells himself he's being silly. An unchecked notification is no reason for his eyes to water.

He presses his lips together and writes one last, short message.

Please.

He sets his phone facedown on his desk and forces himself to focus back on work. He is going to

trust Yoongi.

Yoongi will check his messages.

And Yoongi will come.

Because Yoongi cares about Seokjin, no matter what's happening, that fact will never change. Seokjin is certain.

&&&

Yoongi knows he shouldn't go home. He has a room at Zeus Hotel and new clothes he bought at the department store. He has his laptop and he was even smart enough to grab his favorite camera from his apartment. He has everything he needs. He shouldn't go home.

He promised himself to stay strong. He knows Seokjin, knows the other won't give up without a fight. They were more than the contract and they both know it. They became too much, too real. Too close to everything Yoongi was never going to have again.

The day Yoongi brought Seokjin back from the hospital, after he'd watched him drink a glass of water and tucked him under the covers of their bed, Yoongi sat in his study for hours, thinking. He had their contract on his desk, reading it over and over and over.

1. The marriage lasts for one year, from the date of the wedding.

5. Both parties will refrain from interfering in the other's personal life.

He had written it all in. He had drafted the contract in order to protect himself. The contract had been right and somewhere along the way he went wrong.

He'd been stupid. Something about Seokjin made him foolish, made him let his guards down. Seokjin made Yoongi forget why he had isolated himself to begin with.

Seokjin's car accident was a cruel but necessary reminder. Yoongi knows he will never survive losing Seokjin. Yoongi knows he has to give Seokjin up and then he can go back to who he is. Reserved and isolated and perhaps a little lonely but safe and stable.

He hardened his heart, determination solidifying in his stomach. He will push Seokjin out completely and at the end of October, when their time is up and Yoongi has fulfilled his end of the agreement, they will part ways. And he will never see Seokjin again.

His chest hurts with just the thought of it, but he can live with the ache. A small wound he will tend to and heal. It's manageable, he tells himself.

He promised himself not to respond to Seokjin, not to check his messages or return his calls.

He is bad at keeping his promises.

He tries to stay away, but Seokjin's last message, a simple plea, was terrifyingly powerful. Yoongi's feet carry him back to their apartment.

He finds Seokjin in the kitchen, stacking the dishwasher. The dining room just off the kitchen is set, a multitude of dishes filling the space. A week ago Yoongi would have happily sat down to enjoy the food, but he knows better now. His mind has cleared and he knows none of this belongs to him. The food and the atmosphere, the subtle awareness that Seokjin made this for him, that Seokjin is

caring for him, it doesn't belong to Yoongi. It never did in the first place. He allowed himself to get caught up in a dream, in make-believe.

He rubs at the side of his chest, hoping to dull the ache there. Nothing changed, he just woke up to reality. *Nothing changed.*

"You made it," Seokjin says and Yoongi doesn't need to look at him to hear the smile in his voice.

Yoongi clenches his teeth together and hardens his resolve before he dares to look at Seokjin. It doesn't help. It's still like a kick in his gut, the brilliance on Seokjin's face, the height and depth of Seokjin's of his feelings evident in the shine of his eyes. Yoongi's fingers curl into fists. This man loves him. This man *loves* him, and he doesn't want it, cannot have it. He needs to let it go before it consumes him, before he's drowning so deep in it that he won't be able to breathe without Seokjin's smile, before he cannot move without Seokjin's touch. It's too dangerous, too much.

This was never supposed to be more than a business arrangement. He fucked up. He messed up so badly and the thumping pain in the left side of his chest is his punishment. Seokjin became everything Yoongi promised never to have.

Yoongi is bad at keeping promises.

Seokjin wipes his hands on a dish towel and walks around the island in the kitchen to Yoongi, smiling widely. "I knew you would come." He reaches a hand to rest lightly on Yoongi's elbow and gently guides him to the table. "Sit down, eat."

Yoongi sits and stares blankly across the table as Seokjin settles opposite him. "You said it was important."

"Eat first," Seokjin says, placing a piece of meat on Yoongi's bowl of rice.

Yoongi makes no move to pick up his chopsticks. "I'm not hungry." He tilts his head and says, "Why don't you get to the point?"

Seokjin's lips tighten into a grimace and he sighs, setting his own chopsticks down on the table and folding his hands in front of him. "What's going on?"

Yoongi arches a brow. "You tell me." He gestures to the table. "I didn't stage a food intervention."

"Something's *wrong* Yoongi, and I don't appreciate being kept in the dark." Seokjin leans forward, reaching his hand out to touch Yoongi. His fingers hesitate and hover before he pulls back slowly and sighs again. "Is it the car accident? It was really minor, I'm fin-"

Yoongi's teeth grind together and he spits out, "It's not the fucking accident."

"Then fucking *talk* to me so I know," Seokjin exclaims, patience gone, steel in his voice.

"It's October," Yoongi says slowly, forcing himself to look Seokjin in the eyes.

Seokjin frowns, brow furrowing. The action draws Yoongi's attention to the small wound there, still healing, dark red and scabbed over. His mind whirls with worst-case scenarios. What if Seokjin had died, what if, what if. Yoongi presses his hands to his thighs to keep them from shaking. He needs to let Seokjin go and everything will be back to normal. He can live like he has for years, safe and protected and hidden behind hundreds of walls he built with his blood and sweat and tears.

"There's less than three weeks left on the contract," Yoongi elaborates, watching realization dawn in

Seokjin's eyes.

"Oh." Seokjin's gaze flickers and he clears his throat. "That's, actually, I wanted to talk to you about that before." He shifts and forces a smile to his lips, hope and anticipation behind his eyes. "I was thinking we could extend the contract. Things are different now and I...I want to stay."

A week ago, Yoongi would have said yes. He would have grinned wide and gummy and walked around the table and pulled Seokjin in for a kiss. He still has to cut down the urge, still has to press his lips together to keep the word *yes* from leaping off his tongue. Seokjin doesn't belong to him. Seokjin was never his. Yoongi can't have people. It's better that way. He'll be okay. Let go and the ache in his chest will go away one day.

Yoongi shifts and stands. "Nothing's changed. I don't want to alter the contract. We've both fulfilled our duties, it's time to part ways."

Seokjin blinks, bewildered. "Yoongi, what..." He huffs out a disbelieving breath. "What the fuck are you saying?"

"I don't want to alter-"

"I heard what you said." Seokjin scrapes his chair against the floor and stands, an angry red flush climbing up his neck, coloring his skin. He takes in a slow, fortifying breath before he looks back at Yoongi, concentrated and piercing. "What happened, Yoongi? What's going on, why are you pushing me away?"

Yoongi shrugs. "Nothing's wrong."

"Don't insult my intelligence," Seokjin spits out. "You can lie and deny it, but we both changed this year. We're more than a fucking business contract. I *know* you have feelings for me, and I have feelings for you." Seokjin hesitates, expression softening, eyebrows furrowing. "I lo-"

Yoongi doesn't want to hear it, doesn't want those words to haunt him, doesn't want them to burrow under his skin and fester, killing him slowly over the years. Before they can reach him, he says coolly, "Saying it in Korean doesn't change anything."

Seokjin freezes, his eyes widening, shock and disbelief and something almost like betrayal flashing over his face. He slumps against the table, a hand coming out to steady himself. "You...knew?"

Yoongi presses his lips together and looks away, but it's too late. The image of Seokjin, eyes wide and hurt, is already etched behind his eyelids. He clears his throat and reminds himself this is only temporary. "I'm leaving."

He turns and steps away but Seokjin's soft, wavering voice paralyzes him. "Yoongi, don't do this."

Those aren't tears in his eyes and his chest isn't seizing in heartbreak, Yoongi reassures himself. This is temporary, a necessary evil he has to endure. If he hadn't been a fool, if he hadn't let his guard down, he wouldn't have to suffer. Love is a double-edged sword, and it slices through more than it soothes.

Yoongi inhales slowly and walks out, refusing to look back.

When he gets to the elevator, he slumps against the wall and squeezes his eyes shut, willing the moisture away. The ache in his chest is stronger now, sharp and stabbing. Seokjin never belonged to him anyway.

Never again, he promises himself. *Never again*.

He pulls out his phone and dials the number to his lawyer.

It'll be okay, it'll all go back to normal, a mantra in his mind. If he says it enough, he might start to believe it.

&&&

Seokjin isn't an idiot. He knows something happened to Yoongi, something to put fear into his eyes and terror in the tremors of his fingers. Something that made Yoongi stop looking at Seokjin with unconcealed fondness, his expression turning dark and desolate and forsaken. It stabs through Seokjin's ribcage to watch. He misses Yoongi. He wants to draw him close and give him the strength Yoongi gave him. He wants to make Yoongi feel safe and loved, but he cannot unless Yoongi lets him.

Seokjin decides to do the only thing he can do; he waits. He waits and hopes his bet doesn't lose, the roulette table still spinning as time winds closer to the end of October. He waits and prays and wishes for Yoongi to return to himself, return to the man Seokjin has grown to love. The one who put an unopened package of tea in the kitchen cupboard even when he doesn't drink tea. The one who braved all of Jeongguk's assaults and emerged victorious in the end. The one who kisses him like he's trying to consume Seokjin, *more, more, more* a fevered whisper exchanged in their breaths. The one who placed his hand over Seokjin's and said *happy birthday hyung* so reverently that Seokjin almost believed he was Yoongi's entire world in that moment.

Seokjin waits and hopes and prays for *his* Yoongi to return. For more nights strolling with hands entwined together through a night market, buying silly hats. For more afternoons folding laundry together. For more mornings when the sun streams in like gold and Seokjin can take an extra five minutes in bed to count the freckles on Yoongi's nose.

Seokjin gives Yoongi time and space. He goes on with his routine, leaving for work in the morning, coming back to cook a dinner only he will eat. He does the dishes and folds the laundry and waits for Yoongi to come back again so the space feels less like four walls and more like home.

Seokjin waits and hopes and dreams and never thinks it will all shatter like shards of glass.

He enters the apartment late one afternoon, toes off his shoes at the entrance and sets his bag on the living room sofa. He makes his way to the kitchen for a glass of water. He leans his back on the closed refrigerator door and tilts the glass up to his lips. He pauses when a bright spot of white on the dining room table catches his eye.

He lowers the glass of water in his hand to his side and steps out of the kitchen to the dining table.

The white spot is a small stack of papers, edges lined up cleanly, laid innocently by the center floral arrangement. An elegant fountain pen lays by the papers, thick and silver and gleaming.

Seokjin's hands tremble, the blood rushing from his head, suddenly dizzy. He hears a shattering *crash* and it takes him a minute to realize it isn't the sound of the sky falling in on him, but of the glass in his hand slipping from his grip to break into a thousand pieces on the floor. He doesn't move to pick them up. If he cannot even hold himself together, he has no hope for the glass.

He lunges for the papers, grabbing them and bringing them close, as if closer proximity will somehow change the words. As if the distance has distorted the lines of ink into lies and knives that cut up his hope, tattered strips fluttering raggedly.

He crumbles the papers between his hands, anger swiftly rushing through him, waves upon waves, gratefully replacing the hollow emptiness of loss and yearning. He spins on his heel, grabbing his car keys and storming out of the apartment, only one destination in mind.

Yoongi must not have been diligent yet, because Seokjin is welcomed warmly when he reaches the Min offices. He sets his jaw and heads to the top floor where Yoongi's office is located.

Yoongi's assistant Minjoon stands when he sees Seokjin and there's a wary hesitation in his movements.

Ah, Seokjin realizes. *Minjoon knows*. He probably helped to facilitate the paperwork. Probably escorted Yoongi's lawyer in, offered her a coffee. Staring at Minjoon, Seokjin has a moment of irrational hate, misplaced and mindless. He hates everyone who touched these papers. Yoongi's assistant and Yoongi's lawyer and most of all Yoongi. He hates him for sinking so deep into Seokjin that his breathing is a resonance of Yoongi's, and now that he's gone, Seokjin is struggling to inhale.

Seokjin arches a brow at Minjoon, silently daring the other man to stop him, and storms into Yoongi's office, making sure the door slams to his satisfaction. It has the desired effect.

Yoongi jolts and looks up, expression stuttering when he sees Seokjin. He presses his lips together and leans back in his chair. Something flickers through his eyes, but it's too quick for Seokjin to grab a hold of, ice taking its place rapidly.

"Seokjin," Yoongi greets coolly, and Seokjin's breath chokes in his throat when he realizes he's lost the *hyung* honorific, like Yoongi is trying to rewind to when they first met.

Seokjin gathers his strength and says in a voice that's much steadier than he anticipated, "What the fuck is this?" Seokjin holds up the crumbled papers, eyes accusing and just the slightest bit desperate, a small part of him that he'll never be able to vanquish completely that hopes, hopes, hopes.

Yoongi's gaze falls on the papers before shifting back to Seokjin, impassive. "Divorce papers."

"Why did you give me divorce papers?" Seokjin demands, voice tight. He hates that he can't read Yoongi's thoughts, hates that it feels like he's the only one upset. Hates that he's starting to realize maybe he was the only one caught up in a dream. Foolish, senseless heart.

Yoongi swallows and looks away. "The contract expires at the end of this month. Divorce papers are expected."

Seokjin scoffs. "Neither one of us has been following that damned contract for months."

Yoongi frowns. "It was right to begin with." He looks back to Seokjin. "We had a deal."

"Things changed," Seokjin grits out, desperate to make Yoongi admit what they shared, what they grew to be. Desperate to make Yoongi see that whatever nonsense is whirling around in his mind cannot stand against what they became.

"Nothing changed!" Yoongi says, voice sharp and loud, the first hint of emotion he's let slip out.

"Bullshit. I opened my heart to you. I lo-"

"Don't!" Yoongi stands abruptly, slamming his hands onto his desk. "Don't say it. You didn't say it before and you *don't* get to say it now."

Seokjin swallows the words down, a lump forming in his throat, anger finally melting away to

misery. "Don't do this, Yoongi. Whatever you're going through, it will pass. I'll help you through it. I don't want to lose what we found."

Yoongi sighs heavily, breath shuddering as he pushes it past his lips. He taps his fingers on his desk, frowning at them. "I don't -" he starts, his voice breaking. He clears his throat and tries again a little louder, eyes still focused on his fingers. "I don't want this to be difficult. I don't want to hurt you."

"You can't divorce me without hurting me, Yoongi," Seokjin says softly, sadness coloring his tone.

"We made an agreement, at the beginning. One year. You swore one year and then...." Yoongi trails off and finally looks up at Seokjin.

One year, Yoongi. I need you for one year, and then you'll never see me again.

Seokjin closes his eyes and swallows, his own words piercing his skin, tiny wounds that bleed more than they should. The dream is over, he tells himself.

Wake up, Seokjinie. Wake up, Seokjinie.

The dream is over and he's awake, cold and wingless, destined to stay grounded.

He opens his eyes slowly, pleading silently with Yoongi one last time, clutching onto the world of smoke and fantasies. "If I sign this," he says slowly, watching Yoongi carefully. "If I sign this and walk out of that door, you'll never see me again. Is that what you want?"

For a moment, Seokjin thinks Yoongi makes a move toward him, he thinks he sees doubt and regret and yearning in his eyes. But when Yoongi opens his lips, he says, "Yes. That's what I want."

Seokjin makes an aborted noise in the back of his throat, a sob or a whimper, he doesn't know. He bites his teeth together to keep it within him, adding it to the pit of bitterness in his stomach. He nods and steps to the desk, almost scoffing as Yoongi backs away at his approach. He ignores Yoongi and lays the battered papers on the desk, taking a pen and signing his name with a flourish in the blank white space indicated. His mind travels back to one year ago, signing the contract with Yoongi on the second floor of a deserted cafe in Gangnam. He wonders if he can let it go now. He wonders as he watches the ink form his name if he regrets any of it.

He lays the pen flat on the papers and looks back up at Yoongi, takes his time memorizing his face. Dark eyes that keep him transfixed. A button nose that scrunches when he's displeased. Thin lips that have traveled the length of Seokjin's body, murmuring words he never fully heard. The way his fringe sits over his brows, the freckles on his nose that only Seokjin knows the number of.

He doesn't regret any of it, and the knowledge makes his heart thump painfully in his chest. "Goodbye, Yoongi," he says quietly, and leaves.

It isn't until he's reached his car, hands wrapped tight around the steering wheel, that he realizes he's crying. He lets his face crumble and slumps over the wheel, shoulders shaking as the sobs wrack through him.

&&&

"You sure it's okay to just go in?" Jimin asks, watching Taehyung uncover the keypad to Seokjin and Yoongi's apartment.

"We have dinner plans and neither of them are answering their phones. It's, like, implied that we can wait inside," Taehyung reasons, peering over his shoulder to smile reassuringly at Jimin.

"I practically lived here," Jeongguk inserts, shifting the paper bags of newly acquired groceries in his hands. "It's fine."

"See? Totally okay." Taehyung turns back to the keypad and punches in 1-0-0-7.

"Oh," Jimin says, amused, catching the door Taehyung holds open for him. "That's today's date."

"What is?" Jeongguk asks, stepping into the apartment and kicking off his shoes.

"The code. It's today," Jimin says, taking one of Jeongguk's bags and heading to the kitchen.

"Hyungs!" Taehyung calls out, running upstairs to see if Seokjin or Yoongi is home. "Hyungs, we're here! Feed us!"

Jimin points Jeongguk to the kitchen. "Unpack the groceries here. We might as well start cooking." Jimin pulls out his phone to find a recipe. He had been counting on Seokjin being present to direct them but this might be a nice surprise, a chance to pay Seokjin back for all his home-cooked meals.

Jimin and Jeongguk have already started washing and cutting the ingredients when Taehyung bounds into the kitchen.

"They are definitely not here," he reports, sliding up to peer over Jimin's shoulder.

Jeongguk scoffs. "That's obvious."

Taehyung ignores him and rests his head on Jimin's shoulder, smiling at him. "What can I do to help?"

Jimin's mind flashes to a couple of weeks ago when Taehyung attempted to make him breakfast in bed. He turns and smiles sweetly at Taehyung, ushering him around the counter to the breakfast bar. He pats a stool and says, "Your job is to sit here and supervise."

Taehyung pouts. "I want to help."

"You are helping," Jimin assures him. "You're my support." He tilts his head cutely and smiles. "Cheer me on, Tae?"

Taehyung makes a muffled noise and reaches out to cup Jimin's face in his hands. "You're the most amazing person in this world."

Jimin's breath catches and he feels his cheeks heat with a blush. Before he can protest in embarrassment, Jeongguk does it for him.

"Yah, yah! What did I say about this?" He pulls Jimin away from Taehyung's grasp and steps between them. "I don't approve."

Taehyung sighs in exasperation at Jeongguk. "You liked me like two months ago. We were cool."

Jeongguk scowls. "That was before you started sleeping with Jimin-hyung."

Taehyung purses his lips. "But I slept with him way before that and we got along just fine."

Jimin's eyes widen and he hurriedly steps around Jeongguk to pull Taehyung from the stool, pushing him out of the kitchen. "Run, Taehyung."

"You what!"

Taehyung's eyes widen in fear and he starts to jog out into the living room.

Jeongguk takes off running after Taehyung and all Jimin can hear is a lot of shouting and the unmistakable skidding of furniture being overturned. Jimin steps away from the kitchen. "Don't run inside, you're going to get hurt," he scolds, but his words are lost in the commotion.

Taehyung loops back around through the dining room, Jeongguk trailing behind him. Taehyung skids to a stop and points to the floor. "Yah!" he says to Jeongguk. "You broke a glass."

"No, I didn't, you broke it," Jeongguk retorts, brow furrowed.

"I did *not*."

Jimin frowns and makes his way to the dining room to investigate. He finds a large puddle of water and the sparkling shattered remains of what once was presumably a glass. He scowls and sends a sharp look to both Taehyung and Jeongguk. "This is what you get for horsing around." He taps at Taehyung's hip to move him away. "Go get me a wastebasket and some paper towels." He flicks his gaze to Jeongguk. "You too. I need a broom."

"Hyung, I'll help," Jeongguk offers, suddenly subdued and remorseful. He bends to pick up the glass shards but Jimin makes a sharp noise with his tongue.

"You'll get hurt." Jimin shoos him away. "Go, you can help by doing what I say." Jimin crouches down, cautiously picking up the larger shards and setting them on the table.

"Where are the paper towels?" Taehyung calls out.

"They're in the linen closet," Jeongguk yells back, heading to the laundry room to retrieve a broom.

"Where's the linen closet?"

Jeongguk sighs heavily and heads into the direction of Taehyung's voice. "It's not like you've never been here before, hyung. Yoongi-hyung's lived here for years," he says, voice muffling as he steps further from Jimin.

"Excuse me if I don't snoop into my cousin's linen closets!"

Jimin is about to scold them again when he hears the door chime as it's unlocked. He stands and smiles, heading to the entrance to find Seokjin struggling out of his coat. "Hyung!"

Seokjin jolts, glancing over to Jimin.

Jimin's heart leaps into his throat and his stomach drops. Seokjin's hair is a mess, dishevelled and messy. His cheeks are flushed and his eyes are red and puffy. He's been crying. Jimin has only seen Seokjin cry once, when Jeongguk was taken to Seoul, the precursor to his whole life crumbling. He's scared of what Seokjin's tears mean.

Jimin walks over quietly, putting a hand gently on Seokjin's arm. "Hyung, what's wrong?"

Seokjin lets out a short huff of breath and steps away, heading to the spiralling staircase. "Why are you here?"

"We had dinner plans," Jimin says softly, following Seokjin. "You didn't answer your phone so we....just came in..." Jimin's voice trails off and he keeps trying to step into Seokjin's view to look at the state of Seokjin's eyes again.

Seokjin pauses and arches his brows at Jimin. "We?"

"Taehyung and Jeongguk."

Seokjin sighs and closes his eyes, a hand coming up to rub at the bridge of his nose. "Of course." He opens his eyes. "Dinner's cancelled, Jimin. Go home."

Jimin takes a step closer to Seokjin just as Taehyung and Jeongguk run into the space.

"Whatever Jeongguk says, I didn't break it, hyung," Taehyung says as soon as he spots Seokjin.

"Taehyung-hyung is a liar," Jeongguk retorts, stopping short when he sees Seokjin. His expression darkens instantly. "Why are you crying?"

Seokjin scowls, ignoring him and heading up the stairs to his room.

Jeongguk runs after him, bounding up the stairs two at a time. "Is it Mom? Hyung!"

Jimin shares a worried look with Taehyung before they both rush up the stairs, following Seokjin. They find Jeongguk staring numbly as Seokjin pulls out several pieces of luggage and opens them on the floor.

Seokjin storms into the closet, re-emerging shortly after with an armful of clothes. He dumps them on the bed and heads back, repeating the process.

"Hyung, what's going on?" Jeongguk asks, bewildered, worry etching across his face.

"What does it look like? I'm packing." Seokjin riffles through a night side table, pulling out small items. All his movements are jolted and harsh, anger evident in the motions.

"Why are you packing?" Jeongguk elaborates, frustrated. "You said you wanted to stay. You said Yoongi-hyung makes you happy!"

Seokjin freezes and squeezes his eyes shut, taking in a deep, slow breath. "If you're not going to leave, you might as well help me pack," he finally grits out, ignoring Jeongguk's statement. He shoves a bag into his brother's hands.

"Hyung," Taehyung finally speaks up, stepping closer. There's a furrow in his brow, his eyes clouded. Jimin can almost hear the gears in his head clicking as he tries to piece something together. "Have you talked to Yoongi-hyung?"

Seokjin scoffs, shoving clothes into his suitcase.

"He wants you to stay. I talked to him," Taehyung says, trying to get Seokjin to stop.

"He wants to follow the fucking contract," Seokjin seethes, pausing long enough to look Taehyung in the eye. "So we're going by the fucking contract. One year, over and done with."

"What contract?" Jimin asks, eyes wide, flicking between Taehyung and Seokjin. "What's going on?"

"What contract?" Jeongguk parrots, throwing the bag in his hands down on the bed, growing anger ticking in the clench of his jaw.

Seokjin looks at him and hesitates, pressing his lips together before sighing and resuming his packing. "You were right all along, Jeongguk. It was fake." He shoves items roughly into a bag.

"The Chairman wanted to marry you off and the only way I could stop it was for me to marry better." He smiles humorlessly, a sharp edge of lips and teeth. "I thought Yoongi was a miracle." He scoffs. "I thought a lot of foolish things."

Jimin stares, mouth gaping open in shock, unable to process what he just heard. "It was fake?"

"We signed a contract to remain married for one year. And then divorce." Seokjin's voice hitches and he shakes his head. "I'm sorry I lied to you. It was the only way."

"You said Yoongi-hyung makes you happy. Was that a lie?" Jeongguk presses, voice scarily even and calm.

Seokjin stops and stares down at his hands, blinking rapidly. "No."

Jeongguk nods to himself, lips pressed together so tightly they turn white. "I'm going to kill him," he grits out, running out of the room and bounding down the stairs.

Taehyung's eyes grow wider with panic. "He's really going to kill him." He turns to Jimin. "I'll be back to drive you home later. I have to go after them."

Jimin nods numbly, mind still a muddled mess of incomplete thoughts. He stares at Seokjin, unable to form any words of comfort, his tongue paralyzed.

Seokjin stares down at his hands, his lower lip trembling almost imperceptively. He slowly splays the fingers on his left hand, eyes transfixed. He reaches his right hand over and carefully slips his wedding band from his left ring finger. Jimin can see the hiccup in Seokjin's breathing as he clutches the gold ring in his palm.

Jimin thinks he just witnessed the collapse of Seokjin's world for a second time. He blinks rapidly at the build up of tears behind his eyes and steps forward to give Seokjin a gentle hug, wishing he could do more.

&&&

Yoongi doesn't know how long he spends staring at Seokjin's signature on the divorce papers. He keeps tracing the black ink with the tip of his fingers, trying to feel the imperceptible volume of it. He can't seem to breathe properly, inhaling on a hiccup, exhaling in a huff.

He keeps telling himself he doesn't regret it. This pain will get better. This pain will fade one day. It's better to be tossed in the waves of a temporary heartache than wait until Seokjin is so permanently embedded in his blood that his veins sing with him. It's better this way. He'll be okay again. He has to find the locks to his walls again. He did the right thing.

He doesn't jerk out of his nearly trance-like state until he hears the thudding of footsteps nearing and a shout of protest. He furrows his brow and stands, stepping around his desk just as his office door slams open and Jeongguk charges straight at him.

"You asshole," Jeongguk spits out, his fist drawing back.

Before Yoongi can react, Jeongguk's fist connects with the left side of his face. Yoongi stumbles back against his desk, hitting his hip hard enough to bruise. He hears the clattering of items being knocked off his desk as he tries to regain his balance. His hand comes up to touch gingerly at his jaw, wincing at the throbbing pain.

"Mr. Min!" Yoongi's assistant charges into the office. "Are you okay? I'll get security."

"No," Yoongi says, his jaw protesting with the movement. He tastes iron in his mouth and pulls his fingers away, spots of blood on the digits. "No, I deserved that." He waves his hand at his assistant. "It's okay, you can go."

His assistant eyes Jeongguk warily but he does as he's told, exiting slowly and closing the door softly behind him.

Yoongi finally looks back to Jeongguk, sees his eyes wide and watering, fury in the set of his lips but something akin to betrayal in the furrow of his brows. Yoongi arches a brow and dabs the side of his mouth with his sleeve. "You want to hit me again?"

"It was fake?" Jeongguk accuses, ignoring Yoongi. "This whole time, you were *lying* to me?"

Yoongi sighs. "Seokjin was the one who wanted to deceive you. I was just following his request."

"I don't care about Seokjin-hyung's side of this. I *told* you how important he is to me. I told you I can't give him to anyone that won't treasure him."

"I'm sorr-"

"I *trusted* you with him."

"It was an arrangement from the beginning," Yoongi says, voice even and calm. "There was never any real feelings."

"Bullshit! Seokjin-hyung loves you."

The ache in Yoongi's chest throbs, sharp and insistent, overpowering the pain in his jaw. "Isn't this what you wanted in the first place? We're getting a divorce, your wish came true."

Jeongguk's eyes flicker, his fingers curl into fists, shaking at his side. "I thought we were becoming a family."

Yoongi's face dims. "I don't have a family, kid. Your brother was never going to change that."

Jeongguk lunges forward again to hit Yoongi but he's pulled back sharply. They both turn to see Taehyung, panting, gripping Jeongguk's shirt tightly in his hand.

"Let me go, hyung," Jeongguk seethes.

Taehyung shakes his head, expression serious and fierce. "This isn't going to help your brother." He pulls Jeongguk back and shoves him roughly to the door. "Come on, Seokjin-hyung needs help getting his stuff to your place."

Jeongguk seems to hesitate, eyes flickering between still boiling anger and sadness.

"Now," Taehyung says, tone deep and authoritative.

Jeongguk straightens and sends Yoongi a sharp look. "Don't you *ever* speak Seokjin-hyung's name again. Don't even think it."

Taehyung watches until Jeongguk leaves the office before he turns his gaze onto Yoongi, a mix of deeply disappointed and livid. "I'll deal with you later, hyung," he says before following Jeongguk and leaving Yoongi alone in his office again, the room strangely silent after the sudden commotion.

He's doing the right thing, he reassures himself. And one day the ache in his heart will fade. One

day, the lump in his throat will be gone and he will know he was right.

&&&

The sun has long since sunk beneath the horizon by the time Yoongi makes his way back home. The suite is deadly silent, as Yoongi expects. It feels like a vacuum, empty and cold and strangely unfamiliar. It's the same space. His shoes are still neatly arranged on the shoe rack, except now there are gaps between pairs, Seokjin's shoes removed. Yoongi stares at it for a moment, in a trance.

He shakes his head and goes to his bedroom to change out of his work clothes. He hits the light switch in the closet and stops, his eyes flickering over the wardrobes lining the walls, bereft of Seokjin's sweaters and his work pants and his stupid, silky shirts. Yoongi brings a hand up to rub at the left side of his chest and pushes into the room, determinedly keeping his mind blank.

Everywhere Yoongi looks, he sees Seokjin's absence. His glasses aren't on their nightstand table, his skincare products are missing from the bathroom counter. His laptop is gone from the living room, and Yoongi can't see any of Seokjin's books littered on the coffee table in the reading nook. Seokjin has been meticulous.

It's a good thing, Yoongi tells himself. And one day his feelings will catch up to his thoughts.

He trudges to the kitchen, clicking the light on. He squints as the room floods with light, expelling the gloomy blue with the artificial yellow of the overhead bulbs. He moves to the cabinet where he keeps his coffee and tugs it open.

His heart stops, restarts, stutters and struggles to find a rhythm. His feet are paralyzed, his hands shake as he reaches forward to grab the small box of earl grey tea that Seokjin left behind. It's Seokjin's favorite brand, the tin blue and decorated with whimsical flowers. He brings it close to his chest and opens it, a strong scent of bergamot flooding his lungs.

He remembers Seokjin telling him happily how to brew the perfect cup of tea on a Sunday morning, a faint flush of pink on his cheeks, still warm from sleep. He remembers Seokjin handing him his tumbler to hold temporarily in the elevator as he fiddled with something in his bag, giving him a chaste kiss on the cheek as a thank you.

He remembers Seokjin bringing him three different kinds of coffee because he didn't know what Yoongi liked yet, months ago, before their marriage, before this all turned upside down on him. He remembers Seokjin's fingers under his as he reached for the one cup that was tea, and the tingling in his hand at the contact. He remembers everything about Seokjin and he crumbles against the cupboard, knees too weak to withstand his own weight.

He leans his head on the cabinet door and pulls his knees up to his chest, huddled on the cold floor. He takes one breath too quickly, inhales a little too sharply, and suddenly he cannot stop the tears that built at the back of his eyes anymore.

He brings his hand to his mouth to muffle his sobs, squeezing his eyes shut and leaning heavily on the cabinet door.

He misses Seokjin so much.

It's for the best, he tells himself.

He wants to beg him to come back.

You'll get over it one day.

Seokjin loves him.

This pain is only temporary, he assures himself.

Just temporary.

Fleeting, like the time he shared with Seokjin.

The scent of bergamot is heady all around him as he finally lets himself cry.

Chapter End Notes

I have no ending notes this time. 'Bye guys.

Mask

Chapter Notes

Wonderful people have made wonderful works ;;; thank you!!

[Rayne MADE ME CRY](#)

[Trisha](#) made this [lovely](#) edit thank you so much ;;;;

[Dark Core](#) made [a playlist!](#)

[Danielle](#) made [another art](#) for AGW ;;;;, THANK YOU

[ethereal mochi](#) made [more edits that personally hurt me](#) ;;; thank you!!

[Ap](#) made this [heartbreaking edit WHY WHY WHY](#) thank you ;;;;

[DwongN](#) drew this [amazingly heart-wrenching art](#), thank you ;;;;

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Yoongi hears a loud commotion outside his office mere hours after he filed the divorce papers, he's fairly certain it is his grandmother who decided to grace him with her presence. Yoongi notes that his assistant doesn't even try to accompany his grandmother into his office. He swallows a sigh as he sees his grandmother storm her way in. He sets his jaw and clenches his teeth until they hurt.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" his grandmother barks as soon as the door shuts behind her. She has her hand gripped tightly over the top of her cane. Yoongi recognizes it as the one she doesn't actually need, but uses when she wants to appear old and weak, garnering sympathy. He thinks she looks less fragile and more ready to lift it over her head and hit him with it.

Yoongi sits back in his chair and shrugs. "I'm working," he says, deliberately obtuse.

"The divorce, Yoongi," his grandmother seethes. She storms over to his desk and knocks her cane on the top of his desk. "Marriage isn't a plaything, child. It's for life."

"You mean until death," Yoongi corrects, the words cutting at his mouth as he expels them, remembering everything he's lost.

She sends him a sharp look, eyes trying to pierce through his mask. "You and Seokjin are moving into the mansion immediately until this is resolved. And you will withdraw this ridiculous divorce. I thought you knew better than to run scared to the lawyers at the first sign of a fight." She smacks her cane on the desk one last time for emphasis, and steps away, apparently in the belief that she has settled the issue.

Yoongi grinds his teeth together. "It was a contract, Grandmother," he calls out, watching her freeze and turn to look at him again. "And the terms have been fulfilled," he says.

"What did you just say?" she says slowly, anger flashing in her eyes, disbelief in the huff of her breath.

If Yoongi's chest was anything but an empty, aching hollow, he might feel scared, terrified even. He knows exactly what his grandmother is capable of when she doesn't get her way. Yoongi wishes he could be concerned. He just feels defeated and alone.

“I didn’t want to get married. I *told* you that. I made it perfectly clear that I was not going to get married.”

“But you did,” she argues. “And Seokjin is *good* for you.”

“It was an act, Grandmother. You should have known that.” He clenches his fingers into fists. “It was a contract for one year. To get you to stop. To get his family to stop. And now it’s over.” He tilts his chin up in defiance.

She sends him a withering glare, shaking her head in disbelief. “You *lied* to me? You made a fool out of me like this for an entire year?”

“You’re the one who pushed me to this extreme.”

“Seokjin is *good* for you,” she insists strongly. “You love him. I could see it in your eyes.”

Yoongi shakes his head. “I never loved him,” he denies, the words burning his tongue, acid and poison sliding to the back of his throat. “And he never loved me.” His heart stops for a moment at the lie. His chest feels heavy, like a large, solid weight is squeezing his ribcage, suffocating him.

She scowls. “He is our family whether you intended it or not.”

“I don’t have a family,” he replies quietly.

His grandmother straightens her back and sets her jaw. A sense of foreboding washes over Yoongi when he sees her eyes dim from fiery anger to ice cold indifference.

“From this moment on,” she says, enunciating every syllable with deadly precision, “I have no grandson.”

It’s unexpected, Yoongi thinks dully as he watches his grandmother storm out of his office. He didn’t think his heart could rip into any more scattered, broken pieces.

He was wrong.

&&&

Jimin's mind is in a haze days after everything comes out. It was all a contract, a ruse, a play. Seokjin and Yoongi were the actors, and Jimin was one of the audience, in the front row, riveted, entranced, his heart ripped apart for no reason but a lie. It's too difficult for him to fully understand, for him to look back over the last year and relive the moments that broke his heart, that changed him.

He taught Seokjin to dance, held him in his arms, lead him with a firm hand at the center of his back. He watched Yoongi take that from him, watched as Yoongi smiled at Seokjin at their wedding, how they looked into each other's eyes and danced, slowly but smoothly. It had killed him, back then. The waltz is about trust. It's about trust, and yet Yoongi was able to guide Seokjin when Jimin couldn't.

It was fake. It was all pretend, and somehow Jimin still thinks, that waltz was real.

He thought he had truly lost Seokjin. He gave up on him. Jimin wonders now about the alternative. He wonders what would have happened if he had waited for Seokjin.

His eyes flicker over Seokjin as he shuffles around Jeongguk's living room, organizing his bags, taking the time to refold his clothes properly this time. He wonders if he would be right there beside him, packing his bags together, ready to take Seokjin's hand and lead him to wherever he wanted to

go.

Jimin's heart pangs, and there's a heavy, corrosive weight in his stomach at the thought. Without the past year, without all the heartbreak and the tears and the torment of a lost love, he never would have Taehyung now. His heart shakes in protest. Taehyung is his summer storm, his lighthouse. Taehyung is the wind under Jimin's wings, bolstering him up, higher, higher, to pinnacles he never imagined before.

No, Jimin does not regret anything this past year, no matter the scars that remain. And looking at the way Seokjin's hands hesitate and tremble as he closes a suitcase, he thinks Seokjin didn't want it to end either.

This isn't the end of pretending for Seokjin. This is genuine heartbreak. Somewhere along the way, Jimin realizes, it started being real for Seokjin.

"You shouldn't be the one running away," Jeongguk seethes from the sofa, arms crossed over his chest. "That bastard should be the one-"

Seokjin closes his eyes and sighs. "Jeongguk, please. I'm tired."

Jeongguk frowns, uncrossing his arms, admonished.

"But do you really need to leave the country?" Jimin interjects gently, worrying his bottom lip. "Isn't it enough that you signed the divorce papers?"

"You're not the one in the wrong," Jeongguk adds.

Seokjin folds a shirt, smoothing down the edges over and over, as if the motion is soothing. "It's better this way," he finally says, tone low and defeated. "It was my plan to begin with." He sighs and smiles weakly at them. "I promised, after all. I promised Yoongi he wouldn't see me again after a year."

Jimin blinks away tears and bites his bottom lip. He knows. Seokjin always keeps his promises.

Jimin leaves soon after and heads back to his dorm room. Jeongguk makes Jimin promise not to say a word about Seokjin's plans to Yoongi. *Including* not telling Taehyung. Jimin agrees. It's easy enough. Taehyung won't ask, and he has no reason to speak with Yoongi ever again.

His dorm room is not empty when he arrives. Taehyung is curled up on his bed, fully clothed, hugging Jimin's pillow to his body. Jimin laughs lightly under his breath and slips off his jacket, crawling into bed beside Taehyung. He wrestles the pillow from Taehyung's grip, sliding in to replace it.

Taehyung's eyes blink open and he smiles when he sees Jimin. "Hey," he says, his voice cracking with sleep. "I missed you."

Jimin scoffs. "So you broke into my room?"

Taehyung shrugs, wrapping his arms around Jimin and pulling him close. "It's not breaking in if you leave the key under the mat and tell me where it is."

Jimin smiles, patting Taehyung's back. "You okay? You usually call before you come over."

Taehyung frowns. "I went to see Yoongi-hyung." Jimin freezes but Taehyung continues, "He's being stupidly stubborn. He hasn't been this bad since he started living with me in Daegu." He sighs

and pulls Jimin closer, closing his eyes. "How's Seokjin-hyung doing?"

Jimin stays frozen in Taehyung's arms, biting his lip. "He's doing as well as can be expected, I guess," he answers vaguely.

Taehyung sighs. "It's going to be okay, Jiminie. Trust me. Yoongi-hyung is stubborn but I'm even more stubborn than him. I'll keep talking to him. All he needs is time."

Jimin swallows down the truth that's bubbling out of his throat. Time is the one thing Yoongi doesn't have left.

&&&

Yoongi is so stupid. Hoseok blinks hazily and frowns at the array of empty soju bottles in front of him on the small table. They look like bowling pins. He doesn't quite remember where he is, but he's starting to suspect it is a bowling alley. He looks up and his frown deepens. It's really noisy to be a bowling alley. And dark. Maybe they're glow-in-the-dark bowling.

He turns to his left and hits Yoongi's arm several times to get his attention. "Hey. Hey, hyung." His hand misses Yoongi's arm and he teeters in the booth, unable to regain his balance.

A hand comes around his waist and corrects his posture. He pats the hand absently, eyes still trying to focus blurily on Yoongi.

He is pretty sure he was going to ask him something, but the thought has escaped into the clouded mud of his mind. Instead, he sneers and points a finger at Yoongi. "You're really stupid," he slurs out. "Did you know that?"

Yoongi shrugs, unaffected, and takes another shot. "I know. You've told me twenty times already."

"Because you are!" Hoseok insists. "I really liked Seokjin-hyung."

"I know," Yoongi says, pouring another shot.

"I really, really liked him."

"I know."

"You're stupid."

"So you said."

Hoseok whines in frustration. He has so much he wants to say to Yoongi. How Yoongi is regressing into who he was at ten years old, alone and scared. How Hoseok can see this is eating Yoongi up inside. How pushing everyone away will only make the pain worse. How he promised himself never to let Yoongi walk down that path alone again.

There's so much he wants to tell Yoongi, but the alcohol has tied his tongue and muddled his mind.

"Wait," he says, a brilliant idea sparking in his head. Even drunk, he has the *best* ideas. "I'm gonna call Joonie and he'll tell you." He holds up one finger at Yoongi, a signal to wait, as he pulls his phone out. He dials Namjoon's number, more by habit than by conscious thought.

A phone on the table, somewhere between bottles of soju, lights up and starts vibrating. Hoseok scowls. It's annoying.

He hits the person to his right hard in the stomach. “Joonie, make your phone shut up. I’m trying to call Joonie.”

“Hoseok,” Namjoon says slowly, calmly, his voice an octave higher like he’s trying to deescalate something. “I’m right here.”

“I *know* that,” Hoseok says, rolling his eyes. It’s a mistake. He’s instantly light-headed. He wobbles against Namjoon, thankful for the arm around his waist. “Great, it went to voicemail,” he sighs accusingly at Namjoon. He hangs up and puts his phone on the table.

“Hoseok,” Namjoon tries again. “I’m right here.”

Hoseok narrows his eyes at his boyfriend, suddenly recognizing his presence. “When did you get here?”

“I’ve been here the entire time.”

“Why aren’t you drunk?”

“Because I’m driving.”

“Oh.” Hoseok swings his gaze to Yoongi on his other side, flicking his eyes over his frame. “Why isn’t hyung drunk?”

“Because he has an inhumanly high tolerance level,” Namjoon answers.

Yoongi scoffs, throwing his head back with another shot.

“Oh.” Hoseok frowns. He pats Namjoon’s wide chest, appreciating it for a moment longer than is appropriate before he remembers his task. “Tell hyung he’s stupid.”

Namjoon leans back on the booth and says behind Hoseok to Yoongi, “You’re stupid, hyung.”

Yoongi snorts derisively, but otherwise shows no reaction.

“Tell him why, Joonie,” Hoseok prompts.

“Because you’re letting the past control your future,” Namjoon says succinctly.

Hoseok nods in agreement. “Yeah. That.” He smiles blurrily at Namjoon. “Thank you, baby.”

Yoongi slams his shot glass on the table and Hoseok jumps in surprise. “I think I’m done here,” he says, standing, swaying slightly at the sudden movement.

Namjoon moves to stand. “Hyung, I’ll drive you home.”

Yoongi waves him off. “I’ll call a cab. I want to be alone,” he says as he walks off into the crowd of the club.

Hoseok frowns at his retreating back. Something set him off. He withstood hours of being called an idiot, but *something* set him off now, sparked a bad memory.

He sighs. He’s tired and sad and drunk. He just wants to go home and sleep for seven or eight years. He curls into Namjoon’s chest and closes his eyes. “Hey. Can you call my boyfriend? I wanna go home.”

Namjoon's arm squeezes Hoseok close. "I'm right here, babe."

"Yeah," Hoseok agrees, already drifting to sleep. "You're always right here."

&&&

He's having that dream again. Yoongi blurrily opens his eyes, staring at the setting sun outside his window. The comforter is too warm, his limbs feel heavy and stiff. He groans and presses into his pillow. He knocked out sometime mid-afternoon, too tired to face the rest of the day. He wishes he could blame alcohol, but he's completely sober.

It'll get better, he says to himself. He's starting to wonder when it won't sound like a lie.

He sighs and forces himself out of bed, stumbling to his feet and groggily making his way to the bathroom. His mind keeps replaying the dream again.

Darkness and silence broken only by the sound of his own footsteps, tracing empty streets. The blaring of a horn, the rush of a car whipping past him, and the now sad, mournful tune of his mother's humming that used to fill their home with happiness.

He rubs his temples. He wants to call Seokjin, wants to hear his voice to calm down. He wants Seokjin to tell him everything will be okay, to make bad jokes, and talk about the silly insignificant things about his day.

He misses Seokjin.

Yoongi bends over the sink and splashes cold water on his face, more to disrupt his own thoughts than to do any real cleansing,

He regrets losing Seokjin.

Another cold splash of water and vigorous scrubbing of his hands over his face. He did the right thing. It will hurt less to lose him now than it would in a few years. This hurts less. If it hurts this much now, he knows with absolute certainty that he would never be able to survive the pain later.

He pats his face dry, noting the slight abrasive red blotching his skin where he scrubbed too harshly, and changes his shirt before he heads downstairs for a supper. He's not hungry but refusing to eat would mean he's more upset than he wants to admit. He's fine. He'll be fine. Seokjin was always temporary.

The kitchen is dark and empty and cold. He frowns at the lifeless space, appliances that seem dull where they used to gleam, the counter space barren, now devoid of the various bottles of spices Seokjin used to use. The pit of Yoongi's stomach feels hollow. It's only hunger, he wants to believe. He wonders when he became such a bad liar.

The ringing of his doorbell interrupts his thoughts and he glances towards the doorway, unflinching. He contemplates who it could be.

It could be his grandmother, finally finished punishing Yoongi. It's not too bad, he expected it. She's acted similarly when events did not proceed as she wished. He knows she'll forgive him one day. Neither of them have much family left. They have to love each other.

Granny's tantrum is nothing compared to Seokjin's voice, stretched thin and almost shaking, saying *"If I sign this and walk out of that door, you'll never see me again. Is that what you want?"*

The doorbell rings again and Yoongi still doesn't move, staring at the dark hallway. It could be Hoseok, back with more alcohol that just makes remembering Seokjin more difficult, just makes his mind work twice as hard to bring back his face, his smile, the way he laughs. Yoongi really doesn't want to drink anymore.

He sighs as the doorbell stops ringing and the sound of the lock opening chimes. It's probably Taehyung, who has been by twice a day, either at home or at the office, to urge Yoongi to stop and think for a moment. Yoongi has always known that Taehyung is just as stubborn as he is. He didn't want to be proven right again.

"Whatever you have to say, I don't want to hear it," Yoongi calls out as he sees movement approach him.

Instead of his cousin, though, it's his aunt that appears in front of him, a cool brow arched. "We can be sullen and taciturn, then," she says, walking around Yoongi and into the kitchen, placing several cloth shopping bags on the counter. "But at least turn on the lights." She reaches over and hits the on switch for the lights, the kitchen immediately flooded with brightness.

Yoongi squints, his eyes stinging at the adjustment.

Mikyung busies herself, taking cartons and packages from the grocery bags and setting them on the table with swift efficiency.

Yoongi frowns at her, stepping slowly into the kitchen to lean on the breakfast bar. "What are you doing here?" His aunt rarely comes over to his place, content to speak briefly over text and the occasional dinner at Granny's.

Mikyung doesn't look at Yoongi, stacking cartons of strawberries and turning to the refrigerator. "I figured you properly weren't feeding yourself." She opens the refrigerator and her lips dip into a disapproving frown. "I was right."

Yoongi huffs and slides onto a stool by the breakfast bar. "Did you cook for me?"

"Don't be silly, you know I don't cook." She turns around again to grab another stack of packages. "I bought these with *love*."

Yoongi doesn't laugh, he doesn't think he can yet, but his mouth relaxes into a small smirk. "Thank you, Auntie."

Mikyung glances up at Yoongi for a moment, her eyes that look so much like his narrowing for a moment, her lips pursed like she wants to say something. She's probably been formulating the words for two weeks, knocking them around her head, exchanging and editing them, as if there is one perfect combination. She's been like that since Yoongi's parents passed, thoughtful, overthinking, calculating. It reminds Yoongi of Seokjin, the measured, careful steps he took, the cautious way he let his feelings drip bit by bit into Yoongi's ears and Yoongi's lips, perforating into Yoongi's lungs until all he could breathe was Seokjin's scent.

Yoongi doesn't understand it, doesn't have the patience for his aunt's measured words that she cannot utter yet. Just like he didn't have the patience for Seokjin's gradual encroachment into his heart. They were a bad fit to begin with. He knows they were. He knows, but somehow they pieced together beautifully, jagged edges slotting together, a new masterpiece he never knew, never imagined.

Yoongi sighs and shakes the thought from his mind. He clears his throat and says to his aunt, "What? You want to tell me that I'm an idiot, too?"

Mikyung blinks slowly at Yoongi, watching him carefully, her gaze sharp and concentrated. Yoongi thinks her stare is stronger than Granny's. The family underestimates her. Everyone underestimates her, but Yoongi remembers the steel underneath her gilded shell, an unbreakable rock against the waves and wails of his grief.

She parts her lips and finally says, "No. I'm on your side. Whatever you want to do, I'll support you. I always have."

Yoongi glances away, swallowing, something like gratitude swelling from his chest to his throat. "I'm doing the right thing," he says, an echo of his voice in his mind. "I'm fine."

The rustling from Mikyung's movements stop and he hears her sigh quietly.

"Just say what's on your mind," he prompts, looking back and meeting her gaze directly.

Mikyung's eyes flicker and her jaw sets as she says slowly, "I feel like I'm watching history repeat."

Yoongi scowls. "That's exactly what I'm trying to avoid."

"You'll never let Seokjin go. Just how you've never let your mom and dad go." Mikyung sighs again and resumes packing the refrigerator.

"I let them go," Yoongi protests.

"You buried them in your heart, where it can never heal properly."

"They were my parents," Yoongi grits out, the ache in his chest growing.

"I know."

"You don't just get over that."

"I never asked you to." Mikyung frowns, shifting things around the shelves of the refrigerator. "I had hoped Seokjin wouldn't leave another scar on your heart. I should have done more to stop this in the beginning. I'm sorry."

"I let Seokjin-hyung go," Yoongi says quietly, trying hard to believe his own words. The pain is only temporary.

Mikyung shakes her head and walks over to the breakfast bar to face Yoongi. She reaches over and holds his left hand in both of hers. "Yoongi. You're still wearing your wedding ring."

Yoongi feels like he's been stabbed, a hard jolt to his chest. He yanks his hand out from his aunt's hold, clutching his fingers into a fist. He doesn't want to remove the simple gold band, its weight almost a part of his fingers now, an extension of his skin and his bones.

He stares down at his knees, blinking, his eyes suddenly irritated and uncomfortable. "I can't go through it again, auntie," he says softly.

"I know," she replies, just as soft, low and calming. It's just like how she used to speak after one of his outbursts, climbing the stairs to his room to tell him dinner would be waiting whenever he was ready.

"I swore I wouldn't love again. It's too hard to let go."

"I know," she repeats, that same calm tone, throwing Yoongi back to his childhood.

"I had to push him away, auntie. Before it's too late. Before I lose him."

"Oh sweetie." Yoongi looks up at the petname, something she uses rarely now, something she used to use back before things turned dark. Mikyung's brows drop, her lips twist, her eyes glisten with unshed tears. "Yoongi, sweetie, you already have."

He furrows his brow in confusion but he can already feel the clawing of regret and fear wrapped around his throat. "What?"

"You're already mourning him. You're already trying to bury him in your heart, right next to your mom and dad."

Yoongi shakes his head in denial but his blood thrums through his veins with the truth.

He loves Seokjin.

He loves Seokjin.

He lost Seokjin.

&&&

"You're sure you don't want me to go with you?"

Seokjin doesn't turn at Jeongguk's voice, keeps his eyes focused out the passenger side window of the car, watching the passing street lamps. He holds his carry-on bag in his lap and fiddles idly with the strap, running the black leather through his fingers.

"Hyung," Jeongguk prompts from the driver's seat, and Seokjin can feel his gaze focused on him.

Seokjin forces a smile to his lips. "I'm sure. You have school here. You have the company to take over." He finally turns to glance at his brother. "Mom still needs one of us close by."

Jeongguk frowns. "Still...."

Seokjin reaches over to ruffle Jeongguk's hair. "I'm your hyung. I'll be fine."

"Why couldn't you go to Paris instead? You at least know Wendy-noona there."

"Because I gave up that life already," Seokjin answers. He didn't want to follow his old plan of running away to France. He had already buried it months ago when he placed his bet on Yoongi. Somehow he didn't feel right reviving it.

When they arrive at the airport, Jeongguk helps Seokjin with his luggage, staying quietly close to him until they reach immigration.

"Will you be okay without me?" Seokjin asks as they linger in the space outside the immigration enclosure.

Jeongguk straightens his shoulders and tips his chin up. "I'll handle things here. Have a good time, enjoy yourself. I'll let you know when I've destroyed the Mins."

Seokjin laughs despite himself at Jeongguk's bravado. He hits Jeongguk's shoulder. "Yah. Worry about yourself first. Yoongi didn't really do anything wrong. We both signed the contract."

"I don't care what you did," Jeongguk says, wide eyes on Seokjin. "I never cared. You could break

every promise you've ever made and lie to me every other sentence, and it still wouldn't matter. I'm always on your side."

Seokjin smiles gratefully at his brother and pulls him in for a hug, patting his back a little too forcefully. Jeongguk doesn't flinch, just holds on tighter and sighs heavily into Seokjin's shoulder. "You're a good brother," Seokjin says. "I'm very happy to have."

"Course. We're family," Jeongguk mumbles into Seokjin's shirt, still gripping tight. "If you get lonely, just call me, okay? I can fly to wherever you are."

Seokjin smiles again and peels Jeongguk off of his shoulder. He reaches up to ruffle his hair again. "I know. Now go."

Jeongguk frowns, lips formed in a pout, but he steps back and straightens his spine. He waves weakly at Seokjin. "Have a safe flight."

Seokjin waves before turning on his heel and heading into immigration. He arrived too early, worried about trouble with his passport. It works fine, of course it does. Wendy is meticulous.

He wanders towards his gate, contemplating his new name, embossed in black next to his picture in his passport. Kim Jae. He frowns. He's a Kim again, but now he's no longer Seokjin.

He sighs, sliding into a seat by his gate. He's tired. Tired of being someone he isn't. Tired of uprooting and moving. Tired of searching for a safe haven.

Tired of leaving without any closure, without any reason. He shouldn't have had to leave Seoul at three in the morning, a child packing his own luggage in a mad dash in the night. He shouldn't have had to leave his mother in Busan, barely a teenager making his way alone across the country into a home that never welcomed him.

He shouldn't have to leave the man he loves, the man he *knows* cares for him, somewhere in that stupid heart he tries to pretend he doesn't have. He shouldn't have to leave without a reason. He shouldn't have to leave without closure.

He shouldn't have to leave.

He made a bad bet and the creditors have called it in. Debtors always have to run, it's their punishment for dreaming.

Seokjin stares out the large window, watches airplanes taxi across the runway, watches the sun start to rise, the dawn bright and hopeful. The navy blue hues turn to grey, the bleak skyline ominous before splashes of pink and gold paint the horizon. He clenches his jaw and tries to silence his heart. He thinks he's going to do something very, very foolish.

&&&

Yoongi spends a sleepless night reflecting over his aunt's words. He quickly realizes he cannot sleep and heads to his study, settling into his computer chair and rocking side-to-side. He's surrounded by the photos he took of Seokjin and Jeongguk, stolen, frozen moments he tried to immortalize. He should put them away, stash them somewhere he cannot see them, dark and buried and forsaken. There are so many things Yoongi *should* do and nothing makes him feel any better.

Nothing gives Yoongi the comfort of Seokjin's presence, calm and sturdy and all-consuming. Nothing eases the panic that's been swirling around his head since Seokjin's accident, bleeding into dread and desperation with every passing day.

You're already mourning him.

He's afraid, and the fear has been clouding his mind for weeks, knee-jerk reactions, old habits taking control without any thought behind it.

He's afraid of Seokjin sinking in so deep into Yoongi's life that Yoongi won't be able to function if he ever left. Yoongi's afraid Seokjin's love will weave into his veins, syncopate his heartbeat, overwhelm him until Seokjin seeps down to the marrow of his bones.

Yoongi's afraid of letting his parents go. He's afraid to try, that he might fail, that he might realize he really is broken forever, no hope for the happiness others seem to achieve so easily.

He's afraid he will let his parents go, and their time with him will vanish, smoke exhaled and disappearing with the breeze. He wants to keep them with him, those few memories held so close to his chest they become his skin, pale and warm and loving. He's afraid that if he doesn't hold onto them, no one will and they'll truly be gone.

When the night starts to bleed towards dawn, the sun still invisible, the sharp sparkle of the stars dimmed and the sky giving way to hues of blue, Yoongi admits to himself what he fears the most.

He's afraid of never seeing Seokjin again. Of never hearing his voice, feeling his touch, being in that magical presence of warmth and love and security, in that space where the beat of his heart is understood without words, and an answer is echoed back to him.

He fucked up.

He grabs his phone and his car keys. He's going to fix it.

He's wearing the clothes he slept in and he hasn't showered, his appearance sloppy and dishevelled. It's probably not the best look to have when he begs Seokjin for forgiveness, but urgency spurs him out of the apartment.

He doesn't expect Seokjin to answer his call but he tries anyway, dialling the familiar number as he ducks his head to climb into his car. He settles into the driver's seat and nearly drops his phone when the call connects to an automated voice. The professional tone informs him the number is not in service and Yoongi tries to tap down on the dread in his chest.

Seokjin probably changed his number. It's reasonable. Yoongi starts his car and head to Jeongguk's apartment, assuming Seokjin moved in with his brother rather than back to the Jeon household. He presses on the gas pedal and prays it's too early for Jeongguk to be up, prays that Seokjin is willing to let him in and give him a chance to talk. He prays Seokjin gives him another chance.

There is no answer at Jeongguk's apartment, no matter how long and how loud Yoongi knocks. Jeongguk isn't picking up his phone, Yoongi's calls are connecting straight to voicemail. He supposes his number has been blocked, unsurprisingly. It's not the calls that strike a hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach. The absence from Jeongguk's apartment is pressing a heavy weight onto Yoongi's shoulders. It's hardly six in the morning, they should be home. Even if Seokjin went back to the Jeon household, Jeongguk should still be in his suite, ready to punch Yoongi at his sudden reappearance.

For too many moments, Yoongi leans his back against Jeongguk's apartment door, blowing out long exhales, trying to *think*. If Seokjin had told Namjoon anything, it would have filtered to Yoongi from Hoseok.

Busan, Yoongi realizes. Seokjin and Jeongguk may have gone back home, back to their mother and

the warmth of family. They went to Busan for the weekend, or a week, or a month. Yoongi should respect that. Yoongi should wait until Seokjin decides to return.

There's a sharp tug of discord in his mind that he has no logical explanation for. He knows, without evidence, without any rational thought, that if he waits, he will lose Seokjin forever.

He straightens his shoulders and pushes away from Jeongguk's door, feet treading with purpose back to his car and towards someone he never thought he'd seek help from.

&&&

Jimin thinks this has to be the strangest morning he has ever had, blinking owlishly at the disheveled man standing outside his dorm room door. He doesn't even know why he opened the door to begin with. Jeongguk had given him strict instructions to "never ever ever tell that asshole anything about hyung ever again." He didn't have any plans to, anyway. They may not be romantic rivals anymore, and Jimin may be dating said man's cousin, but he will always protect the brothers he grew up with.

"What are you doing here?" he asks Yoongi, holding the door open just wide enough to lean on the doorjamb.

"I'm sorry if I woke you up," Yoongi starts, as if they're having a polite, ordinary conversation.

"What are you *doing* here?" Jimin repeats.

Yoongi's lips purse and he says bluntly, "I'm looking for Seokjin-hyung."

Jimin scoffs, wondering where Yoongi gets the nerve to look for Seokjin after he broke the other's heart like that just days ago. "He's not here."

Yoongi doesn't seem fazed by Jimin's dismissive response. "Do you know where he is?"

"You think I'm going to tell you?" Jimin asks, incredulous.

"I can just ask Taehyung," Yoongi retorts.

"I didn't tell Taehyung and he respected my decision." Jimin crosses his arms and tilts his chin up. "We have a healthy and loving relationship built on trust and support. Unlike yours."

Yoongi presses his lips together, his jaw clicking as it clenches and Jimin almost feels bad for him. *Almost.*

"I just need to talk to him," Yoongi says quietly, meeting Jimin's gaze.

Jimin bites his lip, mollified. Yoongi looks pitiful, uncombed hair, large circles under his eyes, ashen complexion. He looks like he saw the end of his world.

Yoongi sighs and closes his eyes. "Please. The fact that I'm even here, asking for your help should tell you how desperate I am." He opens his eyes again and says with a fervency Jimin understands all too well, "I fucked up."

The words echo in Jimin's head, his own voice crying them out against Jeongguk's chest. Taehyung gave Jimin his second chance when he didn't deserve it. Yoongi is asking Seokjin for the same. He chews on his bottom lip, uncertain. Finally he makes a face and blows out a long breath. "I hate that I can relate to you. You have to promise me you won't say anything to hurt hyung."

Yoongi's face brightens. "I swear, I'll never hurt him again."

"And if he doesn't want to talk to you, you have to respect that and not bother him."

"I swear. Where is he?"

Jimin glances at his wrist before he realizes he hasn't put a watch on yet. He flicks his gaze to Yoongi. "What time is it?"

Yoongi frowns, confused, but still he pulls his phone out of his pocket. "It's half past six. Why?"

Jimin straightens in alarm. "Hyung has a flight at seven."

"Busan?"

Jimin shakes his head and Yoongi's eyes widen, panic splashing across his features.

"A flight to where?"

"Canada. I don't think you'll make it –" He blinks, watching Yoongi move faster than he ever thought possible, sprinting down the hallway to the stairs.

A part of Jimin hopes he makes it, knows how precious a second chance can be. He's forever grateful Taehyung gave him chance upon chance upon chance until he got it right.

Another part of Jimin, the petty part that holds grudges, hopes Seokjin's flight takes off just as Yoongi arrives at the airport.

He yawns and shuffles back into his room, scratching his hair, and wonders which part of himself fate agrees with.

&&&

Yoongi has to choose between Incheon and Gimpo airports. His plane is stationed at Incheon, giving him clearance to access restricted areas. He makes an instinctual decision to head to Incheon, and prays he is correct. He has to catch Seokjin before he lands in a foreign country, before Seokjin vanishes into unfamiliar surroundings and out of Yoongi's life forever.

He makes several phone calls on the drive to the airport, to his pilot on standby, and to the chief of his security team, asking him to locate which plane Seokjin will take. The answer is alarming. Jeon Seokjin isn't listed on any flights leaving any airport in Korea.

Yoongi realizes with a growing panic that Seokjin must be using an alias. Seokjin isn't just leaving. He's doing exactly what he promised Yoongi so many months ago, the words beating against Yoongi's ears with the whip of wind and rain.

One year, Yoongi. I need you for one year, and then you'll never see me again.

He sets his jaw in determination and grips his fingers tight on the steering wheel. The sun races with him as he presses hard on the acceleration, rising steadily, reminding him of time running out. Grey-blue brightens to streaks of yellow and rose. The stars fade until it's just the faint trace of the moon in a brilliant blue canvas.

He doesn't bother parking once he reaches the airport, pulling up to the international departures entrance and stopping his car. He dashes through the automatic door and takes off in a sprint, weaving through the crowd of passengers heading to new lives and new adventures. He makes his way through security easily, the staff was apparently warned of his arrival and escort him through

immigration to the gates without much delay.

He feels like he's spinning in circles, eyes scanning the impossibly large space, jogging past gate one, gate two, gate three. His breath comes in pants, his knees and legs feel weak and ready to collapse. His body pleads to stop but he keeps going, pushing himself through.

Please, please, please.

Every final boarding announcement blaring overhead brings a new surge of panic and adrenaline into his blood, spurring him on. He keeps running past gates, gate thirty-three, gate thirty-four, eyes desperately searching for that broad frame, that silky tuft of golden brown hair, those eyes that somehow see through all of Yoongi's carefully constructed walls.

He doesn't know how long he spends racing through the airport, but finally his body stops, exhausted. He bends at the waist, bracketing his hands on his thighs, gulping in thick pants of air.

He doesn't find Seokjin.

He lost him, truly and completely lost him.

Yoongi squeezes his eyes shut, his chest seizing in pain.

He let go of the hand that wanted to hold on forever.

&&&

This is not crazy ex-boyfriend behavior. If anything, he is technically an ex-husband, which would make this crazy *ex-husband* behavior. Which it's *not*.

Seokjin nods to himself, convinced by his own denials, as he punches in the familiar code to what he once called *home*. He deserves an explanation. He deserves to hear the stupid truth from Yoongi's own stupid mouth before he leaves everything behind. He doesn't know why he needs to hear it directly from Yoongi. He doesn't even think it will give him any closure, or help him leave it behind. He's probably still foolishly trying to hold on.

Leaving the airport as they announced the boarding call to his flight is probably the most impulsive thing he's done in his entire life. He thought about it throughout the duration of the taxi ride from Gimpo to Yoongi's apartment. Maybe the bet at the roulette table in Macau was more impulsive. He concludes that this is all the same act, from Macau to now, his chips still on the table, the roulette wheel tick-tick-ticking agonizingly slowly, his breath suspended in his lungs as he watches for the outcome. His bet is still on Yoongi. He doesn't want to leave the table yet.

Seokjin tries not to be curious, but he wants to know how Yoongi is living. He tells himself he's checking the rooms to make sure Yoongi isn't home, tells himself he's not still concerned about how much Yoongi is eating and if he's taking care of his laundry. The apartment is an organized clutter, take-out cartons stacked on the kitchen counter to be thrown out. Seokjin is relieved as he peeks through the cupboards and the refrigerator. It has been recently stocked with healthy albeit store-bought food. The rooms are scattered with small evidences of Yoongi. His tablet in the living room, his favorite black hoodie strewn over what used to be Seokjin's chair, mismatched socks discarded around the foot of the unmade bed. There are traces of Yoongi everywhere but the man himself is missing. Seokjin bites his teeth together hard and tries not to draw parallels to his own heart.

He hesitates outside of Yoongi's office, fingers hovering over the doorknob. He's scared. Scared to find traces of himself still cluttering the desk, the photos Yoongi took of him tucked secretly under documents and drafts. He's scared to find those photos gone, that he's already been completely erased

from Yoongi's life, from Yoongi's heart.

He sighs and closes his eyes, reminds himself that this is over, the dream is done, and he needs to move on. *After* he makes Yoongi grow up and tell him why they had to end what they should be holding on to forever.

Seokjin makes his way downstairs and settles on the sofa in the living room, crossing his legs, his foot tapping impatiently against the side of the coffee table, waiting and fuming.

By the time Seokjin hears the telltale sound of the door being unlocked, the sun has long since risen into the sky, brightening the suite with blinding light as it streams through the floor-to-ceiling windows. He ignores the little jump in his heart and straightens his shoulders, arms crossed over his chest and a deep frown on his lips. He doesn't turn to see Yoongi shuffle into the apartment, keeping his gaze steady ahead of him, refusing to face Yoongi until the other faces him. It takes a lot of discipline and willpower to keep his resolve, but he finds himself tilting his ear to hear better.

He can hear Yoongi step through the foyer, some clattering that Seokjin assumes is Yoongi taking his shoes off. He hears his footsteps, unusually slow and heavy, almost defeated. And then the padding of feet stops and the silence hangs heavy between them. Seokjin clenches his fingers into fists and fights to remain still. He is determined that Yoongi should be the one to come to *him*. He's already lost enough pride trespassing into his ex-husband's suite.

Seokjin doesn't know what he was expecting. Maybe Yoongi angrily demanding what he's doing here. Maybe a dismissive command for him to leave. Maybe even complete silence as Yoongi ignores him and climbs the stairs to his office. Seokjin does not expect Yoongi to start laughing, derisive and humorless and somehow so sad.

"Fuck," Yoongi says, muffled as if his hand is over his mouth.

Seokjin frowns, waiting for Yoongi to confront him.

"Get a fucking grip, Min Yoongi," Yoongi says to himself, sighing heavily.

His patience finally defeated, Seokjin shifts, turning around on the sofa to face Yoongi. His eyes widen in surprise, taking in Yoongi's appearance. Unkempt hair in disarray, face too pale, devoid of the usual subtle color that makes Yoongi glow. He's dressed in frumpy sweats and an oversized hoodie that looks like it hasn't been cleaned in a week. There are large, dark bags under his red-rimmed eyes and Seokjin finds his brows pinching in a concern he shouldn't feel anymore. Yoongi doesn't look good. Yoongi looks exhausted and defeated and everything not like the man Seokjin knows.

He clears his throat and steels his resolve again, reminding himself that *he* was the one that was dumped and he's not here to be worried about Min Yoongi. He's here for answers and maybe some yelling and then he's going to get the next flight out of Korea to Canada and never look back again. He's here for closure, he lies to himself.

He's here to see the roulette wheel tick-tick-tick to a stop, his heart still full of the hope he will never be rid of.

He sighs and beckons with his hand at Yoongi to join him in the living room. "Sorry to barge in, but I think we need to talk," he starts and Yoongi jumps, his eyes widening and his mouth falling open. Seokjin frowns. "Stop acting like you've seen a ghost."

"You're here," Yoongi stammers out, unmoving, wide eyes completely focused on Seokjin.

"Relax, I'm not here to argue. I just want an explanation." Seokjin arches his brow. "Which I think I'm entitled to."

"You're *here*," Yoongi repeats, stepping forward carefully like he's afraid Seokjin will disappear.

"We've established that." Seokjin gestures to the chair diagonal to the sofa. "Sit and let's talk."

"You didn't leave," Yoongi says, still a little dazed and Seokjin's starting to feel like he's missing something. Yoongi rushes into the living room and slips into the spot where Seokjin indicated. "I thought you left Korea."

Seokjin blinks, surprised. "Who told you that?"

"Park Jimin said you had a flight to Canada this morning."

Seokjin frowns. "Why did he tell you that? Why are you speaking to Jimin?"

"I tried to find you. I've been at Incheon all morning looking for you." Yoongi leans forward. "You're not really leaving Korea, right?"

Seokjin scoffs and crosses his arms. "Isn't that what you wanted?" he asks, voice icy cold and distrustful.

Yoongi's shoulders slump and his brows furrow. If Seokjin didn't know any better, he would think Yoongi looks remorseful. "I'm sorry, hyung," he starts.

Seokjin flinches, the sound of the word *hyung* in Yoongi's unique treble vibrating against his ears, reminding him of all they were and all he wanted them to be.

"I fucked up," Yoongi continues, leaning forward into Seokjin's space like he always does, pushing forward and rewriting all of Seokjin's rules. "I want you to stay. In Korea, in Seoul. With me. Please."

Seokjin's breath catches in his throat and he shifts his gaze away from Yoongi, not wanting to see the pleading in his eyes. He swallows, his fingers tighten into fists, the ends of his nails biting into the skin of his palm. He's confused and angry and resentful. Worst of all, he's desperately hopeful, that part of him that loves Yoongi clawing to take control, to tell Yoongi *yes* without another word. He clenches his jaw and blows out a long, careful breath. "I think," he starts slowly, still not looking at Yoongi, "first you owe me an explanation. Of everything."

Yoongi nods, pressing his lips together. "You're right."

Seokjin leans back and tilts his chin up, arching a brow. "I'm listening."

Yoongi sighs and hangs his head, folding his hands between his knees and staring at his fingers. "You know about my parents. I lost them both, unexpectedly, and it..." He frowns and swallows, formulating the words. "I didn't handle it well. I didn't really handle it, to be honest. It tore apart my entire world. They were my parents, hyung." He looks up, brow pinched and blinking rapidly at the moisture in his eyes.

Seokjin keeps his fists clenched and squashes the urge to comfort him.

"I never wanted to go through that again. I...I still don't think I could survive losing someone so close to my heart. I made a vow, to myself, to my parents, to fate, that I would never let anyone in that close again." He keeps Seokjin's gaze for several moments. "I was successful until you."

Seokjin looks away.

"When, when you were in that accident and I got the call from the hospital, it all came crashing down on me. I can't survive losing you, hyung. I thought, I would lose myself if you were ever taken from me."

Seokjin presses his lips together, still not meeting Yoongi's gaze. "So you pushed me away."

"Yes."

"That's really stupid."

"I know."

They are silent for a moment, too many thoughts whirling around Seokjin's mind. Anger and regret and forgiveness, a jumbled, muddy mess of emotions he doesn't know how to parse out. Finally he takes a breath and says, "And now? What changed?"

"I realized I lost you already when I pushed you away."

Seokjin doesn't look at Yoongi, just watches his hands tremble as Yoongi holds them tightly together in his lap.

"I want you to come back, if you are willing," Yoongi says carefully.

"I signed the divorce papers, Yoongi. I quit my job. I left just like you wanted me to," Seokjin says, his tone more hurt than he'd like to admit.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"You hurt me."

"I fucked up, hyung. Please."

Seokjin blows out a shuddering breath, wavering. He misses Yoongi so much. He loves him. He wants to believe he can have everything they almost were. "How can I trust you again? What if you decide a year from now that you have to push me away again?" Seokjin finally meets Yoongi's eyes, his gaze flickering with conflicting emotions. "You can't do that to me."

Yoongi shifts forward, closer to Seokjin, nearly leaving his chair with the movement. "I'll make it up to you my entire life," he promises.

Seokjin's heart skips a beat, hope pin-prickling up his spine. "That sounds a lot like a commitment," he says, eyeing Yoongi carefully.

"It is," Yoongi affirms, voice certain and eyes intensely focused on Seokjin.

Seokjin wavers, wanting so badly to believe Yoongi, wanting to take another chance, wanting to hold on to the man he's grown to love, truly and wholly and with his entire being.

"If there's a chance," Yoongi says softly, pleading, "if there's even the smallest speck of a chance that you'll stay, that you can forgive me and give us another chance, please. Don't throw that away. If you're angry now, then be angry, but please, if you think you can, please hold on." He lifts out of his seat and moves to kneel. "I'll get down on my knees right now and beg. I need you."

A flash of Seokjin's own words, one year ago, spins through Seokjin's mind. *"I'll get down on my*

knees right here and beg you. I need you." His hands held on so tightly to Yoongi's arms, gripping like a lifeline, and now Yoongi's doing the same with him. Not physically, but with every look and every word and every silent plea, a prayer in the tremble of his lips.

Yoongi had taken a chance on him a year ago.

Seokjin frowns and uncrosses his arms. "Get up. I'm mad at you but I don't want you to beg." Yoongi hesitates and Seokjin scowls. "I mean it. Get up."

Yoongi nods, sitting back up on the edge of his chair.

"I'm not moving in right away," Seokjin says firmly.

Yoongi brightens, eyes widening and a smile breaking out on his lips. "You'll stay?"

Seokjin nods slowly. "We can start dating. Slowly. Like we should have done from the beginning."

"Thank you, hyung," Yoongi says, grin so large his gums show. Seokjin's heart pat-pat-patters in his chest, a happiness blooming from Yoongi's.

"I'm not helping you with Jeongguk," he continues.

Yoongi shrugs, unconcerned. "I won him over once, I can do it again."

Seokjin arches a brow and spares him a glance. "You have to win me over again first."

Yoongi's smile softens and he tilts his head, contemplating Seokjin. "I don't mind."

Seokjin huffs out a short laugh and looks away, down at his hands, at his knees, at his feet tapping against the floor idly. His smile fades from his lips and he asks seriously, eyes still on his own hands, "Did you really spend all morning at the airport looking for me?"

Yoongi groans tiredly and flops back in his chair, stretching his legs out. "I must have circled Incheon three times."

Seokjin can't stop the smirk that twitches at his lips. "I was at Gimpo."

"Why were you at Gimpo?" Yoongi asks, incredulous.

"Because Incheon was where —" Seokjin stops, snapping his mouth shut and blinking rapidly. He glances at Yoongi and knows from the way his face has fallen that he knows exactly what Seokjin was going to say.

Because Incheon was where Seokjin first told Yoongi he loved him.

Yoongi's brow furrows and he shifts out of his chair and onto the sofa next to Seokjin. "Hyung," he starts, fervency in the undertone of his voice, "about what you sai—"

"Later, Yoongi," Seokjin interrupts, not wanting to bring up that particular messy ball of emotions. "When I'm not mad anymore, we can talk about it later."

Yoongi looks like he wants to push further but nods and sits back against the side of the sofa.

"Later," he agrees before he tentatively reaches forward, opening his fist and splaying his fingers next to Seokjin's hand, a silent invitation.

Seokjin stares at it for a moment, Yoongi's long fingers, strong, gentle, and so achingly familiar to

him now. Seokjin knows every bump and knuckle, has kissed every smooth bit of skin on the back of his palm. He has felt every rough patch slide across his ribs and his cheek and the expanse of his wrists. Seokjin stares at Yoongi's hand, his chest swelling with love and regret and desperate hope. He shifts his hand, sliding it over Yoongi's palm, entwining their fingers together. Yoongi folds his fingers down, gripping tightly at Seokjin as if he's afraid Seokjin will let go. He's wrong, Seokjin thinks.

He's never letting go again.

Chapter End Notes

So. You'll notice I added another chapter. I am nearly done and I don't think it'll be much longer before this is complete. Thank you guys for all the love and support all these months. We're nearly there!! Hang on!!!

When a Min Loves

Chapter Notes

Will I ever be over the art people make for this fic? No. No, it will always make me tear up. Thank you.

[Carolina Avilan](#) made [this beautiful art](#) thank you!!

[Amu](#) made [these lovely](#) works. AND THEN. [AN FMV I'M YELLING](#). Thank you so much!!!

[ethereal mochi](#) continues to make [the most amazing edits](#) I can't thank you enough ;;

Important reminder: smut is prefaced by "####" and ended at "####".

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It takes a week for Seokjin to see Yoongi again. Seokjin had asked for time, to settle back in, to think about what he wants to do, to let his emotions catch up with what transpired. Yoongi agrees readily. He's willing to do whatever Seokjin asks. It doesn't stop the thump of worry that beats with his heart. Maybe Seokjin will change his mind. Maybe Seokjin will realize he's better without Yoongi. Maybe he's lost him after all.

Instead of dwelling on his anxieties, Yoongi decides to do something he should have done years ago. Yoongi makes an appointment with a counsellor specializing in grief and loss. He knows it isn't a "fix", and progress cannot be immediate, but Seokjin's words keep spinning around in his mind. *What if you decide a year from now that you have to push me away again? You can't do that to me.* Seokjin doesn't know if Yoongi will regress again. Even Yoongi doesn't know the answer to that.

He doesn't want to live like that anymore. He wants to know he won't self-destruct when life turns him upside-down. He wants to grow and heal. He thinks professional help is a good first step in that journey.

Seokjin sends messages throughout the week to Yoongi, short bursts of text that Yoongi finds himself reading over and over, an involuntary smile on his lips, warmth radiating from his phone screen to his chest. He misses Seokjin, wants to see him again. He misses Seokjin's presence, but the words are enough for now. It'll be enough until Seokjin is ready to see him again.

Finally, after seven long days, Seokjin messages Yoongi, asking to meet up in Hangang Park where they used to go for strolls after dinner.

I can come pick you up? Yoongi sends back immediately. He doesn't want to wait any longer, doesn't want to miss out on the twenty minutes it will take Seokjin to drive over.

Hmm, I'd rather you were alive for our date and Jeongguk still wants to kill you, Seokjin answers back, followed quickly by a winking emoji.

Yoongi wants to think he scoffed at least momentarily at it, but the muscles on his face tell him he's smiling and it's dangerously close to fond.

It's dark and too cold by the time Yoongi arrives at the designated meeting place. He's wrapped up in

a black leather jacket that he is starting to understand is more for fashion than warmth. Even the thick black turtleneck he has underneath does little to block the gusts of wind. Somehow, though, he doesn't mind the cold when he spots Seokjin waiting on a bench, dressed in a pink coat, pink hoodie, pink sneakers, and the pink cap Yoongi bought for him.

He smiles underneath his mask and jogs over to Seokjin. "Hey."

Seokjin looks up at him, the corners of his eyes crinkling as he smiles back, hidden behind his own black mask. "Hi."

"Did you wait long?" Yoongi asks as Seokjin stands, straightening to his full height.

Seokjin shakes his head and makes a dissenting noise. "Not long." He steps beside Yoongi and gestures down the cement path. "Should we walk?"

Yoongi hums in agreement, crossing his arms across his chest to ward off another gust of frigid wind.

"Are you cold?" Seokjin asks suddenly, a hint of concern in his tone.

Yoongi shakes his head and forces his arms down to his sides. "I'm fine."

Seokjin huffs out an amused laugh. He takes his hand from his pocket and wraps his fingers around Yoongi's wrist. He tugs Yoongi's hand until both of their hands are encased in the warmth of Seokjin's oversized wool pockets. "Better?" he asks, teasingly, shoulder nudging Yoongi's as they walk.

Yoongi squeezes his fingers around Seokjin's. He stills, letting his weight pull Seokjin to a stop.

Seokjin tilts his head in question, eyes still smiling.

Yoongi steps into Seokjin's space, closer, impossibly closer, and uses his free arm to wrap around his waist. He dips his head into Seokjin's shoulder and breathes his scent in, absorbing the heat from Seokjin's chest. He wants to tell Seokjin how much he missed him. He wants to tell Seokjin about how all the icy chill of the November night melts away just by being here with him. He wants to tell Seokjin about the way his heart flutters in his chest around him, about the way his doubts and worries grow dim at the sound of his laughter.

Seokjin wraps his arm around Yoongi's shoulders and sighs into Yoongi's neck, holding him tight. Yoongi wants to tell him he loves him, but it's too soon, still a little too fragile to spill his heart out for Seokjin. He settles for the echo of Seokjin's words.

"Better," he repeats back to Seokjin, holds Seokjin's waist closer still. "Better."

&&&

Seokjin feels a little shameless going back to the director of the gallery after leaving her without a replacement on short notice. She makes sure he fully understands the new levels of stress he pushed her to before she finally sighs in relief and offers him new employment. He promises to fully train his replacement before he leaves again. He's in Seoul to stay.

Seokjin doesn't want to stay in the gallery forever. He started in art because of Jeongguk, as a way to help his brother in some small way. He enjoyed it, but he's starting to wonder what other things he might enjoy. Things are different now. Seokjin is different now. He's decided to live for himself, and even if he likes the gallery, he thinks he'll like a lot of other experiences, too. He wants to try. He

wants to live. He wants to be Kim Seokjin again, a destiny of his choosing, a horizon as vast and bright as the sky.

Thankfully, he thinks he's already found his replacement at the gallery. Kim Jisoo is a fresh graduate they hired as an assistant. She's shown an amazing potential for the work, and her instincts are correct. Plus, Seokjin likes her odd sense of humour. Her nonsense songs are a tolerable replacement for when he leaves and there are no more puns to brighten everyone's day.

Seokjin's thoughts are interrupted by Jisoo's voice approaching his office, singing *Team Leader Seokjin, Team Leader Seokjin* to the tune of an advertisement he is sure he has heard before. He looks up from his computer expectantly, pushing away slightly from his desk to peer outside his office door.

Jisoo peeks her head into Seokjin's office, her hair falling over her face in the movement. She quickly brushes it away and smiles at him. "Team Leader Seokjin, you have a visitor. And it's not me!"

"Who-" he starts before Jisoo backs away and Yoongi's grandmother shuffles her way through the doorway.

The chairwoman glares over her shoulder at Jisoo's retreating form, then flicks her eyes to Seokjin. "You've employed a very strange girl."

Seokjin doesn't respond except to stand, walking around his desk to usher the chairwoman into a chair. "What brings you here?" he asks once she's settled.

She sends him a sharp glare, lips twisted into a frown, the wrinkles around her lips deepening. "First, I came for your apology for that" - she flaps her hands in the air aggressively - "sham you called a contract."

Seokjin's good mood dims and he purses his lips, nodding in supplication. "I'm very sorry I lied to you. I'm sorry I wasn't the one to tell you the truth. And I'm sorry I wasn't there to deal with the consequences."

"Hmm." The chairwoman presses her lips into a thin line, eyes flicking up and down Seokjin in harsh evaluation.

Seokjin smiles charmingly like he knows she likes, tilting his head. "Forgiven?"

She keeps her gaze stern for a few more moments before a smirk tugs at her lips. She straightens in her seat and reaches over to pat at Seokjin's hand. "Of course you are. And I have good news, which is why I came over today. I was able to intercept the divorce proceedings."

Seokjin's smile fades from his lips. "Granny, please don't."

She blinks at him, momentarily confused, before her expression hardens. She arches a cool brow. "I was under the impression you and my grandson were back together. Am I wrong?"

"You're not wrong," Seokjin starts slowly.

"It's not nice of you to make fun of a poor elderly woman like me," she continues, completely ignoring Seokjin. He wants to point out that she's far from pitiful, but he wisely keeps his lips shut as she goes on. "What's wrong with my grandson, anyway? He made a tiny little mistake. You're at fault, too, for signing that damn thing to begin with." She scowls at him. "I'm owed this. Whatever agreement you had between each other, you told me you were married. I was promised a grandson-in-law. You have an obligation to me."

Seokjin waits until the chairwoman seems finished before he starts again. "Granny-

"Where's your honour, Seokjin?" she interrupts.

Seokjin leans forward and takes the chairwoman's hand in both of his, holding it gently and looking into her eyes. He smiles at her and tilts his head cutely. "Granny. I like your grandson very, very much."

She narrows her eyes at him. "Then what's the problem?"

"The problem is that our marriage started out wrong."

"That's not my problem," she replies stubbornly.

"We want to start fresh," he explains. "Without secret agreements or contracts. Just me and Yoongi. A clean slate." He squeezes her hand. "We need to end the old marriage to start again. Hmm?"

Granny's eyes light and she sits back, nodding understandingly. "Ah, I see. Well. Don't worry about a thing, child. Your granny here is going to help you." She withdraws her hand from Seokjin's and winks at him. "I'll make sure to push the divorce through quickly."

Seokjin blinks, slightly bemused at Granny's sudden change in demeanour. He expected her to protest for at least a little while longer. He purses his lips. Something is wrong.

Granny stands, gathering her clutch under her arm. "It should only take a few days to finalize the divorce. And then we can start planning the new wedding."

Seokjin's mouth falls open. "Granny, Yoongi and I haven't discussed-

"I really out did myself for the first ceremony, but don't fret," Granny continues, oblivious to Seokjin, already heading out the door. "I'm sure I can make this wedding even better. Leave it all to me."

"Granny-

"Bye, love. I have a lot to plan." She waves goodbye, pulling her phone from her clutch and typing out what Seokjin assumes is her strategy.

Seokjin slumps back into his chair and runs a hand through his hair, sighing. It's not really an insurmountable problem but it is an inconvenience. It's more a question of the when that troubles him, not the if. There's no doubt in his mind that he will remarry Yoongi. He misses Yoongi in the mornings. He wants to see Yoongi's sleeping face when he wakes up, count the freckles across the bridge of his nose, note the new ones as they appear. He misses Yoongi through the day. He wants to go home to find Yoongi arranging dinner, wants to divide the laundry with him. He wants to draw close after a long day at work, rest his head in the juncture of Yoongi's shoulder and neck, wants to feel the firm press of Yoongi's arms around him, holding him steady, revitalizing him.

And worst of all, he misses Yoongi at night, even before their dates end. The heavy, gloomy reminder that they have to part, that time is tick-tick-ticking away their moments. That soon, Seokjin will return to the guest room in Jeongguk's apartment and Seokjin will cling to the linger feeling of Yoongi's hand in his.

It's inevitable, Seokjin knows, that they will reunite, and remarry. When they do, it will be properly, without any pretences or stipulations. He just doesn't know if he's ready, quite yet. His heart is still playing catch up with his head, feelings still ricocheting off the confines of his ribs, slowly inching back to their rightful place. He doesn't want to start his marriage – his real, concrete, sincere marriage

– while he's still handling the emotional ramifications of the past twelve months.

He shakes his head, dismissing his worries. Yoongi will delay Granny until Seokjin is ready. Yoongi make it clear to Seokjin that he wants to do exactly what Seokjin desires and needs. Whatever the pace, whatever the task.

His thoughts are interrupted when Jisoo appears at his office door again, handing her head sideways around the frame and smiling sheepishly at him. "Team Leader Seokjin. I have another question about what you taught me this morning."

He smiles and pushes away from his desk. "Show me," he says, sliding his hands into his pockets and strolling out with Jisoo, mind already at ease. He knows he can count on Yoongi to sort it out.

He trusts Yoongi.

###

This is bad.

Yoongi sucks in a sharp breath, desperately inhaling the oxygen he needs even as his hands fumble to get under Seokjin's shirt, seeking the heated skin he knows will welcome him. Seokjin has abandoned Yoongi's lips in favour of pressing wet kisses down Yoongi's jaw line, sucking at the spot beneath his ear. Seokjin's scent surrounds Yoongi, enveloping and intoxicating, a heady mix of vanilla and subtle sweetness. Yoongi's quickly losing his ability to think, thoughts half-formed and scattering, wordless and senseless.

Seokjin slips a finger through the belt loop of Yoongi's pants and tugs his hips forward even as he presses against Yoongi, crowding him closer into the door, chest against chest. Seokjin finally seems satisfied with the spot under Yoongi's ear and moves to lightly bite Yoongi's earlobe. Seokjin's panting breaths are hot in Yoongi's ear, spikes of arousal shooting down his spine, urging him on.

This is bad, Yoongi thinks again, but the thought is quickly vanquished as his fingers finally succeed, fumbling and clumsy, to untuck Seokjin's shirt from his pants. His hands immediately seek the smooth skin of Seokjin's stomach. He grins when he feels Seokjin quiver against him, when he hears the hitch in his breath against his ear.

They weren't supposed to go this far. They went on a simple date, sashimi and those silly claw machines that Seokjin likes so much, and then an all-night coffee place when they didn't want to part just yet. Yoongi should have just let Seokjin off when they finally arrived at Jeongguk's apartment. Seokjin shouldn't have asked him to escort him upstairs to the suite. Yoongi should not have played with Seokjin's hands the entire elevator ride up and Seokjin most certainly was not supposed to pause outside the door and bend to give Yoongi a quick kiss.

This is bad but Yoongi has forgotten all thoughts of stopping.

He runs his hands around Seokjin's waist, remapping the curve of it, fingers light and sliding smoothly until he reaches the small of Seokjin's back. His fingers crawl down to dip beneath the waistband of Seokjin's pants and Seokjin jolts against him, laughing into his ear.

"Yoongi," Seokjin says, still half-laughing, lips travelling down to nip at his pulse point, fingers digging into Yoongi's hips. "Do you want to come inside?"

Yoongi groans, thumping the back of his head against the door, sucking oxygen into his lungs and trying to blink past the haze of arousal clouding his thoughts. "Your brother's going to kill me," he manages to huff out even as he angles his neck for Seokjin's lips, even as he grinds against Seokjin's

hips.

"Is that a no?" Seokjin whispers against the shell of Yoongi's ear, slotting his thigh between Yoongi's legs and grinding against his arousal.

Yoongi's fingers clutch harder around Seokjin's waist, holding him closer, instinctive and desperate to hold on. "No. Yes." He groans, angling his head to nip at Seokjin's neck. "Whatever means continue."

Seokjin laughs against him, his chest rumbling with it, and he fumbles with the door. "Jeongguk won't be home for a couple hours," he says when he finally gets the door open. They tumble into the apartment, knocked off balance, holding on to each other to keep upright.

When they've stopped stumbling and finally regained their equilibrium, Yoongi fists his fingers into Seokjin's shirt and pulls him down for an open-mouthed kiss. He presses into him, the minty taste of Seokjin a heady drug that he needed for far too long. He can't get enough of him, can't bring him close enough, can't imagine ever letting go. He wants more, slotting his lips against Seokjin, trying to inhale him. He reaches a hand between them and palms at Seokjin's cock through his pants.

Seokjin moans against Yoongi's lips, pulling back to whisper urgently, "Bedroom."

"I don't know where that is," Yoongi replies quickly, attaching his lips to the underside of Seokjin's jaw, sucking the smooth skin there lightly.

"Fuck," Seokjin pants, a breath shuddering out of his lips. He starts walking Yoongi backwards.

Yoongi should probably stop trying to mark up Seokjin's neck for just a moment, should probably turn around and see where he's going, but he can't bring himself to part from the scent of Seokjin enveloping him just yet. He follows Seokjin's lead, let's Seokjin guide him around the apartment, past the living room, down the hall, falling into an unfamiliar room. Suddenly they're on the bed and Seokjin's lips are back on his. Yoongi threads his fingers into Seokjin's hair, pulling him down over him. Seokjin's hands push Yoongi's shirt up his chest, hands caressing newly exposed skin as he goes, until Yoongi's sweater is bunched around his neck under his chin.

Seokjin pulls back and laughs. "Hey, let me take this off."

Yoongi makes a displeased noise but quickly tugs his sweater over his head, tossing it over the side of the bed. He starts to reach up for Seokjin again but Seokjin dips his head, starts to lave at the hollows of Yoongi's collarbones with his tongue. He inches downward, running his tongue over Yoongi's chest, flicking over his nipples.

Yoongi writhes on the bed, his hands reaching for Seokjin's head, trying to urge him back up. His breath is coming in pants and his cock strains painfully against the zipper of his jeans. He thrusts up shallowly, seeking some kind of friction, and meets Seokjin's thigh. He groans, rutting against his thigh. "Hyung," he starts, pleads, doesn't know what he's pleading for, just wants some relief, just needs to get out of his jeans, needs Seokjin to get out of his clothes. It's been too long since he's had Seokjin like this, too long since Seokjin's been over and around and enveloping him, overriding all his senses.

Seokjin ignores Yoongi, dipping lower, shifting down the bed. He mouths against the hem of Yoongi's pants, over the tight line of Yoongi's boxer briefs, his hand coming back to palm at Yoongi's erection. He looks up at Yoongi and smiles, sly and smug, pressing his palm down over Yoongi's cock.

Yoongi groans, his legs spreading as Seokjin settles between his thighs. "Hyung," he starts again, but Seokjin lays his cheek on Yoongi's groin, right beside Yoongi's cock still straining in his jeans. His mouth dries up and he forgets how to swallow.

Seokjin glances back up at him again, his fingers leisurely popping open the top button of his jeans. "Shh," he breathes, sliding the fly of Yoongi's pants down. He lifts up slightly, shifting Yoongi's jeans down until they snag just under his ass. It's uncomfortable and restricting, but Seokjin's mouthing Yoongi's cock over his briefs and Yoongi doesn't give a fuck about his jeans anymore, just wants his briefs off and the hot, slick heat of Seokjin's mouth on his cock.

"Please," he wheezes, watching Seokjin, eyes transfixed on the bright flush of pink high on his cheeks, on the kiss-swollen, shiny gleam of his lips, on the sly, excited flash in Seokjin's eyes.

Seokjin smiles and hums, fingers digging under the band of Yoongi's briefs and pulling them down carefully, lifting the elastic over Yoongi's cock. The briefs bunch up with Yoongi's jeans, snagging under the swell of his ass. Seokjin wraps his left hand around Yoongi's cock, just tight enough for a slight friction as he starts to pump Yoongi slowly.

Yoongi presses his lips together, exhaling through his nose, trying to keep his hips still even when his every instinct is telling him to seek more friction, more speed, more everything.

Seokjin seems to have pity on him because he glances up again and smiles before dipping his head, sliding his tongue from the base of Yoongi's cock to the tip. He hovers over the tip, laving at the slit, fingers still pumping evenly at the base of the shaft.

Yoongi makes a grunted sound, fingers pressing into the soft material of the duvet. "Hyung," he whines.

The word breaks off into a moan as Seokjin's lips push down on the tip of Yoongi's cock, sucking him into the tight, wet heat of his mouth.

"Fuck," Yoongi moans out, feet pressing into the mattress, his hands coming to rest gently in Seokjin's hair, following the bob of his head.

Seokjin sets an ease pace, bobbing up and down Yoongi's cock, pulling off to lave down to his balls, then back up again, sucking him down to the base. When Yoongi's cock hits the back of Seokjin's throat, Seokjin swallows around him, humming, the vibrations radiating through Yoongi's body, electrifying. Yoongi doesn't last long. It's been too many weeks since he's been with Seokjin, Seokjin's mouth is too hot, too wet, too tight.

His fingers tighten in Seokjin's hair and he bites back a moan. "Hyung, I'm close. I'm gonna come soon," he warns, hips stuttering shallowly.

Seokjin hums around Yoongi's cock, dives down with more enthusiasm, fingers tight on Yoongi's thighs, hard enough to bruise.

Yoongi throws his head back against the pillows and grunts as he comes down Seokjin's throat, the pleasure pulsing through him in wave after wave. Seokjin swallows around him as the aftershocks knock the breath out of his lungs. "Fuck," he groans, opening eyes he never knew he closed, fingers grabbing for Seokjin's shoulders, trying to tug him up.

Seokjin makes a small noise of protest even as he follows Yoongi's urgings. "I just swallowed, Yoongi-" he starts, but Yoongi pulls him down over him, mouth slotting against mouth.

Yoongi can taste himself on Seokjin's tongue and the knowledge has another pulse of something

akin to pleasure running down his spine. When they finally break, Yoongi places a lingering kiss on Seokjin's left cheek, sighing against the skin.

"You're fucking amazing, hyung," he breathes, trailing his fingers down Seokjin's side, circling his waist and holding him close.

"I know," Seokjin says, grinning down at him.

Yoongi huffs out an unamused laugh, fingers massaging Seokjin's side.

"Hey, Yoongi," Seokjin says, grinding down on Yoongi's hip, his cock hard and reminding Yoongi of unattended business.

"Yeah?"

"You can go for another round, right?"

Yoongi chuckles, kissing down Seokjin's neck. "Yeah, give me a few minutes."

"Hmm." Seokjin tugs on Yoongi's earlobe lightly. "Wanna finger me for those few minutes?"

Yoongi's breath shudders in his lungs and he groans. "Where do you keep the lube?"

Seokjin laughs against Yoongi even as Yoongi shifts them, flipping Seokjin under him. It's going to be a long night.

####

Yoongi is woken by a gentle shake of his shoulder. He blinks his eyes open, frowning, his cheek pressed against a pillow that smells just like Seokjin. He smiles sleepily when he sees Seokjin lying next to him. They're both on their sides, facing each other, huddled under Seokjin's fluffy duvet. He must have drifted off, he thinks. He sighs and closes his eyes again, lulled by Seokjin's fingers gently stroking his neck. The pull of sleep tugs at the edges of his consciousness, sated and warm and right. He missed Seokjin so much.

"You should probably leave soon," Seokjin says, his tone whispering and mournful.

Yoongi frowns and blinks his eyes open. He doesn't want to leave, wants to stay with Seokjin tonight, tomorrow, forever. He wants to tell him he loves him. He wants to ask him to move back in. He wants to marry him again. He wants everything he stupidly threw away. He reminds himself that he doesn't deserve it, that he hasn't earned any of it back again. The fact that he can even have this moment with Seokjin is enough, for now.

He grunts and lifts up on his elbow, nodding, trying to shake the drowsiness from his limbs. "Yeah, sorry."

Seokjin frowns, his hand dropping to Yoongi's hand, running his thumb over the expanse of it. "Sorry, it's just that I heard Jeongguk come in and I'd rather you survived another day."

Yoongi snorts but smiles reassuringly at Seokjin. He bends to place a slow kiss on the corner of Seokjin's lips, lingering, trying to map the moment into his memory. The warmth radiating from Seokjin, the faint bloom of hickeys down his neck, the soft noise Seokjin makes when he reaches up to tangle his fingers into Yoongi's hair and pull him down for another kiss.

Yoongi sighs, melting back into Seokjin's embrace, letting Seokjin draw him lower, letting Seokjin

taste his lips for as long as he'd like. He missed this. He missed him. He never wants to let it go again.

Seokjin pulls back, his fingers still tangled in Yoongi's hair, his thumb stroking Yoongi's cheek. He smiles up at Yoongi and licks his lips. "Yoongi," he whispers, eyes flickering over Yoongi's face, watching him closely.

"Yeah, hyung?" Yoongi replies, a cheeky smile on his lips. He tilts his head, waiting.

"I love you."

The breath knocks out of Yoongi's chest in an instant, his heart stops, restarts, beats a litany of *Seokjin, Seokjin, Seokjin*. He feels his face heat with a sudden flush, has to dip his head into Seokjin's shoulder to keep from showing the absolute *giddy* grin on his lips.

Seokjin laughs, his shoulders shaking with it. He slaps his hand hard on Yoongi's shoulder. "Yah!"

Yoongi grunts, just buries his head further into the crook of Seokjin's neck.

"Yah, Yoongi." Seokjin hits Yoongi again. "I just told you I love you."

"I know."

"At least let me see your face," Seokjin huffs, still slapping at him.

"Don't want to," Yoongi pouts. He doesn't want to look at Seokjin right now. He's already about to burst. His face and his chest and his fingers and his toes, everything, it's all about to burst.

"I love you," Seokjin says again, wrapping his arms around Yoongi's shoulders.

Yoongi closes his eyes, inhales deeply, fingers tightening into the feathery duvet, and gathers the courage to say the words he's been afraid of for too many years. "You, too, hyung," he whispers, barely audible, the words sticky and awkward on his tongue. A weight shifts in his chest, lightening, filling, wrapping around his heart and weaving into the marrow of his bones.

Seokjin stiffens, his hands tightening on Yoongi's back. "What was that?" he requests, his voice disbelieving and hopeful.

Yoongi pauses and inhales deeply, gathering the words from the deepest depths of his body. "You too," Yoongi says, just as carefully, just as stilted, just as quietly, but it must be enough for Seokjin because his arms tighten around Yoongi's shoulders and he presses a multitude of quick, happy kisses wherever he can reach.

"You still have to go soon," Seokjin says, muttering against Yoongi. "I'm not fighting my brother at two in the morning."

Yoongi sighs and finally lifts up, placing his weight on the palms of his hands against the bed. He peers down at Seokjin, at his sparkling eyes and wide grin and finds himself smiling fondly back. "I kind of think I could take him on," Yoongi says, tilting his head.

Seokjin snorts. "Dream on, pumpkin."

Yoongi gapes at him. "You called me *pumpkin*?"

"Do you prefer baby?"

"How about stud?" he suggests, a smirk growing on his lips.

Seokjin laughs, the corners of his eyes crinkling up. "Muffin," he counters.

Yoongi cannot take this affront. He sets his jaw in determination and attacks, tickling Seokjin in retaliation. Seokjin shrieks and writhes underneath him, swatting at his hands. "Call me stud," Yoongi says, grinning as Seokjin tries to roll away from him.

"Pudding cup," Seokjin giggles out.

They both freeze when the door to Seokjin's room creaks open.

Yoongi stares down at Seokjin, wide eyes mirroring his own.

"I think," Jeongguk says loudly, "it's time for the ex-husband to leave."

"Shit," Yoongi breaths, somewhat afraid to turn and look at Jeongguk.

Seokjin giggles before he stops himself, trying to put on a sombre expression. "Shit," he repeats back.

"Anytime now," Jeongguk says, and there's a sound of him tapping his foot impatiently against the hardwood floor.

Yoongi straightens and glances over his shoulder at Jeongguk, sees the kid with his arms crossed over his puffed up chest, scowling like a guard dog. "We're both naked under here so..." He arches a brow at Jeongguk.

Jeongguk's scowl deepens and he kicks away from the door frame. "You have two minutes before I call the police for trespassing," he says as he walks away, slamming the door behind him.

Yoongi turns back to Seokjin. "That went well," he says.

Seokjin hums noncommittally and pats Yoongi's hip. "Come on, get dressed. Can't have you on CNN getting arrested."

"Granny would be thrilled," Yoongi grumbles but hobbles off the bed, gathering his clothes and struggling back into them. When he's fully dressed, he heads back to the bed and gives Seokjin one more peck on the lips. "I'll call you when I get home."

Seokjin smiles and sits back against the headboard. "Bye Peppermint."

Yoongi makes a face. "That's the worst one."

Seokjin tilts his head against the pillows and shrugs. "Give me fifty years and I might call you stud."

Yoongi grins. That doesn't sound bad to him at all.

&&&

Jimin didn't really realize it, but it's been months since the last time he has been out with Seokjin, and even longer since it's been as carefree and happy as it is now. The past year was a quiet turmoil, a daily battle with his feelings and hardly a moment of peace. He thinks he sees the affects of hard-won serenity, not only in himself but in Seokjin. They're both more playful today, more open. Ridiculously silly and childish. Jimin's stomach hurts from laughing so much.

They don't have much of an agenda tonight, just strolling through Hongdae and stopping wherever they please.

"Oh, Taehyung really likes that," Jimin says as they pass a bbopki stand. He pauses, wondering if he should buy one for Taehyung to take back home. He turns to see Seokjin grinning smugly at him. He frowns. "What?"

"Hmm." Seokjin shrugs. "Nothing."

Jimin makes a face as Seokjin continues to eye him smugly. "What is it?" he asks again, exasperation growing in his tone.

"Nothing, really." Seokjin starts walking again and Jimin follows warily. He points to another food stall. "Does Taehyung like that, too?" He gestures to a street dancer performing. "Is that Taehyung's favorite song?" He grins at Jimin. "I don't think you've spoken two sentences together without adding Taehyung into it."

Jimin scowls at Seokjin. "I'm not that bad."

Seokjin sends him a mock grave stare. "You are." He nudges Jimin's shoulder. "It's not a bad thing. It's nice to see you so happy with him."

Jimin rubs his ear in embarrassment as he realizes, okay maybe he's been mentioning Taehyung a lot. "I really like him, hyung," he says sheepishly.

"I'm glad." Seokjin loops his arm around Jimin's shoulder. "I think you guys are a good fit. And he really loves you a lot."

Jimin smiles despite himself. "Yeah. He does."

"Good." Seokjin nods decisively. "I'll talk to Jeongguk. He'll come around once he realizes Taehyung isn't going to change anything between you two."

Jimin hums and bites his lip, glancing up at Seokjin. He doesn't want to dampen the mood, but Seokjin's teasing reminded him of something that's been weighing on his mind for a few weeks. "Hey, hyung. You're doing well with Yoongi, right? Because I know I wasn't supposed to tell him about your flight-"

"It's okay. We're doing well. We're doing really well," Seokjin says, smiling softly, that sparkle in his eyes that Jimin was never able to inspire.

Somehow, it doesn't hurt anymore. It just makes Jimin smile back, happy, a new feeling warming his stomach. Safe. Content. Grateful.

However long and painful this journey has been, Jimin thinks he's grateful for it.

He's starting to understand that most things won't work out the way he plans them, and that's okay. Because the result in the end is so much better than he anticipated. It's the beauty of life, he thinks.

His lonely years are over now, left behind with the doom and dread. He has his brothers, just like he always did even if he didn't realize it. Their bonds were forged in Busan, strengthened and tested and weathered to prove their worth. He has Taehyung, steady and persistent and sinking deeper and deeper into the heart Jimin long thought broken.

With a little bit more time, he thinks he'll have even more people in his world, shining so many bright

lights that the darkness won't be able to return. In time, he wants to be that bright light for others, too.

He grins and wraps his fingers around Seokjin's wrist, pulling him backwards. "I wanna buy Taehyung bbopki. Come on."

"Buy hyungie one, too," Seokjin says, acting what he probably thinks of as cute.

Jimin scrunches his nose. "Don't want to."

Seokjin ignores him, shaking his shoulders. "I want a heart shape." He smiles charmingly. "A heart for hyung."

Jimin laughs despite himself, nodding in defeat and pulling out his wallet. He approaches the stall and orders two. A heart for Seokjin and a star for Taehyung. He smiles to himself, Taehyung's words filling his thoughts.

Because I think you're made up of constellations and I dream of touching the stars.

He can't wait to give it to Taehyung later tonight.

&&&

Seokjin misses the reading nook at Yoongi's place. He sighs and readjusts on the sofa in Jeongguk's living room. The lighting at Yoongi's place is *perfect* for reading. Natural light streams in through floor-to-ceiling windows. The sometimes harsh rays filter through sheer white curtains that Seokjin had picked out himself. He misses his favourite chair. He misses his favourite blanket.

He makes a face and pulls his elbows back to hit the pillows on Jeongguk's couch, trying to rearrange them. He never realized how *uncomfortable* it is here.

"Hyung," Jeongguk says, drawing Seokjin's attention as he enters the room. He holds out a large envelope. "I had to sign for this earlier today. It's for you."

"I've been home for hours, and you're just telling me this now?" Seokjin asks.

Jeongguk shrugs. "I'm giving it to you now."

Seokjin furrows his brow and peers curiously at the package. His eyes flicker as he recognizes the design on the return address. Yoongi's lawyers.

"I thought your divorce was already finalized," Jeongguk says, frowning. "You know. Your divorce from the man you're dating."

"I sense some kind of judgment in your tone," Seokjin replies, taking the package from Jeongguk's hands.

Jeongguk huffs. "Most people stop dating their exes."

"We're not exes. We're just divorced."

"Do you hear the words that are coming out of your mouth right now?"

Seokjin scowls and looks up at his brother. "Yes, I am dating my ex-husband. Yes, I still love him very much. No, you don't have a say in it. It would be nice if you could support my decisions about my life without giving me a hard time about it."

Jeongguk's face flickers with uncertainty and a little bit of guilt. "It's not that I don't trust you, hyung. I don't trust Yoongi-hyung."

Seokjin remains silent, staring pointedly at Jeongguk.

Jeongguk sighs and hands his head. "Does it really have to be him?" he asks petulantly.

"Yes."

"Why?"

There are a lot of reasons, Seokjin thinks. Because Yoongi was an anchor when the winds threatened to topple him over. Because Yoongi took his hand, every time, even when Seokjin didn't expect him to. Because Seokjin missed Yoongi's cute nose and his rumbling voice and that calming, addicting aura, that feeling of belonging together. Because Yoongi went after him in the end, begged for forgiveness. Because Yoongi doesn't want to lose him again.

There are a lot of reasons why Seokjin's heart is set irreversibly on Yoongi, but he doesn't say any of them. Instead, he smiles at his brother and says, "Because I love him."

"What if he hurts you again?" Jeongguk asks, though his tone is losing conviction, resignation creeping through.

Seokjin shrugs. "Then you can punch him in the face again."

Jeongguk's eyes widen momentarily. "He deserved it," he says, defensive.

Seokjin hums, unconcerned. He starts to open the package from Yoongi's lawyers, not minding Jeongguk. "I didn't say he didn't." He pulls a stack of papers from the envelope, scanning them quickly. A frown grows on his lips as he flips through the documents, snippets of sentences making his fingers tighten on the sheets.

At the finalization of divorce....

Transfer ownership of shares....

Lump sum settlement....

He stuffs the papers back into the envelope and stands, looking around for his phone.

"Wha-" Jeongguk starts, confused.

"I'm going over to Yoongi's. Have you seen my phone?" He pats at his pockets futilely.

"I think I saw it in the kitchen," Jeongguk replies dully, face still scrunched in confusion. "What's in the papers?"

"A breach of contract," Seokjin says, heading to the kitchen, relieved to see his phone on the counter by the refrigerator. He grabs it and makes his way to the door, shrugging on a long wool coat. "Don't wait up for me," he calls out to his brother.

"Don't bother coming back!" Jeongguk responds from the living room.

"Love you, too!" Seokjin shouts as the door slams behind him.

&&&

The drive over to Yoongi's place is peculiar, familiar and yet strange at the same time. Familiar in that he's traced this same route a hundred times, hands working over his steering wheel mindlessly. He thinks that even if he was half asleep, his mind completely shut off from any coherent thought process, he could still make his way down these streets, the destination calling like a beacon.

It's strange in that he hasn't visited these streets for weeks. The last time he has been at Yoongi's was when he made his mad journey from the airport to confront Yoongi.

His fingers flex over the steering wheel, eyes flickering over the passing streetlamps, glowing warm yellow, the sun long past set. It feels like the lights guide him along, that the pavement streets welcome him back.

It feels like going home.

The security guard recognizes Seokjin when he arrives and lets him into the building, sending him up in the elevator to the penthouse suite. He hesitates once he reaches Yoongi's door, wondering if he should knock or punch in the code and just enter. He blinks hard at the door before shaking his head and uncovering the keypad. It just seems wrong asking for permission to enter the place that still feels like home.

He keys in 1-0-0-7, eyes widening in surprise when the pad beeps negatively at him. He clenches his jaw, annoyance edging quickly to anger starting to heat under his skin. Yoongi changed the code. Yoongi changed the code *Seokjin* made, the one that meant something special to both of them. He wants to know when Yoongi did it. The night Seokjin left? The next day? How long did it take Yoongi to throw away all his traces?

He scowls at the keypad and keys in the date he wishes didn't mean anything. 0-8-1-4. He blinks in surprise when this, too, doesn't unlock the door.

He never erased that code but apparently Yoongi has. He frowns at the lock, eyeing it accusingly like it's keeping him out to personally offend him.

He tries again. 0-3-0-9. It fails.

1-2-3-0. Another failure.

1-9-9-3.

1-2-0-4.

Each time the keypad chime alerts him of the failure, and the once charming beeps have become mocking, taunting him.

"Yah!" he says in exasperation at the lock, scolding the inanimate object.

He backs up slightly when he hears shuffling on the other side of the door and it wrenches open.

"Damn it, Taehyung, I thought you said you wouldn't try to figure out the code- Oh." Yoongi stares slack-jawed up at Seokjin, blinking in confusion, looking like a lost little boy. Seokjin doesn't really want to admit it now, when he's still annoyed at the lock, but Yoongi looks ridiculously cute dressed in red plaid pajamas, his hair still damp from a shower. "Hyung?"

"Hi. You changed the code," he says, dully.

Yoongi's gaze doesn't shift from Seokjin, his hand still holding the door open, confusion still written

all over his face. "Yeah."

"Why?"

"It's the day you signed the divorce papers. I didn't like it."

Seokjin can feel his face flush. He tilts his head, contemplating Yoongi. "What's the code now?"

Yoongi blinks, expression blank, like he's still trying to understand how Seokjin appeared in front of him. "9-2-9-3."

Seokjin's lips twitch and he clears his throat to remain sober. "Is that...our birth years?"

Yoongi nods slowly.

Seokjin loses the battle over his expression and smirks, amused. "You're worse than me."

Yoongi seems to knock out of his trance and scoffs. "I'm not the one naming you after food."

Seokjin smiles charmingly and tilts his head at Yoongi. "Are you going to let me in, honeybun?"

Yoongi snorts and steps back, opening the door wide to allow Seokjin into the space.

Seokjin steps inside and toes off his shoes, hesitating as he picks them up to place on the shoe rack. There are still gaping spots empty beside Yoongi's shoes where Seokjin's used to sit. It's strange, in a heavy, panging sort of way, hitting Seokjin in his gut as he hovers his shoes in his hand. It's stupid and trivial, and he was the one who packed his things, but it still hurts to see it, his absence from the place he still considers *home*.

Yoongi seems to feel the same heavy atmosphere, because he's quickly trying to find a pair of house slippers for Seokjin. He studiously does not look at Seokjin as he shoves a spare pair next to Seokjin's bare feet, straightening and clearing his throat.

Seokjin finally places his shoes next to Yoongi's and slides the slippers on, following Yoongi into the living room.

Yoongi sits on the far end of the couch, causally hugging the sofa arm, trying to appear aloof even when Seokjin can see the questioning furrow of his brow. He's wondering why Seokjin showed up so late in the evening. Wondering why Seokjin didn't call beforehand, wondering what it could be that prompted Seokjin to face the place he's been purposely avoiding. And if Seokjin is reading the slightly nervous, careful flicker of his eyes correctly, Yoongi is wondering if he's messed up again, and what he can do to fix it.

Seokjin glances around the room again, cataloguing the evidence of his absence here too. He doesn't fully understand why he's forcing himself to do it. All he gets is a heavy pang in his stomach and a tightening in his chest. It hurts to look around and see all the personal touches he added missing, hurts to know he almost really did disappear from Yoongi's life. And Yoongi almost disappeared from his.

He supposes he has some kind of fixation on it because he's still trying to understand how it happened, and how to stop it from ever repeating again. He doesn't have the answer yet but as he glances back at Yoongi, his eyes patient and open and entirely focused on Seokjin, he thinks they might find it, one day soon.

Yoongi shifts on the couch, tapping his fingers on the arm. "You wanted to talk about something?"

Seokjin nods, settling onto the couch on the other end opposite Yoongi. He hooks his right leg under him and sits facing the other. "I wanted to talk about the divorce settlement I received today."

"You're not satisfied with it?"

"I'm confused." Seokjin narrows his eyes at Yoongi. "I wasn't supposed to *have* a settlement to begin with."

Yoongi shrugs. "I broke every other stipulation in the contract."

"Except the expiry date," Seokjin says before he can stop himself.

Yoongi's expression falls. He looks down and licks his lips, nodding guiltily. "I'm so sorry, hyung, I was stupid and scared and I reacted badly. I'll never stop being sorry for what I did."

Seokjin presses his lips together and nods. He reminds himself that he's forgiven Yoongi, that keeping Yoongi in his life is more important than nurturing the hurt, even if he is entitled to feel it. He reminds himself that his heart is still playing catch up with his head and that's okay, because he thinks he's getting better, able to move on sooner when he feels himself falling down that pit of bitterness again.

"Sorry," he says. "I didn't come here for another apology."

Yoongi waits patiently for Seokjin to continue, gaze intensely focused on him. It's a heady feeling and Seokjin tries to ignore the tingling that's starting at the base of his spine.

"You gave me shares in the Min company, Yoongi."

"I know," Yoongi answers unflinchingly.

"You gave me five percent."

Yoongi stares blankly at him. "I don't get the issue."

"You only own fifty-one percent!" Seokjin blurts, aggravated.

Yoongi tilts his head, blinking. "I know."

"That's the deciding vote. I could have done anything with that. I could have sold them. I could have formed an alliance with other share holders and forced you out of your position."

Yoongi shrugs again, not even a small bit bothered.

"Why?" Seokjin prompts, exasperated with Yoongi's lack of response.

"I'm okay with anything you decide to do."

"Doesn't it scare you how much power you gave me?"

Yoongi's lips quirk into an amused smirk and he lets out a quick laugh. "Hyung," he says, smiling at Seokjin like he's missed something obvious. "You've had an obscene amount of power over me for months. How is this any different?"

Seokjin's heart swells with love and affection and a happiness that has evaded him for too many years of his life. This is the Yoongi he knows. This is his Yoongi, the one who silently cares for him, quiet and hidden and without desire for acknowledgment. The one who bends and moves to

Seokjin's desires, who changes plans and thoughts and promises carved in stone just because he wants to make Seokjin happy. This is the Yoongi who trusts Seokjin, beyond the surface, down to the vulnerable, secret layers of the heart he hasn't shown to anyone else.

This is the Yoongi who loves Seokjin.

This is the Yoongi that Seokjin loves with all his being, the one he wants to spend the rest of his life with. The one he's done missing.

Seokjin shifts, rising onto his knees. "For the record, that was kind of a stupid move."

Yoongi smirks. "I don't know if you've noticed this yet, but I'm kind of stupid for you."

Seokjin crawls across the length of the couch until he hovers over Yoongi, straddling him. Yoongi's eyes widen but he moves to accommodate Seokjin, hands resting lightly on Seokjin's waist.

He tilts his head back, a bewildered smile on his lips. "Wha-"

Seokjin leans in and softly presses his lips to Yoongi's, cutting off whatever question he was set to pose. He feels Yoongi's initial surprise, stiff and frozen for a split second, and then it's Yoongi's warmth, melting under him. Yoongi inhales deeply, fingers flexing on Seokjin's waist. He angles his head, breaking the kiss to slide their lips together again and again. Yoongi parts his lips, tugging lightly at Seokjin's upper lip, drawing it between his teeth.

It's slow, unhurried. Seokjin almost feels light-headed, like he's floating somewhere between the ground and a brilliant sky he's only ever dreamed of reaching.

Yoongi shifts, sliding lower onto the couch, pulling Seokjin down with him, their lips still connected. Yoongi's hands move to smooth over Seokjin's chest, running leisurely from his ribs to his collarbones and back again.

Seokjin lifts from Yoongi, far enough away that he can see Yoongi's face clearly.

Yoongi pouts up at him, patting his chest. "Hey. I was enjoying that," he says, playfully.

Seokjin smiles, reaching a hand up to lay on top of Yoongi's on his chest. "Yoongi," he says, thumbing over Yoongi's knuckles. "I'm moving back in."

Yoongi freezes, his eyes widening. "Really?"

"Yes," Seokjin confirms.

Yoongi bursts into a grin, wide and gummy and so beautiful that Seokjin's breath takes an extra second in his lungs, unable to move for a moment. "Thank you." He lifts his neck to peck Seokjin's cheek. "Thank you," he says again, kissing Seokjin's other cheek.

Seokjin laughs, dipping his head into Yoongi's neck, shoulders shuddering with the giggles.

He's happy.

He's in love.

And he knows, this time, they have a chance to make it last.

&&&

As rare as the occasion occurs, Yoongi knows he is perfectly capable of waking up early. He just usually has no motivation for it. This morning he has every reason in the world.

Before the sun even breaks through the horizon, the sky still a hazy deep blue, the stars still piercing and twinkling like tiny diamonds, Yoongi untangles himself from the sheets and Seokjin's warm embrace. The early morning chill hits the bare skin of his feet, but he manages to stay silent, mindful of Seokjin sleeping. He waits, breath held still in his lungs, biting his lower lip, watching if he's roused Seokjin. The other has always been a light sleeper, sensitive to jostling of any kind.

Seokjin's brow furrows and his left hand reaches up to scratch his neck, but he gratefully remains asleep.

Yoongi knows he should feel exuberant and lucky that Seokjin finally agreed to move back in, another step forward in their relationship that Yoongi had nearly ruined. And he does. His heart swells with the knowledge that he'll see Seokjin every night, and wake up to him every morning. That they'll do the laundry together, that he'll wander into the living room and find Seokjin working, that his shoes will be at the door. That his tea will fill the cupboard, not misplaced, not forgotten, but where it belongs.

And there it is. Under all the giddy happiness and the grateful thumping of his heart. It's the all-consuming peace that Seokjin is back. That Seokjin is *home*, with him. To stay.

It's what spurs him out of bed and into his study before dawn. He grabs a notepad and a fountain pen, settling in his computer chair. He studies the blank sheet carefully, twirling the pen between his fingers. He sits like that for a while, just thinking, trying to find the right words, trying to shape them into the perfect combination, a magic spell that will cause Seokjin to say *yes*.

He knows he's rushing, and he knows he should wait. He knows, but there's a growing impatience in his gut, an anxiety that things haven't fully corrected yet. He's always been impulsive anyway.

He uncaps his pen and writes in clear, bold lines.

1. The terms of this contract are for life.

When he's finished and checked his work over twice, he hustles downstairs to the kitchen, hoping he can still make breakfast before Seokjin wakes up. The sun is bright in the sky now, Yoongi doesn't think he has much time left.

The rice isn't even done cooking when he hears Seokjin's footsteps lightly descend the staircase. He wipes his hands nervously down his sides and frowns, shaking his head. He tells himself not to be nervous, even as butterflies flutter rapidly in his stomach.

"Yoongi?" Seokjin calls out, stepping hesitantly into the kitchen. His voice is cleared from sleep, smooth and strong.

Yoongi feels a slight pang of disappointment, eyes flicking over Seokjin, taking in his bright skin and large eyes and full lips. He cannot detect even the smallest haze of sleep in Seokjin, no pink flush in his cheeks, or groggy rumbling voice, or blur of sleep blinking in his eyes. Yoongi missed it, this morning, downstairs frying meat and measuring rice into the rice cooker while Seokjin opened his eyes to the day.

It's a silly thing to care about, but still. Yoongi feels that pang of disappointment. He has a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand more mornings to witness it, he reminds himself, and smiles at Seokjin. "Hey," he says.

Seokjin stares at him, bemused. "Are you cooking breakfast?"

"Un. Sit." He gestures to the breakfast bar, to Seokjin's spot.

Seokjin stares at him for a moment, lips twisting in puzzlement, but eventually he takes his place at the breakfast bar. "It's strange for you to be up before me," he says as Yoongi turns back to the stove.

Yoongi shrugs and tells himself to calm down, to wait. Wait until breakfast is done and ease Seokjin into the topic. Patience. "I wanted to cook you breakfast."

"Aw," Seokjin coos and Yoongi can hear the laughter in his tone. "Are you going to make this a habit?"

Yoongi snorts, flipping the meat in the pan with his chopsticks.

"It's sweet, but I'd prefer if you did the dishes," Seokjin continues, having a lot more fun than this conversation warrants.

"You're always mentioning the dishes, hyung," Yoongi sighs.

"It's my only complaint," Seokjin sighs.

Yoongi ignores him and picks up some meat with his chopsticks, turning to face Seokjin. "Ah," he says, holding out the chopsticks.

Seokjin blinks for a moment before a grin spreads over his lips. "Ah," Seokjin says, happily opening his mouth for the food. He wriggles in his seat, making pleased noises as he chews the food. When he finishes he smirks at Yoongi. "If I knew I'd get meat, I would have moved in weeks ago."

Yoongi's lips twitch into an answering smirk and he tilts his head. "Did you get enough meat last night?"

Seokjin's eyes widen and he reaches across the counter to smack Yoongi's chest even as he laughs. "Yah!"

The rice cooker chimes and Yoongi takes his chance of escape, heading over to scoop out two bowls of rice. He turns off the element and places the pan of meat on the counter before retrieving a couple containers of store-bought side dishes from the refrigerator.

"Dig in," he says, sliding into the seat beside Seokjin.

"Thank you for the meal," Seokjin says, reaching forward for the food.

Yoongi leans his elbow on the counter, appetite vanished with the fluttering of butterflies in his stomach. He watches Seokjin happily chew, smiling fondly. He's grateful Seokjin is back with him. He's grateful to have this man in his life. He promises himself to never let go again.

He frowns when Seokjin stops chewing, his brow furrowed as he looks seriously at Yoongi.

Yoongi straightens. "What?"

Seokjin slowly lowers his chopsticks and sets them on the counter. "Why aren't you eating?"

"Ah." Yoongi clears his throat and idly fixes his fringe. "I'm just not really hungry."

"You're a bad actor, Yoongi." Seokjin shifts in his seat to face Yoongi. "We have to be honest with

each other if we're going to make this work this time around." He stares expectantly at Yoongi.
"You're nervous. What is it?"

Yoongi taps his finger on the counter, eyes searching Seokjin's. He had wanted to wait until after breakfast, set the scene. Make it more romantic than a bunch of words at the breakfast bar. But Seokjin has that stubborn glint in his eyes and Yoongi sighs, nodding. He pushes the plates away so at least this moment isn't forever tainted with the smell of cooked meat.

He clears his throat and straightens in his chair, reaching over to take Seokjin's hands in his own. Seokjin blinks in surprise but lets Yoongi bring their hands together loosely, fingers linked. Yoongi stares down at their hands. "I have a proposition for you," he starts slowly, focused on their hands, playing with Seokjin's fingers nervously.

"Sounds sexy," Seokjin jokes.

Yoongi's lips tug upwards but he doesn't laugh, the weight of his thoughts keeping him sombre. He shakes his head, pressing his lips together. He inhales deeply, fingers tightening around Seokjin's. "I love you," he exhales, saying the words clearly, feeling the heavy credence of them as they roll off his tongue.

Seokjin's fingers jolt in his and he makes a surprised noise but Yoongi still doesn't dare to look up yet.

"I don't want to go back to what we were," he continues, struggling to recall the words he rehearsed in his mind all morning. They've abandoned him now, and he's fumbling to find any words that might express what is beating in his heart. "I want to do this right, this time. With vows that we mean, and looking far into the future."

"Yoongi, are you proposing?" Seokjin asks, nearly breathless, a strange kind of tentativeness in his voice.

Yoongi disentangles his right hand from Seokjin's and reaches into his back pocket, pulling out the sheet of paper he prepared earlier. Looking at the lined sheet now, folded into quarters to fit into his pocket, he thinks it might be a bit too crude for his purposes. He should have printed it on fancy paper, with calligraphy and letterheads.

It's too late, though, Seokjin is already pulling it from his grip. "What's this?"

Yoongi stares at the paper and clears his throat again. "A new contract. If, if you want it."

"Number one," Seokjin reads out loud and Yoongi has the urge to cover his face from embarrassment. "The terms of this contract are for life. Number two. Min Yoongi promises to love Jeon Seokjin with all his heart, mind, and soul." Seokjin pauses, silent.

Yoongi finally dares to peek at him, lifting his eyes cautiously to find Seokjin grinning at him. "Well?" he asks hopefully.

Seokjin sobers and blinks at him, playing dumb. "Well what?"

Yoongi makes a face. "You're not making this easy on me," he complains.

"You haven't even asked me properly." Seokjin leans back in his chair and crosses his legs, tapping the contract on his knee. "I'm afraid I can't entertain these terms without a formal request."

Yoongi arches a brow, but a smile tugs at his lips. "Do you want me to get down on one knee too?"

Seokjin shakes his head. "I just want to hear the words." He tilts his head. "Please?"

Yoongi's chest warms and he reaches forward again, taking Seokjin's left hand in his. "Hyung," he says, locking eyes with Seokjin, and lets his heart override his mind, the words forming from deep within himself. "I've been watching you for a long time. I love you. I want to build a future together. Will you marry me?"

Seokjin's lip quivers and he reaches his free hand up to rub at the corner of his eye. Still, he laughs, the sound watery and rumbling. He nods. "Yeah."

Yoongi grins and lunges off his chair to pull Seokjin into a hug, hooking his arms around Seokjin's shoulders and holding him close. He's going to remember this moment for the rest of his life, he promises, immortalizing the heat of Seokjin's chest, the sound of his happy quiet laughter, the faint scent of mint, the tickle of Seokjin's fingers as they grab at Yoongi's back. He inhales deeply and presses his lips to Seokjin's shoulder. "Thank you, hyung."

"Get me a pen, I need to sign this stupid contract," Seokjin says, pulling back. "I can't believe you wrote another one."

"It's funny," Yoongi defends, reaching over the counter for a pen.

"It's ridiculous," Seokjin retorts, but still he smiles as he smooths out the paper on the countertop.

Yoongi hands over a fountain pen, watches Seokjin uncap it, his fingers curving around the sleek silver body. "The terms are more agreeable this time," he says.

"I see there's no sex clause this time."

"That was a fucking mistake from the beginning," he grumbles.

Seokjin snorts. "I told you not to include it. You should learn to listen to hyungie better." Yoongi hums noncommittally as Seokjin scribbles something at the top of the contract.

Yoongi's brow furrows and he tries to see what Seokjin wrote, wondering what part of the terms he disagrees with. Seokjin shifts to the bottom of the paper and signs his name in a large flourish.

He hands the contract back to Yoongi, grinning. "I'm going to call Granny and take all the credit," he says, but Yoongi finds he doesn't have anything to say, smiling stupidly, fondly, happily at the paper, reading the messy scribble of Seokjin's handwriting near the top of the page.

Right there, in term number one, is Seokjin's amendment.

1. The terms of this contract are forever. You're marrying me in the next life too.

Yoongi takes the pen Seokjin discarded and signs his name next to Seokjin's. He's never found a more agreeable contract.

Chapter End Notes

I mean. They have to have another contract, guys. It's hilarious.

Can you believe there is only one more chapter and then the epilogue left? It's been a

RIDE, let me tell you. Thank you so so soooo much for the amazing response. It's surreal.

For those anxious about the end, I anticipate I will post the last chapters before the comeback but I won't be posting during Yoonjin Week. Please give Yoonjin Week a lot of love!!!

Marriage, Not Dating

Chapter Notes

The amazing work people have made for this fic:

[Zea](#) made this [amazing gif poster](#) THANK YOU

[jensnoriel](#) and [inah regina](#) made [these instagram edits](#) thank you!!

[claud](#) made [AN TRAILER](#) I'M ;;; thank you!

[Maria Rasheed](#) made such a [wonderful edit](#) thank you ;;;;

[Ellie](#) made [more edits](#) thank you!!!!

[pagdiwa](#) drew [this gorgeous art](#) I am still so so so soft thank you!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Yoongi stops outside the entrance to the restaurant, Seokjin's hand in his trying to tug him forward.

"Hmm?" Seokjin turns to look at Yoongi. "What's wrong?"

Yoongi stares up at the sign over the door, listens to the busy bustle inside the restaurant. He blinks and flicks his gaze to Seokjin. "I just had a bit of déjà vu."

Seokjin snorts. "It's not even the same restaurant where you met my brother."

Yoongi doesn't respond, still frowning at the restaurant. It's weird. This time Seokjin is completely at ease, amused even, and Yoongi's the one with his nerves on end. He really hadn't cared about Jeongguk when he met him first, and didn't care if he liked the idea of their marriage or not. Yoongi cares a lot this time around. He sighs.

"Come on, Yoongichi," Seokjin teases. "Let's go face my scary brother."

Yoongi scowls but allows Seokjin to lead him into the building. "Your brother hates when you call me that, you know."

"Hmm. But you don't, do you?"

Yoongi makes a face but he can't deny it. He likes the cute lilt in Seokjin's voice when he says it, likes the way Seokjin can't help but smile as it rolls off his tongue. He likes that it's *his* and his alone.

His thoughts are interrupted when they arrive at the private dining room. Jeongguk is already at the table, just like the first time, a deep scowl on his lips and his arms crossed tightly over his chest. He sniffs loudly when they enter, and nods to Seokjin only.

Yoongi almost laughs, wondering what kind of time loop he's stumbled into.

Jeongguk has apparently already ordered, the table lined with several steaming dishes. Yoongi and Seokjin take their seats opposite Jeongguk and a terse silence falls over the space.

Seokjin attempts a smile and says cheerfully, "Well, at least I don't have to do introductions this time."

Jeongguk makes a face and remains stubbornly silent.

Yoongi presses his lips together and shifts in his chair. He reaches over to squeeze Seokjin's knee briefly. "I see you already ordered," Yoongi starts in a forced jovial tone.

Jeongguk sneers. "The faster you eat, the faster I can get out of here."

Seokjin scowls at him. "Yah. You said you'd try."

Jeongguk sends a sharp glare at Yoongi. "Why? He's just gonna leave you again."

"Jeongguk," Seokjin warns.

"No, it's fine," Yoongi says. "He has every right to be upset."

Jeongguk scoffs. "I'm not *upset*, I'm pissed off." He flicks his gaze to Seokjin. "At both of you, to be honest. You hardly even got divorced and you're *engaged* again?"

Seokjin picks up his chopsticks and reaches over to a side dish, largely ignoring Jeongguk's outburst. "The good news is, *you're* not the one marrying Yoongi. I am."

"I don't approve."

Seokjin's jaw clicks and Yoongi can tell he's getting frustrated. Yoongi reaches over to squeeze his knee again, reassuring him. "Maybe you should go for a walk, hyung," Yoongi suggests. "Jeongguk and I can sort this out."

Jeongguk surprisingly brightens at the suggestion. "Yeah, I think that's a good idea."

Seokjin narrows his eyes suspiciously at his brother. "You just want to punch him again."

Jeongguk glares menacingly at Yoongi. "He deserves it."

Yoongi frowns. He does kind of deserve it but he also remembers the power of Jeongguk's fist and would rather not repeat the experience.

"Stop hitting your hyung," Seokjin scolds.

Jeongguk flicks his gaze to Seokjin, his expression hardening, and says through gritted teeth, "He's made it very clear that he isn't my hyung anymore."

Yoongi would honestly rather take Jeongguk's fist to his face again than feel this pain, throbbing, aching, poisoning his blood. His eyes widen and he feels wave after wave of regret and loss and shame wash over him. This is his fault. In pushing Seokjin away, he also abandoned Jeongguk. He ignored Jeongguk's pleas, vulnerable and beseeching, begging him to keep them together. *I thought we were becoming a family.*

Yoongi presses his lips together and tries to breathe through the suffocating, stabbing loss in his chest. He threw Jeongguk's words back at him, a knife, sharpened and aimed to kill. *I don't have a family kid.*

Yoongi's starting to understand, now, the severity and consequences of what he did. He's starting to understand Jeongguk's position. This is less about him and Seokjin. This is between him and Jeongguk.

Yoongi inhales and sets his jaw, determined to make this right again. He turns to Seokjin, catching his eye. "Hyung. Please. I need to talk this through with Jeongguk alone."

Seokjin hesitates, eyes flickering between Yoongi and Jeongguk, uncertain. Yoongi holds Seokjin's gaze, steady and trying to convey the importance of this request. Finally Seokjin sighs and stands. "Don't punch each other. I will be back in ten minutes." He squeezes Yoongi's shoulder briefly as he leaves.

Yoongi waits until he hears the click of the door closing, leaving him alone with Jeongguk. He looks back at Jeongguk. His arms are crossed tightly over his chest, his jaw is clenched. He studiously looks to his side, away from Yoongi, and remains taciturn and silent.

"Do you want me to start with an apology or an explanation?" Yoongi asks, keeping his tone neutral and unimposing.

Jeongguk sneers. "I don't care what you have to say."

Yoongi frowns. "I'll start with an explanation then," he says, ignoring Jeongguk's scoff. "You've probably noticed the absence of my parents."

Jeongguk's jaw ticks and he shifts in his seat. "My dad died, too. I don't go around throwing people away."

Yoongi nods. "I never said I had a *good* reason. It's just a reason." Yoongi looks down at his hands, splaying and curling them, the action soothing. He doesn't like to voice what he needs to say, but his therapist has been encouraging him to be more open, to face things with a level head, as far as he safely can. "I was ten when I lost them," he starts again, watching his hands. "They were my everything. One night I went to sleep loved. And in the morning, I had nothing. I lost them both at the same time and I guess I didn't handle it well."

He scoffs at his own words. "Okay, I know I didn't handle it well. It's...not something I thought I could heal from. And it was something I was terrified would repeat." He blinks and swallows the lump in his throat. "I'm still terrified, honestly."

He shifts, still not glancing back up at Jeongguk. "I thought it was safer to just not love anyone. Safer to not have a family. I didn't intend for anything to happen with Seokjin-hyung. I didn't think he could work his way into my heart."

He smiles fondly. "Your brother has a way of flipping my world on its head. I didn't expect Seokjin-hyung would mean so much to me. I didn't expect that I would want his brother to be my brother, too."

Yoongi finally looks up, sees Jeongguk clenching his jaw tight, his eyes shining with unshed tears, fighting to keep the scowl on his face. "Jeongguk. I'm sorry. I hurt you. I hurt hyung. I hurt myself. I'm so sorry. I'm going to do my best to make up for it for the rest of my life."

Jeongguk blinks rapidly and looks away again, frowning deeply. Finally, he draws in a shaky breath and says slowly, quietly, as if trying to keep his voice from wavering, "If you're looking for permission to marry hyung, I still won't give it."

"I don't need your permission," Yoongi says, smiling at the familiar words.

Jeongguk scoffs, a small answering smile fighting to break on his lips. He forces a frown and looks back at Yoongi. "What do you want, then?"

Yoongi's smile softens. "Your forgiveness. When you're ready to give it."

Jeongguk contemplates him for a few long, heavy moments in silence. Yoongi holds his breath,

waiting for the outcome. Finally Jeongguk says, "I'm not as easy to win over as my brother."

"That's okay," Yoongi replies. "I'm going to be around for a long time. I can wait."

Jeongguk seems to like that answer, his lips quirking into a smile before he scrunches his nose and sobers. "Whatever." He picks up his chopsticks. "I'm hungry."

Yoongi is about to reply when Seokjin bursts back into the room, sliding into his seat by Yoongi. "Good, because I'm starving." He picks up his chopsticks as well and starts to eat like the last ten minutes didn't happen.

Yoongi stares at him. "Were you outside eavesdropping the whole time?"

"Yes," Seokjin says, mouth full. He grins at Yoongi and holds his chopsticks out to him. "Ah."

Yoongi blinks at him dully but finally opens his mouth for the proffered food.

"Okay, new rule. No feeding each other at the dinner table," Jeongguk says in protest, a disgusted sneer on his face.

Seokjin grins at Yoongi, his eyes twinkling. Yoongi doesn't know why, but he feels proud to receive that smile. It's going to be okay, he thinks, no matter what. Because Seokjin is smiling at him, happy. And Yoongi knows nothing can take that away from him again.

&&&

Granny is unsurprisingly enthusiastic to start wedding preparations again. She is determined to hold the ceremony as quickly as possible.

"It took three weeks last time. I'm sure we can beat that this time around," she reasoned.

Even her determination is thwarted, however, as the circumstances around the remarriage creating several hurdles to overcome.

Since this time Yoongi and Seokjin are heading into their marriage with open and genuine hearts, Seokjin wants his mother to not only attend, but to play a significant part of the ceremonies. He also requests time for Wendy to clear her schedule in Paris and fly back to Seoul for the wedding. Yoongi's grandmother is more than willing to accommodate Seokjin's requests, but it takes time, setting them back by a couple of weeks.

The biggest challenge by far is the fact that news of the divorce never broke publicly. It's a blessing, to keep the media ignorant of – how Granny calls it – "that little tiff". It does require certain precautions when planning a *remarriage*, and Granny finds her ambition suitably challenged keeping it quiet.

The whole process sets them back even further, and with every date they push back, new problems arise.

Seokjin sighs, the headache from his latest wedding planning meeting still throbbing behind his eyes. He kicks out of the elevator, arriving on the floor where Yoongi's office is located. He makes his way to Yoongi's office, smiling at Minjoon as he passes.

Yoongi and Seokjin take turns attending the meetings, both trying to work as much as they can to put time aside for a proper honeymoon.

"That's my only request," Yoongi had said when Granny started everything. "Two weeks. Uninterrupted."

Seokjin kind of hates that Yoongi lucked out and got to skip this particular meeting.

Yoongi looks up from his papers, smiling as he sees Seokjin enter. "You're here?"

Seokjin sighs and slumps into the chair opposite Yoongi. He lulls his head back and pouts at the ceiling. "Barely."

Yoongi makes a sympathetic noise. "Was it a tough one?"

"I spent an hour and a half listening to Taehyung and Hoseok argue over who gets to be best man."

"Isn't that my decision?"

"Nope." He lifts his head and shrugs, apathetic.

Yoongi arches a brow. "It should probably be Hoseok, then? Since Taehyung was my best man last time and Hoseok has never let it go."

"Ah!" Seokjin points his finger at Yoongi. "Foolish thought! According to your cousin, if the marriage was fake, the honour of best man was fake too."

Yoongi purses his lips and lays his pen flat on the desk. "So, Taehyung is my best man?"

Seokjin eyes him derisively. "Ha! You think Hoseok would allow that?"

Yoongi sighs and leans his elbows on the desk, waiting for Seokjin to tell him the answer.

"Hoseok is three-quarters your best man and Taehyung is one-quarter," Seokjin finally says.

Yoongi's brow furrows in confusion. "How-"

"It took an hour and a half, Yoongi. You're not going to mess with the compromise," Seokjin warns, weariness making his statement sharper than he'd like.

Yoongi frowns, the furrow of his brow lowering. He stands, walks around his desk, and stops in front of Seokjin. He hitches his hip onto the edge of his desk and peers down at Seokjin, concerned. "Are you okay, hyung?"

Seokjin sighs and nods. "Yeah. Just tired."

Yoongi reaches forward, his hand lightly tapping Seokjin's knee, almost hovering, a ghost of a touch. "If it's too much, we can stop. Postpone. Or elope. Whatever you want."

"I'd love to elope," Seokjin says wistfully, just the thought of it melting the stress from his shoulders. "But neither side of our families would ever forgive us and you know it."

Yoongi tilts his head, considering Seokjin. "We don't have to tell them."

Seokjin blinks and raises his eyebrows. "Go on."

Yoongi pulls his hand back to rub at his earlobe. "I'm ready to marry you immediately, whenever you want. And we'd still have to hold the ceremony and Granny will still be impossible to deal with. But I know someone at city hall that could put our marriage through right now if it would help-"

"Yes," Seokjin blurts out. "Now. I want that. Just you and me and the clerk." He extends his leg, hooking his foot around Yoongi's ankle. "I just want to be your husband again."

Yoongi grins at him, happy and relieved and excited. He hops off the desk and swoops down, holding Seokjin's face between his palms and kissing him. Seokjin melts into the kiss, letting his eyes close. He raises his hand to hold Yoongi's waist, keeping him there, letting the kiss linger a little longer.

Yoongi pulls back with a sigh, going back to peck Seokjin's lips one more time before straightening. He skids around his desk, bending over the top to turn his computer off before grabbing his coat. "Let's go get hitched, hyung," he says, grinning.

Seokjin laughs, nearly certain he said the same words to Yoongi the first time around. He reaches forward for Yoongi's hand and entwines their fingers together. He squeezes Yoongi's hand and thinks it feels nice. Strong and gentle.

And his. Forever.

&&&

It doesn't truly sink in that they are getting *married*, fully, completely, sincerely *married*, until they pull up to city hall. Seokjin steps out of the car and looks up at the glass and metal of the windows reflecting in the winter sun, sharp gleams of light that blind him. He must have stopped too long because he hears Yoongi shut the car door, can feel his gaze heavy on him. He doesn't look away from the building, blinking at it, the reality of what will occur permeating through to his blood.

"Hyung?" Yoongi says, questioning, tentative, still so tentative, like he's afraid Seokjin will dissipate, the condensation of a heavy sigh in the cold winter air.

Seokjin is beginning to realize how ill-advised this is. Their friends and family aren't here. There's no one to document this, no photographer or videographer, not even Yoongi's camera. Yoongi is still in his work clothes, a black and white checkered shirt and black chinos. Seokjin curls his fingers in the long sleeves of his oversized brown hoodie. He's wearing *jeans* and *sneakers* to his wedding. It's all so rushed and impulsive. Nothing about this is a wedding. No flowers, no hotels, no music, no reception. They don't even have *rings*.

"Hyung," Yoongi starts again, closer now. "If you changed your mind, we can forget this whole idea."

This isn't a wedding, Seokjin realizes. This is a marriage. He finally turns to look at Yoongi on his right, smiles at the way Yoongi is nervously touching his fringe.

He never wanted a wedding. It's always been the marriage he needed.

He hooks his arm around Yoongi's elbow and leans into him. "No. I won't change my mind," he finally answers.

Yoongi's responding smile is nearly as blinding as the sun on the windows of city hall.

They make their way inside to Yoongi's acquaintance, a vibrant woman named Suran. Suran welcomes them into her office, closed off from the rows of cubicles, a welcome bit of privacy for a very important process. She calls in two young clerks to act as witnesses. They introduce themselves in such a tizzy of excitement at the prospect of witnessing a marriage on a dull Wednesday afternoon that Seokjin doesn't quite catch their names. He thinks it was Lisa and Rosé, but he cannot confirm before he is seated across from Suran, Yoongi beside him, and a marriage certificate form and family

register in front of them.

Seokjin watches Yoongi fill in the form with deft efficiency, his fingers curled around the silver pen, etching in the details of their union. Yoongi smiles when he finishes and hands the form over to Seokjin.

"Your turn, hyung," he says.

Seokjin completes the form and hands it over to Suran. She inspects it for a moment before producing a marriage certificate. Suran fills the certificate in by hand, elegant penmanship, clean strokes that spell out their forever. Seokjin watches, mesmerized, until she finishes and looks up. She smiles at Seokjin and slides the certificate over to him.

"Sign here," she says, indicating a blank space at the bottom of the paper.

Seokjin blinks and picks up his pen. He hovers over the line. This isn't a *wedding*, he thinks again. No cake, no flowers, no dances, no rings. But it is his marriage, a lifetime of him and Yoongi, of family and support and anchors through whatever storms fate deems fair.

He glances over to Yoongi, his pen still gripped tight between his fingers. This is a marriage and he wants to start it right this time, with love and promises. He wants to start it with vows he will spend his lifetime fulfilling.

"Yoongi," he says, laying the pen down and reaching over to slide his palm over Yoongi's hand. Yoongi's brow furrows and he sends Seokjin a confused look. Seokjin doesn't have the words prepared, hasn't had a chance to pen them down yet. He would have preferred to draft them, revise them, find the exact combination that can somehow translate the depths and crevices and plains and peaks of his love for this man. He doesn't have the luxury, unfortunately, so he settles for voicing the words written in his heart.

"Yoongi," he starts again, smiling, "you're always trying to be so strong. For yourself, for everyone around you. You were my anchor when I needed it. You're really amazing. I love you." He rubs his thumb over Yoongi's knuckles. "You can lean on me now. I'll always be here to support you. Let's stay together until the very end."

Yoongi's eyes shine with unshed tears, his lips pressed tight to maintain his composure. He sniffs loudly, bring his free hand up to press against his eyes. "Damn it, hyung," he says, voice thick.

Seokjin smiles and leans closer to him, bending his head low and up to look at Yoongi's downturned face. He reaches his free hand up to wipe at the soft skin of Yoongi's cheek. "I'm going to sign the certificate now, Yoongi," he says, disentangling their hands.

He picks up his pen again and with a quick stroke, signs his name in black ink. His chest feels full, his shoulders relieved, his heart thumps in happiness. He smiles and slides the certificate over to Yoongi.

Yoongi seems to have regained his composure. He exhales sharply and stares at the paper in silence. Seokjin waits patiently until Yoongi glances back at him. "Seokjin-hyung," he starts. "I can't believe it's been a year since we started." He smirks. "I still remember the first day we met. I thought you were too perfect. Styled and elegant and cool." He tilts his head. "Maybe I thought you were a little arrogant too."

Seokjin scoffs but his eyes crinkle with amusement.

"I was right, though," Yoongi continues. "You are perfect. Kind. Smart. Hard-working. Really

gorgeous," he says with a smug smirk. "I know I have so much to learn from you. You've already taught me more than I could ever imagine. Thank you, for loving me. I will love you with every breath that I take. Let's be together for a long time, hyung."

Yoongi reaches over Seokjin to his left side, laces his right hand with Seokjin's left. Seokjin watches, questioning, as he brings Seokjin's hand up to his lips. Yoongi closes his eyes and places his lips firmly at the base of Seokjin's ring finger, deliberate and lingering.

Shocks of pulsing electricity work through Seokjin's blood, flowing through every vein.

They don't need flowers or music or rings. They don't need to impress each other, or prove anything. All they need is each other. Seokjin knows, whatever may happen, they'll always be okay.

Yoongi lowers Seokjin's hand to his knee and withdraws his hand, almost shy. He grabs the pen on the table and signs his name with a flourish.

Their witnesses behind them burst into cheers and applause, and Suran smiles happily at them, but Seokjin and Yoongi only have eyes for each other.

Finally. After months, after all their ups and downs and one divorce, finally, they found their happiness.

Seokjin grins at Yoongi, his husband. He reaches a hand to Yoongi's forearm and draws him over until Seokjin can tilt his head up and slide his lips softly over Yoongi's. This is his, without pretending, without stipulations. Yoongi is his and he is Yoongi's. Eternally.

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Fucking Dispatch, Yoongi thinks, scowling.

The photography director sighs and lowers his camera. "Mr. Min, a little enthusiasm, if you please? This is supposed to be a spread about your wedding, not your divorce."

"Really? I thought the scoop was the divorce bit," Yoongi shoots back.

"Why don't we take a five minute breather?" the producer suggests, stepping in and smiling politely.

Seokjin seems to agree. He peels away from Yoongi and heads off the set to the snack table.

Fucking Dispatch, Yoongi thinks again.

Some intrepid young reporter had somehow stumbled on the public record of Yoongi and Seokjin's divorce, splashing the story on every news station, paper, and online site. He thinks they even trended on Naver for a few hours. The media follows them everything they go now, their phones are constantly bombarded with calls and requests for interviews.

They finally decided to do one interview and be done with it. Yoongi's grandmother arranged another photoshoot and television special with KBS. Yoongi's starting to think he really is in a timeloop.

"You're worse than last time," Seokjin tells Yoongi when he reaches the snack table.

Yoongi glares, affronted, as Seokjin passes him a bottle of water. "Excuse me?"

"You're stiff. Like a board." Seokjin puts his arms tight by his side and lifts his shoulders to his ears in demonstration, laughing before he even holds the pose for a second.

Yoongi scowls. "I'm perfectly natural."

"You won't even hold my hand, baby," Seokjin teases, tilting his head and grinning when Yoongi flushes.

He rolls his eyes and sets the water bottle back on the table, inching closer to Seokjin. "I seem to recall last time you kissed me. Maybe you should try it again." He smirks up at Seokjin.

Seokjin scoffs. "Shameless."

"I'm offering a solution, hyung," Yoongi says, denying the accusation, grinning.

"Hmm." Seokjin's lips quirk up. "Okay. You can have a kiss."

Yoongi preens, lifting his face, anticipating.

Seokjin brings his hand to his own lips. He kisses his fingers and throws an invisible kiss dramatically to Yoongi, grinning.

Yoongi blinks at him, mouth agape. "What the fuck was that?"

"A hand kiss." Seokjin continues to grin at him, the corners of his eyes crinkling.

"That's not the kind of kiss I was aiming for."

"Hmm, but it's the kind you get." He tilts his head again. "Don't want it? I'll take it back." He reaches between them, fingers delicately plucking the air between them.

It's so stupid. It's so immature. Yoongi scowls and grabs at the air between them. "I want it," he says, pulling the invisible - *non-existent* - kiss into his pants pocket.

"You're really cute, Yoongi," Seokjin coos.

The director calls them back on set before Yoongi can retort. The stupid hand kiss must have worked because Yoongi finds himself smiling for the rest of the shoot.

The couple interview is a little less boring than last year, and Yoongi wonders if it's because now he has some true anecdotes to share about Seokjin. Or maybe it's that this time around, it's not pretend.

He stretches his arm over the back of the sofa they're on, dropping his fingers to lightly touch Seokjin's shoulder as he listens to Seokjin answer a question.

The journalist smiles at them. "It seems you're a very happy couple."

"We are," Yoongi confirms.

"Strange that such a happy couple would divorce," the journalist intones and Yoongi wants to roll his eyes.

"That wasn't subtle at all," Seokjin quips, still smiling. Yoongi snorts.

The journalist is undeterred, leaning forward. "Alright. Let's put aside the subtlety. Many have speculated that your marriage was arranged, a business deal more than a love match. Others are saying that this remarriage is not genuine, but an effort to cover up the scandal of the divorce. I invite you to clear the air, right here and right now."

Seokjin lulls his head to look at Yoongi. They lock eyes and Seokjin shrugs, telling Yoongi he's fine to answer how he pleases.

Yoongi nods seriously and turns back to the journalist. "Yes. It's exactly what you think," he starts. The journalist's eyes brighten and her grin widens. "The reason Seokjin-hyung and I divorced," he continues slowly.

"Yes," the journalist prompts when Yoongi pauses too long for her liking.

Yoongi pulls his lips tight, fighting the smirk that wants to tug his mouth up, and says very seriously, "It was a paperwork error."

Seokjin bursts into laughter, wide, open-mouthed gales. He whacks Yoongi's stomach and tips over with the giggles, his entire face crinkling with it.

Yoongi finally lets himself smirk and raises his brows at the journalist. "Next question?"

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Yoongi is mildly certain that Hoseok is going to hold this grudge for the entirety of his natural life. Perhaps into the afterlife as well. They will all be floating souls in some otherworldly realm, and Hoseok is still going to swim his way over to Yoongi, somehow manage to glare in his bodiless form, and remind him of the insult to his very personhood this was.

He adjusts his cuffs, fixing the folds after he shrugs his tuxedo jacket on, and sighs at Hoseok's glaring, pouting expression. "I thought we settled this."

"That was your mistake," Hoseok huffs, arms crossed over his chest.

"I made you best man this time," Yoongi reasons.

"Three-quarters best man! Three! Quarters!" Hoseok glares at Taehyung on the other end of the dressing room.

"I'm only one quarter!" Taehyung pouts, sending a petulant glare back at Hoseok.

"You got to be best man last time."

"It was fake! It doesn't count," Taehyung whines.

Yoongi closes his eyes and rubs at his temple. "You were fine with sharing the title yesterday."

"Before I discovered your treachery," Hoseok snaps. "Why is *he*," Hoseok says, pointing an accusing finger at Taehyung, "making the first speech?"

"I don't even get t-" Taehyung starts but snaps his lips shut when Yoongi sends him a withering glare.

Yoongi flicks his gaze to Namjoon, raising his eyebrows to convey silently how this is all Namjoon's fault.

Namjoon has the decency to look sheepish, ducking his head. He puts his arm around Hoseok's shoulders. "Hey, it's okay, right? You still get to make a speech."

Hoseok glares at Namjoon, face turned into a perfect triangle.

Yoongi finds he doesn't have much sympathy for Namjoon. This is his ridiculous request anyway. Yoongi doesn't know why he has to take the blame for it. They told Hoseok that Taehyung will make the first speech at the reception, but in reality Namjoon will appear with flowers. The orchestra will swell, the lights will focus on Hoseok, and finally Namjoon will successfully propose.

The only reason Yoongi agreed to the plan is because he's been told that it's his fault Namjoon's first proposal failed spectacularly. Yoongi's still trying to sort out *how*.

"All I want is the first speech," Hoseok insists, shaking Namjoon's arm off his shoulders. It's a lie but Yoongi won't point that out. All Hoseok wants is everything, the first speech, the spot beside Yoongi at the alter, the first dance with Seokjin. Yoongi wholeheartedly struck out that last request without a moment of hesitation.

"That's fine!" Taehyung exclaims, presumably tired of taking the blame for something he has no control over. "I'm not even speaking!"

"Taehyung!" Namjoon says, eyes wide with panic. He looks back and forth between Yoongi, Taehyung, and Hoseok, and Yoongi has to press his lips together to keep from laughing. He looks so obvious, it's a miracle Hoseok hasn't clued in yet.

Hoseok narrows his gaze on Namjoon, turning to face him on the couch. "You're being weird."

"I'm not being weird," Namjoon denies, badly.

"Why are you being weird?" Hoseok presses.

Namjoon is saved by a gentle knock on the dressing room door.

"Come in," Yoongi calls, expecting to see his grandmother huff in and set the chaos into order like she always does.

When the door opens slowly, however, Yoongi straightens and blinks bowing immediately in greeting. "Mother," he says, the term still strictly formal and stiff. He heads to the door to usher her into the room.

The others stand quickly, bowing, a loud chorus of greetings and compliments directed to Seokjin's mother. She smiles apologetically at all of them.

"Ah, hello," she says softly. "I'm sorry to interrupt."

"No, no! We were just leaving," Namjoon says, rounding Taehyung and Hoseok up and heading out the door.

When the room is emptied, Yoongi clears his throat and gestures to the sofa. "Would you like to sit?"

"Ah, thank you." She accepts the invitation and sits primly on the couch. Yoongi is struck at her presence even more than he was that time he visited in Busan. She's tall and elegant, a modern day noble woman, he thinks. He can see glimpses of Seokjin in her. That undertone of royalty, and elegance so powerful it almost glitters. She smiles at Yoongi and gestures for him to sit by her.

He sits, back straight and knees together, a nervous hand coming up to play with his fringe.

"Don't be anxious," she tells him, a bubble of laughter in her tone. "I'm not here to warn you about breaking Seokjinnie's heart." Her eyes sparkle. "That's Jeongguk's job."

He huffs out a small laugh, rubbing the back of his neck. He wants to tell her that Jeongguk already took his jab at Yoongi, but he keeps his mouth closed and waits for her to continue.

Her smile softens and she places her hands in her lap, folded together neatly. "I have something I've been wanting to say to you for a few weeks," she starts. "Now seemed like an opportune time."

He blinks, surprised and curious. "I'm all ears."

She nods and looks away to stare vaguely at the flower arrangement on the coffee table, some kind of strange blue and white flower that Yoongi doesn't know the name for. "Hmm, where do I start? At the beginning, I suppose?" She smirks and nods, agreeing with herself. "Many, many years ago, I met your mother."

Yoongi's eyes widen and his mouth falls open.

"It was before Jeonggukie was born. I was probably four or five months along in my pregnancy. It was a whole new world opened up for me. I thought this was it. The end of every trouble. The end of every tear and hardship." She smiles sadly. "I was very naive."

Yoongi licks his lips and looks down at his hands. "Hyung told me a little about it. Jeongguk, too. I'm sorry."

She shakes her head. "Hmm, that. That was a different kind of pain. This was much more subtle." She locks eyes with him. "But just as difficult." She shifts and clears her throat. "Jeonggukie and Seokjinie don't know about it. They were far too young. Though....Sometimes I wonder if Seokjin remembers."

Yoongi furrows his brow, unsure what to say.

"Before Jeongguk," she starts again, glancing back to the blue flowers on the table, "I earned enough for a modest place for me and Seokjin. Things were tight, financially. I couldn't buy what I wanted to for Seokjin. Sometimes we struggled, but we never went hungry. For that I am eternally grateful." She smiles wistfully. "And then I met Jeongguk's father. He was kind and generous. And he liked me very much."

She laughs and Yoongi smiles with her.

"He couldn't give me marriage. He had an obligation to his family." She tilts her head in consideration. "I'm not even entirely sure he would have married me if he was free to do so. He liked the freedom, of coming into our lives when he pleased, and leaving when he grew weary. It didn't matter to me. I didn't need marriage. I needed security and finances."

"When I became pregnant with Jeongguk, his father bought us a luxury apartment in Gangnam, gave me access to my own bank account that was always full." She laughs. "I thought everything was perfect. Money was going to fix every problem I had." Her smile dims. "I told you before. I was very naive. But when you grow up lacking something, you begin to believe what you lack is what's keeping you from happiness."

Yoongi watches her, unable to respond, the words ringing a hollow truth in his ears.

"Money doesn't buy respect or happiness. My old friends suddenly saw me as a bank. It was difficult to make new ones, the stigma of being a mistress tainted me in their eyes." Her expression hardens. "Worse, it tainted my son."

Yoongi's stomach churns but he keeps listening, unwilling to stop her, wanting to know, to

understand a little more than he does now.

"I wanted to give Seokjin everything. He was the sweetest child, bright and loving. He was my baby." She smiles fondly before she continues. "I wanted him to go to the best school. The one you no doubt attended. So I enrolled him in the kindergarten program. He was five years old and so cute in his uniform."

Yoongi's lips twitch into a smile imagining it.

"It was fine, for a while. Until the other parents found out who his parents were." She blinks and shifts again, taking a deep breath. "I was called into the school one day, and when I arrived in the office, three women were arguing with the principal, loudly. There were saying *vile* things." Her face twists in anger for a moment before she exhales slowly, regaining her composure. "None of them seemed to care that my son, my precious child, was right there in the middle of them, sitting his hands under his legs, like he was being scolded. Like he was being punished for being him."

Yoongi's fingers clench into fists in sudden and striking anger.

"I was furious, but when they saw me, their words became even worse." She shakes her head, huffing. "The principal started to talk about expelling Seokjin. Not because he was causing trouble or failing. But because his father was absent and his mother was a mistress." She scoffs. "And that's when I realized how powerless I still was. I had money, but I could never have respect. This world, Yoongi, your world. It glitters like a diamond, but it cuts just as sharply."

"I'm so sorry," Yoongi says, and wishes he could go back in time, to that moment. To defend Seokjin and his mother, to be a pillar of support when they had none.

Seokjin's mother smiles at him warmly. "No, Yoongi. Don't be sorry. It's okay. Your mother made it okay."

His brow furrows and he looks at her, questioning.

"I don't know what stroke of providence placed her there. She was dropping something off in the office and she saw what was happening." Her smile widens. "She was even more furious than I was. She took me aside, took Seokjin by his hand, and told me she would handle it. She was absolutely brilliant, Yoongi. She took the others into the principal's office. I don't know what she said to them, but then minutes later they came out and *apologized*." She laughs. "Grown women, chaebols, apologized not only to me. But to Seokjin."

Yoongi's lips twitch into a smile. That sounds like his mother. Fierce and stubborn and brilliant.

"I never saw her again after that. I didn't attend many events, I didn't want a repeat of that visit in the office. But there was never a problem at the school again. She was kind and good to me when I thought I was alone."

She reaches over hesitantly, taking Yoongi's hand in hers and squeezing.

"I wanted to tell you about it. I thought you might like to know."

Yoongi swallows and stares at his hand in Seokjin's mother's hands, feels the warmth that is somehow unique to mothers, remembers the warmth of his own mother's hand. "Thank you," he manages to sound out, his throat thick with emotion.

"Your mother took care of my son," she says, bending to catch Yoongi's eyes. "I'd like to return the favour. If you're comfortable with it. Whenever you're ready, I'd like for you to think of me as a

mom. Not just Seokjin's, but yours too."

Yoongi's chest expands and he blinks rapidly against a sudden build up of moisture in his eyes. He looks down at their hands again, his throat choked with too many emotions, love and longing and uncertainty.

"If you're ever ready," she says again, "I'll be here."

Yoongi squeezes her fingers and swallows. He's still scared of it, of this. Of a family after years of lonely isolation. He cannot run straight into it yet, but he thinks in a little bit, with time and effort, with Seokjin's help, and a personal determination, he might get there one day.

"When I'm ready," Yoongi says, keeping his tone even, the words slow so his voice doesn't waver. "I'll let you know."

She smiles warmly. "Okay." She stands, withdrawing her hands from his. "I'll get going now. The ceremony is soon."

His lips quirk. "It kind of can't start without me."

She laughs, a hiccuping, cascading sound, so much like Seokjin's. "I'm glad it's you," she says when she sobers.

"Hmm?"

"I'm glad it's you marrying Seokjinie."

Yoongi's heart thumps in his chest and he grins. He is too.

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"He's too good-looking."

"I didn't think it was possible."

"It's just a suit, guys."

Seokjin ignores the chorus around him, keeping his eyes on his reflection in the mirror. Somehow, with the chaos of interviews and photoshoots, and last minute details, the day of his re-marriage just appeared. He was shuffled out of his place early in the morning, his mother and brother, Jimin and Wendy pulled him from bed and into their car, waving goodbye to a still half-asleep and highly confused Yoongi. Seokjin wishes someone would have stopped to capture Yoongi's dumbstruck, groggy face on camera. He supposes he will just have to keep it in his memories.

Seokjin leans closer to the mirror, fixing a stray hair and smiling to himself. "Yah," he intones. "I really am handsome."

"We know," Jeongguk says, sounding bored.

"You're actually a prince," Wendy says, grinning at him in the mirror.

He winks at her and she chuckles, hitting his back lightly. He smiles. He's missed her. She's been a constant presence of support and understanding in his tumultuous world. He's grateful she could come back home for his wedding.

"Hey, where's Mom?" Jeongguk asks, peeking around the dressing room.

"She left a couple minutes ago," Jimin answers, turning his phone to himself and waving at the camera.

"Well, where did she go?"

"How would I know?"

Whatever – no doubt riveting – exchange Jeongguk and Jimin were about to engage in is interrupted by a sharp knock on the door. Wendy pats Seokjin's back and heads to open the door.

"Oh," she says as Seokjin hears the door open. It's the surprise and uncertainty in her tone that makes Seokjin turn around.

Mikyung smiles politely at the occupants of the room, a cool brow arched. "May I come in?"

"Ah, of course," Wendy says, stepping back and letting Mikyung enter the room.

Jimin eyes her curiously but Jeongguk just waves in greeting.

"I was hoping to have a word in private," she says, looking at Seokjin,

Seokjin nods and gestures to the sofa that Jimin is pulling Jeongguk off of.

"We'll see you in the hall," Jimin says as they file out, leaving Seokjin alone with Mikyung.

He smiles at her, sitting in a chair opposite the sofa. "Is this tradition?" he asks.

She blinks, confused. "Pardon?"

"Is it a Min tradition, to speak privately with the groom before a wedding?" Seokjin elaborates. "You did it last time."

Her eyes light with understanding. She smiles apologetically. "Don't worry," she says. "I'm not here to warn you this time." She arches a brow and adds, "Though I hope you understand now why I felt the need to do so a year ago."

Seokjin's eyes flicker and he nods. "Yes. I think I understand now."

She sits back against the couch cushions, crossing her legs, knee-over-knee. "I'm glad."

Seokjin smiles neutrally in response, and waits for Mikyung to continue. She seems to hesitate in her words, a characteristic that Seokjin has grown to recognize as her attempt to edit her thoughts before they are said, cautious to say only exactly what she means. He waits patiently for her to start.

Finally she exhales and places her hands over her knee. "My brother and his wife loved Yoongi a great deal. He was their entire world." She chuckles wistfully, the sound low and fading quickly, but happy. Very happy, Seokjin thinks. "You should have *seen* my brother. All nine months that unnie was pregnant, he walked around with his chest puffed out, like some kind of hero. He was so proud of Yoongi. Even before he took his first breath."

Her smile fades and she locks her gaze with Seokjin.

"Yoongi was loved, more than this world could ever begin to understand. More than I could ever explain. And it was ripped away from him." She presses her lips together and blinks rapidly. "I did what I could, but it was never what he deserved. But I think-" She licks her lips and takes a deep, fortifying breath. "I think you've finally gotten through to him. And I wanted to thank you for that."

For making Yoongi feel loved again. For sticking with him. For loving him."

She tries to smile but her lips quiver. She sniffs and lifts a hand to her eyes, wiping away the build up of tears that she refuses to let fall.

"I don't cry," she says, admonishing herself.

"Auntie," Seokjin finally says, his tone gentle. The familiar address makes Mikyung look back at him. He rises from his seat to sit beside her, putting an arm around her shoulders, pulling her in for a half hug. He thinks he understands her a little more now. The quiet, protective way she looks after Yoongi. Her cool demeanour. Her stalwart determination to keep Yoongi's heart safe. She's a lot like her nephew, Seokjin realizes.

Mikyung hesitantly pats Seokjin's back and he pulls away, smiling at her.

"Auntie," he says again. "You can stop worrying about Yoongi. He's doing really well. He's very generous with his heart, even if he didn't know it. You did a good job." He smiles warmly at her. "Thank you, for everything you've done for him."

She sniffs, drying her eyes. "I don't know how out of everyone Mother could have roped into this, it was you. Maybe oppa was watching." She tilts her head, considering Seokjin. "He would have adored you, you know. You would have been partners in crime."

Seokjin grins, curious about Yoongi's father. "You should tell me about him, sometime. We can go for lunch. Just the two of us."

She blinks, momentarily surprised, before a large, gummy smile spreads over her lips. Seokjin is struck by the resemblance to Yoongi and thinks again that they're so much alike.

"I would like that," she answers, and gives Seokjin another hug, strong arms warm around his back. "I'd like that very much."

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Hoseok loves weddings. He *loves* weddings, especially when they are weddings of his close friends and family. He goes to as many ceremonies as possible. He never has to look far for an invitation. He is the *best* wedding guest. He's fun and bright and can cry on cue for the videographer. Newlyweds love him.

Somehow, throughout the many, many, *many* years of wedding-attendance, Hoseok has never once thought of his *own* marital status, and lack thereof, until this moment. He's standing there, beside Yoongi, watching as the officiator reads out vows that Yoongi repeats back to Seokjin, and it hits him like a ton of bricks.

Yoongi's eyes don't leave Seokjin's, and Seokjin's never falter from the gaze. They're in their own little world, it seems like, a universe that started as two and somehow became one. There's a smile tugging at Yoongi's lips, a hidden joke that he shares only with Seokjin as he repeats the vows back to him. Seokjin's answering smile is almost blinding. They look so in love. They *are* so in love and Hoseok is so pleased to be here, witnessing it with his own eyes.

He glances out to the crowd, searching out a familiar frame, tall and lean and sexy. He finds Namjoon easily and they lock eyes. Hoseok grins at him, wiggling his eyebrows in the Morse Code that Namjoon taught him when their power went out one winter evening.

U-r-s-e-x-y.

Namjoon lifts his hand to his mouth, stifling a laugh and bending his head, shy. He peeks up from under his lashes and bashfully lifts his hand up, his thumb and index finger formed into a small heart shape. He retracts it quickly, probably embarrassed, shaking his head, that beautiful dimple of his visible even from this distance.

I am going to marry that man, Hoseok suddenly thinks, barely suppressing the urge to yell out a proposal from the stage to his boyfriend. He wouldn't do that to Yoongi. Not during their vows. He'll wait five minutes.

As soon as the vows are exchanged and Yoongi and Seokjin bow to the crowd, Hoseok is off the stage, right to Namjoon's side. He pulls Namjoon away as Yoongi and Seokjin make their way down the aisle, out to their dressing rooms to change and probably make out. If they are like Hoseok, they will definitely make out.

He wraps his hands around Namjoon's forearms and squeezes, grinning at him. Namjoon blinks, confused.

"Babe, wha-"

"Marry me, Joonie."

Namjoon's jaw drops and he stares dumbly at Hoseok.

"I love you. You love me. We've been together for four years. Let's make it forever," Hoseok continues, his voice fading as Namjoon remains unresponsive, blinking, mouth opening and closing like he doesn't know how to form words again.

Oh, Hoseok thinks. Namjoon is probably taken aback by the suddenness of the proposal. By the impulsive quality to it. Namjoon is the most romantic man on earth. He is probably expecting something more than a rushed statement at the side of a wedding hall during their best friends' wedding. *Ooooooh*.

He smiles, releasing Namjoon's arms and reaching up to cup his face. "Baby, don't worry. I'm going to give you the most romantic proposal ever. I'll surprise you one day, with roses and balloons and a whole event." He nods, satisfied that he is so in tune with his boyfriend's wants and needs. "Forget I said a thing. We're not engaged. No talk of marriage. Shh! I'll take care of all of it."

Namjoon's eyes widen and he finally seems to react, reaching for Hoseok's wrists. "No, babe, it's not-"

"Don't sweat it, baby." Hoseok pecks Namjoon's lips and pulls back. "I want to do this. Let me do this for you. Please." He pouts cutely at Namjoon, making high-pitched, aegyo noises.

Namjoon sighs, resigned, and hangs his head. He nods. "Okay. Of course." He smiles at Hoseok before backing up and heading back into the hall.

"Wait, where are you going?" Hoseok calls after him.

"I have to cancel a thing," Namjoon answers. "Oh, I think I can get back your first speech, too."

Hoseok's eyes brighten and he claps his hands together. "You're the best, Joonie! I love you." He makes a heart with both of his arms over his head.

Namjoon smiles fondly and tilts his head to the side. "Yeah. I love you too."

He knows there are several trained, professional videographers here right now, with expensive, quality equipment, years of experience, and the artistic know-how to capture every moment, but Jimin thinks the shot he got on his phone beats all of them. He smiles fondly at his phone, replaying the video he took. Yoongi smiles up at Seokjin, teasing, his eyes unmoving from Seokjin's as his fingers crawl from Seokjin's side to the small of his back. Seokjin grins down at Yoongi, fondly watching him, stepping closer to him when Yoongi applies a subtle pressure to his back. They assume the waltz stance and hold it for all of ten seconds into the dance before Yoongi's other hand comes around to grip at Seokjin's trim waist. Seokjin's laughter echoes in the video and Jimin grins fondly. They're really cute together, after all. He's happy they got a second chance.

He's happy he got a second chance to attend their wedding, with a light and happy heart.

"Hey gorgeous," a deep, aching familiar voice says, sliding into the barstool next to Jimin. "Can I buy you a drink?"

Jimin smiles, sly and amused. He turns to Taehyung and leans his elbow on the table. "It's an open bar," he replies, eyes closing into crescents.

Taehyung grins at him and leans forward to whisper, "Guess I'll have to do it some other time. How does this Thursday sound?"

"Hmm," Jimin says, pretending to consider it. "I have a date with my boyfriend, though."

Taehyung's grin softens into a warm smile. "Yeah?"

Jimin nods. "Yeah. And he's really kind and patient." Jimin leans forward, elongating his leg to hook around Taehyung's calf. "He's funny. And handsome." Jimin tips so that his forehead rests on Taehyung's. He looks down at their laps and smiles. "And he loves me very, very much," he finishes softly.

"I do," Taehyung confirms, his voice low and deep and serious.

Jimin's face warms and he sits back, his chest too full with affection for his boyfriend. He stands and holds his hand out to Taehyung. "Come on, dance with me."

Taehyung wraps Jimin's hand in his, enveloping him, and pulls him to the dance floor. It's a slow song, jazzy, pulsing, a sensual kind of flow. They meld together easily, limbs entwining, moving as one entity. He presses closer into Taehyung, inhaling deeply, exhaling, matching the rhythm of Taehyung's lungs.

He loves this man so much, he thinks. He looks up, catches Taehyung's intense gaze. He tilts his head, slides his arms around Taehyung's neck, and tugs him down to his height. Taehyung's fingers flex on Jimin's hips, inching around to rest on the swell of his hips. Jimin's mouth parts on an exhale and he finally lets his heart tumble out from his lips.

"I love you, Taehyung," he breathes.

Taehyung smiles and bends his head, settling his lips on the shell of Jimin's ear. Jimin's spine tingles, goosebumps erupt on his skin when he feels the rush of Taehyung's breath in his ear. "I know," Taehyung answers.

Jimin's chest eases, his shoulders lighten. He was worried that Taehyung might not realize the ever increasing depth of his feelings. He smiles, relieved in the knowledge that he is loved, and Taehyung

is loved. He rests his head on Taehyung's chest and lets his eyes flutter shut, memorizing the moment as Taehyung keeps them swaying to the beat of the music.

When he takes Taehyung home this time, Jimin thinks, it won't be to forget, and it won't be for one night. It's going to be for as long as Jimin can hold on.

&&&

Yoongi thinks he should make it a habit to wake up early. He shifts to his side, bring his hands to rest under his head. He wants to move his knee, stretch it out after hours in the same position, but it's caught between Seokjin's legs. He thinks he can wait a little longer before disrupting his husband.

Yoongi grins at the thought and watches the way Seokjin's chest expands and contracts with every slow breath. His cheeks have a faint flush of pink, warmed from the fluffy white comforters, no doubt. Yoongi kind of wants to reach over and trace the curve of Seokjin's cheekbone. He resists, wanting to give Seokjin more time to sleep off the exhaustion from the wedding last night.

Yoongi hasn't checked his phone yet so he can only guess at the time. He figures they must have about two hours before their flight to Japan, a two week honeymoon that Yoongi has been anticipating for weeks. He thinks the three nights at the luxury onsen will be the highlight, if only for the sight of Seokjin in a yukata.

His fantasies are jarred when Seokjin makes a sleepy noise and shifts slightly, opening his eyes. Yoongi's breath stops momentarily in his lungs at the sigh. Seokjin's large, deep brown eyes, Seokjin's lips full and pink smiling at him, his hair parted over his forehead. The light filtering down from the windows almost cast a halo around his crown.

"Hi, baby," Seokjin says, amusement evident in his tone even when his voice is thick with sleep.

Yoongi smiles back and give in to the urge to trace Seokjin's cheekbones with his hand, touching light with the tips of his fingers. "Good morning, yeobo."

Seokjin bursts out a surprised laugh, his cheeks darkening to a deep rose color.

Yoongi lets his fingers trail into Seokjin's hair, gently combing through the locks. "Did you sleep well?"

"Mm. Did you?"

"Yeah."

Seokjin smiles. "Good." He pulls his hand out from under the covers and reaches forward to boop Yoongi's nose.

Yoongi scrunches his nose in response. "What was that for?"

"You have the cutest nose, Yoongichi," Seokjin replies, laughing.

Yoongi snorts and lifts up on his elbow. He leans over and silences Seokjin with a chaste kiss, letting his lips linger for a moment before he starts to pull back.

Seokjin's hand slides around his neck and guides him back down, sighing into the press of their lips. *More*, Yoongi thinks, a familiar thought by now, as he shifts to hover over Seokjin. He places his forearms on either side of Seokjin's head as Seokjin shifts his legs to accommodate Yoongi's weight.

Finally, Seokjin lets his head drop back down to the pillows, his eyes sparkling, his fingers massaging the nape of Yoongi's neck. "We're married," he says.

Yoongi huffs in amusement. "We've been married before, you know."

Seokjin shrugs. "We're technically still newlyweds, though."

Yoongi hums in agreement. His eyes brighten with a realization. "We've technically had three weddings."

Seokjin laughs as the realization dawns on him too. "We have," he agrees.

"What's your favourite one?" Yoongi asks, curious if Seokjin will pick the day at city hall or last night with all their friends and family.

Seokjin shifts, his knees knocking against Yoongi's hips. He runs his hands down Yoongi's neck to his shoulders and his biceps. "The first one," he answers.

Yoongi's eyebrows raise in surprise, the answer completely unexpected. "Why the first one?"

Seokjin purses his lips and studies Yoongi's face for a moment before he finally says softly, "Because whether you knew it or not, that's the day you became my family."

Yoongi's heart skips a beat in his chest and he falls down on Seokjin's chest, burying his head in the crook of Seokjin's shoulder. "You're too cheesy, hyung," he complains, embarrassed.

Seokjin snorts, his arms coming around Yoongi's back to hold him. "And you're fun to tease." He squeezes Yoongi tight in his arms. "Get used to it, pumpkin."

Yoongi chuckles, breathing in Seokjin's scent. That sounds like a really good idea to him. "It might take a few decades," he mumbles into Seokjin's chest.

Seokjin hums and pats Yoongi's back. "I think I can deal with that."

Yoongi smiles and lets his eyes drift closed again, not worrying about their flight. They can always catch another. They have time.

Chapter End Notes

Okay! So the next chapter is a VERY short epilogue (as in, less than 1000 words), and will be up before the end of this week. If you're craving babies ever after now, though, I will direct you to this [drabble I wrote for agw universe months ago](#).

Thank you all SO MUCH for being here on this journey with me. I really hope you enjoyed it!!!

Uncontrollably Fond

Chapter Notes

Hmm. What do I say to properly commemorate the end of this fic? I know I'm supposed to be a master of words but somehow I don't think I can express the magnitude of what I feel.

First I would like to thank everyone for the comments and kudos, for messages on my social media platforms. For reccing this fic, for art and edits and every creative thing I've seen. It's unreal how enthusiastic you guys have been. I sincerely thank you.

I know I'm the worst at replying and I feel so bad for that. But I would like you to know that I have read every single word you guys have sent me, and I treasure them dearly. When I felt tired and uninspired, when I just wanted to give up this fic, throw up my hands and quit, I would go back and read all your lovely words. And it kept me going. Your words have power. Thank you for sharing them with me.

When I started this fic way back in 2016, I thought it would be a longish fic. I estimated around 80k words. I'm laughing at my past self now. It's more than double that. And it is the longest single story I have ever written. A huge accomplishment for me. Thank you for being on this journey with me. Thank you for making this fic more than it was in my head.

It comes to an end but I hope you guys know how grateful I am for the journey. Thank you. See you around :)

The thing about Yoongi is that he always wants *more*, especially when it comes to Seokjin. He can never get close enough, can never run his hand on enough expanse of skin, never spend enough lazy mornings waking up next to him. Yoongi always wants more. More nights huddled in the reading nook, Seokjin on his games and Yoongi fiddling with his camera. He thought after all these years, it would have dimmed, but it remains and increases and consumes him.

Seokjin always tells him he's lucky. Seokjin feels the same way, just as stupidly in love as Yoongi is. Yoongi thinks it's more than luck.

It's no surprise, then, that after three years of marriage, they both agree they want *more*.

Yoongi walks quietly to the room that used to be his studio, making sure to hush his footsteps as he inches his way over. He peeks over the small plastic gate that bars the occupant from escaping and grin, large and gummy, when he sees the light of his life trying to bounce her way into an upright position.

"Hi, baby," he coos, his voice raising to a higher octave instinctively. "Are you up?"

Daeun makes a garbled, excited sound and braces her hands hard against the padding of her bed, her legs struggling in a distorted plank position as she tries to heave herself up to standing.

The decision to adopt Daeun was the best thing he and Seokjin ever did. She's everything good and

pure and beautiful in his world. When he first held her in his arms, he swore he will be there for her, every step, every moment, every hour and day and year.

He thinks he understands, now, the kind of depth of feeling his parents loved him with. He thinks he's starting to understand that it didn't go away with their passing. He's not quite there, but every moment with Daeun and Seokjin, he thinks he's getting closer.

Yoongi unlocks the baby gate and steps inside, heading straight to Daeun with open arms. She gives up on standing and crawls to meet him half-way, a giggling grin on her lips.

"Ap!" she says, her attempt to say *appa*.

He bends, scooping her into his arms, kissing her cheeks. She squeals, her hand patting roughly at his face and hair.

"Ap!"

"Good morning, baby. Did you sleep well?" he asks, cradling her securely against his chest.

She smacks his face in response and laughs as he scrunches his nose in protest, rolling gales that squeak with every crescendo. He swears she's inherited Seokjin's hiccuping laughter.

"You sound just like your daddy," he tells her and her eyes go big and round at the mention of Seokjin, like she's just remembered his existence and is rejoicing in the knowledge.

She kicks her legs in Yoongi's grip, kicking the soft part of his stomach, and points to the door.

"You want to see Daddy?" he asks. "What about Appa time?"

He pouts but she remains resolute. She kicks harder and makes babbling noises, insistent.

He suppresses his grin and sighs, heading back to his bedroom. "I can't really blame you, I guess. You get that from me."

Seokjin is half-awake, still buried under a mountain of comforters, moving lazily when he hears them enter. Daeun makes another excited noise and Yoongi place her gently on the bed so she can crawl up Seokjin's chest.

"Your baby's up, hyung," Yoongi tells him, shaking Seokjin's shoulder lightly.

Seokjin peeks his head out of the duvets and squints at Yoongi. "I see that." He looks down at Daeun grabbing at the blankets over his chest. "I see Daeunie is up as well."

Yoongi snorts but there's a warm flush to his cheeks. No matter how many years have passed, Seokjin still manages to fluster him.

Seokjin picks Daeun up and smothers her cheeks in kisses. "Good morning my pudding." She giggles and pats his face, far more gently than she did to Yoongi, he notes with an arched brow.

"Hyung," Yoongi says over Daeun's giggles.

Seokjin sits up, holding Daeun in his lap. "Hmm?"

Yoongi clears his throat and tilts his head, catching Seokjin's gaze.

Seokjin blinks at him, confused for a moment, before he bursts out into laughter. He reaches one

hand up to tug at Yoongi's long-sleeved tee, making Yoongi bend over him. He tilts his neck and gives Yoongi's cheek a peck, soft lips warm on his skin.

Yoongi smiles, satisfied.

"Happy?" Seokjin says when he pulls back.

"Ecstatic," Yoongi answers, smirking. He reaches down to lift Daeun from Seokjin's lap and into his arms. "Come on, Min Baby. Time for breakfast."

Daeun lets out the loudest, most excited scream she's uttered all morning and he laughs.

"She gets that from you," he says to Seokjin, already carrying her downstairs.

He can hear Seokjin's tinkling laughter follow him down the steps and he thinks about that's he's more than lucky. It was something like fate that brought them to each other, but it was only the two of them, building a foundation and a life and a love together brick by toiling brick that made them stay.

They found each other and made a home in each other's heart. They found this place made of gold, not the false sheen of a gilded world, not the thin layer of riches to cover a hollow heart. It's a golden world, of love, and happiness, and hope. He's never letting it go.

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

For whatever reason, I recently wrote a couple snippets in the A Gilded World verse, and I thought I would just add them on as a bonus to the story, and as a VERY late thank you for 5000 kudos. I cannot believe this story received so much love. Thank you
;;;;

(These are set before the epilogue but after chapter 20.)

Jimin & Taehyung

Whenever anyone asks the story of how they met, Taehyung starts with, "Jimin saved my life."

Jimin jumps in at this point with loud protests and takes over the story. They met at their good friends' engagement party and Jimin saved Taehyung from tripping. "Running around the party like a kid," Jimin says, smiling fondly and adoration thick in his voice. Taehyung likes when Jimin sounds like that, like he's irreplaceable in Jimin's heart.

But once, after they get home and they're shrugging off their clothes into matching pajamas, Jimin stops and stares at Taehyung like he's trying to understand something. Taehyung tilts his head in question and smiles encouragingly at Jimin. "Hmm?"

Jimin purses his lips, hesitating on his words like he does when he's unsure. Taehyung waits patiently, silent and still smiling. Jimin usually works his way to the words eventually these days, without prompting. "Why," Jimin finally starts, "do you always say I saved your life when we first met?"

Taehyung shrugs. "Because you did."

Jimin laughs, the corners of his eyes creasing, and shakes his head. "I saved you from falling."

"No," Taehyung answers, his voice dropping lower, serious and sincere.

Jimin blinks, confused. "What?"

"You didn't save me from falling."

Jimin smiles, bewildered. "I'm positive I stopped you from falling, Tae."

Taehyung shakes his head. "No. I fell that night. And I've been falling ever since. I keep falling more and more and more for you." He smiles. "But you did save my life. You saved me from a life not knowing the brightest star in the galaxies."

Jimin's cheeks flush a deep pink and his eyes widen, shining and sparkling. He reaches a hand up to cover his face and mumbles about how embarrassing Taehyung is. "How can you say that with a straight face?" he whines, muffled behind his hands. He flops onto the bed and kicks his legs, thrashing.

Taehyung smiles and thanks all the stars in the sky for sending Jimin to Earth, so Taehyung could be the one to fall.

And so Jimin could be the one to catch him.

Seokjin & Yoongi

In Seokjin's second new year at the Min household, the celebration is extravagant and bustling and busy. There's too much food, and music, and decorations. Taehyung's family comes up from Daegu, and Jimin flies back early from Busan. Nearly all the rooms are filled up, and there's always a commotion somewhere, just a few steps away. It's nice, Seokjin thinks. He's been in this house with just him and Mikyung and Granny, felt the heavy weight of silence, a sadness in the walls. It's nice when it's full, and lived in, and brimming with love.

He mentions it to Mikyung, when Jeongguk and Granny are three games into their Go tournament, and Jimin's laughing at something Taehyung's mother quips, Taehyung's face growing red but a smile tugging at his lips. Yoongi is absent, disappeared somewhere with Taehyung's father. Seokjin suspects it has to do with the fireworks Yoongi's uncle brought in the trunk of his car.

"Hmm?" Mikyung asks, glancing up from the puzzle they're working on, a thousand misshapen pieces to put back together spread out before them.

"It's nice," Seokjin repeats, comparing one of his pieces to an edge, trying to match up the colors. "To have the house full."

Mikyung glances around the room, a soft smile warming her features. "Yes," she agrees. "It's been a long time." She looks back to the puzzle and tries a piece. "We don't usually have the Kims over from Daegu. I'm glad they came." She sends Seokjin a grateful look. "Thank you for suggesting it."

Seokjin shrugs. "I thought it'd be nice." He pauses, and watches Mikyung, turning over his words in his mind for a moment. "Granny seems happy."

Mikyung nods. "She likes the noise. I think it reminds her of when we all used to be together. Like a family."

Seokjin smiles and tilts his head. "We are a family."

Mikyung glances up and holds Seokjin's gaze, her eyes softening. "We are."

"Everyone!"

Seokjin flicks his gaze to Yoongi smiling brightly, his cheeks flushed from the cold outside. He's rubbing his gloved hands together, and his uncle shuffles behind him with excitement.

"We have a surprise in the garden," Yoongi announces.

"It's going to blow you away," Taehyung's father adds with a wink.

Yoongi's expression falls into a scowl. "Uncle."

Taehyung's father blinks innocently at Yoongi. "What? I didn't spoil the fireworks."

"Uncle!"

Jimin's twinkling laughter fills the room and he throws his head back, hitting Taehyung's chest. Yoongi looks over at Seokjin and pouts, complaining silently.

Seokjin snorts and sends Yoongi a kiss. It seems to appease Yoongi.

Later, after midnight and the festivities have worn everyone into half-sleep, Seokjin and Yoongi settle in what used to be Yoongi's room. As Seokjin climbs into the bed, Yoongi positions his head on his pillow, lying on his side to look at Seokjin.

"It was a nice day," Seokjin says when he's facing Yoongi, watching Yoongi's fringe fall over his brow.

"Hmm," Yoongi agrees. "Despite my uncle ruining the fireworks."

Seokjin laughs. "Everyone knew about it all day, Yoongi."

Yoongi scoffs and shifts so he's a little closer to Seokjin, his hand buried under his head. His eyes flicker over Seokjin's face, tracing his features before traveling back to Seokjin's own eyes. "Granny was talking to me today."

Seokjin smirks. "Fascinating."

Yoongi sends him a short-lived scowl before continuing. "She wanted to know if we'd like to move in. To the mansion."

Seokjin blinks, watches Yoongi's face closely, reading in between the words. He licks his lips and says slowly, answering truthfully, "One day, I think. But not yet. I like having you all to myself right now."

Yoongi snorts but he seems satisfied with the answer. "Me, too."

Seokjin reaches a hand over to play with Yoongi's hair, brushing the strands away from his face, letting the ends slip from his fingers. "I think in a couple years, when we have kids, we can raise them here. With Granny and Aunt Mikyung. Get a dog."

Yoongi stops breathing and his eyes widen. His mouth drops open slightly and he blinks at Seokjin slowly. "We're going to have kids?"

Seokjin's hand stills in Yoongi's hair. He always assumed they'd have children later, when they were ready, but he hasn't ever broached the subject with Yoongi. They missed that conversation, rushing into a fake marriage that turned into something neither of them is willing to let go. "If you want," he says, eyes flickering over Yoongi's face.

Yoongi's eyes brighten and his mouth widens into a gummy smile, deliriously happy. "Yeah, I think I want that with you."

Seokjin closes the distance between them and presses his lips to Yoongi's, sliding them together in a chaste but warm kiss. Yoongi's hand moves to Seokjin's shoulder, gripping and tugging him closer until they're flush, chest to chest, lungs working together as one for oxygen.

Yoongi smiles against Seokjin's lips, a laugh muffled in his throat, and Seokjin thinks this is the best

way to start the new year.

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