

Memento

Von Nevaeh

Kapitel 7:

It was a cold evening, the air smelling faintly of snow. Taehyung barely noticed it though, anxiously circling the small park next to their apartment building. He had only managed to tell Jimin that his mum had visited, and that she knew. The look of devastation on Jimin's face was something he wouldn't be able to forget soon.

They hadn't asked him to leave, not directly, but when Jimin let go of his hand he knew he should give them some space. Let them talk it out. Logically, he knew that it was unlikely they were fighting. Jimin's mum had been nice about it, delighted even when they watched the wedding, but it couldn't cancel out all the horrible experiences, all the years of being afraid to come out.

After the fifth path through the park Taehyung sat down on an icy bench, panting. He checked his phone, still no message, tried to think of something to do to get his mind off of whatever was happening at home and finally he pulled out his phone again. He hesitated for a second before he hit dial. It rang a few times before someone finally picked up.

"Hi hyung, what's up?"

"Hey, Jungkook-ah. Are you busy?"

There was a short pause before Jungkook said: *"Is everything alright?"*

"I... Yes, I think so, but I can't go home right now and I thought I could talk to you while I wait?" He started shivering. It was really awfully cold, his breath coming out in smoky puffs.

"What? Where are you? What happened? Did you guys have a fight?"

Taehyung giggled, rubbing his hand against his thigh and said: "No, not exactly. I'm at the park down the street. Jimin needed the apartment for... for a talk with his mum. She visited this afternoon, it was a surprise." He laughed again. "Found out we're a couple. A lot more excitement than I had planned for today!" Another nervous laugh, but it was suspiciously quiet on the other end.

"I can come pick you up. You can stay here if... if you can't go home."

And that's why he had called him. Someone who would understand. "I think it's fine, Jungkook-ah. I'll wait till they're done talking. She wasn't upset this afternoon, so I hope..."

There was a harsh exhale on the other end, before Jungkook said: *"Can you maybe lead with that next time? I was having a heart attack here! I was trying to figure out how we are supposed to fit three people into our place after you got kicked out of yours, asshole!"*

Taehyung laughed, and it was a real one this time. "Sorry, I'm sorry! I... Honestly, it all happened so fast and I don't quite believe it yet myself. I'm afraid Jimin will text and say that she changed her mind and hates me now and... I'm sorry. She watched our wedding video and seemed happy, but... it's too good to be true? Isn't it? Jungkook-ah?"

He heard rustling in the background, before Jungkook said: *"I'm on my way to the subway, gonna pick you up. I'm sure it'll be fine, hyung, but you shouldn't sit in the park. It's freezing! Is a coffee shop or something close? You can wait there for me!"*

Taehyung smiled, slowly getting up. "Yes, around the corner."

"Ok, go there, I'll see you in ten!"

"Thanks." He smiled against the phone. Jungkook had already hung up. "Thank you." He whispered, his heart so tight. No matter what happened this evening, he wasn't alone. They weren't alone anymore. And it was... he blinked the tears away, ignored the burning in his throat. It was a little magical.

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"I'm sorry it took so long." Jimin whispered while he stroked Taehyung's hair out of his face.

"It's okay. It was important. And it was fun, hanging out with Jungkookie." Or at least it would have been, if they both hadn't been so anxious, although Jungkook had done his best to try to distract Taehyung from it. And... when the text came, telling him that everything was fine and that he should come home, having someone with him made the relief so much better. Jungkook hadn't tagged along, although Taehyung had offered to at least give him some food for ruining his evening, but Jungkook had only hugged him and said that it had been the best news in a long time.

Well. In the end Jimin only gave him a quick peck when Taehyung came back home, but refused to tell him what he had talked about with his mum. The rest of the evening had been quiet, although they had argued with Jiyoo about the sleeping arrangement. She insisted on the couch and if he was honest he was glad she did. He was about to go insane if he couldn't talk with Jimin soon.

It was a little early to go to sleep, but they hadn't intended to anyway. Instead, they

were lying there, facing each other, Taehyung patiently waiting for Jimin to talk. Barely patient. Jittery.

"I'm so sorry I didn't warn you." Taehyung finally whispered back.

Jimin huffed, a tiny smile tugging on his lips. "Y'know, it's been kind of on brand for you, lately. Not texting important news." Taehyung was about to protest when Jimin interrupted him: "Can I go home this weekend?"

Taehyung frowned, immediately worried. He sat up, and Jimin reluctantly followed. "Of course, you don't have to ask. How... how did it go? With your mum?"

"Well, surprisingly good considering I've been afraid of this moment for almost ten years." He giggled, but it was a nervous laugh. "Told her she shouldn't have gone to you, though, could've waited for me to come home."

"No it's fine, if she had been mad I could've spared you the worst."

Jimin smiled, a sad little smile and took Taehyung's hand. "She wants the rest of the family to know, and I guess it makes sense, so I'll drive over to Daegu with her."

"Do you... think your dad and your brother will be okay with it?"

He shrugged, playing with Taehyung's fingers. "Don't know. I'll find out."

"And... you want to go alone?"

He nodded, humming. "Yes."

Taehyung looked away, trying not to let it show on his face that he was disappointed. They had always done everything together, and it hurt, a little, a tiny bit, that Jimin didn't want him there.

"Hey, whatever you're thinking is not it. I just... I was afraid of it for so long and I want to do it on my own. I need to. Please..." He took Taehyung's other hand, biting his lip. "Please don't be mad."

"I'm not mad." Not really. Not about that. But this time, when there was something good to share... and wasn't he family now? "At least your mum supports us. I showed her the wedding."

Jimin smiled, reluctantly. "Yeah, she told me. Said that it was a beautiful wedding."

"Hm." Jimin didn't look all that happy though. "What is it? You're still worried. She said she didn't mind."

Jimin hesitated, not looking at Taehyung, but still fiddling with his hands. Of course there was something else. Of course it couldn't be easy, just once. "Jimin. Tell me."

He sighed, and said: "She's nice to you since it could be worse, you know?" He chuckled. "She knows you, we've been friends forever and... and you're sick. You know, I won't be surprised if she asks me if I don't want to look for a nice girl, like, in a year or so." He was still not looking at Taehyung, and when he was silent for a minute or two, Taehyung finally said: "Bullshit. I don't think your mum is such a good liar. I talked to her as well, and I've known her for a while and that is not true!"

"And if it is?" He sounded so small, fragile, defeated. And although Taehyung couldn't really blame him for being afraid he... he didn't want to hear it. He didn't want to take something good and make it awful, not this time.

"No, Jimin. It's not. I know it's scary and believe me, I had to pinch myself to be sure it's not a dream, not after everything my parents said to us, but not everyone is like that. Did your mum actually say any of that?"

"No..."

"Then maybe you should believe her!"

It took a while for Jimin's internal debate to finish, before he turned to Taehyung again, hugging him close while he pushed them both to lie down again. Taehyung couldn't see Jimin's face, pressed against his chest, so he let his chin rest against Jimin's head, against his soft hair that always smelled so nice. Jimin was shaking, softly, but it was okay. It would be okay. This... this one thing would be okay.

He was about to drift off when Jimin moved away, whispering: "You know, it's a good thing I moved that dildo away yesterday. That stupid giant thing you got me for our anniversary. I think I would've died if she saw that."

Taehyung's eyes widened and when Jimin started giggling, he attacked his sides until Jimin begged for mercy, barely able to breathe between the laughing fits. Yeah. Thank god for that.

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In the end Taehyung didn't even have time to worry during the weekend. Jungkook had visited, together with Namjoon, and he had dragged Seokjin along as well. After opening up a group chat and posting a few photos, Hoseok complained that he hadn't been invited so he'd come over as well and they had spent the rest of Saturday playing video games, eating junk food and watching stupid dramas. It was... nice. Comfortable. Like he belonged. Something that was still an unfamiliar feeling. And when Jimin came home on Sunday, late in the afternoon, exhausted and tired, they were still there, and Jimin just let himself be cuddled. The apartment was a mess, it was smelling funny after all of them had stayed the night, but it didn't matter. It felt good. It felt... right.

"Hyung, how was it? How did it go?"

They let him shower and eat something, and Taehyung would've waited for their

friends to leave before he wanted to interrogate Jimin, but Jungkook had beat him to it.

Jimin probably had the same idea, looking between them a little unsure. "Well... so my dad was not all that surprised, but he wasn't ecstatic. Asked if it was only Taehyung or if I did like other men as well. That was..." He scratched his forehead. "I mean, at least it was funny that they thought that Taehyung was so amazing he would make me reconsider my attraction. Or whatever."

It scratched along the line of 'your friend made you gay' and they all knew it. He saw the tight faces, how Jungkook was about to say something, how Namjoon stared at the floor with intent.

"He said he'll get used to it, though. And that I'll have to invite my family for the next wedding, since it was rude not to do so this time."

Taehyung laughed, loud and unexpected and he didn't even know where it came from. *His* parents had said it was rude to die far away with his boyfriend. He liked this version of rudeness better.

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah, sorry, I just... I like your dad. I do." He smiled and Jimin smiled back, a little unsure. They could talk about it later.

"My brother wasn't happy either, he said he doesn't like gays and asked if I was sure you didn't have Aids..." Namjoon inhaled sharply at that, but Jimin ignored it. "I said we never slept with anyone else and I guess that was more than he wanted to hear so he dropped it. He said he doesn't like my choices but that we're still brothers and if that's what I want to do he'll accept it."

"That sounds enthusiastic..." Hoseok said. He had frowned through the whole story, his fingers twitching against his leg.

Maybe Jimin's family wasn't all that ready to support LGBT rights, maybe they had to work it out how their relationship would go on, now that things have changed so much. But... seeing Jimin sitting between their friends, seeing their anger and how much they wanted to protect him and fight for him... it made Taehyung content. He was in good hands. It would be fine.

"It's a start. They... don't hate me. And I think it helps that I didn't sleep around or something."

"You wouldn't be worth less if you did," Namjoon said.

In the end, Seokjin rubbed Jimin's shoulder, saying: "It's your family. They'll come around. Give them a little time."

It was a beginning. It could've been so much worse, it could have been a lot better, but it wasn't the worst starting point. And when Jimin looked at him and smiled, he knew that Jimin knew that, too.

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December came, and with it came the snow and the short days and another change in medication and... the fear. What if he didn't make it, to the end of the year? What if he died, not quite 25, because there was no doubt anymore that he was sick. And when it started it came in a landslide. The latest medication made the nausea somewhat better, but even if he could eat more consistently he didn't gain any weight back. His face was sunken in, his hands looked thin and weird and his energy was sinking so rapidly it made it hard to reassure Jimin that he was still going strong.

The newest addition were painkillers, since the tumor in his lungs got worse, and the one in his pancreas, the one they had cut out, came back. They said it was normal, they said it wouldn't lessen his time, but that was barely a consolidation.

As long as he was still able to function on his own he was fine. He could still work on the photo book, he was able to go to the hospital on his own, he even managed to visit Jimin once a week, when he recorded with Hoseok for their channel.

When there was barely a week left to Christmas though, Jimin's parents visited. Jimin's dad had been nice enough, awkward at first, not knowing how to treat Taehyung after knowing him from being a little kid, but he had tried his best and it had been more than Taehyung had expected. Tried to talk to him about his duties as a husband and that he was supposed to treat his son right until they both had to laugh since it was obvious that there wasn't much time left for Taehyung to do any of that. They had hugged later, for a long long time, and he had whispered to Taehyung that he was glad it was him, that he had always seen him a little like a son and that he wished that they could've made it work, the family thing.

They promised to visit for New Years. Jimin had told them that it was too exhausting for Taehyung to travel for Christmas, and Jimin's brother and his girlfriend came over to Daegu so his parents didn't want to come to Seoul. It was... encouraging, somehow, when Jimin's dad said 'I expect to see you on New Years'. He wasn't allowed to die before that.

It was two days before Christmas, when Jimin got up to get ready for work and Taehyung felt his bladder, grunting that he needed to go to the bathroom first, when a new kind of fear set in. A kind of pure, all encompassing fear that came out of the deepest depth of his being. When he pushed the blanket to the side, struggled to sit up and fell down when he wanted to stand. Jimin screamed, immediately pulling him up and Taehyung tried to push him away, got on his wobbly knees while his vision threatened to black out and stumbled to the bathroom, with Jimin lurking behind him as if he would drop dead any second.

And even if he had almost convinced himself that it had only been a bad morning, it had happened again. And again. Until Jimin told him to not go out alone anymore, and that he shouldn't worry and that he would take care of him. He had never wanted to make it hard for Jimin, but it looked like there was no other choice. On Christmas Eve, while they were watching TV in the afternoon, he told Jimin. 'I want to die at home. Please don't leave me in a hospital. Please don't carry me to a hospice.' And Jimin had hugged him tight and kissed him and promised him to do everything he needed to

feel safe.

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"What do you say?"

As was tradition, they had put their small, plastic Christmas tree next to their TV, the few presents draped beneath it. They didn't have enough space for a big one, and not enough money for a real one, but the lights were shining pretty nonetheless and the rest of the apartment was full of tinsel and fairy lights and little decorations and they wouldn't trade their tiny tree for anything else.

Taehyung had unwrapped his presents first. He had said he didn't want anything this year, only reminding him of what he couldn't have anymore, but Jimin told him he had already bought most of it early. In the end Taehyung hadn't complained about a new tie and the fuzzy, over-sized sweater. It looked... expensive, when he rubbed the soft material between his fingers. But Jimin seemed so pleased that he couldn't ruin it by telling him he should've saved the money.

"I will wear it every day this winter, I promise." He kissed Jimin's smile, tasting sweet and warm and beautiful.

"Please don't wear a tie at home." He kissed him again, giggling. "I have another present. You can wish for whatever you want, and I'll do it. Since the clothes aren't all that fitting anymore."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. You're too thin now."

Taehyung leaned back, pretending to be deep in thought when he finally answered: "Sleep with me." Jimin's smile immediately faltered, hesitation clearly written over his face, but Taehyung only rolled his eyes. "I'm not that fragile, and I want to... I want to feel you. As long as I still can."

"Don't. Not now." Jimin was biting his lip, looking away, and Taehyung let him have his internal debate. They had cut their sexual explorations, it was too exhausting and they had other things on their minds, but the holidays had always been quiet and lazy and if it was the last time... he wanted to do it when he was still able to participate.

"Promise me you tell me if it is too much? I don't want to hurt you."

He nodded, already grabbing his present to hand it to Jimin. "I promise. Here, this is yours." Taehyung barely managed to sit still while Jimin was ripping the paper off, eyeing the book suspiciously. It didn't look like much on the outside, and the cover wasn't important anyway.

"That was the project I worked on last month. I... I hope you like it."

"Oh." Jimin opened it eagerly after hearing that and there it was, a journey through their lives, meticulously put together from thousands of photos from their cameras, phones, social media and everything else Taehyung could find. It had been... cathartic, going through it all, and he hoped Jimin could use it as an anchor, when Taehyung was gone. As a... good memory.

"So?"

Jimin was carding through it slowly, their teenage years, graduation, that awful time they had lived in dorms, their first apartment together, their second place, memorable photos Taehyung shot for work, during Jimin's performances at dance school, and finally... their wedding. He waited patiently until Jimin was through the whole book, touching some photos as if lost in the memory. When he reached the final page, he looked up, tears in his eyes. "This is so much better than what I got you."

"It's not a competition, Jimin. And... I have to make up for, like, 60 Christmas presents I can't give you anymore."

He nodded, his eyes lingering on the last photo of them kissing, barely hidden behind Jimin's small hand.

"It's so beautiful. Thank you." And he moved over to where Taehyung was sitting at the couch, kissing him with so much love and so much need that Taehyung didn't want to feel anything else for the rest of eternity.

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It was a new experience, in a way. Getting carried to the bedroom, to preserve energy and because walking around was almost too exhausting. He kept it for bathroom breaks, most days, but right now he liked the feeling of being protected. Jimin peeled the expensive sweater off him, the one he had put on immediately as promised, all the while kissing every spot of free skin. Taehyung didn't complain. He could still undress himself, but he wanted to take everything Jimin was willing to give him.

When Jimin moved Taehyung's sweatpants down, he hesitated. "You know, I could blow you. Wouldn't that be better? I mean, less exhausting?"

Taehyung sat up, already struggling out of his underwear. "I don't even know if I can get it up, and when you fuck me we can both feel good." Jimin huffed and helped him ease it down his legs. "If you feel uncomfortable or weak or something you have to tell me. Please don't faint while we're at it or I'll never be able to have sex again."

He was staring Taehyung down, until Taehyung smiled and gestured for him to get down and kiss him. "And we don't want that, do we?"

Taehyung had been right, in the end. He was barely hard, and Jimin's efforts didn't change that. It took some pep talk though for Jimin to stop worrying and the things that worked *did* feel good. He wanted to be close to Jimin, to feel his flushed skin and his racing pulse and all the little noises he could barely hold back and he wanted to

feel wanted and loved and... and alive. He didn't need an orgasm for that. And he was sure it would be the last time they could do it, since he had barely managed to keep his promise not to faint. It was good, though. He smiled against Jimin's neck when he drifted off, listening to his steady heartbeat, his soft breathing. It was everything he had wanted.