

They warp into a road three streets away from their target building, by the back door of the café Taeyong used to work in. That job feels like several lives ago now, but the peeling yellow paint is still the same as it ever was. It's a risky move to be here, because he knows there could easily be workers inside who know him, but time is of the essence. They need to be the first ones to reach this kid.

"This way," he tells Jungwoo, keeping his voice low and a firm grip on his hand as he leads him down the alleyway. "Head down."

Jungwoo follows, obedient, cap low over his eyes. Taeyong pulls his own on tighter, face mask secured in place as they pass by the café windows at a casual walk. When they emerge out onto the street, Jungwoo pulls his hand away, and they speed up to a brisker walk together.

"What's the plan here?" Jungwoo asks, once they're safely down the road. "What are you going to tell him?"

"The truth." He turns sharply into a new street. "The short version, I suppose. Whatever will convince him to come with us, or at least let us get him away from here. We can't let them get to him."

"It's hard to trust strangers, though, and especially strangers like us. Do we have a backup plan if he refuses?"

"You're the backup plan. We'll round him up and haul him away if we have to," he says, shooting Jungwoo a smile. The motel they're looking for comes into view between the row of buildings in front of them, innocuous and old. "Did you think I just brought you because you're cute?"

"Yes. And because of my lovable personality," Jungwoo says, completely seriously. "I'm not going to drag him anywhere he doesn't want to go."

"We're not dragging him anywhere. But if we have to pull him out of danger, we will. Understood?"

Jungwoo nods, following Taeyong down a small side road. "I know. But I don't have to like it."

"We'll do what we can," he says, slowing down as they come up to the building. "Safety first, always. Looking out for ourselves and others, including this kid. Right?"

"Right," Jungwoo agrees, uncharacteristically twitchy. No one likes going out on a mission, especially not one organised so hastily, but Jungwoo has always been anxious about showing his face in public. He says it's because he's the cutest and thus the most recognisable among them, other than maybe Mark.

"In and out. We'll be fine." They can't waste any more time. Taeyong reaches out to pull the motel door open, keeping his head down as they walk through the lobby.

"Hey," the man behind the counter calls after them. "You got a room?"

"Yes, sir," he says, without looking at him. The door inside the lobby leading to the rest of the building is secured by a key card lock, but there's a handy window set in the middle of it, giving him a view into the corridor beyond.

“Sure about that?” the guy asks, leering over the counter at them. “If you have friends here, they have to come and let you in.”

“That won’t be a problem,” he says, turning to Jungwoo. “Will you take care of this?”

“Do I have to?”

“It’ll buy us more time. They’ll bring in an armada if they hear that we’re here, too.”

Jungwoo wrinkles his nose. “Fine.”

There’s a whoosh of air as Jungwoo speeds away, the blur of his figure zipping around the room, from the desk to the chair and back. The force of it sends a few papers flying off the front desk, and then he’s back at Taeyong’s side barely ten seconds later, hair tousled and face displeased. Taeyong turns to see the man sat under the desk, frozen in fear, hands and legs tied up with several yards worth of sticky tape. He’s gagged by what seems to be his own bandana, but it doesn’t stop him from trying to shout around it, eyes goggling at them.

“Thank you,” he says, offering his hand to Jungwoo, who takes it without question.

“Let’s just get this over with.”

Taeyong turns back to the window, focusing on a spot further down the corridor. A familiar thrum overtakes his body, flooding his nerves and snapping them both further into the building, right at the spot he’d been targeting.

“Hendery said he’s in room 205. That’s bound to be on the second floor,” Jungwoo says, pulling away again to start up the stairs, Taeyong hot on his heels. The motel is unnervingly quiet around them as they run up the staircase together, scanning the room numbers as they pass by.

205 is at the end of the corridor, facing the street they’d first come down. Jungwoo looks at him, face thin under the sallow lightbulb, and Taeyong looks back, pulling his facemask down before knocking on the door.

There’s no sound from inside at first. So he knocks again, and calls out, “Jung Sungchan? You don’t know us, but we’ve come to help you.”

There’s movement, then, quick footsteps on old floorboards, but no vocal response.

“It’s alright, we’re friends,” he tries again. “My name is Taeyong, and I escaped the labs before, too. We’re on the same side.”

The sound of a window scraping open rings through to the corridor, and Taeyong immediately steps back, gesturing to the door. Jungwoo takes initiative quickly, backing up into the hallway before he disappears in a whoosh of air. There’s a loud crack as the door breaks against the force of Jungwoo’s run, wood and plastic scattering in the hallway after him. Jungwoo whips back to Taeyong’s side after only a second, gripping a tall boy by his bicep and the back of his neck. Sungchan stares at Taeyong, eyes shining with fear, and Jungwoo releases his hold on him, stepping a safe distance back.

"It's okay," Taeyong says again, holding up placating hands. "Do you recognise me? We're not here to hurt you."

"Of course I do," Sungchan says, eyes flitting between Taeyong and the open window in his room. With Taeyong in front of him and Jungwoo behind, he looks like a trapped animal, skittish and dangerous. "Lee Taeyong. You're exactly who they'd send."

"I'm not with SM," he says again. "I haven't been for nearly a year, now. We've come to help you get away from them."

Sungchan looks back at Jungwoo, who is watching the exchange with a stony expression. Taeyong can see the concern in his eyes, and anxiety in his posture. He's right; they need to get out of here as soon as possible.

"How did you find me?"

"The receptionist called the police when you checked in, and SM are coming here, right now. We've been keeping an eye on the reports to make sure we could get there first in a situation like this. In case someone like us needed our help." He lays his hands out flat, offering them to Sungchan. "And here we are. But we haven't got much time. If you want to get away from them, you need to come with us now."

Sungchan eyes his palms before glancing inside his room again. "I was doing just fine before you came."

"You can't outrun them. You can't outfight the weapons they'll bring to subdue you, not on your own. Trust me. I can get us far away."

"Far away?" he asks, hands trembling, fists balled like he's preparing to fight. "Or straight to them?"

"Sungchan—" Jungwoo starts to speak, but before he can finish the word, Sungchan spins on his heels and splay out his hands in Jungwoo's direction. The air rumbles with an unseen force, and the ground beneath them shakes as Sungchan's ability throws Jungwoo down the corridor, straight into the far wall. The vibrations that spread out from him make Taeyong topple over backwards too, clutching at the ground as it shakes beneath them. The quakes die out as quickly as they'd come, and he looks up to see Sungchan dashing his way through the empty motel room, aiming for the open window.

In a second, Taeyong teleports into the space in front of the window to block Sungchan's path. Sungchan sees him at the last moment, skidding to a stop in the middle of the room.

"Let's not do this, please," Taeyong says, hands held up in front of him. "We don't have the time, unless you want to go back to that place."

"I'm not going with you," Sungchan says, gritting his teeth and throwing another quake his way. The air is punched right out of Taeyong as he goes flying backwards, his bodyweight shattering the window behind him—and he topples right out of it, tipping over the low window ledge as glass rains down around him.

He's barely begun to fall before he thinks of the yellow-lit corridor, materialising there beside Jungwoo again, who's just getting to his feet. Taeyong turns to look back in the room, and Sungchan is looking right back at him, hopped up onto the window ledge. Their eyes meet for only a moment before he jumps out too, using a quake to break his fall, rattling the whole building as he lands. Then comes the tell-tale noise of fast footsteps echoing down the alleyway, headed towards the main road.

"Ow," Jungwoo groans, rubbing the back of his head as he stands up straight. He looks at Taeyong, eyebrows raised, one hand reaching out for him. "In and out, huh?"

Taeyong takes it without a word, body pulled taut as he teleports them both into the street they came down only minutes ago. Sungchan is emerging from the alleyway in front of them, and Jungwoo speeds away from Taeyong, snapping back to put Sungchan between them again.

"Listen to me," Taeyong says, taking him by the shoulders. "We have to go, right now."

"How do I know you're not with them?" Sungchan says, voice rising with fear, backpack clutched in his arms. Several passers-by have stopped to stare.

"If we were, would he be asking so nicely?" Jungwoo says, looking around restlessly. "Come on, man. You've got to give us something, here."

Sungchan blinks, head jerking to the side. "There's a truck approaching," he says, fingers twitching. "A big one. I can feel it. That's them, isn't it?"

"Yes," Taeyong says, imploring. "Take my hand, and we'll get you away from here. Okay?"

He holds both hands out, and Jungwoo steps around Sungchan to grasp one. Sungchan looks down at the one offered his way, jaw clenching. If he can sense their vehicles approaching, he must know now that he can't outrun them. He must realise that the stranger offering him a hand is his best shot of getting away from here.

Sungchan clutches his bag to his chest, takes in a breath, and grabs Taeyong's hand firmly. As soon as they're connected, Taeyong grips him back tight, and pictures the beach hut where he'd had his first kiss. They're pulled from the ground together, and in their last fraction of permanence, he can see the giant plain truck turning into the road ahead of them.

They re-emerge in the empty beach hut, small and stuffy with stale air. The three of them barely have enough space to stand next to each other, the door bolted shut, only slivers of dim light reaching in through the cracks. He wonders if Taeil's family still own this particular hut, or if they've had to let it go. Things have been hard for them all for the past two years.

Sungchan jolts, full bodied, backing up away from them until he hits the wall. Taeyong is just thankful he doesn't immediately blast the wood away. "Where are we?"

"A beach hut on Jeju's busiest tourist beach, so don't talk too loudly."

"Why here?" Jungwoo questions, steadying himself with a hand against the wall.

"Holidayed here once," he says, inhaling the smell of sand and old wood. "It's a good in-between place."

Sungchan's breaths are coming fast and heavy, and even in the dim room, Taeyong can tell he's tensed to bolt at any second. "Why? Why did you bring me here?"

"I meant what I said," Taeyong replies, trying to keep his voice steady. He's breathing hard himself. The brush with SM was too close for his liking. "We're here to help you. If you want me to drop you somewhere safe, I can do that, and we won't bother you again. But we really came to offer you a roof over your head and food in your mouth, so that you don't have to get yourself caught checking into motels anymore. It's up to you."

Jungwoo's hand is feeling across the wall until he finds the little bench seat behind him, sitting down on it with a sigh. "Hyung, please remind me never to come on a rescue mission again."

Sungchan shoots a look at him, eyes boggling. "Why? Why did you come to rescue me? Why take the risk of bringing me with you at all?"

"You're like us," Taeyong says, trying to meet his eyes in the dim hut. "We have to look out for each other when the world is against us. Also, I wouldn't wish a stay at SM labs on anyone."

"Strength in numbers," Jungwoo says, breathing in through his nose, out through his mouth. "There are twelve more where we came from, living safely away from the labs. Some of them have never even been there. To be so lucky, right?" He quirks a small smile, and there it is—the real reason he'd wanted Jungwoo to come along. He's never met anyone so disarming upon first impression.

"Twelve others? All hiding from SM?"

"Do you not read the news?" Jungwoo asks, tone light. "I thought everyone in South Korea knew Taeyong's face. Most of the rest of us get shown on T.V. every so often, too."

"I do," Sungchan says, glancing between them. "I recognise both of you. But that doesn't mean you're safe."

"Good stranger danger instincts, but we're not going to force you to do anything you don't want to."

They stay quiet as Sungchan's breathing evens out with theirs, until the hut doesn't feel quite so small anymore. Taeyong waits for him to break the silence again, voice small this time.

"Do you really mean it? I can stay with you?"

"I really mean it," he promises.

"Is it safe? Your hideout?"

"We've been hiding successfully for some time, now. We know how to get by, and I know you're new to this. Let us help you, and you can help us stay safe in return."

Sungchan bites down on his lip, red and raw. "I don't want to hurt anyone."

"Good," he says. "Neither do we. But we still have to protect ourselves."

Sungchan looks at Jungwoo again, slumped against the hut wall. Taeyong gets it. He's tired, too.

"You don't have to stay permanently if you don't want to. But at least stay with us for a little while, see what you think. I promise we'll look after you."

Sungchan looks to be on the verge of tears. He fidgets on the spot, taking in a breath and releasing it again, shaky. "Okay."

That'll do. The kid's been through a lot. He holds his hands out again, and Sungchan reaches out slower this time. Grips his hand gently, and Taeyong squeezes back, firm. "Thank you for trusting us."

Sungchan only nods. Jungwoo stands again, rolling his neck and sighing. "Home?"

"Yeah," Taeyong smiles. "Home."

Jungwoo takes his hand, and the three of them disappear from the hut together.

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When they snap back into the office room, Doyoung instantly whips around from the window to look at them, wide-eyed and anxious. Yuta is still sat in the same position they'd left him in, hands clasped together, elbows resting on the desk, staring straight ahead as the white noise of the police radio crackles in the corner. He lifts his head to look at them when they materialise, but Doyoung is already swooping over to greet them, taking Jungwoo into his arms.

"Oh, thank God. Let's never make an important decision that quickly again." He moves over to hug Taeyong too, and Taeyong returns the hold gladly, dropping a reassuring kiss to the side of his head.

"It was necessary, and it worked. We're back in one piece, so it's all fine."

"Be glad you're back in one piece, or I wouldn't be so nice right now," he says, stopping in front of Sungchan and thankfully restraining himself from a third hug. The kid is twitchy enough without being enveloped by a stranger. "Hi there! Welcome to the hideout. I'm Doyoung, and this is Yuta. We're really glad you got here safely."

Sungchan nods, mouth opening then abruptly clamping shut again.

"Everything go smoothly?" Yuta asks from his seat.

"I wouldn't say smoothly," Jungwoo says. "But we did it."

"Anything we need to worry about?"

"Nah. Just the usual. Definitely got sighted by pedestrians, but what can you do? We were putting on a bit of a show."

"Where is this place?" Sungchan asks. Taeyong follows his line of sight to the window and out to the field surrounding their building, and the empty industrial estate beyond that.

"That's a good question." He puts a gentle hand on his arm, guiding him over to the office door. "Come on, I'll show you around."

"Kun has been stress baking, if you want to go and find him for food," Doyoung says. "He'll want to know you're back, too."

"Will do. This won't take long." It's better for Sungchan to know where exactly he's been brought to, make sure he's settled. They can't afford him bolting again.

Sungchan is still gripping his bag to his front as he follows Taeyong out of the room. Jungwoo joins them, but splits off to head towards the stairs, waving as he goes. "I'm going to find Kun and his baking, let him know we're back."

"See you there," he says, leading Sungchan the other way, along the top floor corridor. He stops at the door at the end, opening it up to the dark room beyond.

Hendery's hub is a strange juxtaposition of tightly pulled blinds and the harsh glow of a dozen screens, lighting the room with odd shadows, but Hendery's eyes are shining bright when he spins in his chair to look back at them. "Hello!" he greets, loud, hopping up from his chair and bounding over to them. "You guys did great! I watched the whole thing from down here. Close call, don't you think?"

"Watched it?" Sungchan asks, staring at the screens. "How?"

"Hacked a few satellites," he grins. "It makes things easier."

"This is Hendery," Taeyong says, resting a hand on Hendery's shoulder. "Technopath, and the best in the hideout at making sure we're safe and secure."

"It's nice to meet you, man," Hendery says, sticking his hand out. "I was the one who found you, you know. I was so excited to see your name pop up, dude, I've been wanting to meet you for a while, so I was really hoping Taeyong could get to you. And now you're here!"

"Thanks," Sungchan says, taking Hendery's hand cautiously, who shakes it with vigour.

"No problem. It's the most exciting thing to happen around here for a while, so I should be thanking you, really. You've even given me a lead to work on, which is great, because SM have been shy for a while now."

"A lead?" Taeyong asks, perking up.

"I'm tracking the truck they sent out to fetch Sungchan. I've never seen one as heavy-duty as that. Who knows? It might lead us right back to their new labs."

"To SM? You're looking for their new labs?" Sungchan asks.

"They relocated after your escape," Taeyong explains. "Which was impressive work, by the way. But they still have some of our friends in there."

"You want to get them out?" He looks between them, frowning. "Really?"

Taeyong surveys him. Most of the people in this building have escaped SM before. Sungchan himself did it. Why the pessimism? "We'll talk about that later. For now, let's just get you settled, shall we?"

"Are you doing the grand tour?" Hendery asks, and Taeyong nods, ushering Sungchan back out of the room. "Enjoy. It'll be nice to have a new face around here."

Taeyong waves as they go, shutting the hub door behind them. He leads the way back across the corridor to the room opposite, opening the door quietly.

"Welcome to the bedroom," he says, keeping his voice low when he spots a few sleeping figures. He points at the first pair, a lanky boy and his grey-haired cat, curled up in the corner. "That's Yangyang, with Ten. Ten isn't always a cat."

"He's the shapeshifter," Sungchan says, before pointing at Yangyang. "But I don't recognise him."

"Yangyang is one of the lucky few who's never been inside the labs. He's also the only person living here who doesn't have an ability. He's Kun's brother, and they came into hiding with us together, a few months ago now."

"Who's the new guy?" Jaemin pipes up from where he's sitting beside Jen0. Taeyong turns his way, resting an arm across Sungchan's shoulders.

"This is Sungchan. Hendery found him very suddenly earlier, and Jungwoo and I went on a snap mission to collect him. Sungchan, this is Jaemin and Jen0."

Jaemin waves in greeting, and Sungchan nods back. Taeyong looks at Jen0, who's still sleeping on the only real bed in the room. "Is he doing okay?"

"Not really." Jaemin's voice is a shade too bitter, and Taeyong makes a mental note to come back and talk to him later.

"He'll be okay. He came down with a fever last night, and we're hoping he'll sleep it off," he explains to Sungchan, walking over to the pair. "Has Kun looked at him today?" he asks Jaemin.

Jaemin nods. "He said that it's probably just the flu. He can help him through it, but it's up to Jen0 to fight it off."

"Poor baby," he murmurs, placing a gentle hand to Jen0's forehead. He's burning hot. "He's getting plenty of water, right?"

"Yes. I've been staying with him."

"You're doing a good job. He'll be alright, Jaemin."

Jaemin looks down at his fingers, nodding slightly. Taeyong definitely needs to talk to him later.

When they leave the bedroom again, Sungchan pauses in the corridor, glancing around them.
“Taeyong?”

“Yes?”

“Is this a school building?”

“It is. It’s an old sports building, to be precise. What gave it away?”

Sungchan gestures to the bedroom. “That room doesn’t look like a bedroom. It’s too big, and the windows look just like the ones in my old school.”

“You’re right. We renovated the empty classrooms on the top floor to suit our needs. There’s also the office room we arrived in, which is where we do a lot of the planning, but wait until you see the downstairs. It’s much more exciting.” He starts towards the staircase, Sungchan keeping close step beside him. “We have a bathroom with showers, a big sports hall for those who want to practise with their abilities, and even a little kitchen we can work with. It’s not very big for a sports building, but it’s plenty big enough for all of us.”

“How have you kept all this hidden for nearly a year?” Sungchan asks, disbelief evident. “How does no one know you’re here with all of this going on inside?”

He watches his feet as they step down the stairs, stopping and leaning into the bathroom on the right to show him where the toilets are. “Toilets, if you need them. Running water in the showers. As for the hideout, we have to thank Jen0 and Jaemin for that. Jen0 transformed parts of the building so that they’re secure for us, and Jaemin is good at making people who come along forget that the building is here at all. It’s very useful.”

Sungchan looks around at the bathroom absently. “Is it true? What they say about him on the news? Does Jaemin control minds?”

“No. It’s not like that. He’s been able to modify memories a little, but it’s a far cry from mind control. You might find everyone here is different to the rumours that go round about them.”

Sungchan nods, and Taeyong leads him down to the sports hall. “The other guys in the labs told me the true stories about all of you, and since my escape the news makes me sound scarier than I am, too. I’ve learned not to trust everything I hear. I just had to ask.”

“Good,” he says, and pauses outside the hall doors. There’s the muffled sound of an explosion from the inside, and for yet another day he’s thankful that he and Jen0 worked to soundproof the whole room. “Fair warning, it sounds like they’re practising in here.”

Sungchan nods briskly, and Taeyong pushes the door open. They walk straight into a snowstorm, filling the sports hall with swirling white and deafening noise. Wind whips past their faces, and Taeyong shivers in his t-shirt, but Sungchan only gazes around at the sight.

“Xiao Dejun?” he asks loudly, pointing at the snow, and Taeyong gives him a thumbs up.

“Correct. And Lee Donghyuck,” he shouts, pointing at the faint figure he can make out in the middle of the room, palms raised to the wind. A second later, twin explosions blast from Donghyuck’s palms,

clearing the air momentarily. He can feel the blast of hot air from here, before the cold wind bats by again, raising goosebumps on his chest and arms.

“Hey!” a voice rises above the noise, and he turns to see Chenle standing at the edge of the room, beaming at them. “Half-time! They’re back!”

The snowstorm lets up almost immediately, the wind stilling and allowing the snowflakes to float down to a rest on the sports hall floor. As the air starts to clear, Dejun emerges from a gust of white, his footsteps loud on the settled snow.

Chenle reaches them first though, throwing himself onto Taeyong in a strong hug. “I’m so glad you’re back okay! Is Jungwoo back too?”

“Jungwoo is fine. He went to let Kun know we’re back, so I’d better catch up with them before Kun has my neck for making him wait.”

Chenle laughs, high and loud. “Oh, he will, he was worrying so much! I told him it was going to be okay. You’re always okay, Hyung.”

“I do my best,” he says, patting Donghyuck’s shoulder as he reaches them, too. “Sungchan, this is Chenle. Chenle, Donghyuck, Dejun, this is Sungchan. He’s going to be staying with us for a while.”

“Yes,” Sungchan says, staring at Chenle. “Um.”

“Hey there, new guy,” Donghyuck says, despite the fact that Taeyong had just introduced him by name. “Aren’t you the one with the earthquakes?”

Sungchan shrugs slightly, shying away from the looks of the other three. “I can shake stuff, I guess.”

“Like Taylor swift?” Donghyuck asks, and Chenle immediately starts singing *shake it off, shake it off*.

“Like—” Sungchan eyes the room around them, then raises his hand, aiming at a knee-high pile of snow a few feet away. Taeyong feels the tell-tale rumble of Sungchan’s power rattling the air, then watches as it blasts the snow apart, scattering clumps around the room. Some of it blasts back on them, and Chenle laughs again, delighted.

“Woah,” Dejun says, appreciative. “Nice! You’ll be fun to spar with!”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” Taeyong says, placing a hand on Sungchan’s shoulder to lead him from the room again. “Sungchan just got here, and he doesn’t have to spar any of you unless he wants to.”

“Sir, yes, sir!” Donghyuck says, striking a strong salute.

“Don’t do that,” he reprimands. “You can get back to it. We’re going to eat some of whatever’s currently baking down the hall.”

“It’s cookies. Kun told me off for trying to eat the batter,” Chenle informs him.

“Brilliant,” he says, pulling the door open again. “Enjoy yourselves.”

"We will!" Donghyuck calls.

"Okay, I'm joining in this round," Chenle announces, turning back to the sports hall.

He hears Donghyuck and Dejun groaning. "You'll win too easily if you join in!" Donghyuck complains.

"Then let's do two on one!" he hears Chenle suggest brightly before the door shuts behind them.

Sungchan stares at the door, and Taeyong cracks a grin. "Like I said. Not what you expected?"

He shakes his head. "No. You've seen the wanted broadcast they put out about you guys, right? They make Chenle out to be some sort of ruthless killer. But he's actually a little cherub or something."

He can't help but laugh. "Chenle is a good kid. SM have a tendency to reduce us to the worst parts of our powers."

"Yeah," Sungchan says, looking down at his feet. "They sure do."

He knows Hendery and Yuta must be itching to debrief this kid—and he can't say he's not curious himself—but that can wait for now. As far as they know, it's been a while since Sungchan has been with family or friends, or anyone at all who would give him the time of day. He could stand to have a hot meal and some good company first. "Come on. You must be hungry. Let's get some cookies."

Kun stops chopping his vegetables as soon as Taeyong enters the kitchen, turning his knife to point in his direction. "Lee Taeyong! I can't believe you started the tour before coming to tell me you were back safe! Was I the last stop on the list?"

Taeyong puts his hands in the air, submitting immediately. Jungwoo is sitting on the table behind Kun, legs swinging as he chews on a fresh cookie, while Mark stands from the chair beside him to give Taeyong a hug.

"If Jungwoo told you that, wouldn't you already know that we were back safely?" He reasons, lowering his hands and stepping aside to give Sungchan space. He embraces Mark's hug, patting him on the back. "I was trying to show our friend his new home."

"Sorry," Sungchan says meekly, and Kun immediately puts down his knife, coming over to put his hands on Sungchan's arms.

"Oh, no, it's okay, it's not your fault," he says, voice softening out completely. "If you're hungry, there are cookies for you. Get one before Jungwoo eats them all."

"It all went fine," Taeyong says, gently, stepping forwards to kiss Kun quickly. "No need to worry."

"Good. But I still don't have to like it whenever you leave." Kun leans in to give him a kiss back before moving back over to the countertop.

"I did tell him you'd come back alright," Mark offers, scratching the back of his head.

Taeyong gestures to Mark. "See? When has he been wrong about these things? You can't even trust Mark's foresight?"

"It's nice to hear, but this little thing called human emotion keeps me on my toes. More importantly, I'm starting dinner, if you could round up a few people to help me...?"

"I can help, and the kids might be in once they've finished sparring. Do you want me to wake up Yangyang?"

"He's sleeping? What for?"

"Joining Ten's afternoon nap, I think. They're two peas in a pod, these days."

"Oh, I'm fine, thank you," Sungchan is saying weakly, as Jungwoo holds out the plate of cookies in his direction. They're piled high, because Kun is used to cooking for fourteen hungry boys.

"You can eat if you're hungry," Taeyong tells him gently, because he can see the way he's looking at the cookies despite his refusal. "What's ours is yours, and so on. We share everything here."

"Just have one, at least," Kun urges. "That way you can eat properly at dinner, too."

Sungchan looks at the plate, hesitating. Jungwoo shuffles up on the table, patting the spot beside him, beckoning Sungchan to come and sit with him.

"Hey, what's this?" Kun says, coming back up to him again, and Taeyong watches as he reaches out to touch his hairline. His fingers come away with a little blood on them, and Taeyong stares, surprised. "Did you get hurt?"

Before he knows it, Taeyong is being ushered into one of the chairs so that Kun can run his fingers over his scalp. "Oh," he realises, as Sungchan goes stiff beside him. "It's probably from the glass. I'm fine, seriously. I didn't even feel it."

Kun picks out a small piece of glass from his hair, and then another, and another. "What happened?" he asks, running his fingers over the small gashes. Warmth trails behind his touch, injuries sealing up under Kun's careful fingers.

"Had a run in with a window. Don't worry about it," he says, and Jungwoo snorts. "Just my excitement of the day."

"That's pretty cool, Hyung," Mark says, wide-eyed.

Kun shoots Taeyong an unimpressed look, like he's worried the kids will start running into windows for fun, now. Truthfully, he wouldn't put it past Donghyuck and Chenle. "You haven't done any real damage, but you should be more careful. Take a shower before dinner."

"Will do," he says, standing and carefully scooping the glass from the table. "I'll take these to the scrap box."

"Fine," Kun says, heading over to the sink to wash his hands. "Can you send Doyoung to help me, and wake up Yangyang and Ten on your way? They could be more useful and help me with these peppers."

“Will do.” He looks up at Sungchan, who has finally relented to Jungwoo, nibbling cautiously on a cookie. “Will you be alright if I go and shower?”

He nods quickly, then says in a low voice, “I’m sorry about pushing you out of the window.”

Taeyong just pats his arm. “Don’t worry about it. Welcome to life in the underground, kid. I think you’re going to fit in well here. Any questions, any worries, you can come to me, okay?”

“Reliable leader,” Jungwoo croons, seemingly in a much better mood now than he was fifteen minutes ago. “Oh, wise one.”

“Anyone here will happily help you out, actually” he says, looking at Jungwoo pointedly. “They’re all good people.”

“But especially our leader Yongie,” Jungwoo says, and Taeyong shakes his head at him, smiling.

“I hope you’ll find yourself at home here, Sungchan.”

As he leaves the kitchen, he can hear Mark begin to ask about Sungchan’s ability, and smiles to himself. He can feel Sungchan’s eyes on his back as he shuts the door, but he knows he’s in good company.