

playing with fire

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playing with fire

by [melecs](#)

Summary

It's funny; the last time he was going to say goodbye to Hoseok forever, they were sharing overdue kisses and frustration. Not this time.

(Black Day Remix of 'playing for keeps' by blushmark)

Notes

The version where Taehyung doesn't admit the truth. I've never done a remix before, so this was a new experience, but I had fun! Certainly a challenge. Go read the original fic, it's amazing!

- Inspired by [playing for keeps](#) by [blushmark](#)

The fall was nasty, and avoidable, and hilarious until he hit the ground head-first. Jimin laughed, then called an ambulance when his friend wouldn't wake up. And it was that one fall, with all the leaves and severed branches, that led them to this clean and intimidating room. Allegedly.

Taehyung doesn't remember any of it.

Currently, Taehyung's entire life is based on the word of Jimin and Jungkook. They say they're his best friends. Jimin knows the password to his phone (newly-shattered, a blade of grass wedged under the screen), he knows Taehyung's family, Taehyung's interests. And Taehyung doesn't remember Jimin—not entirely, just shards of him—but something about him is trustworthy. Something in his face.

The man with the green shirt and the lab coat is one Taehyung has never seen before. Even with memories missing, Taehyung is sure he would remember this face: handsome and friendly, with an easy and confident smile. He's instantly attractive, more than any other stranger. The man's teeth line up so nicely. Surely Taehyung would remember him if there was anything to remember at all.

His head hurts.

This is what it's like, Taehyung thinks, to be soulless. To just be inhabiting a body without a sense of identity. He knows who he is, of course, but doesn't know his own life. The doctor they visited said his memories were still inside his head, but Taehyung can't feel them.

Taehyung vaguely registers Jimin speaking to a lab coat man, in that light voice Taehyung has definitely heard before, “—if Taehyung has past history with, um—” Those bright eyes flit to the very handsome one—Dr. Jung Hoseok, a name Taehyung had read on the physician's recommendation post-it, and again on the plate outside the door. Maybe he's not even a doctor—he doesn't look like a doctor—but Taehyung's not sure what else he would be.

Taehyung's always been one for a fast friendship (he thinks). And for some reason, Jung Hoseok seems like the kind of guy Taehyung could butter up in no time. He's a fascinating stranger. Someone who draws Taehyung in immediately.

Jung Hoseok says something that Taehyung doesn't pick up. But he hears the quality of the doctor's voice—calm and expressive and rough at the ends. In his mildly-concussed state, Taehyung keeps quiet. Jung Hoseok, focused and stony-faced, doesn't look like he wants to make a friend now.

There are two other men in the room, besides Jimin, Jungkook, and Jung Hoseok: one with a deadbeat attitude who keeps going rounds with Jimin, and a large man who actually sets a little spark of something off in Taehyung's brain. But everyone is new and frustrating.

It all happens quickly, and Taehyung is so literally out of his mind that one moment he's eyeing the curve of Dr. Jung's nose and the next he's lying beside to a fancy machine. Jimin

looks nervous, like Taehyung could be in real danger. And Taehyung says he's not scared, but the tightness in his stomach is still there. The deadbeat doctor pushes a needle into his arm, one of the hydrophobic ones. Hypotonic?

Then Taehyung forgets how to breathe. That's exactly what it feels like, like he's on a mountain and there's not enough oxygen to go around, so he stops trying. Gives in.

The last thing he sees before reality fades around him is Dr. Jung's face, clear in his vision as everything else blurs.

↔

Waking up the first time is nothing. Everyone is still strange and new. So they try again, and Taehyung keeps the hope that this works.

Waking up the second time is jarring—not like waking from a nightmare, but like waking and discovering an entire lifespan locked inside his brain.

The first thing he sees is Jimin, and now the shape of his face is recognized as a permanent fixture in Taehyung's life. He's spent years with this man, and how could he ever forget *Jimin*? Jungkook, too; they're his best friends. Taehyung could talk about them for hours.

And Kim Namjoon! He's exactly the same as the last time they saw each other. When was that? Seeing the three of them together brings a wide grin to Taehyung's lips, and he calls out their names in disbelief: "Park Jimin! Jeon Jungkook! Kim Namjoon!"

Taehyung absorbs the room around him, trying to pick apart the details he hadn't noticed without his memory. And the most glaring detail, as it always has been, is Jung Hoseok.

The memories that invade every ounce of Taehyung at that moment are because of seeing Hoseok's face. His smile, with an almost proud curve to it, and the sudden expanse of Taehyung's chest that hasn't been felt in a long time. One of the memories smells like a karaoke bar. Every other sense follows and trips over memories and memories and Taehyung wonders if this is what the verge of death is like.

And there's the memory, clear as glass, of Jung Hoseok's face—illuminated by disco lights and a television, while a poor rendition of 'Yanghwa Bridge' floats in the background. The moment that made Taehyung kiss him that night, pushed to the very front of Taehyung's mind. In Taehyung's brain, this man turns from Dr. Jung Hoseok into just Hoseok: the one he could have loved (the one he probably *did* love).

Hoseok is loud in every way, and nobody has ever been able to change that. Right now, his eyes are loud, pressing questions into Taehyung's soul: '*Do you remember me?*' '*Do you hate me now?*'

In a split-second decision, one that feels too familiar and one that can change his life, Taehyung lies.

⇔

“You look fucked up.”

“Thanks, Jungkookie,” he laughs, “wouldn’t you be out of it if every memory ever just came back to you at once?” Taehyung presses his forehead to the cool window in an improvised attempt to calm his headache.

A small hand pets his hair. “I’m gonna be your personal nurse when we get back,” Jimin says.

“Nurses are supposed to be sexy, though.”

“And you’re helping me, Jungkook. We’ll get Tae’s life back to normal in no time.”

The train pulls up to another station, and people filter routinely into the car. “I swear, it’s just a bit sore at this point. I’ll be fine.”

Jimin doesn’t accept that answer. Usually he’s like a child, but he can be motherly when he needs to. “We don’t need you any dumber than you are. I knew that one specialist guy was just blowing things off, like, ‘*Should be routine*,’ or whatever,” Taehyung only met Min Yoongi briefly, but Jimin’s imitation is notably poor. “Obviously it’s not perfect; you didn’t remember Hoseok at all. And good riddance. We were friends, but what he did to you was a total dick move. You couldn’t even explain yourself to him!”

The captain of his personal defense is, of course, Park Jimin. Right now, Taehyung just wants to sleep. “He didn’t mean to be a jerk.” After all this time, he’s still defending Hoseok without any good reason.

“So you remember him after all?”

Jimin and Taehyung both freeze at Jungkook’s revelation. Yes, he remembers Hoseok very well, too well. He remembers everything about Hoseok. Jimin stares at him, waiting for some explanation as to why he pretended. But Taehyung can’t give that to Jimin when he’s not sure himself.

Quiet. They stay that way, bumping into each others’ thoughts until the train pulls in at their station.

⇔

He's in a forest, dense with trees and budding flowers. Maybe he's been here a long time; he's not sure. Taehyung walks around, no objective in mind. Just enjoying a nice day.

The sound of running water is faint, and Taehyung follows it. He soon reaches a clearing in the woods, breaking apart to reveal a calm stream. And a voice, bright and lovely, calls his name: "Taehyung! Tae!"

Hoseok is by his side in an instant, smile stretching his cheeks up. They mesh naturally, Taehyung's arm flinging itself around the other man's shoulder and Hoseok doing the same. "Hey, you! Wanna go for a walk?"

The scenery blurs as they walk through the woods, until Taehyung has no real concept of passing time. At some point the stream splits from the ground and turns into a deep, blue lake. They stop here, some distance above the lake, sitting on the grass and hanging their feet over the ledge.

He's close to Hoseok, and this is how Taehyung understands he's dreaming. Hoseok has a distinct smell to him, something Taehyung never could pinpoint but just knows it as *Hoseok*. And in his dream, the air smells like nothing. But in his dream, as he turns toward Hoseok, the man's eyes are the same.

Slowly, without Taehyung controlling his own body, he leans closer to Hoseok and their lips meet automatically. It's too easy. This is how it should have gone the first time: no reason to stop, no reason to regret this. But the feeling doesn't reach Taehyung's mouth; this isn't real, he can't taste Hoseok. Taehyung hasn't dreamed like this in a while, but now memories of Hoseok are gathered in a pocket at the front of his brain.

"I missed you," Dream Hoseok breathes between them, "I told myself I wouldn't, but I missed you." This isn't something Hoseok would ever say. "Everything was so empty, when I'd look up and expect you to be right in front of me, and then you weren't."

Taehyung nods. "I missed you, too." He reaches out and gathers Dream Hoseok's fingers between his own, without the warmth or sensation of reality.

Beneath their feet, the still lake water swirls itself into something darker, more sinister. Fear strikes Taehyung then; he's drawn to certainty, and that might be why Hoseok was so attractive in the first place. But he doesn't know what's in the water below.

"You made me sink," Dream Hoseok's hand finds the space between Taehyung's shoulders, without really touching him. "It's your turn, Taehyung."

That's the last warning before Hoseok pushes him into the swirling water that seems deeper and farther than before. As Taehyung falls, he catches sight of Hoseok's large smile.

Even after Taehyung wakes up, Hoseok's face is pressed into his eyelids.



Cypher is a cold place where everything is too modern and sterile. It's not exactly a hospital, but feels so close to one. The only difference is the feeling of death is missing from the air.

In the past two years, Hoseok hasn't changed at all. The polo he wears under his lab coat is one Taehyung's sure he owned in college. They're both at that age where they'll start looking old soon, but Hoseok's smile has looked the same for thousands of days. His hair is lighter, and that's it.

His laugh is the same. His voice. The way he walks. The dimples pressed into the corners of his lips. It's remarkable, because every time Taehyung has thought of Hoseok in the past two years, he's imagined a different man.

So seeing him again is a challenge. Something about this man takes his breath away with every encounter, and Taehyung is out of practice in hiding the awe that comes with Jung Hoseok's existence.

Taehyung tightens his grip on the bag of honey butter chips in his hand. He always keeps a bag stocked at his place because even if they're not the best snack, they taste like memories. It's only then that Taehyung remembers these are Hoseok's favorite. He started eating them because of Hoseok.

He swallows. "I came to drop off my follow-up report."

There's nothing on Hoseok's end. No greeting, no smile, no brightness in his eyes. It's frustrating. He just stands there, looking like a real scientist, skimming the hastily-inked responses of Taehyung's file. The tension between them, pulled tight like a string, threatens to snap at the center with every passing second. It's a tension that's not supposed to exist on Taehyung's side, because he's not supposed to remember Hoseok at all. Taehyung stuffs his mouth with chips like they're pain meds.

That incites something very human in Hoseok. The quick glance up, the scrunched brow. "Oh, sorry," Taehyung says around a mouthful of chips, "Want one? Your favorite flavor, right?"

"I'm fine," Hoseok tells him, and there's a long pause before he asks, "Kim Taehyung, how do you know these are my favorite flavor?"

The world ends. Every particle of oxygen in the room is sucked up into Hoseok's eyes. For one heartbeat, everything is still. The universe tornadoes around them, and Taehyung is afraid. He doesn't want to sink.

He could confess. This is the second chance, this is judgement day. Hoseok doesn't deserve his lie. It's a door swinging open, and Taehyung knows he can walk through and come clean and get another shot at living in the same realm as Jung Hoseok. It's his own choice.

But that's not what happens. Instead, Taehyung stares straight at Hoseok and tells another lie: "Jimin told me. Yesterday." At that, Hoseok's mouth falls slack and his eyes grow dark; he doesn't believe Taehyung. "Yeah, he was telling me that we knew each other in college. Apparently you and Jimin were pretty good friends."

"You remember me," Hoseok's voice is low and dangerous, "don't you?"

Every ounce of resolve Taehyung has obtained over the past two years is channeled at that moment. "Are you messing with me? The first time I saw you was two days ago."

This is mean. It's wrong—he doesn't have to do this. That open door in Taehyung's mind flies shut. He justifies it by telling himself that some doors have to stay closed.

"I see." Hoseok clicks his pen and scribbles something down on Taehyung's report. There's a tightness in his jaw as he hands the report back to Taehyung. At the very top of the paper in Hoseok's round, sloppy script is the word '*Rejected*.' "I'll need to see you back here any time within the week, then. I'll give you another blank report to fill out."

"But I already filled one out," he only hesitates a second before tacking on a, "Hoseok-ssi."

"It's protocol," is Hoseok's clipped response. "This is a rare case of partial memory recovery. If you don't remember me, fine. Just fill out another report, bring it here, and you're free to go."

They used to bicker like this years ago. One of them would do something stupid, and say something more stupid, and it would spiral until their responses were short and immature. They would always make up within the week. But this is big, and Taehyung has a feeling it won't end the same.

"Fine," Taehyung says, "Guess I'll be back in a few days then."

⇔

In the middle of the night, Taehyung wakes up. He doesn't lurch forward in terror or find his skin coated in sweat, but the feeling is there. The emotion: fear, ignorance, loneliness.

He's had nightmares before, like everyone does, but this nightmare feels like a memory. Or maybe his memories feel like nightmares. What did Namjoon call it? 'The dream team?' He's always thought dreams and memories were different. But maybe they're the same.

Once Taehyung gets this thought in his head, it sticks. Sticks like the dream of kissing Hoseok two years ago (or was that a memory?). It's too early for this. In the dark, Taehyung fumbles for the light switch and squints his eyes when he manages to turn on a bedside lamp. There's a pen and a sheet of paper next to his bed, the follow-up Hoseok had given him. In the column labeled '*Immediate Side-Effects*,' Taehyung scribbles down, '*Nightmares*.'

Then the light is off and Taehyung is back on his side. Taehyung falls back into a sleep, into his brain. It feels like forgetting how to breathe.

⇔

The second follow-up comes with a nervous, heavy mess in Taehyung's stomach. It's a feeling he's not used to anymore, not since he first began admiring Hoseok.

A part of Taehyung is disappointed to see Namjoon first, and another part is relieved. "Hey," Namjoon calls him over, "Is that your report?"

"Yeah," Taehyung glances over it again, like he has twenty times, "My second one."

Namjoon lets out a laugh and pats Taehyung at the shoulder, "Sorry he made you do it again. Sometimes Hoseok gets into these moods—I'm sure you remember—where everything is ruined if one little thing goes wrong. I don't know why this report would work better than the first one," he offers Taehyung a reassuring smile, "seeing as partial memory retrieval is fairly common, but I can give him this report any—"

"Common?" Taehyung blinks. "He said it was rare. That's why I filled this out."

Taehyung's never been good at reading people, especially someone as cryptic as Namjoon. His face is serious. "You two need to talk this out. If you don't, then you'll really forget him, even if it's only little things. Reality only happens one time, Taehyung. Just remembering him will never be totally *true*, you know? I know you remember him; it doesn't make sense otherwise. You met me *through* him, so for you to remember me only, there must be something there."

Yet another chance to confess, and again Taehyung passes it up. "Maybe there was a fluke. I remember everyone else but him."

To Taehyung's right, footsteps approach. An even, confident step that Taehyung had memorized years ago. "Namjoon?" Hoseok clears his throat after rounding the corner. "Kim Taehyung."

"Hello," It's an effort, from the deepest part of Taehyung, to produce some kind of smile through the guilt. Why is the sight of him so affecting? "I brought my paperwork again."

"I see. If you'll step into my office for a quick second and I'll sign off on everything?"

Namjoon takes a breath. "I'll take care of it, I was just—"

"It's fine, I can do it." Determination clouds the man's eyes, and he looks at Taehyung as if to say, *'Well? Aren't you going to follow me?'*

He doesn't want to go into Hoseok's office. He imagines it as private, and although Taehyung has craved alone time with Hoseok before, things are different now. But that smile, so open and friendly—he can't say no to that smile. "Oh, sure."

Hoseok's office is small, not too show-offish. Really, it's an oversized broom closet with a desk and a laptop.

"Once again," Hoseok explains, "This is the last follow-up before I'm out of your hair." Taehyung guesses it's something he says to all his patients. But because of how they know each other and what they know about each other, the meaning is skewed.

Hoseok is in a better mood today. He looks younger, more well-rested.

Taehyung's still teasing the edge of a breakdown.

He hands over the paperwork, and again it finds itself in Hoseok's lean fingers. "I was just talking with Namjoon about it. Nothing much is different since a few days ago. I've been having nightmares, though, but I still don't remember you. No offense."

The smile at Hoseok's lips doesn't falter for a moment, but his gaze grows deep and sad. "Our team can't be perfect all the time."

"No, you're great at your job." Taehyung thinks back to college, where Hoseok changed his major three times before settling on something vaguely connected to his work at Cypher. It's good to see him in a job he's passionate about, with people he's close to. It's *good*. "You helped me a lot. I guess this is what I get for playing around and falling out of a tree, right?"

"You're too kind," Hoseok scrawls a red 'Approved' on the report, "Always were."

They don't feel like Taehyung and Hoseok. This isn't how the atmosphere used to be between them. Here it's thick and fragile, like the wrong word could break them. Here they're doctor and patient.

"Well," Hoseok sighs, "You're free to go."

He doesn't move. All this time without Hoseok, trying to forget Hoseok, and suddenly he wants to stay. Just one more minute, one long minute to burn Hoseok's face into his mind and have it never leave. It's funny; the last time he was going to say goodbye to Hoseok forever, they were sharing overdue kisses and frustration. Not this time.

"Taehyung? You can go."

Taehyung didn't imagine that he'd have to do this twice. Their last goodbye was so final, so why does this feel temporary? Carefully, Taehyung gathers himself together and takes a step toward the door. His legs are shaking. "Okay."

Another step. This is easy; it's just walking. Walking backward so he can see Hoseok's face. It's new—he's so used to moving closer and closer to Hoseok, not farther away. And as his fingertips brush the doorknob behind him so slightly, Hoseok's lips part in a quiet, "Wait."

“Yeah?” The longer he waits, the worse it feels.

“Please,” It sounds like an afterthought, like Hoseok didn’t think Taehyung would hear him. “Please just say you remember me.”

“I don’t.” Taehyung’s jaw locks.

For a second, maybe two, Hoseok just looks at him. “Are you lying to me?”

“I do not remember you. I don’t.” Taehyung doesn’t know who he’s convincing anymore. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry, too.”

The surprise is hard to mask. He hadn’t expected an apology from Hoseok. They both know what he’s saying sorry for. And Taehyung wants so badly to say it’s okay, that he forgave Hoseok immediately when he shouldn’t have.

Hoseok clears his throat, “For a while I thought you were serious. I thought you were playing for keeps, but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed like a joke. And now…”

It’s hard to breathe. He’s been nothing but serious about Hoseok from the start. “Hoseok-ssi —”

“Nevermind. Forget I said anything,” Hoseok looks down, shakes his head, smiles like nothing’s wrong. “We have an appointment soon.”

At first, Taehyung doesn’t register what that means, and then he understands. Hoseok and Namjoon have an appointment, and this is the end. It was quick and easy. Just keep a straight face and don’t let the aching touch his eyes. “Oh. Yeah, don’t let me keep you. Goodbye,” Taehyung pours everything into that goodbye, “Thanks for your help.”

Hoseok glances up, freezes time. “Bye, Taehyung.”

On his way out of Cypher, Namjoon pats him on the back and gives him this pitying looks that makes Taehyung’s throat burn.

To Taehyung’s credit, he doesn’t cry. Hoseok can’t make anyone cry, even if he’s trying. So Taehyung rides the train home, and the last time Jimin had to deal with the most emotionally drained version of his friend was two years ago.

Hoseok was always that person. The person that undeniably complemented him so perfectly that together, they were messy. He tells himself that this was meant to happen, that things would never work between them. They weren’t anything back then, besides dangerous participants in some awful cycle of seeing what the limit was. In a way, it’s fitting that Hoseok ended things the first time and Taehyung the second.

That doesn’t stop the walls of Taehyung’s heart from constricting, wishing stupidly every day that he could take the train to Cypher and say he remembered Hoseok from day one. But after

a certain amount of time, it becomes too late to do anything. Hoseok had given him so many chances, so many openings to admit the truth, and he didn't take any of them.

"Are you over him yet?" Jungkook asks one day.

"Who?" Jungkook doesn't clarify, just shoots Taehyung a disappointed look. "I mean, I still think about him, of course. I really liked him."

Taehyung wonders if it's pathetic to still be hung up on someone who there was never a connection with. Through the nightmares, and time, details of Hoseok are lost. He becomes a ghost again, a bitter memory that Taehyung is forced to live with. *Reality only happens one time.*

And still, he clings to memory.

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