Caught in a Lie

by KittenSmitten, mysoulrunswithwolves

Summary

Taehyung's best friend Jiminie went missing when he was twelve years old. Six years later Taehyung is working in New York's most prestigious strip club, LIE, when he meets the owner of the club and his boss, a mob syndicate heir who looks eerily like the best friend he had thought was dead.
Lie

Chapter Notes

This is straight from a Twitter prompt by the lovely Nissi, so all credit for the AU and idea goes to them!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It was only ever supposed to be a job.

Famous last words, he supposes.

Kim Taehyung is, for lack of a better word, broke.

It’s the only reason why he even applied for the job in the first place. If he would have known what would happen when he took the job he might have never taken the job. Then again, if he’d known about half the things that were going to happen in his life he would have done things a lot differently.

Like not take Jiminnie for granted when he had him.

Still, it’s not the most humiliating job in the world. He just can’t tell his parents exactly where he’s tending bar these days.

A cool breeze whispers down the street, and he stuffs his hands into the pockets of his old denim jacket.

“Okay, you can do this, it’s just a club,” he mutters under his breath.

He’s standing a few yards away from the main entrance to LIE—New York’s most exclusive strip club—and trying to remember that just because he’s going to work here doesn’t mean he’s lost his morals. After all, how immoral can a club be when the dress code is black tie?

Taehyung exhales, shrugs his shoulders back, and approaches the club, walking past the line that’s already forming even an hour before the club officially opens for the night and around the corner to the staff entrance in the back of the side-alley. He knocks on the door, unsurprised when he’s greeted by a bouncer on the other side.

Shit, even the bouncer’s in a perfectly fitted black suit.

“Hi,” he says, giving his warmest smile to the bouncer. He’s not much taller than Taehyung, but his shoulders are broad and he looks like he could break several of your fingers while smiling pleasantly. Like he is, right now, at Taehyung.

Taehyung swallows. “I’m Kim Taehyung, the new bartender?”

The bouncer eyes him head to toe, before saying, “ID please,” in the smoothest, richest voice Taehyung has ever heard.
He digs his wallet out of his pocket and pulls out his ID, handing it over to the bouncer. He waits as the bouncer spends a minute studying his picture, eyes flicking between Taehyung’s face and the ID. “I dyed my hair red recently, but it’s naturally black like the photo,” he says, nervously biting his bottom lip between his teeth while the bouncer scans his ID with a black light flashlight.

“Welcome to the family,” the bouncer says, handing over his ID and flashing Taehyung a wide smile. “I’m Kim Seokjin, but you can call me Jin.” He steps aside to let Taehyung through the door.

“Thanks,” Taehyung says, stepping inside. He follows Jin through a maze of hallways lined with stockrooms and dressing rooms and offices. Jin stops in front of a solid door at the end of the hallway.

“Namjoon’s out on the floor. He’ll get you a badge and get you settled,” he says, ushering Taehyung through the door. It latches behind him with a click, but Taehyung doesn’t notice. He’s too busy gawking.

He is so unprepared for this job.

_LIE_, against all expectations that Taehyung might have had for a strip club, is one of the classiest places he’s ever stepped into. Taehyung hasn’t been in very many strip clubs—okay, he hasn’t been in any, but that’s because he doesn’t even like women in that way—but the interior of the club seems designed to cater to small, intimate shows rather than wild crowd-pleasers. The staff entrance lets into the rear of the club, and from what he can see the club is split into two rooms divided by a raised bar that is accessible from both sides.

The club is empty, so before Taehyung goes in search of the manager, he takes a moment to look around. The interior is a stunning blend of sleek, white armchairs arranged around small gold tables, each grouping of chairs gathered around a dais with a pole and separated from the other groups by gossamer golden curtains. Taehyung wanders around the bar, a bit shocked when the other side is completely different from the first. This side of the room sports an entirely gold wall, several levels of tables and seating arranged around pillars that are dripping with strings of light. There’s a long, narrow strip of mirrored flooring that cuts through the rich black carpeting with several poles strategically spaced throughout so that anyone sitting in the black and gold striped chairs will have a clear view of the dancers.

He wanders to the front of the club and takes in the whole scene, surprised to see a few things he missed at first glance.

Along the back wall of the club, just behind the bar, there are deep alcoves, each lined with a padded bench, the backs of them shaped to look like wings. Gold curtains made of fabric just thick enough not to be called sheer are held open by hooks, separating each booth and easily drawn closed to provide the illusion of privacy. From the front of the club, Taehyung can see that the main entrance opens onto a small marble dance floor in front of the bar, and that there’s a balcony that overlooks the bar and dance floor, although he figures that those booths are for the _really_ VIP guests.

He takes in the gold accents, sparkling crystal chandeliers, silken curtains, and the overwhelming feeling of excessive wealth, and Taehyung wonders what, _exactly_, he’s gotten himself into.

“You must be the new bartender,” says a voice behind him.

Taehyung jumps slightly and turns around, coming face to face with a tall man with bleach blonde hair and an undercut, dimples on full display as he smiles widely.

“I’m Namjoon, the manager. We spoke on the phone?”
“Uh, yeah, I think so,” Taehyung says, reaching out to shake Namjoon’s outstretched hand.

“Come with me,” he says, motioning him to follow as he heads to the back of the club and through a black door in the wall that Taehyung didn’t see in his inspection.

That’s probably the point.

Namjoon starts talking as they walk through a back hall. “You’ll need to be here every night at seven to open up and get the bar set up, and then you’ll be expected to stay until closing at three in the morning,” he says, leading Taehyung past several rooms where he can see dancers stretching and warming up in mirror lined studios. He opens a door at the end of the hall. “This is the breakroom for anyone that’s not a dancer. You already have your own locker with a uniform in it.” Namjoon squints at him as he walks into the room. “The one in the locker should fit you just fine, but let me know if you need a different size.”

“Oh, okay,” Taehyung says, wandering into the room. There’s couches along one wall, smooth mahogany cubbies against the other wall, and another door that looks like it leads into a bathroom.

“Any questions?” asks Namjoon, leaning against the door jamb with his hands stuffed casually into the pockets of his neatly tailored pants. His suit is all black, shimmering gold undershirt undone at the collar.

Taehyung snaps his fingers, remembering what Jin told him. “Uh, Jin told me I’d need a badge?”

Namjoon nods in recognition. “Yeah, that’s the one thing that isn’t quite ready yet, so come and see me at the end of the night and I’ll get it to you.”

“Okay, great.” Taehyung looks around again, spotting the cubby that already has his name on it, black clothes hanging and waiting.

“I’ll let you get changed,” Namjoon says, looking down at his watch. It looks European and expensive as fuck. “But our other bartender will be here in a few minutes and he can answer any other questions you have about the job.”

Namjoon leaves with a smile, the door shutting behind him with a soft snick.

Taehyung turns and takes off his worn denim jacket and hanging it on one of the waiting hangers in his cubby. He examines the uniform to find everything—shoes, belt, pants, shirt, vest, and even socks—waiting for him and in his exact size. It would probably be creepy if it wasn’t so convenient.

He changes quickly, exchanging ripped black jeans for tailored slacks and his slightly frayed Henley for a fitted collared shirt, also black. He slips the vest on, smoothing it on his shoulders and lining up the buttons, admiring the ambitious shade of tan. It’s got an undertone of golden amber to it, and Taehyung has never felt so coordinated in his life.

He steps into the bathroom once he’s fully dressed, finding stalls, showers, and mirrors everywhere, including a full length one just inside the door against the wall.

At least his hair doesn’t clash too badly with the uniform.

He walks back out into the main room and nearly collides with a man walking into the dressing room. Taehyung spins at the last second and avoids him, but still trips over his feet and falls on the floor in an ungainly sprawl of limbs.

“Fuck,” mutters the stranger. “You okay kid?”
“Yeah,” squeaks Taehyung, a bit pained but otherwise okay. He stands up and idly brushes off his shirt while he examines the man in front of him. He’s shorter than Taehyung by an inch or so, pale skin offset sharply by his black hair and uniform. “I’m Taehyung,” he says, remembering that manners are a thing he was taught.

“Yoongi,” says the man, moving over to his cubby and dropping his phone and keys on a shelf within. “Are you the new bartender?”

Taehyung nods, intending to ask what Yoongi does but Yoongi continues speaking immediately.

“Thank fuck,” he says, running a hand through his hair and tugging Taehyung after him as he starts heading out the door. “I’ve been practically begging Namjoon to hire me some help for a month now.”

“Oh,” Taehyung says, stumbling after Yoongi as he tugs him quickly down the back hallway. “I didn’t realize—”

“Ever since the boss got engaged last month things have been crazy,” Yoongi says, talking right over Taehyung. He lets go of his wrist as they get behind the bar and starts pulling down bottles of liquor from the shelves. “Get some tumblers and glasses prepped, will you?” Yoongi says, pointing to the cabinets under the counter. Glasses of all sizes and shapes are already lined up underneath the overhang of the counter for easy access at the work station, so Taehyung digs around underneath the counter for the tumblers.

“No, Mr. Park owns this club and a bunch of other establishments. His kid is in charge of operating this one,” Yoongi continues, organizing bottles and walking around to set up the other side of the bar. “He got engaged a month ago, and the press was insane so naturally every celebrity and trust-fund brat wants to spend their nights here.”

“Oh, okay,” Taehyung says, feeling a bit lost and very out of place. The closest he’s ever been to a celebrity was when he once accidentally tripped into a scene that was being shot on the city streets on his way home and ruined a take. “So, how exactly does this work?”

“Namjoon didn’t tell you?” Yoongi asks, pausing as he wipes down an already clean glass. When Taehyung shakes his head in response, Yoongi sighs. “Of course he didn’t. Okay, so here’s how this is gonna go,” Yoongi says, coming to stand in front of Taehyung.

Yoongi proceeds to tell Taehyung everything he needs to know about working at this club in one minute flat. “It’s simple, kid. First, never do anything to upset Jin. Ever. Second, patrons will often buy dancers drinks, and it’s your job to make sure those drinks don’t get spiked. Third, don’t argue with the patrons—ever. Got it?”

It’s simultaneously too much at once and not enough, but Taehyung nods.
“Good. Now,” Yoongi places a hand on his shoulder. “Do you know how to make a Manhattan?”

Taehyung rolls his eyes. “We live in New York City, what kind of question is that?”

“Don’t sass me,” Yoongi snaps, flicking Taehyung with the bar rag still in his grasp. “The club opens in ten minutes and I need to know what you can and can’t make.”

“Well, I can make all the basics and—”

“Do you have any drinks of your own creation?” Yoongi interrupts, leaning against the counter.

“No, but—”

“Why not?”

“I don’t really like alcohol so creating drinks isn’t that high on my to-do list,” Taehyung spits out in a rush, half afraid that Yoongi will cut him off again.

“Are you shitting me?” Yoongi asks, incredulous. When Taehyung shakes his head Yoongi sighs gustily. “What kinda bartender doesn’t test his own drinks?”

Taehyung shrugs. “I’m only eighteen and I’m not big on breaking the law? I learned how to mix drinks from an older friend of mine, and he always tested them to make sure the ingredients were balanced correctly. I’ve never needed to taste anything on my own.”

Yoongi stares blankly at him for a moment before muttering something that sounds suspiciously like ‘we’re so f*cked’ under his breath before glancing nervously at the main entrance. “Okay, so here’s what we’re going to do. You take this side of the bar,” Yoongi says, motioning to the side of the bar that faces the long row of poles and raised seating.

He turns Taehyung towards him and unbuttons the top two buttons of his shirt, as he continues speaking. “That’s where most of the trust fund kids hang out, and you’ll mostly be making martinis and shots all night. If you get asked to make anything that you don’t know how to make just send them to me and I’ll do it.”

Yoongi tugs the collar of Taehyung’s shirt away from his neck. Taehyung frowns and eyes Yoongi’s collar, which is similarly casual. Yoongi turns away to pull the pre-sliced fruit from the fridge under the counter, and Taehyung catches a glimpse of the older man’s collarbone as his shirt shifts with his movement.

He licks his lips, half in appreciation for the flash of pale skin, half in nervousness. Right. The unbuttoned shirt is probably better for tips.

“Kid! Did you hear me?” Yoongi barks, snapping Taehyung’s attention back to the task at hand.

“Sorry, yeah. Can do,” Taehyung says, watching as Jin wanders from the back of the club to where they stand behind the bar.

“I’m about to start letting people in,” Jin says by way of greeting. “You two ready?”

“Yes,” chirps Taehyung in the same moment that Yoongi flips him off.

“Good luck tonight, Taehyung,” Jin says, waving as he continues on his way to the main entrance.

“Thanks!”
“Are you always this happy?” Yoongi asks, scrubbing a hand across his face.

“Most of the time, yeah, I try to be,” Taehyung nods. Life’s too short to let the little things get you down. It’s easier to be optimistic.

“Maybe you’ll be good for this place,” Yoongi mutters, wandering over to the other side of the bar as the lights in the club dim and the black lights flicker on.

The change in the room is stunning.

Anything white now glows, and the gold darkens to a muted shimmer that makes the whole place feel like a hazy fever dream. It’s ethereal and breathtaking all at once.

A few dancers wander out from the back, taking up residence by poles and booths, already beginning to dance and move to the beat of the music now thrumming through the club as the first few guests start to claim tables and seats.

Taehyung plasters one of his brightest smiles on his face and goes to work.

Three hours later and Taehyung is beginning to feel downright awe that Yoongi did this alone for a month. He’s getting so many orders that he hasn’t had a free hand since the first order came in, and if this is what it’s like every night he’s amazed that Yoongi isn’t dead.

The lights flicker twice in warning before turning off, the club illuminated only by the strings lights scattered around the club. Both sides of the room cheer in excitement, and Taehyung fumbles a glass in the dark, wincing when he hears it shatter against the floor.

“Fuck,” shouts Yoongi. “I forgot to warn you about this. They do this every time Hope is about to perform.”

“Okay,” calls Taehyung, afraid to move for fear of stepping on more glass.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” comes Namjoon’s smooth voice through the sound system. “Give it up for Hope!”

A wild cheer moves through the crowd, and Taehyung flinches as a spotlight beams onto the marble floor at the front of the club, now free of people dancing, a lone figure under the spotlight. The music changes to something slow and seductive, and the white, silk hooded-robe Hope is wearing falls away as the bass drops and his body rolls.

Taehyung stands frozen in place, mind struggling to understand how—what appears to be the club’s headline dancer—is a man with a way of moving that has Taehyung’s blood simmering in his veins. The dancer, Hope, is wearing nothing but a glittering pair of black leggings as he dips, rolls, and crawls all over the small dance floor.

“Pretty amazing, isn’t he,” Yoongi says in his ear, making Taehyung jump halfway out of his skin.

“Yeah, but he’s a man?” Taehyung says, so shocked to see a male dancer that his brain doesn’t know what to do with the information. “I thought only women were strippers?”

Yoongi snorts. “Maybe twenty years ago. Besides, Hobi is more of a dancer than a stripper. He’s got the highest request rate for private dances.”
“I can see why,” Taehyung mutters as Hope does something downright sinful with his hips that has men and women screeching and throwing money at him. It’s dirty and lascivious and kind of amazing, and Taehyung feels a sort of madness stir in his blood as Hope snatches some bills from off the floor and tucks them tauntingly into the low waistband of his leggings.

“Look sharp,” Yoongi mutters, tugging on Taehyung’s arm. “Boss just walked in and he’s headed this way.” Yoongi points quickly to a man weaving his way through the crowd around Hope’s performance.

Taehyung’s eyes settle on silver hair and a nicely fitted tux—and really, who wears an actual tux to a strip club—before Yoongi pulls him over to the other side of the bar, steering Taehyung around the glass still on the floor.

“I’m going to clean up the glass, just get them whatever they want and try not to stare too much,” Yoongi instructs before effectively throwing him to the wolves.

He doesn’t have time to do anything else but kick blindly at Yoongi’s retreating form before he’s faced with two incredibly handsome men in perfectly tailored tuxedos.

“What can I get you?” He asks, struggling to make out specific features in the low lighting. The one he’s addressing, the one in front, has russet brown hair that’s swept away from his face in a perfectly coiffed style, while the man with the silver hair—Taehyung’s new boss—stands just slightly behind him.

The man moves forward now, stepping up next to the brunette and leaning against the bar and into the lights cast from the backlit shelves of liquor. “We’ll take a shot each of that 89’ whiskey you’ve got on that top shelf,” he says, giving Taehyung a slow, easy smile.

Taehyung’s fingers begin to shake. His face, his voice, his everything is so familiar and he struggles to place why. “Sure thing, coming right up.”

“You must be the new bartender Namjoon hired,” the man continues. Taehyung can feel his eyes on him as he pulls the whiskey down from the shelf and grabs a pair of glasses.

“That’s me,” he says, unstoppering the bottle.

“Babe, look at how well Hobi’s doing tonight,” says the man with russet hair. “He’s killing it.”

Grey-hair laughs, high and sweet, and something clicks in Taehyung’s brain.

And Taehyung knows, now, why he looks and sounds so familiar. It didn’t register until the man laughed, but now he knows and his heart rate triples and his palms start to sweat because it can’t be.

Taehyung feels the glass slip out from his now numb fingers and shatter on the floor. Yoongi whips his head around with a muttered curse that Taehyung barely hears. In fact, he can barely hear anything because the person standing in front of him asking for a drink can’t be here.

Taehyung knows for a fact that Park Jimin died six years ago.

“Jiminie?” he whispers through numb lips.

The man—the one who looks eerily like his best friend from childhood, the boy he’d spent every waking moment with—turns to him with wide eyes.

“That’s a name I haven’t heard in a long time,” he says, eyes narrowing as he looks Taehyung up
and down. The man next to him does the same, a bored look in his eyes. “Who are you?”

“You can’t be Jiminie,” Taehyung says, ignoring the question. “Jiminie died when I was twelve,” he says, voice barely louder than the music playing through the club. But the more he looks at the young man in front of him, the more he can’t shake off the resemblance.

“Who are you?” he repeats, tone low and cool.

Taehyung takes a breath, wonders if maybe, just maybe the conclusions he jumped to when he was twelve were wrong and that just maybe this could be his dearest and closest friend, Park Jimin, standing in front of him.

He exhales, takes a chance, and says, “Jiminie, it’s me. It’s Taetae.”

“Holy shit,” Jimin whispers.

And Taehyung knows, can tell by the way he slumps against the bar and his eyes go wide with shock, that he’s somehow managed to find Park Jimin, alive and well, in New York’s most prestigious strip club.

He takes another breath.

Chapter End Notes

I wrote this whole chapter in less than 24hrs with a head cold. Huge thanks to my beta KittenSmitten she’s amazing and I’m so lucky to have her <3

The strip club I described comes with visuals!

one half (imagine the poles and glass floor in front of those chairs)
same side different angle (with dance floor if you're creative)
opposite half
same side with the bar to the right
'private' booths along the back wall'
VIP booths on the upper balcony

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter

Find Callie on Tumblr | Twitter | Discord
Jiminie is alive.

Jiminie is alive and well and *engaged* to another man. Taehyung suddenly mourns not only the lost years between them, but the chance he’s now realizing he’s missed, to potentially be with Jimin, and the impact of both in the same night has him feeling like he’s sinking slowly deeper underwater.

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**Permission**

Chapter Summary

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Jimin can’t breathe.

Five words is all it takes—*Jiminie, it’s me. It’s Taetae*—for his world to come to a screeching, crashing halt.

He hasn’t thought about Kim Taehyung in four years but against all odds he’s here, working at his family’s bar.

Taehyung is in the most dangerous place he could possibly be and he doesn’t even know it. Jimin
fights off the overwhelming surge of panic that floods through his system, pushing it aside in order to
focus on the situation unfolding in front of him.

Jimin forces air into his lungs, pushes himself up from where he’s been leaning against the bar,
and moves slightly closer to a bored looking Jeongguk.

Taehyung is still looking at him like he can’t believe his eyes, and starts talking in a dazed voice. “I-I
thought you were dead, Jiminie,” he says, reaching out to brush his fingers against his cheek.

Jeongguk suddenly comes alive and slaps Taehyung’s hand away from Jimin. “Keep your hands off
my fiancé, kid,” Jeongguk snaps in the same instant that Jimin says, “don’t call me that.”

Several things happen at once.

Taehyung snatches his hand back, expression confused and looking like a wounded puppy.

Yoongi, who has been quietly standing behind Taehyung mutters, ‘oh fuck, here we go’ under his
breath.

Hobi’s performance comes to an end and the black lights flicker back on.

Jimin feels an overwhelming rage swell within him at Jeongguk’s actions because how dare he,
that is not what they agreed upon when they drew up the marriage contract—

Jimin takes a breath, and pushes aside his anger at Jeongguk to deal with later when they’re not about
to step into a very important business meeting. Neither of them can afford to walk into that with
anything less than their full focus.

“Youngi,” he says, ignoring the way Taehyung is looking at him with a hurt expression. ”I need you
to bring us four Cypher shots in twenty minutes.”

Yoongi nods, “Sure thing, boss.”

“Come, Kookie,” Jimin says to Jeongguk, turning to leave. He pauses and turns back, not missing
the way Taehyung’s face lights up with hope. “And Yoongi?” He asks, waiting until Yoongi makes
eye contact with him. “Make sure you bring them up.”

He turns and keeps walking, but not fast enough to miss the hurt that flashes across Taehyung’s
face.

“Who was that?” Jeongguk asks, once they’re working their way up the spiral staircase in the back
corner of the club. It’s relatively private, but not private enough.

Jimin turns so quickly on the staircase that Jeongguk—following him up—nearly collides with him.
“It doesn’t matter who it was,” he snaps, still seething under the surface. He schools his emotions and
says, in a much calmer tone, “What matters is that we’re about to walk into this meeting and if we’re
both not on our peak game this will go south real quick. Must I remind you that we need this deal to
go through?”

Jeongguk smiles, slow and easy, already looking a little bored with the conversation. “Sure, babe,
whatever you say.” He steps closer, pressing into Jimin to whisper, “I love it when you get bossy.
Really gets me going.”

Jimin restrains himself from pushing Jeongguk down the stairs. “Save it, Kookie. Now is not the
time. Remember your place in this meeting.” He turns around and keeps moving up the stairs until he
reaches the upper level, the secluded, quieter booths fairly empty tonight.

He moves forward toward the booth in the corner, Jeongguk coming up next to him and wrapping and arm around his waist as they approach the booth where two men in finely tailored dark suits already wait for them.

“Gentlemen,” Jimin says, stepping into the alcove as Jeongguk draws the gossamer gold curtains closed around them. “Sorry to keep you waiting. Let’s get started, shall we?”

He sits down, Jeongguk sliding in next to him and resting his hand on Jimin’s thigh possessively, and gets down to business.

“How are you this evening?” He asks, unbuttoning his suit coat and reclining against the back of the booth, crossing his legs and dislodging Jeongguk’s hand from his thigh.

“Nice place you got here,” smirks Baekhyun, looking at the rich mahogany wood and cream and gold décor.

“Thank you,” Jimin says, legitimately pleased. He’d built LIE practically from the ground up as soon as his father allowed him to start his own personal endeavors, closely supervised by his father, of course, but his own nonetheless, and he’s incredibly pleased at how successful the club has become. “I’m glad you could both make time to meet with me.”

“Speaking of which,” begins Chanyeol, “what can we do for you?”

Jimin knows exactly what he wants from them, but these kinds of meetings are more like dances, and revealing the right information at the right time is key. “What do you know about Kim v Jeon Corp?” he asks, eyes flicking between the two men across from him, measuring their reactions.

“You must be kidding, Jimin,” Baekhyun scoffs. “Do you think we’re that dumb?”

“I’m sorry?” Jimin asks, feigning confusion. They’re right, of course. He knows that they know what Kim v Jeon Corp is. Chanyeol is a congressman for New York, and Baekhyun is a Federal judge, and it’s the biggest case in the federal courts right now. But they don’t need to know that he knows that.

“Why should we tell you anything?” Chanyeol asks, leaning back to mirror Jimin’s body language and settling into the conversation.

“Because if you do,” pipes up Jeongguk, silent up to this point, “we’ll make that nasty scandal both of you are involved in go away.”

“How do you know about that?” Baekhyun whispers, face paling a bit.

“It’s my business to know what’s going on in certain circles of this city,” Jeongguk says with a bored smirk. “You should be asking what I don’t know about the two of you.” He smiles, slow and dangerous. “I can assure you, the list is quite small.”

“So. What do you know about Kim v Jeon Corp?” Jimin repeats, smile gone as he stares them down intensely.

Chanyeol opens his mouth to speak, but stops short as the gossamer golden curtains part and Yoongi walks in with four shots.

“Ah, Yoongi,” Jimin says warmly. “Perfect timing. I think our guests could use a shot right about
now.”

Yoongi nods silently and sets down four cream-colored shots, flakes of gold just barely visible in the liquid.

“What is in this?” Baekhyun asks, picking up a shot to peer at it closely.

“This is the house’s specialty shot,” Yoongi says, after Jimin motions for him to explain. “It’s called Cypher. I created it when I first started working here. It’s made with Goldschläger, Vodka, and Irish Crème.”

“Goldschläger?” Chanyeol asks with a low whistle. “I’ll give you this, Park Jimin, you don’t fuck around.”

“Thank you, Yoongi,” Jimin says. There’s a reason why he prefers Yoongi to handle the delivery of drinks to meetings like this. He’s an incredibly discreet and loyal employee.

“Enjoy, gentlemen,” he says as he begins to back away.

“Oh, Yoongi,” Jimin says, halting him before he leaves. “We’ll probably need another round in… about ten minutes?”

Jeongguk grins his agreement. He knows what’s coming, and Jimin doesn’t envy the two men across from them for the position they’re in.

Yoongi nods again before slipping back through the curtain.

Jimin reaches forward and picks up his shot, briefly raising it in salute to the two men across from him before throwing it back, Baekhyun, Chanyeol and Jeongguk echoing his movement.

“Back to the issue at hand,” Jimin says, bringing the conversation they were having back into play.

“Okay, what do you want to know?” Baekhyun asks, clenching his hand in his lap.

“Who’s going to win,” Jimin states, gaze unwavering. “Which way is the jury leaning?”

Baekhyun and Chanyeol share a long look, a silent conversation happening between them. Finally, Chanyeol turns to Jimin. “If we tell you that, what do we get in return?”

Jimin sits back. This is the one part of the meeting that’s Jeongguk’s responsibility. It’s his family that has the proper materials to coerce most of the most important people in New York to do what they need them to do.

It’s the main reason why he pushed the merger between their families through marriage between their heirs.

He’s not afraid to do what he needs to do to keep his family legacy secure, even if it means arranging his own marriage.

Jeongguk reaches into his suit coat and pulls out an envelope. He slowly shakes out several glossy photos and spreads them out on the table. “I’ll make this, and any chance of it getting out to the public, go away,” Jeongguk says, sitting back with a self-satisfied smirk.

Chanyeol picks up one of the photos and blanches, a similar reaction coming from Baekhyun as he leans over to look at the photo.
“I’m sure you can imagine,” Jeongguk drawls, “what would happen if it got out that two of New York’s most prominent political figures—that each have wives—were fucking each other?”

Jimin lets them stew over Jeongguk’s question for a moment, take in the spread of evidence before them that Jeongguk has obtained through his family’s extensive and broad reach.

“All I need to know,” Jimin says quietly, pulling their attention away from the photos spread across the table, “is which side the jury is sympathizing with, and all of this never gets out.”

“Based on what we’ve seen so far in proceedings—”

There’s a cough that interrupts Baekhyun as the curtains part again, and Jimin expects Yoongi to step through but it’s Taehyung, and he’s early, right as he was about to get the information he needed. Jimin could scream in frustration.

“I, uh,” Taehyung pauses as he sees the glare Jimin is giving him. “Have your next round.”

“Put them on the table,” Jimin grits out, reaching over to squeeze Jeongguk’s thigh in a bruising grip. He can’t deal with Taehyung interrupting right now, the need for a physical outlet for his frustration is overwhelming, Jeongguk is right there, and to Jeongguk’s credit he doesn’t even flinch with the force of Jimin’s grip.

Taehyung quickly sets down the shots. “Do you need—”

“No,” Jimin clips out. “Go.”

Taehyung disappears behind the curtains, a tense silence in his wake.

Jeongguk smoothly reaches down and uncurls Jimin’s fingers. “You were saying?” He prompts Baekhyun.

“Based on what we’ve seen, it looks like the jury's leaning toward Jeon Corp.”

Jimin suppresses a smile and a relieved sigh.

“I’ll drink to that,” Jeongguk says with a smirk, raising his shot and kicking it back.

“And you’ll make sure nobody finds out about...” Chanyeol trails off.

“The fact that you’re fucking each other?” Jeongguk finishes for him.

“Nobody will know what we know as long as Jeon Corp wins in court, you have our guarantee,” Jimin reassures. “Now, if you gentlemen will excuse us, Jeongguk and I have other business to attend to tonight.” He stands up, buttoning his suit coat as Jeongguk does the same next to him.

“Please, stay awhile. Nobody will bother you up here, should you wish to spend a few hours alone.”

He watches as Baekhyun and Chanyeol trade hesitant glances before standing up to shake hands with them.

“Pleasure doing business, gentlemen,” Jimin says by way of farewell as he and Jeongguk slip through the drawn curtain and head back to the main level.

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All things considered, Taehyung’s first day at his new job isn’t going as well as it could have. In the
minutes since Jimin disappeared upstairs with his fiancé, Taehyung has all but been useless to Yoongi, who is busy mixing the shots to take up to Jimin.

“Kid,” Yoongi snaps, waving a hand in his face. “Pay attention to this drink. It’s the house specialty and you need to know how to make it.”

Taehyung dimly focuses on the liquors that Yoongi is mixing together, barely registering what’s going on around him.

Yoongi snaps his fingers in front of his face. “Hey. Look,” he begins, starting in on another group of shots for the loud tables on Taehyung’s side of the club. “I know you’ve had a shock or whatever, but I need you to snap the fuck out of it and focus. You need to be making drinks.”

With an effort that feels momentous, Taehyung pulls himself together and tries his hardest to push the part of him that’s positively reeling from shock aside, so that he can get back to work. “Right. Okay,” he says to Yoongi, and gets started on the new orders coming in.

After a few minutes of working in silence Yoongi picks up a tray of shots and says, “Hold down the bar, I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Taehyung nods mutely, registering a few moments later that Yoongi is taking those shots to Jimin and the realization hits him all over again.

Jiminie is alive.

Jiminie is alive and well and engaged to another man. Taehyung suddenly mourns not only the lost years between them, but the chance he’s now realizing he’s missed, to potentially be with Jimin, and the impact of both in the same night has him feeling like he’s slowly sinking deeper underwater.

Somehow Taehyung manages to fill the orders coming in while Yoongi is gone, careful not to break anymore glasses tonight. Enough things have shattered today as it is.

Yoongi is back in a matter of minutes, and Taehyung sighs in relief. It’s not like he was drowning in orders, but the fact that he’s drowning in his own feelings is enough of a hindrance that Yoongi’s presence is instantly calming to him.

“What the fuck is going on tonight,” Yoongi mutters, watching as an entire cabal of trust-fund fuckboys stagger into the club.

Taehyung still feels like he’s underwater, but at least this time he can shrug his shoulders at Yoongi by way of response.

The bulk of them spread out to cover several tables on the floor while a few of them make their way over to Taehyung and start placing orders.

Yoongi is busy mixing another round of Cypher shots for upstairs, so Taehyung starts dutifully taking down orders, relieved when they’re all things he can make without Yoongi’s help.

That is until one of them, who seems to be the leader, comes up to Taehyung and says, “Make me a Rum Martinez.”

“Yeah, okay,” says Taehyung, not letting on to the fact that he has no idea what kind of drink that is at all.

“Hey Yoongi,” he says once the fuckboys are all back at their tables. Yoongi looks up from his own
Yoongi’s eyes widen slightly as he comes over to look at the list in Taehyung’s hand. “Who the fuck ordered this shit?” Yoongi grips, sighing when Taehyung nods to the group of fuckboys at the tables in front of the line of poles. “Of fucking course they would. Okay, have you ever used a smoke infuser to make drinks?”

Taehyung stares at him blankly.

“Right, why would you know how to use it?” Yoongi looks down at the watch on his wrist. “Fuck, I can’t do both. Okay, here’s the plan,” he says, snatching Taehyung’s list from his still numb fingertips. “I’m going to make this bitch of a drink, and you’re going to take these shots upstairs.” Yoongi gestures to the shots he’s set aside.

Taehyung’s stomach drops to the floor. “Uh, okay,” he says, unsure if he wants to sprint upstairs or run out the back door.

“But listen, kid,” Yoongi says, snagging his sleeve and waiting until Taehyung looks him in the eye. “You drop off those shots and then you get the fuck outta there.” Yoongi chews on his lip as if wondering how much he should say. “You’re just there delivering the shots, you don’t see or hear anything, got it?”

Taehyung nods vigorously at Yoongi, starting to wonder what exactly is going on in this club.

“Good. Now go,” Yoongi says, shooing him away and placing the tray of shots in his hands.

Taehyung turns and begins making his way through the club to the back where the stairs are. He climbs them slowly, trying to rid himself of the lingering dread that builds with every step.

He coughs slightly and pulls aside the curtain, stepping through and immediately becoming aware of several things in the same moment.

There are dozens of illicit photos on the small table that seem to be taken of what looks like several rather intimate moments between the two men sitting across from Jimin and his fiancé.

The hostility that rolls off Jimin as he registers that it’s Taehyung nearly causes him to drop his tray.

And Taehyung isn’t dumb; he knows that whatever’s happening in this booth is shady as fuck and probably some kind of illegal and he is horrifyingly aware that the sweet boy he knew six years ago is not the same person that’s sitting in front of him.

“I, uh,” Taehyung pauses and swallows reflexively as he sees the glare Jimin is giving him. “Have your next round.”

“Put them on the table,” Jimin snaps. Taehyung doesn’t think he’s imagining the annoyance in Jimin’s voice. Jimin’s hand comes to rest on his fiancé’s thigh in a gesture so intimate that Taehyung actually wishes that he was literally anywhere else.

Taehyung quickly sets down the shots. “Do you need—”

“No,” Jimin snaps at him. “Go.”

Taehyung doesn’t need to be told twice, and he’d rather be anywhere else than in this room, unable to recognize the boy he grew up with.
Taehyung retreats back to his position behind the bar and returns to work, going on autopilot as he fills orders and makes drinks.

But the whole time he’s working the one feeling that keeps bouncing between his ribs is the grief of finding Jimin, someone he thought he’d lost a long time ago, and realizing that it doesn’t matter if he’s dead or alive because the Park Jimin he knew is gone.

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“That went well,” Jeongguk quips, slinging an arm around Jimin’s shoulders possessively as they walk through the club to the car that’s waiting for them.

“Shut the fuck up,” Jimin snaps, his anger from before rising to the surface so swiftly it takes him by surprise.

He nods to Yoongi in farewell as they pass the bar, ignoring Taehyung completely. He is so angry in this moment that he doesn’t trust himself to so much as look at Taehyung.

Not when he’s not sure he won’t go running straight into his arms for comfort like he used to back when they were kids.

Jeongguk scoffs and slows his steps, but Jimin latches his fingers around the wrist Jeongguk has slung over his shoulder and marches him out of the club and into the waiting car, still seething in rage.

He slides into the back seat after Jeongguk and shuts the door. He waits until their driver pulls out into traffic before he lays into Jeongguk.

“How dare you,” Jimin seethes, releasing all of his annoyance at Jeongguk as he quietly hisses at him, low enough that their driver can’t hear him over the road noise and the privacy screen that’s rolled up.

“How dare I what?” Jeongguk quips with a quirk of his eyebrow.

“What the fuck makes you think you have the right to tell someone else not to touch me?” Jimin asks furiously.

“You’re my fiancé, I think that gives me the right—”

“Gives you the right?” Jimin says, and it takes more effort than he’ll ever reveal not to shriek in outrage. “You don’t have any rights, and you don’t get to act that way in public,” Jimin says, anger burning hot and thick in his blood. “We agreed, as per the conditions of the marriage contract, that I have control in public. Not. You.” He pauses, letting his words sink in. “I’m not your fucking toy. At least not in public.”

“Yeah okay, whatever babe,” Jeongguk says, brushing off Jimin’s anger like dust from the sleeve of his jacket.

Jimin feels the brush off, feels the way Jeongguk dismisses it and that’s fucking it. He schools his face into a carefully neutral expression because even though they’re more or less alone in the back of the car, this lesson will be better taught behind the closed doors of his room at home.

He’s going to show Jeongguk what it’s like to have control taken away from you in a situation where it should belong to you. As much as Jimin is in control in public, Jeongguk is in control in private.
But tonight he’s going to take Jeongguk’s control away.

Silence reigns for the rest of the car ride home, unbroken even when Jeongguk gets out of the car first and turns to wait as Jimin does the same, shutting the door of the car behind him and following him through the doors of the Park family estate.

Jemin toes out of his shoes and strides through the entryway, not particularly caring if Jeongguk is keeping up, and walks straight through the open door of his father’s office.

“Ah, Jimin,” his father greets warmly. “How was the meeting?”

Jemin stops in front of his father’s imposing oak desk and bows quickly in greeting. “Everything went as planned, Father,” he says, and Jeongguk wanders into the room and slouches into one of the chairs in front of his father’s desk.

“I take it you had to use the material Jeongguk’s family supplied?” asks his father, looking at Jeongguk briefly and acknowledging his presence.

“Yes, sir,” Jeongguk says, nodding politely. For all of his bored insolence that Jeongguk exudes, he knows when to be properly respectful, and Jimin’s father is not a man you disrespect if you want to live comfortably in this city.

“Good,” nods his father. “I’m glad you were able to settle this. What did you learn?”

“Based on the way things are going, the jury is sympathetic towards Jeon Corp,” Jimin says, clasping his hands behind his back. “Jeongguk will maintain contact with Baekhyun and Chanyeol to make sure we’re aware if this assessment changes in any way.”

“Well done, Jimin,” his father praises, and Jimin feels the familiar rush of satisfaction he gets from earning his father’s approval.

“Thank you, Father.” He turns to Jeongguk. “Kookie, go up to my rooms and wait for me there.” Jimin has some things to discuss with his father in private; things Jeongguk can’t know about.

Jeongguk gets up and leaves after bowing slightly to Jimin’s father in farewell.

Jemin waits until he hears the door click shut behind Jeongguk before asking, “Father, how are you feeling?”

His father picks up his favorite fountain pen and begins writing in one of his many ledgers. “I’m the same as I always am, Jimin. Asking me how I’m doing all the time isn’t going to change the fact that I’m dying.”

Jemin sighs, grabbing the blanket that’s lying discarded in one of the armchairs in the office and walking around his father’s desk to drape the light blanket around his shoulders. “Is the pain too much?” he asks, hoping that more specific questions will get his father to talk to him.

His father grumbles under his breath, but does mutter, “It’s no worse than it usually is,” if not a bit begrudgingly.

“Good,” Jimin says, patting his father softly on the shoulder in a rare show of affection. “Remember that you promised you would tell me if it got too bad.”
“I know,” his father snaps, patience fraying. “Now stop fussing over me and go back to making sure our plans for this family stay on track.”

“Yes, Father,” he submits, bowing low. He knows when he’s being dismissed.

He quietly leaves the office, shutting the door behind him.

He walks toward the grand staircase, mulling over his father’s condition. His father has taught him everything he knows about surviving in this world; he expects Jimin to be ready to take over for him, regardless of whether or not he feels like he’s ready to.

He’s not sure he’ll ever be completely ready, but negotiating the contract between himself and Jeongguk was his first major step in the right direction, and one that his father praised him for.

Jemin would do just about anything for the praise of a father he’s only had for six years, and might not have for much longer.

He reaches the top of the stairs and turns left down the hallway and into his wing of the house, his feet silent on the deep carpets that line the corridor. He pauses in front of the door to his room, heaving a deep sigh before opening the door.

Jemin steps inside, his mind heavy and his body sluggish, weighed down by everything that’s happened today—the stress of the meeting at the club, Jeongguk’s attitude and its necessary adjustment, his father’s condition. The unintentional reunion with Taehyung.

This day from hell can’t end fast enough.

He closes the door and leans his back on it gently, observing Jeongguk across the room as he unbuttons his dress shirt. Jeongguk eyes him in return, slowing his fingers to a lazy pace when he sees Jimin watching him.

“Everything okay downstairs, babe?” Jeongguk asks, and Jimin nods.

It doesn’t matter that they’re engaged, that their families are merging business operations through his future marriage to Jeongguk—Jemin can’t let the Jeon family know that his father is dying. At least, not until the transition of power is complete.

He swallows down the knot lodged in his throat, and remembers that he has a lesson to teach. He pushes off the door, and strides towards Jeongguk. Jimin pushes Jeongguk’s fingers away from his shirt and takes over, slipping each of the buttons free with quiet ease. He moves next to Jeongguk’s cufflinks, setting them gently on the dresser before turning back to Jeongguk and flattening his palms on his fiancé’s chest. He slides his hands up, over Jeongguk’s shoulders and down his biceps, pushing the shirt off and letting it fall to the floor.

Jemin meets Jeongguk’s eyes as he tugs his undershirt out from under the waistline of his pants. Jeongguk is interested, Jimin can tell, but not yet invested, so he pulls the shirt up slowly, allowing his tongue to peek out and lick one corner of his lips. When he pulls it back in, slowly, as if it’s an unconscious habit, he catches his lower lip with his teeth and nibbles softly.

Jeongguk lifts his arms and Jimin slides the undershirt over his head. When he drops it on the floor and looks back to Jeongguk’s eyes, the lust that he’s looking for is firmly lodged in Jeongguk’s gaze.

“Today was a long day,” he says softly, plucking at Jeongguk’s belt buckle. It lets go easily, and Jimin slides the belt free. He unbuttons Jeongguk’s pants and holds the top of the fly open with one
hand while he pulls the zipper down with the other.

Jimin locks eyes with Jeongguk again as he drags his fingertips softly back up the length of Jeongguk’s clothed cock, already half hard, and Jeongguk lets out a slow, involuntarily shaky breath.

“Help me let go,” Jimin whispers, wrapping his fingers around Jeongguk’s hips and dislodging his pants from their place there. Jeongguk’s ass and thighs are too perfectly sculpted, his dress slacks too perfectly fitted for them to actually fall off with so little effort on Jimin’s part, but it’s enough to give Jeongguk ideas, and that’s Jimin’s goal.

When Jeongguk speaks, his voice comes out rough. “How much do you need to let go of?” he asks, his pupils already blown wide, his lips forming the words with effort. Jimin’s eyes dart to those lips as they move around the words, and he feels heat begin to pool in his stomach.

Jimin dips the first two joints of his fingertips beneath the waistband of Jeongguk’s underwear, scraping his manicured nails lightly against the skin at the V of Jeongguk’s hips and letting his hands hang there, the weight of them pulling against the elastic band.

“All of it,” Jimin says, and when he meets Jeongguk’s gaze again, Jimin knows he’s already won.

“Take off your clothes,” Jeongguk demands, and Jimin lets him take over.

He sheds the pieces of his tux one at a time, moving eagerly, until Jeongguk orders him to go slower. Jimin turns it into a show, then, bending and flexing as he slides his hands along his own skin, tracing muscular limbs and soft curves.

He doesn’t operate the most successful strip club in all of New York City without knowing exactly how to work an audience.

The teasing act gets to him too, though. The longer Jimin drags it out, the more anticipation builds in him, like a shot of adrenaline coursing through his veins, and he can feel himself hardening under Jeongguk’s intent gaze.

Jeongguk stops Jimin before he can remove his boxer briefs, leaving the skin-tight material to cling to him in all the right places. “Get over here and blow me,” Jeongguk commands, and Jimin’s parted lips curve into a wicked grin.

He sinks to his knees on the Persian rug in front of Jeongguk, and pulls his pants down earnestly this time, gliding the palms of his hands down corded muscle as the slacks fall to the ground. He worships Jeongguk’s body with his fingertips, ghosting them back up to his ass, cupping gently as he leans forward and licks Jeongguk’s cock through the fabric of his boxers.

Jeongguk grabs Jimin’s silver hair and yanks his head back, so that Jimin is forced to look at him. “I said blow me, not tease me,” he growls, and a shiver of ecstasy shakes its way up Jimin’s spine.

Jeongguk releases his firm grip on Jimin, but doesn’t untangle his hand from Jimin’s hair. Jimin likes it when Jeongguk exerts control over him like this, and Jeongguk knows it—is offering this as incentive for good behavior—so Jimin complies and does as he’s told. He pulls Jeongguk’s boxers down completely, and Jeongguk steps out of them, kicking them off to the side with a flick of his ankle. And then Jimin goes to work.

He doesn’t ease Jeongguk into it. Jimin likes the sharp gasp, the sudden inhale, that he pulls out of Jeongguk as he wraps his lips around the head of Jeongguk’s cock and slides all the way down in
one smooth, practiced motion. Jeongguk’s hand tightens in Jimin’s hair and pulls him back off his erection, Jimin dragging the flat of his tongue against the underside of Jeongguk’s cock as he submits to Jeongguk’s guidance.

His lips cling tight as Jeongguk pulls back. Jimin gives a little suck when he reaches the head, working his tongue over the slit before Jeongguk’s hand slackens enough to let him slide down the shaft again.

“Fuck, baby, your mouth is so perfect,” Jeongguk breathes, and Jimin hums around his cock in agreement.

A full body tremor wracks through Jeongguk, and Jimin would smirk if his lips weren’t currently stretched around something better.

Jimin sucks at Jeongguk’s cock greedily, taking him all the way in and swallowing, chipping away at Jeongguk’s self-control with hollowed cheeks and soft licks. He breaks Jeongguk down slowly, until Jeongguk’s hips are quivering with the effort of restraint and his breaths come ragged and abrupt.

He loves this, the control he has through submission. It’s the ultimate form of manipulation—something Jimin has learned to be very good at—and he won’t lie to himself: using this power turns him on, and tonight is no exception.

He’s incredibly hard. His underwear is uncomfortably tight and stained wet from precum, and Jimin is desperate to touch himself, but he knows he can’t. Not yet.

Jeongguk will come first, whether he wants to or not.

Jimin redoubles his efforts, picking up his pace and pushing through the ache beginning to settle in his jaw. Jeongguk’s hand tightens in his hair, his arm flexing with the movement, and Jimin knows what Jeongguk wants. He lets his jaw fall loose and hollows his cheeks, and he tugs gently at Jeongguk’s hips, urging him on.

Jeongguk discards his restraint, and fucks Jimin’s mouth.

He thrusts hard and fast, sliding in and out of the heat of Jimin’s mouth, and Jimin groans around him.

Jeongguk’s hips stutter once as the vibrations ruin the last of his self-control. Jeongguk moves to pull back, and Jimin knows that it’s time.

He braces his hands on the back of Jeongguk’s thighs, pulling Jeongguk closer, and takes back his control, slamming Jeongguk’s cock as far into his mouth as he can take it. He swallows once, twice, three times, holding Jeongguk tight against him, and then Jeongguk is coming hard down the back of his throat.

Jeongguk gasps as his orgasm hits him, and Jimin pulls back, swallowing and sucking gently to work Jeongguk through it.

He moves to push Jimin off, and Jimin catches him and eases him down to the floor. Jeongguk only rests for a minute or two before he’s glaring at Jimin.

“What the fuck, Jimin? You know better than to make me come first.”

Jimin just holds his gaze, steel in his eyes. “And you know better than to be possessive and controlling in public.”
“Seriously? You’re still on that?” Jeongguk asks, sitting up slowly.

“Have you learned your lesson yet?” Jimin responds.

Jeongguk watches him for a moment, his eyes holding Jimin’s for a full minute before sliding down and taking in Jimin’s unflagging erection. “Get your ass on the bed,” Jeongguk says, his voice hardening.

Jemin stands and walks to the bed, sitting on the edge and watching Jeongguk expectantly. He knows what’s coming—Jeongguk’s going to put him in his place—but he doesn’t care. His message has been delivered, and Jeongguk has been warned against future idiocy.

“Prep yourself. I’m not doing it,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin’s eyebrow climbs. He doesn’t argue, though.

He reaches for the lube on the nightstand and scoots back, into the center of the mattress, uncapping the bottle and squeezing a generous glob into his hand. He tosses the bottle away and positions himself on his hand and knees, reaching around to rub against his hole and slip one finger inside.

They fuck often enough that there’s no pain, but the lube’s still a little cold, and Jimin sucks in a quiet breath.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Jeongguk walk to the nightstand and open the drawer, but, unsurprised, he dismisses the action and focuses on working himself open.

Jeongguk watches, a little more patient than usual—perhaps because he’s come once already?—but just as Jimin’s about to slide a third finger into himself, Jeongguk climbs onto the bed behind him. Jeongguk grabs Jimin’s hair and pulls him up, his back flush against Jeongguk’s chest, and reaches around to slide a silicone ring slowly down to the base of his cock.

Jimin swears internally—he’s already so damn hard and Jeongguk’s toy is going to be a fucking menace. Only a small gasp escapes him as Jeongguk’s fingers stroke delicately down and up his cock. Once the cock ring is in place, Jeongguk pushes him back down onto all fours, forcing a curl into Jimin’s spine that leaves him struggling to control his breath.

“What are you done yet?” Jeongguk demands, and Jimin grits his teeth.

“Almost.”

Jimin finishes his work quickly, avoiding his prostate, because, honestly, with the cock ring on, that’s only going to increase his torture. Jeongguk drags his fingernails up and down the back of Jimin’s thigh as he waits, and Jimin can’t suppress the shudder that slithers through him.

When he’s ready, he pulls his fingers free and wipes them clean on the bedspread.

“Safe word?” Jeongguk asks idly.

“Fuck,” Jimin swears at the implication of needing one.

Jeongguk laughs. “That’s not a very good safe word, darling. I’ll have you crying that out in no time. Pick a new one.”

Jimin glares at Jeongguk over his shoulder, and spits out, “Mochi.”

“Mm, that’s better, baby,” Jeongguk says, bending over Jimin. “Sweet and gooey, just like I’ll make
you.” He bites into Jimin’s shoulder, his cock, hard once more, sliding against Jimin’s ass. His arm wraps around Jimin’s waist, and he takes Jimin’s cock in his fist, pumping lightly. The slide is easy, with how much leaking Jimin’s been doing, and Jeongguk finds an agonizingly slow rhythm.

Jimin’s grinding his teeth against the gasp that wants to escape when Jeongguk twists his wrist as his hand pulls up Jimin’s length. A sharp sound rips out of Jimin as he arches into the pleasure, pushing back into Jeongguk’s hips. Jeongguk smirks against his skin before pulling his tongue flat along the bitemark he’s made.

Jeongguk groans. “Ughh, you react just right, baby. Those sounds you make are pure sin.”

“Then put your dick in me and make me make more,” Jimin pants, trying to hold his desperation at bay and failing.

“Are you sure? I feel like this teasing thing is going really well.”

“Fucker,” Jimin says.

“Asshole,” Jeongguk replies.

“I have one,” Jimin spits out. “Use it.”

Jeongguk snorts his amusement, but lifts himself off Jimin’s back. He pushes Jimin down into the duvet, spreading his legs wide and draping himself on top of Jimin. The tip of Jeongguk’s cock catches on Jimin’s hole as he settles in place, and Jimin pushes back up into it, forcing his hips off the mattress.

Jeongguk growls, shoving Jimin back down, and Jimin whimpers, the friction against his cock almost unbearable.

“I’m gonna fuck you like this, baby,” Jeongguk says in Jimin’s ear, his voice throaty and thick. “Slow and deep. I’m gonna draw it out. I’m gonna make you beg me to let you come. And then when I’m ready, I’m gonna fuck into you so hard that you can’t sit tomorrow. And I’m not gonna touch you once.”

A whine bursts out of Jimin, and Jeongguk reaches up to pin both his hands against the bed.

“You’re not going to touch yourself, either,” Jeongguk says, as he slides inside. “Hold tight, baby.”

The slow drag of Jeongguk’s cock is delicious for all of a minute before it transforms into hell. Jimin feels himself unraveling, falling apart at the seams in a way that he won’t be able to fix, his mind descending into an addled haze of pleas and sobs.

Jimin has no idea how long it lasts, unaware of everything except the constant pressure inside and out, the coil of heat that’s built up in his abdomen and sunk lower. He needs to come, needs to find relief, and Jeongguk holds it at bay.

He tries the only thing he can think of to goad Jeongguk into finishing this, and clenches down around Jeongguk’s cock. Jeongguk moans, and Jimin whimpers, because it works, and Jeongguk is fucking him harder.

He slams into Jimin’s prostate repeatedly, biting down again on Jimin’s shoulder, and then he’s coming, fucking deep into Jimin and groaning into the crook of Jimin’s neck. He milks his orgasm, drawing out his pleasure before pulling out and pushing himself off Jimin.
Jimin sobs harder, because he still hasn’t come, and he wants to, he needs to, so badly, he needs it, but Jeongguk is getting dressed again and Jimin can hardly raise himself up off the mattress.

“Kookie,” Jimin begs, and Jeongguk just smirks.

“Finish yourself, baby. You have my permission.”

If Jimin wasn’t wound so tight, he’d kill Jeongguk.

“Get the fuck out,” Jimin says hoarsely, rolling himself over shakily and trying to get the cock ring off.

“Need help first?” Jeongguk asks, and Jimin vows to go through with the murder when he has better control over his limbs.

He struggles with the plastic ring for another second or two, the grip in his fingers insufficient, before he grates out, “Please.”

Jeongguk laughs, and says, “What was that? I couldn’t hear you over the whimpering.”

“*Fucking take this thing off,*” Jimin hisses, and Jeongguk finally obliges, tossing the toy on the bed next to him.

Freed, Jimin doesn’t even have to touch himself before his orgasm tears through him. Cum splatters thickly over his abs, and his vision goes dark with the force of his release.

Jeongguk grins smugly, murmuring a soft, “Good night, darling,” and blowing Jimin a kiss before slipping out the door.

“Fucker,” Jimin says again, melting into the bed, irritation and pleasure swirling together through his veins.

***

Seokjin ushers out the last of the patrons, sending them out the doors and locking them as the last few guests stagger out on the sidewalk.

Taehyung heaves a sigh of relief and slumps against the bar, more than ready to change back into his clothes and head home for the night.

“Okay kid,” Yoongi says, stepping up next to him. “Now the real work begins.”

“What do you mean?” Taehyung asks apprehensively.

“We’re going to stay here and you’re going to learn how to make all of our specialty drinks—and what they taste like—before you leave tonight,” Yoongi says with no mercy.

“What?” Taehyung groans, knowing that if he stays much later he’s going to miss the last bus connection out to the projects. He pleads with Jin, who’s walking past the bar, presumably on his way to whatever office he has as head of security. Jin just shrugs at him, absolutely no help at all.

“While you do that, I’m going to be restocking for tomorrow night.”

Yoongi’s tone is one that leaves little room for argument, so Taehyung resigns himself to another hour of work and a sleepless night and day walking around the city until he can come in for work the next night.
“Okay,” he sighs. “What do I need to know?”

“I’m not drinking that,” Taehyung says, not more than twenty minutes later. He’s staring at a cocktail that Yoongi called Fire, and he’s almost certain that he will die if he drinks it.

“You don’t have to drink the whole fucking thing.” Yoongi snorts, putting fresh bottles on the shelves behind him. “But you do have to taste it.”

“Youngi, I wouldn’t serve this drink to my worst enemy,” Taehyung protests. “I know what’s in this drink. No way am I drinking any of it.”

Yoongi turns around and scowls at him. “If you don’t take a fuckin’ sip of this you’ll never know what to recommend to those assholes who think they can drink anyone under the table.”

Taehyung thinks about fighting Yoongi on this, he really does, but he ultimately decides that it’s not worth it. Yoongi looks pretty stubborn about this, and Taehyung really needs this job, so he sucks it up and takes a sip.

“Oh man, holy shit,” he coughs. Fire is right; the drink fucking burns on the way down.

Next to him, Yoongi has the gall to fucking laugh at him, and if Taehyung weren’t so busy trying not to cough away the burn in his throat he would kick him.

“Now you know what to recommend to those cocky assholes that think they own the place,” Yoongi smirks, an ‘I told you so’ expression on his face.

“I fucking hate you,” is Taehyung’s response.

“I can promise you,” says a new voice approaching from behind him. “That’s not the first time he’s heard that.”

Taehyung starts in surprise as the headline dancer from before—Hope—comes and leans against the bar. Now that the house lights are on and he’s not distracted by literally everything about the way Hope moves, he focuses on the vivid purple color of his hair.

“Nice hair,” he says, in the same moment that Yoongi says, “Yeah, well fuck you, Hobi.”

Hope—Hobi?—ignores Taehyung in favor of replying to Yoongi. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” Hope says with a smirk.

“Fucking hell,” spits Yoongi, furiously wiping down the counter of the bar in what Taehyung thinks must be an effort to look busy.

“Um, hi,” Taehyung says, realizing that maybe Yoongi needs a moment to reset his brain after that exchange. “I’m Taehyung, the new bartender.”

“I’m Hoseok!” he chirps, eyes brightening as he smiles wide, shaking Taehyung’s hand. “But you can call me Hobi. Nice to meet you.”

Taehyung smiles back, relieved to find someone who seems to be as naturally cheerful as he is. “I saw you dance earlier,” he says letting go of Hoseok’s hand. “You’re really good.”

“Thanks,” Hoseok says, smiling again.
“Hobi over here is the most requested dancer,” says Namjoon, walking up to the bar and joining them as Taehyung and Yoongi finish stocking the bar. “Don’t let his humility fool you.”

Yoongi sorts and mutters something that sounds suspiciously like ‘

humility, my ass’ under his breath, but it goes ignored.

“Here,” says Namjoon, holding out a card to Taehyung. “This is your badge. Just press this to the reader by the back door and you’ll be able to get in anytime.”

“Awesome,” Taehyung says, taking it from him. Maybe he can sneak back into the club later this morning and sleep on the couch in the breakroom or something.

“Are you guys almost done here?” Namjoon asks.

“Yeah, we’re done,” Yoongi says, yawning.

“Then get out of here, go home,” Namjoon says, making shooing motions at them before turning to walk back toward his office.

“Where you headed, kid?” Yoongi asks, turning and steering Taehyung back toward the breakroom, Hoseok following behind them.

Taehyung doesn’t really want to tell Yoongi where he lives, but there isn’t an easy way to deflect such a direct question, so he mumbles, “The projects, south end of the city.”

Yoongi squints at him. “Didn’t the last connection for that area leave,” he looks down at his watch, “shit, ten minutes ago?”

Taehyung squints and combs a hand through his hair. “Uh, yeah I guess.”

Yoongi halts in the middle of the back hallway, and Taehyung watches as he studies him, not missing the way his eyes briefly flicker to Hoseok’s. “Okay, well, fuck that shit. You can crash at my place tonight.”

“I'll see you both tomorrow,” Hoseok says, brushing past then both and disappearing into the dancer’s room.

“See you,” Taehyung calls as Hoseok disappears through the door. “Are you sure?” He asks Yoongi, not wanting to impose.

Yoongi rolls his eyes. “Just get in there and get changed,” he says, gesturing to the breakroom door. “I’m ready to go home and sleep for ten fucking hours.”

Taehyung doesn’t need to be told twice.

Chapter End Notes

Just to reassure everyone, this fic is Vmin endgame. We promise.

Callie wrote that Jikook sex scene. Needless to say, when I read it I was Jungshook.

Everything else was written by yours truly <3 Oh, and by the way, both of us cranked out more words in one sitting than we have maybe ever (Callie broke a personal record.
with 2.6K for that sex scene). I wrote 6k words, 5k of which were in one sitting. That's how much we're dying to get this to you.
-Kiki

Yep. That scene was me. I own it. 2017 is the year of no shame. <3
-Callie

We both spent a lot of time researching drinks for this fic and all of the drinks mentioned are actual drinks you can make! (Pls don't try them if you're underage)
Fire Cocktail
Cypher Shot

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter

Find Callie on <Tumblr | Twitter | Discord
Jimin disappeared from his life so suddenly, and even after a few days of knowing Jimin is well and alive and his new boss, the pain of losing him is still there. Except now it’s magnified, doubled in intensity because there are years separating them that he’ll never get back, won’t ever know about unless Jimin actually tells him what happened.

OMO guys, sorry this update took us a bit longer than we anticipated?? but it's a loooong chapter, and we wanted to get it just right. there's some great--well. you'll see soon enough. ;)

also, we went back and made some quick edits to chapter 2, for continuity. so that you don't have to reread, what we changed were details of the court case. it's no longer a panel of judges hearing the case, but a full jury. anyway! here it is, we hope you enjoy!

-callie

Jimin is not pleased when he’s woken up by a phone call at 10 a.m. He reaches for his cell, glaring blearily at the numbers on his alarm clock and patting around on his nightstand until he finds the obnoxious device, and slides the green ‘accept’ icon without bothering to look at who it is.

“I have only been asleep for four hours,” he growls into the receiver, rubbing his eyes groggily, “so this had better be good.”

“I’m really sorry to bother you, Jimin, but I assumed you didn’t know yet, and you need to.”

Baekhyun’s voice hits Jimin like a pitcher full of ice water to the face, and Jimin bolts upward, the comforter falling to his waist. He’s definitely awake now.

He flings the covers off his legs, cool air turning his bare skin to gooseflesh, and Jimin pulls the phone away from his ear long enough to check his caller ID. It’s an unknown number—a burner phone if Baekhyun’s smart. “Don’t tell me there’s a problem,” he warns, standing up and stretching. He grimaces against the ache in his lower back. “It’s only been three days since we talked, Baekhyun. What the hell changed in three days?”

He’s already stepping into his bathroom, the tile cold under his feet, when Baekhyun drops his bomb. “One of the jurors we were counting on is going to be an issue, I think.”

“You think, or you know?” Jimin asks. “There’s a difference.”

“She actually cried during the testimony yesterday afternoon. That’s too much empathy for me to feel comfortable,” Baekhyun answers.
“Fuck,” Jimin swears. He opens the shower door and leans into the stall, twisting the nob and turning the water as hot as it will go. He’s going to need it today, he can tell. The shower door swings closed behind him as he shuffles past the jacuzzi tub to the sink. “Okay, I need a name.”

“I can’t give you that!” Baekhyun protests, and Jimin stills. He catches sight of himself in the mirror and rubs his eyes. He looks like shit.

With only an audience of one, Jimin lets his frustration show on his face. “Baekhyun,” he says slowly, enunciating carefully. “You waited until this morning to tell me about something pivotal that happened yesterday. You woke me up, after four hours of sleep—on a Friday, no less, which is the busiest night in my club—to deliver bad news. You stuck your dick in a Congressman—repeatedly. So don’t tell me that you can’t do this.”

“But—”

Jemin lets the tiniest bit of calm anger to creep into his voice as steam fills the bathroom and begins to cling to the mirror. “Baekhyun, are you testing me?” he asks quietly, and the silence on the other end of the phone is deafening.

“…No,” Baekhyun finally says.

Jemin allows himself a small, dangerous smile and channels the expression through his voice. “You’d better not be. Because I’m infinitely scarier than Kookie, whom you were supposed to call if something went wrong. If you fuck up with him, he’ll ruin you—your social standing, your marriage, your career… If you fuck up with me, I will end you on a molecular level.”

He pauses for dramatic effect, because ninety-five percent of a good threat is its execution, and then delivers the final blow.

“I am not here to hold your hand, Baekhyun,” he says quietly, a hard edge to his tone. “Get me the name. You have twelve hours before I unleash hell on you. That’s generous, don’t you think? I’ll be waiting at my club.”

Jemin ends the call without waiting for a reply, and pulls up Jeongguk’s contact. He presses send.

The phone rings. And rings. And rings.

Jemin seethes.

Jeongguk’s voicemail finally picks up. ’You got Kookie, take a bite—beeep.’

“Get your ass out of bed and call me, Kookie. We’ve got a problem. And if I have to be awake at 10 o-fucking-clock because of it, so do you.” He starts to lower the phone, and then thinks better of it.

“And what are you, five? For the millionth time, change your fucking voicemail message. It’s unprofessional.”

Jemin ends the call, as satisfied as he can be considering the trajectory of his morning—which isn’t really very satisfied at all—and brushes his teeth. He stares out the floor-to-ceiling window as he does, taking in the view from his rooftop penthouse. It’s rare that he has the opportunity to do so during the late-morning hours.

It’s grungy—a dull, uninteresting palate of colors speckled with dull, uninteresting people scurrying around like ants.

He hates it.
The nighttime view is so much better, when the lights pulse up the streets beneath him and breathe life into the city, and the people lose their focus and move about more freely. When the sun sinks, it takes their responsibilities and commitments with it, leaving behind raw desire and reckless candor.

That’s the city Jimin lives for.

He abandons the view and returns to the sink, spitting the foam from his mouth and bending over to suck a mouthful of water from the spigot to rinse with. When he’s done, he takes a swig of mouthwash from the bottle on the counter, and swishes it around his mouth, silently counting out two minutes as he does.

The repetitive, habitual motion is soothing, and Jimin feels a bit calmer when he’s finished. He turns to walk to the shower, the steam thick now in the room, but is stopped by his ringtone.

Jemin picks up the phone, the tension returning immediately and settling heavily in his shoulders.

“ Took you long enough,” he says.

“ Shut the fuck up. I’m still asleep,” Jeongguk groans.

“ Not for long,” Jimin replies. “ Baekhyun called me.”

Jemin hears the rustle of sheets, and then, “ He did what?”

“ He called me.”

“ Motherfucking—”

“ Can we move this along?” Jimin interrupts. “ I want to shower before hell freezes over. Curse him out for not properly following instructions later.”

“ Whatever. Why’d he call?”

“ We’ve got a crying juror in danger of flipping, so you’re up. Take care of it.”

Jeongguk hums, unconcerned. “ Well, we’ve already got profiles built for each of the jurors, so dealing with it will be easy. I’ll figure out who it is and it’ll be fixed in a couple hours.”

“ No mess, Kookie,” Jimin cautions. “ This has to stay one-hundred-percent below radar, or everything is fucked.”

“ I’m not stupid, Jimin,” Jeongguk replies.

“ Could have fooled me. Call me when it’s done,” Jimin orders.

“ Yes, darling. Should I let you know after I’ve taken a shit, too?” Jeongguk says, and Jimin can hear the smirk in his voice.

He hangs up on the fucker, and finally steps into the shower, the water unrelentingly hot, even after his phone calls.

It’s absolute bliss.

When he’s finished in the shower, Jimin dries off and drops the towel in a pile on the bathroom floor.
He blow-dries his hair, styling it carefully and hair-spraying it in place. Next, he pulls concealer from the drawer and smooths his complexion, hiding the bags under his eyes. He turns his face left, then right, studying his reflection, before deciding he needs a little more color today than his four hours of sleep could provide naturally.

A trace of blush to contour his cheeks, a hint of eyeliner and eyeshadow to give him the suggestion of sensuality, and a touch of color on his full lips to draw the eye. It’s Friday, after all, and he owns a strip club. Sex appeal is practically a job requirement, and if people underestimate him because he wears make-up, it’s all the better for him.

Satisfied with his appearance, he pads into his closet, picking a grey three-piece suit, and a lavender shirt. He dresses quickly, only hesitating for a moment before picking a skinny, eggplant-colored tie to complete the ensemble.

He makes a pot of coffee, then calls down to the concierge to request the day’s papers and order his car. When the coffee’s ready, he pours it in a tall travel mug, adds a dash of creamer, and snaps the lid on top, heading toward the door. He stops to shrug on an overcoat—the days are getting chillier as the season moves toward winter—and sips his coffee as waits for the elevator.

When he emerges from the front of the building, Jimin’s car is waiting, and the driver offers him his newspapers, car door already held open for him. Jimin settles himself in the backseat, unfolding the papers and skimming through the news. Twenty minutes later, they roll to a stop in front of LIE, and Seokjin is opening his door.

“You’re early today, boss,” Seokjin greets him, and Jimin grunts.

“It hasn’t been the smoothest of mornings, Jin.” He steps into the interior of the club, his eyes relieved of the harsh midday sun, and lets his head of security take his jacket.

“I’m sorry to hear that. Joonie and I were just about to order some food. Can we get you anything?” Jin asks, walking Jimin to his office.

“Hmm, where are you ordering from?” Jimin asks absently as he flips the lights on and drops his newspapers in the recycling bin. He inhales the last sip of his coffee, looking at Jin over the lip of the mug.

“We were going to get Chinese, but we could probably be convinced to order from that panini place you like so much,” Jin offers as he hangs Jimin’s coat on the rack by the door.

“Either is fine. You know what I like from both places, so the two of you can choose. Just—” Jimin sets his empty mug down on his desk, making a woeful face at it. “—Get me more coffee while you’re at it?”

“Of course,” Jin smiles fondly. “Let me know if you need anything else.”

“Thanks, Jin.”

Jin pulls the office door shut, and Jimin sinks into his chair, leaning back slightly. He closes his eyes and breathes a sigh, and—

Nope. He’s gonna fall asleep if he does that.

Jimin sits up reluctantly, pulling his phone from his pocket and checking his notifications.

No new calls, no new messages.
What is Jeongguk doing? It’s been two hours since Jimin called him, and he hasn’t heard a peep back yet. Jeongguk said it himself—they already had profiles built for each of the jury members, so what could possibly be taking so long?

Jimin shakes off his growing anxiety and toggles on his computer.

At the top of his list of emails is one from Namjoon, stating that he’s finished balancing the club’s finances for the previous month, and they’re ready for Jimin to take a look. Jimin sighs, and opens their bookkeeping software.

He stares at the numbers for the next forty-five minutes, trying to find any holes in Namjoon’s work, but Jimin’s attention keeps sliding back to his phone, where it sits silently on his desk.

Finally, he gives up on the bookkeeping. Namjoon is an actual genius and has long since perfected the art of hiding the extortion money his family funnels through the club, seamlessly working it into LIE’s profits in a quarter of the time it would take Jimin to do the same thing. He trusts Namjoon to take care of it this once without his direct supervision.

Jin drops off his food when it arrives and Jimin gratefully gulps at the coffee that accompanies it, hoping that the caffeine will help his focus, but the take-out container sits ignored on his desk. The longer it takes Jeongguk to call, the more Jimin’s stomach churns in discomfort, and the idea of food is less than pleasant.

He tries to focus on approving the alcohol and cosmetics orders that need to be placed, and the hundred other little things necessary to running a club, but the coffee in his system only makes him more restless, compounding the concern that grows every minute his phone is mute.

Throughout the afternoon, Jimin thinks about calling Jeongguk probably once every three minutes, but pushes the impulse aside. Jeongguk knows his business, and if Jimin pesters him about it, it’ll start shit he doesn’t want to deal with. For all he knows, Jeongguk is baiting him with his silence, and Jimin is hellbent on not falling for it.

He can be patient.

Right?

Right. He can be patient.

When five o’clock rolls around, the dread is so thick in Jimin’s stomach that he feels like he might throw up. And if he’s going to actually throw up, it might as well be because of booze, he decides. It’s not like he’s getting any actual work done, anyway, and the prospect of getting drunk and forgetting the worries swirling through his head is enticing.

He stands up, pocketing his phone, and exits his office with more purpose than he’s been able to muster all day, making his way back out to the bar at the front of the club, thinking about the ‘89 whiskey tucked away on the top shelf.

His feet freeze when he realizes that Namjoon and Seokjin aren’t the only other people in the club anymore. Taehyung’s moving behind the bar, hours early to work, snatching a bottle of blue liqueur off the shelf, his tongue sticking out between his lips in concentration.

Jimin hesitates.

He really wants that drink, but he’s been avoiding Taehyung for a reason…
Fuck it. He wants that drink because it’s a distraction from the worry roiling in the pit of his stomach. Getting the drink and dealing with Taehyung…well. He supposes that’s a 2-for-1 deal in the diversion department.

He’ll just have to be careful, but that’s no more and no less than business as usual for him.

He takes a deep breath and approaches. Taehyung’s back is to him as he works, intent on whatever he’s mixing, so Jimin leans against the bar casually and takes the opportunity to study him.

He’s tall and slender, and the way his shirt stretches across his back as he moves makes it clear to Jimin that he’s the lean sort of muscular. He looks good, and Jimin wonders for the span of two seconds what it would have been like growing up next to him, watching him become the young man standing in front of Jimin now.

Maybe he could have talked him out of the fire-engine red hair.

Jimin snorts at the thought, and Taehyung jerks in surprise, spinning around to face Jimin and knocking over whatever he was working on with his elbow.

“Fuck!” he yells, grabbing for the shot glass and missing it. It crashes to the floor, splattering blue liquid all over the cuff of his jeans and breaking with an audible crack.

“You seem to break a lot of glasses,” Jimin notes, smirking. “Maybe I ought to start charging you for them.”

Taehyung’s eyes go wide, the color draining from his face as his attention snaps back to Jimin, and Jimin’s smirk turns into a laugh.

“I’m kidding. Shit, I snuck up on you, it’s not actually your fault,” Jimin says. He winks coyly. “At least, not this time.”

Taehyung, still a little pale, mutters, “Right.”

A silence falls between them as Taehyung cleans up his mess, quietly bemoaning his stained pants, and Jimin watches him work. When the glass is disposed of and the bar rag, now a splotchy blue, is tossed in the bin under the cupboard for washing, Taehyung meets Jimin’s eyes.

“Jimine—”

“No,” Jimin says firmly. “It’s just Jimin.”

Taehyung swallows visibly. “Okay, Jimin—” he tries again, but Jimin knows can’t answer the question that’s coming next, so he cuts him off again.

“Make me a drink,” Jimin says.

“You’re— You’re only 18,” Taehyung hesitates. “I could lose my license serving you.”

“That didn’t bother you a couple nights ago,” Jimin grouses, staring Taehyung down.

To Jimin’s eternal disappointment, Taehyung holds his ground, meeting his boss’s gaze firmly with a stare of his own.

Jimin sighs. “You’re not on the clock, and who am I gonna tell? The owner of the club? The cops?” He raises one eyebrow pointedly, and waits for Taehyung to give in.
It happens faster than he anticipates. Taehyung deflates a little before pulling himself back together, and asking, “What do you want?”

“I came out here for the ‘89 whiskey, but your misadventures have me curious. What were you making?”

Taehyung blinks. “Uh…it was just something I was trying out. Yoongi hasn’t tried it, yet, so I probably shouldn’t—”

“Does it have a name?” Jimin asks.

Taehyung pauses before saying softly, “I was thinking maybe Stigma.”

“And what’s in it?”

“Vodka and Curaçao Blue, and a couple of drops of Irish cream.”

Intrigued, Jimin folds his arms across his chest and leans in toward Taehyung. “Make me one.”

“Don’t blame me if it’s shit,” Taehyung replies, fetching a shot glass and setting it on the bar in front of Jimin.

Taehyung grabs the cocktail shaker he was using, dumping the old ice out of it and scooping in fresh. He measures out two ounces of vodka and two ounces of the Curaçao Blue before capping the shaker and flicking his wrist back and forth.

He strains the mixture, pouring a fourth of it into the shot glass in front of Jimin, and turns around, reaching across to the workspace he’d been using previously.

Jimin reaches for the shot, intending to find out what it smells like, but Taehyung’s back and smacking his hand away as he drips a bit of Bailey’s onto the top of Jimin’s drink with an eyedropper.

Each drop hits the top of the blue liquid with a tiny splatter before sinking into the drink like a stain, tan streaks racing to the bottom of the shot glass.

Jimin stares at it, surprised, before looking up at Taehyung. He slides the shot towards Jimin and waits expectantly.

“It’s beautiful,” Jimin says, awed, as he lifts it up to inspect it. The colors begin to blend together just the littlest bit with his careless movement, and he takes that as his cue to throw it back.

It’s citrusy and a bit bitter, and the tiny hint of Irish cream is smooth on his tongue, teasing in its fleeting presence.

A drawn-out moan escapes Jimin as he sets the shot glass down on the bar. His eyes find Taehyung’s, and his childhood friend blushes nervously.

“Well?” he asks, and Jimin grins.

“Yoongi’s gonna hate it.”

Taehyung wilts, and Jimin laughs. “He’s gonna hate it because it’s really fucking good, and he didn’t think of it.”

Taehyung smiles a wide, boxy smile—one that makes Jimin reel with momentary nostalgia—and
“Thank God. I was terrified for a minute that I’d killed you.”

His choice of words sink in and the smile slips a bit from his lips, and Jimin scrambles to salvage the happiness on Taehyung’s face.

“And the eyedropper for the Irish cream—that’s the icing on the cake. He’s gonna swear like a sailor every time he has to make one of these, and it’s gonna be priceless.” Jimin pauses, then asks, “How’d you come up with it?”

“Ah…” Taehyung scrunches his face in a pained expression. “I thought it’d be pretty?”

“For fuck’s sake—seriously? You didn’t build it by taste?” Jimin asks, astonished, and when Taehyung shakes his head, Jimin bursts out in laughter.

Taehyung giggles along, and Jimin feels the knot in his stomach loosening.

He tells himself that it’s the effects of alcohol on an empty stomach, and he motions for Taehyung to pour him another.

Five more shots later, Jimin feels pleasantly floaty, the worry in his gut having melted into a pool of cozy warmth, and he doesn’t think much of it when Taehyung bites his lip and goes quiet—not beyond how appealing it makes his lips look, anyway.

When his phone rings, he’s only irritated by it.

“Aren’t you going to get that?” Taehyung asks.

Jimin looks at the caller ID—it’s Jeongguk, finally—and runs his hand through his hair. He swipes his thumb across the screen to answer and takes a couple steps away from the bar.

“You took your damn time, Kookie,” he says, working to keep from slurring. Maybe getting drunk wasn’t a good idea, after all.

“There was an unforeseen complication,” Jeongguk replies. “We need to talk about it. Where are you?”

“’M at LIE,” Jimin answers slowly.

Okay, I can be there in, like, thirty minutes,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin panics.

“No!” he yelps into the phone. “You can’t come here! I’ll come meet you. Stay there, an’ I’ll come to you, okay? Tha’s fine, right? Imma come righ now.”

Jeongguk can’t come here. Taehyung’s here, and Jimin’s drunk, and they’ve been laughing together, and Jeongguk will be able to sniff out the source of Taehyung’s happiness faster than a bloodhound on a fresh trail.

“Jimin are you drunk?” Jeongguk asks, incredulity obvious in his voice.

“No,” Jimin denies uselessly. “’M definitely not.”

“Shit. Seriously, Jimin?”

Jimin cringes, pushing his fingers through his hair again. “You weren’t calling, okay? I was nervous.”
“So you got drunk on a Friday before the club even opened,” Jeongguk chides flatly. “Fuck. Is there somebody around that can babysit your ass until I get there?”

“Oh...yeah,” Jimin admits, peeking sideways at Taehyung. He’s watching Jimin as he cleans up his supplies and readies things for the club to open. Jimin plucks at his fringe, tugging the stubborn strands of hair back into place.

“Alright. Don’t you fucking leave before I get there. We’re gonna have a conversation, you little shit,” Jeongguk growls, and the line goes dead.

Jimin swallows hard.

Whoops.

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Taehyung looks up as Jimin staggers back to the bar. He makes a mental note that Stigma is a stronger drink than he thought it might be. That, or Jimin is a lightweight.

He doesn’t think Jimin is a lightweight.

“Everything okay?” He asks, taking in Jimin’s pale face and the way he looks faintly nauseous.

“M so fucking,” Jimin moans, slumping onto the counter of the bar.

Taehyung grimaces, already dreading having to do another wipe down of the counter before opening. “Maybe you should sit down?” He suggests.

“Yeah, that’s—” Jimin pauses, looking up at him with a lazy smile, “—probably a good idea.” He pushes away from the counter, only to sway alarmingly.

Taehyung rushes around the counter to catch Jimin around the waist before he falls over. He starts leading him over to one of the cream armchairs until Jimin shakes his head and makes a lazy motion to the upper floor balcony.

“You haven’t eaten anything?” Taehyung asks exasperatedly. No wonder he’s so gone after six shots.

Jimin’s only response is to giggle into Taehyung’s shoulder.

He doesn’t know how he manages to get the giggling and stumbling Jimin up the narrow spiral of stairs, but they make it into one of the wing-backed booths without incident. He gets up to leave once Jimin is safely seated, but he snags Taehyung’s arm and stops him from leaving.

“You have to stay with me,” he says, slurring slightly. Taehyung hates the way his heart kicks into triple time, the reply ‘yes of course, always,’ on the tip of his tongue until Jimin finishes his sentence. “Kookie said so.”

Taehyung doubts that Jeongguk had Taehyung in mind when he said that, but Jimin is tugging on his arm and pouting at him, and Taehyung has never been able to deny that pout anything, a quality that Jimin often exploited when they were kids.

“Okay, sure,” he says, sitting next to Jimin, a safe distance between them. As much as he might want to, he can’t forget that Jimin has Jeongguk.
They sit together in silence for a moment, and all of the questions that Taehyung has been burying and shoving aside since Jimin walked up to him and asked for a drink come bubbling up to the surface.

“What happened to you, Jimin?” he asks into the quiet, voice low but still loud enough for Jimin to hear.

Jimin looks over at him and blinks slowly. “What do you mean?” he asks, just as quietly.

“I thought you were dead, Jimin,” Taehyung says, fighting back emotion in his voice. Jimin disappeared from his life so suddenly, and even after a few days of knowing Jimin is well and alive and his new boss, the pain of losing him is still there. Except now it’s magnified, doubled in intensity because there are years separating them that he’ll never get back, won’t ever know about unless Jimin actually tells him what happened.

Jimin giggles and says, “Of course I didn’t die, why would you think that?”

“Um,” Taehyung starts, reigning in his frustration at Jimin’s cavalier response. “You up and disappeared one day, and when I asked your grandmother where you were she said you were gone.” He watches as Jimin’s expression grows a bit more serious. “I was twelve and I didn’t know what to think, and then my family moved away and I just assumed that gone meant dead.”

“Well,” he says, shrugging. “I’m not dead.”

“Yeah, I can see that,” Taehyung snorts. He’s painfully aware of the fact that all his grief was for nothing. “Where have you been?” he asks, hoping that Jimin is relaxed enough and tipsy enough to let down the shield that he keeps wrapped around him so tightly.

“My father came and took me home,” he says, leaning a bit closer to Taehyung. “Apparently, he had me raised by someone else to keep me safe.”

Taehyung mulls this over for a second, thinks back to the way sketchy things were clearly happening when he’d brought drinks up to Jimin three nights ago. The thought suddenly occurs to him that Jimin could be in trouble, that he could be involved in something dangerous and might need help getting out. “Safe from what? Are you in trouble?” he asks earnestly. “Do I need to get you out of something?”

Jimin laughs outright in his face. “No, Taehyung, I don’t need your help.”

Taehyung waits for more, for Jimin to explain further, but he stays silent. “Would you tell me if you were in trouble?” he asks. Jimin used to come to him all the time with his problems, used to ask Taehyung for help with the silliest things, but Taehyung was always willing to do it; he would drop anything to help Jimin.

Jimin eyes him from the corner of his eye before curling up and giggling again. “Definitely not,” he says through his laughter.

“Why not?” Taehyung asks, hurt at being so casually dismissed.

“Because the second you get involved you get a target on your back,” Jimin says, before clicking his jaw shut and going a bit pale.

“Wait, what?” Taehyung asks, reaching out and gripping Jimin’s forearm tightly. His mind reels with the sliver of information he’d just been given. Whatever Jimin is involved with must be bad.
Jimin shakes his head, jaw clenched tightly, unwilling to say anything else. They stare at one another in tense silence for a moment before Taehyung sighs and relents, releasing Jimin’s arm in favor of crossing his own over his chest.

“Fine, don’t tell me,” Taehyung says with a small frown. “Just know that I’m here if you ever need anything. I’m still your friend.”

Jimin doesn’t say anything, just looks at him with a smile slowly stretching across his features. He scoots closer, closing the gap between them, until he can lean over and comfortably rest his head on Taehyung’s shoulder.

Which is how Jeongguk finds them a few minutes later.

“Kookie,” Jimin says in greeting, giggling slightly.

Jeongguk scowls. “I can’t believe you got this wasted.”

“‘S not my fault his drinks are so pretty,” protests Jimin, his head still on Taehyung’s shoulder, poking Taehyung in the stomach.

“You did this to him?” Jeongguk growls, turning his full attention on Taehyung.

“Not intentionally!” Taehyung says, a bit fearfully. “I didn’t know he hadn’t eaten anything.”

Jeongguk narrows his eyes.

“I swear,” Taehyung insists.

“Don’t you have a bar to prep?” Jeongguk asks him, raising his eyebrow pointedly.

Taehyung gets up and turns to leave, flashing Jimin a brief smile as he leaves. He breathed a bit easier once he’s away from Jeongguk, but he’s relieved that Jimin at least talked to him today, instead of ignoring Taehyung as he had been.

It’s not nearly enough, but it’s a start.

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Jeongguk waits until Taehyung has disappeared down the stairs before he speaks, but the look in his eyes bores into Jimin immediately.

Jimin flinches under the scrutiny, and reaches up to smooth his hair. It’s unnecessary, he knows, but he’s never been able to control his nervous tick, no matter how much he tries.

“What the actual fuck did you think you were doing getting drunk, Jimin?” Jeongguk says furiously.

“‘M not allowed to make mistakes?” Jimin retorts, his anger rising up and making him feel more sober than he is. “I was stressed. This case has to go our way! You said you’d handle it in a couple of hours, and then it took you all day. What the actual fuck were you doing, Kookie?” Jimin spits Jeongguk’s own words back at him, gaining momentum under Jeongguk’s glare.

Jeongguk stares at Jimin for a long moment, then sighs and scrubs his face with one hand. He collapses into the booth next to Jimin and leans his head against the back rest, squeezing his eyes shut.

Jimin gapes, wide-eyed, lips parted in surprise at Jeongguk’s reaction.
“She was problematic,” Jeongguk finally says, sounding like the wind’s been torn from his sails. “She was one of our thinner profiles, and what we had on her apparently wasn’t persuasive enough for her to see things our way. I had to adjust.” Jeongguk pinches the bridge of his nose, his thumb and forefinger stretching out to rub his eyes. “We set it up so she approached one of our guys—somebody known to be connected to my family—and it was just harmless interaction, but we taped it and sent it in to the news anonymously. It’ll air at nine, and it won’t matter that they won’t find any evidence to back up the connection between her and our group when they investigate more thoroughly. Her impartiality will already be compromised and they’ll replace her with the first alternate before Monday morning.”

Jeongguk’s head rolls to the side and he grins tiredly at Jimin. “And Alternate Juror Number One will be *significantly* easier to influence.”

Jimin’s a little stunned by how much information Jeongguk has offered him, when hoarding information to be used at the right time is what the Jeon family is all about.

“It sounds like you had a rough day,” Jimin concedes. He looks down at his lap, and his voice quiets, taking on a sincere tone. “Sorry I made it worse.”

The length of the following silence between them inevitably prompts Jimin to look up at Jeongguk, whose eyes are just as wide as Jimin’s had been.

“What?” Jimin asks.

“You said *sorry*,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin rolls his eyes.

“I also said drinking was a mistake. Did you miss tha’ part?” Jimin replies a little peevishly. “I’m human, Kookie—I’m not perfect all the time.”

Jeongguk snorts, a grin stretching across his face. “That implies you’re perfect some of the time.”

“I’m perfect a *majority* of the time,” Jimin states, daring Jeongguk to argue.

Jeongguk laughs, amusement flitting across his face. “Whatever you say, babe. Here, gimme your phone,” he says, changing the subject.

Jimin’s eyes narrow in suspicion. “Why?”

Jeongguk pushes Jimin over and reaches into his pocket, pulling out his phone. “’Cause I’m gonna text Namjoon to get you something to eat.”

In the time that it takes Jimin to sit back upright, Jeongguk has opened Jimin’s contacts, scrolled to the N’s, and typed out a brief message. He hits send, and waves the phone under Jimin’s nose as Jimin straightens his suit coat.

He retaliates with a pout and snatches his phone back. “No, Kookie, it’s *my* phone. I can do it.” *Burgers*, he types carefully before sending the text.

“Ooh, drunk Jimin is whiney today?”

“Shuddup!”

“Stellar comeback, babe,” Jeongguk chuckles. “Honestly, I don’t know why I’m not taking your ass home right now. It’s not like you’re gonna be any kind of useful here tonight.”
“No, I have to stay!” Jimin protests. “Baekhyun is bringing me the juror’s name.”


“It’s a test,” Jimin says. “If he brings me her name, I still have control, and he passes. If he doesn’t, he fails, and we know that he’s a loose cannon.”

“Why would you think he’s dumb enough to fall out of line?” Jeongguk asks.

“He argued with me ‘bout it this morning when I asked him for it,” Jimin sighs, frowning.

“The fuck is going through his head?” Jeongguk wonders. “First he calls you when he was told to contact me, then he argues with you? This dude is begging me to be pissed at him.”

Jimin pats Jeongguk’s thigh reassuringly. “I put the fear of God back in him, don’ worry, Kookie.”

“I’m sorry I missed it,” Jeongguk smirks. “You’re sexy as fuck when you try to be intimidating. Thinking about it is kinda turning me on.”

“Do I need to make you regret that sentence?” Jimin asks, raising his eyebrows.

“Maybe later. Right now, you need eat,” he says, nodding his head toward Namjoon, who’s cresting the stairs, a fast food bag in one hand.

“Oh! Burgers!” Jimin squeaks, brightening visibly.

“You weren’t kidding when you said he was toasted,” Namjoon says, setting the bag on the table in front of Jimin. “How much did he drink?”

“Dunno. Ask the new kid behind the bar,” Jeongguk says, watching as Jimin pulls a carton of French fries out of the bag and shoves a half a dozen of them in his mouth at once. “He’s not going to be useful tonight, but we’ve got a delivery we’re waiting for, so we’ll hang up here until then.”

Namjoon nods. “I’ll let Jin know and we’ll send somebody up with it when it arrives.”

“Thanks,” Jeongguk replies, and Namjoon heads back down the stairs.

Jimin’s halfway through his second burger, a bit of ketchup stuck in the corner of his mouth, when a bouncer brings them a crisp white envelope.

“That didn’t take long,” Jeongguk notes, and Jimin nods in approval.

“I told ‘im to have it here by ten, but he’s smart enough to know that sooner is better for him.” Jimin’s head is clearing a little bit, the food in his stomach starting to help balance the alcohol in his system. He takes another bite, his cheek puffing out like a chipmunk’s as he talks around it. “He knows I’m usually here by six, so he prolly had it delivered as soon as he was sure I’d arrived.”

Jeongguk grunts. “Too bad. I was looking forward to fucking him up.”

“Next time, Kookie,” Jimin consoles. He gestures at the envelope. “Is it the right name?”

Jeongguk tears it open as Jimin shoves the last of the burger in his mouth. He studies the single piece of paper inside for a moment, before digging a lighter out of his pocket and setting the page on fire.

“It’s the right name,” he confirms, and they watch the sheet of paper curl and turn to smoke. When the flame reaches Jeongguk’s fingers, he drops the remainder of the page into the ashtray on the table
“I guess he passes the test,” Jimin says as he crumples the wrappers from his meal and shoves them back in the bag.

Jeongguk sighs disappointedly, and gestures at Jimin’s mouth. “You got a little ketchup there, babe.”

“Mm,” Jimin replies, his tongue darting out and licking his lips clean. Jeongguk’s eyes are still on his mouth, though, so he adds, “Did I miss some?” He licks his lips again, slower, dragging his tongue from left to right across his top lip in a sensual slide.

“Maybe I’d better take you home, after all,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin smirks.

*Oh, yes,* he thinks. *Sex appeal is definitely part of his job description.*

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In his first week working at *LIE*, Taehyung learns how to mix all of the house drinks, because Yoongi decides Taehyung needs to ‘learn how to make this shit so he can do it bitch-ass shit-faced.’ Yoongi’s grin is wicked when he adds, “With how much you’ll have to drink just to make sure the ratios are right, that’ll be sooner than later.”

The laugh that Yoongi let loose after he said that still gives Taehyung shivers.

Taehyung’s slowly getting used to the contradiction that is Yoongi, though. He talks rough, and pushes Taehyung mercilessly to be a better bartender, but occasionally he catches Yoongi looking at him fondly, and that’s just endearing enough to get Taehyung through the late nights that they pull at the bar so that he can make those drinks *bitch-ass shit-faced*.

When Yoongi notices that he’s late enough that he’ll miss the last bus connection, he always offers Taehyung his spare room, and Taehyung’s grateful for that because it means he isn’t sleeping on the breakroom couch in the club.

On the nights Taehyung thinks he can make the last connection, he turns down Yoongi’s offer. He’s been spending so much time at the club lately, and he misses his little brother and his little sister, so whenever he can go home he does. Making breakfast for them in the morning, even if it means getting up after only a couple hours of sleep, is worth it.

It’s during his second week of work at the club when Namjoon sleeps on him for the first time.

It wasn’t like, *intentional,* on Namjoon’s part. And in Namjoon’s defense, he wasn’t expecting Taehyung to be there.

It starts with Taehyung missing his bus.

He only misses it by a minute, the tail lights disappearing down the road and three in the morning is *too* early—or too late—for him to chase after buses so he sighs, pulls his worn denim jacket tighter around his body, and walks back to the club.

By the time he gets back to the club he can’t feel his fingertips, the autumn chill cutting through every layer of clothing to settle in his bones. He doesn’t hesitate to take advantage of the showers in the breakroom’s bathroom, standing under the hot water to banish the chill so that his bones don’t feel like they’re going to snap in half, and once he’s finished he towels off and shrugs back into his
clothes, hoping to keep the warmth from the shower as long as possible.

Without much more thought, he flicks off the lights and flops down on the breakroom couch, pulling the conveniently placed blanket over himself and settling in for a long night.

He’s just about to drift off when a heavy weight flops down on him as somebody else collapses on the couch. It startles him so badly that he nearly bites through the tip of his tongue as he jolts awake.

“What the hell?” He yelps, struggling underneath the sudden weight.

“Oh, shit,” says his assailant, who is unmistakably Namjoon. He rolls off Taehyung and into a sitting position. “Taehyung?” he asks, blinking at him blearily in the darkness. “What are you doing here?”

Taehyung sits up, panic ebbing away as he recovers from the shock of another person just collapsing on him when he was almost asleep. “Hey, Namjoon,” he says quietly, hoping beyond all hope that this doesn’t result in him losing his job. “I uh, missed my bus back home. I’m sorry, it won’t happen again.”

Namjoon chuckles lowly in the quiet of the room. “Don’t worry about it,” he reassures, hand palming his face briefly before finding his shoulder in the darkness and squeezing it. “I’m just not used to someone being in my usual nap spot.”

“I can go,” Taehyung offers, hoping that Namjoon won’t make him leave. He’s not keen on spending another night on the streets.

“No, don’t go. I can sleep in my office.” He doesn’t sound too excited about that option.

“I mean, I can curl up, make room for you,” Taehyung suggests, not willing to give up the couch entirely, but not wanting Namjoon to have to spend the night slumped over his desk.

“Oh, thank fuck,” he says, immediately slumping over and leaning on Taehyung.

“Or, okay, this works, too,” Taehyung says, surprised at Namjoon, until he realizes that he’s already asleep.

Taehyung resolves to never miss the bus again.

“I don’t understand why I have to do this,” Taehyung says, eying the shot Yoongi shoves into his hand with apprehension.

“You’re a bartender for fuck’s sake,” Yoongi drawls, pouring himself a shot. “It’s a damned requirement.”

Taehyung groans. “But I really don’t like to drink,” he says, just as Hoseok bursts through the door with an obscenely happy smile on his face. For someone who spent the majority of the night dancing he still seems to have an unlimited amount of energy.

“Are we drinking?” Hoseok asks, dropping his duffle bag in the entryway and joining them around the coffee table in the living room.

“The fuck are you doing here?” Yoongi sputters. “Actually, forget that.” He waves his hand in front of him in a dismissive gesture. “How did you get into the building?”
“Hello to you too,” Hoseok says, helping himself to the bottle of tequila Yoongi’s pulled out for the occasion and pouring himself a shot.

“What are you doing here?” Yoongi asks again, eyes a bit wider than usual.

“I memorized the code into your building a while back just in case I didn’t want to wait for you to buzz me in.” Hoseok throws back his shot easily and Taehyung starts to feel like the only one who can’t consume alcohol like it’s water.

“The fucking nerve,” Yoongi sputters.

Hoseok leans back on his hands. “Why, do you not want me here?” he asks, smirking at Yoongi.

Taehyung has never seen Yoongi blush as much as he is right now. Taehyung throws back his shot just to distract himself from the awkwardness between these two and whatever is going on.

“I didn’t say that,” Yoongi mutters, snatching the bottle from Hoseok and gulping straight from it.

“Well, if you bitches are getting drunk to kick off our weekend, I’m definitely joining.”

“I’m not a bitc—” Taehyung starts before getting cut off by Hoseok.

“Ooh, let’s play strip poker!” he suggests gleefully.

Yoongi nearly spews tequila all over Taehyung as he chokes.

“I’m not sure I feel comfortab—” Taehyung tries again.

“Relax, Taehyung,” Hoseok coos. “I’ll make you comfortable real quick,” he says, biting his bottom lip between his teeth and winking.

Taehyung doesn’t know if he’s scandalized or turned on, but neither is acceptable. He turns to Yoongi for help, only to find that he’s staring at Hoseok, mouth slightly agape, fingers strangling his shot glass.

“I’ll get a deck of cards,” Hoseok says, interpreting their numb silence as acceptance.

“I want to die,” Yoongi whispers, very much looking as if his soul has already departed from his body.

“I’m sure it will be fine?” Taehyung tries to reassure Yoongi. He’s never played poker in his life, so he’s fairly certain that he’ll end up naked first, which is vastly unappealing to him, but only slightly less so than seeing both Yoongi and Hoseok naked.

“You don’t understand,” Yoongi says, voice hollow. “Hobi will intentionally lose until he’s naked, and then start winning until I’m naked.” Yoongi pauses, letting the impact of his words sink in. “I can’t be naked with Hobi, Taehyung.”

There’s one beat of silence, then another, before Taehyung says, “On second thought, if we’re doing this, I need another shot. Or seven.”

Yoongi nods dazedly. “There’s more alcohol in the kitchen,” he says, moving to get up and barely managing not to trip over Hoseok’s bag in the middle of the floor. “Damnit, Hobi!” He shouts, loud enough that Hoseok will be able to hear him from wherever he is in the apartment. “Don’t just drop your shit wherever you want in my apartment.”
Hoseok’s laugh echoes down the hallway as he makes his way back into the living room, brushing past Yoongi, who heads into the kitchen in search of alcohol.

Taehyung pours himself another shot, trying not to stare at Hoseok’s thighs, clad as they are in skintight leggings that leave very little to the imagination.

“Fucking hell,” shouts Yoongi from the kitchen.

“What?” Asks Hoseok, stepping through the hallway and into the kitchen.

Taehyung gets up to follow him, thinks about Hoseok’s leggings and Yoongi’s inability to look anywhere else when Hoseok is in the room, and sits back down. He grimaces as he downs another shot, getting used to the burn with each new shot. It’s either that, or he’s getting drunker. Probably both.

After a prolonged moment, Yoongi appears around the corner, hair slightly tousled, and swipes his keys from the coffee table. “We’re out of alcohol, which is a fucking travesty considering our professions, so I’m going to the store down the street to get more.”

Taehyung pulls out his phone and blinks at the time. “Is there even anywhere you can get liquor at six in the morning?” He asks, aware of the inconvenience that is their schedules.

“I didn’t say I was going to get good alcohol,” Yoongi gripes. “Hoseok is staying here, so good luck,” he calls, disappearing down the hall and out the door before Taehyung has a chance to fully process Yoongi’s statement.

He kicks back another shot.

“Damn, Taehyung,” Hoseok says, walking back into the room. “I didn’t think you were that fond of drinking?”

“I’m not,” says Taehyung, almost afraid to look at Hoseok’s smile too long for fear of going blind from the brightness of it. Maybe he should stop drinking so fast, give his body a chance to catch up.

He pushes the bottle into Hoseok’s hands, considerably less full than it had been a few minutes ago.

“So,” Hoseok starts, “How did someone as sweet as you end up working in a place like LIE?”

Taehyung shrugs, not really intent on telling Hoseok about the various jobs he worked until he was able to get his bartending license. Or that he only took this job so that he could help support his family. “The tips are really great,” he finally settles on saying. “What about you?”

Hoseok smirks. “I’ve always loved to dance and, well. The tips are pretty great.”

“How did you learn to move like that?” Taehyung asks, thinking back to the first time he saw Hoseok dance.

“It all starts with the right music,” Hoseok explains. “Or, at least it does for me.” He pulls out his phone and, after a brief moment of tapping at the screen, starts a song. “Something like this.”

Taehyung is fairly certain that even with hours of music similar to the track that’s playing—all sensual bass and heavy beats that stir something in his blood—he’d never be able to dance the way Hoseok does.
“Sure, you could,” Hoseok says, when Taehyung says as much. “The basics are really simple. Anyone can do it.”

Taehyung laughs outright at that. He can barely handle walking on his good days, so he doubts that dancing is anything close to a good idea.

“Come on,” Hoseok says, standing up and stretching out a hand for Taehyung. “I’ll teach you the basics, help you get laid, maybe.”

And Taehyung is starting to feel the alcohol, so he knows it’s a bad idea, knows that Hoseok is dangerous and far too attractive, but something in him wants to learn. He wants to let go and have fun for a night without worrying about his family or the tension simmering between him and Jimin, and it’s probably the alcohol warming him and making him feel bolder than he actually is, but he reaches up and takes Hoseok’s hand and lets him pull him to his feet.

“Okay, just do what I do,” Hoseok says, starting to circle his hips slowly in time to the music playing from the sound system.

If he were more sober, Taehyung might pause to think about the fact that Hoseok’s phone is programmed into Yoongi’s Bluetooth sound system, but he’s definitely feeling a bit drunk now and Hoseok’s hips are scattering any remaining rationality right out of his skull.

It’s a credit to Hoseok’s kindness that he doesn’t immediately laugh the moment Taehyung starts moving in stiff, uncoordinated movements.

“Uh,” Hoseok says, still moving effortlessly to the music. “You’re way too stiff.” He reaches out and snags Taehyung’s wrist, pulling him closer before turning him around. “Like this,” he says, resting his hands on Taehyung’s hips and starting to circle them in time with his own, the movements much more fluid under Hoseok’s hands.

Yeah, he’s definitely not sober anymore.

“Just feel the music,” Hoseok says in his ear, pressing closer so that he’s guiding Taehyung’s movements with his whole body and Taehyung—

Taehyung has never danced with someone before, never had the time or inclination to do so when there were so many other things to worry about, but Hoseok somehow manages to make him forget about anything he’s ever worried about just by rolling his hips into Taehyung’s.

If Taehyung were sober he would stop, would put an end to the lesson because Hoseok, as beautiful as he is, isn’t what Taehyung wants.

But he’s not sober, so he doesn’t stop. Instead, he relaxes into his knees, lets his head drop back against Hoseok’s shoulder and pretends, for a dangerous moment, that it’s Jimin behind him. And he can’t really think past the warmth in his veins, Hoseok’s breath ghosting across his neck, the alcohol burning through him, but he doesn’t really try, too focused on the way Hoseok rolls their bodies together.

“What the fuck.”

Taehyung stumbles, nearly falls on his face as he turns to see Yoongi standing in the entry to the living room, two bottles of what looks like vodka in his hands.

He looks angry.
“Hey Yoongi,” Hoseok says, dancing his way over to Yoongi. “What took you so long?”

“I’m—you’re,” Yoongi sputters. “What the fuck is going on here,” he finally spits out, vainly trying to ignore Hoseok as he tries to get Yoongi to dance with him.

“It’s not what it looks like?” Taehyung asks, because he doesn’t know what it looked like, not really, but judging by the look on Yoongi’s face it looks like something it shouldn’t.

“It looked like Hoseok was about to start ripping your clothes off,” Yoongi says, flinging his keys onto the coffee table.

His keys hit Taehyung in the stomach, which is odd because Taehyung is nowhere near the coffee table—oh.

“Relax,” Hoseok coos, draping his arms around Yoongi’s shoulders. ”I was just teaching him how to dance.”

Yoongi looks at Hoseok, narrows his eyes, and then looks at Taehyung. “You sure didn’t look like you needed lessons in dancing, kid,” he complains, but his eyes are softening and Taehyung sighs in relief.

He doesn’t know what’s going on with Yoongi and Hoseok, but it’s nothing he wants to be in the middle of.

“Who’s ready to play some poker?” Hoseok asks, finally succeeding in taking the alcohol away from Yoongi and sauntering over to the coffee table, sitting down and shuffling cards. “You bitches ready to get wrecked?”

“Not even remotely,” Yoongi says, but he sits down next to Hoseok with a glare aimed at Taehyung that dares him to do otherwise.

Taehyung sits down, and Hoseok deals the first hand.

“Read it and weep, boys,” Hoseok shouts, throwing down his hand.

Yoongi groans and reluctantly takes off his one remaining sock, leaving him with nothing other than his jeans.

Taehyung squints at the cards in his hand. He can’t be sure because he’s done at least two more shots of vodka and his brain feels fuzzy, but he thinks his hand is better than Hoseok’s. “I think I won,” he says, revealing his hand.

“Holy shit,” Hoseok hisses, outraged. “How the fuck did you manage to get a straight?” He expertly pulls off his shirt.

“A what?” Taehyung asks, in the same moment that Yoongi mutters, “Fucking hell,” under his breath as Hoseok flings his shirt aside.

Taehyung has seen Hoseok without a shirt before. It’s literally his job to take his clothes off, but this is the first time he’s seen him up-close and personal, without the distracting lights or screaming men and women and—

“Fucking hell,” he echoes.
It’s unfair, is what it is. He looks over at Yoongi in sympathy because he knows what Hoseok does to him, so it has to be worse for Yoongi. He’s flushed, and Taehyung is pretty sure it’s not from the alcohol.

Taehyung only feels a little bit bad that he’s winning and Yoongi is losing, though.

“How the fuck,” says Yoongi a few hands later, “did this happen.”

Taehyung looks up from the shot he’d been contemplating in his hand and remembers, a second too late, to keep his eyes above waist level as he looks at Yoongi.

“How is it,” Hoseok says, gesturing between himself and Yoongi, both bare assed and pouting. “That we’re completely naked and you’re only missing your socks?”

Taehyung blinks blearily between them, already knowing that if he sees them naked ever again it’ll be too soon. “Beginner’s luck?”

Yoongi and Hoseok both stare at him incredulously, before scrambling for their clothes, the game apparently over.

And he was just starting to understand the rules, too.

At the end of his second week working at LIE, he finally convinces Yoongi to teach him how to make a Rum Martinez. He regrets convincing Yoongi to teach him around the moment the wood chips become necessary. There is a special place in hell for people who order this particular drink.

Taehyung looks at his watch and sighs, knowing that with how long it took Yoongi to teach him to make the drink he’s probably not going to make his bus.

“You’re crashing with me again tonight,” Yoongi says as they’re changing in the breakroom.

“Um,” he says as he slips into his jeans. “If you don’t mind?” At this point, pretty much anything beats spending a night with Namjoon on the couch and he likes Yoongi’s guest bedroom, anyway.

Yoongi eyes him for a moment, before turning to face him fully. “Spare room is yours, if you want it. You know, permanently.”

Surprised by the offer, Taehyung weighs the pros and cons for a moment,shrugging on his jacket while he thinks.

“You coming?” Yoongi asks, turning around at the door to face him, already on his way out.

“Yeah,” Taehyung says, walking briskly to catch up to him. “I’ll take the room. You know, permanently.”

Yoongi nods. “You can get your shit tomorrow and move in,” he says once they’re halfway to the apartment. “But tonight I wanna sleep.”

Yeah, sleep sounds good right about now. “Yeah, okay,” Taehyung yawns.

He misses the small, fond smile that Yoongi throws his way.
Yoongi’s already waiting on the curb when Taehyung’s cab pulls up.

Taehyung asks the driver to pop the trunk, then twists around in his seat to reach for his wallet. When he sits back up, Yoongi’s already paying the fare, and Taehyung frowns.

They pull his stuff from the trunk, and Yoongi lifts Taehyung’s suitcase, hefting it with a grunt. “The fuck you got in here, kid? Bricks? Why doesn’t this fucking thing have wheels?”

“Oh, just shoes?” Taehyung replies. “Look, are you sure about this? ‘Cause you don’t have to—”

“Every time you ask me that I get less sure,” Yoongi says, grabbing the handle of Taehyung’s duffle and slinging it over his shoulder. “Just shut up and carry your shit.”

Taehyung slams the cab’s trunk closed and grabs the other suitcase, shifting his backpack as he stands back up. He turns and looks up at the skyrise where Yoongi’s apartment is.

Where Taehyung’s apartment is. He lives here now, he reminds himself.

Yoongi pauses at the front door and waits for Taehyung to catch up. “Are you watching? ‘Cause I’m not buzzing you in every time you forget the damn code.” He pushes the buttons slowly so Taehyung can memorize them, and the clack of the lock automatically releasing signals Taehyung to reach for the handle. He pulls the door open and follows Yoongi inside.

The elevator ride is too quiet, and Taehyung squirms a little.

“Look, I know you said I don’t have to help out with the rent or anything,” Taehyung starts, speaking softly. “But I don’t take charity well. I’ve worked hard for everything I have, and I’m proud of that. But if you’re not going to let me pay towards utilities or something, maybe I can help with the housework? I’m good at cleaning and cooking—”

Yoongi shrugs. “If you wanna clean, you can clean, but I’m not letting you poison me. I heard from Jimin how you fucking came up with the Stigma shot, and I’m not interested in tasting anything that you cook because it looks pretty.” Yoongi pins Taehyung with a pointed look, and Taehyung splutters.

“No, I really am a good cook! I used to make dinner all the time for my sibl—”

Yoongi snorts. “Sure, kid. We’ll see.”

When they reach the eighth floor, he exits the elevator behind Yoongi. Yoongi dumps Taehyung’s bag of shoes in front of the door and fishes in his pocket for his keys. He pulls them out, separating a key from the ring and handing it to Taehyung before slipping another into the lock and turning it.

Taehyung looks down at the key in his hand, wrapping his fingers closed around it carefully.

He’s just in time to keep from dropping it, as Holly barrels out of the apartment and straight into Taehyung’s legs. Taehyung giggles, dropping the suitcase in his hand to give the dog his full attention.

“Am I fucking chopped liver?” Yoongi mutters, bending to pick Holly up. “Move your ass, kid. Don’t fucking steal my dog from me before you even bring your shit inside.”

Taehyung laughs again, and pulls his bags inside the door, closing it behind them. “Is the spare room
mine, then?” he asks.

“Unless you plan on sleeping on the couch,” Yoongi answers, setting Holly back down and moving down the hallway toward the kitchen, the small dog scampering after him. “Get your shit unpacked or whatever, and then we’re gonna order some takeout.”

“But I really can cook—”

Yoongi cuts him off with a deadpan look, and Taehyung quits arguing.

“Oh, right. Takeout sounds good.”

Taehyung quickly realizes that above all, Yoongi is absolute shit at keeping anything other than leftover takeout in the fridge. He wouldn’t be surprised if Yoongi hadn’t ever eaten out before. So here he is, shopping for groceries late on a Monday afternoon so that they don’t starve the rest of the week. As grateful as he is to have a two-day weekend, only having Sunday and Monday to do things in the daylight hours without sacrificing sleep can get a bit difficult.

He curses Yoongi for not having anything edible in the apartment the entire walk home, as he struggles with the keycode at the entrance, the elevator ride up to the eighth floor as his arms slowly fall off with the weight of the grocery bags, and as he fumbles with the keys to unlock the front door.

He is, on the whole, not prepared for what he sees when he rounds the corner.

He doesn’t even see it first, is the thing. No, he hears it first. The quiet, drawn out moan that pulls his eyes away from where he’s toeing out of his shoes to the kitchen table.

The first thing his brain registers is skin, and a lot of it. When his eyes settle on what he realizes is Hoseok’s finely sculpted ass, Yoongi’s legs wrapped around his waist as Hoseok rocks into him in a steady rhythm.

It’s.

Taehyung’s brain stops completely, then reboots, and he registers everything in a matter of seconds, his eyes widening in horror as they continue to fuck on his previously pristine kitchen table. Hoseok is bent over Yoongi, whose back is arching off the kitchen table as he rakes his fingers down Hoseok’s back, leaving red lines in his wake, eliciting a deep moan from Hoseok’s throat as he buries his face in the curve of Yoongi’s neck.

Taehyung’s brain restarts right about the same moment the grocery bags fall from his arms and onto the floor. “What the fuck,” he says, snapping his eyes shut to the sound of breaking eggs.

“Shit!” exclaims Hoseok. “I thought you said he would be gone for a while?!”

“He said he was going to the grocery store!” Yoongi responds.

Taehyung can hear the sound of bodies scrambling around the room. “I’m still here, guys,” he reminds them, only to be ignored.

“Clearly he doesn’t take as long as you said he would,” Hoseok says, and Taehyung can tell that they’re still in the room, so he keeps his eyes pinched closed tightly.
“How the fuck was I supposed to know he’d be back in twenty minutes?” Yoongi says, voice fading a bit as he walks down the hallway toward his bedroom.

“I was so close,” Hoseok moans, before Taehyung hears the sound of Yoongi’s door clicking shut.

Taehyung opens his eyes slowly, finally breathing when the kitchen is blessedly free of naked men. Which, now that he thinks about it, what the actual fuck.

He shakes his head and tries to banish the image of Hoseok and Yoongi fucking from his mind as he collects the groceries from the floor and moves to start putting things away.

The sound of a headboard hitting the wall repeatedly sends him scrambling for his headphones a minute later.

He doesn’t see either of them the rest of the night, which is just fine by him.

Still, out of long engrained habit and a desire not to starve, he gets up early in the morning—which on their schedule means eleven in the morning—and makes breakfast.

He’s painfully aware of the fact that Hoseok was here the whole night, so he makes enough food for three, and sooner rather than later the smell of coffee and bacon entices Hoseok, and eventually Yoongi from sleep.

Taehyung intentionally ignores them until he’s made up all three plates of food and set them at the bar with a pointed, forlorn look at his kitchen table.

“Look, Taehyung,” Hoseok starts, toying with the fork Taehyung placed next to his plate.

“We’re sorry,” mumbles Yoongi, shoving his hash browns around on his plate.

Taehyung’s tongue comes unstuck from the roof of his mouth. “I’m sorry for walking in on you guys yesterday,” he says, and watches in satisfaction at Yoongi and Hoseok both look at him with dumbstruck expressions. He walks around the counter and sits on the stool to Yoongi’s left so that Yoongi is sandwiched between him and Hoseok. “Now, eat.”

He watches from the corner of his eye as Hoseok and Yoongi exchange a look, and Hoseok shrugs and tucks into breakfast.

“Holy shit,” Hoseok mumbles around a mouth of bacon. “Where did you learn to cook like this?”

Yoongi glances at Taehyung, surprise in his eyes, and shoves in a mouthful of his own.

Taehyung shrugs. “I like cooking for my siblings.”

“Okay,” concedes Yoongi, “I take it back. You can cook for me whenever you want.”

“Sure. No problem,” Taehyung says with a shrug, trying not to smile as he makes his play. “I’ll keep making you food as long as you stop fucking in my kitchen.”

He watches in satisfaction as Hoseok chokes on his mouthful of hash browns while Yoongi’s fork clatters to his plate from limp fingers, a ‘you smooth fucker’ slipping past his lips in begrudging respect.

“Sure, sure,” Hoseok says, recovering. “But now that I know that you walking in on us is going to
produce this kind of cooking, maybe I should start leaving the door open,” he says, winking.

“No,” Yoongi says immediately.

“Just keep away from my kitchen and behind closed doors,” says Taehyung. He’ll be just fine if he never sees something like that ever again.

“Okay, but this food is amazing,” Hoseok praises, shaking Yoongi slightly in his excitement. “Yoongi, can we adopt him?”

Yoongi blushes furiously at this and nearly inhales a strip of bacon in shock. “Hobi, what the fuck.”

Taehyung isn’t doing much better, blushing right along with Yoongi, although not quite as much.

Hoseok, unsurprisingly, ignores Yoongi to muse, “Maybe I’ll stay overnight more often, if Taehyung is going to start cooking.”

Yoongi, whose blush had just started to fade, blushes again in full force, and Taehyung would feel bad for him except…

“Karma’s a bitch,” he whispers in Yoongi’s ear, satisfied when all Yoongi can manage is a small whimper into his juice.

Jimin’s relieved when his car finally comes to a stop in front of his building. He’s tired, and a little bit cranky because it’s been an incredibly long day, and the only thoughts in his head revolve around a quick shower, followed by uninterrupted time with his pillow.

He’s too impatient to wait for his driver to open the door for him, which, he realizes later, is some kind of karma.

He hears an ‘ow’ from the other side of the car door as he swings it open, and then there’s a dog practically crawling into his lap, tail wagging and tongue lolling, leash leading past a pair of sneakers, which are attached to the legs of whomever he’s accidentally knocked over, and—

“Holly?” Jimin asks, catching sight of the dog’s tags and recognizing the owner’s name on them. “Yoongi, are you oka—Taehyung?”

“Jimin?”

“What are you doing with Yoongi’s dog?” Jimin asks, stepping out of the car and closing the door. He offers Taehyung a hand and pulls him up.

“Yoongi muttered something about ‘piss off, I'm not walking the dog before I sleep,’ when we got home from work, so I figured I’d do it,” Taehyung answers, brushing himself off lightly. Holly bounces around their feet, excited to make another friend. “Wait, do you live around here?”

“Yeah, this is my building,” Jimin says dismissively. “You said ‘when we got home from work’—are you living with Yoongi?”

“Uh, yeah. It’s kind of a recent thing?” Taehyung flinches a little, and Jimin catches it.

“Why?” he asks, curious.

“Because it’s a long bus ride from where my family lives, and I kept missing the last connection?”
Taehyung says hesitantly.

Jimin frowns, trying to place where in the city Taehyung could have been living that the buses would stop running in the wee hours of the morning, but Taehyung’s talking again, so he brushes it aside for later.

“Do you want to walk with us?” Taehyung is asking, and Jimin’s eyes snap to Taehyung’s in time to catch the flicker of hope that dashes across Taehyung’s features.

No. No, he really doesn’t want to walk with them. He wants to take the elevator up to his penthouse, shed his clothing, relax under a hot shower, and then sleep. But his legs are already moving towards Taehyung, and his hand is gesturing for Taehyung to lead the way, and—

Fuck.

Jimin sighs. “After you,” his mouth says, completing his body’s betrayal.

The smile that overwhelms Taehyung’s face is worth it, though. It’s both soft and excited at the same time, the perfect description of Taehyung wrapped into one expression.

Fuck.

They walk in silence, for the most part, Taehyung occasionally calling out to Holly to urge him along from the last fire hydrant to the next.

Jimin’s grateful for the quiet. It means he won’t say anything he shouldn’t. Just thinking back to what he let slip during their conversation a couple weeks ago—when he was drunk and hadn’t known when to shut up—makes him grimace. So Jimin is grateful for the quiet, right up until Taehyung breaks it.

“Jimin?”

“Yeah?”

“This is really nice.”

Fuck.

“I should probably go,” Jimin says, stopping walking immediately. “We probably shouldn’t—”

“Why?” Taehyung interrupts. “Why can’t we be friends like this?”

Jimin holds his tongue.

“I’m already involved, okay?” Taehyung says softly. “We grew up together. I work at your club. I’m not going anywhere.”

…I’ll see you tomorrow at work, Taehyung,” Jimin says, turning around and walking back the way they came.

He ignores the way Holly pulls exuberantly at the leash. He ignores the crestfallen look on Taehyung’s face. But he can’t ignore the squeezing in his chest.

Maybe Taehyung’s right. Maybe it’s way too late to keep him at a safe distance.

Maybe the only way to keep Taehyung safe now is to keep him close.
Chapter End Notes

“I’m perfect a majority of the time,’ Jimin states, daring Jeongguk to argue.” *callie lowkey inserts personal feelings into the fic* (but really, when is Jimin not perfect?! NEVER. FIGHT ME. <3)

“And he was just starting to understand the rules, too.” *Kiki lowkey inserts herself into the fic* (okay but rly every time I play poker I clean house and usually have no idea how I did it. All my friends hate me.)

OKAY, so y'all have been super appreciative in the comments of the photos & drinks we've linked, so we're back with more!

**Stigma shot**

**Jimin's penthouse** (for real, this place makes callie weep bitter tears of longing)

Anything (like pictures of Jimin's apt etc) that need to not disappear into the interwebz will be posted to my tumblr (linked below), and anything you want to ask Callie and I you can do through my tumblr. The tag for this fic is 'fic: caught in a lie' and pls, if you feel inspired and want to create anything tag me or Callie so we can link it!

-kiki

ayyy, drink with caution, yeah? neither Kiki nor I are big drinkers so we haven't vetted these drinks. please be safe! <3 oh! all the Tae POVs (except for the scene where he moves in with Yoongi) were Kiki. the Jimin POVs and Tae's move were yours truly.

-callie

I WROTE THE YOONSEOK SEX.

-Kiki

*whispers* and I'm so proud

-callie

we're gonna take a super short break from writing this--super short, we promise!--because we both have other ongoing fics that need updating, but we'll be back soon with chapter four AND BOY ARE WE EXCITED FOR CHAPTER FOUR. YOU SHOULD BE TOO. so hopefully this long chapter full of fluff and other goodness will tide you over until then. in the meantime, remember that WE LOVE YOU ALL

Find Kiki on [Tumblr](http://example.com) and [Twitter](http://example.com)

Find Callie on [Tumblr](http://example.com) | [Twitter](http://example.com) | [Discord](http://example.com)
“It’s a bit traumatizing,” he says, and Jimin laughs at the look on his face. “More traumatizing than thinking I died at twelve?” Jimin asks, still laughing. “Hey,” Taehyung snaps, not because it isn’t true. No, the problem is that it’s too true. That thinking his best friend had died was the most devastating thing to ever happen to him, even more than his family having to move from their comfortable home into—well. “That’s not funny, Jimin.” “Oh, I’m—” “Losing you was the single worst thing to ever happen to me, Jimin.”

Chapter Notes

italicized/centered lyrics are from Taylor Swift's "Red"

if you're not into reading smut, stop when you reach these lyrics:
Loving him is like driving a new Maserati down a dead-end street
Faster than the wind, passionate as sin, ending so suddenly
then hit us up via comment/twitter/tumblr for an abridged run-down of the important things you've missed <3

y'all, this chapter nearly broke us. we cranked out SO. MANY. WORDS in the last three days. Kiki and i met in person for the first time on monday, and we spent our three days together laughing and being extra and writing like demons. we got a combined total of 12 hours of sleep between the two of us over those three days in our insane drive to post this 17k beast of a chapter, and we're seriously so dead on our feet rn, so send us some love in the comments and we'll be back after a crazy-long nap to love you back~
callie

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing him was blue like I’d never known
Missing him was dark grey all alone

(Sunday)

In the few weeks he’s lived with Yoongi there are a few things Taehyung has learned.

First, Hoseok almost never stays the night, but if he does he will wake Taehyung up before he leaves just so he can have a homemade breakfast. He’s not a huge fan of this, because it usually means that Hoseok is waking him up a mere two hours after he’s gone to sleep. Second, is that he now has to
invest in a good pair of headphones because Yoongi and Hoseok can be very vocal and Taehyung really doesn’t need to know that Hoseok is just as good in bed as he is on a pole. Third, and this is the most important thing, Yoongi and Hoseok are definitely not dating. Or so they keep saying, to him, at different times. They’re absolutely not dating.

Taehyung thinks they’re dating.

Still, it doesn’t take him long to realize that his peaceful, sleep-filled Sunday afternoon is not going to happen because Yoongi and Hoseok have decided to spend the first part of their weekend doing something that definitely isn’t sleeping.

Not if the periodic moans filtering through their shared bedroom wall are any indication.

So Taehyung is wandering around the city, killing time and enjoying the crisp fall air, a terse let me know when you’re done sent to Yoongi’s phone in the vain hope that he’ll be able to return to the apartment sooner rather than later.

He hums in pleasure when he stumbles across an art gallery with an open exhibit. And it’s good, too. The gallery is stunning and chic, and Taehyung is two feet in the door, busy admiring the general atmosphere of the place when—

“Taehyung?”

Taehyung spins around to come face to face with Jimin. “Oh,” he says eloquently.

“What are you doing here?” Jimin asks, hands tucked away into the pockets of his expertly tailored pants.

“I’m here for the art.”

“Shouldn’t you be sleeping?”

“Things are a bit loud at my apartment right now, so I decided to get some fresh air,” he sighs, unwilling to out Yoongi and Hoseok like that. He’s a good roommate, damnit.

“I see.” Jimin eyes him for a moment, before offering: “I was just about to leave, if you want to walk back with me?”

He doesn’t know what he did, but there is no way he’s going to turn down alone time with Jimin. Not when that’s all he’s been wanting since he saw him again for the first time all those weeks ago.

“Yeah, okay,” he says, giving Jimin his biggest smile.

“Okay,” Jimin nods, leading the way out of the gallery and waving his driver off before heading down the block in the direction of what Taehyung assumes is his apartment.

It takes Taehyung two blocks before he’s brave enough to break the silence between them. “Why were you at the exhibit?” he asks, trying for a casual tone and landing somewhere around anxious.

Jimin eyes him from the corner of his eye, the corner of his mouth twitching up slightly before he answers. “I had a meeting with an important client who happens to enjoy art. But he had to leave early.” He shrugs. “He left a few minutes before you got there.”

“Cool,” Taehyung says, fearing another silence between them but not knowing where else to direct the conversation.
“Are they doing construction by your apartment?” Jimin asks, changing the subject. “The noise?” he says, by way of clarification when Taehyung looks at him in confusion.

“Oh,” he says, realization dawning across his features. “No, the noise is more along the lines of Yoongi and his, uh, friend.”

“Oh,” says Jimin, then, “oh,” as Taehyung’s full meaning sinks in. “Wow.”

“It’s a bit traumatizing,” he says, and Jimin laughs at the look on his face.

“More traumatizing than thinking I died at twelve?” Jimin asks, still laughing.

“Hey,” Taehyung snaps, not because it isn’t true. No, the problem is that it’s too true. That thinking his best friend had died was the most devastating thing to ever happen to him, even more than his family having to move from their comfortable home into—well. “That’s not funny, Jimin.”

“Oh, I’m—”

“Losing you was the single worst thing to ever happen to me, Jimin. You were my best friend. I loved you, and the fact that you were there one day and gone the next? That your grandma only told me ‘he’s gone and not coming back’ and I had nothing else to go on?” They’re no longer walking, Taehyung having halted at some point that he doesn’t consciously remember. “Jimin, all I knew was that you were gone, that you weren’t coming back, and then my family had to move and I never saw your grandmother again.”

He looks up at Jimin when he realizes that he’s been glaring furiously at the concrete beneath their feet. Jimin has gone pale, lips parted slightly in shock.

“You were my entire world, Jimin, and you just disappeared. Sometimes, when I see you at the club, it takes me a second to remember that you are alive and that it really is you, not a figment of my imagination.” He takes a step forward, moving a little more into Jimin’s space. “There hasn’t been a day since you disappeared that I didn’t wish I could see you again. I want you back in my life, Jimin.”

“Oh,” Jimin chokes out, before visibly collecting himself and pulling up that shield Taehyung never sees him without. Or, at least, not without for long.

Taehyung thinks that his speech warrants more than just ‘oh’, but he doesn’t get a chance to say as much because Jimin is grabbing his wrist and dragging him quickly down the block.

“The hair has to go, Taehyung,” Jimin says once he pulls him into a quiet alley close to his apartment. He hadn’t been paying attention to how far they had walked.

“What?” Taehyung asks, not following Jimin’s jump in logic.

“If you want to spend time with me,” Jimin says, slowly and clearly. “Your red hair has to go. I can’t be around you when you’re walking around like a fucking bullseye.”

Taehyung should really be caught up on the implication that being around Jimin makes him a target of some kind, but all he can focus on is the part where Jimin said he’ll be around Taehyung. “You want to spend time with me?” Taehyung asks in disbelief.

“Not with your hair that horrible—and, honestly, terrible—shade of red.”

Taehyung opens his mouth to protest Jimin’s abuse of his choice in hair color, only to have Jimin
speak before he can do so.

“If you want to spend time with me, to be my friend again, this is my condition,” Jimin says nonchalantly, pulling out his phone and unlocking it to check his notifications.

And Taehyung…Taehyung shuts the fuck up. Whatever he said about losing Jimin as a friend must have struck some kind of chord with Jimin because getting Jimin back in any capacity after that rant was more than he expected, if not what he hoped for.

“Okay,” he finally says, snatching Jimin’s phone out of his hand to add himself as a contact, ignoring Jimin’s protest at having his phone taken away. Before he gives it back to Jimin, he sends himself a quick text so that he has Jimin’s number. “There,” he says, handing Jimin’s phone back. “Now you can text me whenever you want.”

Jimin looks at his phone, now safely returned to his hand, a bit numbly, like he’s having trouble processing what just happened.

Taehyung’s phone buzzes twice in his pocket and he pulls it out, two texts waiting for him. The first is the one he sent from Jimin’s phone, but the second one, sent a few minutes ago, is from Yoongi.

“Oh,” he says, looking back up at Jimin who seems to have recovered from his surprise. “I can go home and sleep now.”

“Yoongi’s friend finally leave?” Jimin asks with a smirk. He ducks back out onto the sidewalk with Taehyung as they both begin walking again.

“Well,” he says, turning left at the corner toward his apartment and separating from Jimin. As much as he wants to keep talking to Jimin, the thought of getting a few more hours of sleep is so strong it outweighs even that urge. “I’ll text you later today!” he calls, as he jogs backwards down the street to keep Jimin in view as long as possible.

Jimin waves farewell, and Taehyung is grateful that Jimin’s too nice to outright laugh over the way he trips over his own feet and falls flat on his back because he’s running backwards.

He’s really tired.

***

Jimin is in a meeting with Namjoon, talking care of some quarterly reports, when his phone buzzes with incoming messages. Namjoon waves his hand dismissively, so Jimin pulls out his phone, carefully keeping his face devoid of expression on the off chance Namjoon is paying attention to him, despite his excitement when he sees Taehyung’s name in his notification banner.

*Hey Jimin guess what [Received 17:24]*

😊😊😊😊😊😊 [Received 17:24]

What the fuck are these emoji.
“What the fuck,” he says, and Namjoon looks up in concern.

“Something wrong?” he asks, pausing what he’s doing at Jimin’s outburst.

“It’s nothing,” Jimin dismisses, waving him back to his work. “Just a confusing message.”

What [Sent 17:25]

Wtf [Sent 17:25]

Kim Taehyung what is that supposed to mean [Sent 17:25]

[hairdye.jpg] look what I got [Received 17:26]

Can we do this tomorrow?? [Received 17:26]

Jimin looks away from his phone and catches Namjoon’s attention. “We don’t need to meet tomorrow, right?”

“I don’t think so,” Namjoon says warily, looking like he might riot if Jimin asks him to spend another of his days off in the club.

“Just checking,” Jimin says. “I don’t need you—I just wanted to be sure you won’t need me.”

Namjoon sighs in relief and nods. “I mean, not that I don’t love working for you, but I don’t want to spend another night on the couch in the breakroom after trying to sort out all this paperwork for your various, uh, investments.”

Sure. I have time in the early afternoon [Sent 17:26]

“Sure, sure,” Jimin says absently. Then, “Wait, you sleep in the breakroom?”

“Um, no, never,” Namjoon says, very obviously trying to backpedal.

“I don’t care if you do, I just didn’t know you worked that hard,” Jimin says, frowning at Namjoon. His phone buzzes again, and he looks back down at it to read Taehyung’s response.

Good! The sooner I can hang out with you on the reg the better [Received 17:26]

I want my hair dyed asap [Received 17:27]

“I keep telling him not to work so much,” says Seokjin, sticking his head into Namjoon’s office.
“Seokjin, why are you here?” Jimin asks, turning around in his armchair to look at him. “I don’t need you today.”

Seokjin smiles warmly and nods. “I know, I was just reviewing some tapes.” He steps into Namjoon’s office and comes around to sit on the corner of Namjoon’s desk. “One of the dancers mentioned a guest that was a little too handsy and I was trying to find a face so I can keep a closer eye if he comes in again.”

“Is Hoseok having trouble again?” Jimin asks. It’s not the first time they’ve had to ban someone from the club because they got a bit too entitled with one of the dancers. It’s not Hoseok’s fault that he’s so popular.

“He’s having less trouble now that he and Yoongi are…like, whatever they are,” Seokjin says, his tone making it clear that he doesn’t really know what exactly Yoongi and Hoseok are.

Well, now he knows who Yoongi’s friend is that Taehyung mentioned.

“But I’m still working on keeping him and our other dancers safe,” Seokjin continues. “I don’t like it when they don’t feel safe. Makes me feel like I’m bad at my job.”

Jemin nods. “I don’t know what I did to deserve you, but thank you Jin. You’re amazing.”

“Thanks, Jimin. It was either work for you or open my own dojo, and you pay better, so.”

He laughs and turns back to his phone as Seokjin and Namjoon fall into a deeper conversation about work.

_Haha miss me that much? [Sent 17:28]_

_You have no idea [Received 17:28]_

Jemin balks at that, not completely sure how he feels about Taehyung’s honesty or the way his chest tingles with warmth at the thought of Taehyung missing him.

“Something wrong?” Seokjin asks, interrupting his conversation with Namjoon about the club’s banned client list to eye Jimin.

_I’ll see you tomorrow, Tae [Sent 17:28]_

“Yeah, everything’s fine,” Jimin says, waving Seokjin off. Taehyung probably doesn’t mean it in that way anyway.

_It’s a plan 😊 [Received 17:28]_
“Are you ready?” Taehyung asks excitedly as soon as Jimin has opened his front door. He steps past Jimin, not waiting for an answer, or an official invitation inside, and kicks his sneakers off.

Jimin can tell when Taehyung looks up and registers the interior of the penthouse, because Taehyung’s jaw drops and his eyes go comically wide. Jimin snickers, and closes the door.

“Wow,” Taehyung says, dropping the drugstore bag on the floor carelessly. He takes in the décor with a quiet gulp before moving to the floor-to-ceiling windows that make up the entirety of the living room walls.

“The view’s better at night,” Jimin says offhandedly, picking the bag up and moving toward the master bathroom to deposit it by the sink.

“Jimin, this is stunning,” Taehyung finally manages, his face practically pressed flat against the glass in his attempt to see everything at once, and Jimin pauses, unable to tear his eyes away from the captivated expression on Taehyung’s face.

“Are you leaving handprints on my windows?” he teases.

“Yes,” Taehyung admits unashamedly, still staring at the people and cars moving around a hundred and twenty feet below them on the street.

Jimin snorts. “The view’s not going anywhere, you know,” he says. “You can ogle it while we wait for the dye to set.”

“Yeah, okay,” Taehyung agrees, peeling himself away reluctantly and turning toward Jimin. “Where are we…?”

“In my bathroom,” Jimin says, tipping his head sideways to indicate Taehyung should follow him. “C’mon, it’s this way.”

Taehyung shuffles along behind him, walking slowly as he takes in the size of Jimin’s bedroom, the excessively large bed, the expensive artwork on the walls, the luxurious amenities in the master bathroom… Jimin tries not to smile at how easily impressed Taehyung is.

He might fail a little, the corner of his mouth unable to keep from quirking upward.

“Wait—” Taehyung sputters. “The shower is glass, and the wall is all glass, and— How do you shower?”

“I turn on the water and step under it?” Jimin asks, amused.

“But what about privacy?” Taehyung presses, and Jimin shrugs.

“I don’t really worry about it,” he says, gauging Taehyung’s expression as he speaks. “If somebody wants to watch me in the shower, let them. I got over being shy a long time ago, Taehyung.”

Taehyung’s doe-eyed stare is back, only this time it’s aimed at Jimin, and he can’t help the blush that creeps unbidden up the outside edge of his ears.
In a moment of self-defense, he settles a flabbergasted Taehyung on the kitchen stool that he’s dragged in front of the sink and busies himself with unpacking the supplies in the bag.

“What color did you decide on?” he asks, hoping to distract Taehyung from whatever’s going through his head.

It works. Startled out of his train of thoughts, Taehyung prattles on about a chestnut brown that his little sister picked out so that he’d have the same color hair as Prince Charming.

“Prince Charming, huh? You got a Cinderella somewhere that I don’t know about?” Jimin jokes, his tone carefully sculpted.

He tells himself that he isn’t genuinely interested in Taehyung’s answer.

A giggle escapes Taehyung as Jimin wraps a towel around his shoulders and clips it in place. “Nope. Just you,” he says winsomely, a smile somewhere between sweet and sly taking up residence on his face as he watches Jimin in the mirror.

Unsure of how to reply, Jimin averts his eyes from Taehyung’s and picks up Taehyung’s comb. He drags it slowly through Taehyung’s hair to make sure it’s not snarled anywhere, and Taehyung curses.

“Shit. Sorry, Jiminie, I shouldn’t have— I mean, you’re engaged, and that really wasn’t funny, and I kind just got caught up in the way we used to be together, and I—”

“It’s fine.” Jimin interrupts Taehyung in an effort to reassure him, but Jimin doesn’t think the smile on his lips extends to his eyes. He wishes it did when he sees the upset visible on Taehyung’s face. “Kookie and I are…it’s arranged. An alliance for mutual benefit, I guess. Our relationship is—” he pauses, trying to come up with the right words to explain it without giving too much away. He stalls, unable to vocalize what he means without saying things he shouldn’t.

“None of my business,” Taehyung supplies flatly, keeping his eyes firmly on his own reflection.

For some reason, this hurts Jimin.

“If you’re going to be my friend, it can be your business,” he says in a fit of irrationality. He hesitates, knowing he has to qualify that statement. “But…there are some things I’m not going to be able to share with you.”

“To keep me safe?”

Taehyung’s eyes dart up to meet Jimin’s, and Jimin can’t tell what Taehyung’s feeling because too many emotions swirl through his eyes for Jimin to pick them out. Disappointment? Determination? Curiosity, maybe?

Jimin places the comb back on the counter and picks up a clip to start parting Taehyung’s hair, pulling it back in sections and twisting it so that he can pin it out of the way.

He works for a minute in silence, thinking through his words before he says them as he finishes clipping Taehyung’s hair up. “Yeah,” he finally replies. “To keep you safe.”

Jimin reaches past Taehyung for the box of dye, but Taehyung catches him off guard, setting his palm on Jimin’s upper arm and wrapping his long fingers around Jimin’s bicep. He squeezes gently, and it’s comforting.
“I trust you,” Taehyung says quietly, and the only thing Jimin can see in his friend’s eyes now is a sincerity that makes Jimin shake just a bit under its intensity. “You tell me what you can—what you want to—and I’ll listen.”

“Thanks, Tae,” Jimin says, the nickname slipping out before he can stop it.

Taehyung beams, his smile practically blinding in its brilliance, and, unable to look away, Jimin kind of regrets not using the nickname sooner.

Jemin’s answering smile reaches his eyes this time, and he only breaks their gaze with reluctance when he feels the blush rising in his cheeks.

Jemin turns away, then, popping open the box of dye. “Okay!” he says briskly. “Let’s mix this up and turn you into Prince Charming, shall we?”

Forty-five minutes, an intense lesson regarding the genius of Gene Kelly on roller skates, and two popsicles each later, Taehyung is bent over Jimin’s tub, and Jimin is leaning over him, running his fingers through Taehyung’s hair and working the excess dye out before rubbing in a palmful of his sulfate-free shampoo. He’s thorough, using his fingertips to massage the shampoo into the roots, and a low groan escapes Taehyung as Jimin drags his fingers back and forth across Taehyung’s scalp.

Jemin freezes for a moment, uncomfortably aware of their position and the sound that Taehyung has just let loose.

Then Taehyung’s squeaking out an apology, muttering something about being weak to head massages, and Jimin’s brain is filing that information away before he can chastise himself for it being an incredibly bad idea to do so, and his fingers are resuming their massage, sluicing the shampoo out of Taehyung’s hair under the running water.

He grabs the conditioner that came with the hair dye, and squeezes it directly onto Taehyung’s head. A soft giggle bubbles up through his throat as Taehyung shivers under the cold temperature of the cream, and then Jimin rubs it in, focusing on not focusing on Taehyung’s reaction.

He’s distracts himself by studying the new color of Taehyung’s hair as he rubs it dry with a towel, it’s still so wet, so it’s hard to tell, but it looks like there’s a lot of red left, and Jimin frowns. He hands Taehyung the blow dryer, and watches at the red in Taehyung’s hair becomes more apparent with each minute.

At best, his hair is burgundy, with misshapen patches of bright red peeking through. It is definitely not chestnut brown.

“Tae,” Jimin says slowly.

Taehyung is staring in the mirror in horror. “Please tell me the back is better?” He turns around, and Jimin winces.

The longer hair at the crown of Taehyung’s head suffers in the back just as it does in the front, but the shorter hair toward the nape of his neck is so dark brown it’s almost black.

“It…depends on what you want it to be better at,” Jimin replies carefully, and Taehyung releases a laughing sob. Or a sobbing laugh. Jimin can’t really tell which.

Taehyung slumps into the chair in front of the sink, eyes aimed vacantly at Jimin, and Jimin realizes
in that moment that they may have screwed this up.

His rational brain turns off then, and his body moves on autopilot. He moves immediately to stand next to Taehyung, his hand finding its way to Taehyung’s cheek. He rests it lightly there for two seconds, until he realizes what he’s doing, and then drops it, the skin of his palm burning from the touch.

He clears his throat as he steps away, pulling out his phone and beginning to scroll through his contacts.

“I’ll call Sehun right now and set up an appointment to fix it. In the meantime, you’re allowed to wear a beanie at work. If you want.”

Taehyung lets out a choked noise, and Jimin runs away from it, placing his ringing phone to his ear.

(Wednesday)

Two days later, Jimin is awake significantly earlier than usual, and directing his driver to Taehyung’s address. Surprisingly, Jimin is excited, not irritated like he would be if he was waking up hours early for anyone else.

He tries real hard not to think about the reason behind that.

Taehyung’s eyes gleam when the car pulls up and the driver gets out to open the door for him. He crawls into the backseat, plopping down unceremoniously next to Jimin, and grins.

The windows of his car are tinted as dark as legally allowed, so Jimin hasn’t found himself in need of sunglasses before this moment.

“—never had my hair done professionally like this before, you know? I mean, my mom always cut it for me, and when I dyed it red a friend of mine from drama class in high school did it, and—”

“Hello to you, too,” Jimin says, his lips quirking up.

What is it about Taehyung that always makes him smile uncontrollably? He squashes it down—play it cool, Park Jimin—as Taehyung replies.

“Oh, okay, you can’t blame me for being excited to fix this,” Taehyung argues, pointing at his hat-covered head. “Wearing a beanie 24/7 made Yoongi suspicious, and he yanked it off my head last night after work. I thought he was gonna die because he was laughing so hard. I am never gonna live this down.”

The tiny smile is back on Jimin’s face, and this time he doesn’t fight it.

He knows he should. He knows that accepting Taehyung back into his life as his friend has the potential to be dangerous for Taehyung, if the wrong people decide that he’s a weakness they can exploit to get to Jimin.

He’s got to be so careful—for Taehyung’s sake, and for the sake of his family, whom Taehyung loves with an unmatched fierceness—but here in the seclusion of his own car, with tinted windows and the privacy screen rolled up, Jimin doesn’t fight this one smile.
He just lets Taehyung ramble on about other things he’d like to experience for the first time someday, and quietly tucks the information away.

When they arrive at the boutique, Jimin tells Taehyung to hang back, and approaches the receptionist. He doesn’t recognize her—she must be new—so he introduces himself. “I’m Park Jimin, and I’m here to see Sehun,” he says.

Checking in with the receptionist under his own name, and not Taehyung’s, is a necessary precaution, regardless of how silly it may seem. Sehun is awfully shy, especially with new people—an odd trait for a hair stylist, but one that made Jimin like him instantaneously when they first met.

After how long they’ve known each other now, he trusts Sehun’s discretion implicitly, but the rest of the salon staff? They’re a bunch of gossips, and if Jimin can keep Taehyung’s name out of it entirely maybe they can skate through this appointment with no one the wiser.

The receptionist’s eyes flicker from Jimin to Taehyung and back, and she frowns. “Sehun isn’t here today. Maybe you mixed up your appointment date, or you booked with a different stylist?” She glances back down at her book, scanning it for Jimin’s name.

“No,” Jimin says. “I called Sehun personally, and he agreed to see me today. Can you please check and see if he’s here yet?”

The receptionist’s frown deepens and she looks like she’s about to argue that their boutique doesn’t do that kind of special treatment, but a quick glance up at his unyielding expression convinces her to get up and stalk toward the back office, where the salon’s manager, Junmyeon, is likely holed up. When she emerges again, a plastic smile is plastered on her face.

Jimin wonders briefly what Junmyeon said to her. It’s not really her fault that she doesn’t know who he is yet, but he’s guessing she will next time he comes in.

“He’s ready for you,” she says, artificial sweetness oozing through her words. “Right this way—”

“I’m familiar,” Jimin says, adopting a polite smile and waving Taehyung forward. “Thank you,” he dismisses her courteously, walking past her toward the private room where Sehun is probably waiting.

He bypasses Sehun’s usual chair and leads Taehyung to the private room in the back. Jimin himself had paid for the room to be built into the interior of the salon, so that he wouldn’t have to sit up front with everyone else. With how much time he spends with Sehun, it’s been well worth the investment.

He pushes the door open and steps into the private room, and Sehun greets him with a wide, toothy smile.

“Jimin,” he says softly, clasping Jimin’s shoulders and placing a kiss to each side of his face, the cool plastic of his black thick-framed glasses pressing into Jimin’s cheeks.

Jimin mimics the gesture and moves out of the doorway to let Taehyung in as he says, “Hello, Sehun. How are you?”

“Better now that you’ve finally decided to get rid of the grey. You need something that’ll fit your personality bett—oh,” Sehun says, trailing off in surprise when he sees Taehyung.

Jimin chuckles as Sehun flushes. “The grey suits me just fine, Sehun. I actually brought a friend for
color correction today.”

Jimin turns to Taehyung and nods once. Taehyung shuts the door behind them and pulls his beanie off his head.

“It’s one-hundred percent Jiminie’s fault,” Taehyung says, throwing Jimin under the bus. “I told him that unicorn snot couldn’t cover the red, but he wouldn’t listen.”

Jimin watches as bewilderment turns to amusement on Sehun’s face, and then he’s laughing and Jimin’s shocked at how quickly Taehyung navigated past Sehun’s reserved nature.

“Well, I’m sure—*unicorn snot?*—” Sehun says, raising an eyebrow at Jimin as he gestures Taehyung into the salon chair, “—would have worked just fine if someone had remembered to use hair color remover on the red before applying…what color were you aiming for?”

Well. Now he knew what they’d done wrong, at least.

“Prince Charming Brown,” Taehyung replies easily. “Hey, your rainbow hair is gorgeous, by the way. Did somebody here do it?”

“Hmm?” Sehun asks as he flings a cape around Taehyung’s shoulders and snaps it in place. “Oh, I did.”

Taehyung gapes. “You dyed your own hair into that beautiful rainbow and it didn’t come out looking like *mine*? Aah, you’re so good at this! Jiminie, can I have rainbow hair too?!”

Jimin and Sehun both answer at the same time, Jimin’s firm ‘Absolutely not,’ sounding loudly over Sehun’s more demure ‘thank you.’

Taehyung takes a moment to pout, and then says, “I’m Taehyung, by the way.” He sticks his hand out from under the cape to shake Sehun’s hand, and Sehun smiles and grasps it gently.

“Nice to meet you, Taehyung. I’m Sehun. I’m sure you already know that, but it’s nice to be properly introduced. Now. What color, exactly, is Prince Charming Brown?”

Jimin sits in the shampoo chair while Sehun dabs at Taehyung’s hair with the dye, the tip of his tongue pinned between his lips as he concentrates, and Taehyung chatters on about nothing and everything. Sehun laughs and responds occasionally, and Jimin sits back and watches, keeping a passive expression lodged on his face.

He should have anticipated Taehyung cracking Sehun’s shell and opening him up—he did the same thing to Jimin, honestly—but Jimin can’t help the little twinge in his gut at the thought that there’s something different about their own connection. That their history makes the way Jimin’s reservations melted away something…unique. Something special.

Jimin frowns internally.

What he and Taehyung have *can’t* be special. He knows this. For Taehyung’s safety, and— And— Two days ago, he’d gone out of his way to tell Taehyung—when he shouldn’t have—that his arrangement with Jeongguk was just that. An arrangement. He’d tried to explain that there isn’t anything between them but business and the occasional fuck—well, okay, *more* than occasional, but that’s because Jeongguk’s libido is *healthy*, and the sex is good, so—
Focus, Jimin.

It shouldn’t matter what the details of his relationship with Jeongguk are. The fact of it is that he has a relationship with Jeongguk, an important one, one that he can’t fuck up, for the sake of everything he’s trying to balance with his family and their various interests. For the sake of ending the bad blood between the Parks and the Jeons, and moving forward with his plans. To let all that fall apart would be an unfathomable mistake, one that Jimin is incapable of even contemplating.

So why, in that moment, had it been so important to tell Taehyung that it was arranged?

Jemin sucks his lower lip in between his teeth and chews on it, mentally running through all the little things he’s been ignoring since he reunited with Taehyung. The way the words ‘Jiminie, it’s me. It’s Taetae,’ made him freeze, the way Taehyung’s arms still held the allure of comfort when Jimin was upset, the way that they fell right back into the easy friendship they’d had before they were separated.

The way Jimin’s chest tightened when he left Taehyung on the sidewalk with Holly.

He hardly notices when Sehun kicks him out of the shampoo chair to wash the dye out of Taehyung’s hair. He’s preoccupied, his mind a muddled mess, and he moves on autopilot. But when Taehyung groans a soft noise of enjoyment at the feeling of Sehun’s fingers on his scalp, Jimin snaps to attention. He should be the only one that makes Taehyung sound like—

Oh. Oh, no.

No, no, no, no—shit. Was he really jealous right now?

He cannot be jealous over Sehun getting along with Taehyung, over Sehun running his fingers through Taehyung’s new, beautiful, dark brown hair. There’s absolutely no way that he can even entertain jealousy over the thought of Taehyung being close with anyone else. Taehyung is just his friend, and—

And that’s all he can allow. There’s no room for anything more, despite the way his heart is racing and his palms are sweating, and—

Jemin chews the inside of his cheek as Sehun styles Taehyung’s hair, the two of them giggling over some silliness. He clenches his jaw as Taehyung suggests swapping numbers so he and Sehun can hang out sometime. He presses his lips together in a tense line when Sehun kisses Taehyung’s cheeks in farewell.

He can’t possibly be jealous.

“Jeminie, are you okay?”

Jemin jerks out of his thoughts, and turns to see Taehyung watching him carefully. He lets his head fall back against the headrest of the backseat again, and surreptitiously exhales a quiet breath.

“I’m fine, Tae,” he says, forcing a tight smile onto his face.

“You’re just awfully quiet,” Taehyung mutters, a frown creasing his brow.

The car comes to a stop in front of Taehyung’s building, but Taehyung doesn’t get out when the driver opens the door.
“I was just thinking about how good your hair looks,” Jimin finally says, which is not entirely a lie, just…isn’t anywhere near the whole truth.

None of his internal struggle is Taehyung’s fault, though, and Jimin knows he can’t take it out on him, so he softens his smile, letting it become something more real, and Taehyung perks up.

“Yeah?” he asks brightly.

“It’s very charming,” Jimin assures him, and Taehyung practically preens under the compliment. “I like it a lot.”

***

(Thursday)

Taehyung can’t believe he got Jimin to agree to a dollar theater matinee showing of *It’s Always Fair Weather* instead of getting a few more hours of sleep before work.

More than that, he can’t believe Jimin’s never seen *It’s Always Fair Weather*.

“I can’t believe you’ve never seen *It’s Always Fair Weather,*” is the first thing out of his mouth when Jimin’s driver opens the door of the car to let him out.

“Hello, Taehyung,” Jimin says calmly, running a hand through his hair and adjusting his sweater on his shoulders.

Taehyung takes a second to appreciate how good Jimin looks in baby blue before continuing, unwilling to foster such dangerous thoughts like that for more than a second.

“I mean,” Taehyung says, ignoring Jimin’s hello and grabbing him by the wrist to tow him into the theater. “It’s a classic.” He stops at the ticket counter, digging into his pocket for his wallet.

“Oh, don’t worry. I got this,” Jimin says, already pulling out his wallet.

“I can pay,” Taehyung says a bit uselessly as Jimin pays the attendant and gets their tickets.


And Taehyung bristles slightly because it’s not nothing to *him*. Money isn’t something he’s used to having a lot of and the way Jimin is so casual about throwing it around—about just *paying* for him like this—bothers him.

“I’ll get the popcorn,” he says, smiling slightly and making an effort to cut Jimin off as he heads to the concession counter.

“Taehyung,” says Jimin, grabbing his arm to prevent him from dropping money on the counter. “Please, let me get this too.”

“This was *my* idea though,” Taehyung says, not quite believing how difficult this is becoming. “Let me pay for my part of the date.”
Jimin hands his card to the cashier behind the concessions counter. “Taehyung, I’ve got this.”

Taehyung bites his tongue to keep further argument at bay.

“Consider it my restitution for never having seen this movie,” Jimin says, leaning against the counter as they wait for their popcorn. “Which is apparently a sin of epic proportions.”

Taehyung lets his protestations rest in favor of groaning, “It’s a classic, Jimin. Quite honestly it’s a sin to not see this movie.”

Jimin snorts a laugh and grabs their popcorn before walking into the theater. He hands the tickets to Taehyung so he can hand them off to the ticket attendant.

Taehyung laughs as he has to tug Jimin into the seats at the back of the theater, rather than the middle rows where he was heading. “Back row is best row,” he explains, pulling Jimin down into the seat next to him.

“Whatever you say,” Jimin says, smiling wryly.

Taehyung is about to say something snarky back—he’s not sure what but it would have come to him when the house lights go down and the movie begins. He reaches over for a handful of popcorn only to have his fingers collide with Jimin’s in the dark of the theater. A spark of heat burns through him from fingertips to toes, and Taehyung begins to realize that if this keeps happening, it’s going to be a very long movie.

Except it isn’t, because while Jimin had initially scoffed at the idea of seeing a musical from 1955 Taehyung watches in unmasked glee as Jimin becomes completely enthralled by the movie, turning so that he can watch Jimin watch the movie, idly munching on popcorn.

“Wait,” whispers Jimin, a good portion into the movie. “Are they singing to the tune of ‘The Blue Danube?’”

“Ohmm?” Taehyung hums, Jimin’s question pulling him out of a slight daze. “Oh, yeah,” he says, squinting at the screen for the first time in at least fifteen minutes. “They totally are.”

“That’s,” Jimin says softly, “so dumb.”

Taehyung gasps and throws a handful of popcorn at Jimin, giggling in shock when most of the popcorn catches in his hair. “You’re dumb,” he snickers, unable to focus on the movie, despite the on-screen man’s internal screaming being his favorite part of this song.

Jimin doesn’t look away from the screen, but he does fling most of the remaining popcorn at Taehyung, shoulders shaking as Taehyung whines about popcorn down his shirt.

And it’s there, in the dark of the theater, that Taehyung realizes that he wants more from Jimin than his friendship, that ever since he saw him all those weeks ago he’s yearned to have Jimin close to him again, to be friends again, and more.

It’s in the dark of the theater that Taehyung realizes that he’s pining after a man who is engaged to someone else. And he despairs for a moment, until he realizes that Jimin is here, with him. That he willingly chose to spend time with Taehyung.

That Jimin’s hand is resting against his on the arm rest between them, popcorn forgotten.

Wait.
Electricity sparks along Taehyung’s arm, making his blood boil and his skin burn where he’s touching Jimin. His heart rate spikes, blood thrumming through his body as he twitches his hand, just barely, so that it’s pressing against Jimin’s, hardly daring to breathe.

Jimin’s pinky finger twitches against his, a slight movement, but enough for his pinky to shift over his own tentatively.

Taehyung’s chest tightens and he slowly, so slowly, turns his hand over until his palm is facing up, eyes fixed on the screen like this is the first time he’s seen this movie and not the thirtieth.

Jimin lifts his hand and slowly slides it over Taehyung’s, sparks catching and igniting with the slow drag of skin on skin. Desire and heat and pleasure rush through him as their fingers interlock until he craves more, wants to feel Jimin’s hands on him, feel him pressed up against him.

Taehyung spends the rest of the movie wondering if all of Jimin’s skin is as soft as his hands are.

Not even Gene Kelly tap dancing on roller skates can manage to pull him away from marveling at the fit of Jimin’s hand in his, or the way Jimin’s thumb is tracing a slow line of fire along the outside of his index finger, back and forth in a steady rhythm.

Taehyung just sits there, eyes staring sightlessly at the screen as tingles rush up and down his spine with every swipe of the pad of his thumb against his finger, every time Jimin squeezes his hand slightly in his own another rush of warmth floods through his body and he’s torn between feeling too warm and wanting to curl in closer to Jimin’s warmth.

“Ready?” Jimin asks, nudging him with his elbow and squeezing his hand gently.

Taehyung blinks at the now blank screen as the house lights come up. “Uh, yeah,” he says, following Jimin out of the theater.

It takes him a moment to realize that their hands are still linked. He takes a breath and the warm fuzzy feeling he’s been basking in is slowly replaced with an irksome feeling he can’t quite place that has him opening his mouth and saying, “Jimin, we gotta talk about this.”

Jimin’s grip around his hand tightens in a spasm. “No,” he says, glancing over at Taehyung, face carefully blank. “Not right now. I mean, yes, we have to talk about it, but for right now I need you to let me have this.”

“But you’re en—”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Jimin says, stopping so suddenly that Taehyung bumps into him. Jimin turns around to face him, and neither of them bother to care that they’re standing in the middle of the theater lobby. “Just, not right now,” he says, a bit softer and much quieter.

“Okay,” Taehyung breathes, tension slipping away from his shoulders as Jimin pulls him into a brief hug by their still joined hands.

He knows when to stop pushing Jimin.

Jimin drops him off at his apartment, an hour or so before he has to leave for work, only releasing Taehyung’s hand when he actually has to leave the car.

He falls asleep that night, after work, with his hand still tingling, the feeling of Jimin’s fingers laced
between his seeping into his dreams.

***

(Friday)

Taehyung doesn’t know what on earth is going on, but he knows whatever it is it isn’t good.

It was his shift Thursday night after his movie date with Jimin when he first noticed it.

Hoseok—when Taehyung had said his customary hello—had merely given a terse grunt and a frown in response instead of the usual Hoseok Sunshine Smile™ that he was used to getting in return.

And then there was Yoongi.

Taehyung had taken one look at his expression when he finally joined him behind the bar to prep for their shift and had swiftly and silently moved to the other side of the bar to finish the prep work.

It had taken him the next forty-five minutes to finally work up the courage ask: “Is everything alright, Yoongi?”

Yoongi had turned a glare on him so fierce Taehyung’s teeth stung. “Why don’t you fucking ask Jung fucking Hoseok,” he’d spat, so furious that Taehyung had shut his mouth with an audible click and worked the rest of his shift without talking to Yoongi again.

Which you can only get away with for so long. He can’t just leave Yoongi at work, and so now he’s here, lying awake in his bed on a Friday morning, watching the clock tick closer to afternoon when he should be sleeping before work, only to be woken up by the dull thump of bass through the wall he shares with Yoongi.

He already knows that he’s not going to be able to fall back asleep, and so instead of trying to do that, he thinks of things he could do to entertain himself before going in to work.

When the idea hits him, he’s just tired enough to want to do it.

He throws off his blankets and starts cooking.

Jimin [Sent 14.23]

Hey [Sent 14.23]

Jiminnnn [Sent 14.25]

Jiminnie [Sent 14.28]

I can’t sleep and I want to do something [Sent 14.32]

Yoongi is being a bitch save me [Sent 14.35]
“Sir, I’m terribly sorry to bother you, but there’s someone at the front desk here that’s insisting that he’s allowed to visit you. His name is Kim Taehyung?”

Jimin pulls the phone away from his ear at stares at it, noting that it’s only three in the afternoon and he’s got eight unread messages. He’s barely awake for the day—what the fuck is going on?

He settles the phone against his ear again and sighs, saying, “Yeah, it’s fine. Let him up.”

“Very good, sir. Thank you.”

Jimin goes to his closet and throws a robe on over his bare skin, then stalks back out to his living room and opens the door, with moments to spare to cross his arms and arrange a glare on his face before the elevator dings and the doors open and Taehyung steps out.

Taehyung dismisses his expression entirely, focusing on the fact that Jimin’s wearing nothing but a silk robe. He blushes, and turns aside to look out the window.

“Why aren’t you dressed?” he mumbles, and Jimin smirks when Taehyung won’t meet his eyes.

“Because I didn’t think I’d be entertaining company before the club opens today,” Jimin replies.

“Why are you here at this hour?”

“I told you I’d cook for you, didn’t I?” Taehyung replies, brushing past Jimin and entering his home. “Hurry up and get dressed, will you? We have to get going.”

“Going? Tae, don’t you need a kitchen to cook—”

Taehyung cuts Jimin off with a mischievous grin, and shoves him lightly toward his bedroom. “No suits, Jiminie!” he calls from the living room as Jimin disappears into his bathroom. “Wear something comfy to move in!”

Comfy to move in?

What the hell is Taehyung up to, Jimin wonders.

He showers quickly, taking more time to style his hair and make up his face than he does under the hot water, and then digs a pair of fitted black jeans from the back of his closet. He spends a few moments looking for a specific top, finally finding the oversized kelly green sweater in the bottom of a drawer. He pulls it on, careful not to muss his hair and face, and settles its wide neck just off center enough to show off a hint of collarbone.

When he rejoins Taehyung in the living room, Taehyung’s eyes fix on Jimin unwaveringly, sliding from his face down his torso, to his legs. Jimin fights down a blush, and Taehyung clears his throat, yanking his gaze back up to Jimin’s eyes.

“You, uh, look really good in green,” Taehyung says, and Jimin smiles a small smile.
“Thanks,” he says lightly. “So where, exactly, are we going?”

“Oh, I’m so not telling. You’ll just have to trust me, Jiminie,” Taehyung sing-songs, and Jimin rolls his eyes.

“Do I need to call for my car?” he asks.

Taehyung giggles. “If you ever wanna get to the part where we’re eating, yeah,” he says. “Driving to our destination would be a good idea.”

By the time Jimin and Taehyung are sauntering past the concierge desk—Taehyung stopping long enough to grab a backpack from the attendant, chirping a ‘thanks for hanging onto this for me’ in her direction—the car is waiting for them, his driver holding the door open.

“Daaamm, he’s fast,” Taehyung whispers over Jimin’s shoulder, following him out the front door of the building.

“To the club, sir?” the driver asks.

“No, not today,” Jimin says, raising an eyebrow at Taehyung.

Taehyung fishes a folded piece of paper out of one of his back pockets and hands it to the driver. Surprised, the driver unfolds the note, reads it, and looks up at Taehyung, an unspoken question in his eyes.

Taehyung is ready for it, with a finger pressed to his lips. He winks. “It’s a surprise,” he says, and Jimin groans.

A laugh bubbles out of Taehyung as he shoos Jimin into the car in front of him. “You thought you were going to get it out of me, didn’t you? Too bad, Jiminie!”

And as irritated as Jimin should be at the way Taehyung is absconding with his evening, he’s more amused. And intrigued. And excited.

He probably shouldn’t be any of these things, but he can’t help it. There’s something about Taehyung that overrides everything Jimin should be feeling with emotions he has no control over.

It should be terrifying, but, oddly enough, Jimin’s not afraid.

Jemin tries to keep watch out the windows, to pay attention to where they’re headed, but Taehyung grabs his face, laying his palms flat on Jimin’s cheeks and turning his head so he can’t see out the window and is stuck staring into Taehyung’s eyes, so Jimin aims his most potent angry pout at Taehyung, but Taehyung just giggles and pinches Jimin’s cheeks and whispers, “No cheating, Jiminie.”

When the car finally stops in front of Brookfield Place, Jimin looks at Taehyung inquisitively. “This place has nothing to do with food, Tae.”

“Doesn’t it, though?” Taehyung smirks, and Jimin can see the satisfaction writ on his face at the way he still holds all the cards.

Taehyung grabs Jimin’s wrist, slinging his backpack over his shoulder, and pulls Jimin into the building, weaving through shoppers and passing high-end boutiques in a determined way that still leaves Jimin stumped.
It’s not until Taehyung has dragged him into the Winter Garden and pushed him down onto a bench beneath the palm trees that what Taehyung has planned actually dawns on Jimin.

“Wait. You packed a picnic?” he asks, surprise laced through his voice, as Taehyung reaches into his backpack and retrieves five containers full of food, setting them on the bench next to Jimin. He hands two chopstick boxes to Jimin, then pulls two water bottles out of the backpack before tucking it, now empty, under their bench.

“Yep,” Taehyung grins, sitting on the other end of the bench, crossing his legs and turning to face Jimin in one graceful move. He holds his hand out for one of the chopstick boxes, and Jimin places it in his palm, flicking the other one open and pulling out an unadorned pair of chopsticks as he pulls one knee up and turns to face Taehyung.

Taehyung peels the lids off containers, and, stunned, Jimin takes a second to absorb exactly what Taehyung has cooked for him.

“Japchae?” he asks, looking up and catching Taehyung’s eyes.

Taehyung nods. “My family eats traditional Korean dishes, like, fifty percent of our meals, and this is my favorite. My siblings like it a lot, too, so I make it a lot.”

Jimin is quiet as he watches Taehyung’s hands open containers of braised black beans, kimchi, spicy carrots, and sticky rice. His fingers fiddle with his chopsticks as Taehyung lays everything out before him.

“You prepared a full meal,” Jimin says. “With side dishes, and—” Jimin falls silent again. When he manages to look up at Taehyung again, he has to blink hard to banish the wetness gathering in his eyes. “It’s been,” he says, swallowing thickly, “over a year since I had a full Korean meal like this.”

Taehyung’s face creases with worry, and Jimin realizes he’s doing a shit job of hiding his raging emotions. Taehyung’s fingers reach out to graze Jimin’s knee and caress it gently in one smooth, barely-there glide.

It’s oddly soothing.

“Hey, Jiminie,” Taehyung says, drawing out his name in concern. “What’s wrong?”

Jimin shakes off his momentary lack of control, and smiles a genuine, soft smile at Taehyung. “Nothing. I’m fine.”

Taehyung’s fingers pull back hesitantly, and move to grip his own pair of chopsticks. “Okay,” he says, picking up the container with japchae in it and offering it to Jimin. “You first, then,” he adds softly.

They eat in comfortable silence, passing the dishes back and forth between them, and the food—the food is so good. Jimin can’t believe that Taehyung learned to cook like this. When he tells Taehyung as much, Taehyung just laughs.

“It’s a ton better than the mud pies I used to make for you, huh?”

Jimin cracks a grin at the memory, chuckling around a mouthful of noodles. “Ugh, I’d forgotten about that! I can’t believe you expected me to eat actual mud, Taehyung.”

Taehyung’s eyes twinkle mischievously as he says, “And I can’t believe you never complained about a tummy ache after you did it.”
“I did complain,” Jimin laughs. “Just not to you.”

Taehyung grins at that, nabbing the last slice of spicy carrot. Jimin makes a wounded ‘ah!’ noise in protest, so instead of shoving it into his own mouth, he holds it up for Jimin, meeting Jimin’s gaze as he does.

Jimin doesn’t break the eye contact. He just leans forward, parts his lips, and lets Taehyung feed him the carrot.

The carrot slice is long, though, and there’s no way he can fit the whole thing neatly in his mouth, not at the angle that Taehyung is holding his chopsticks, so he molds his lips around it and nibbles it in half, and then watches as Taehyung eats the other half.

Visibly flustered, Taehyung’s aim is messy, and a bit of the dressing smears the corner of his mouth. Jimin doesn’t stop to think about it.

He lifts his left hand, resting his forefinger against the underside of Taehyung’s chin, and drags the pad of his thumb across the smudge, pulling at Taehyung’s lips as he wipes the dressing away. Then he brings his thumb to his own mouth, and sucks it clean.

Taehyung’s pupils are wide, and a bit glassy, and his cheeks are flushed, and Jimin burns.

He breaks the eye contact, lowering his thumb to his thigh to wipe it off on his jeans, and clears his throat.

“Thanks for cooking, Tae. That was really good,” he manages to squeeze out. He feels parched, and he thinks that it’s probably not just his throat, but he lifts his bottle of water to his lips anyway, chugging down the last of it in hopes of washing away whatever that was, and Taehyung finally snaps out of his daze.


They pack the empty containers back into Taehyung’s backpack, and Jimin stands and stretches before turning to walk back to where the car had left them.

Taehyung grabs his wrist, stopping him before he actually takes a step. “Not so fast,” he says, his usual smile finding its way back to his features. “We’re not done yet.”

“What?”

“Just come with me,” Taehyung says, excitement creeping into his voice as he pulls Jimin towards the doors that lead out toward the Hudson River.

Jimin checks his phone—it’s only just before five, so he supposes they have a little time yet before they have to head home to get ready for work—and gives in, letting Taehyung drag him along on whatever this whirlwind adventure is.

It takes Jimin significantly less time to figure out what Taehyung has up his sleeve this time—Taehyung is proving to be delightfully difficult to predict, but proximity gives him away quickly this time. Within a minute, they’re outside, the strong breeze off the river ripping through their hair, and facing the ice rink.

“How long’s it been since you skated, Jiminie?” Taehyung asks, excitement gleaming in his eyes.
“Not since we were kids,” Jimin answers, a little breathless, and his lips are curving up before he can help it. “Did you get any better at it?”

Taehyung splutters. “Of course, I did! I’m gonna skate circles around you, Park Jimin.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it,” Jimin giggles, turning towards the rental tent. He pulls his wrist out of Taehyung’s grasp, just far enough that Taehyung’s holding his hand instead, and tugs Taehyung along behind him.

Twenty minutes later, it has become clear that the last thing Taehyung is capable of doing is skating circles around Park Jimin. Or skating at all.

Jimin doesn’t really mind.

Arms flailing comically and feet sliding in opposite directions, Taehyung is kind of a skating disaster. If he manages to keep his balance for three consecutive minutes, it’s likely a new personal best, but each time he falls, he gets up, grins it off, and tries again.

When Jimin grabs him by the hands and pulls him back to his feet for the third time, digging his toe pick into the ice as he takes Taehyung’s weight, he decides that maybe this time he shouldn’t let go.

Then Taehyung’s standing again, precariously balanced, and Jimin chuckles.

“Alright,” he says, starting off slowly, moving in reverse and leading Taehyung along by their linked hands. “Push off at an angle with your left, and glide on your right—good—now try it with the other foot. There you go. Don’t dig in with your toe, you’ll trip yourself—that’s how you stop. Just take it slow. Once foot at a time.”

Jimin looks up from Taehyung’s feet, and watches Taehyung concentrate, his tongue pinched between his teeth and his eyes glued on his skates. It’s hard not to get a little lost in the way his lips curve up with each new spurt of confidence, with each successful step.

After a few minutes, Jimin lets go of one of Taehyung’s hands, and turns to skate next to him, his left hand still in Taehyung’s right—just in case. They make it mostly around the rink, the smile on Taehyung’s face mirrored on Jimin’s, before the inevitable happens.

Jimin doesn’t see it coming, or he would have braced for it, but he’s caught just as off guard as Taehyung is when a kid barrels past them from behind, knocking into Taehyung and taking out his balance in seconds, sending them both crashing to the ice.

Taehyung falls first, his arms cartwheeling in a futile attempt to stay upright. All it does is rob Jimin of his own balance when Taehyung tumbles backward, yanking Jimin down with him. Taehyung lands on his ass, limbs sprawled in every direction, and Jimin—

Jimin lands on Taehyung.

His breath is knocked out of him by the impact, but when he meets Taehyung’s eyes, he’s breathless for an entirely different reason. Dark pools of warm chocolate hold him captive, and it takes him longer than it should to notice that they’re chest to chest, hips pressed against hips and fingers woven together, lips a mere inch apart, and when Taehyung exhales shakily, it warms Jimin’s cheeks.

Jimin desperately pushes back the realization that a different part of his body is heating up, too.

He tries to remove his hand from Taehyung’s, but Taehyung still looks a little shocked by the suddenness of their situation and isn’t letting go, so Jimin settles for lifting himself up and off
Taehyung with one arm braced against the ice.

Hovering over Taehyung, Jimin sucks in an unsteady breath and asks, “You okay?”

Taehyung nods tightly, flinching a little as a pair of ice skates zoom past eighteen inches from their faces.

Growling in irritation, Jimin cranes his neck to make sure all of Taehyung’s appendages are safely tucked in next to his body. When he’s sure Taehyung isn’t going to lose a finger to an ice skate blade, he turns back to Taehyung, tugging his fingers free and bringing them up to Taehyung’s face.

He touches his thumb to Taehyung’s cheekbone, his fingers ghosting over the shell of his ear as he searches Taehyung’s eyes. “You sure, Tae? You look a little out of it. Did you hit your head?”

“Nah,” Taehyung manages. “I’m okay.”

“C’mon, let’s sit you up,” Jimin says, pushing himself onto his knees and pulling Taehyung up with him.

They make their way slowly off the ice, Jimin steadying Taehyung with an arm around his waist, and Jimin says, “How about we go get hot cocoa? Is it still your favorite hot drink?”

Taehyung turns to smile at Jimin. “You remember.”

“Of course, I remember,” Jimin says, retrieving their shoes from the rental attendant. “The woman that raised me kept a can of hot cocoa mix in the cupboard just for you.”

“Wait—the woman that raised you? Why don’t you just call her your grandmother?” Taehyung asks, his forehead wrinkling in confusion as he plops down on a bench and starts untangling his skates.

Jimin sits next to him, pulling on his own laces. “You keep saying that, but she’s not actually my grandmother. I mean, I thought she was, back then, but when my father came to get me… I learned a lot of things that day, one of which was that I wasn’t related to her at all.”

Taehyung sucks in a corner of his lower lip and chews on it as he digests this information. “That’s sad, Jiminie, but it doesn’t mean that she isn’t still your grandmother. You don’t have to have a biological relationship for your emotional relationship to be valid.”

Jimin stares at Taehyung a moment, assessing his words, before he bows his head to his task again. He wiggles his skates off, slipping his feet back into his own shoes before he speaks. “I suppose you’re right. I wish I’d thought of it that way sooner.”

“It’s never too late, Jiminie,” Taehyung grins, tugging on his worn sneakers.

Jimin bites his tongue. It is too late this time, because the woman that—his grandmother, in spirit if not by blood—had passed away two years after Jimin had left her, but he doesn’t want to tell Taehyung that. He’d loved her just the same way he loved everyone, and Jimin couldn’t bear the thought of breaking the smile on his lips with sad news.

*There’ll be plenty of time in the future to tell him,* Jimin thinks. *I don’t need to do it now.*

The café near *LIE* that Jimin instructs his driver to take them to is a quiet place, unassuming and a bit plain in its décor, but the coffee there is Jimin’s favorite and they serve hot cocoa.
He orders for Taehyung, then requests a cup of coffee for himself, but Taehyung interrupts in an unseemly squawk.

“Jiminie, we’re on a hot cocoa date. Absolutely no coffee allowed,” Taehyung says, and Jimin wonders for two seconds if maybe Taehyung had hit his head on the ice after all.

“Tae, I didn’t get any coffee before we left my place, and you dragged me out hours before I normally would have left home. I’m not asking you to drink it. I just want to make it through work tonight.”

“Coffee is terrible for you, Jimin,” Taehyung lectures sweetly, a caring smile plastered on his face. “It’ll stunt your growth.” He eyes Jimin, his gaze falling from Jimin’s face to his feet, and then working its way smoothly back up. “Course, it might be too late for you. It looks like the damage has already been done.”

“Kim Taehyung, did you just make a short joke at my expense?! I resent that! Take it back, or deal with the fact that I’m getting coffee right now, because I’m not suffering your rude attitude without caffeine. It’s for your own safety.”

Taehyung laughs, and turns to the barista, who has a combination of irritation and boredom plastered across her face. “Two hot cocoas, and put a shot of espresso in one of them,” Taehyung says, checking over his shoulder for Jimin’s approval as he quickly pulls a couple of loose bills from his front pocket and hands them over.

Jimin just sighs and rolls his eyes, knowing that arguing with Taehyung over who’s going to pay will kill the mood, and then goes to find a table in a back corner of the café.

When Taehyung joins him, holding two steaming oversized mugs and sliding into the booth next to Jimin, it’s with a wide smile on his face, and Jimin doesn’t regret skipping his morning coffee at all.

On his way up to his penthouse, Jimin stops at the concierge desk. The same woman as before is still there, and she smiles, greeting him politely as he sucks in a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

“The gentleman I left with earlier, Kim Taehyung—” he says carefully, as if his words could cause irrevocable damage, “—I need to add him to my list of approved guests. He’s not to be stopped when he comes over, regardless of the hour.”

“Of course, sir. Let me just get the appropriate form for you to fill out.” She rummages through a file of papers, then hands him one.

It’s a simple half-sheet of fill-in-the-blank lines that ask for Taehyung’s information, and a place for Jimin to sign and date his authorization. He fills it out quickly and hands it back. Taehyung will have to stand for a photo to accompany the form next time he comes over, but otherwise, it’s done.

Jimin tries not to think too hard about the long-term wisdom of his decision as he dresses for LIE.

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Touching him was like realizing all you ever wanted was right there in front of you
Taehyung wakes up to someone pounding on the front door.

It’s not the ideal way to wake up on a Sunday morning, especially not when he’s only been asleep for—he reaches over and checks the time on his phone—sweet merciful heavens, he’s only gotten four hours of sleep what the fuck.

He hears Yoongi’s bedroom door slam open and begins praying for the poor soul who decided to wake up Yoongi because if he has learned anything about Yoongi in the last month he’s been living with him it’s that to wake him up before his alarm does is akin to having your death certificate signed and notarized. Game over. The end.

Taehyung listens, somewhat eagerly, for the verbal flogging the unfortunate human woodpecker outside their door is about to receive. He giggles a little when he hears Yoongi shout, “Who the fuck—” as he rips open their front door.

He’s expecting yelling, so he’s surprised when all he hears is the sound of the front door slamming shut, followed by hushed, furious whispering between Yoongi and somebody else as both voices move down the hall to Yoongi’s room. It’s as they’re passing his doorway that he manages to pick out Hoseok’s voice. He’s not used to hearing Hoseok sound angry, but he definitely does.

Taehyung spends about five minutes trying to go back to sleep before the whispering on the other side of the wall wanders into the territory of audible conversation.

He’s still considering trying to sleep through it until he hears Hoseok say, “You said you didn’t want people to know, and I quote, ‘that I’m fucking a stripper.’”

“Wait a fucking second,” Yoongi replies, definitely above a normal speaking volume now. “That’s out of context and you know it.”

“Context doesn’t fucking matter,” Hoseok says, all but shouting.

Taehyung dives for his headphones, intending to drown out this conversation with music, when his phone starts ringing.

He doesn’t even look at the caller, just swipes to accept the call, so relieved that he says, “Oh, thank fuck,” by way of hello.

“Well, good morning to you, too” chuckles Jimin.

Taehyung wants to die.

“I don’t usually have people this excited to talk to me,” Jimin continues.

“Yoongi is fighting with Hoseok right now and it is one conversation I do not want to be hearing.”

“Oh, shit?” Jimin asks. “Sounds intense.”

“Uh,” Taehyung pauses as Yoongi screeches “I don’t care if you’re a stripper, Hobi!” only to have
Hoseok yell back, “Don’t call me Hobi unless we’re fucking!”

“You could say that,” he says, tuning out Hoseok and Yoongi in favor of listening to Jimin. “So, what’s up?”

“I’m bored and I don’t want to sleep anymore,” says Jimin with no hesitation.

“I wish I was still asleep,” Taehyung says, a bit mournfully.

Jimin just laughs at him. “Did you have any plans today?” he asks, shifting the subject away from sleep.

“You mean besides getting a full eight hours of sleep?”

“Yes, besides that.”

“Not really. I thought about taking a walk, cooking a bit, maybe. What about you?” Taehyung asks, starting to wonder why Jimin called him in the first place.

“I thought I’d call and see what you’re up to.”

“Yeah, but did you have to call so early?” Taehyung whines, disregarding the fact that he was actually already awake when Jimin called him.

“Karma’s a bitch, or whatever,” says Jimin. “You woke me up early on Friday to go skating.”

“Yes, but—” Taehyung cuts off as he realizes that the fighting from the room next door has ceased, their apartment now suspiciously quiet. He thinks back to try and recall if he heard the front door shutting but he knows he didn’t. He’s fairly certain they’re both still in Yoongi’s room.

“But…?” Jimin prompts.

Taehyung shushes him, listening intently.

He regrets quieting Jimin to listen when he hears a long, drawn out moan that sounds suspiciously like Yoongi.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Taehyung gripes,throwing off his blankets and quickly hunting around for some clean clothes.

“What? What is it?” Jimin asks, a bit urgently like he’s worried Taehyung is in some kind of trouble.

“Yoongi just moaned in the way that means I have less than three minutes before Hoseok is fucking him.”

He nearly falls over as he struggles into his jeans. On the phone, Jimin chokes.

“And I know from experience that Yoongi is twice as loud when Hoseok tops,” Taehyung says, pulling the phone away from his ear to shrug a warm sweater on. It’s blue with white bunnies on it.

“—many times has this happened to you?” Jimin is asking, when he puts the phone back to his ear.

“Enough to know that I’m coming over to your place,” Taehyung says, grabbing his keys, wallet and leather jacket, the sound of a headboard thumping against a wall spurring him to move faster.

“Okay,” says Jimin, and Taehyung crams his feet into his shoes before flying out the door.
Taehyung doesn’t even say anything when Jimin lets him in, just heads straight for the liquor in the kitchen.

“A bit early for that, isn’t it?” Jimin asks, following Taehyung and watching as he downs three shots of vodka in rapid succession.

“Fuck you,” Taehyung says as he throws back another shot, and Jimin reeks back, not used to Taehyung being anything other than sober. “I had to hear their sex sounds. Do you know what that’s like, Jimin? Yoongi and Hoseok. Having very vocal sex.”

Jimin opens his mouth to reply, then closes it and grabs a bottle of whiskey and tequila. He jerks his head to get Taehyung to follow him further into his apartment.

“If we’re going to drink, we should do it in the media room,” he says, leading Taehyung back into his apartment.

“Any reason why?” Taehyung asks, gasping slightly as he walks into the media room for the first time. The floor to ceiling windows that overlook the New York skyline, paired with the large plush couch that lines all three walls and faces a floor-to-ceiling projector screen for movies creates a truly breathtaking space.

It helps that it has a dope ass stereo system that Jimin plans on taking full advantage of.

“This,” says Jimin, syncing his phone to the speakers and choosing his mix of slow and sexy songs to play quietly in the background.

Taehyung nods and flops down on the couch, kicking his feet up on one of the round cushioned tables in front of the couch. “Jimin, this couch is wide enough for two people to sleep on it comfortably.”

Jimin sets the alcohol down on one of the other tables not occupied by Taehyung’s feet before meeting Taehyung’s eyes. “That’s sort of the point, Tae.” He can’t help the wink that follows that statement, thoroughly enjoying the way Taehyung stares at him blankly for a moment before blushing a vivid crimson.

Taehyung grabs a nearby tumbler and pours a generous amount of tequila into it that he wastes no time in knocking back. “Yoongi owes me big time for sexiling me,” he says, coughing slightly through the burn.

“It can’t be all bad,” Jimin says, pouring himself two fingers of whiskey, taking a generous swallow of it, then another, as he sits sideways on the couch next to Taehyung.

Taehyung sighs and relaxes back further into the couch. “No, it’s not. I just need some good noise cancelling headphones.”

Jimin quirks an eyebrow at Taehyung but doesn’t say anything else, filing away that information for later.

“Hoseok is pretty cool too,” Taehyung continues, the vodka and tequila making him more
uninhibited with his speech that he usually is. “I like having him around.”

“Yes?” Jimin asks, more to encourage Taehyung to keep talking than anything else. The alcohol has made Taehyung’s voice a bit rougher than usual, just a bit deeper in his register, and Jimin is just buzzed enough from his whiskey to not care that it’s making his blood run a bit hotter in his veins.

“Yes,” Taehyung continues. “Yoongi sleeps a lot, which is fine and I’m used to that, but sometimes when Hoseok accidently stays for a while he’ll come and talk to me, or if we’ve just woken up I’ll make him breakfast before he leaves.”

Jemin just nods and sips at his whiskey, enjoying listening to Taehyung ramble about his life.

“And when I’m visiting my family? Hoseok always texts me and asks how they are, wants to make sure they’re happy and healthy. Of course, I figure he does that because if they’re fine I come back sooner and he doesn’t have to deal with Yoongi kicking him out of the apartment without breakfast.

“Not to mention,” Taehyung says as he takes another swig of tequila, raising a finger before he continues. “That my younger siblings can clean better than Yoongi. I told him when I moved in that I would help out with chores, but I had no idea I’d be doing all the cleaning.”

Jemin is starting to feel a vague sense of whiplash with how quickly Taehyung is jumping between subjects.

“Another reason why I like Hoseok so much—and this one is really important, Jiminnie—is because he teaches me cool things sometimes and I get cooler every time he does.”

“Like what things?” Jimin asks, curiosity and whiskey overruling his restraint.

He’s not ready for what Taehyung says next.

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Taehyung is probably—definitely—a little drunk.

“Hoseok taught me how to dance so I could get laid,” he hears himself saying, and if he could reach out and snatch those words back he would because the look Jimin is giving him spells trouble.

“Oh, yeah?” Jimin asks, half choking on the mouthful of whiskey he just swallowed, and to Taehyung’s hazy ears it sounds like a challenge.

“Yeah, turn up the music and I’ll show you,” he says before he can think about what he’s doing too much.

Jemin smirks at him and turns up the volume on his phone, raising the sound of the music until Taehyung can feel in his bones the heavy bass of a song made for a slow grind.

He hasn’t really been paying attention to what Jimin has had playing in the background, more concerned with erasing the sound of Yoongi’s moans from his mind by soaking it in tequila, but he pays attention to it now. It’s sensual and heavy, making him want to sink into the floor under the weight of it.

He starts swaying gently, letting his hips loosen and sync with the beats of the music, circling them
slowly. He focuses on his movements, trying to make them smooth and steady like Hoseok had shown him. And he’s doing fine, but he quickly realizes that it’s not much fun dancing on your own, so he holds Jimin’s gaze and beckons him up to join him in the open space in the middle of the room.

Jimin drains the last of his whiskey in his glass and gets up, walking over until he’s face to face with Taehyung, body moving in time with his.

He’s pretty sure it’s the alcohol that has him looping his arms around Jimin’s neck, bringing their bodies closer together until the heat is building and simmering between them. And it may only be noon on a Sunday, but for Taehyung it feels like midnight and he’s too tired and too drunk to even wonder if this is the best idea.

Besides, Jimin smells really good.

Taehyung feels sparks course through his body, electricity boiling his blood as Jimin slowly places his hands lightly on Taehyung’s hips. The music shifts to a different song, one heavy beat bleeding into the next, and Jimin steps closer until one of his legs slots between both of Taehyung’s.

And the sensation of it. Taehyung sinks into his knees, exaggerating the sway of his hips and letting his head loll back on his neck, biting his lip to keep from audibly reacting. His entire body tingles, and the way it felt for Jimin to hold his hand during a movie a few days ago is magnified by twenty as fire burns through his veins.

He’s still thinking about the sensation of their thighs rubbing together when Jimin puts pressure on his hips, turning Taehyung around so swiftly that the only way Taehyung can react is by pressing back against Jimin’s chest.

If he were sober, he wouldn’t press his hips back into Jimin’s, wouldn’t grind his ass into Jimin’s hardening length and rest his hands over Jimin’s on his hips, but Taehyung isn’t sober.

He is just drunk enough that the lines of right and wrong don’t matter anymore, that the only thing that does matter is the way Jimin’s hips grind against his ass as he rolls their bodies together. Or the way Jimin’s mouth feels against the skin of his neck as he sucks a trail of smoldering kisses down the column of Taehyung’s throat, reaching up to pull aside the collar of his shirt so that Jimin can bite down on the junction of Taehyung’s shoulder and neck.

Teeth digging into Taehyung’s skin have him blinking awake in a second, suddenly feeling more sober than he has since he threw back his first shot of vodka because as much as he craves Jimin’s lips against every inch of his skin, Jimin is also engaged to somebody else.

Taehyung spins around in Jimin’s arms, intent on telling him exactly that, but one look at Jimin and all rational thought flies from his brain as Jimin looks at him with so much open heat and desire that Taehyung ignites and burns.

He’s so fucked.

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Taehyung spins around in his arms, eyes wide and a hand pressed to his neck, and all Jimin can think about is how soft Taehyung’s lips look as they’re parting in shock, as he breathes in to say something.
So Jimin does what he’s wanted to do since Taehyung started to move along to the music four songs ago and fits his lips between the spaces of Taehyung’s.

Taehyung’s already parted lips part further as he gasps under Jimin’s lips, and Jimin wastes no time in pressing his advantage, reaching up with one hand to cup Taehyung’s jaw and sliding his other hand around his waist pressing Taehyung close to him.

It takes Taehyung exactly two seconds before he’s kissing Jimin back hungrily and just like that, Jimin is engulfed in a blaze of heat and desire so strong it leaves him breathless in the rush of it. Every single thought and reason why he shouldn’t be kissing Taehyung burns to ash as his tongue slides against Taehyung’s in an exchange so fiery his tongue feels singed.

But nothing compares to the burn of Taehyung ripping himself away from Jimin, a tortured, haunted expression on his face as his eyes turn glossy and red.

Jimin reaches out for him, tries to pull him back in and hold him so tightly, until Taehyung realizes that he is exactly what Jimin wants. But when he looks into Taehyung’s eyes all he sees are pools of hot chocolate quickly cooling and hardening under the weight of logic and reason.

Taehyung turns and runs, tripping away from him with eyes brimming as he scrambles to leave Jimin’s apartment as fast as he can.

Jimin can’t do anything other than stare after him, too frozen with disbelief at everything that just happened to do more than that.

His front door slams shut, and Jimin can’t help but think that’s the most fitting way for this shitty mess of emotional suffering to end.

Loving him is like driving a new Maserati down a dead-end street
Faster than the wind, passionate as sin, ending so suddenly

***

Taehyung keeps his head down as he sprints home from Jimin’s, running as fast as he can through the hordes of people on the sidewalks of New York City on a Sunday afternoon.

He feels like he’s going to burn away, turn to ash on the wind, and the tears streaming down his face are the only thing keeping him anchored. He jams his fingers into the keypad when he reaches his building, desperate to get inside before someone asks if he’s okay because he’s really not, and thinking about it only makes it worse. It takes three tries, his vision blurred and his fingers sliding sideways into the wrong buttons, but the clack of the door unlocking when he finally gets it is a sound Taehyung will forever be grateful for.

The elevator ride is torturously slow, but thankfully devoid of other humans, so Taehyung takes a moment to scrub his cheeks dry. It would be just his luck if he ran into Yoongi—or Yoongi and Hobi—in the apartment, and he can’t deal with that right now.

Yoongi is suspiciously absent from the common areas in their apartment when Taehyung lets himself in, so he counts his blessings and makes a beeline for his room, closing the door between him and the
rest of the world, and then falling back on it.

He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath to steady himself, regretting it instantly when all he can smell is Jimin’s cologne on himself. It triggers a visceral reaction, and he groans, slightly appalled by the fact that he can be upset enough to cry one minute, and so fucking turned on the next.

He wills it to go away, stripping down to his boxer briefs and leaving the pile of clothes where they fall on the floor next to his bed. He crawls under his covers—maybe he can ignore it and get some sleep, now that it’s quiet in the room next door. But trying not to think about Jimin’s cologne on him—Jimin’s hands and lips and teeth on him—means he’s thinking about it, and his…situation…only worsens.

“Fuck,” he says, staring at the ceiling in irritation. He closes his eyes, and makes a choice.

If it’s not going to go away on its own, Taehyung knows how to get rid of it, and Jimin and Jeongguk never need to know.

He lifts the elastic band and slides a hand beneath it, trailing his fingers down his stomach and to his cock, rubbing his thumb around the head before trailing it down his length.

He bites his lip a little to keep himself silent, and starts slow, with teasing touches, as he thinks about the way Jimin’s thumb felt as he dragged it across Taehyung’s lips two days ago, and how Jimin’s body pressed against his when they fell on the ice. He thinks about how Jimin’s hands gripped his hips firmly not two hours ago, and about the way Jimin spun him around, the strength in his arms as he manipulated Taehyung into exactly the position that he wanted him in.

He swipes his thumb over the slit, collecting the pre-cum gathering there to smooth his glide, and then speeds up his strokes. He thinks about the soft, wetness of Jimin’s mouth on his neck, the way he sucked little kisses down the curve of Taehyung’s neck.

He thinks about the gentle scrape of Jimin’s teeth across his skin before Jimin bit down, and the way heat blossomed in his stomach and sank lower as Jimin’s teeth latched on.

It’s good—it’s so good—but it’s not quite enough, so Taehyung pauses, leaning over the edge of his bed and grabbing his sweater off the floor. He holds it up to his nose, seeking out Jimin’s cologne, and—yes—this is so much better—

He balls the sweater up under his nose and reaches back into his boxer briefs, wrapping his hand around his cock and stroking in earnest, visualizing the sensual twist to Jimin’s lips when he smirks, the way his eyes are liquid desire when he looks at Taehyung, the way their lips slid together as Jimin pulled him closer, they way Jimin’s tongue caressed hungrily against his, and it's—

“You’re so fucking perfect for me.”

Taehyung freezes, Yoongi’s voice carrying through the wall between their bedrooms, and guilt for jacking off thinking about Jimin washes through him, dousing the fire in his groin.

He thinks about the way Jimin’s fingers felt laced between his own, how fucking perfect Jimin is for him, and he can’t stand the hollowness of what he’s doing anymore.

He wants Jimin, yes, but he wants all of Jimin, not just fodder for wet dreams and masturbation. He wants hand holding, and kisses, and sex in their bed, and breakfasts made together in the morning, not this illicit infatuation that can’t grow into anything else because Jimin’s engaged to someone else—
His cock softening, Taehyung slips his hand free of his underwear and wipes it off on his sweater before whipping it across the room in disgust.

He rolls over onto his side, curling in on himself, and wishes he hadn’t already cried himself out.

***

Jimin can’t fucking believe it.

This whole week—all the times he and Taehyung were out together, the way that he’d felt the tension between them swell, building into this fragile thing that finally shattered tonight in the best, and then the worst, possible way—

And Jimin can’t fucking believe it.

He can’t believe that Taehyung ran.

Jimin was sure by that point that Taehyung wanted it just as much as he does. The way that he’d flat out said that he wanted Jimin in his life… It’d been a splash of gasoline on smoldering embers, the raw intensity behind those words, and the way Taehyung’s body slid sinuously against his, inhibitions stripped and intentions laid bare—

But when Jimin had taken that risk and made a move, Taehyung fucking ran.

Fucking shit, Jimin is so angry.

He turns and takes the two steps toward the booze they’d left forgotten on the round cushioned table in front of the couch, pouring himself two fingers of whiskey. He knocks it back in three large gulps, then pours again.

He falls back into the couch with his drink, slouching into the cushions, his knees spread carelessly wide and his left arm tossed over the back of the sofa. His right hand cradles his glass of whiskey where it rests on his abs, and he brings it up to his lips again to wash down the fury caught in his throat.

He’s already drunker than he should be, so he forces himself to nurse his drink, rather than throwing it back and pouring another, like he wants to do.

He doesn’t know how long he’s been sitting there, sipping at his whiskey, the sky starting to dim outside, when he notices the song change and it’s another one good for a slow, sexy fuck, and he really didn’t expect to be sitting here listening to this playlist alone, still half-hard thinking about the irresistible grind of Taehyung’s ass against his hips and the burn of Taehyung’s skin under his lips.

He takes another drink.

“You didn’t bother to wait for me to get started then, huh?” Jeongguk says, and Jimin looks up from his rapidly-emptying tumbler, surprised to see his fiancé. Jeongguk is standing there in tight black leather pants, red leather jacket, and a white t-shirt.

“Kookie, wha’re you doin’ here?” Jimin asks, not bothering to hide his slur.

“It’s Sunday night. I thought maybe you’d like some company since we don’t have anywhere we
have to be tomorrow,” Jeongguk replies, unzipping the pocket of his red leather jacket and pulling out a wad of something black—is it fabric? He tosses it to Jimin, who manages to cage it against his chest with his left hand, not taking his eyes from Jeongguk’s figure, as he drops his shoulders back and shrugs off the jacket, tossing it aside carelessly, not caring that it lands messily on the floor at the end of the couch.

“You mean you wan’ed to fuck,” Jimin says astutely.

He’s drunk, not stupid.

A sly grin works its way across Jeongguk’s face, but he doesn’t say anything. He just pulls the tail of his shirt free from where it’s tucked into his pants, and strides toward Jimin.

Jimin watches the play of the muscles in Jeongguk’s thighs—the leather pants he’s wearing leave nothing to the imagination, and as long as Jeongguk’s in the mood to put on a show, Jimin’s going to enjoy it—

And then Jeongguk is literally on him, straddling Jimin’s hips with his knees. He takes Jimin’s glass from him, throws back the last of the whiskey in it, and discards the tumbler on the table with the bottle. He turns back to Jimin and guides his chin up with one hand, locking their eyes together, and braces himself on the back of the couch with the other, then slides his knees sideways on the cushion, lowering his hips down to Jimin’s in a fluid motion that reaffirms the straining bulge in Jimin’s pants.

Jimin’s hand automatically moves to grip Jeongguk’s hip, his other hand clenching around the ball of fabric that Jeongguk had thrown to him earlier. He has no idea what it’s for, but he suspects he’ll find out soon enough.

Hips flush against Jimin’s, Jeongguk smirks, then grinds his hardening cock down. A sharp gasp rips unbidden from Jimin’s throat, and Jeongguk leans down to swallow it whole.

He fits his lips over Jimin’s, licking his way inside Jimin’s mouth and sliding his tongue along Jimin’s in a slow caress. Jimin chases him when he pulls away, sucking Jeongguk’s lip in between his own before sliding his own tongue into Jeongguk’s mouth.

Jeongguk pushes him back against the back of the couch, pressing demanding kisses to Jimin’s lips, jaw, neck, ear, in retaliation, and Jimin throws his head back against the back of the couch, his eyes squeezed shut as he focuses on the hunger in Jeongguk’s lips against his skin.

“I kinda like it when you’re pliant like this,” Jeongguk says roughly against Jimin’s neck, his tone belying the understatement in his words and giving away exactly how pleased he is by Jimin’s reaction. He lowers his hand from Jimin’s chin, and takes the rolled fabric from Jimin. Untucking an end to the fabric, Jeongguk unrolls it holding it up for Jimin to see.

It’s a long, wide strip of satin, and when Jeongguk asks, “Should we take that a step further tonight?” Jimin wonders briefly if he’s going to have bruises tomorrow.

He presents his wrists anyway, knowing any response from him but agreement will end in another massive disappointment in his sex life tonight, and—

Jeongguk snorts. “Not tonight, baby. I got something better planned. Maybe next time, though—I’m not going to forget that offer any time soon.”

Jimin doesn’t know if he thinks this is a good thing or not.
Jeongguk rises from Jimin’s lap, standing and backing up smoothly, surprising Jimin. He pulls his tee over his head in one fluid motion, tossing it to the floor, his shoulders rippling as muscles move under skin. Jimin doesn’t pretend he’s not watching, but when Jeongguk catches Jimin’s eyes traveling up and down his body, he makes an amused noise.

“Like what you see?” he asks, unbuttoning and unzipping his leather pants.

“Always,” Jimin answers.

Jeongguk’s smirk is back as he laughs and says, “I wonder how you’ll like tonight’s adventure, then…”

Jimin’s brow creases lightly at Jeongguk’s willfully vague provocation, but then Jeongguk is slowly inching his leather pants down, and Jimin’s attention is one-hundred percent diverted.

Jimin’s made no secret of the fact that leather pants turn him on—the way that it clings to the flesh, hiding nothing—it can highlight the slightest movement and make it look liquid, like sin poured into a human mold, and it’s fucking hot, especially when Jeongguk wears them clubbing, and—

His eyes stay riveted on Jeongguk’s legs as they’re peeled free of leather, but Jimin’s drunk mind inserts someone else into the scene.

Taehyung, wearing the leather pants, dancing up against Jimin. Taehyung thumbing the leather pants open, biting his lip as he meets Jimin’s gaze. Taehyung pushing leather pants down past his hips, baring his cock for Jimin to—

Fucking hell.

Jeongguk has stripped down to his underwear—a sinfully tight pair of boxer briefs today—and he’s looking at Jimin with a curious expression, like he’s trying to read where Jimin went from the distant look in his eyes.

Jimin forces himself to focus on what’s here—on who’s here, because Taehyung sure as fuck isn’t—and Jeongguk shrugs it away. “Sit up, babe,” he says, and Jimin complies, leaning forward.

He runs the tips of his fingers across the sensitive skin just above the elastic of Jeongguk’s underwear, and Jeongguk fights off a full-body shiver, slapping Jimin’s hands away and nudging his knees together and to the side. Jimin obliges, turning to the side, and Jeongguk kneels on the edge of the couch behind him, lifting the strip of satin to Jimin’s face, and preparing to tie it over his eyes.

Jimin panics for a second, digging his fingernails into his thighs as the blindfold blacks out his vision, but Jeongguk is speaking softly about how good this is going to be, and moments after he’s finished tying it in place, his fingers are trailing down the line of Jimin’s neck, and the sensation is phenomenal.

Completely caught off guard by it, Jimin’s whole body shudders at the touch, and suddenly he’s looking forward to this very much.

Jeongguk chuckles. “I’m gonna undress you now, okay, baby?” he says, whispering it softly in Jimin’s ear and making him jump.

“Oh, okay,” Jimin replies, his voice catching a bit in his throat, and he feels Jeongguk’s hands under his elbows guiding him up from the couch.

He stands slowly and takes a step forward as Jeongguk pulls gently at his arms. He feels off balance,
and it’s only made worse by the fact that he’s still drunk, but all he can do is trust Jeongguk to take care of him. The irony of this situation doesn’t escape Jimin—this is precisely what he’s agreed to for the rest of his life—and Jimin finds it hilarious that it took a blindfold to point this out and give him a taste of what it might be like.

A giggle escapes him, and he feels Jeongguk’s thumb brush against his cheekbone softly in response. Then Jeongguk’s hands drift to the hem of Jimin’s grey sweater, and he’s pulling it up, and Jimin lifts his arms so that Jeongguk can tug it off.

Jeongguk’s fingers check the blindfold, to make sure it didn’t shift, and then they’re sliding down Jimin’s body, and Jimin quivers under the silky touch of lips against his neck. They work their way slowly, softly down the curve to his shoulder, and then Jeongguk is biting him, and Jimin is back with Taehyung, sinking his own teeth into Taehyung’s skin, and not even Jeongguk’s tongue sliding over his own skin to soothe the bite mark pulls Jimin back this time.

It’s too gentle, too little like Jeongguk and too much like Taehyung for Jimin to stay present, especially with his sight restricted, and every touch winds Jimin up further, the fire in the pit of his stomach burning everything else away as he’s laid back on the couch, his ripped, now-way-too-tight skinny jeans unbuttoned and tugged down off his hips, his boxer briefs disappearing with them. His cock twitches with the freedom, his burning skin brought to goosebumps by the comparatively cool air against it.

All clothing gone, the lips return to Jimin’s chest, and then a tongue is licking Jimin’s nipple, sucking it between lips and pulling a quiet cry from Jimin at the intensity of it. Not knowing where he’ll be touched next is fucking amazing, and Jimin imagines Taehyung hovering over him unable to decide how to tease Jimin next.

Then the touches disappear, and he’s sitting in the quiet, unsure of what’s going on. It stretches on, and he gets impatient. His cock straining—he’s been hard for so long, and Taehyung is keeping him waiting so long—

And then sensation is back, freezing cold against his nipple—did he go get an ice cube?—and Jimin can’t help the shocked ‘ah!’ that bursts out of his lungs, his chest heaving under the cold and the force of his exhalation, and then there are fingers on his cock, and Taehyung’s dragging his fingertips down his length, teasingly soft, almost not there at all, and a desperate moan slithers past his lips. He can see Taehyung’s satisfied smirk in his mind’s eye and he just wants to kiss it off his face, to lick into Taehyung’s mouth and feel Taehyung respond the way he did when they were dancing.

He’s about to lift his arms to search for Taehyung, to pull him down and drag filthy sounds out of him in retaliation, when lips join the fingers ghosting along his cock, and Jimin is absolutely unashamed of the sob that erupts from his throat, the way his hips jerk up, the way his fingers burrow into the cushion beneath him, muscles locked in rigid claws he can’t seem to loosen as Taehyung’s lips slide down his cock.

Fingers toy with the ice cube against his chest, sliding it down over his abs then back up to circle his other nipple, lips pulling up at the same time in a smooth motion that breaks Jimin down farther, and he can’t help the way he’s falling apart for Taehyung. He doesn’t want to.

He would do anything for Taehyung.

The ice cube finally melts away and the fingers that were holding it in place disappear. The fingers holding the base of his cock let go too, as Taehyung’s mouth slides all the way down, taking Jimin in deep, cheeks hollowing around his length, sucking and swallowing, and Jimin sobs fully this time,
the sound utterly needy and wrecked, and Taehyung hums around Jimin’s cock, making Jimin’s hips twitch into a shallow thrust again before Taehyung pulls off completely.

The cool air that hits his spit-slicked cock is just about as good as the ice cube had been, and Jimin’s filter is gone, and he’s begging for more, please, and then he hears the snap of a lube bottle opening, and relief floods his voice, because he wants it—he needs it—needs Taehyung’s fingers inside him fucking him open now he’s burning so bad, and then his cock, thick and hard, sliding in and breaking him apart.

Jimin gets his wish, a shattered gasp escaping him as the first finger pushes inside because it’s cold from holding the ice, but he pushes down onto it, not caring that it’s a little too tight because it’s good and he definitely needs more, and Taehyung must be reading his mind, because he adds a second finger and Jimin writhes, rolling his hips again and again and fucking himself on it with a whimper that borders on frantic.

Taehyung works him open quickly, efficiently, and Jimin imagines, briefly, Taehyung fingering himself open often enough to earn that skillful dexterity, and then Taehyung’s adding a third finger and Jimin’s ripped back from his imagination with a shuddering cry. Taehyung crooks his fingers into his prostate to distract from the burn, and Jimin’s burning in another way that’s so overwhelming he doesn’t notice anything but the pleasure tearing through his body like a forest fire out of control.

“Again, please, I need it,” he babbles, and he’s rewarded with exactly what he wants, his back arching off the couch, and he’s ready to come, just a little more is all it’ll take, and he’s so desperate for it, but he doesn’t want it until he’s been fucked properly, and Taehyung seems to sense that it’s time, because he pulls his fingers out and Jimin whines at how empty feels, but Taehyung doesn’t make him wait long, plunging in slowly in one deep thrust, and Jimin throws his head back in a silent scream as Taehyung lets him adjust. It doesn’t take long until Jimin is rolling his body, fucking down onto that perfect, thick cock, building speed and pushing hard for his release, but Taehyung places one hand on Jimin’s hip to slow him down and Taehyung places and steals the lead, setting a slower pace that has Jimin almost in tears because the drag is so good against his prostate and it’s so much more than he can handle and then he’s coming, gasping as his cock spills cum all over his abs, writhing under Taehyung as his hips thrust harder, picking up speed, stuttering a little as he works to control his own pleasure, and then he’s pressing his body hard into Jimin’s, biting the crook of his neck as he fucks him hard into the cushions.

Jimin wriggles beneath him, fingernails scratching furrows into Taehyung’s back as he fucks him past his limits, oversensitivity intensifying with every thrust, and finally Taehyung’s hips are losing their rhythm and he slams deep into Jimin three more times before his orgasm crests and he fills Jimin with hot cum, his hips twitching as his release wracks through him, his fingertips digging into Jimin’s shoulder and hip as he rides it out, panting next to Jimin’s ear.

Another sob rips free of Jimin, and Taehyung comes to his senses, pulling out of Jimin as carefully as he can and bringing his knees up next to Jimin’s waist, leaning over Jimin to untie the blindfold for it, and Jimin is ready for it, eager to see Taehyung’s face—the fucked out expression he must be wearing, and the haze in his eyes left over from his orgasm—and he lifts his head off the cushion with effort, to give Taehyung better access to the knot tied at the back his head, and then Taehyung’s lifting the blindfold off, and Jimin blinks slowly against the darkness that settled in the room when the sun set, trying to make out Taehyung’s features, but when his eyes adjust—

It’s not Taehyung.

It’s not Taehyung.

This terrible realization sinks into him, and Jimin’s mind releases the memories it had locked away
from him in the heat of his desire: Jeongguk’s arrival, his slow grind on Jimin’s lap, his voice soft as he tied the blindfold over Jimin’s eyes—

Jimin snaps his eyes closed again, willing Taehyung to come back, and the force of it squeezes a tear through his lashes. It streaks down the side of his face toward his ear, and a sob bubbles up from Jimin’s chest and bursts free violently, and then Jeongguk is there, gathering Jimin up to hold him close, confused as to what went wrong but offering comfort as best as he knows how.

It’s not what Jimin wants.

He’s not what Jimin wants.

He’s not Taehyung.

Jimin pushes weakly at Jeongguk, shoving at him until he lets go of Jimin, and Jimin is curling onto his side, burying his face in the back of the sofa as his tears fall, letting them drip to the couch and darken the fabric.

“Do you want me to stay?” Jeongguk asks between Jimin’s gasps, but Jimin just cries harder and doesn’t answer.

The room is silent, except for his sobs, and after a minute Jimin hears Jeongguk dressing, and a moment later, his front door opening and closing quietly.

Jimin lays there on the couch, heaving sobs wracking his body and Jeongguk’s cum beginning to trickle out of him, and tries to forget Taehyung.

It feels wrong.

_Forgetting him was like trying to know somebody you never met_

Chapter End Notes

*whispers* we're not sorry

WE'RE DOING A COOL THING: Monday, April 17 we're gonna do a Q&A
livestream via Kiki's twitch channel! drop by at 9pm Eastern Time to ask us anything, we may not answer spoilery questions, but we'd love to talk about the fic with you and hang out!

some reference photos for you, if you're at a computer, click on the photos for descriptions.

Scenes from It's Always Fair Weather, as described:
Gene Kelly tap dancing on roller skates singing to the tune of "The Blue Danube"

And while we're at it, a recipe for Japchae, cause it looks effing amazing and why the hell not. It's actually listed at Taehyung's favorite food on his BigHit bio, did you know? #IntentionalChoices

Callie and I made the Stigma shot while we were together, and we video'd for you, so check it out over on my Twitter (If the sound doesn't work on your computer, try watching on your phone or tablet. We're not sure why it's having issues, sorry). Also, if you're interested in getting writing progress updates from us, follow us on Twitter. These last few days have been crazy, and we tweeted so many almost-spoilers.
-Kiki

Kiki made a playlist of songs we looped while writing various scenes in this update, if you're interested. i definitely looped NCT U's "7th Sense" the whole time i was writing that JiKook scene at the end--give it a reread with that in the background, and I promise you'll get goosebumps.
-callie

Scene breakdown (SPOILER ALERT):
Kiki wrote all the Tae POV's except the masturbation scene, and the Jimin POVs where he's talking to Seokjin & Namjoon and where Jimin and Tae are drinking & kissing. Callie wrote the all hair dying scenes, the picnic/ice skating date, Tae's masturbation, and the JiKook. (man, that JiKook)

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter

Find Callie on Tumblr | Twitter | Discord
Consequences

Chapter Summary

Jimin feels watched.
It isn’t a new feeling; he’s watched all the time by everyone. Paparazzi want pictures of him with his fiancé, people at his club want to watch him socialize and see who he’s talking to, who he’s friends with, his father’s men constantly watch him to see if he’s going to fuck something up.
No, Jimin is used to being watched from all sides.
He’s not used to being watched by Taehyung, though.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He’s dragged out of a deep, dreamless sleep by his phone ringing.

“’llo?” he mumbles, blindly swiping the accept button and jamming the phone against his ear, face smashed into the pillow and muffling his words.

“Are you still sleeping, Taehyung?” comes his mother’s voice, slightly tinny through the phone.

“Oh, so it’s going to be one of those phone calls.

“Uh, maybe,” Taehyung says, making the barest effort to sound more alive, unsurprised when he falls very, very short of the mark.

“Maybe if you spent less time sleeping and more time working we wouldn’t be struggling to keep our home.”

“Mom, I’m working a full forty a week,” Taehyung says. He doesn’t hold her words against her. He knows how incredibly stressed his parents are, but it still stings, the implication that he’s not doing enough. “I’m sending you everything I can spare.”

“It’s not enough, Taehyung.”

“I’m literally sending you almost my entire paycheck as it is, Mom. I’m living off my tips, mainly,” he explains, fully awake now. This isn’t the first time they’ve had a conversation like this, but this is the first time it’s been this bad.

“I know you are, but this real estate deal is putting so much pressure on us. Is there any way you can send more?” his mom asks, tone pleading.

Taehyung’s stomach plummets. He really can’t, not if he wants to keep eating. But how do you tell that to your mom? When his dad has a job that doesn’t pay near enough, when they’re trying to feed his younger sister and brother. How does he say that?

“I—I can’t, Mom,” he whispers. “I’m doing everything I can.”

“It’s not good enough,” his mother snaps, and this time it burns. He knows how desperate she is, that
we all say things we don’t mean when we’re desperate, but it still makes him feel like shit.

Taehyung is so tired. He’s tired of dancing around Jimin, of trying to pretend like nothing is there, that Jimin didn’t kiss him and that there isn’t anything there when he knows that they both feel it. He’s tired of working himself so hard only to hear every time that, ‘it’s not enough. You’re not doing enough.’

He’s tired of feeling defeated and alone.

“I’m sorry, Mom,” he says quietly. “I’ll try and send more.”

He doesn’t wait for her to respond and hangs up.

He’s so tired, so overwhelmed. There are so many emotions swirling through him and he doesn’t know what to do, torn between crying, screaming, or running around the block to burn off his frustration at this hopeless situation his family’s in.

Through all the thoughts and desires swirling through his mind right now, though, there’s one he keeps circling back to, that he can’t stop entertaining dangerously. He wants…

He wants Jimin. Wants Jimin to hold him tight and to feel safe and cared for in his arms. He wants to feel like he’s enough for somebody, just for a few hours.

The more he thinks about it, lingers on the idea, the more aching want turns into burning need and he needs something to tether himself, to anchor him back into safer waters and away from the way his mind is crashing in waves of inadequacy.

He doesn’t care that it’s not a good idea, he needs Jimin, so he throws off his blankets and falls out of bed and into a t-shirt and jeans recovered from his floor. He spends exactly three minutes being human before he walks out the front door of his apartment, mouth tasting like mint and heart aching for Jimin.

He knows what he wants.

***

Jimin wakes up to a pounding on his front door, and he sits up groggily. He’s about to throw his legs over the edge of the bed and get up when the pounding stops, and he hears the latch of the door open and close. Relieved of the burden of getting up, Jimin collapses back onto his pillows.

It’s probably Jeongguk. Jeongguk lets himself in all the time. Jimin lets his eyes slide closed again, but it only lasts a second as he registers the fact that whoever it was made a shit-ton of noise before they came in.

And his relationship with Jeongguk’s been quieter than usual since last week.

Jimin forces his eyes open once more, sitting up and resigning himself to be awake. He doesn’t make it out of bed before his bedroom door swings open a crack, though, and the voice that greets him is, for lack of a more potent word, a surprise.

Taehyung’s been—well. He hasn’t exactly ignored Jimin for a week, but he’s certainly been distant, and Jimin’s been more than happy to let him have the space that he wants. He’d needed a little time to sort himself out, too.
So when Taehyung’s soft, broken ‘Jiminie’ creeps through the four-inch gap between the door and its frame, Jimin’s shock wakes him up entirely.

“Tae?” He moves to get up, and then realizes he’s not wearing anything but the bedsheets.

After their last encounter, he should probably be covered. He doesn’t want to scare Taehyung off again. “Stay there a minute,” he says, and he scrambles to his closet and hastily pulls on a pair of underwear and his robe.

Marginally more clothed, he pulls the door open gently. “Is everything okay?” he asks, but as soon as he sees Taehyung’s face, he knows it isn’t.

It’s dark in his bedroom, the heavy curtains and the door to the bathroom pulled closed against the midday sun so that Jimin can sleep, but light from the living room illuminates Taehyung’s face, and Jimin can see the distress there, a tightness in his features and a wild mix of anxiety and guilt fermenting in his eyes.

“Heyyy,” he drawls, “Taetae, what’s wrong?”

Taehyung looks so small and exhausted as he looks at Jimin and says, “I’m not good enough, and I just—” Taehyung stops speaking and takes a deep, shuddering breath, and Jimin doesn’t wait for him to begin again.

He takes Taehyung by the wrist and pulls him into a tight hug, wrapping his arms around Taehyung’s waist and shoulders, holding him the way he’s been dying to for the last week.

Taehyung folds into the embrace, burying his face in the crook of Jimin’s neck and breathing slowly, clinging like Jimin is the only thing anchoring him in this moment.

Jimin loosens his hold just enough to pull Taehyung toward the bed. “Come lay down,” he says softly, and Taehyung follows.

He props himself up, sitting with his back against the headboard, and pulls Taehyung to him. Taehyung molds against his side comfortably, like he was meant to be there, tucked underneath Jimin’s arm. Jimin shoves that thought away and focuses on the problem immediately in front of him.

He gives Taehyung a couple of minutes to relax into him, and then asks the question he’s dreading the answer to. “Is this about us?”

Taehyung shakes his head and snakes his arm underneath Jimin, wrapping it around his waist and slinking further into Jimin’s hold. He turns his face, resting his cheek against Jimin’s chest where his robe has fallen open, and Jimin takes a moment to remind himself that skin-against-skin is not the point of Taehyung’s presence in his bed.

“Do you want to tell me?” Jimin nudges quietly, and a silence stretches between them.

He can feel the way Taehyung is considering his question, how his arms tighten around Jimin’s middle and how his voice is strained when Taehyung finally speaks the word, “No.”

And Jimin is glad that Taehyung is taking his question seriously, but when Taehyung says ‘no,’ the uneasiness in his own chest at seeing Taehyung this way grows.

Jimin doesn’t like it, but he settles back quietly, running his fingers lightly through Taehyung’s hair. Taehyung melts into the touch, and they sit there like that, legs almost tangled, arms around each
other, comfortable together, for a good long while, until Taehyung says, “Can you tell me I’m good enough?”

Jimin’s heart breaks.

Whatever has Taehyung feeling this way, he’s had enough of it.

He shifts Taehyung in his arms, encouraging him up into a sitting position, and turns Taehyung to face him. He meets Taehyung’s eyes and says, “You have always been good enough. You are perfect.”

And this time it’s Taehyung that’s making the first move, Taehyung that’s fitting his lips between Jimin’s, and it’s Jimin that takes two seconds to get over his surprise before he’s parting his lips for Taehyung.

Taehyung sits up further as he presses into the kiss, swinging one leg over Jimin’s lap and straddling him as he slides his hands up Jimin’s chest, over the curve of his shoulder and up the back of Jimin’s neck.

And Jimin—Jimin is relieved. He’s so fucking relieved that Taehyung wants him after all, that he hadn’t been seeing things that weren’t there, that he hadn’t fucked up their relationship—whatever it is—beyond repair, and he can’t help the way that he gasps into the kiss, pulling Taehyung tighter against him, mentally cursing the layers between them for being so in the way, because the warmth of Taehyung’s mouth on his is addictive and Jimin needs to feel all of Taehyung against him like this, for the rest of his life.

And this time it’s Taehyung that plies him open, his tongue licking into Jimin’s mouth like he needs it, like he needs Jimin, and it’s too much for Jimin to handle. He groans into Taehyung’s mouth, his hands sliding down Taehyung’s back to cup his ass, and Taehyung’s shiver travels up his spine and through his lips. Jimin pulls back just enough to suck on Taehyung’s lower lip, pulling and nibbling with his teeth before he breaks the kiss and draws in oxygen, because he needs to tell Taehyung, he has to say it—

“You’re so good, you’re perfect, you’re everything I want—” Jimin manages to get out, before Taehyung is knocking their foreheads together and giggling a little, pressing their lips together again, chastely this time as they settle against each other.

“I’m sorry I ran,” Taehyung says.

“I’m sorry, too,” Jimin replies, for not waiting to find you again, for selling myself off to Jeongguk—But these are thoughts he doesn’t say, because he can see in Taehyung’s eyes that he knows what Jimin means, and neither of them want to break the delicate balance between them right now.

A quiet moment sits between them, and then Jimin says, “We should, uh, probably—um. I mean, I’m—”

Taehyung interrupts, grinning mercilessly. “—really fucking turned on? Because, same.” He grinds his hips down into Jimin’s to prove his point, and yep, holy shit—

Jimin tilts his head back against the headboard, the gentle thunk as it hits lost under the moan that slithers from between his lips. His fingertips dig into Taehyung’s hips, desperate to pull him back and make him do that again.

“Jimin,” Taehyung says, “I want this. I want you.”
And Jimin’s eyes find Taehyung’s again.

In them, Jimin sees need—desperation and lust, yes, but also a need born of emotional fragility, and he can’t stand it. Jimin brings his hand up to caress Taehyung’s cheek, flattening his palm and Taehyung presses his face into it.

“Are you sure?” Jimin asks. “I don’t…I don’t want either of us to regret this.”

And just like that, the fragility in Taehyung’s gaze is gone, replaced with a mix of determination and soft affection, and the words that tumble from his lips shoot straight to Jimin’s heart.

“I’ll regret it if we don’t do this, Jimin. I’m tired of skirting around us. It’s always been us, it will always be us—please,” Taehyung says softly. The corner of his lips tug up, and he adds, “Don’t make me beg,” and Jimin’s brain stops processing.

The words ‘it’s always been us’ manage to trickle through and sink in, and nothing has rung truer to Jimin in his whole life.

“Okay,” he whispers, a little afraid that this isn’t real, that it’s another dream, but then Taehyung is molding himself against Jimin’s body again, and his lips are soft and warm, and not even that time with Jeongguk felt half as real as this—

He pulls away, and breathes against Taehyung’s lips, “Do you trust me?”

And they’re so close he can feel Taehyung’s mouth curve into a smile. “With everything,” Taehyung says, and Jimin has never felt quite like this before, so light and free, his heart soaring.

The lube he normally keeps in his nightstand is still abandoned in the media room from the last time it was used, but Jimin’s never been one to have just one bottle of lube in the house, and he knows there’s one in the bathroom—

He moves his hands back underneath Taehyung’s ass, and twists, his feet finding the floor as he stands up, lifting Taehyung with him. Taehyung yelps and locks his legs around Jimin’s waist, laughing in delight as Jimin carries him through the closet and toward the bathroom.

Jimin is grateful when Taehyung slides the pocket door to the bathroom open, so that he doesn’t have to take his hands off Taehyung to do it himself, and then he’s settling Taehyung on the countertop between the sinks, reaching down underneath Taehyung’s legs to pull the drawer open.

He kisses Taehyung breathless as he fishes around in the drawer one-handed, growling in frustration when he has to stop and glance down to find what he’s looking for.

He pulls a condom and a bottle of silicone lube out of the drawer and Taehyung’s eyes widen just a little bit. Jimin sees his reaction, and sets the foil packet and the bottle down on the countertop, closing the drawer with his thigh as he steps in closer between Taehyung’s legs.

“Tae, have you done this before?” he asks.

Taehyung’s answer is soft, but full of resolve. “No,” he says, tightening his arms around Jimin. “I want you to be my first.”

And suddenly Taehyung’s answer when Jimin asked him if he trusted him—‘with everything’—takes on a whole new weight.

Jimin leans in to kiss him again, and then says, “You tell me what you want, Tae.”
Taehyung blushes just a little and fiddles with the hair at the nape of Jimin’s neck, and Jimin laughs.

“Don’t get shy now,” he grins. “Seriously, I want to make this good for you, so if you have something particular in mind…”

“I want you not to be stupidly careful with me because it’s my first time,” Taehyung says, starting slowly and gaining confidence as he speaks. “And I want you inside me.”

Jimin’s heart pounds in his chest at Taehyung’s request, and he presses a quick, dirty kiss to Taehyung’s lips, licking teasingly into his mouth before working his way along his jaw. He sucks Taehyung’s earlobe into his mouth, rolling his tongue around it in a wet caress, and Taehyung’s breathing gets a bit shallower.

“Everything else is up to you,” Taehyung manages to say, and Jimin groans as he mouths his way down the line of his neck.

He gets to Taehyung’s collar, and pauses long enough to tug the hem of the shirt up and over his head, dropping it on the floor without another thought and leaning into Taehyung to plant little kisses along his collarbone.

Taehyung’s hands find the knot holding his robe closed and pick at it, untangling the fabric ties and pushing the robe open. He runs his hands down Jimin’s chest, his abs, and pulls at the elastic of Jimin’s underwear.

Jimin shivers.

“I have an idea, if you’re feeling a little adventurous?” he asks, his lips ghosting across the skin of Taehyung’s shoulder, and Taehyung’s hand slides lower, grazing the outline of Jimin’s hard cock through the fabric.

Jimin’s mouth falls open at the touch, and he can hear the smirk in Taehyung’s voice when he says, “Jiminie, I’m game to try anything you want right now, as long as it involves you fucking into me before we’re finished.”

Taehyung’s words might as well be the end of him, Jimin thinks, and he moves to kiss Taehyung’s lips fully, once, twice, before he manages to make himself turn away. He drops his robe to the floor, kicking it to the side, and takes the three necessary steps away from Taehyung to turn the water on in the tub.

He clutches the edge of tub to ground himself as he adjusts the temperature of the water, but then he hears the sound of denim whispering against denim and he glances back over his shoulder in time to catch Taehyung shucking his jeans. It’s work to rip his eyes away from that intoxicating sight when the water temperature is right, but putting the stopper in the drain so he can get back to Taehyung is good motivation.

He’s not prepared for the vision of nudity that greets him when he turns to face Taehyung. Taehyung’s erect cock is resting heavily against his abdomen as he leans backward against the mirror, his legs dangling freely over the edge of the countertop, and when he sees Jimin’s eyes are on him, he wraps his fingers lazily around his own length and strokes himself slowly.

In an utterly unsmooth move, Jimin practically trips over himself in his rush to remove his own underwear. Taehyung giggles, and it’s infectious, Jimin’s lips curving up to match Taehyung’s.

When Jimin’s underwear is discarded and his erection is freed, though, Taehyung’s laughter fades away and his eyes fall on Jimin’s cock hungrily, his pupils dilating in a way that makes heat pool in
Jimin’s stomach. Jimin focuses long enough to pull an armful of towels from the cupboard under the sink, and then he’s between Taehyung’s legs again, urging him to lift up his hips enough that he can pillow them with the towels.

He tugs Taehyung forward until his ass rests at the edge of the counter, and reaches for the lube, snapping the cap open and squeezing a healthy glob onto his fingers. It’s not warm, so he slides it between his fingers and looks up at Taehyung.

Some of the nervousness is back on his face, so Jimin brushes Taehyung’s jawline with his clean fingers. “Hey,” he says, leaning forward to capture Taehyung’s lips with his own. “I’m gonna take good care of you, okay? Relax for me.”

Taehyung’s struggle against his nerves is visible, so Jimin drops his hand to Taehyung’s cock, layering his fingers over Taehyung’s and encouraging their glide up and down his length, dragging the pad of his thumb in a circular motion around the tip of his cock before rubbing it against the slit, smearing the pre-cum beading there and making Taehyung gasp into Jimin’s mouth.

Diversion in place, Jimin places a slickened finger against Taehyung’s rim, caressing it gently before applying pressure and sinking the finger in.

Taehyung clenches down hard on Jimin’s finger, so Jimin redoubles his efforts at distraction, trying not to focus too hard on how hot and perfect Taehyung feels around his finger. He releases Taehyung’s lips and dips his head down to mouth at his thigh instead. He moves his lips quickly across Taehyung’s pretty flesh, and nudges Taehyung’s hand out of the way, drawing his nose up the underside of Taehyung’s cock before following it with a long slow lick. Taehyung shudders underneath Jimin, and Jimin slides his lips over the head of Taehyung’s cock as his finger moves in deeper, pumping slowly to adjust Taehyung to the sensation.

“Jiminie—” Taehyung breathes, desperation sneaking its way into his tone, and Jimin sucks Taehyung farther into his mouth, working his tongue along Taehyung’s cock with ruthless efficiency.

Taehyung opens up for him slowly, but Jimin is more than willing to be as patient as necessary. He can’t believe it, but he finally has Taehyung in his arms, his lips parted and his eyes rolled back like Jimin touching him is everything he needs, and Jimin’s going to do it right.

Nothing is more important.

When Jimin slips a second finger inside Taehyung, he releases Taehyung’s cock and returns his lips to Taehyung’s, beginning his search as he stretches Taehyung, crooking his fingers and brushing them along Taehyung’s walls, until Taehyung is arching into the touch. Jimin’s lips twist in satisfaction, and he rubs his fingers against that spot again, and Taehyung sucks in a sharp breath, garbling Jimin’s name.

“You’re doing so good, Tae,” Jimin whispers into Taehyung’s mouth, “So good for me, just a bit more stretch, and then I promise I’ll give you what you want—”

Taehyung whimpers in response, too lost in the haze of pleasure to mind when Jimin works a third finger into him, alternating little touches against Taehyung’s prostate with active stretching, and soon he’s as ready as Jimin can make him.

“Are you ready, Tae?” Jimin asks, pulling his fingers out slowly and wiping them off on a towel. Taehyung is nodding fiercely, noises of agreement bubbling out of him—until he sees Jimin reach.
for the condom sitting on the counter, and then a determined ‘no’ erupts from his lips, and Jimin’s
eyes snap up to Taehyung’s.

“Are you sure, Tae?” he says, surprise freezing him in place.

“Are you clean?” Taehyung asks, the conviction in his voice reflected in his gaze.

“Yes,” Jimin says. “I got retested last week, after—”

“Then I want to feel you inside me,” Taehyung interrupts. “All of you. Nothing comes between us
anymore.”

Jimin’s brain short-circuits, and just like that, the self-control that he’s been clinging to this whole
time disintegrates.

He throws himself back into Taehyung’s arms like it’s the only place he’ll ever belong again,
pressing his lips to Taehyung’s and licking his way into his mouth, his hands roaming across
Taehyung’s body, unable to decide where they want to touch most. Taehyung latches onto one of
Jimin’s hands, twinning their fingers together, and winds his other arm around Jimin’s waist, pulling
him as close as he can. Their cocks brush together, and Jimin sucks in a breath at the contact, and
Taehyung’s biting his lips and mumbling “Please, Jiminie, don’t make me wait anymore—”

And how is Jimin supposed to resist that?

He reaches for the lube again, trying to untangle his hand from Taehyung’s to slick himself up, but
Taehyung won’t let go, and then he’s waggling his fingers at Jimin and Jimin is squeezing lube onto
Taehyung’s waiting hand, and—

Fuck, the cold of the lube on his cock is a shock, but not nearly as much so as the caress of
Taehyung’s hand as he wraps it around Jimin’s length and pumps slowly, smearing the gel
everywhere, and Jimin’s mouth falls open as his hips involuntarily jerk deeper into Taehyung’s grip.

Then Taehyung is guiding Jimin’s cock toward his ass, and Jimin—Jimin can hardly think, but he
knows that this awkward position on the countertop is not what he intended—it isn’t good enough
for Taehyung—so he tightens his hand in Taehyung’s and drops the lube bottle to the floor, pulling
Taehyung down off the counter.

Jimin locks eyes with Taehyung and brings Taehyung’s hand, still laced together with his own, to his
mouth, pressing his plump lips against the back of Taehyung’s hand in an openmouthed kiss. Then
Jimin turns and leads him toward the overflowing tub, water pouring over the sides and rushing
across the slanted floor toward the drain. Jimin climbs the single step and swings one leg into the tub,
then the other, displaced water cascading over the edge, and Taehyung follows.

Jimin leans quickly to turn off the water, and when he twists back around to face Taehyung, his
blessedly naked body is pressed against Jimin’s. Taehyung leans down and slides their lips together,
pushing hungrily against Jimin, raking the fingernails of his free hand down Jimin’s back.

They sink down into the water together, Jimin taking his place between Taehyung’s legs, a shiver of
anticipation chasing up and down his spine. Taehyung bends his knees around Jimin’s waist and
locks his ankles together, and pulling Jimin in closer so he’s sitting on Jimin’s thighs.

Jimin backs Taehyung up, until his shoulders are against the end of the tub, pulling their entwined
hands up to the lip of the tub to pillow Taehyung’s head on their arms. He leans forward, drawing
his tongue along Taehyung’s jaw and nipping at his ear, and places his palm flat on Taehyung’s
lower back, guiding his hips forward. His cock slides along the cleft of Taehyung’s ass, and
Taehyung’s arm tightens around Jimin’s shoulders, holding himself in place so Jimin can line his cock up and begin the careful push inside.

Taehyung’s mouth falls open, a pitchy moan filling the room as the head of Jimin’s cock pushes past his rim, and Jimin pauses there, his breath ragged, because Taehyung is so fucking tight.

He rubs his hand up and down Taehyung’s back, and tucks his lips next to Taehyung’s ear. He whispers to Taehyung then, the first words that come to mind—’You’re doing so good, Tae, so perfect, so fucking good inside you’—and Taehyung relaxes.

Jimin resumes his careful insertion, stroking Taehyung’s cock and giving Taehyung control over everything, waiting for Taehyung’s eager nodding and his scrabbling fingers on Jimin’s back before he slides each inch inside, until he’s all the way in.

He grinds his hips slowly into Taehyung then, because staying entirely still is impossible when Taehyung feels this good, when he’s this hot inside, when Jimin is enveloped in this velvet tightness and he’s sure he’s only a momentary lapse in control away from coming right then and there, and then Taehyung’s moaning against Jimin’s shoulder, shaping his thickened voice into barely intelligible words.

“Please, Jiminie, move, wanna be good for you, please, let me—”

And Jimin is so done with waiting.

“Shh, Tae, you’re all I need. Let me make you feel good, baby—” He pulls back slowly, and slides back inside, a slow glide that’s got him shivering, because being inside Taehyung is fucking heaven, and he wants to stay there forever, marveling in the perfection of it. Their mouths find each other and Jimin fucks him slow, drawing out the drag of his cock in deliberately lazy thrusts, because fuck if Jimin is going to let this end any faster than absolutely necessary.

“Fuck, Tae, you’re so tight,” he groans, and Taehyung falls apart a little more with each languid thrust, a long wordless cry streaming from his lips as Jimin’s fingertips tighten on Taehyung’s waist and his hips speed up, rocking into Taehyung steadily, faster, as water sloshes ignored over the side of the tub.

“Please, Jimin, please, wanna be good for you—” Taehyung gasps, and Jimin pins him against the wall of the tub, whispering ’I got you, baby,’ as he takes advantage of the gentle slope of it to adjust his angle, and then Taehyung’s gasps change in quality.

They become breathy, airy, as Jimin fucks into his prostate, abandoning a sliver of carefulness for a faster pace that has him biting his lower lip as the heat pooling in his gut sinks lower into a tightly-wound coil of pleasure that’s waiting to be released. “’M so close, Tae. So fucking—good—” he pants, struggling to control the rhythm in his hips as he thrusts deep and fast into his lover.

Taehyung’s babbled ‘touch me, ’m so close, just a little, please, touch me—’ has Jimin gritting his teeth, and he wraps his hand around Taehyung’s erection. He gives it two full strokes before Taehyung is tilting his head back against their arms, his orgasm spurting into the water between them, and—holy hell the way he tightens around Jimin is intense and he can’t help it, he’s gonna—

One more full thrust is all Jimin gets in before he’s coming inside Taehyung, a throaty moan ripping from him as he breathes shakily into the crook of Taehyung’s neck.

As soon as he’s caught his breath again, he sucks a mark into Taehyung’s skin, and Taehyung practically convulses under Jimin’s lips, the force of his own release leaving him tingling and
Jimin pulls out of Taehyung carefully, massaging the hollow of Taehyung’s hip with his thumb as he does, very aware of the tenderness that Taehyung’s feeling.

“Was I good, Jiminie?” Taehyung asks, self-consciousness creeping into his words, and Jimin pulls him into an embrace, pressing his lips against Taehyung’s.

“Of course you were, Tae. You’re the best thing to ever happen to me,” Jimin reassures him, twisting them around in the water and settling his back against the edge of the tub. The tub is only two-thirds full, the rest of the water displaced by their activity, but it’s enough for them to relax into.

Jimin tightens his arms around Taehyung and pulls him against his chest, their fingers weaving back together, and Taehyung settles back against him, content.

“You make me happy, Taetae,” Jimin says against Taehyung’s temple, kissing his dampened hair before lifting his fingers to comb it back into place.

“Good,” Taehyung says, sounding sleepy, turning his face sideways to nuzzle into Jimin’s neck. “Always want you to be happy.”

Jimin kisses Taehyung’s forehead properly then, and smiles against his skin. “Then you’d better stay with me always.”

Thirty minutes later, Jimin is draining the tub for the second time—Taehyung insisted on an actual bath to clean up after a few idle minutes of cuddling, and who was Jimin to pass up the opportunity to wash Taehyung’s hair again?

Jimin gets out of the tub first and hunts through the pile of towels on the counter for something clean enough to dry off with. He rubs himself dry quickly, then bundles Taehyung up with another towel, patting him gently all over and scrubbing the wetness out of his hair.

He kisses Taehyung then, and sweeps his feet out from underneath him to carry him back to the bedroom.

When Taehyung is under the covers, Jimin goes back to the bathroom for their clothes, leaving all but their underwear in a pile on his bedroom floor. His slips Taehyung’s boxer briefs up his legs, settling the elastic over his hips, then pulls his own on and slides in next to Taehyung.

He checks his phone quickly—no new notifications he should be worried about—and sets an alarm for an hour later, then tucks Taehyung in against his side.

Taehyung hums softly, then says, “Does this mean—I mean, are we—” He stops, and starts again. “I know you can’t break off your engagement, but what does that mean we are?”

Jimin stares at the ceiling as he considers. “Inevitable,” he finally says, and Taehyung lifts his head a little to look at Jimin. “I want to be with you, Tae, but...can you let me worry about the engagement for now? I’ll find a way to deal with it.”

Taehyung lets his head fall back to Jimin’s shoulder as he replies, quietly, his breathing evening out, “Okay.”
When Jimin’s alarm goes off an hour later, he’s still awake, thinking about how to deal with their situation.

When he’s helped Taehyung dress, scrounged up something to feed him, and seen him out, he still hasn’t come up with a good answer.

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Taehyung returns to a dark apartment and the sound of a movie playing quietly in the living room.

Taehyung feels like he could sleep for an age, and also like he won’t be able to sleep for about four hours. He sheds his shoes and walks back into his room, changing into a fresh pair of sweatpants and t-shirt, before shuffling back out into the living room.

Yoongi and Hoseok are curled up together on the couch, Yoongi tucked between Hoseok’s legs, head resting against Hoseok’s chest so that Hoseok can run his fingers through Yoongi’s hair. And they’ve been this disgusting since a week ago when they made up from whatever fight they’d had and sexiled him from the apartment.

Yoongi’s eyes flick towards him for a moment, a faint smile ghosting across his face. Taehyung crosses in front of the TV quickly to curl up in the armchair next to the couch, sitting down with a wince that reminds him of what exactly he’s just finished doing.

And with whom. He’s glad the dark of the room hides the visible marks Jimin left all over him.

He stares sightlessly at the screen, too mired in his thoughts to really pay attention. A part of him can’t believe what he’s done, what he’s just become. He’d never thought that he would be this person, the person who gets involved with somebody in a relationship. Somebody that isn’t strictly his. Except he hasn’t been able to look away from Jimin since he saw him and he knows, now, that he’s never going to be able to look away from him.

On the couch, Yoongi sneezes and then yawns, and Taehyung watches as Hoseok tightens his hold around Yoongi, a hopelessly fond look in his eyes.

He shivers, remembers how amazing it felt to kiss Jimin, to feel his hands on him, feel him inside him, and he knows that as guilty as he feels over what he’s doing, he can’t stop. Not now.

Maybe not ever.

He’s been craving Jimin, even now he wants to be back with Jimin, curled up in his impossibly soft sheets and wrapped around him. He wants to hold Jimin and never let him go. He wants to take Jimin somewhere far away, where his family isn’t in trouble and Jimin isn’t engaged and it’s just the two of them.

He pulls out his phone.

I miss you [Sent: 21:37]

He texts Jimin. He glances over to the couch, gaze lingering on Yoongi and Hoseok, at how relaxed they are, Yoongi’s eyelids drooping as he falls asleep on Hoseok.

His phone buzzes.
I miss you too [Received: 21:39]

Sleep well, Taetae [Received: 21:39]

Taehyung yawns, suddenly exhausted and spent, emotionally and physically. Things aren’t ideal with Jimin, but he finally has a part of him, and for now, that’s enough.

For now.

***

Jimin feels watched.

It isn’t a new feeling; he’s watched all the time by everyone. Paparazzi want pictures of him with his fiancé, people at his club want to watch him socialize and see who he’s talking to, who he’s friends with, his father’s men constantly watch him to see if he’s going to fuck something up.

No, Jimin is used to being watched from all sides.

He’s not used to being watched by Taehyung, though.

It has him a little on the edge, honestly, because, while the goosebumps he gets when he catches Taehyung’s eyes on him are novel, Jeongguk is sitting next to him tonight, and Jimin needs to keep the two parts of his love life distinctly apart from one another. Jeongguk is observant, and Jimin needs to keep his fiancé distracted without getting distracted himself.

It’d be easier if Jeongguk was feeling…conversational.

He’s not, though, so Jimin can’t fall back on his usual habits of seduction as a means to redirect Jeongguk’s attention. Not that he really wants to, anyway, not now that he and Taehyung are finally together, and especially not in front of Taehyung.

Ji

Jimin’s eyes keep meandering back to the bar, falling on the sliver of collarbone peeking out of Taehyung’s open collar, the corded muscle in visible in his arms after Taehyung rolls his sleeves up to his elbows, the tip of Taehyung’s tongue peeking out the corner of his mouth as he concentrates on his work.

It makes it very difficult for Jimin to concentrate, which is a problem, he realizes.

What he doesn’t realize is how big of a problem, until Jeongguk follows his line of sight to the bar and asks bluntly, pointedly, “Something over there worth staring at, Jimin?”

There absolutely is something—someone—over there worth staring at, and Jimin can’t let Jeongguk know it.

Jimin restarts his internal chant of ‘you can’t let Kookie find out, you can’t let Kookie find out’—the mantra he’s been reciting for the last three days, since he and Taehyung commenced their affair in his bathtub—in hopes of curbing his wandering focus, and does his best to ignore Taehyung’s steady gaze.

***
When Taehyung was twelve, he didn’t know how much Jimin meant to him until he was gone. He’s not going to make that mistake again.

It’s hard to focus at work, now. Not that Jimin’s presence wasn’t ever anything less than a distraction, but it’s worse now.

Before, it felt like every lingering glance was a question, a silent query. Taehyung was never sure what Jimin was thinking, or if he cared about Taehyung at all.

Now, though, now he knows. He knows how much Jimin cares about him, how much his touch burns and how much Jimin wishes things had happened differently.

It’s hard to focus at work when all he wants is to be pressed against Jimin.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Yoongi shouts over the music when Taehyung drops another shot glass as he’s cleaning it, fingers going numb as Jimin walks past the bar and gives him a wink and lingering stare, bottom lip snagged between his teeth.

“Sorry, Yoongi,” he says, sweeping up the shards of glass and hiding his burning face in the shadows underneath the bar. “I’m fine.”

He’s fine as long as Jimin doesn’t look at him like that again.

At least not while he’s trying to clean glasses.

The need for Jimin only increases, and every day that they don’t get time alone only makes it worse. Despite the craving to feel Jimin’s skin under his fingertips, they only manage stolen moments together, brief kisses in passing in the dark hallways of the club, their only night together that first time when Taehyung needed Jimin so badly. It’s maddening, and Taehyung wishes that Jimin wasn’t so busy running a business, so that he had more than stolen kisses and heated glances.

That’s probably why Jimin pulls him into one of the supply rooms in the back and presses him against a wall, lips moving hungrily against his neck on Saturday before the club opens for the night.

“I have to prep the bar, Jimin,” Taehyung gasps, not capable of protesting any more than that as Jimin kisses him deeply a second later.

“That’s what I pay Yoongi for,” Jimin says, rolling his hips into Taehyung’s and pinning his hands above his head against the wall.

He silences any further protest from Taehyung by keeping his lips busy with his own. It’s been days since he last kissed Jimin, it’s been too long, and he shivers as Jimin runs his tongue along his bottom lip.

“I missed you, Jiminie,” he whispers into the space between them.

Jimin’s lips quirk in a smirk as he says, “You’ve seen me every day, Tae.”

“Yes, but I’ve missed this,” he says, leaning in to catch Jimin’s lips against his own. “I miss the feeling of you inside me.”
He can feel Jimin shiver as he releases one of Taehyung’s hands in favor of cupping his jaw, body pressing closer to Taehyung as he entwines their fingers of the hand he still has pinned.

Taehyung reaches with his free hand and pulls Jimin in by the waist, slipping his hand beneath the waistband of Jimin’s pants to palm his hardening length between them.

Jimin grinds against his hand, and Taehyung gives up all notions of self-control to slip his hand into Jimin’s underwear, wrapping a hand around his cock and dragging his hand up—

“What in the shitting fucking hell is going on.”

Taehyung flinches as Yoongi’s voice sounds in the heated silence between them. Jimin slowly pulls away to turn and look at Yoongi, Taehyung’s hand frozen obviously around his cock.

“Yoongi,” Jimin says, more calmly than Taehyung feels is possible, given the circumstances.

“You know what?” Yoongi spits, glaring furiously at Taehyung. “I don’t want to know.”

The door slams shut behind him as he leaves.

Taehyung feels guilt creep into his stomach, but not enough to outweigh the heat pooling in his stomach as Jimin continues grinding against him. Taehyung quickly undoes the fastenings on Jimin’s pants, allowing easier access for his hand.

“Jimin,” he all but whimpers. “I should,” he gasps as Jimin nibbles gently on his earlobe. “I should go and help him.”

But Jimin unbuttons his pants and pulls his cock free in a strategic move that has Taehyung quickly abandoning any notion of leaving until Jimin is finished with him.

“I missed you too, Tae,” Jimin whispers against his lips before nipping lightly at his bottom lip. “Every second. Not being able to touch you is the worst hell I’ve ever experienced.”

Taehyung groans softly. “You’re touching me now, Jiminie.”

“Guess I should do something about that, then.” Jimin tangles their hands together around their cocks, both now free of their pants, and drags their hands up slowly, from base to tip.

Taehyung knows he’s going to feel guilty about this later, but right now he can’t be bothered to care about anything other than the way it feels to have Jimin rubbing against him, with him.

It feels fucking amazing and it doesn’t take long for the heat that’s been coiling in his stomach to build, winding through his body until all he can do is shake against Jimin and squeeze their entwined hands.

He’s not surprised when he comes first, but he is surprised when Jimin follows him, mere seconds later, his cum mixing with Taehyung’s around their cocks, sticky and hot.

Jimin presses closer to capture Taehyung’s lips in his, a slow, languid kiss as they both come down from the highs of their orgasms.

“When can I see you again?” Taehyung whispers as Jimin snags a clean rag from a nearby shelf to quickly wipe their hands clean. “Tonight?”

Jimin shakes his head. “I can’t tonight. I have a charity thing I’m supposed to attend with Jeongguk.” He kisses Taehyung again. “Sunday night?”
Taehyung tries to smile as much as he can, disliking the fact that he has to share Jimin but knowing it’s not really his place to say anything about it when he’s the homewrecker in this scenario. “Just text me,” he says finally, pressing a small kiss to Jimin’s jaw.

“Have a good day at work, Tae,” Jimin says with a wink, tucking himself back into his pants and striding out the door with one final kiss to Taehyung’s lips.

Taehyung takes another moment, collects himself, and then follows suit, heading to the breakroom to get changed.

***

An hour ago, he was with Taehyung.

Jimin was kissing him, was grinding into his hand, had their fingers laced together—had his hand around their cocks, sliding together and gasping against Taehyung’s lips.

An hour ago, Jimin was happy.

Now he’s just tired, irritated and uncertain, sitting and waiting in his car outside his fiancé’s building—his fiancé, whom he’s barely spoken with in the last two weeks because of the way Jimin reacted after their last encounter—and he’s been waiting for ten minutes now, for Jeongguk to come down so they can go to a fucking charity gala and pretend everything is normal.

Everything is not normal.

Jimin’s gotten really fucking good at compartmentalizing over the last six years, though, and he can only hope that Jeongguk will hold up his end of their lopsided equation, at least for tonight.

He slouches in his seat, not caring about the wrinkles he is inevitably inflicting upon his tux, and closes his eyes, instead choosing to sink into daydreams of Taehyung, a much more pleasant alternative. By now, Taehyung would be behind the bar, pouring the first round of shots for the night, or maybe mixing a cocktail…

Jimin settles on that picture, visualizing the way he holds the cocktail shaker, the way he flings the contents back and forth with easy flicks of his wrist, the lithe muscles in his arm tensing beautifully, and then a deft twist of his fingers to remove the cap, the way he’d look up at Jimin from under his long eyelashes, his gaze smoldering as he pours the drink—

The car door opens, breaking him out of his reverie, and Jeongguk finally climbs in next to him.

He’s quiet, and he doesn’t greet Jimin.

Shit.

Attempting to break the silence, Jimin says, “Took you long enough,” but as soon as the words are out of his mouth, Jimin knows they’re a bad choice. He bites his lower lip and wishes he could take them back.

Maybe his compartmentalizing needs some work, after all.

Jeongguk settles back in his seat and glances sideways at Jimin. He studies Jimin for a moment, opens his mouth to speak, and then apparently thinks better of it, pursing his lips closed again.

Feeling uncharacteristically fidgety, Jimin sits up, running his hand through his hair, and straightens
his jacket. He faces out the window in an attempt to hid his nerves, but they’re reflected back at him in the glass. He frowns at his reflection.

“I had business,” Jeongguk finally says, and Jimin hears a note of tension in his voice.

“You had business,” Jimin says flatly, turning back to Jeongguk. He winces at his tone—he knows he’s being overly sensitive—but he can’t seem to stop himself. It’s like he’s watching this conversation happen from outside himself, and he can’t get control of it, can’t turn it around. “You couldn’t take care of it earlier?”

The car pulls into traffic.

Jeongguk sighs, tipping his head back against the seat, and just like that, the strain between them melts away.

“I was waiting for a phone call that didn’t come,” he says, frowning, and Jimin realizes that the stress level in the car didn’t go down, it just shifted to cause other than himself.

He makes a conscious effort to reel himself back in and stow his attitude—if Jeongguk is trying, he can work harder to do so, too—and asks, “Something wrong?”

“Maybe,” Jeongguk says, and this single word, paired with his disquieted tone and the growing crease between his brows, triggers an alarm bell in Jimin’s head.

“Something I should know about?” he asks.

“Baekhyun was supposed to check in.”

The alarm bell in Jimin’s head gets louder, and his voice turns cold. “And he didn’t?”

“No. Normally I’d give him the benefit of the doubt the first time he misses a check in, but with his previous attitude…” Jeongguk sighs. “I can’t deal with it until tomorrow, anyway. We’ve got this fucking dinner.”

“Dinner and dancing,” Jimin reminds him. “As founding sponsors, we’ve got to waltz or some shit before we can leave.”

“Seriously? Who the fuck comes up with this shit?”

“Our mothers,” Jimin says softly, and the car falls silent, the only noise filtering in from outside. Jimin goes back to staring out the window, and after a moment, Jeongguk’s hand finds Jimin’s.

He doesn’t lace their fingers together and he doesn’t squeeze tightly. He just holds Jimin’s hand gently, letting them rest together comfortably on the seat between them, and Jimin appreciates the gesture.

It’s not much comfort, but for now, it’s enough.

***

Taehyung finishes stowing his street clothes in his locker and steps back, only to yelp in shock when he registers Yoongi standing right next to him, glaring furiously.

Taehyung gulps.

“Oh, hey, Yoongi,” Taehyung says, aiming for nonchalance. “How are—”
“No,” Yoongi snaps. “You don’t get to ask me how I am when I just walked in on you with your hand around our boss’ dick.”

Right. That did happen.

“Yoongi, look—”

“No,” Yoongi cuts him off again. “I don’t want to hear your bullshit excuses.”

“But—”

“But nothing, Taehyung, Jimin is engaged. What the fuck are you thinking?”

Taehyung opens his mouth to say, ‘You don’t understand, we’re supposed to be together,’ but he can’t get a word in edgewise as Yoongi plows right over him, voice harsh in the empty breakroom.

“Do you have any idea what the fuck you’re doing? Do you know how much danger you’re putting yourself in? Taehyung you’re a child and you’re fucking with things you can’t possibly understand, and to top it all off? You’re fucking someone who doesn’t belong to you.”

Yoongi turns and heads to the door without looking back at Taehyung.

“Well at least I’m with someone who belongs with me.”

He doesn’t mean to say it, but he’s so angry that the words slip through his lips before he can stop them. He doesn’t have anything against Hoseok, nothing against him being with Yoongi, but for a second he wants Yoongi to hurt as much as he is. It’s a second of vicious triumph before the guilt crashes into him.

He watches Yoongi’s shoulders tense, his fists clenching at his side as he freezes in place. He turns his head slightly, not looking at Taehyung, but enough that he hears it clear as day when Yoongi says, “You disgust me.”

The breakroom door clicks shut behind him.

Taehyung spends the entirety of his shift avoiding Yoongi, something the latter seems intent on doing as well.

He refuses to talk to Yoongi, not when his words are still circling around and around in his mind, burning through every ounce of guilt and anger until all that’s left is an all-consuming hurt that settles heavy in his heart.

He messes up three different rounds of Cypher shots—it’s the one drink he still has trouble with—before the night is through but not even that is enough to send him to Yoongi, who is still glaring at him every time their gazes happen to meet.

He just wants to go home and crawl beneath his sheets. He wants to fall into the oblivion of sleep so that he can forget, if only for a moment, that he hasn’t just had a terrible fight with his roommate and friend, that his life isn’t falling apart around him as he watches. He just wants to forget it all.

He bolts for home the second Seokjin locks the doors behind the last guest, barely taking the time to change back into his clothes before he’s flying out the back door, ignoring Hoseok’s greeting as he walks back to the dancer’s room, towel draped around his neck.
He just wants to be alone.

***

Dinner is vexing.

The food is good, but at a thousand dollars a plate, it’d better be the best meal he’s ever had, and it’s not. On top of that, the portions could be larger—it’s Jimin’s guess that they didn’t plan on two young men with healthy appetites because most of the people at this event are in their seventies and picking at their plates like birds that wish they were at home, tucked into their nests for the night—so Jimin finds himself daydreaming about Taehyung’s homecooked japchae.

Or, at least, he would be daydreaming about Taehyung’s homecooked japchae, if only the little old lady sitting on his right would let go of his elbow with her vice grip and quit yammering nonstop about her granddaughter’s marriageable qualities.

Jemin reinforces the smile plastered on his face and mentions his fiancé—who’s here, sitting to his left, and has she met him yet?—for the fourth time since their waiter set the risotto in front of them.

Dinner is vexing, but at least the look of abject horror—followed by staunch refusal of acknowledgment—on the little, old lady’s face offers him some amusement every time he points out that he’s engaged to marry a man.

Jeongguk seems to have it easier. The elderly gentleman on his left is mostly preoccupied with cutting his wife’s steak down into small enough bites for her to gum it to death with her dentures, leaving Jeongguk to enjoy his meal mostly in peace and Jimin to suffer jealously. At least their waiter is excellent about keeping his wine glass full, regardless of how many times he’s drained it.

When dessert is served—a chocolate mousse meringue cake that Jimin suspects looks better than it’ll taste—he switches to champagne. It’s a calculated move on Jimin’s part; the waiter reaches between Jimin and his handsy neighbor to pour for him, and Jeongguk gives him an amused look when Jimin takes the opportunity this creates to scoot his chair closer to Jeongguk.

Jemin passes it off as a moment of affection, leaning into Jeongguk’s side with a giggle and poking Jeongguk surreptitiously in his side until he lifts his arm and drapes it over the back of Jimin’s chair, pulling him closer yet.

At least this thing that’s sitting between them—and make no mistake, it’s still very much present because Jimin knows Jeongguk’s not capable of letting go of things that bother him—at least neither of them is letting it affect their public image.

And speaking of their public image...

Jemin notices a news photographer loitering nearby, watching them, so he leans in to whisper in Jeongguk’s ear—‘we have an audience, Kookie’—and scoops a mouthful of dessert onto his spoon, lifting it to Jeongguk’s lips.

Jeongguk’s eyebrow rises, but he dutifully opens his mouth and lets Jimin feed him.

A flash goes off, and Jimin smiles at Jeongguk, satisfied with their performance, but the answering smirk on Jeongguk’s face is a warning delivered too late for Jimin to react, and Jeongguk lunges forward, holding Jimin’s shoulders to keep him from squirming free. He plants a sloppy, chocolatey kiss on the corner of Jimin’s lips, and Jimin cues up a bubbly laugh, shoving half-heartedly with both hands at Jeongguk’s chest as his fiancé kisses him again, his lips landing more squarely on Jimin’s this time and lingering.
The photographer’s flash goes off several times in rapid succession during their little show, and Jimin brings the corner of his napkin to his mouth and dabs delicately at the remnants of Jeongguk’s messy display, smiling shyly behind the fabric as he allows a demure blush to creep across his cheeks.

Once the photographer has moved on, Jimin reaches for his glass of champagne, opting for a liquid dessert.

An hour and a half later, Jimin is well on his way to being drunk.

They’ve danced their dances, suffered a twenty-minute lecture on the history of the building the gala is being held in, been badgered into making a significant donation each, and retreated to a table in the corner of the room with an open bottle of champagne (and an unopened one) and two glasses.

It’s oddly pleasant, this quiet moment with Jeongguk.

They’re still sitting together intimately, Jimin tucked under Jeongguk’s arm and resting his head on Jeongguk’s shoulder, Jimin’s arm draped across Jeongguk’s thigh, his hand on Jeongguk’s knee—they have appearances to keep up—but in the darkness of the back corner of the ballroom they’ve settled back into something a little more like the relationship they used to have before, and it’s pleasant.

Jimin swallows down the last of the champagne in his glass and reaches for the bottle, only to find it empty. Jeongguk unwinds himself from around Jimin and leans forward, grabbing the new bottle, and opening it, refilling Jimin’s glass before topping off his own. Jimin smiles his thanks, and settles back against Jeongguk again.

“Jimin, do you remember when we first met?” Jeongguk asks, and Jimin smiles a little at the fact that Jeongguk’s reached the level of drunk that makes him reminisce.

“Of course I do, Kookie. That was a big day for me,” Jimin says.

It was the day the woman who raised him—his grandmother, he corrects firmly—pulled him out of school early and took him to get ice cream from the truck in the park. They spent half an hour talking about nothing and enjoying each other’s company, and then a limousine pulled up and a well-dressed couple got out and strode over to them.

And then his grandmother had introduced them as his parents.

They’d whisked him away from her, and dressed him in a tux, and told him to sit quietly through dinner, and that they’d have a chance to talk later that night—

And then he’d met Jeongguk, the fourteen-year-old boy who’d sat across from him at dinner and covertly made faces at him to make him smile.

He’d been afraid, confused, and felt so alone, but Jeongguk hadn’t given up until twelve-year-old Jimin had needed to slap a hand over his mouth to contain his laughter.

“Do you remember what I told you after dinner that night, before you left?” Jeongguk asks, and Jimin snorts.

“Your name?” he says, his lips twisting in an amused grin.

“After that, you brat,” Jeongguk huffs, and Jimin laughs and dives deeper into his memory.
A moment or two of introspective silence, and Jimin has the answer Jeongguk is looking for, but he’s not sure he likes where it’s going.

“You said, ‘You’re not alone,’” Jimin replies, carefully keeping his eyes on his drink. He twists it in his hands, rolling the stem between his fingers and watching the liquid swirl in the glass.

“You’re not alone.” Jeongguk echoes, and Jimin feels Jeongguk’s thumb brush softly against his shoulder. “Do you know why I said that?”

Jimin doesn’t answer.

Jeongguk sighs, and continues. “I said that because you looked so lost. I grew up in this life, you know? I was raised since birth to do whatever it takes, to put the family first, and you—you were so soft. You had no clue what was coming next, the kind of _education_ that awaited you, and you looked like you might need a friend to get through it.”

Jimin promptly stills his fidgeting fingers, and takes a gulp of his champagne.

“I’m still that friend, Jimin. After everything…” Jeongguk takes a deep breath. “Even with everything there was—is—between us, I’m still that friend. So why did you push me away?”

Jimin closes his eyes, willing the question away, and when it doesn’t work, when Jeongguk is still sitting there waiting for an answer, Jimin throws back the rest of his drink and sits upright.

“It was sub drop, Kookie. It’s not like I could control it.” He doesn’t look at Jeongguk, even though he can feel Jeongguk’s eyes trained on his face.

“I’ve helped you through sub drop before, Jimin,” Jeongguk says. “You’ve never pulled away like that. You’ve never pushed me away. Why did you do it this time?”

“I don’t know,” Jimin snaps. He wants nothing more than to leave, so he sets his empty glass on the table in front of them and stands up, but Jeongguk curls his fingers around Jimin’s wrist and holds him in place.

“You don’t know, or you don’t want _me_ to know?” Jeongguk replies, his voice cool and controlled, and Jimin can’t help it when his eyes dart up to meet Jeongguk’s.

Jeongguk’s eyes contradict the calm in his voice, and Jimin feels panic bleed into his veins. His heart pounds, his ears ring, his palms begin to sweat, but his mind focuses on one crystal clear thought.

_Jeongguk cannot learn about Taehyung._

Jimin _has_ to keep Taehyung safe.

He weighs his options. Option A, Jimin walks away, right now. He leaves this party, and leaves Jeongguk to find his own way home, their public image be damned. Jimin _wants_ this option, wants to ignore Jeongguk’s question and go back to pretending they’re okay, but he knows that this will only make Jeongguk more suspicious, and a suspicious Jeongguk is a dangerous Jeongguk.

Or Option B, sit back down and lie his ass off, fix his face into a convincing mask, and lead Jeongguk astray as best as he can. It’s a risk; Jimin dislikes lying—he knows he’s bad at it and being convincing takes so much effort on his part—but Jeongguk knows this about Jimin, so if Jimin can pull it off, Jeongguk will let it go and Taehyung will be safe.

That’s worth every ounce of effort this is going to take.
Jimin sucks in a quiet breath, and sits back down, Jeongguk’s fingers loosening on his wrist, but not letting go.

And then Jimin sells it.

“I— I don’t know,” he says, softening his voice and picking at his fingernails. He dredges up how it felt when he’d realized it wasn’t Taehyung that night, and he dwells on it, grinding salt into the wound, letting his eyes well with tears as he speaks. He doesn’t blink them away. “You took the blindfold off, and I saw your face, and I— I thought ‘this is going to be it. This is what you signed up for, for the rest of your life,’ and that was terrifying, okay? I’m only eighteen, and I signed my own life away, and it’s not that I don’t trust you with my future, it’s that I don’t trust anyone, myself included, and—”

“Hey,” Jeongguk interrupts, “look at me.”

Time to commit, Jimin.

He squeezes his eyes closed quickly and pushes the tears down his cheeks as Jeongguk’s palm presses against his face, turning him so he has to meet Jeongguk’s eyes.

When he does, he lets the panic for Taehyung’s safety seep back into his expression, hoping that it completes his mask.

Jeongguk studies him, searches his eyes, notes his twitches and sniffles, and then swipes at the tear streaks on Jimin’s face with his thumb.

Jimin ducks his head again, and averts his eyes.

Please, let that be enough.

Jeongguk’s hand moves to the nape of Jimin’s neck and smooths Jimin’s hair as he stands up.

“C’mon. Let’s go home. I don’t know about you, but I’ve had enough of this for one night,” he says, and Jimin pushes himself shakily back to his feet, wondering if Jeongguk means he’s had enough of their argument or enough of the party.

On the ride home, Jimin doesn’t think about how the best lies are partial truths. He doesn’t think about how the blindfold made him see the reality of the path he’s on with Jeongguk, and he doesn’t think about how any of that makes him feel.

Instead, he makes himself focus on gauging Jeongguk’s every move, his every word, trying to determine if he bought Jimin’s act or not. When the car comes to a stop in front of Jeongguk’s building, and Jeongguk pulls Jimin toward him and places a soft kiss on his temple before getting out of the car—

Jimin lets himself believe he’s gotten away with it.

***

It’s one of the few things that goes right in his day when he manages to get home before Yoongi. It’s a relief to be able to drop the brave face he’s been hiding behind all night and let the hurt and guilt streak from his eyes in hot streaks of regret.
He doesn’t linger in the entryway, instead rushing to his room and throwing off his clothes so that he can slip into an old t-shirt and crawl into bed, ready to be done with today.

It’s how Hoseok finds him a while later.

Taehyung is lying in his bed, tears slowly leaking from the corners of his eyes to soak into the pillow he’s got mashed against his face when there’s a knock on his door.

He quickly brushes away the wetness on his face and wipes under his nose, clearing his throat before he shouts, “Come in!”

He sounds better than he feels.

He doesn’t know who he’s expecting—Yoongi for round two, maybe—but he’s surprised when Hoseok walks through his door, shutting it softly behind him before coming over to sit on the edge of Taehyung’s bed.

“Hey, Tae,” Hoseok says gently, reaching out to rub Taehyung’s back with his hand. “You wanna tell me what’s wrong?”

Taehyung is curled away from Hoseok, facing the wall his bed is against—the wall he shares with Yoongi’s room—so he doesn’t bother to try and mask the way his face twists when he says, “I’m fantastic.”


Taehyung thinks about lying, about brushing off Hoseok, but the next thing he knows the tears are back and Hoseok is scooting a bit closer. “I think,” he pauses, tries to work past the lump in his throat. “I think I fucked up, Hoseok.”

“What is it,” Hoseok snorts, “fuck everything up day?”

Taehyung hears a choked sounding sob rip from his throat.

“Oh, no,” Hoseok coos. “Taehyungie, baby, it’s okay.”

Taehyung just sobs harder at Hoseok’s kind words. Heaving, shuddering things that leave him breathless and gasping.

He feels Hoseok’s arm wind around his waist as Hoseok crawls into bed behind him, pressing close to him and comforting him as much as he can.

“Nothing I do is good enough,” he chokes out between gasps for air.

Hoseok tugs on his waist until Taehyung rolls over to face him. “Taehyung, you’re enough,” Hoseok says softly, cupping Taehyung’s face and making him look at him. “You’re going to be okay.”

Taehyung allows Hoseok to pull him against his chest, one arm wrapping around his waist to hold him close, the other reaching up to run his fingers through Taehyung’s hair soothingly. He fists his hands in Hoseok’s t-shirt, taking the comfort he’s offering and trying to let Hoseok’s words sink in and feel like anything other than empty platitudes.

He doesn’t know at what point he falls asleep, but it’s right as he’s about to fall into the oblivion of sleep that Yoongi’s voice filters into the room, asking something of Hoseok.
The last thing he hears before he slips under is Hoseok saying, “I’m good here.”

He’s glad he won’t be alone tonight. Even if it is Hoseok and not Jimin.

He’s not alone.

***

Jimin is three steps past the front desk in the lobby of his building when the attendant calls out to him.

He glances back over his shoulder at the middle-aged man on duty, only to find him out of his seat and walking quickly to Jimin, a large manila envelope held out in front of him.

It has Jimin’s name written on it in neat letters, and nothing else.

“A courier delivered it an hour ago, Mr. Park,” the attendant says, handing it to Jimin.

“Thank you,” he replies. “Have a good evening.”

“You too, sir.”

He doesn’t let the displeasure from receiving a business delivery at his home address cross his face until he’s in the elevator, and he doesn’t open the envelope until he’s in the privacy of his penthouse, his jacket hung in the closet and his shoes toed off at the door.

He slices the envelope open then, pulls the contents free, and immediately feels cold. Bile rises in his throat as he flips through the half-dozen 8x10” photos of him and Taehyung fucking, clearly taken with a long lens through the glass wall in his bathroom.

The first is of Jimin carrying Taehyung into the bathroom, his hands groping Taehyung’s ass. In the second, Taehyung’s in the process of stripping his jeans off while Jimin turns on the water. The next one is of the two of them naked, Jimin’s face buried in Taehyung’s groin and his fingers up Taehyung’s ass, Taehyung’s head thrown back against the mirror. Then one of Jimin kissing the back of Taehyung’s hand as they step up to the tub, clearly aroused; then one of Jimin and Taehyung kissing as they fuck, water splashing over the edge—

The last image is of Jimin hunched over Taehyung’s form as they come, Taehyung’s mouth hanging open in pleasure, Jimin’s face buried in his neck, and Jimin’s blood starts to boil.

He’s blackmailed enough people to know what it looks like, and he’s not surprised when he flips the last photograph over and finds a phone number penned on its back.

Jimin drops the photographs to the floor, and lashes out.

He grabs the closest thing at hand—a 14th century Chinese vase worth over a half a million dollars—and screams bloody murder as he hurls it violently across the room.

The sound of the vase shattering into a thousand pieces matches the way everything feels like it’s falling apart, and he screams again, funneling all the rage clenching in his gut up and out through his lungs. He screams himself hoarse, and then screams some more.

When he has nothing left, he takes a moment to breathe, to collect himself, and then picks up his cell phone, activating an app that records his calls and dialing the number on the back of the photo.
A familiar voice greets him when the call connects. “Jimin! It’s good to hear from you. I take it you got my status report?”

And just like that, Jimin’s anger returns. It’s a cold thing, now, and he doesn’t keep it from his voice when he responds.

“Baekhyun, this had better not be what it looks like it is.”

“It’s exactly what it looks like, Jimin. One good turn deserves another, after all,” Baekhyun replies cheerily.

“You’re going to regret this,” Jimin spits out.

“If I go down, we both go down,” Baekhyun says. “You, me…Chanyeol and Taehyung. All of us, together. That’s how this game works, now.”

At the mention of Taehyung’s name, Jimin seethes. “Who else has seen these photos?”

“Just you and me, Jimin. For now, anyway.”

“And what, exactly, do you want in order to keep it that way, Baekhyun?”

“Ahh, I knew if I waited long enough you would ask. I do have some new…terms for our current agreement.”

“And they are?”

“First, Chanyeol and I are done manipulating things behind the scene for you. No more interference on our parts for the sake of this case, or the deal the case is deciding.”

Jimin grits his teeth. “Fine. Next?”

“You and the Jeons give me everything you have on Chanyeol and me.”

Jimin closes his eyes in helpless frustration. “That’s…going to be harder to arrange. I don’t control the Jeon family, Baekhyun.”

“Then you’re going to have to talk your fiancé into giving up his leverage, Jimin. Because I’m not settling for anything less than everything you have. I’m talking digital files wiped clean, all physical evidence placed directly into my hands, everything. In return, I give you everything I have on you and your sexy little bartender, and then our association is over. Chanyeol and I are free of you, end of story.”

Jimin clenches his jaw. “And how am I supposed to arrange that without Kookie knowing why, Baekhyun?”

Baekhyun chuckles softly, “Oh, I’m sure you’ll think of something. You’re a bright boy. I’ll give you two days to get it done.”

“Two days is not near enough. I need a week,” Jimin responds immediately. “You’re asking for a lot, here, Baekhyun. You can afford to be generous with the timeline, considering what you’re getting out of this.”

“Four days, then. You have until Wednesday at midnight to talk the Jeons into this arrangement,” Baekhyun concedes. “Don’t disappoint me, Jimin. It’s in both of our best interests for this to end amicably.”
The call ends abruptly, and Jimin stares at the phone in his hand and the photographs on the floor in front of him.

He sinks down to his knees, all the shock and despair he didn’t realize he was holding at bay crashing into him and churning in his stomach.

He picks up the photo taken of them as they orgasmed and stares at it. He stares at the look on Taehyung’s face, the way Taehyung’s arms were wrapped around his shoulders, and he remembers exactly what that embrace felt like. It was an intimate moment that should have been private.

It should have been just between them.

Jimin feels weak for not preventing this. He feels like a complete and utter fuck-up, and the one thing that he wants—the one thing that would make him feel better—he can’t risk asking for.

With shaking hands, he powers off his phone, so that he can’t call Taehyung.

Chapter End Notes

*grins wickedly*

Hello darlings! Here we are at the end of another chapter. You guys are troopers.

If you missed our Q&A you can still find that on my Twitch channel. They’re all there under the videos tab.

Oh! And since we both write while looping music for certain scenes, you can find the playlist for this chapter on my YouTube channel. I think I’ve managed to put them in the right order for the scenes, but shout at us and we’ll tell you which songs we looped when ;)

Callie and I love hearing from you, whether it's in comments, Twitter, or Tumblr, you guys always make our day. Thanks for loving and reading this!

-Kiki

110% what Kiki said. we super love you. *throws a million finger hearts at you*

-callie
As per usual, Kiki wrote the Tae POVs and Callie wrote the Jimin POVs.

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter

Find Callie on Tumblr | Twitter | Discord
**Trust**

Chapter Summary

Why is he being so understanding? So kind? He should hate Jimin right now—the engagement was his idea, when he proposed their marital alliance, and Jeongguk had asked why he should even consider it, Jimin had said, ‘trust me’—Jimin had said ‘trust me,’ and then he’d broken that trust.

Chapter Notes

*whispers* we missed youuuu
-callie

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hoseok isn’t there when Taehyung wakes up.

He lies in bed and wakes up slowly, letting the lazy afternoon sun streaking through his room bring him to full consciousness. The memories of his fight with Yoongi come to him quickly and in the wake of the flood of guilt and aching loneliness he can’t help but wish that Hoseok was still sleeping next to him.

He yawns, stretches, and gets up, leaving his room to brush his teeth before going in search of food and Hoseok.

What he gets instead is Yoongi, glaring into a bowl of cereal.

“Oh,” Taehyung says, unsure where things stand with Yoongi but definitely sure that he would rather be anywhere else than alone in a room with Yoongi and his angry glares.

Yoongi doesn’t say anything, just turns his glare from his cereal to Taehyung.

Taehyung will not apologize. Not when he knows that Jimin is supposed to be with him, that he and Jimin belong together in ways nobody else can understand.

He straightens his spine and turns about-face, walking back into his room to hastily throw on a sweater and jeans and grab a coat. He doesn’t have to be here, and without Hoseok to act as a buffer he’s not willing to put up with Yoongi’s judgmental glares.

He just wants to be with Jimin.

He doesn’t look at Yoongi as he leaves the apartment, only pausing to grab an apple off the counter for something to eat as he walks the short blocks between his apartment and Jimin’s.

He walks through the glass doors of Jimin’s building, waving at the security guard when he nods at him, and drops his apple core into the garbage outside the elevators. It isn’t until he’s stepping out of the elevator and through Jimin’s door that he realizes that Jimin could very well still be asleep.
It’s silent in the apartment, and Taehyung toes out of his shoes and wanders quietly through the rooms, working his way back to Jimin’s room which is still pitch black.

Whoops.

Taehyung gets a strange sense of déjà vu as he peeks his head through the door, just barely able to make out a Jimin-shaped lump sprawled under the covers of his bed. He stands there for a moment, watching Jimin’s chest rise and fall with the slow breathing of a deep sleep, and the loneliness in his chest loosens and dissipates until all that’s left is a need to be pressed against Jimin until he forgets Yoongi, his family’s troubles, everything but the feeling of Jimin’s skin against his own.

He quietly shuts the door behind him, breathing a soft curse under his breath as the room goes pitch black, making it difficult to strip down to his underwear and crawl between the soft sheets without tripping over something and waking Jimin up, but his luck holds and he somehow manages it.

He slides across the sheets until he’s pressed against Jimin’s warm skin, releasing a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding, and wonders how long he’s been unable to breathe this easily.

Breathing comes easier when he’s with Jimin. Always has.

“Jeongguk?” Jimin asks sleepily, rousing enough to roll over and nestle into Taehyung’s shoulder.

“It’s me, Jiminie,” Taehyung says, forcing himself to brush aside the sting of Jimin thinking he’s Jeongguk. “It’s Taehyung.”

Jimin pulls back and blinks into the darkness. “Hey, Tae,” he says warmly, arms winding around Taehyung tightly. “Did you text me?”

Taehyung soaks in the feeling of Jimin’s arms around him, revels in the warm brush of skin against skin. “No,” he mumbles, realizing that maybe he should have. “I just really needed you.”

Jimin shifts against him, bare legs shifting and sliding between Taehyung’s own. “What’s wrong, Taetae?”

What isn’t wrong. It’s all there, on the tip of his tongue. His family’s struggle to keep their home, his fight with Yoongi, but instead of any of that all he manages to say is: “I miss you.”

Maybe it’s because it’s still dark in the room, or maybe it’s because he’s desperate to think about anything other than what’s actually bothering him, but Taehyung is so grateful that Jimin doesn’t press further, only responding with a soft, “I missed you too, Tae.”

But he doesn’t get it. And Taehyung is opening his mouth before he can think better of it, the same darkness that shields him in his lie of omission lending him courage as he speaks his mind. “You don’t understand, Jimin,” he presses, pulling Jimin in tighter until they’re chest to chest, nose to nose. “I miss you so much I feel like I’m suffocating. And even when I’m with you, I miss you.” He places a soft kiss to Jimin’s forehead. “It’s like I know that I’m going to have to leave you, that the time I have with you is limited, and I miss you before I’ve even left.”

“Tae,” Jimin breathes, and it sounds like regret.

Taehyung knows that the next words out of Jimin’s mouth are going to be ‘I’m sorry,’ so he heads them off by capturing Jimin’s lips with his own.

He doesn’t want apologies right now; he wants Jimin.
Jimin is slow to respond, pulling away slightly in an attempt to get more information out of Taehyung, to talk for a bit more until he understands what’s wrong, but Taehyung lifts a hand to the back of his neck, threading his fingers into Jimin’s silver locks and pulling him in closer.

He can feel it when Jimin melts against him, sinking into the kiss and letting Taehyung sweep into his mouth, letting Taehyung take what he needs from Jimin in the moment. Taehyung would be relieved if his blood wasn’t thrumming through his veins, burning through any lingering feelings until all that remains is a searing need for Jimin when he remembers that he hasn’t been this alone with Jimin since the last time he was here.

He presses Jimin back against the sheets, rolling them both until Taehyung is draped halfway across him, using his other hand to trace a path up Jimin’s side, until his hand finds Jimin’s against the pillows, reveling in the shiver that works its way up Jimin’s spine as their fingers interlace.

It doesn’t take long for the thrumming in his veins to brighten into hot, pulsing need that feeds desperation and desire into the kiss. Taehyung will never admit to the pleasure of feeling Jimin arch into him when he rolls his hips down against Jimin’s, stirring his blood as much as Jimin has done to him with a single kiss.

“I like your pajamas,” Taehyung says against the skin of Jimin’s neck. He leaves an open-mouthed trail of kisses from the corner of his jaw to his collarbone. The hand that isn’t entwined with Jimin’s wanders down the bare skin of his torso beneath Taehyung—the solid planes of muscle standing out in defined ridges beneath his hand—to marvel at the softness of the skin of Jimin’s bare hip beneath his fingertips.

He can feel Jimin’s answering smirk against his lips. “I don’t wear pajamas.”

“Exactly,” Taehyung says, pulling away for a moment to gaze into Jimin’s eyes before the need becomes too much again and he captures Jimin’s lips with his. All he can think about it how this isn’t enough, how he wants more, to be closer, to burn beneath Jimin’s fingertips.

“What do you need,” Jimin breathes into the space between them, sensing the need and desire in Taehyung’s kiss. “Tell me what you need.” His fingers tangle into the strands of hair at Taehyung’s nape as he pulls him into a deep, languid kiss, his tongue sweeping through Taehyung’s mouth in easy glides.

He needs…

He needs to feel close to someone, to feel like somebody cares about him. In the wake of his fight with Yoongi it’s the only thing he can think about. He wants to care and be cared for in return. He wants—

He wants to know what it would feel like to have Jimin come undone around him, what it would feel like to sink into the tight heat of him.

He wants to know what it would be like to fuck him.

Taehyung is curious.

“Can I,” Taehyung starts, managing to separate his lips from Jimin’s with great difficulty, not even sure how to ask something like that.

Jimin buries his face into Taehyung’s neck, lips working toward his ear and sucking the lobe into his mouth while he waits for Taehyung to finish talking. “Can you what, babe?” Jimin prompts when he’s silent for too long.
“Can I fuck you?” Taehyung asks, feeling dirty for asking but sure beyond a doubt that this is what he needs in this moment. He feels uneasy, unsure if Jimin will agree to this when the only other time they’ve done this Jimin was in complete control.

Jimin pulls away to look at him, doing a poor job of hiding the way he shudders, or the way precum beads onto his stomach between them.

Despite his body’s obvious arousal at the question, Jimin pulls back to consider, eyes searching Taehyung’s—for what exactly he doesn’t know. Taehyung reaches up with one hand, stroking the soft curve of Jimin’s cheek with the back of a finger, eyes hungrily soaking in every detail of Jimin under him, soft and relaxed and his, at least for this moment.

And that’s what makes this moment so special for Taehyung—well, special and desperate—because at any moment he could lose Jimin again, and it’s a pain so staggering that he can barely entertain the thought, but sights like this make the pain worth it.

“Okay,” Jimin says finally, apparently finding in Taehyung’s eyes whatever he was searching for as he reaches up to pull Taehyung in for a warm, languid kiss as he tugs Taehyung’s boxer briefs off and throws them out of sight.

Taehyung doesn’t really have a response to this, other than to deepen the kiss and roll his hips against Jimin’s with a new sense of urgency. He’s distantly aware of the fact that Jimin is reaching for something, but he doesn’t think much of it until Jimin is pressing the small bottle into his hand and fuck.

Taehyung has no idea what he’s doing.

“I have no idea what I’m doing,” he whispers against Jimin’s lips.

Jimin huffs a gentle laugh. “You remember what I did?” He continues when Taehyung nods. “Just do the same thing.”

Taehyung sits back on his heels, between Jimin’s legs and just…takes a minute to take in the sight before him; Jimin ready and waiting for him. It’s a bit overwhelming.

He slicks up the fingers of his left hand, idly brushing soft kisses against the skin of Jimin’s inner thigh as he does.

“Tell me if I’m doing it wrong,” Taehyung whispers into Jimin’s skin, the only warning he gives before he presses the tip of his first finger in.

There’s no hiding the shudder that rips through him as Jimin gasps a moan beneath him. He quickly learns what feels good to Jimin, using his moans as a guide as he starts with one finger and ends with three, particularly pleased when his fingers just barely brush against the spot that leaves Jimin shaking and writhing against the sheets.

“Tae, Tae,” Jimin groans. “’M ready, baby, so ready for you.”

And if watching as his fingers slowly undid Jimin didn’t make him painfully hard, Jimin’s words definitely do.

He is unprepared for the feeling of sinking into Jimin. He moans, a sound that’s swallowed by Jimin’s mouth as he pulls Taehyung up to kiss him hungrily. Jimin is so hot and tight around him, and he already knows he isn’t going to last long.
Jimin wraps his legs around Taehyung’s waist, encouraging him to move, helping him set a steady pace as he lifts his hips to meet Taehyung’s with every slow thrust. “Faster, Tae,” Jimin encourages, lips leaving a trail of marks along the skin of Taehyung’s neck.

Taehyung has one hand on Jimin’s hip, the other tangled with Jimin’s hand again and it’s almost too much, the feeling of Jimin clenching around him as he fucks into him. It’s completely different than when Jimin was inside him and it’s so much more overwhelming and intimate than he thought it would be.

“You feel so good,” he hums into Jimin’s collarbone, careful not to leave visible marks—a thought that taints even this moment because while he’s completely Jimin’s, Jimin isn’t completely his. He doesn’t dwell on it, not when changing the angle of his thrusts has Jimin untangling their fingers so he can claw at Taehyung’s back with both hands at the sensation.

“Right there,” Jimin pants, whimpering as Taehyung hits his prostate repeatedly. With every thrust.

It’s a different kind of satisfaction, he thinks, as he slips a hand between them to stroke Jimin’s cock. The pleasure of watching someone come apart and knowing I did that—it’s a heady feeling, but it’s nothing compared to the feeling of Jimin spasming around his cock as he comes hot between them.

It’s too much for Taehyung, and his own orgasm hits him before Jimin’s has fully ceased.

“Fuck, Taehyung,” Jimin heaves, going boneless and limp beneath him. His legs unwind from around his waist and Taehyung is loath to pull out, not keen on losing the intimacy of being connected to Jimin in every way possible, but he does. Slowly.

Taehyung manages to roll off Jimin before his limbs give out completely, so totally spent that he thinks not moving for the next day at least is a great idea.

It’s Jimin who gets a washcloth from the bathroom and cleans them both up, wipes away the splatters of cum on Taehyung’s stomach before tossing the washcloth aside in favor of crawling back into bed with Taehyung, who instantly seeks out Jimin to curl around him.

“Better?” Jimin asks quietly as Taehyung winds an arm around his waist to pull him close.

“Everything is better when I’m with you,” Taehyung breathes into the nape of Jimin’s neck. “Always has been, always will be.”

Sleep claims him quickly after that, but not before he hears Jimin whisper: “You’re the best thing to ever happen to me, Kim Taehyung.”

***

When Jimin wakes an hour later, he’s curled up with a drooling Taehyung, and while the puddle accumulating on his pillow really should gross him out, he only manages to find it endearing.

He lays there, watching Taehyung drool, his soft, rhythmic breaths a contagious cadence, and wonders how the hell he got lucky enough to find Taehyung again.

The last of the day’s light spills from the edges of the curtains, but the room is dark otherwise, and for that, Jimin is grateful. It means privacy, which, in light of last night’s blackmail threat, is something that has to be in the foreground of Jimin’s mind from here on out.
Especially since Jimin doubts it was on Taehyung’s mind at all when he crawled into bed with Jimin today.

He flushes thinking about it, his face warming despite the fact that Jimin’s innocence is long since a thing of the past. The way Taehyung had touched him, taking what he needed while still taking care of Jimin… His blush intensifies, and a shiver works its way up his spine. Sex with Jeongguk was always good, but it had never been quite as good as that, his partner all raw need and an eagerness to please.

Jimin thinks his burning desire to see Taehyung happy probably has something to do with it.

Being able to protect Taehyung’s happiness will be worth every bit of trouble that agreeing to Baekhyun’s demands will cause—Jemin is sure of it. But he’s also sure that making this deal will cause a lot of trouble.

It’ll definitely be trouble if his father ever finds out that he endangered his engagement and the alliance with the Jeon family, but it’ll mostly be trouble if Jeongguk finds out. Hell, it’s gonna be trouble even if Jeongguk doesn’t find out, because Jimin has to convince Jeongguk to agree to Baekhyun’s demands without actually telling him about Baekhyun’s demands.

Think, Jimin. How the hell are you going to pull this off?

A sour tightness begins to coil in his stomach as he considers his options, and he carefully disentangles himself from Taehyung before it can overwhelm him. He slips from the bed and grabs his phone, using the light from the screen to make his way to the closet so he can throw on his robe. Clothed, he escapes into the living room.

He pushes his hand roughly through his hair, and pulls up Jeongguk’s contact info. His thumb hovers over the ‘send’ icon, but he can’t bring himself to press the button.

He tosses his phone on the sofa and sits next to it, perched on the edge of the seat, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. He breathes carefully, timing his inhales and exhales to calm himself.

One thing at a time. He can deal with the Jeon family’s information on Baekhyun and Chanyeol later. For now… Jimin needs to focus on a single goal: call Jeongguk off, so that Baekhyun doesn’t feel hounded anymore.

He sits up, picks up his phone again, and dials before he can think too hard about it.

“Jemin,” Jeongguk answers immediately, wary surprise laced through his voice. “I didn’t expect to hear from you today.”

Fuck. That’s right. Their argument last night, at the gala, and Jimin’s blatant lie. He forces oxygen into his lungs, and exhales carefully, shielding the microphone from his mouth as he does so that he doesn’t give himself away.

One thing at a time.

“I… I was thinking about what you said about Baekhyun,” Jimin says carefully. “How he missed his check-in. Have you gotten ahold of him yet?”

Jeongguk’s silence on the other end of the phone lasts three seconds longer than it should, and Jimin feels a bead of cold sweat slide down his side from his armpit. He scrubs at it through his robe, irritated at his lack of control over himself, and then launches himself off the sofa. He begins pacing,
too restless to sit still any longer.

“I called several times today and he isn’t picking up,” Jeongguk says, and this time there’s anger simmering underneath his deceptively pleasant words. “I think I’m gonna have to schedule a meeting with him for tomorrow.”

With Jeongguk, a meeting is never just a meeting. It usually involves underlings and violence, and the other party’s immediate and sincere regret for fucking up. Jimin needs to stop this before it goes any further.

“Don’t,” he says, and it comes out a little too quickly. Jimin clenches his teeth, and tries to harden his tone and slow his words. “I talked to him last night.”

“What?! Why the fuck does he keep calling you?” Jeongguk spits, and Jimin doesn’t bother to correct his assumption.

“I don’t know, but I’ll deal with him from now on. He clearly isn’t responding well to you,” Jimin says. He hears how inflammatory his last sentence is and winces, unable to reel it back in.

“Absolutely not,” Jeongguk says, irritated. “If you do that, you’re giving him what he fucking wants. You can’t give in, Jimin. This is how they wiggle out from under your thumb, you know this.”

Jimin does know this, but he also knows that it’s much too late to worry about that particular outcome. He scrapes his fingers through his hair again, his fingernails scratching harshly along his scalp in a gesture that’s fifty percent nervousness and fifty percent annoyance at his inability to handle this conversation as smoothly as he wants.

He has to make this work. He has to. For Taehyung.

“Kookie—”

“What happened to being intimidating, Jimin, hmm?” Jeongguk speaks over him. “What happened to putting the fear of God back in him? We are not giving Baekhyun any leeway, Jimin. We can’t afford—”

“Kookie,” Jimin pleads, and Jeongguk stops. Jimin closes his eyes and licks his lips, stilling his feet and kicking his brain into gear. “Remember how I asked you to trust me when I suggested our arrangement?”

Jeongguk’s silence is answer enough.

“There’s a bigger picture here, Kookie, just like before. I need you to let go of this and let me handle Baekhyun.” Jimin pushes the words out quickly, and holds his breath as the quiet on the other end of the phone call stretches on.

“Jimin, what’s going on?” Jeongguk finally asks.

Shit. “I just need you to trust me, Kookie. Please,” Jimin says, his voice is audibly tight. “Just trust me.”

Jeongguk sighs. “Fine. Handle it. But whatever is going on—don’t choke on it trying to deal with it by yourself. And if Baekhyun steps out of line even the tiniest bit, you better fucking talk to me.”

Jeongguk doesn’t wait for Jimin’s response before he ends the call, and Jimin falls back onto the sofa, slouching down and leaning his head against the backrest.
The nausea roiling in his stomach doesn’t slow, and he closes his eyes to focus on tamping it down. Jeongguk is clearly suspicious—if he wasn’t after their argument last night, this phone call definitely nudged him over the edge—and Taehyung’s safety hangs in the balance.

Taehyung. Why does Jimin always lose his cool when Taehyung is involved?

As if summoned by Jimin’s thoughts, Taehyung shuffles sleepily down the short hallway from Jimin’s bedroom, stopping at the entrance to the living room. “Jiminnie?”

Jemin glances in his direction, and then does a double take when he realizes that Taehyung is still completely nude. He bolts upward, ushering Taehyung back into the privacy of his bedroom, and says, “Shit, Tae, don’t walk around naked. My whole penthouse is fucking windows.”

“Thought you were over being shy,” Taehyung mumbles.

“I am,” Jimin answers. “You can’t afford to be—you’re walking around naked in my house and you’re not my fiancé.”

The words are harsh, and Jimin regrets having to say them, but Taehyung needs to hear it. Just because he’s going to make a deal to get the photos from Baekhyun doesn’t mean that Baekhyun can’t take new ones, so how else is Jimin supposed to keep Taehyung safe?

Taehyung’s face falls as Jimin hands him his underwear, but he pulls them on without complaint. “I didn’t like waking up alone,” he says instead, his voice quiet. “Can we…”

Jemin feels like shit when he sees the disappointment on Taehyung’s face. He steps in closer, weaving his arms together around Taehyung’s torso, and asks softly, “Can we what, baby?”

Taehyung hesitates, then leans down to kiss Jimin softly. His arms come up to hold Jimin, and Jimin chases away everything but the feeling of rightness that comes with being in Taehyung’s embrace.

“Can we, I dunno, cuddle for a little bit, maybe? Watch some TV curled up together or something?”

It sounds like heaven to Jimin. “Sure, Taetae. Climb back into bed. I’ll be right behind you.”

He kisses Taehyung once more, lips lingering, before separating himself and turning to fetch his phone from the living room.

Returning to the bedroom with his phone in hand, Jimin shucks his robe, tossing it over one of the chairs in front of the curtained window, and passes the TV remote to Taehyung, murmuring a soft, ‘you pick, Tae,’ as he settles in beside him.

Jemin is only a little surprised that Taehyung stops channel surfing when he gets to the Hallmark channel. A sappy, straight-to-TV, romance movie flickers across the screen, catching his attention. Satisfied, Taehyung sinks deeper into the covers and curls into Jimin’s side, and Jimin—

Jemin thinks that the acting is terrible and the plot is cliché, but if it makes Taehyung happy, then he knows there’s no better way to spend his night.

Jemin has been awake for a grand total of seven minutes when his phone rings. If it was anyone else, he’d ignore it—at least until he’s done brushing his teeth—but it’s the ringtone he’s programmed in for his father, and no one makes Jimin’s father wait.
He hastily spits out his mouthful of toothpaste, rinsing once quickly as he accepts the call and puts his phone to his ear.

“Good afternoon, Father. How are you feeling?” Jimin asks habitually. It seems like those four words—how are you feeling?—are how he begins every conversation with his father now.

His father’s reply is as usual. “I’m the same as I always am, Jimin. That’s not why I’m calling, however. We need talk. How soon can you come to the estate?”

Jimin pulls his phone away long enough to glance at the time, taking traffic into consideration. “I can be there in an hour and a half. Traffic will start picking up soon, and I need to take care of a couple things before I can leave.”

“Sooner is better, Jimin. Don’t tarry. Oh, and I’ll tell Martha to plan on you for dinner,” his father says, extending the invitation in a way that makes it clear that Jimin’s presence is expected.

“Of course. I’ll be there as quickly as I can, and I’d love to stay for dinner. I’ll see you soon, Father.”

After the phone call ends, Jimin calls down to schedule his car and finishes brushing his teeth. He rushes through his shower, and barely pauses to style his hair. He skips the makeup entirely—his father has never understood why he wears it in the first place, so today it’d just be a waste of time—and dresses in an all-black suit, pairing it with a casual black shirt to keep it from being too formal for dinner.

He stops beside his bed on his way out, and sits on the edge of the mattress next to Taehyung. “Tae, baby,” he says softly, pulling the covers from over Taehyung’s head.

Taehyung groans and tries to burrow deeper, and Jimin laughs, a quiet tinkling sound, as he wrestles the blankets free. He finds enough of Taehyung’s forehead to press a kiss to the skin there, and then Taehyung is blinking up at him.

“Jiminie?”

“You said you don’t like waking up alone,” Jimin whispers, “but I have go, so I’m waking you up first.”

Another groan rumbles free of Taehyung’s chest, and he abandons clinging to the blankets in favor of latching onto Jimin’s waist.

“Tae, you’re going to wrinkle my suit,” Jimin giggles. “Come on, sit up.”

Taehyung does, only letting go of Jimin begrudgingly.

“I’ll be back later tonight, if you want to stay here, okay?” Jimin says softly. “Just be extra careful about being seen, with all the windows. Use the bathroom off of my office if you want to shower.”

Jimin runs his hand up Taehyung’s arm, and settles his palm against Taehyung’s neck, the tips of his fingers brushing the hair at his nape. “It has everything you need in there, and no way for anyone to get a look at what’s mine.”

“Yours, huh?” Taehyung says hoarsely, and Jimin smiles.

He pulls Taehyung forward and molds their lips together. Taehyung shivers, and Jimin breaks their kiss, resting their foreheads against each other as his lips linger over Taehyung’s, unable to tear himself away entirely.
“Definitely mine,” he whispers. He kisses Taehyung once more, and adds, “Always and forever. And I’m yours, in the most important way.” He brings Taehyung’s hand up to his chest and places it against his heart.

He can see the way Taehyung swallows down his emotions before he nods, and Jimin knows it’s not enough. He feels like he’s not enough, like he’ll never be able to give Taehyung everything he deserves.

It doesn’t feel good.

Taehyung must feel something similar, though, because he leans in to Jimin, kissing him deeply, pulling Jimin closer, and Jimin gives in. He pushes away his uncomfortable thoughts, and focuses on the warmth of Taehyung in his arms, the softness of Taehyung’s lips against his own. This feels right.

He pulls away reluctantly when his phone chirps to let him know his car is waiting.

“‘M sorry, baby, I really have to go. Father’s expecting me for dinner,” he says. Jimin stands, and Taehyung flops back to the mattress, burrowing back into the covers and watching Jimin leave with a resigned sigh.

A small smile pulls at the corners of Jimin’s mouth at the thought of how good Taehyung looks in his bed—how at home he looks, like he belongs there—and on his way past the foot of the bed he squeezes Taehyung’s toes through the blankets.

Taehyung jerks his foot away instinctively, but there’s a smile on his lips and that’s all Jimin could ever ask for.

Martha greets Jimin with a smile when he arrives at the family estate, and informs him that his father is in his study.

“Dinner will be ready in ten minutes, sir,” she says, the warmth in her eyes and her tone belying her formal words.

“Thank you, Martha. I’ll help Father to the dining room,” he replies, and she nods her acknowledgement.

“It’s good to see you home, sir. He’s missed you,” Martha smiles before heading toward the kitchen.

“It’s mutual, Martha,” Jimin says. He turns in the opposite direction and knocks on the door to his father’s office.

When he’s given permission, he enters, and says, “Hello, Father.”

His father looks up at him over the edge of his spectacles, and Jimin sees immediately that his father has not had a good day. The hardness in his eyes speaks volumes about pain, and the thought that his father is suffering this way constricts his chest, making breathing difficult.

“Father, are you okay? Can I get you something?” Jimin says, stepping forward and rushing through the words as if saying them more quickly will result in a faster response.

“I’m fine, Jimin,” his father says, turning back to the papers on his desk.
“Have you taken your pills? Where are they? I can get them and a glass of wa—”

“Enough, Jimin. I have taken my pills, and I am not in debilitating pain. I am fine, so stop.” His father’s tone brooks no argument, so Jimin stops.

“I’m sorry, Father.” He sits in one of the chairs in front of his father’s desk, his posture perfectly straight, and waits.

His father sighs, taking off his glasses and setting them on the papers before him. He leans back gingerly in his chair, and says “It’s alright son. I know it’s just how you show you care.”

Jimin nods, his eyes on his hands clasped together in his lap.

“You do need to toughen up your attitude a bit, though. You wear your heart on your sleeve, son, and that’s going to get you in trouble someday.”

The irony of his father’s statement strikes Jimin as funny—because it’s way too late, he’s already working to keep his mess contained—but Jimin swallows down the caustic laugh burbling in his gut before it can surface.

“Martha said dinner’s just about ready,” Jimin says instead. “Shall we go to the dining room?”

His father nods his consent, and Jimin immediately stands and offers his arm. It’s something he wouldn’t normally do, especially after the reprimand his father’s just given him about being too soft, but his father’s pain is something Jimin can’t just sit by and observe. He needs to do something about it.

Jimin is surprised when his father actually rests his hand on Jimin’s arm. He doesn’t say anything though. He just lends his strength to his father as they walk slowly through their home, and he lets his father pretend that he doesn’t need it.

Martha brings the first course of the meal out to them once they’re seated, his father at the head of the table, and Jimin in the chair to his right. Jimin dives into the apple walnut salad with appreciation—he hasn’t eaten anything since he woke, and he’s missed Martha’s cranberry vinaigrette since he moved into his penthouse—but he slows when he realizes his father’s only picking at his own salad.

“No appetite?” Jimin asks softly. The doctors had said that his father’s medication might do that to him.

“My appetite is fine,” his father replies, taking a bite, and Jimin turns back to his food, wincing. Everything is ‘fine’ lately. Jimin is well aware that fine is not good.

“How are you and Jeongguk doing?” his father says, catching Jimin off guard.

“Oh, um. We’re fine. We’ve been catching up. A lot has changed between us in the last year,” Jimin says. “We’ve both changed quite a bit.”

“I certainly hope so,” his father comments wryly. “Jeongguk was wild as a child. I don’t think his father ever actually knew what to do with him.”

“He wasn’t that bad,” Jimin defends. “And anyway, he’s been extraordinarily competent in all our dealings for the court case. I could have let him handle it on his own.”

Jimin’s father’s eyes snap up to Jimin. “Did you?” he asks carefully. “Let him handle it on his own, that is.”
“Of course not!” Jimin answers quickly. “I apologize for misspeaking, Father. I’m aware that the Jeon family is less experienced in public dealings, and that’s why we’re mentoring them through the process. I simply meant that Jeongguk is showing an aptitude for the work. He’s taking to it well.”

“He’s learning quickly, then?” his father asks, continuing his line of questioning.

“Yes, father,” Jimin says, squirming internally. When his father had said that they needed to talk, Jimin hadn’t expected that to mean he would be on the receiving end of an interrogation.

His father places a bite of apple in his mouth, and chews. It’s crisp enough that Jimin can hear it crunch in the lull of their conversation. His father swallows, and continues. “And what else are you teaching him?”

A frown threatens to twist Jimin’s mouth—where, exactly, is his father going with this?—but he smooths it away and replies carefully. “Nothing, Father. Perhaps he’s learning a thing or two about how to handle being prominent in society, and how to handle the publicity that comes with it, but I’m not actively teaching him anything else.”

“You haven’t started showing him our inner workings, then? How we handle business?” his father asks idly, and Jimin freezes with his fork halfway to his mouth, turning to look at his father in surprise.

His father’s face is carefully blank, but his eyes are steel, and Jimin realizes that he misread the hardness in his gaze earlier, mistakenly categorizing it as pain-induced. Jimin realizes that he was very wrong.

Jimin’s father is not having a good day for an entirely different reason.

“Of course not, Father,” Jimin says cautiously. “And I won’t until the marriage is finalized and we’re legally bound. There’s no reason he should know anything about our business until it’s his business as well.”

His father studies Jimin unblinkingly for a long minute before he leans forward and says, “Then would you care to explain why Jeongguk visited Suho’s salon and insisted on going over the books to better acquaint himself with our methods?”

Holy shit.

What?

Okay. Jimin needs to talk to Jeongguk. Now.

He sets his fork down gently on his plate, and wipes his mouth delicately with his napkin. “I’m…I’m not sure why Father, but— If you don’t mind, I’m going to see to this immediately.”

“See that you do, Jimin,” his father replies, his voice unyieldingly hard. “Jeongguk does not belong in the middle of our affairs, not now, and not after you’re married. He and his family’s connections are insurance to make sure our business continues to thrive in your hands once I’m gone, and nothing more. Do not forget it.”

“Yes, Father,” Jimin concedes, his stomach churning. He sets his napkin next to his place and gently pushes his chair away from the table. “Please give Martha my sincerest apologies for leaving in the middle of the meal.”

Jimin’s father merely nods as Jimin leaves.
Jimin waits until he’s on his way back to the city before he calls Jeongguk, the partition between him and his driver fully closed, and he doesn’t wait for Jeongguk to speak once he hears the call has been picked up.

“Kookie, where are you?” Jimin asks, taking care to gentle his tone.

“At home, why?” Jeongguk answers.

“At your family home or at your loft?” Jimin clarifies.

“My loft. Jimin, what’s going on?”

Jimin can hear the confusion in Jeongguk’s voice, so he presses his advantage. “My father called me to the estate, so I’m driving back into town now. Don’t go anywhere. I have some things I need to go over with you.”

“Okay, but—”

“I need to go. I’ll see you soon.” Jimin hangs up before Jeongguk can argue.

One exceedingly long car ride later, his driver pulls over in front of Jeongguk’s building, and Jimin is ready to read Jeongguk the riot act. He’s spent the entire drive thinking through the possible explanations for Jeongguk’s behavior at Suho’s salon, and Jimin hasn’t come up with a single reason that he could accept as valid.

He’s a little concerned about all the reasons he’s come up with that are not sufficient explanations for Jeongguk’s behavior, however, so he’s funneled his anxiety and irritation into anger, and let himself simmer in it.

When his driver opens the car door and Jimin steps onto the curb, he’s ready to get to the bottom of this.

He makes his way quickly inside, his face carefully kept expressionless, and rides the elevator up to the top floor. Jeongguk’s door swings open moments after Jimin knocks on it, and Jeongguk steps to the side to let Jimin in.

Jeongguk is dressed in an oversized white cotton button-up and baggy, faded blue jeans. He looks good in casual clothes, but Jimin doesn’t spare him a second glance, brushing past him into the open space of his loft and seating himself on the white leather couch in the center of the room. Jeongguk closes his front door and follows slowly, reclining on the other end of the couch from Jimin in an utterly relaxed pose.

Jemin purses his lips and stares Jeongguk down.

“Well?” Jeongguk says. “No hello kiss, so you’ve got something on your mind. You sat on the couch instead of at the table, so whatever’s bothering you has made you uneasy enough to seek comfort in your surroundings. And you’re looking at me like you’d like the flesh to melt off my bones, so I’m guessing it’s something I’ve done. Am I wrong?”

Jimin hates that Jeongguk can read him so well.
“Why were you at Suho’s?” Jimin asks, letting his irritation into his voice.

Jeongguk quirks one eyebrow upward and smirks. “Daddy found out about that and called you all the way out to the estate to reprimand you for my behavior, did he?” When Jimin doesn’t answer, Jeongguk continues. “Typical. Your father never seemed to understand that one person can’t control another, but then again, you never did much to prove him wrong, did you?”

Jimin’s mouth tightens into a thin line. “Just because you never behaved the way your parents wished doesn’t mean you can throw stones at me for being a better son than you,” he spits.

“Oh, that’s fucking rich,” Jeongguk says, sitting up and leaning toward Jimin, his tone angry. “You weren’t a better son, you were a puppet. You still are. Your father dances you across the stage by strings you can’t see, Jimin. But that’s fine. You’ll learn how to be your own person eventually.”

Jimin bites off his retort and forces the conversation back on track. “Why the fuck were you at Suho’s, Jeongguk?” he asks again, biting off each word.

“Because you’re hiding something from me,” Jeongguk says plainly, leaning back into the cushions again. “There’s something going on that you won’t tell me, and if you won’t tell me, then I have to dig it up myself.”

The perceptive look on Jeongguk’s face is almost calculating, and Jimin realizes he needs to be very careful.

Jimin quiets himself. He takes a deep breath, and says, “I asked you to trust me. What part of the phrase ‘trust me’ was too much for you?”

“The desperation in your voice when you said it,” Jeongguk replies smoothly. “You always try to handle everything on your own, and you’re going to drown in it someday. I’d like the avoid that eventuality.”

Jimin sighs, releasing a little of his tension and adjusting his approach. “I had an interesting conversation with my father,” Jimin says, beginning to string unconnected truths together to form a convincing story. “There’s a private complication with Baekhyun, and I need to deal with it personally, which means you have to stay out of it.”

He tugs habitually at the cuff of his suit jacket as he meets Jeongguk’s eyes. “I promise I’ve got this, and if I don’t, I’ll come to you. I’m not new to this game, Kookie.”

Jeongguk laughs. “If you say so, baby.”

Jimin frowns at the way that ‘baby’ sounds less like Jeongguk’s usual term of endearment and more like an amused joke.

He stands, straightening his jacket, and looks down at Jeongguk sprawled across the couch. “Stay away from my family’s business interests, Kookie. I don’t need my father scrutinizing our every move right now. If you’re worried about me taking on too much on my own, then don’t add to my problems.”

Jeongguk nods once and watches as Jimin walks back toward the front door. “You’re not staying for a quickie, then?” he calls after Jimin.

Jimin rolls his eyes, flipping Jeongguk off over his shoulder, and pulls the door closed firmly behind him.
Back in his car, Jimin takes a deep breath and calls his father. “There was a complication regarding our mutual business venture,” he explains, “and Jeongguk wanted to be proactive in addressing the situation. It…lead him to an unfortunate place.”

“‘Unfortunate’ is a poor choice of words, Jimin. I am displeased with Jeongguk’s behavior. Get control of him, or I will.”

“It’s contained, Father, I assure you. Jeongguk won’t step out of line like that again.”

“He’d better not, Jimin. My patience wears thin easily, these days.”

“Yes, Father. Rest well tonight,” Jimin says.

His father just hangs up.

_Thinning patience, indeed_, Jimin thinks, trying not to focus on how much his father’s abruptness hurts. He tips his head back against the seat, and then thumbs his phone screen back to life. He pulls up his contacts and dials his favorite sushi bar.

When he steps inside his penthouse, the first thing Jimin notices are Taehyung’s shoes still by the door, and a warmth radiates out from the center of his chest through his body.

He sets the paper bag with the sushi in it on the table by the door, kicks off his own shoes and takes off his coat, and then fetches a pair of chopsticks from the kitchen, grabbing the food on his way back past the door.

The whole penthouse is quiet and dark, except for the soft glow of a lamp filtering down the hallway from his bedroom, and the tinny laughter of a studio recorded sitcom. Jimin follows it like a moth drawn to flame, and when he steps into his bedroom, the sight before him sucks all the oxygen out of the room.

Taehyung is laying on his stomach on Jimin’s bed, his ankles twisted together in the air, his elbows propping him up as he watches TV. He’s wearing one of Jimin’s oversized sweaters—which means it’s just about the right size for Taehyung—and boxer briefs.

Nothing else.

Taehyung’s mouth falls open in a moment of radiant laughter before his eyes catch on Jimin standing in the doorway, and then Taehyung’s face brightens _further_, and Jimin doesn’t know how it’s possible for something so beautiful to become even more perfect.

Taehyung pushes aside the bag of chips and the package of cookies on the bed in front of him, and scrambles forward, launching himself into Jimin’s arms with a happy noise that pierces Jimin’s heart and heals him all in one instant.

Jemin barely manages to set the food and the chopsticks on the dresser next to the TV before Taehyung’s on him, wrapping Jimin up in the best welcome home he’s ever received.

“I missed you,” Taehyung whispers, and he leans back just far enough to fit their lips together, and Jimin—
Jimin falls a little bit more in love.

With everything that’s gone wrong today, having this one thing—this one precious, pure thing—go right… It’s a little more than Jimin can process as Taehyung lavishes him with affection.

When Taehyung pulls away, Jimin drops his forehead to Taehyung’s shoulder, blinking furiously to dismiss the overwhelming emotion welling in his eyes.

Taehyung notices—of course Taehyung notices—and says, “Hey, Jiminie, what— What’s wrong?”

“Just a rough day, sweetheart,” Jimin mumbles into his collarbone. “This is making it better, though.” He tightens his arms around Taehyung’s middle, and Taehyung cards his fingers through Jimin’s hair.

He presses his lips against Jimin’s temple, and says, “Tell me about it.”

The way he says it—Jimin knows that he means it, that he really wants to hear about what’s bothering Jimin. And Jimin wants to tell him, but—

“Tell me what you can tell me,” Taehyung whispers understandingly into his hair, and Jimin does.

“Somebody wants something from me that I don’t know how to deliver. And I have to keep it from Jeongguk, which means he’s digging in places he shouldn’t be, trying to figure out what’s going on. And my father found out that Jeongguk’s being nosy, and he’s…upset.” Taehyung presses another kiss to Jimin’s temple, and Jimin continues. “It’s just a lot to juggle. Coming home to you…”

Jimin twists his neck to peer up at Taehyung. It puts his lips within kissing distance of Taehyung’s neck, so he takes a moment to indulge before he finishes his thought, dragging his lips across Taehyung’s skin in an openmouthed kiss.

“Coming home to you is just really nice,” he sighs. He nuzzles in a little closer, drawing a line along the underside of Taehyung’s jaw with his nose, and breathing out slowly.

Taehyung twitches in his arms, and a giggle bubbles from his lips. “Jiminie, that tickles.” A loud gurgle from Taehyung’s stomach follows, and he adds, “I’m too hungry for a tickle fight right now. Can we get something to eat?”

Jimin steps apart from Taehyung, and grins, looking him up and down. “I don’t know any place that’ll serve a customer without pants…”

Taehyung flushes. “You said to be careful of windows, so I pretty much stayed in your room the whole time,” he grumps. “I put on pants to go get snacks, but if I’m gonna lounge in bed all day, I’m gonna do it in comfort.”

Jimin can feel the way his whole face smiles at Taehyung’s irrefutable logic, and he picks up the paper bag full of sushi. “Lucky for you, I know a place where the dress code requires a lack of pants.”

Taehyung’s eyebrows shoot up, and Jimin drags him by his hand into the bedroom, pushing Taehyung down into one of the chairs in front of the curtained windows. He sets the food down on the table between the chairs, and peels his suit coat off, tossing it on the other chair, where it lands atop his long-forgotten robe.

His pants follow his coat, and Taehyung’s eyebrows climb even higher.
Then Jimin is settling himself on Taehyung’s lap, and he pulls the first tray of sushi out of the bag.

Taehyung’s eyes focus on the food, but his hands tighten on Jimin’s bare hips, and he catches the corner of Jimin’s mouth in a hungry kiss. “I don’t know if I wanna eat you or the sushi first.”

Smirking, Jimin grabs the chopsticks and picks up a piece of sushi. He holds it out for Taehyung, who takes the mouthful and begins chewing, and Jimin says, “Sushi first. Then you’ll have energy to eat me.”

Taehyung chokes on his half-chewed food, and Jimin laughs—a true, deep laugh that’s got him on the brink of falling over backwards—and he smacks Taehyung’s back until he’s breathing again.

“Sorry, Tae,” Jimin grins. “I promise I’ll behave now.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it,” Taehyung mutters. He opens his mouth wide, waiting for the next bite, and says, “C’mon, Jiminie, hurry up and feed me so I can endorse your misbehavior.”

***

The first thing Taehyung does when he returns to work on Tuesday is walk to Namjoon’s office and knock on his door, walking in when he hears Namjoon say, “Come in.”

“Oh, Taehyung,” Namjoon says, smiling pleasantly. “What can I help you with?”

Taehyung quickly sits in the chair Namjoon gestures too and tamps down on his nerves. “I want to quit being a bartender.”

Namjoon stares at him blankly. “What?” It’s not really a question, more a statement.

Taehyung takes a deep breath and presses forward. “I want to stop tending bar and start dancing. I could really use the extra income that dancers get, and Hoseok has been teaching me things here and there. I’ll learn fast…” he trails off in the face of Namjoon’s unceasing shaking of his head.

“Absolutely not.”

“Namjoon, I really need this.”

“Two reasons, Taehyung,” Namjoon says, holding up two fingers. “First, Yoongi would actually kill me if I let you switch. He hates manning the bar solo. Second,” Namjoon continues, talking over Taehyung’s muttered ‘Yoongi can go fuck himself,’ “we don’t actually need another male dancer. We just hired Taemin a few weeks ago.”

Taehyung can’t help the way he slumps in his seat, despite his resolve to stay firm.

“I can talk to Jimin about giving you a raise, but since you’ve only worked here for two months that’s going to be a bit of a hard sell.”

“No,” Taehyung says, lunging forward and waving his hands in front of Namjoon. “You don’t need to bother Jimin with this. I’ll figure something else out.” The absolute last thing he needs is Jimin finding out about his family’s problems. He doesn’t want his rich boyfriend to come and throw money at him.

Jimin isn’t really his boyfriend, anyway. No matter how much he might wish he was.

“Thanks anyway, Namjoon,” Taehyung says, standing up and trying not to sound too defeated.
Namjoon smiles sympathetically. “Let me know if I can do anything else.”

Taehyung nods, then turns and leaves Namjoon’s office, going to the breakroom to change for his shift.

This is, without a doubt, the worst shift he’s ever had.

Taehyung realizes now that he was naïve to think that his fight with Yoongi would have blown over by now.

No, Yoongi is a real bitch when he wants to be.

At least he gravitates toward the cold sort of anger. Being ignored by Yoongi is marginally better than being yelled at by Yoongi, if one can manage to ignore the feeling of a glare like daggers pressing against one’s back.

Taehyung isn’t good at ignoring Yoongi’s glaring.

“Hey guys,” Hoseok says, sauntering over to the bar to pick up a round of shots for a table he’s been entertaining. “How goes the tending tonight?”

He addresses both of them, coming to the back counter between the two sides of the room. He’s covered in glitter from head to toe. Taehyung glances at his table and yep. Hoseok has a bachelorette party.

“Fine,” Taehyung says, answering Hoseok’s question at the same moment that Yoongi spits, “How the fuck do you think, Hobi?”

Hoseok raises an eyebrow at Yoongi before eyeing the both of them. “Okay listen up because I have about one minute before my table decides to stop shoving money down my pants since I, the stripper, have to be the adult here.”

Yoongi rolls his eyes. Taehyung picks at a hangnail.

“Whatever’s going on between the two of you needs to stop. Someone apologize because Yoongi’s being a bitch to everyone and I’m tired of apologizing after him.” Yoongi opens up his mouth to retort sharply but Hoseok silences him with a look. “Don’t even with me right now, Yoongi. You know it’s true and I’m tired of dealing with it.”

Hoseok swipes his tray of shots off the counter and saunters away.

Taehyung turns to Yoongi, an apology on his lips—although for what exactly he’s not sure. Last Taehyung checked he was allowed to sleep with whomever he wished.

“Are you still letting him fuck you?” Yoongi asks before Taehyung has a chance to say anything, voice just loud enough for Taehyung to hear over the music.

Taehyung reels back, disliking the phrasing but not willing to risk Yoongi’s wrath any further by protesting. “Yeah,” Taehyung hedges.

Yoongi grimaces and looks away. “Don’t fucking bother, then. I don’t want to hear it.”

Any apology or attempt to keep the peace evaporates on Taehyung’s tongue, and he turns back to his side of the bar and addresses the people and dancers waiting for orders.
He doesn’t owe Yoongi anything.

The next time Hoseok walks by he looks between Yoongi and Taehyung with a frown etched into his face, but doesn’t say anything.

At the end of the night, Taehyung figures out why.

“Yoongi, Taehyung,” Seokjin calls, motioning them away from the bar and into the back hallway. “Can I see you both in my office?”

He phrases it politely, like a question, but the steel in his gaze says it’s anything but.

Taehyung slouches over to Seokjin and the follows him into his office. He’s never been in Seokjin’s office before, but it instantly feels like Seokjin. Warm woods, plush armchairs, sleek monitors along one wall; the whole room speaks of effortless elegance and sophistication.

There’s a set of brass knuckles resting on the corner of the desk in front of Taehyung. He doesn’t ever want to know if Seokjin’s used them before.

“Would one of you care to explain what’s going on?” Seokjin asks calmly, walking around his desk to sit in the chair behind it, clasping his hands in his lap, the picture of ease.

Taehyung doesn’t dare say a word, not with the look that lingers in Seokjin’s eyes.

“Explain what?” Yoongi snaps, slumping down into his armchair. “Nothin’s going on.”

Well, Yoongi’s never had very many fucks to give anyway, Taehyung muses.

Seokjin levers a flat stare at Yoongi. “Try again.”

“I’m sorry,” Taehyung says, apropos of nothing.

Seokjin looks at him and raises an eyebrow. “What for?”

“Well,” Taehyung gulps. “I don’t actually know what’s wrong, it just seemed like the right thing to say.”

Seokjin turns back to Yoongi. “Learn something, Yoongi.”

Yoongi scowls down at his hands.

Seokjin’s sigh is gustier than a fall breeze. “It’s been brought to my attention that there is a situation between the two of you that’s causing problems in the work environment.”

“Shouldn’t Namjoon be the one talking to us?” Yoongi barks. “Isn’t he the fuckin’ manager?”

“Namjoon is in a meeting right now.” Seokjin does not offer any more information on that front. “Look,” Seokjin says, leaning forward and resting his arms on his desk. “I don’t want to be here all night and I’ve got a very nice bottle of merlot at home, so here’s what you’re going to do. Whatever the issue is, whoever started it, it’s done. Either apologize or lose your job.” Seokjin ignores Yoongi’s outraged scoff. “When a problem between the bartenders is making life miserable for the dancers, something has to change.” He eyes them each in turn. “Apologize.”

“I’m sorry,” Yoongi grits out, looking like he would rather run naked through the club at peak hours
blindfolded and bitch-ass shitfaced.

Taehyung sighs internally. “I’m sorry for saying you don’t belong with him,” Taehyung apologizes. If there’s one thing his mom taught him it’s to apologize once and apologize right. “You guys are actually great together.”

Yoongi crosses his arms over his chest and slouches down—if possible—even further in the armchair. “Whatever,” he grumbles, but Taehyung can see the way his eyes soften around the edges and his lips relax. “Are we done here?” He glares up at Seokjin.

Seokjin’s sigh is world-weary. “Yes, you can both leave.”

“Thank fuck.” Yoongi is gone within seconds.

“Have a good night with your wine,” Taehyung says with a small smile for Seokjin. “And thanks.” Seokjin returns his smile with a warm one of his own, and shit but he’s so handsome. “You too, Taehyung. Anytime.”

Taehyung leaves the office with one last smile over his shoulder, feeling lighter than he has in days.

Taehyung is leaving the break room, checking his phone for notifications, when someone snakes an arm around his waist and presses up against him from behind.

“Come home with me?” Jimin asks, teeth grazing the shell of Taehyung’s ear.

Taehyung halts mid-step and presses back into Jimin, his hands coming up to lace with Jimin’s on his stomach. “Yes, please.” While things with Yoongi have finally gone back to normal—due in no small part to Seokjin—he’s not exactly eager to spend time with him outside of work just yet.

Jimin releases him, only to link their hands again and lead him out the employee entrance, dropping his hand as soon as they step out of the club.

Taehyung wishes he didn’t have to.

It’s late by the time they get back to Jimin’s apartment, closer to dawn than night after Taehyung’s unexpected meeting after work.

He follows Jimin deeper into his apartment, squeaking in shock when Jimin roughly pulls him into the curtained bedroom and presses him against the closed door. Jimin kisses him before the sound has fully died from his lips, tongue insistent and hot against the seam of his lips.

Taehyung melts into Jimin, sinking his fingers into Jimin’s silky grey strands and tugging him closer, molding their bodies together as he angles his head and deepens the kiss, sighing as Jimin sweeps through his mouth possessively.

“How was your day at work, dear?” Jimin smirks, changing the kiss from something deep and probing to light, fluttering kisses against his lips.

“Better than last week,” Taehyung manages between the soft presses of Jimin’s lips against his.

“Can I make it even better?” Jimin asks teasingly, one hand trailing down Taehyung’s stomach to
palm him through his jeans.

Taehyung refuses to acknowledge the whimper that escapes between his lips at the touch, turning it into a whispered “yes, please,” instead.

Jimin smirks again and presses close to Taehyung, lips sucking hungrily down Taehyung’s neck as he gets rid of their clothes so that he can hoist Taehyung up around his hips and carry him to the bed, pressing him against the sinfully silky sheets.

It’s better than the first time.

Jimin seems intent on taking Taehyung apart piece by piece, moving between slow, deep kisses and soft, gentle strokes of his hands along Taehyung’s skin, worshiping.

Taehyung could get used to this.

He tangles his fingers into Jimin’s hair as he starts to slowly stretch him, starting with one finger and ending with three, working Taehyung up so much that when he finally does press in with one smooth stroke Taehyung sees stars haloing Jimin’s face above him.

Jimin fucks him slow and deep, swallowing up Taehyung’s moans with his kisses and leaving dark, bruising marks all along Taehyung’s neck and collarbones possessively. Taehyung arches up into Jimin when he changes the angle slightly, fingers clawing into the skin of Jimin’s back as pleasure tingles up his legs to coil in his abdomen.

Jimin detaches from his most recent mark against Taehyung’s neck to hover above him again, eyes catching and holding against Taehyung’s own. It’s right there, on the tip of his tongue, the ‘I love you, Jiminie’ that he so desperately wants to utter. It’s right there and yet he can’t, not with everything that’s going on around the both of them. Not when Jimin can’t even tell Taehyung what kind of business he gets up to every day, the matters he ‘attends to.’ No, no matter how much Taehyung wants to tell Jimin exactly how he feels about him—what he’s felt for him since he first saw him walk into LIE a month ago and realized his best friend was still alive—he can’t. Not when the risks are so high.

So he doesn’t say anything, just keeps staring into Jimin’s eyes as he comes—shuddering and shaking underneath him—and maybe Jimin understands anyway, with the way his eyes go soft and he finds his release right after Taehyung’s.

He closes his eyes and revels in the feeling of Jimin pressed close to him, still inside him, and their mingled breathing sounds like the most beautiful symphony he’s ever heard.

“Will you hold me tight and not let go?” Taehyung asks, craving closeness and Jimin’s heartbeat against his ear more than anything else right now.

“Always,” Jimin murmurs into the skin of his neck. “Let me clean us up first?” Jimin asks, shifting against Taehyung as he gets up to get a washcloth from the bathroom.

Taehyung misses the feeling of having Jimin inside him. He feels empty when Jimin’s not with him.

Jimin comes back and quickly wipes them both down before crawling back in bed, tucking them both between the sheets as Taehyung wraps himself tightly around Jimin.

“Hey, Jiminie?” Taehyung ventures after a few moments of basking in the afterglow. There’s something he’s wanted to ask Jimin for a while now.
“Yeah, baby?” Jimin replies, voice sleepy and warm in his ear.

“What happened to you, after you were taken away?”

Jimin sighs deeply, arms tightening reflexively around Taehyung. “I was introduced to my real family, my mother and father, and almost immediately after that I began my training.” He pauses, quite for a moment with contemplation. Taehyung makes an inquiring noise, wanting to know more but unwilling to push Jimin further than he felt comfortable. “I was taught etiquette, behavior and the proper way of dressing first,” Jimin continues, “and then later taught martial arts, horsemanship, and social skills to help me survive in the world of high society.”

“Wow,” Taehyung says, any other form of expression escaping him.

Jimin sighs and presses a kiss into his hair. “It was overwhelming. Honestly, if I didn’t have Jeongguk I wouldn’t have survived.”

Taehyung feels the familiar twist in his stomach at the mention of Jeongguk, but he wants to know, so he asks: “How did he help?”

Jimin snorts a laugh. “He wasn’t that much help at first. It was more of a ‘I’m in this crazy world too, I get it’ sort of thing. We both suffered in silence, learned what our parents wanted us to learn. Since he was two years older, he helped me out with my Korean and French studies. He helped me study so that my tutors wouldn’t get frustrated when I didn’t immediately understand basic conjugations.”

“He honestly seemed pretty indifferent at first,” Jimin says, after a short pause of contemplation. “But the more our parents pushed us together the more fascinated he became with me and we fell into this friendship born from a need for someone else who understood what it was like to be groomed to take over an empire like our families have.” Taehyung feels Jimin shrug around him. “He eventually came to help fill the spot where you were supposed to be. He could never replace your friendship, but he helped keep the loneliness at bay.”

Taehyung chews on his bottom lip in thought, wondering how Jimin and Jeongguk went from that kind of relationship to the one they have now. “How,” he starts, then pauses, not sure if he really wants to pry this deep, before going for it anyway. “How did he end up your fiancé? You don’t really seem like friends anymore?” Taehyung asks because they don’t. He can’t see the friendship between them that Jimin has been reminiscing about for the last five minutes.

Jimin pulls back slightly to press a soft kiss to his lips. “He was the obvious choice. I have…things to accomplish and joining my family with his was the fastest way to do that.” Jimin shrugs again. “Besides, we’d already been fuck-buddies for a while until some…unfortunate events separated us, so it wasn’t as hard as I thought it would be to convince him to marry me. It was still hard, but not impossible.”

“Wait,” Taehyung says, bypassing all of the ominous pauses in Jimin’s speech and going straight for the most important thing. “You guys were fuck-buddies?”

Jimin laughs softly. “Yeah, Jeongguk was my first, actually.” He rubs a soothing hand along Taehyung’s ribs. “I wasn’t his, but that didn’t matter to me, and he really helped me when I came out. He supported me in front of my parents, so it seemed only natural that our friendship would become something…more in time.” Jimin looks at him. “You okay, Tae?”

Taehyung takes a moment to process everything before deciding that it really doesn’t matter who Jimin lost his virginity to. He’s here, now, with Taehyung, telling him more about his life than Taehyung ever thought he would get to know. “Yeah,” he finally responds. “Yeah, I’m good.”
And while it’s still difficult to have to share Jimin with Jeongguk, in whatever capacity that is, he knows that Jimin cares for him deeply, and it’s enough.

He starts to drift in the warmth of Jimin’s arms, sleepy and content where he is, and it’s back. The whispered ‘I love you Jiminie,’ is on the tip of his tongue, he almost lets it slip free, but sleep claims him before he can.

It’s too risky.

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It’s Wednesday.

It’s Wednesday, and Jimin’s time is just about up. Baekhyun told Jimin he has until midnight, and midnight is just over five hours away.

Jumin is very carefully not panicking.

He disregards his carefully applied makeup and squeezes the bridge of his nose, pressing against his eyes and unconsciously letting out a heavy sigh as he pushes his chair away from his desk. He hasn’t found an opportunity to talk to Jeongguk about his family’s information in the last three days, but even if the perfect time had miraculously presented itself, Jimin still has no clue what to say to convince Jeongguk to hand over everything his family has.

Jeongguk’s not going to like the request—even if Jimin makes it a request, and not a demand—and he’s going to want answers. Which Jimin can’t give him.

Sighing again, Jimin powers down his computer and picks up his cell phone. The club opens in an hour, and he needs to get out of here before it does, or he’ll be sucked into staying later than he can afford.

He scrolls to Jeongguk’s name in his contacts, and presses ‘send.’

It rings twice before Jeongguk picks up.

“Hey, babe. I’m in a meeting right now, so I’m a little busy. Can this be fast?”

Jumin hears the muted sound of flesh striking flesh in the background, and swallows.

“I need to see you,” he says, and his voice comes out smaller than he wants. He clears his throat and focuses on sounding confident. “Can you come over to my place when you’re finished there?”

Another punch lands, and Jeongguk’s muffled voice says, “hold up,” before he turns back to Jimin. “Sure thing, babe. You need anything else?”

“Nope,” Jimin replies. “How long?”

“About forty-five minutes,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin winces for the sake of the poor soul who requires that much of Jeongguk’s time.

“Okay, see you soon.”

Jumin hangs up, and heads for Namjoon’s office. He opens the door and sticks his head in, not bothering to knock, but the office is empty. He frowns into the vacant room, closes the door, and goes in search of his club’s manager.
He finds Taehyung first, catching a glimpse of his lover disappearing into the staff breakroom, and changes his course. He follows Taehyung into the breakroom, and luck is on his side—they’re the only ones in there.

Jimin sneaks up behind Taehyung and slips his arms around Taehyung’s middle, planting a soft kiss on the nape of his neck before resting his forehead there and soaking in Taehyung’s presence.

To his credit, Taehyung doesn’t jump. They’ve gotten good at expecting the other to pop up out of nowhere when there’s a quiet moment at the club, Jimin thinks.

“You okay?” Taehyung asks softly, layering his arms over Jimin’s.

“Yeah,” Jimin sighs. “I just have to go take care of some business. It’s not gonna be fun, so I thought I’d recharge first.” He hugs Taehyung a little tighter, and Taehyung chuckles, spinning around in Jimin’s arms.

He returns the hug, molding himself around Jimin in a way that makes him feel lightheaded and giddy, and Jimin feels Taehyung’s lips press against his forehead.

It feels good.

Jimin absorbs the warmth of Taehyung’s lips on his skin, a thread of reciprocated need woven through softness and reassurance, and when Taehyung pulls away, Jimin can’t help the way he chases those lips to capture them with his own.

It’s a gentle thing, more tender than heated, and Jimin drags it out, lingers with his lips fit perfectly between Taehyung’s, like the completion of a puzzle he’s finally found the missing piece to.

Taehyung pulls away first, whispering apologies against Jimin’s lips. Jimin knows why he’s apologizing—why he’s pulling away—but he doesn’t want any of it. He wants more kisses; he wants to take Taehyung home with him and drown in this sweetness.

He doesn’t want the caution required by being in public, and he doesn’t want to go home alone. He doesn’t want to deal with Baekhyun’s bullshit.

He doesn’t want to put on the mask he wears with Jeongguk.

He sighs again, dropping his arms and taking a step back, putting the necessary physical distance between them. Taehyung watches him as he does, little creases forming between his eyebrows.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Jiminie?” he asks. He reaches out to put a hand on Jimin’s shoulder, but the breakroom door swings open, and Seokjin sticks his head in.

“Hey boss, what are you doing in here?”

“Looking for Namjoon, so I’m glad you found me,” Jimin says briskly, turning away from Taehyung and striding toward the door. “Would you let him know I’m heading home? I’m not feeling particularly well.”

“I’ll let him know,” Seokjin promises, his eyes darting back to Taehyung, who’s busying himself with hanging his coat and changing into his uniform.

Jimin waves Seokjin out of the breakroom in front of him, and as the door latches again behind Jimin, Seokjin says, “I didn’t know you’d gotten friendly with Taehyung.”
A twist in Jimin’s gut is all the reaction he allows himself to Seokjin’s idle not-so-idle tone. “I’m not, really,” he shrugs. “I was just asking him to pass along my message for Namjoon, and he got all worried when I said I wasn’t feeling well. Kid’s too kind for his own good.”

“Mm,” Seokjin hums noncommittally. “And are you not feeling well?”

“I’m fine. I’ve just got urgent business, and he doesn’t need to know about it,” Jimin replies. “I need to go. Would you have my driver pull around? I’m going to get my coat.”

“Sure,” Seokjin says.

Jimin double-times it to his office, eager to put Seokjin’s line of questioning behind him, and gathers his belongings. He makes his way past the bouncer stationed at the front door and gets into his car quickly, ignoring the patrons lined up for entrance that recognize him and call his name.

He’s got thirty minutes until Jeongguk is supposed to meet him at his penthouse, and most of that will be spent in traffic, considering the time of day, so Jimin settles back into his seat and thinks about the warmth of Taehyung’s arms wrapped around him.

In the face of the challenge in front of Jimin, it seems like good armor.

Jimin beats Jeongguk to his penthouse by seven minutes. He spends those seven minutes changing into something more comfortable—a pair of ragged, holey jeans that he’d practically forgotten he owned, and an oversized sweater that reminds Jimin of being caught up in a hug—and pouring himself a shot of whiskey.

And then another one.

After he’s tossed back his third, he hesitates, the lip of the bottle hovering over the glass, and then screws the cap back on and puts the booze away before he makes a stupid decision. He’s going to need his wits about him to convince Jeongguk to do as he asks.

He sets his glass in the sink just as he hears the front door open, and in a matter of moments, Jeongguk’s ditched his shoes and is walking toward Jimin. He slides up behind Jimin, his arms snaking around Jimin’s middle, placing a heated kiss that lingers just below his earlobe, and Jimin knows immediately that Jeongguk has misunderstood his ‘I need to see you’ call.

Shit.

“Kookie, I need to t—” Jimin says, turning to look at his fiancé, but Jeongguk’s lips fall hungrily on Jimin’s.

He sucks in a breath around Jeongguk’s kiss, and tries again, “We have to ta—” but this time Jeongguk interrupts with a steady grind of his hips against Jimin’s ass, and a hand slipping down to stroke Jimin through his jeans, and Jimin’s attempt at conversation evaporates into a moan.

Jeongguk’s smirk against Jimin’s lips, his low, “I got you, baby,” murmured around teeth and tongues—it’s familiar and comfortable, and Jimin’s been so worried about everything the last three days, that he can’t help the way his mind blocks everything else out. He needs release from his stress, and his body is responding with a determined yes, please, this will definitely help, and he can’t help sinking into old habits like a shipwreck pulled to the bottom of the ocean.

He drowns in Jeongguk’s embrace, Jeongguk’s hand tracing his abs, his pecs, the line of his neck, cupping his jaw and holding Jimin to him as his mouth moves languidly over Jimin’s. There’s no subtlety in the way Jeongguk’s lips move—even if they didn’t have a history together Jimin would
be able to tell exactly what kind of sex Jeongguk has in mind just from the way his lips part, sucking in a breath as he pulls at Jimin’s lower lip with his teeth, as his tongue licks over the bite and then pushes further, caressing along Jimin’s teeth, smoothing along Jimin’s tongue in a glide that’s never failed to set Jimin on fire.

Flickers of heat follow the path of Jeongguk’s hand, but in reverse, from where Jeongguk’s fingers brush along his cheek, down, along his neck, across his chest, over his stomach, and then lower, burning hot and getting hotter as Jeongguk’s other hand slides up enough to pop the button on Jimin’s jeans free, to yank the zipper down. His hand dips beneath the surface of Jimin’s clothes, and with the first tug of Jeongguk’s fingers along Jimin’s stiffening length, Jimin is caught in the undertow, his breath rushing from his lungs as he loses his footing and is swept away.

Jeongguk feels so good moving against him, and Jimin is relieved to be lost in this tide of emotions—the easiness of him and Jeongguk together, the luxury of surrender built into their physical choices—and Jimin wants to relive how good Jeongguk will feel moving inside him. He wants that release, here and now. He needs it.

He manages to gasp out a clipped ‘bedroom,’ and Jeongguk doesn’t argue.

Jimin whines when Jeongguk pulls his hand out of his pants, but then Jeongguk’s spinning Jimin around in his arms and hoisting him up easily, his hands gripping the back of Jimin’s thighs with a strength that makes Jimin shiver, and Jimin wraps his arms and legs around Jeongguk, searching for enough of a hold that he can focus on grinding himself against Jeongguk, on seeking just a little friction to tide him over until Jeongguk can give him more, and—

Jeongguk grunts, and practically throws Jimin onto his bed. He whips off his white t-shirt so quickly that Jimin doesn’t have enough time to properly appreciate the suggestive way it clung to his body, but it hardly matters, because the toned chest beneath it is much better bared anyway.

“Strip, baby,” Jeongguk growls, pushing his pants and boxers down in one smooth, quick motion, and Jimin is scrambling to keep up, sitting up enough to peel his sweater off, then laying back down and wiggling his hips to shimmy his jeans and boxer briefs off.

Then Jeongguk is crawling over him, sneaking a hand under Jimin to grab his ass as his hips plunge down against Jimin’s, and the friction is good—it’s so, so good, and Jimin bites down hard on his lip to keep from crying out—but the slide is still rough. Before Jimin can say anything, Jeongguk is sitting up, sliding backwards on the bed, and sinking his lips down Jimin’s cock.

The wet heat of Jeongguk’s mouth enveloping him has always been heaven, but today there’s something about the way Jeongguk drags the flat of his tongue along his cock, the way he purses his lips around the head and lets his tongue writhe against it as he sucks, and Jimin finds himself contorting beneath him, desperate to buck up into Jeongguk’s mouth and unable to do so. With as quickly as Jimin is falling apart, Jeongguk only needs one had to keep Jimin’s hips pinned to the mattress, corded muscle flexing under tanned skin as Jeongguk holds him in place. It only helps Jimin fall apart faster.

Jimin is lost in the haze of pleasure, floating adrift at sea, unable to fight against the current as it takes him further from the safety of rational thought, and he gives in to it, lets the flood of desire hold him—pliable, shaking—in hopes of catching his breath when the surge of lust lets him surface again.

It washes over him, the wildness of Jeongguk’s thirst and the answering flame of his own ardor, two raging forces that tumble and twist together, burning away everything else and leaving him a smoldering ember, too drowned to ignite on his own, too alive to extinguish the mindless need that fuels them, until Jeongguk’s fingers press inside him, slickened and insistent, and a single thought
sears through him.

Jeongguk’s fingers don’t feel right.

They’re long, but they don’t reach as deep as he wants; they’re strong, but they’re not callused the way Taehyung’s are, and suddenly Jimin is gasping for oxygen, surfacing under the crushing weight of lust, his voice hoarse as he cries out, floundering as his emotions crash back into him, the unrelenting crush of guilt as it sweeps him back to reality and leaves him there, only to crash back over him again and again, ruthless and rhythmic as waves rushing to shore.

Jimin recoils tumultuously, and puts his voice to better use than moaning.

“Kookie, stop—” he pants out, fighting the fire between them for the breath in his lungs, “Jeonggukie, please—stop—”

And just like that Jeongguk is frozen over him, his fingers slipping out of Jimin easily, his mouth releasing Jimin’s softening cock, confusion and concern warring across his features as he takes in Jimin’s shaking figure.

Jimin covers his face as the first sob rips from him and the first tear streaks down the side of his face. He curls onto his side in shame. He can’t stand that Jeongguk is seeing him like this, that he let this go so far—

He can’t stand that he’s done this to Jeongguk and Taehyung.

He feels, for the first time, like he’s cheated, like he’s done something he shouldn’t. Like he’s betrayed someone’s trust in an unforgivable way. Which is funny, because he feels like he’s cheating on the man he loves with his fiancé, and the ridiculousness of it overwhelms him. Tears mix with a caustic laugh, and he hiccups as he inhales, letting the manic cackling take over, because anything is better than the way he feels right now.

He feels Jeongguk’s fingertips on his thigh as they glide up to his hip bone, and encourage him to roll onto his back once more. Jimin doesn’t fight it.

It’s long past time to tell the truth.

He opens his mouth to unleash the words he knows will change everything, and...nothing comes out. They stick in his throat, because, just like he had no clue how to talk to Jeongguk about the blackmail, he has even fewer ideas as to how to talk to Jeongguk about Taehyung.

To his surprise, Jeongguk starts the conversation for him.

He settles back, his legs folded beneath him, and touches Jimin’s calf reassuringly as he says, softly, “You don’t want this anymore, do you?”

There’s a look of understanding, of knowing, on his face that leaves Jimin feeling shredded. He did this. He did this to them.

The least he can do is come clean.

“No,” he croaks, his voice thick. “Kookie, I’m—”

“Don’t say sorry,” Jeongguk snaps. He closes his eyes, and Jimin watches him take a steadying breath before he continues. “It’s Taehyung isn’t it?”
Jimin wants nothing more than to let his gaze break from Jeongguk’s, to find an inanimate object to stare at while he bares his soul, because it would be infinitely easier than watching Jeongguk react to his answer, but he doesn’t, because Jeongguk deserves better than the easy way out.

“It’s Taehyung,” Jimin says quietly. He meets Jeongguk’s stare, prepared to let it put him in his place, but it feels…hollower than it should. Less angry.

Jeongguk sighs, and climbs off the bed. He disappears into the bathroom, and Jimin can hear the water run as he washes his hands. He comes back with a wet washcloth for Jimin to clean up with, and then fetches their underwear, tossing Jimin’s to him before pulling his own on. He pulls his t-shirt over his head as he ducks into Jimin’s closet, coming back with an oversized t-shirt for Jimin, and Jimin pulls it on quietly as Jeongguk turns on the bedside lamp and shuffles back onto the bed, leaning against the headboard and tugging the covers down so he can pull them over his legs.

He reaches an arm out for Jimin, and says, “Tell me,” and Jimin can’t help the way the tears rise in him again.

Why is he being so understanding? So kind? He should hate Jimin right now—the engagement was his idea, when he proposed their marital alliance, and Jeongguk had asked why he should even consider it, Jimin had said, ‘trust me’—

Jemin had said ‘trust me,’ and then he’d broken that trust.

Jeongguk should hate him right now.

Quiet tears streaming down his face uncontrollably, Jimin crawls toward Jeongguk, practically falling against his side as Jeongguk tucks him under his arm. He handles Jimin softly, pulling him under the covers, too, as they settle against each other.

Jeongguk lets him cry himself out, silent as he waits for Jimin, and Jimin doesn’t know what he did in this life to deserve this moment between them.

How could he have ever thought that Jeongguk would be a threat to Taehyung’s safety?

When his breathing evens out and his eyes dry, Jimin brings a hand up to wipe the wetness from his cheeks, and he feels Jeongguk press a kiss to the top of his head.

“Tell me,” Jeongguk says again, and Jimin does.

Jimin tells him about growing up with Taehyung. He tells Jeongguk that Taehyung was the one to talk him out of his fear of riding his bicycle when his grandmother took the training wheels off; he tells Jeongguk how Taehyung piggy-backed him home when he promptly fell off the bike and skinned his knees.

He tells Jeongguk about the time that they were too hungry to wait for dinner, so they dug up the carrots in Jimin’s grandmother’s garden, brushed most of the dirt off of them, nibbled them down within an inch of the greens, and then replanted them, so no one would be the wiser.

He tells Jeongguk about the time his sixth-grade choir teacher gave him a solo for their concert, and he was so nervous that he froze on stage, until Taehyung started singing it from the risers behind him and Jimin could join him, his wavering voice growing stronger with his friend there to back him up.

He tells Jeongguk about the day that his parents took him back, how Taehyung had risked their math teacher’s wrath by rushing to the door and hollering down the hallway as Jimin walked away, yelling that he’d meet Jimin in their lair after school.
He tells Jeongguk that Taehyung had thought he was dead, that Jimin’s grandmother’s ambiguous words had left a hole in Taehyung that had gaped open until they’d reunited by accident—a raw wound that had only just started to heal.

He tells Jeongguk that he never meant to feel this way about Taehyung, that he’d meant to hold him at a distance for everyone’s sake, but it’d been so out of his control. He tells Jeongguk that the way they fell together again was like no time had passed between them. It’d been impossible to stay away, with Taehyung there every time he turned around.

He tells Jeongguk, despite the vehemence of his earlier protest, that he’s sorry—that he’d never meant to put them in this position.

And Jeongguk listens, his arm draped around Jimin’s shoulders as he speaks, his thumb moving in gentle circles on Jimin’s skin, just beneath the hem of his sleeve.

When Jimin falls silent, contemplating how, exactly, to tell Jeongguk the rest—how he’d given in and touched Taehyung the way he’d craved, only to be photographed and blackmailed over it—Jeongguk finally speaks up.

“I’m glad you found him again, Jimin, and I’m glad you have someone to care about like that.” He pauses, and Jimin braces for the worst. “But what about our arrangement? Publicly, we need our engagement to succeed. Our families have to see it working, or the deal will fall apart, and you’re the one that decided this deal was necessary. You’re the one with the master plan, Jimin. What if something happens, and you and Taehyung get caught? What do we do then?”

Ah. Well. There’s his opening.

Jemin clears his throat, and pushes himself up, crossing his legs and picking at the sheet in his lap as he says, “About that.”

Jeongguk’s eyes widen, and the first hint of reproach creeps into his voice. “Jemin, what did you do?”

“We were…photographed. In the, uh, bathroom.” Jimin winces as the words leave his lips, knowing how they sound.

He’s unsurprised by the string of expletives that spill from Jeongguk. It starts with simple, classic swears, and as Jeongguk puts two and two together, and comes up with Baekhyun as the answer, they become louder and more creative. “That shitty, cocknugget monkey-fucker! I’m gonna kill that little bitch before he can even think about running off to his cum-sucking gutter-slut of a boyfriend for one last fuck. I’m gonna—”

“Jeonggukie,” Jimin interrupts, and Jeongguk hits the back of his head against the headboard in frustration.

“You should be mad at me, not him,” Jimin says softly. “I’m the idiot that fucked up.”

“Does Taehyung know?” Jeongguk asks, eyeing Jimin.

“No!” Jimin says vehemently, finally meeting Jeongguk’s gaze. “And it needs to stay that way. He’s not ready for the lack of privacy that comes with our lifestyle. He doesn’t know about our lifestyle.”

Jeongguk snorts, “You’re fucked on that one, Jimin. He’s too innocent to handle it.”

“We’ll see,” Jimin whispers, looking back down at his lap. “He’s stronger than you think.”
“Maybe,” Jeongguk allows. “But we have to deal with Baekhyun first. What does he want?”

Jimin bites his lip. “He’s done working for us—”

Jeongguk nods. “I expected as much since you told me to back off. What else?”

“He…suggested an even trade, everything we have on him and Chanyeol in exchange for everything he has on me and Taehyung.”

Jeongguk’s eyes narrow. “And what, exactly does he have on you and Taehyung?”

Jimin hesitates. “Compromising photos. In an assortment of positions that make it clear that I—”

Jimin swallows, “—that I cheated on you.”

Even with as understanding as Jeongguk has been, saying the words out loud makes them somehow more real, and Jimin watches Jeongguk nervously out of the corner of his eye.

Jeongguk is silent for a long time.

“Do I need to get retested?” he asks finally.

“No! I didn’t—we didn’t do anything until after the last time you and I—”

“The blindfold,” Jeongguk says, realization dawning. “Is that why…”

Jimin nods. There’s no point in holding anything back now, regardless of how ashamed he feels. He owes Jeongguk the full truth.

Jeongguk nods once, sharply, acknowledging Jimin’s confession, and then sighs heavily. “Okay. One thing at a time. When does Baekhyun want our profile on him and Chanyeol?”

“…Tonight? He gave me until midnight,” Jimin admits, chagrined.

“Jimin, what the fuck? That’s in—” he glances at the alarm clock on the nightstand, “—three and a half hours! There’s no way I can get everything together that fast!”

“Kookie, isn’t it just a file? A flash drive or something? There’s plenty of time to—”

“No,” Jeongguk says, his voice hard. “There isn’t plenty of time. My family keeps backup copies of everything on external hard drives. In two different locations. If we’re supposed to get everything—and he wants us to clear everything we have from our entire system, right?”

Jimin nods.

“Figured as much. So if we’re supposed to clear everything, so that he’s got a clean slate, that’s gonna require at least a full day, just for getting from place to place and convincing the holders to let me access the backup files to erase what we have to.

“And my father will hear about it if I do that, so I gotta come up with some excuse and talk to him first. If I try to do this without my father’s permission, we are fucked, and our problems with Baekhyun won’t even be worth a blip on our radar.”

Bile rises in his throat, and Jimin digs his fingernails into his arms to fend off the waves of nausea that follow.

“Dammit, Jimin!” Jeongguk spits angrily, closing his eyes as the works through the problem. After a
minute he asks, “Does he know who Taehyung is?”

“Yes.”

“Shit.”

“Kookie—” Jimin starts, but Jeongguk skewers him with a glance, and Jimin stops mid-sentence.

“Just shut up a minute and let me think,” Jeongguk says.

Jemin shuts up.

Four minutes later, Jeongguk breaks the deafening silence. “Please tell me you were smart enough to record the conversation.”

“Yeah, I have it—” Jimin cuts himself off as he hastily scrambles off the bed, diving for his jeans on the floor, only to realize his phone’s not in any of his pockets. He bolts out of the bedroom, finds his phone on the kitchen counter where he’d thrown back whisky like it was a good idea, and then returns to Jeongguk.

He opens the recording, and presses ‘play.’

It’s a little surreal, listening to himself on the recording. He sounds so cold, but the anger boiling under the surface is obvious to him, and he wonders how he managed to keep it together during the conversation.

They’re almost at the end of the of the recording when Jeongguk’s eyes snap open, and he leans forward in concentration.

“Two days is not near enough,” Jimin hears himself say. “I need a week. You’re asking for a lot here, Baekhyun. You can afford to be generous with the timeline, considering what you’re getting out of this.”

“Four days, then,” comes Baekhyun’s tinny response. “You have until Wednesday at midnight to talk the Jeons into this arrangement.”

“There!” Jeongguk barks, interrupting the playback, and Jimin slams his thumb down on the ‘pause’ button. “You have until Wednesday at midnight to talk the Jeons into this arrangement.” Jeongguk repeats. “Which you have now done.”

Jemin’s mouth falls open. “What?”

“You talked him in circles enough that he didn’t demand delivery by today, Jimin. Just the agreement of the Jeon family to produce all materials. I’ll speak for the Jeon family—we agree. So call him.”

Jemin can feel himself pale. “Kookie, he can’t know that you know.”


“Whatever is happening between us right now, whatever we are,” he says gesturing back and forth between them with a finger, “the public has to think we’re still happily engaged. For the sake of the deal. So, if we let on that you know about my…transgressions…then we’re giving Baekhyun ammunition. He needs to think that Taehyung is my secret, that you and I are okay—because if we act in public like nothing’s changed and he knows better—”
“I get it,” Jeongguk sighs. “I’ll keep quiet, then. But you’re calling him now, and you’re putting him on speakerphone, because if he doesn’t take your word for it, then I’m gonna cut in.”

Jimin opens his mouth to argue, but Jeongguk raises a hand against his protests. “I’ll pretend like I don’t know why I’m agreeing, Jimin, but if I have to step in to convince him that you have my agreement to hand everything over, then I’m going to. We need him to believe that he’s going to get what he wants so that he’ll give us the extension we need to actually get the files.”


“Forty-eight hours. That should be enough. I can make it work,” Jeongguk says.

Jimin is quiet for a moment while he thinks through how exactly how he needs to handle Baekhyun, and then he nods, and gets up and walks around to the other side of the bed. He pulls open the nightstand, and lifts out the envelope from Baekhyun.

Aware that Jeongguk’s eyes are on him, Jimin slides the picture with the phone number on it out of the envelope, and types it into his phone.

His hands occupied, Jeongguk snatches the envelope away from him and pulls the photos out, flipping through them quickly before Jimin wrenches them out of Jeongguk’s hands.

“Hey! Do you mind?!” he barks heatedly. “That was a private moment.”

“That my fiancé was having with another man,” Jeongguk replies sassily. “Of all the people that know these photos exist, I’m the one with the right to see them.”

“No,” Jimin says, aggressively pouting. “You may have the right to know, but nobody has the right to see.”

Jeongguk snorts out a short laugh. “Relax, Jimin. I’m just giving you shit. I won’t look if you don’t want me to.”

Jimin levels a glare at him, his lips twisting into a slight frown as he stuffs the photos back in the envelope and shoves them back into the drawer.

“He looks hung, though. Is that why he let you top? Were you afraid of his—”

Jimin screeches, and launches himself across the bed at Jeongguk, clapping his hands over Jeongguk’s mouth before he can finish his sentence.

Jeongguk laughs under Jimin’s fingers, and pries them off his face. Jimin, robbed of his arms to support himself, ends up on his back, his head pillowed on Jeongguk’s lap. Jeongguk’s laugh fades, but the grin left in its place is spread wide across his features.

“Jeonggukie—” Jimin frowns. He opens his mouth, ready to give Jeongguk a piece of his mind, but Jeongguk speaks first.

“You know, that’s the third time you’ve called me that tonight?”

Jimin closes his mouth.

“You haven’t called me that since our mo—”

“Since before, when we were just friends,” Jimin interrupts. “I know.”
“I didn’t realize how much I missed it,” Jeongguk says quietly.

“It feels right,” Jimin agrees softly. He pauses a moment, considering, and then asks, “Jeonggukie, are we—”

“After the phone call to Baekhyun, Jimin,” Jeongguk says. “One thing at a time, yeah?”

“…Yeah. Okay.”

Jimin sits up, picks his phone up from where he dropped it on the mattress, and takes a deep breath. He looks at Jeongguk, who nods, his features hardening as he sinks into business mode, and then starts the recording app, and presses ‘send.’

Baekhyun answers halfway through the fourth ring, and Jimin switches over to speakerphone in time for them to hear sheets rustling and soft murmuring in the background.

_Did he answer his blackmail phone in bed?_ Jimin mouths disbelievingly.

*Amateur,* Jeongguk mouths back, rolling his eyes.

“Jimin,” Baekhyun says, cutting into their silent conversation. “And here I thought you were planning on self-destructing today. I take it you have what I want, after all?”

“Yes, asshole,” Jimin says. “I have what I promised you; the Jeons have agreed to hand over everything they have on you, so we need to schedule a time to meet.”

“I’ll come down to your club in an hour to pick it up,” Baekhyun says.

“No,” Jimin says. “I won’t have it for you in an hour.”

“Excuse me?” Baekhyun says. “You just said you have what I want, so how is it that you won’t have it an hour from now?”

“You only said I needed to obtain the Jeons’ agreement by today, not that I had to have the files for you by today. Those were your explicit instructions. Shall I play the recording of our phone call for you so you can remember?” Jimin says.

It’s silent on the other end of the phone, and Jeongguk waves his hand at Jimin in a ‘keep it moving’ gesture.

“Baekhyun, if you thought I could get this information from the Jeons family in four days, you’re seriously underestimating their organization. Look, I have their permission to take the appropriate files—they won’t have anything left when I’m done—but actually _getting_ the information is going to take another forty-eight hours.”

“Not acceptable, Jimin,” Baekhyun cuts in. “And I’m not inclined to be forgiving about this development. You already weaseled extra time out of me once. I’m not interested in prolonging this another two days.”

“Then you must not be interested in being out from under the Jeons’ thumb,” Jimin snaps. “You have two options. Option number one: you release what you have on me and I release the photos I have of you and your cum-sucking gutter-slut, and we _all_ go down in flames.”

Jeongguk smirks and flashes a thumbs-up, but Jimin doesn’t slow down.

“Option number two: you wait—_patiently_—for _two more fucking days._ And then all of this is over.
And your marriage and career are still intact and you and your little fucktoy don’t have to worry about us using you anymore.

“You have significantly more to lose than I do if we can’t come to an agreement, Baekhyun. Don’t fuck around with me—I’m trying to cooperate, here. Give me the two days I’m asking for, or reap what you’ve fucking sewn.”

Jeongguk gives him an impressed look, but Jimin won’t count his chickens before they’ve hatched. It’s a full minute before the silence on the other end of the line finally breaks.

“Fine. You have your two days. But I swear to God, Jimin, if you don’t deliver by midnight on Friday night, there won’t be another conversation like this. Don’t push your luck. I want this over with,” Baekhyun says.

Jimin’s chest loosens a little with Baekhyun’s compliance. There’s still a chance he can keep Taehyung safe from this, after all. “We have an agreement, then. Come to my club Friday night between eleven and midnight, and we’ll exchange files,” Jimin says, and hangs up.

He tosses his phone toward the foot of the bed and collapses sideways, groaning.


“I know. But the fact that I have to do it at all makes me so angry,” Jimin sighs. “Taehyung deserves better than this.”

Jeongguk hums, and says, “I don’t know…from what you’ve told me, you two idiots deserve each other.”

Jemin reaches over lazily and slaps at Jeongguk, and Jeongguk grins.

“Seriously, though, Jimin. I’m not going to stand between the two of you, if you want to be with him,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin pushes himself up to a sitting position, meeting Jeongguk’s gaze.

“If our engagement still needs to be in place publicly—” Jeongguk continues, and Jimin nods his affirmation, because the deal isn’t closed yet, “—then you have to be careful. No more bathroom-sex idiocy, no public dates, no handholding, or brushing shoulders when you walk down the sidewalk—but I’m not going to hold you to our engagement if it’s not what you want. You and I…we can make this deal work as friends, even if everybody else thinks we’re more.”

A lump settles in Jimin’s throat, and he finds himself pressed against Jeongguk’s side once more, his arms wrapped tightly around his former fiancé in an attempt to express his gratitude, because he can’t get the words ‘thank you’ past the thickness in his chest.

“Hey, don’t start crying again,” Jeongguk jokes, poking Jimin in his side. A sniffle gives Jimin away, though, and Jeongguk groans and pulls him closer. “Seriously, kid. It’s not that big of a deal,” he says, and Jimin squeezes a little tighter, because it really is a big deal.

Jeongguk’s understanding means everything to him, and it will to Taehyung, too, when Jimin finds a chance to tell him.

“I am gonna miss your ass, though. You’ve got a great ass. Grade A, extra plush—10 for 10, would grope again. I’m gonna have to have words with Taehyung to make sure he appreciates it properly.”

“Jeongguk!” Jimin yelps, slapping Jeongguk half-heartedly.
“What?” Jeongguk snickers. “It got you to quit the tears and smile, didn’t it?”

Jimin just sighs, and squiggles his legs underneath the covers.

After a quiet minute, Jimin asks, “How did you know it was Taehyung?”

Jeongguk snorts. “He’s not very subtle about the way he looks at you, Jimin, and you’ve always worn your heart on your sleeve, at least for people that know how to read you.”

Jimin grimaces.

“That, and the receptionist at Suho’s salon told me you came with—and I quote—‘a tall dude with a boxy smile that followed you like a puppy,’ so it wasn’t hard to figure out, once I realized the two of you were hanging out outside of the club,” Jeongguk adds. “I recommend you have a conversation with her about discretion.”

Oh, he definitely will.

Jeongguk yawns then, and says, “I should go.”

“You can stay,” Jimin blurts out.

“You…want me to stay. Right after we broke off our engagement,” Jeongguk says, a perplexed look smeared across his face.

Jimin blushes. “Not like…_that_. Just. It’s nice to have you back as my friend, is all, and I thought—”

“What?” Jeongguk’s voice is soft. It’s a little hesitant, and tempered with something that isn’t drowsiness, and it makes the question feel important.

Jimin giggles, and plugs his phone in to charge before rooting around in the nightstand drawer for an extra charging cord. Jeongguk accepts it gratefully, turns off the lamp, and crawls back under the covers.

They each settle onto their own side of the bed, curled up on their sides facing each other. Jimin tucks his hands underneath his pillow and looks at Jeongguk. Jeongguk looks back.

“This is kinda weird,” Jeongguk says. “Our sleepovers were never this…innocent before.”

Jimin rolls his eyes, and turns onto his back. “Just go to sleep, Jeongguk.” Jeongguk shuffles around next to him, stretching out under the blankets and bumping Jimin’s elbow with his own. Jimin closes his eyes against the city lights filtering in through the partially open curtains, and relaxes.

It’s Thursday now, but somehow, he’s managed to keep everything from falling apart. His world is still spinning, Jeongguk doesn’t hate him, and Taehyung will be safe. Jimin relaxes, and lets himself breathe deep.

He’s almost asleep when Jeongguk asks, “Did you miss him? After you came to live with your parents?”

Jeongguk’s voice is soft. It’s a little hesitant, and tempered with something that isn’t drowsiness, and it makes the question feel important.
“Yeah,” Jimin mumbles. “Yeah, I did. He was a huge part of my life, of course I missed him.” Jimin sighs, turning onto his side again and blinking at Jeongguk’s unmoving form. Jimin scoots closer, until he can rest his head on Jeongguk’s shoulder and take Jeongguk’s warm palm between his own. Then he adds, “But I had you, so I was okay.”

Jimin yawns into the answering quiet. He feels Jeongguk shift, and the soft press of Jeongguk’s lips against his forehead, and then sleep claims him.

“Oh, fuck.”

Jimin jolts awake.

It’s bright outside—who’s brilliant idea was it to leave the curtains open while he was sleeping?—and Jimin blinks against the early morning sunlight streaming through the window as he registers the fact that Taehyung is here. And swearing, for some reason.

Jimin sits up, or tries to. He feels heavier than usual, and too warm, and—oh. Right. Jeongguk stayed over. Of course—Jeongguk is a fucking boa constrictor in his sleep.

Oh.

Oh. Oh, fuck.

“Taehyung!” Jimin calls, shoving at Jeongguk’s limbs in an attempt to free himself. He hears Taehyung scrambling to pull his shoes back on, and yells again. “Taehyung, wait! It’s okay, you can stay!”

Jimin finally manages to roll Jeongguk’s dead weight off himself, and bolts for the door.

***

He always knew that something like this would happen.

It’s his own fault for getting into a relationship with someone who was engaged.

Taehyung walks into Jimin’s room, expecting to see Jimin spread out on the sheets, and comes face to face with Jeongguk wrapped around Jimin, mostly naked.

“Oh, fuck.”

It slips out before he can stop it, and he bolts from the room in horror with tears blurring his vision. He makes it to the front door before Jimin catches up with him and stops him from putting on his last shoe.

“Taehyung,” he says, slightly out of breath and panicked. “Stay. It’s okay, you don’t have to go.”

“Your fiancé is in your bed, Jimin. I can’t stay.”

“Taehyung,” Jimin says, waiting until Taehyung meets his eyes. “We’re not engaged anymore.”

Taehyung’s shoe drops from between his fingers.
Jimin smiles, hugely, and grabs Taehyung to pull him back to the bedroom and away from the majority of the windows. Taehyung has enough presence of mind to kick off his other shoe before stumbling after him.

“Jeongguk, wake up,” Jimin says as they come into the room, dropping Taehyung’s hand in favor of smacking Jeongguk on the ass.

“The fuck?” Jeongguk says, jerking awake. He rolls over and blinks at Taehyung. “Oh, shit, you’re here.”

Jimin rolls his eyes.

“You guys aren’t engaged anymore?” Taehyung asks, still not quite able to believe it.

Jeongguk snorts. “Nah, Jimin found himself a better lay, or something like that.”

Jimin throws a pillow at Jeongguk’s face.

“Then…why were you sleeping all over him?” Taehyung asks Jeongguk, feeling possessive now that he no longer has to share Jimin and holy shit he doesn’t have to share Jimin anymore.

Jeongguk narrows his eyes at Jeongguk. “Yeah, Kookie, why the fuck were you cuddling with me?”

“Don’t make it a thing,” Jeongguk says, quirking an eyebrow.

“I don’t have to share you?” Taehyung asks breathlessly, the reality of what Jeongguk and Jimin are telling him finally sinking in.

Jimin narrows his eyes at Jeongguk. “Yeah, Taetae. I’m all yours. Publicly I’m still engaged to Jeongguk, so we still have to be careful, but that won’t be forever. Privately thou—”

He cuts off as Taehyung crosses over to him in three strides and pulls him in for a deep, happy kiss. Yeah, they still have to be careful and never seen in public, but just knowing that Jimin is his and his alone is a huge weight off his shoulders. He doesn’t have to feel guilty for hurting Jeongguk anymore.

Jeongguk makes a quiet gagging sound on the bed behind Jimin. Taehyung breaks the kiss in favor of holding Jimin close to him, watching Jeongguk watch them with amusement.

“You’re sure you don’t have feelings for Jiminie?” Taehyung finds himself asking over Jimin’s shoulder, just to make sure he’s in the clear.

Jeongguk crosses his legs under him and regards Taehyung calmly. “I might have, once, but the engagement always felt like more of a friends-with-benefits thing than anything else.” He shrugs. “I am gonna miss his ass though. Enjoy the fuck outta that.”

Taehyung can’t help the grin that stretches across his face as he waggles his eyebrows at Jeongguk. “Oh, I will. Literally.”

Jimin squawks in his arms. “Taehyung, shut up.”

Taehyung dances away, dodging the pillow that Jimin throws at him, and for the first time in weeks he feels as light as air, all worries and woes forgotten in the relief that Jimin is his.

***
Jimin is behind schedule, but just about ready to leave for the club when Jeongguk calls.

“I’m running late, Jeongguk, can this wait?” he asks, his mild irritation obvious through the call. He pins his phone between his ear and his shoulder while he finishes tying his tie.

“Just turn on the news, Jimin,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin can’t read his tone.

He frowns. “Don’t tell me we have a problem,” Jimin gripes as he walks across his bedroom and clicks the TV on. He types in the numbers for the local news channel, and just about drops his phone.

“Holy shit,” he breathes, watching the headline scroll across the bottom of the screen. “We did it?”

“We did it,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin can hear the grin in his voice.

“We fucking did it!” Jimin yells, and Jeongguk is laughing and Jimin is laughing—

All that hard work, the negotiations, the back-room dealings, the blackmail and the threats…all of it is paying off.

His father is going to be so proud.

“Fuck yes!” he says, his chest feeling so light and his breath coming so easily.

“Everything’s ready for my date with Baekhyun, tonight, too,” Jeongguk adds.

Jimin grins. Today is going to be a fantastic day.

***

Taehyung is struggling to hang onto a fitful sleep, not finding the deep sleep he craves due to literally everything in his life being stressful, but exhaustion makes him keep trying.

He’s almost grateful when his phone rings.

“Hello?” He answers, managing to sound more awake than he wants to be.

He’s a lot more awake when his mother’s sobs are the only response he gets.

“Mom?” He asks, sitting up in bed in concern. “Mom, what’s wrong?”

“Have you s-seen the news?” she stutters out, distress choking her words.

News? What news? “Mom, what are you talking about?” he asks, panicking now.

“You don’t have to send us money anymore,” she says, regaining some composure.

Taehyung is elated, relief sweeping through him as he realizes that his family has found a way to keep their house. “Mom, that’s great—”

“They’re demolishing our block,” she continues, cutting him off. “We have a few weeks to relocate before they destroy our whole building for some new project,” she spits, her sobs replaced with the kind of fury that comes from being unjustly wronged.

It’s a dream. He’s dreaming because things like this don’t happen in real life. “W-what?” he chokes out.
“Nothing has made a difference, none of the money we threw at lawyers ended up doing anything, and this company bought the entire block so they can build, and I quote, ‘better living environments to benefit the community’ like they aren’t displacing an entire block of low-income families to ‘better the community’ by building condos.”

Taehyung’s mind is an echoing void of nothing. He can’t think, doesn’t feel anything. He tries to say something, anything, as his mother keeps ranting on the line but his thoughts turn to sand and slip from his grasp whenever he reaches for something to say. Even if he could think of something to say, what would it matter?

It’s out of his control.

He tired his hardest to prevent this very thing from happening and it didn’t make a difference. Not at all.

His best effort wasn’t enough and there’s nothing he can do to fix it now.

Not a damned thing.

Chapter End Notes

Okay kids, here you go.

I don’t have much to say other than I hope you enjoyed this chapter. <3 Callie and I have both been feeling a bit burned out (hence why this update took longer than usual), and we need a week or two working on our own projects to recharge before we dive back into Caught in a Lie.

As usual, you can find the playlist for this chapter on my YouTube channel.

Special bonus: Jeongguk’s loft!

We love you guys! <3
-Kiki

we really do love you <3
also, once again, NYC real estate makes me burn with want.
-callie

UPDATE 6/19/2017:
We know it’s been a month since we updated, and we promise we're working on chapter 7. We’ve got some Big Things™ planned, which means it’s taking us a little longer than usual to get everything lined up and ready to post.

Thanks for being so patient with us. We promise it'll be worth the wait. <3
-callie

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter
Find Callie on Tumblr | Twitter | Discord
Struggle, pt. 1

Chapter Summary

“Tae, what’s going on with your family?” Taehyung releases a long, shaking breath, and then explains. “There’s this real estate deal, I guess,” he says, and Jimin feels ice settle in his gut. “Some company bought up the entire block that my family lives on, and they’re gonna tear down the housing there. And my family can’t afford to move someplace else. The apartment was rent-controlled, for low-income tenants.”
No.
No, no—fuck. Fuck.

Chapter Notes

Tags have been updated! Please make note of that before you read.
(there are images in this chapter, and while it will still work on mobile, it will read best on a computer)

Brace for impact.
-Kiki

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The New York Times, Society Section, November 14th

New York City’s Elite Prioritize Giving Back

By Vivian Wolfe

New York City’s hottest socialite couple once again proved their drive to better their community by registering with Team for Kids to run in this year’s TCS New York City Marathon.

Park Jimin and fiancé Jeon Jeongguk each pledged over $2,600 to the New York Road Runner’s Youth Programs to secure their spots in the race, and crossed the finish line hand-in-hand with a commendable time of two hours and twenty minutes, placing 16th and 17th in the race.
Thanks to the friendship of their mothers, Mr. Park and Mr. Jeon grew up together, sharing tutors and birthday parties throughout their teenage years, studying abroad together during summers, and attending each other’s high school graduations.

Eventually it turned into something more. They announced their engagement in our September 25th issue, sharing with us a collection of adorably affectionate photos that capture their unique and inspiring love.

Since their engagement, their relationship has been anything but secret. Mr. Park posts frequently to his social media accounts, documenting their bond for the world to see:
Mr. Jeon told us that opportunities such as the TCS New York City Marathon are excellent for introducing each other to the causes that are near and dear to their hearts. In the past, Mr. Jeon’s family has had a more on-the-ground approach to philanthropy, participating in localized acts of charity that directly benefit the targeted community, whereas Mr. Park’s family is well-known for large-scale fundraising for non-profit organizations with a mission of grander scope. Mr. Jeon said, “Jimin and I are very much enjoying taking every opportunity to combine our efforts.”

No date has been set for their wedding, but Mr. Park assures us that they haven’t forgotten. “Now that the marathon is over and training for it won’t occupy a significant portion of our schedules anymore,” Mr. Park said, “we’ll be able to turn our attention to wedding planning. We hope to have a date set and a venue selected before Thanksgiving.”

We eagerly await their announcement.

***

Jimin is sprawled, fully dressed, across the couch in his media room when the sound of the front door opening and closing jerks him out of his slumber. He winces against the sunlight streaming in the
It’s a little after four in the afternoon, and he probably should have just gone to bed when he got home from the club, but the high from the court ruling had kept him wound up all night long, and the energy from a busy Friday night at LIE had only intensified the adrenaline pumping through him, so sleep had been out of the question. A few hours after he’d gotten home, though, the silent plodding of mainstream news had managed to bring him back down and make him drowsy, and he’d drifted off where he sat.

Eyes still bleary, he reaches for the remote, fallen and forgotten on the cushion next to him, and turns the TV off. He stands, and is mid-stretch when Taehyung appears in the doorway, and the smile that begins to brighten Jimin’s face disappears just as quickly as it had started when he sees Taehyung’s expression.

He looks so stressed, so lost. His eyes are puffy and red; his lips are pressed in a tight line. When Taehyung makes eye contact with Jimin, his composure—what little of it there is—crumples, and fresh tears spill down his cheeks as he stumbles into Jimin’s arms.

“Oh, baby, no,” Jimin coos softly, rubbing Taehyung’s back as he sobs into Jimin’s shoulder. “Why are you crying, hmm? What’s wrong, sweetheart?”

It’s a full two minutes before Taehyung can answer, and each second of it tears Jimin apart. He needs to know what’s hurting Taehyung like this so he can fix it. Instead he spends those two minutes doing his best to soothe Taehyung with soft caresses along his back.

When Taehyung finally does speak, his words catch Jimin by surprise.

“My family is homeless,” he croaks, his voice breaking under the weight of his emotions.

“What? Taetae, what’s going on?” Jimin pulls Taehyung back a little, so he can see Taehyung’s face, and it’s a mistake. Taehyung’s face is a blotchy mess, and it does nothing but make Jimin feel worse. He sighs. “C’mon, Tae. Let’s get you cleaned up a little bit, and then we’ll talk, okay? You can tell me what’s going on?”

Taehyung nods, and Jimin ushers him into the nearest bathroom, and away from uncovered windows and potential prying eyes. He presses down on Taehyung’s shoulders until he sits on the toilet, and then grabs a fresh wash cloth from the cupboard, running it under warm water until it’s soaked through. Jimin rings it out, pouring his frustration into twisting the fabric free of excess water, and then kneels in front of Taehyung.

Taehyung closes his eyes as Jimin holds his chin delicately and wipes his face with slow, tender motions. His ragged breathing calms as Jimin works to relax him with gentle, even strokes of the cloth against his swollen skin, and when Taehyung’s inhalations no longer shudder, Jimin sets the cloth aside.

He reaches for Taehyung’s face, cupping it in both palms, and kisses him softly on the lips. Taehyung leans into it, greedy for Jimin’s reassurance, but Jimin needs to know what caused this in the first place.

He needs to fix the root of the problem, not just put a band-aid on the symptoms.

“Tae, what’s going on with your family?”

Taehyung releases a long, shaking breath, and then explains. “There’s this real estate deal, I guess,” he says, and Jimin feels ice settle in his gut. “Some company bought up the entire block that my
family lives on, and they’re gonna tear down the housing there. And my family can’t afford to move someplace else. The apartment was rent-controlled, for low-income tenants.”

No.

No, no—fuck. *Fuck.*

This can’t be his fault—he doesn’t want to hear any more—

But Taehyung is an unstopped bottle, now. Words pour out of him faster than Jimin can handle, like Taehyung needs to say it all out loud. Like he *has* to.

And if this is Jimin’s fault—and the more Taehyung says, the clearer it becomes that it *is* Jimin’s fault—then he owes it to Taehyung to hear him out.

He sucks in a breath and faces it.

“They can’t afford to move,” Taehyung says, “and they can’t afford another apartment in the same neighborhood. I was sending them my paycheck, but they went in with some of the other tenants in their building and paid some lawyer to fight it in court. And they lost, the case was just settled, and they’re demolishing the building in a month, and they have to move—”

Taehyung chokes on his words, and his face scrunches up against the return of tears.

“Shh,” Jimin says, rising up onto his feet and pulling Taehyung into a hug. Taehyung buries his face against Jimin’s stomach gratefully, and Jimin swallows back the bile rising in his throat. “It’s gonna be okay. I know people, Taetae. Let me make some calls alright? I’m going to look into it, I promise.”

“Jiminie, I don’t want—”

“No, Taehyung,” Jimin says firmly. He’s not sure what Taehyung was about to protest against, but this is no time for his pride. Not when it’s Jimin’s fault.

*Shit,* this is all Jimin’s fault.

He feels so sick. How could this happen, how could he not realize—

“I’m not going to let your family be homeless,” he hears himself say. “Your mom and dad treated me like I was their son, too. Let me see what I can do to help.”

*Please.*

*Let me help.*

“Okay,” Taehyung whispers.

“Okay,” Jimin whispers back. He tugs Taehyung onto his feet, and kisses him.

It’s delicate, full of the remorse that Jimin is overwhelmed by, but Taehyung takes it as an offer of comfort, and pours his gratitude for Jimin into the embrace.

Jemin breaks the kiss, feeling nothing so much as unworthy of Taehyung, and says, “You look exhausted, Taetae. We can stay in tonight; take a nap, order in…watch a movie or two? We’ll just take it easy.”
“I can’t,” Taehyung says grimly. “I have to go to work.”

Jimin’s brow crinkles in confusion. “Tae, I can call in for you. Nobody will argue with you taking a
day off after this. Yoongi will get over manning the bar by himself for one night.”

Taehyung’s answering smile is tight, and it doesn’t reach his eyes. “Nah, it’s fine. My family’s going
to need the money, regardless of how this turns out. I’ll go to work.”

“How are you sure?” Jimin asks, and as the words tumble from his lips he can see the Taehyung he
knows—the Taehyung that never gives up and makes the best of any situation—resurfacing.

He kisses Jimin again, a little deeper, a little more confidently, like he’s sorted himself back out and
put his walls back in place, and says, “I’m sure. I just needed to get it out, I guess.”

“How are you sure?” Jimin asks hesitantly. “But if you change your mind…”

“Thanks for listening, Jiminie. I feel better already, I promise.” One more soft press of Taehyung’s
lips against Jimin’s and then he pulls away from Jimin’s hold, turning to face himself in the mirror.
He grimaces at what he sees, but the determination on his features doesn’t fade. “I’ll see you at the
club?” he asks, meeting Jimin’s eyes in the reflection, and Jimin nods softly.

“I’ll see you at the club, Tae.”

Jimin doesn’t wait to get to the club before he starts making phone calls. As soon as Taehyung has
left, he starts dialing. The first call is to his commercial realtor. When they can’t give the tenants more
time to find another place to live, he makes his second call, and schedules an appointment in an hour
and a half with his residential realtor. Then he calls the moving company that settled him in his
penthouse. No one answers—of course they don’t, it’s Saturday evening—but he leaves a message
with the words ‘urgent’ and ‘triple your usual fees’ and makes note in his calendar to call them again
first thing on Monday morning.

His fourth call is to Namjoon.

“Hey, Jimin, what’s up?” he answers, and Jimin hears Hoseok’s laughter fading in the background
as Namjoon closes his office door.

“I’m going to be in late tonight, and probably not at all tomorrow, but we need to talk at some point,
you and me and Seokjin. I’ve got a side project for each of you, and they’re critical.”

There’s a long pause, and then Namjoon says, “Jimin…I’m going to be honest with you. I don’t
have time for a side project. And Jin is already helping me more than he should be with the day-to-
day management of the club, on top of his own duties. You ought to be paying him an assistant
manager’s salary, not just as head of security.”

Jimin is both surprised by this, and not. He knew Namjoon put in a lot of extra hours, but he didn’t
think it was quite that bad. “Okay,” he says. “I hear you, and we’ll make appropriate changes. But
that doesn’t make these side jobs go away. Keep your phone on you, and I’ll call when I’m on my
way in tonight.”


“Of course. Thank you for being honest with me,” Jimin replies. “I’ll see you in a few hours.”
He hangs up with Namjoon, and makes one more phone call.

“Kookie, who do you know that can be trusted to run my club on short notice?” Jimin asks as soon as the call connects.

A gentle clatter of utensils against fine china tells Jimin that’s he’s interrupted Jeongguk’s meal. Jimin hears the rustle of a fabric napkin near the phone’s mic, and then the scrape of a chair being pushed back. A muffled ‘please excuse me’ filters through the line, followed by a short pause, and then Jeongguk speaks.

“What happened to Namjoon?” he asks quietly.

“Nothing,” Jimin says. “I need him and Seokjin somewhere else for a while, so who do you have that can fill in for them?”

“You don’t have anybody lined up?” Jeongguk says, surprised.

“I need people outside my father’s purview, Jeongguk. Preferably people who won’t run my club into the ground in the few weeks they’ll be in control.”

“What’s this about, Jimin?”

“I have side projects related to our real estate deal, Jeongguk, and I refuse to let anyone handle it that I don’t explicitly trust with my life. That means I need Namjoon and Seokjin, only they’re already busy, so I need someone to lighten their load.”

“Okay, okay,” Jeongguk says, sounding like he’s sorry he asked. “Let me see who I can dig up.”

“Please. And don’t take too long,” Jimin says. “We need to move quickly on this.”

“Fuck, Jimin, I get it,” Jeongguk snaps. “I’ll get back to you by the end of the night, alright?”

“Perfect. Thanks, Kookie,” Jimin says, relieved. “Sorry I interrupted your dinner.”

“It’s dinner with my father. I don’t mind the interruption,” he replies, sighing. “I’ll call you in a few hours with a couple names.”

“Thanks,” Jimin says, and hangs up.

He immediately strides into the bathroom and turns on the shower as hot as it will go before stripping out of yesterday’s clothes and stepping under the steaming water. A hot shower will go a long way toward helping him get his thoughts straightened out.

He’s got a long day ahead of him, and screwing up is not an option.

When dawn approaches, Jimin is exhausted.

He’s exhausted, but he’s arranged for an interim manager and head of security at LIE, freeing up Namjoon and Seokjin for his other assignments, and he’s purchased a three-bedroom house in a respectable, safe neighborhood. On a whim, he’s abandoned the idea of movers and put in a call to his interior decorator, scheduling a walkthrough with her for Monday afternoon so she can begin furnishing the space.

It’s been a long day, but Jimin feels good about it.
He feels like maybe he can do right by Taehyung after all.

***

When Taehyung returns to Jimin’s apartment after work it’s to find Jimin sprawled out on the couch in the media room, nearly asleep.

He’s barely seen him since he left for work, only catching him briefly as he stopped by the bar to order a drink from him and brush his fingers across Taehyung’s hand as he took the drink from him. It was nice, but not enough comfort, and Taehyung is really looking forward to curling up with Jimin and sleeping for the next ten hours.

He glances at the clock on the wall as he walks over to Jimin, noting with relief that the blinds are drawn over the windows. It’s nearly four in the morning and he doubts that anyone is watching, but he knows he has to be careful of when and how he’s seen in this apartment.

“Hey,” Jimin says sleepily, shifting slightly as Taehyung wedges himself between Jimin and the couch. There’s nothing else like cuddling up against Jimin after a long day, and Taehyung’s heart sings with happiness. “How was work?”

Taehyung shrugs as much as their position will allow, wrapping an arm around Jimin’s torso and squeezing. “It was fine. Normal.”

Jimin breathes deeply and rouses himself a bit, pressing a kiss to Taehyung’s forehead. “I have some good news for you.”

“Oh yeah?” Taehyung yawns.

“Mmm,” Jimin murmurs, nuzzling against his hairline. “I found a new place for your family to live.”

“What?” Taehyung asks, sitting up and looking down at Jimin in shock. He looks adorable, soft and sleepy on the couch beneath him in a long-sleeved Henley and sweats. “Jimin, what did you do?”

Jimin smiles softly. “I took care of your family, baby. I didn’t want you to have to worry about them so I handled it and got them a house.”

There’s something about the way Jimin just ‘handled’ things that should make Taehyung pause and think, but it’s washed out by an overwhelming sense of relief and gratitude. “Jiminie, thank you.”

Taehyung lays back down and pulls Jimin into him tightly, gathering him up into his arms and holding him close. Jimin melts into him so easily, warm and compliant in his relaxed state.

“Of course, baby. Anything for you.” He tilts his head up and kisses Taehyung, sweet and slow.

“Why?” Taehyung asks, when he’s recovered from his shock a bit more, when his heartrate has slowed back to its normal speed. “I’m grateful, but I don’t want my family to owe you for this house. Can we pay rent or pay you back for this?”

“Don’t worry about it, Tae. We didn’t know you were gonna get caught up in this,” Jimin explains, half mumbling. “We never intended for this deal to affect you.”

“Wait, w-what do you mean ‘we,’” Taehyung breathes, voice soft in disbelief. “What deal?”

Because it can’t be. It can’t be.

Jimin stills and Taehyung knows it’s exactly what he fears.
“Jimin,” Taehyung says, pulling away so he can see Jimin’s face. “Did you have anything to do with this deal?”

“It’s not what it sounds like,” Jimin pleads, fingers digging into the fabric of Taehyung’s shirt. “We had no idea—”

“No idea?” Taehyung scoffs, pulling away completely and sitting up on the couch. “You had no idea that this deal would displace hundreds of families, including mine?”

“I didn’t know your family would be involved, no,” Jimin says evenly. “But I fixed things, Tae. Your family is safe.”

“No, you fixed things for my family but you don’t give a shit about anyone else.” It hurts, this feeling like Jimin only thought to consider the effect this deal had on his family because of what they are to each other. “My family gets special consideration because we’re fucking, right?” He almost wants to take it back, the accusation. He knows, somewhere deep down, that this isn’t how it is, but he can’t help but wonder if he’s also a little bit right.

“What?” Jimin cries, sitting up and glaring at him. “Of course not.”

“Then how can you save my family and still do this to hundreds of other families?” Taehyung asks, standing up and pacing across the room, his anger compelling him to move. “Why do you not care about anyone else?”

Jimin seethes, watching Taehyung pace with a measuring glance, like he’s deciding how much to trust Taehyung. “You don’t understand,” Jimin says, dangerously quiet.

“Then help me, Jimin.” Taehyung throws his hands up in the air and stops pacing, standing in front of a still seated Jimin. “Explain things and tell me why.”

Jimin stares at him for a long, tense moment. “They killed my mother,” he says finally. “The people who killed my mother function out of that neighborhood and I—”

“It doesn’t matter,” Taehyung says, cutting him off. He honestly doesn’t care what Jimin’s excuse is. You don’t destroy an entire block of housing to ruin the lives of a few people in some twisted sense of vengeance.

“Excuse me?” Jimin grits out, slowly getting up. “The death of my mother doesn’t matter, Taehyung.” His fists clench at his sides.

“My point is that you can’t hurt hundreds of people to get revenge on ten,” Taehyung says evenly, trying to deescalate the situation. “No revenge is worth that cost, Jimin.”

“It’s worth it for me,” Jimin shouts, running his hands through his hair in an abrupt, distressed motion. “I don’t care what it takes, I want to ruin them. I need to.”

Taehyung reels back at the vitriol in Jimin’s voice, at the unchecked rage simmering from him in waves. “Who are you?” he whispers, no longer sure that he knows who Jimin is.
They stand there in tense silence, nothing but their breathing echoing in the space between them.

“Get out,” Jimin finally hisses, angrier than Taehyung has ever seen him.

“I’m already gone,” Taehyung replies, just as angry—because no matter how Jimin tries to justify it, he’s wrong—before he turns and strides out of the apartment.

He manages to make it to his building before he bursts into tears.

***

US Weekly, Breaking News, November 21st, 5 hours ago

TROUBLE IN PARADISE? Tensions Rise Between Power-couple Jeon Jeongguk and Park Jimin

By Minnie Brodine

It’s been a few weeks, and the streets of New York have been oddly devoid of everyone’s favorite couple.

Say it ain’t so! Jeon Jeongguk’s, 20, and Park Jimin’s, 18, relationship is reportedly on the rocks, according to sources close to the couple, and there’s apparently multiple reasons behind their alleged relationship woes. “Between their philanthropy work and family companies, Jeongguk and Jimin are so busy that they’re barely together—and unfortunately, their problems run much deeper than that,” a source told US. Oh no.

It’s been alleged that Jimin is not putting in the effort. “I believe Jeongguk feels Jimin doesn’t see their relationship as a priority, and that he’s not putting forth the effort to make him happy and feel secure,” the source said. “They’re in a very vulnerable place, and their friends are worried they’ve drifted so far apart that they may not be able to find their way back together again.” Omg.

Jeongguk and Jimin are living separate lives? That’s what a source said. And, while we have not heard any rumblings of relationship troubles, we have to admit that the couple hasn’t been seen together in quite some time. The pair were photographed last week taking a walk together, but that’s the last we’ve seen of them in recent weeks.
The pair just don’t see eye to eye anymore? “Unfortunately, they just can’t seem to connect, and Jeongguk’s devastated.” The source said that their opposite schedules—with his family business and Jimin’s charity work—have Jeongguk feeling like a “lonely and abandoned fiancé.”

Jeongguk “has to worry about his wandering eye,” the source said, after claiming that Jimin has been seen with another man, pictured below, on several occasions. What?! Could Jimin be shopping around?
This is a lot to take in. And while it is true that when we have spotted Jimin it wasn’t with Jeongguk, this is the first we’ve seen any kind of strife in the famously adorable relationship between Jeongguk and Jimin. This reporter is horrified at the thought that after their public engagement and long history as close friends, things could be going awry now. The pair have yet to speak out about their alleged relationship issues. Although nothing has been confirmed, we’re hoping that Jeongguk and Jimin’s relationship is doing just fine!

This reporter remains optimistic that they’re just busy, and that we’ll see more of New York’s favorite couple in the coming weeks. Still, the question remains: Who is this mystery man taking up Jimin’s free time, and where is Jeongguk?
When he walks into the apartment Yoongi and Hoseok are curled up together on the couch, a movie playing softly in the background.

Suddenly, it doesn’t matter that he and Yoongi haven’t been speaking much in the last few days, that they’re still a bit tentative around each other while they wait for the tension between them to fade completely. All he wants to do is tell him everything, even if all he gets is a well-deserved ‘I told you so’ from Yoongi.

“Hey kid,” Yoongi says, squinting at him in the weak winter dawn filling the room. “I expected you to be out most of the day with—” he cuts off and glances at Hoseok from the corner of his eye, “—your friend.” Yoongi cringes, like he can’t believe what he just said.

Hoseok rolls his eyes. “I know about him and Jimin, Yoongi.”

Taehyung bursts into tears and runs for his room.

It takes him ten minutes to get a hold of himself enough to open the door and brave Yoongi and Hoseok. He doesn’t want to talk, not really, but he knows that if he doesn’t let his frustration and hurt spill out of him it’s going to suffocate him.

“Taehyung?” Hoseok asks tentatively when Taehyung is back in the room. “What’s wrong?”
“Jimin and I—” and Taehyung chokes off and turns back to his room because he’s crying too hard to have this conversation—again—and he doesn’t want to just stand there and sob in front of an audience.

When Hoseok joins him in his room he sits on the edge of Taehyung’s bed and runs a soothing hand down his back.

“Talk to me, Taehyung,” he coos softly.

Taehyung sobs into his pillow. He doesn’t know why he’s so upset. He’s the one who told Jimin it didn’t matter if they killed his mother and fuck he feels awful about that. “We had a fight,” he finally chokes out.

“You and Jimin?” Hoseok asks gently.

Taehyung nods and turns his head to the side to whimper at Hoseok pathetically.

Hoseok sighs and runs his fingers through Taehyung’s hair before standing up and going to the door. “Yoongi, get in here.”

Taehyung hears muttered cursing as Yoongi shuffles down the hall and into his room, joining Hoseok on his bed.

“What’s this about, kid?” Yoongi asks softly.

“S stupid,” Taehyung heaves, rolling onto his side to make breathing and talking easier. It’s better than talking into his pillow, at any rate.

“Something happened with Jimin,” Hoseok says softly to Yoongi.

Taehyung watches through blurry vision as Yoongi’s expression clouds over. “What happened? What did he do?”

The outright anger in Yoongi’s voice shocks Taehyung’s sobs into silence.

“Do you remember how I’ve been sending money to my family?” Taehyung begins thickly. Yoongi nods and Hoseok adjusts on the bed more comfortably, settling in for the story he senses coming.

Taehyung can’t begin to tell him how grateful he is that Hoseok quietly lays behind him and wraps his arms around him comfortingly as he starts to talk. “They’re being kicked out of their home, and it’s Jimin’s fault.”

Hoseok’s arms tighten around him, just slightly, and Taehyung takes a deep breath and tells them everything. As he talks, Yoongi’s expression gets darker and darker. “We both said a lot of things, but I don’t know who he is anymore and I’m not sure that I ever did,” Taehyung finishes, breath hiccupping with the last of his tears.

“I’m gonna fuckin’ kill him,” Yoongi says coolly.

“I don’t think killing our boss is the right choice,” Hoseok remarks wryly, “as entertaining at it would be to watch you try.”

Yoongi flops down on the other side of Taehyung with a grunt, staring at the ceiling. “I’m too lazy to actually do it anyway. Might yell at him, though.”

“Just don’t get fired,” Hoseok says, pushing up on his elbow so he can look at Yoongi over top of
Taehyung. “Work would be hella boring without you.”

Taehyung is facing Yoongi, so he can clearly see the slow blink and smirk Yoongi throws at Hoseok. “Is that your way of telling me you love me?” he asks, voice dipping lower into a gravely rasp.

Taehyung can see the laughter in his eyes, can see that he’s mostly teasing, so it’s immensely rewarding when Hoseok replies: “Yes, it is.”

Yoongi’s eyes widen in surprise. “Oh.”

Taehyung wants to gag a little, but he’s also incredibly grateful that their unbelievable sappiness is distracting him enough that the pain of his fight with Jimin is easing slightly.

Hoseok crawls over Taehyung to flop across Yoongi and quite literally smother him in enthusiastic affection.

“Gross,” Taehyung groans when the innocent giggling and hugging turns into passionate kissing. “Can you please not fuck right in front of me, in my own bed?”

Yoongi takes a hand off Hoseok’s ass just long enough to flip Taehyung off.

Hoseok, however, tears himself away from Yoongi’s lips and shimmies down until his head is pillowed on Yoongi’s chest, his hand reaching out to tangle with Taehyung’s. Yoongi grumbles when Hoseok moves away but doesn’t protest further, wrapping Hoseok tightly in his arms.

“It’s going to be okay, Tae,” Hoseok says calmly. “Things will work out, you’ll get past this.”

“Thanks,” he replies softly. “I just wish I wasn’t so surprised about how little I actually know him. I should have known that he wouldn’t be the same person he was when we were twelve.”

Yoongi somehow manages to shrug while on his back. “Yeah, maybe you were a bit naïve. But you can’t blame yourself for not seeing this coming. It’s a pretty big deal, and you’ve every fuckin’ right to feel betrayed.”

Taehyung blinks in surprise and wipes at his nose. “Thanks, Yoongi.”

Yoongi gives him a wry smile. “It’s what we’re here for, kid.”

“We’ve got you, Tae,” Hoseok says, squeezing his hand tightly.

Taehyung swallows past the emotion in his throat, unsure what he did to deserve Yoongi and Hoseok’s loyalty, but grateful all the same. “Okay,” he says, letting his eyes drift shut in the comfortable silence between them.

Taehyung spends his days off watching movies with Hoseok and Yoongi and trying to keep all thoughts of Jimin out of his mind.

That gets easier once he goes back to work on Tuesday, when instead of Seokjin he’s greeted by a man he’s never seen.

“What’s going on?” He asks Yoongi in the relative safety of the breakroom. “Where is Seokjin?”

“Fuck if I know,” Yoongi snaps, his mood taking a sharp downward spiral. “Probably same place as
Namjoon, considering he’s been replaced too.”

“What is going on?” Taehyung asks, mostly to himself. His life feels like one long, drawn-out soap opera.

“Whatever it is,” Yoongi mutters, “it probably has something to do with Jimin.”

Great, like Taehyung needed another thing to be angry about. He quickly changes and shoves his clothes and shoes into his cubby, following Yoongi out of the breakroom and to the bar to start their nightly routine.

His week crawls by.

He still doesn’t have any idea what’s going on, and he can’t ask Jimin why he picked such shitty replacements for Namjoon and Seokjin because he’s still simmering with anger over what Jimin’s done to his family even if he’s starting to ache with loneliness.

He’s self-aware enough to know that he misses Jimin intensely, and loathes himself slightly for it. He shouldn’t miss the person who is ruining the lives of hundreds of families and doesn’t even feel bad about it.

But oh, he does.

Still, not even his longing can erase the fact that Park Jimin will do whatever it takes for his revenge and damn the consequences.

Taehyung wishes he wasn’t a consequence, that he could remain ignorant and unknowing, his pristine view of Jimin left intact.

Ignorance is bliss, after all.

“Fuck’s sake, do you guys work at all?”

Taehyung grinds his teeth as his fingers tighten around the bottle of rum in his hands. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Yoongi’s shoulders tense up dangerously.

“Our pace has never been a problem before,” Yoongi grits out, turning to face Zitao slowly.

As far as managers go, Zitao isn’t great.

“Well it’s a problem now,” Zitao snaps back. “Our patrons are waiting too long for their drinks. Work faster.”

Taehyung can see Yoongi literally bite his tongue to keep from saying something that would definitely get him fired.

“We’ll do our best,” Taehyung replies, saving Yoongi from relieving them both of their jobs.

Zitao narrows his eyes at each of them in turn before slinking off to find someone else to harass.

“I miss Namjoon,” Yoongi groans. “I never thought the day would come when I missed his clumsy ass.”

Taehyung can’t help but agree.
It’s a long shift.

“Where do you think you’re going, pretty boy?”

The new head of security, Kris, stops Hoseok with a hand on his chest.

“Uh, home,” Hoseok says, hitching his bag higher on his shoulder.

“No, you’re not,” Kris smirks. “Boss wants all the dancers to stay for an extra practice tonight. Pole work is a bit lackluster, needs some work.”

“That’s bullshit,” Yoongi seethes. Taehyung doesn’t miss the way his fingers brush and tangle slightly with Hoseok’s free hand. “Have you seen him dance? His pole work is fuckin’ perfection. He doesn’t need any more practice.”

Kris shrugs, unaffected. “Boss’s orders.”

“It’s okay, Yoongi,” Hoseok says, cutting off further protest. “I could use the time to perfect my new routines anyway. Go home without me, I’ll be by later.”

Taehyung looks at the faint smears of purple under Hoseok’s eyes, the strain in his shoulders. As hard as bartending can be, he’s not doing half as much as Hoseok does each night, with his private dances and center-stage routines. Hoseok looks tired. The kind of fatigue that comes from five straight days of near-constant dancing and struggling to sleep through the day.

And yet Hoseok slips away from Yoongi and heads for the practice room in the back hallway with a bright smile and the brush of his hand to Yoongi’s cheek.

The glare Yoongi gives Kris could probably cut steel, and Taehyung pulls him away before he opens his mouth and cuts Kris to ribbons with his words.

“I hate this,” Yoongi seethes when they get home.

Taehyung listens to him pace around the apartment until Hoseok comes home and soothes him, reigning in his anger with quiet words and soft assurances Taehyung can barely hear.

Yoongi’s bedroom door clicks shut and silence blankets the apartment.

Taehyung misses Jimin.

***

Jimin has been angry at Taehyung—the slow, steady, quiet kind of angry—for days.

Honestly, it’s tiring.

Whenever he thinks about their fight—and he’s been thinking about it a lot—he can hear his heart pounding in his ears and he can feel the knots in his shoulders pulling tighter and he can taste the bile rising in his throat, and if he’d had another Chinese vase to shatter into tiny, piercing shards, it would have been done days ago.

Because that’s how Jimin’s heart feels: cut into a thousand sharp little pieces and scattered in a bloody mess across the floor. And he just needs it to be something else that’s broken, something that he can fix. Something he can clean up and piece back together, so that things can go back to the way
they’re supposed to be.

The worst part is that he knows Taehyung didn’t mean it. Jimin knows that Taehyung spoke carelessly in the heat of the moment, and he knows that he shouldn’t have taken it at face-value.

He knows because Taehyung’s the only one he ever told that he wished he had a mom.

Laying on their backs in his grassy backyard, pointing out clouds that looked like scoops of ice cream and bunnies with floppy ears, Jimin had whispered once that he loved his grandma, but he just wished he could have a mom, too. Or a dad. Either one would have been fine, as long as he had one.

Taehyung had nodded knowingly, grabbing Jimin’s hand, and said, “Well, you know everything that’s mine is yours. I’ll always share.”

And then he’d pointed out a cloud that looked like a racecar—well, he’d said it looked like a racecar, even if Jimin couldn’t see it—and everything had continued on as before, like Taehyung knew that Jimin’s confession belonged only in that moment.

Thinking, now, about what Taehyung said then and what Taehyung said during their fight, about how Jimin’s mother’s death doesn’t matter—it hurts in ways that Jimin doesn’t know how to fix.

Jumin had finally had a mother of his own. He hadn’t needed to pretend anymore that Taehyung’s mom was also his.

He’d had a mother of his own for five precious, perfect years, and then she’d died.

So maybe Jimin’s not actually angry. Maybe he’s just heartbroken.

He always gets those two mixed up.

Either way, he’s still tired of it, and he wants it to just go away.

He doesn’t know how to make it do that. In the year that his mother’s been dead, the pain of losing her has never gone away.

He has, however, figured out how to numb it, how to drown it until everything is good again, if only for a little while, and so he heads for the nearest available booze, and helps himself.

“What the fuck are you doing at my bar?” says an angry voice in front of Jimin.

He ignores it in favor of taking another long swig of whiskey straight from the bottle in his hands.

“Is that my ‘89 whiskey? Take your tiny fuckin’ hands off my bottle!” Yoongi hisses, ripping the booze out of Jimin’s grasp.

He’s a little too drunk already to fight to keep it, and the smooth glass bottle is yanked from his fingers before he can manage to tell them to hold on tighter.

“Youngi, give it back,” Jimin complains. “Tha’s an order from your boss.” His words slur together and he makes grabby hands at the whiskey, but Yoongi just glares at Jimin when he raises his eyes to meet the bartender’s.

“No.”
“You can’t use it anymore anyway,” Jimin says. “I drank out of it. ‘S mine.”

“No,” Yoongi says again.

“Why’re you even here?” Jimin asks petulantly.

“Somebody’s gotta be here to accept the booze delivery now that Namjoon isn’t around,” Yoongi snips. “Your new manager is shit at his job.” He glowers at Jimin, crossing his arms over his chest and settling his hip against the counter behind the bar. “Why are you here? And why are you drunk in the middle of the day?”

Jimin frowns. “Tae didn’t tell you?”

“Oh, Tae told me. But I need you to tell me why I shouldn’t break that pretty little nose of yours for what you said.”

How dare he? Jimin glares back at Yoongi. “Don’t piss me off, Yoongi.”

“Don’t piss you off? Don’t piss you off?” Yoongi launches himself forward, leaning into Jimin’s space, his voice hardened in anger. “Listen, you little shit. Taehyung doesn’t fucking know who you are. He doesn’t know what you are. I’ve been around long enough to put two and two together, Jimin, and Taehyung deserves better than someone who can’t fucking tell him the truth. You’re going to get him in trouble, or worse, you’re going to get him killed. And he has no fucking clue about any of it, does he, so he can’t even protect himself.”

Yoongi grabs Jimin’s chin, and holds his face steady, impaling Jimin with the steel in his eyes. “That boy has openly given his heart to you, and you can’t even be open with him.” He releases Jimin with an irritated flick of his wrist, and stands up straight. “You disgust me. Get the fuck off my bar. When I come back, you’d better be gone,” Yoongi spits.

He turns and heads for the back door, and Jimin collapses onto the bar, his forehead thudding on the polished surface.

Fuck.

Yoongi’s right; Taehyung is a good person. He doesn’t know what Jimin has pulled him into, and it’s not his fault that Jimin’s mother is dead. He deserves better than all of this.

He deserves someone better than Jimin.

He stands up unsteadily, and weaves his way to the front exit. The day guard signals Jimin’s driver and assists him into the car, and Jimin sinks back into the seat, staring numbly out the window.

_Taehyung deserves better. Taehyung deserves better._

The words rattle around in his skull throughout the whole drive home, and by the time his car is pulling up in front of his building, it’s the only thought that Jimin can process and his head is throbbing with it.

He sheds his clothes onto the floor and crawls into bed, intending to sleep off the headache and the booze and the shitty feelings that caused them, but it takes him longer to drift off than it should.

_Taehyung deserves better._
Hours later, when he wakes, the sun has sunk below the horizon but Jimin’s feelings of inadequacy remain.

Taehyung deserves better, but Jimin needs Taehyung. He’s already invaded every aspect of Jimin’s life, and Jimin likes it that way. He likes the way Taehyung doesn’t hesitate to let himself into Jimin’s penthouse anymore, and the way Taehyung fits against him when he curls up beside Jimin. He likes that Taehyung is learning his way around Jimin’s kitchen, and that he’s set Jimin’s DVR to record his favorite shows.

He likes the way Taehyung’s laugh can keep a bad day from getting worse and the way his smile can reverse it entirely, turning the day into something good. He’s a whirlwind of happiness and simplicity and innocence, and Jimin feels like he can breathe when Taehyung is around.

Taehyung makes Jimin feel light and free. Free of obligation to his family, free to just…be himself. It’s a luxury he never thought he’d have again, not since his parents reclaimed him, and he knows it’s selfish, but his mother is gone and his father is so sick, and he can’t bring himself to give Taehyung up.

Jemin lays in bed, staring at the ceiling, and realizes that the only way to keep Taehyung and give him what he deserves is to become better himself.

***

When Taehyung’s phone rings and wakes him up he fumbles desperately for it, expecting it to be Jimin.

“Hello?” he asks breathlessly, heart hammering.

“Taehyung?”

It’s not Jimin. It’s his mother, and he can tell by the tone of her voice that she’s been crying.

“Mom? What’s wrong?”

“Taehyung, honey, we need you to send us money again,” she says, sounding more upset than he can remember her being in recent weeks.

“What do you mean?” he asks, confused. As much as he’s still angry with Jimin for showing favoritism and fixing things for his family, he thought that everything was taken care of. Was relying on that one small relief amid the chaos of his life.

“This new house is way too expensive for us to keep with your father’s salary, so we need you to start sending us money again.” She pauses and takes a deep, shuddering breath. “Sweetheart, I’m so sorry that we have to ask you again. I know it isn’t fair to you.”

Taehyung sighs, waving goodbye to his most recent paycheck. He’d hoped to buy some new clothes to replace some of the things he’s had for years, but that’s not going to happen now. “Okay, Mom, I’ll wire it to you today.”

His mother signs in relief on the other end of the line. “Thanks, Taehyung. We do appreciate it, I know this is hard on you too.”

“Thanks, Mom. I’ll do what I can,” he promises. His mother says goodbye but he barely registers it or his own goodbye. He’s just come up with an idea. A stupid one, but an idea nonetheless.
He gets out of bed in a flurry of sheets.

He has errands to run before work today.

It takes him one twenty-minute phone call with Namjoon to get the address he needs.

“Please, Namjoon,” he begs, “it’s important, I promise.”

“Kid, I can’t just give you this address. It’s unsafe and probably illegal.” He pauses. “Definitely illegal. I’m pretty sure it would break three separate NDAs I’m under right now.”

Taehyung takes a moment to wonder what exactly it is Namjoon does that he’s under three different non-disclosure agreements. He pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs deeply. He didn’t want to have to resort to this, but Namjoon is loyal and stubborn and he doesn’t have time for this. “Either give me the address or tell me why Jimin replaced you, your call.”

It’s a bluff. He knows it, and he’s sure Namjoon knows it too. He can’t make Namjoon tell him anything, but he’s really hoping Namjoon will play along.

“You’re lucky I like you, kid,” Namjoon growls, “I don’t do this for just anyone.”

“Thank you, Namjoon,” Taehyung breathes in relief. “Thank you so much.”

“Don’t mention it.” His phone buzzes in his hand as he gets a text. “I just texted you the address,” Namjoon continues, “and seriously. Don’t mention it.”

“Got it,” Taehyung says, smiling in triumph.

Namjoon ends the call, and Taehyung heads off down the street to hail a cab, a bit surprised that he can’t walk to his destination.

It’s further than he expected.

When he arrives at the right block he pays the cab fare with money he didn’t necessarily want to spend on a twenty-minute ride through Manhattan, but he does with nothing more than a sigh. After that, he finds the right building, the right floor—he’s unsurprised that it’s a top-floor apartment—and knocks on the door.

And he waits. He realizes, belatedly, that he should have made sure the occupant would be home before he came all this way, but just as he’s losing hope the door snaps open.

“Did you get a haircut?” is the first thing out of his mouth when he lays eyes on a shirtless, disgruntled, and sleepy Jeongguk. In his defense, his hair does look shorter, the ends neatly trimmed.

“How the fuck…” Jeongguk trails off, scrubbing a hand down his face. “Taehyung why are you here?”

“I need your help,” Taehyung starts, “can I come in?”

Jeongguk eyes him for a long second before shrugging and walking back into his apartment, leaving Taehyung to let himself in through the open door.

“So,” Jeongguk says once he’s comfortably reclined on his pristine white couch. “What can I help you with?”
Taehyung sits gingerly on the couch next to him, afraid that if he \textit{breathes} wrong he’ll stain something. “Jimin did something and I need your help to fix it.”

Jeongguk makes a face. “Is this about your stupid fucking fight?”

Taehyung stares at him dumbly. Of \textit{course} Jeongguk knows. He’s an idiot. “Uh, yeah, partially.” He picks at the frayed edge of the hole in his jeans. “He moved my family into a house so that they weren’t homeless, except the house he moved them into is \textit{way} out of their ability to maintain.”

Jeongguk runs his tongue across his teeth. “So, what do you want me to do about it?”

Taehyung looks up from the hole at his knee to meet Jeongguk’s eyes. “Uh, something?” He honestly didn’t think this far ahead, and now that Jeongguk is asking questions he finds himself at a bit of a loss.

Jeongguk gives him an unimpressed look. “Okay listen, here’s what’s going to happen.”

Taehyung gulps. He hasn’t known Jeongguk for very long, but he gets the feeling that Jeongguk with the upper hand is \textit{dangerous}.

“I’ll make sure your parents get jobs that can support your family where they are, but in return you need to fix things with Jimin.” Taehyung wants to think he’s kidding about that last part, but the look on Jeongguk’s face says he’s serious. “Aside from the fact that working with him is nearly impossible, I want my friend back.”

“Done,” Taehyung says before he can actually process what Jeongguk just said. “Wait, what do you mean ‘working with him is nearly impossible’?”

Jeongguk runs his hands through his hair. “Jimin is a little \textit{bitch} when he’s upset, and you need to \textit{fix} whatever happened between you two so I can have my sanity back.”

Oh, well. Taehyung misses Jimin and his anger has faded to something resembling hurt, but he’s not ready to reach out. Not \textit{yet}. “I’ll fix it,” he replies, vague on when exactly he’ll fix things intentionally, but he means it all the same.

Jeongguk narrows his eyes, like he \textit{knows}, but lets it slide. “Is there anything else I can help you with?”

Taehyung bites his lip, watching as Jeongguk tracks the movement, and debates asking. But he’s been curious for a while and Jeongguk \textit{did} ask…

“What do you and Jimin do, exactly?” he asks, thinking back to the meeting he clearly interrupted his first day on the job and the feeling he got when he realized that \textit{something} important was happening. Jeongguk relaxes further into the cushions of the couch, pursing his lips. “If Jimin didn’t tell you, what makes you think I will?” he asks in clipped tones.

“Because we’re friends now,” Taehyung exclaims with his brightest smile.

Jeongguk blinks at him.

Taehyung smiles back.

“Oh, okay, whatever,” Jeongguk says, wrinkling his nose, “I’m still not telling you.” He seems wholly unaffected by Taehyung’s answering pout. “Now, are you going to let me go back to sleep? If not,
you’re welcome to join me for some fun,” he says with a smirk that promises the kind of fun that’s sinful at best. His eyes wander over the lines of Taehyung’s body appraisingly.

That is not what Taehyung needs right now. “No, thanks,” he says, standing up abruptly. “I’ll get out of your hair—which looks very good, by the way,” he babbles, “you’ll have to give me the name of your stylist.”

Jeongguk scowls and Taehyung scampers out the door before he can undo all of Jeongguk’s generosity with his relentless tendency to talk when he shouldn’t.

Still, he reasons while waiting for another cab, that’s one huge burden off his chest.

Now he just has to fix things with Jimin.

He isn’t expecting it, and that’s what makes it so much worse.

He has the cab drop him off at the club for his shift at work, figuring that he’ll just be a bit early and get started on stocking the bar if Yoongi isn’t there yet.

He’s a little upset with himself that he didn’t see them when he stepped out of the cab, but he doesn’t and they pounce before he can think twice.

“Are you the man Jimin’s been seeing on the side?” a man shouts at him, his eyes blinded as dozens of cameras begin going off.

What the fuck.

“Are you sleeping with Park Jimin?” another voice shouts over the din of passing cars and clicking cameras.

A recording device is shoved near his mouth.

“What’s your name, hot stuff?”

“How does it feel to be the cause of strife between this city’s favorite couple?”

“What gives you the right to interfere in the business of the Park and Jeon families?”

Taehyung is so overwhelmed by everything happening that the questions buzz past him, nothing really registering enough for him to begin to form a response before the next question is hurled at him.

He nearly screams when an arm lands across his shoulders and tugs him down.

“Get your cameras out of his fuckin’ face before I shove them so far up your asses that the only thing you’ll be able to take pictures of is your rotten intestines.”

Taehyung has never been so happy to hear Yoongi’s angry swearing in his life. He ducks down and follows Yoongi, his gaze locked on his shoes, as Yoongi pulls him into the relative safety of the club.

What in the actual hell is going on?

“What the fuck,” he says, once they’re safely ensconced in the club. “What is happening.”
We know how long it's been since you've gotten an update, but as you're probably realizing, this is when things start getting real. Forgive us for the long wait, but just know that it's going to be worth it.

The next chapter will be up in a few days. Don't hate us too much pls <3
-Kiki

chapter 7 got wildly out of control, so we've split it into two parts, as you may have guessed from the title. part 2 will be up in a few days, as Kiki said, and...remember those "dark & gritty" tags? shit's about to get real, so hold onto your hats.

thanks for being patient with us and the long wait, and thanks for your continual support & love. it's 110% mutual. <3
-callie

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter
Find Callie on Tumblr | Twitter | Discord
Struggle, pt. 2

Chapter Summary

Jimin has been thinking about it for days now, and he really only has one choice.

He doesn’t like it. His father really won’t like it. But Taehyung will.

Taehyung will like it, and, in the long run, that’s all that matters.

[alternatively: "tae is a dummy, but i still love him. everyones a dummy. cept probably kookie. n yoongi. n hobi" --> provided by Sunn (a member of our discord server), as she read this chapter]

Chapter Notes

we added new tags with the last update that are going to come into play with this chapter, so if you haven't looked at those yet, do it now. this is your final warning before things get crazy--we'd rather you be safe than sorry!

chapters 7 & 8 were originally one chapter in our outline, but the farther we got into writing it, the longer and more complex it became. when we had 8k words written for the first handful of scenes in the outline (and all the big scenes were still ahead of us), we knew we had to split it up. the fact that this part is still 20k words doesn't surprise either of us.

so here it is...part 2 of The Chapter That Got Wildly Out of Control™. enjoy.
-calie

P.S. once again, this chapter will be much better viewed on a desktop, rather than a mobile device.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Yoongi, what was that?” Taehyung asks, once they’re safely behind the doors of the club.

“I don’t know,” Yoongi says as they work their way into the breakroom. “They did the same thing to me when I showed up, so I kept an eye out for you since they’re actually looking for you. They just don’t know it.”

Taehyung shushes him and looks around the room in a panic, but they’re alone. “But why are they looking for me? How did they find out that Jimin was sleeping with someone else?”

“We don’t know what they know. It could be nothing,” Yoongi shrugs, changing into his uniform quickly. “Still, you need to be more careful.”

“Not that it matters anyway,” Taehyung mutters darkly, buttoning up his shirt. He hasn’t heard a
single word from Jimin, not since their fight, and honestly all he wants is for Jimin to call him and say he’s sorry, that he’s going to fix it.

And now this.

Suddenly it’s too much, and he sits down in front of his cubby and tries to remember how to breathe. He breaks out into a cold sweat, palms growing clammy as he grips his knees in an effort to stay grounded.

“Woah, Tae,” Yoongi says, crouching in front of him, his hands flitting around Taehyung like he doesn’t know where to put them. He settles for awkwardly patting the top of Taehyung’s head as he breathes harshly into his knees.

The last thing he needs right now is people finding out about him and Jimin, publicly, and having that to worry about. Not when his family is still unsettled and everything at work is terrible and he can’t talk to Jimin because they’re fighting and it’s all gotten so messed up and he doesn’t know what to do.

“I don’t know what to do,” Taehyung chokes out, his lungs tight and constricted, feeling like he’s getting too much air and not enough all at once.

“Breathe, Tae,” Yoongi soothes, running his fingers through Taehyung’s hair. “Listen to my breathing, breathe with me.”

Taehyung focuses on the breaths Yoongi draws in and out audibly, working until his breathing is matching the same, even pace, until his heart rate slows back to normal and his hands stop shaking.

“Tell me what to do,” he says, looking up at Yoongi with unmasked panic.

Yoongi frowns at him. “First, we go to work,” he instructs, grabbing Taehyung’s hands and pulling him up off the floor. “Then you go home, take the holiday tomorrow to think things through, and when you’re ready you talk things out with Jimin.”

Taehyung sighs, nodding. “Okay, I can do that.”

The door to the breakroom snaps open, startling them both.

“Are the two of you ever planning on working?” Zitao snaps, glowering at them from the doorway. “Just because tomorrow is a holiday doesn’t mean you can slack off today.”

“Sorry,” Taehyung murmurs, ducking his head down so Zitao doesn’t catch his eyeroll.

“We’re on our way,” Yoongi mutters, hastily shrugging on his vest and tossing Taehyung’s own vest at him. “Calm your tits,” he says, soft enough that Zitao won’t be able to hear him from his position across the room.

Taehyung bites his lip to keep from laughing. New management sucks, but at the very least he gets entertaining commentary from Yoongi to keep him sane.

He slips his vest on and fastens it as he follows Yoongi out of the room, hoping that they can both manage to make it through the night without throwing a glass at either of their bosses.

***

Jimin has been thinking about it for days now, and he really only has one choice.
He doesn’t like it. His father really won’t like it. But Taehyung will.

Taehyung will like it, and, in the long run, that’s all that matters.

He starts by changing the scope of Namjoon’s side project, asking him to provide Jimin with a full list of tenants that will be displaced when they tear down the block of housing.

While Namjoon is putting the list together, Jimin looks back on how much he’s actually spending on Taehyung’s family’s relocation, and breaks down the cost into two columns: necessary expenditures, and frivolous ones.

He doesn’t mind how much he’s spending on Taehyung’s family, but Taehyung wasn’t entirely wrong when he’d accused Jimin of special treatment. Even if Taehyung wasn’t wildly important to Jimin, the Kims were a second family to him throughout his childhood, and they deserve the best he can give them in return for their own kindness.

Once he’s got a rough idea for what it costs to transplant a family of four, he multiplies that number by the number of apartments scheduled for demolition, and makes a phone call.

Bang Sihyuk greets Jimin with a smile—Jimin can hear it in Sihyuk’s voice—and it’s no wonder, since Jimin only ever calls Sihyuk to discuss business, and business between them always ends in a donation to the charity that Sihyuk chairs—Jimin’s mother’s charity.  
The one she founded a year before her death. The one that Jeongguk and Jimin attended the gala for a couple weeks back.
The one that—hopefully—is going to save his ass.

“Jimin, I didn’t expect to hear from you so soon after the gala.”

“And I didn’t expect to be calling, Mr. Bang,” Jimin replies. “But I’m in a tight spot, and I’m hoping you can help.”

“Help how, exactly?” Sihyuk asks carefully.

Jimin sighs. “I’m sure you’ve heard of Kim vs. Jeon Corp?”

“Of course. It’s all over the news. Pass along my congratulations to your fiancé,” Sihyuk answers.

“Thank you, I will. But the win in court has left me with a bit of a dilemma.”

“Mm,” Sihyuk hums. “It’ll be a PR nightmare unless you do something charitable about it, is that what you’re getting at?”

“Something like that, I guess,” Jimin mutters. “I need to make sure that the people who are going to be displaced are taken care of.”

“And what do you think my organization can do about it?” Sihyuk asks.

“I think you can accept a donation in my and Jeongguk’s names, and help the tenants get established in new residences.”

It’s quiet on the other end of the line.

“That’s a large project, Jimin, and one with a rapidly approaching deadline,” Sihyuk finally says. “We’re not equipped to take on a project like that, and the housing market isn’t really in our
Jimin cuts him off. “I’m prepared to make a large enough donation that you can hire someone who knows the housing market, as well as cover all the costs associated with the relocation itself. And I do mean all the costs. If you run out of money, you tell me, and I make another donation.”

Sihyuk whistles lowly. When he speaks again, it’s slowly, as if he’s considering every word. “How large of a donation are you talking, Jimin?”

Jimin recites a number in the millions, and waits.

Sihyuk’s silence stretches on, and Jimin wonders if that means the amount he rattled off is too high, or too low.

“There would be some oversight, of course,” Jimin adds. “I’d ask you to liaise with my man, Kim Namjoon. He’d make sure that the money is being used efficiently, and he can act as a go-between for us if something comes up.”

“I need to talk it over with the board, Jimin,” Sihyuk says, “but I can’t imagine that they would say no to this. It’d look good on our year-end report.”

“It would,” Jimin agrees. “And it would look good in the papers. A quick response to this housing dilemma would make it into all the news outlets—it’d be good press for both of us.”

“Good press for both of us,” Sihyuk repeats. “So, your donation wouldn’t be anonymous.”

“No. The funds come from me, but it’s my name and Jeongguk’s on the donation receipt. Publicly.”

“Okay,” Sihyuk says. “I’ll call an emergency board meeting and get back to you within a couple hours. Are you prepared to make the donation today?”

Jimin exhales, slowly, and he can’t stop the relief that works its way into his tone. “The money is already set to transfer, Mr. Bang. All I need is your agreement to work with Kim Namjoon on my behalf, and your assurance that you’ll put the program into effect immediately.”

“You’ll have both of those things if I can help it. I’ll be in touch soon,” Sihyuk replies.

Jimin ends the call, and is surprised to find that his breathing is steady.

He’s surprised because, while Taehyung is going to like this a lot, his father is going to be pissed at him in a way that Jimin has never experienced before.

He’s a hard man, Jimin’s father, and an unforgiving one. He’s never tolerated anything less than complete obedience from Jimin, from the moment they brought him back into their family—not that Jimin has ever actually tested his father’s patience, not truly. He’s been too busy being grateful that he has a father at all. But Jimin has observed the way his father handles his associates, he’s paid attention to the way that any misstep is repaid twofold, and he’s seen glimpses of the sharp, cutting anger that his father keeps buried until it’s necessary.

His father has rules, and rule number one is don’t fuck with his money.

Jimin is about to break rule number one.

He’s oddly unworried about it. Perhaps his father’s health is diminishing his imposing demeanor, because the thought of his wrath directed at Jimin feels…ineffectual. If his father doesn’t like Jimin’s
decision regarding the housing situation, too bad. It’ll be done, and he’ll deal with the consequences when—if—they come. He’s more concerned about fixing things with Taehyung than he is about the potential for repercussions from his father.

Jimin puts his phone in his pocket, and wonders when, exactly, his priorities shifted and he stopped being so reliant on his father’s affection.

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“Tae is home!”

Taehyung barely has time to brace before Eunjin is crashing into him, a bundle of energy and happy giggles. He drops his bag by his feet and swoops down, hefting his sister into his arms. Something that’s been missing slots into place as her arms wind around his neck.

There’s something about being home that makes heartbreak easier to bear. Maybe it’s the inherent warmth that comes from a home.

“Who are they?”

Taehyung opens his eyes, looking down at Jongkyu, who is pointing behind him to Yoongi and Hoseok.

“Hello to you, too, Jongkyu,” Taehyung replies, setting Eunjin down to snag his brother and ruffle his hair. “These are my friends. They’re going to help us celebrate and start packing.”

Jongkyu folds his arms and peers at Hoseok and Yoongi skeptically.

“Hi!” says Hoseok brightly, crouching down to Eunjin’s level and waving at her. “I’m Hoseok.”

Eunjin giggles, then slaps a hand across her mouth and hides behind Taehyung’s legs.

“Taehyung?”

His mother comes around the corner, and she’s just like he remembered. Thinner, a bit frailer than he remembers, probably due to the stress.

“Hi Mom,” he says, opening his arms and pulling her small frame against his. She hugs him tightly, tucking herself against his chest and rubbing her hand soothingly across his back. Tension he didn’t know he was holding in his shoulders slips away as he hugs his mother. He breathes deeply, basking in the comfort of home as emotions swell within.

“I’m glad you’re here,” she says, pulling away slightly to smile tiredly up at him. “We missed you, Tae.” She reaches up and brushes her thumb across his cheek, catching a tear he didn’t realize had slipped free.

“I brought help,” he says, finally releasing her and changing the subject, afraid that if he allows his mother to hold him much longer he’s going to surrender to all the sadness swirling in the place where his heart should be.

As strained as things have been between him and his parents lately, it doesn’t seem to matter anymore now that he’s here, that things are going to be okay.

He gestures to Hoseok and Yoongi. “We brought boxes and some things for dinner, too.”

“I’m Hoseok,” Hoseok says when his mother looks at him. “And this is Yoongi.” He gestures to
Yoongi, who has yet to open his eyes fully. “How can we help?” Hoseok throws an arm around Yoongi and tugs him to his side in an effort to wake him up more.

“It’s fuc—freaking early leave me alone,” Yoongi mutters, cutting himself off when he remembers Taehyung’s siblings are still in the room and brushing Hoseok’s arm off his shoulders.

“Thank you both for spending the holiday here instead of with your own families,” she says, leading them further into the small apartment. “We’re grateful for the help.”

Taehyung picks up Eunjin and follows his mother, Jongkyu heading off in the direction of his and Eunjin’s room.

He didn’t even think about the fact that Yoongi and Hoseok wouldn’t spend Thanksgiving with their families if they came home with him. He doesn’t know anything about either of their families, actually, and makes a mental note to ask later.

“It’s no trouble,” Yoongi says sleepily, setting down some of their food-heavy bags on the kitchen table and managing to look like a zombie doing it.

“Neither of us had plans, and we wanted to help.” Hoseok shrugs. “It’s better than being in the apartment alone.”

“Well I hope you feel at home here, even if everything is in boxes,” his mother says warmly. He hasn’t seen her this relaxed in a long time.

He makes another mental note to thank Jeongguk. Profusely.

“We don’t mind,” Hoseok says, beginning to unload the groceries.

“Oh here,” says his mom, coming around to unload the food herself. “I’ve got the food, if you three want to get started on the living room and packing everything up?”

“Sure, Mom,” he says, towing a still-bleary Yoongi and a smiling Hoseok behind him as he heads for the living room.

It’s a short trip. Their apartment isn’t very big to begin with. With a gentle nudge at Yoongi, the three of them set to work packing the various parts of Taehyung’s childhood into boxes.

The TV is on quietly in the background, the parade playing out on the screen.

He’s packing away family photos when he finds it. It’s a somewhat tedious process, picking up each of the photos and wrapping them carefully in butcher paper to keep them from breaking and shattering during the move. Taehyung picks up a picture and freezes, his fingers tightening around the frame.

It’s a picture of him and Jimin when they were younger, arms thrown carelessly around each other with wide smiles on their faces.

Intense longing stabs through his heart. What happened to that Jimin? What happened to them? They’d been so happy, so comfortable in one another and it’s devastating to think that it’s all gone now because Jimin is bent on revenge.

“Taehyung? Are you okay?” Hoseok is looking at him with concern in his eyes, Yoongi pausing putting books into boxes to look at him.
“Yeah, I’m fine,” Taehyung replies, wrapping up the picture and stacking it into the box.

“You’re crying,” Yoongi says flatly.

Taehyung reaches up and brushes away the tears that had leaked down his face. He didn’t know he’d started crying. “I’m fine,” he says again.

Yoongi and Hoseok share a loaded gaze before turning back to their packing. He glances up at the TV for something to distract him and nearly drops a photo of him with Eunjin and Jongkyu.

The parade is over and the news has started, reporting on the mundane happenings of the cities and stories of Black Friday precautions, but what snags his attention is the brief highlight about how the Homes-for-Youth charity is arranging alternate, affordable housing for those displaced in the recent court ruling to renovate several blocks in Crown Heights, at the behest of New York darlings, Jeon Jeongguk and Park Jimin.

Jimin found a way to help everyone that his quest for revenge was going to hurt, and something in Taehyung’s chest swells with warmth.

It feels a lot like hope.

Taehyung resumes his task, shoving the longing from earlier aside and resolving to talk to Jimin tomorrow. He’s tired of being alone and he needs to try and reason with Jimin and fix things between them. He promised Jeongguk, after all, and besides.

He’s tired of being away from Jimin, even if he’s not sure who Jimin is anymore. He misses him. And this ray of hope is enough to think that maybe, just maybe, everything will work out for the best.

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US Weekly, Breaking News, November 24th, 2 hours ago

CHEATING SCANDAL! Park Jimin caught CHEATING on fiancé Jeongguk in scandalous affair! We’ve got pictures!

By Lulu Lundberg
Park Jimin is a busy man, but it seems his hands were especially full a couple weeks ago entertaining a mysterious young man—who isn’t his fiancé! An anonymous source captured pictures of Jimin, 18, getting hot and heavy with a pretty young piece in his penthouse apartment. Things aren’t looking good for the millionaire club owner!

Jimin owns and operates many businesses, so he’s used to handling assets. Looks like those skills were put to good use handling an impressive set of assets belonging to a bartender who works in Jimin’s own club, LIE. Scandalous!
Jimin has been engaged for nearly two months to Jeon Jeongguk, 20, heir to the Jeon family holdings. The power couple’s relationship appeared solid, despite reports last week of a possible rough patch. Jimin and Jeongguk seemed blissfully in love when they attended the Homes-for-Youth Charity Gala together a few weeks ago week, sharing a sexy, chocolatey kiss in front of guests and photographers.

Things may have looked good at the gala, but we now know that Jimin shared a steamy night with another man just days before! Not much is known about this mystery man other than that his name is Kim Taehyung, but he works as a bartender at a club owned by Jimin himself. Looks like our little drink mixer has been busy shaking something else when he should be shaking cocktails!

Speaking of cock tales, the timing here is a little suspicious. Our research shows this Taehyung has only worked at LIE for a few months, and he’s already boinking the boss! Is it possible he slept his way into the job?

There is no word yet about the future of Jimin’s and Jeongguk’s relationship. Their marriage would have united two incredibly powerful families. Will Jeongguk find it in his heart to forgive and forget, or will Jimin’s infidelity be too devastating to let go?

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“Did you see it?” Jeongguk asks warily when Jimin answers the door.
“See what?” Jimin replies. He’s in his robe, and his hair is mussed from tossing and turning in bed, and he thinks it’s pretty obvious that he hasn’t see whatever Jeongguk is talking about.

“Shit. Here, gimme your phone,” Jeongguk says. Jimin unlocks it and hands it over, and Jeongguk opens the browser app. “Just don’t fucking shoot the messenger,” Jeongguk mutters as he types in a URL.

Jimin frowns. What is Jeongguk mumbling over?

Jeongguk hands the phone back to Jimin, and asks, “When was the last time you talked to Taehyung?”

Jimin’s frown deepens into a scowl. He’s not talking about Taehyung right now. “Jeongguk, what the hell is—” He cuts off abruptly as his eyes fall to the screen of his phone and he reads the headline at the top of Us Weekly’s website.

A toxic mixture of fury and fear rushes through his veins and, his thumb shaking, Jimin scrolls down the page to see the image plastered on the internet for the world to see: the blackmail photo of him carrying Taehyung into the bathroom.

He stares at it, his anger on the edge of boiling over, and he knows one thing for certain. He is going to kill Baekhyun.

“Oh, it gets better,” Jeongguk says sarcastically, and taps the headline to take them to the article itself.

As he reads, Jimin amends his threat. He’s going to kill Baekhyun, and he’s going to do it slowly and painfully.

When he gets to the second image in the article, his rage erupts, and he screams, turning and cocking his arm to throw his phone across the room. Jeongguk grabs his wrist as he swings, and the device tumbles harmlessly out of his grip, dropping to the carpeted floor and bouncing once as the momentum is absorbed.

Jeongguk sighs. “You’re going to need that in a couple minutes when you cool off,” he says, “And it’s Thanksgiving Day. I doubt you want to wait until store open at 6 tonight and fight the crowds to get a new phone.”

Jimin’s head snaps around, and he seethes in Jeongguk’s direction. He opens his mouth to tell Jeongguk exactly where he can shove his fucking helpful attitude, but before he can say anything, Jeongguk grabs his chin, forcibly holding Jimin’s face in place.

Jimin’s temper flares hotter, but with his jaw in Jeongguk’s vice-like grip, he can’t speak. He glares instead, meeting Jeongguk’s eyes and channeling his ire through the heat of his gaze.

“You better think long and hard before you decide to let the words on the tip of your tongue fall out of your mouth,” Jeongguk hisses. “I fucking told you not to shoot the messenger.” He releases Jimin’s face and wrist. “Now use your brain and figure out your next move.”

Jimin bends over and snatches his phone off the floor—maybe Jeongguk was right to keep him from throwing it, even if Jimin will never admit it out loud—and sits down on the sofa. He reads the rest of the article, bracing himself against the remaining innuendos and accusations, and manages not to crush his phone with his bare hands.

He sits down beside Jimin, silent as Jimin finishes reading. When he’s done, Jimin says, his voice
tight, “Tae and I are still fighting. I don’t know if he’ll pick up if I call.”

“Then call Yoongi. He should at least know where Taehyung is and can warn him about going out in public,” Jeongguk reasons.

“Did something go wrong with the exchange between you and Baekhyun?” Jimin asks, switching gears.

“Nope. Everything went as smooth as a baby’s ass,” Jeongguk replies.

Jinmin grinds his teeth, biting off the anger that’s rising again. “That asshole is going to regret this before the day is over.”

Jeongguk nods. “Good. Get presentable. I’m coming with you, and we’re leaving in twenty minutes.”

“Are the paparazzi out front?” Jimin asks. It’s a stupid question—he already knows what the answer will be—but he needs to ask it anyway.

“You bet your ass. It’s a fucking circus. I came in the back way; my driver called yours and got him to open the gate to the parking level. Oh,” Jeongguk adds, “and I wouldn’t check Twitter for a while. The hashtag ‘caught in a lie’ is trending right now, and your mentions are probably full of assholery.”

“Fucking great.”

When Jimin’s driver pulls up in front of Baekhyun’s home, his anger has cooled—not faded, no, but turned cold. Jimin’s conversation with Yoongi left him feeling like utter shit, and Jimin is ready to harness his self-hatred and aim it elsewhere.

He doesn’t wait to see if Jeongguk keeps up as he steps out of the car. He just stalks up the sidewalk to the front door and slams the knocker down three times before clasping his hands together and plastering a polite smile on his face.

A minute and a half later, Baekhyun opens the door, and the faint aroma of pumpkin pie wafts out to Jimin. He drops his smile in favor of wrinkling his nose at the smell.

“Hi, Baekhyun. We’re not interrupting, are we?”

Baekhyun’s eyes widen, moving from Jimin to Jeongguk, then back to Jimin. “It’s not a good time, gentlemen,” he says. “It’s Thanksgiving Day, and we have company coming.”

“Mm,” Jimin replies sympathetically, pushing past Baekhyun and stepping into the foyer and peering into the rest of the house. “Sucks, doesn’t it, when something inconvenient happens and screws up all of your plans?”

Baekhyun’s forehead creases in confusion, and he places a hand on Jimin’s shoulder. “What? You two need to leave—”

“Like that tabloid article that posted pictures of Taehyung and I two and a half hours ago,” Jimin continues, turning around to meet Baekhyun’s gaze with his own icy stare. Baekhyun’s hand falls away, and Jeongguk follows Jimin inside, pushing Baekhyun to the side and closing the door. “Your pictures of Taehyung and I, Baekhyun.”
Baekhyun pales, his face turning ghostly white, and a light sheen of sweat breaks out along his forehead.

“Honey? Who is it?” a feminine voice calls softly from upstairs.

“We should take this some place more private than the entryway,” Jeongguk says coolly, and Baekhyun’s mouth tightens.

“Probably some place she won’t be able to hear us, don’t you think?” Jimin adds lightly.

He watches Baekhyun swallow, visibly nervous, and a cold smile creeps back across his lips. It doesn’t reach his eyes.

“Answer her, Baekhyun,” Jimin says softly, cutting the quiet between them with the threat inherent in his tone.

“Just someone here about buying the boat,” Baekhyun calls, his tone a croak under the weight of Jimin’s eyes.

“On Thanksgiving?” comes his wife’s bewildered reply, and the words sound closer than they did before.

Baekhyun clears his throat before answering. “I’ll be in the garage for a bit, honey,” he says quickly, turning and ushering Jimin and Jeongguk deeper into the house.

They follow him through the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, and then out a door into the garage. Jimin waits until he hears the latch click shut, and then his fist is balled up and flying into Baekhyun’s stomach. Once, twice, three times, and then Jeongguk is holding back Jimin’s cocked wrist for a second time today and Baekhyun is crumpling to his knees, coughing and gasping for air.

Jimin turns to look at Jeongguk, and he knows his eyes are filled with a kind of wild over-excitement, but Jeongguk isn’t fazed by it. Jeongguk just smirks, and says, “Pace yourself, Jimin. Give him a minute to get himself together before you come at him again. It’s more satisfying that way. Lasts longer, too.”

Something snaps inside Jimin, and he giggles manically. “Aww, thanks Jeonggukie! Look at us picking up where we left off,” he says, aiming a kick at Baekhyun’s side and driving the toe of his Timberland viciously into Baekhyun’s gut. Baekhyun falls onto his side on the concrete floor, and Jimin sheds his coat, tossing it on the hood of the closest car. “Just like old times, you looking out for my best interests,” Jimin says, grinning widely at his friend.

Jeongguk rolls his eyes, and gestures at Baekhyun’s fetal form for Jimin to continue.

Jimin nudges Baekhyun onto his back with his boot and crouches down next to him, watching with detached interest as he struggles to get his breath back. When his wheezing slows, Jimin grabs his hair and pulls, craning Baekhyun’s neck to the side so that he has to look Jimin in the eye.

There’s the beginning of real fear there, and Jimin, pleased at the sight of it, smiles sweetly. “Do you remember when I told you I was the scary one, Baekhyun?” he asks deliberately.

“It’s because I’m observant,” Jimin says, letting go of Baekhyun’s hair with a jerk and watching as his head thuds against the floor.

Baekhyun winces, and starts, “Jimin, I—”
Jimin slaps his mouth and says, “Shut up. I’m talking.”

Baekhyun shrinks back, and Jimin stands up, rolling up his sleeves as he walks over to the workbench that lines the back wall of the garage. “See, Jeonggukie, here, is a bit of a bruiser. He’s strong—really powerful, you know?” Jimin says idly as he pulls open drawer after drawer. “He’s had all kinds of training with all kinds of weapons, but he still prefers to use his fists.”

Jimin pulls out another drawer, and then pauses, turning to look at Baekhyun. He giggles, and winks suggestively. “It shouldn’t surprise you to learn that he’s really good with his hands.”

Jeongguk snorts at the innuendo.

Jimin goes back to his search, rifling through the last drawer he’s opened, until he finds what he’s looking for. “I, on the other hand, like to use all the tools at my disposal.” He tosses the duct tape to Jeongguk, who catches it one handed and begins to peel off his coat, and Jimin turns his attention to the pegboard hung over the work bench.

“I like to really get to know someone, you know? Learn what makes them tick. And then I like to use that against them.” His eyes settle on a compact pruner, and his smile twists into a wicked grin. “You, Baekhyun,” Jimin says, as he picks the pruner off the wall, “are ruled by your dick.”

He turns to face Baekhyun, and discovers that the seed of fear in Baekhyun has blossomed into full-blown terror.

“What do you think, Jeonggukie?” Jimin asks. “Do you think his dick is small enough that one snip will do the job?”

“I don’t know, Jimin,” Jeongguk replies, picking the end of the duct tape and pulling it free of the roll with a scratch. “Chanyeol kept coming back for more. He’s probably big enough you’ll have to make multiple cuts.”

“When he’s flaccid, though?” Jimin frowns, looking down at the pruner in his hand, as if accessing its size. “I highly doubt he’s hard right now, Kookie.”

Laughing, Jeongguk holds out the duct tape to Jimin, and Jimin trims a piece off the roll easily with the pruner. Jeongguk crouches next to Baekhyun to press the duct tape over Baekhyun’s mouth, and Baekhyun’s silence finally breaks.

Baekhyun’s eyes jerk from Jeongguk to Jimin, then back to Jeongguk again, and he chokes out, “It wasn’t me! I didn’t do it!”

Jimin sighs, dropping his hands to his side, and drawls, “I don’t believe you, Baekhyun.”

“But I got what I wanted! Why would I turn on you like that?!” Baekhyun says, his voice breaking.

“Hold him down, Jeongguk,” Jimin says, hardening his voice. He walks the three feet back to where Baekhyun’s sprawled on the concrete, around Jeongguk, and kneels on his thighs, pinning Baekhyun’s legs down with his full weight.

Jeongguk slaps the duct tape over Baekhyun’s mouth and grabs his wrists, gripping them tightly as he digs his knee into Baekhyun’s chest for leverage against the struggling man. Jeongguk’s biceps bulge under the fabric of his shirt, straining to keep Baekhyun in place, and Jimin wolf-whistles at the display. “Fuck, Kook. Your arms have always been such a turn on,” he says wistfully.

Jeongguk grunts. “Get on with it, you little shit. He’s stronger than he looks.”
Jimin cackles, and begins to undo Baekhyun’s belt buckle.

Baekhyun screams through the duct tape, and pisses himself.

Jimin jerks his hands away from the warm stain spreading across the crotch of Baekhyun’s pants, and growls irritably, glaring past Jeongguk’s taut form at Baekhyun as he shrieks wordlessly. When the shrill sound turns into a muffled, indecipherable string of words, Jimin rolls his eyes.

Crawling around Jeongguk, Jimin jerks the tape off of Baekhyun’s mouth, and snaps, “What?”

Baekhyun pants shallowly as shock and panic spill from him in a final plea. “I swear to God, Jimin I didn’t do it. I don’t even have a copy of the pictures anymore, you can search my house! Please, please, I didn’t do it.”

“Don’t make me cut out your tongue first, Baekhyun,” Jimin hisses. He presses the outside curve of the pruner’s blade into Baekhyun’s cheek. “If it wasn’t you, then who the fuck else could it have been? You said no one else even saw the photos.”

“The P.I.! He could still have them! He was desperate for money when I hired him—” Baekhyun gasps out, “—refused any payment but cash, and then got greedy and demanded more when he delivered the photos. Said the first payment was only a deposit—”

“Give me his name and address. You have five seconds.”

Jimin sits back on his heels, pours all the steel he can muster into his voice, and says, “Give me his name and address. You have five seconds.”

Jimin doesn’t even have the chance to start counting before the information he wants tumbles out of Baekhyun’s mouth.

“Excuse me, Jeonggukie,” Jimin says, waving his hand at Jeongguk in a silent request for him to back up.

Jeongguk lifts his knee off Baekhyun’s chest, and Jimin takes his place, crawling over Baekhyun until he’s straddling him, knees against cold concrete. With one hand, Jimin holds Baekhyun’s face so he can’t look away from Jimin’s eyes. With the other, he reaches down, between his own legs, and draws the tip of the curved blade up the zipper of Baekhyun’s pants, slowly, gently, letting the weight of the tool do all the work for him. “If I find out you’ve lied to me, Baekhyun, or if you ever fuck with me or Taehyung or Jeongguk again, I’ll come for your cock, and I promise it won’t be nearly as enjoyable as when Chanyeol does it.” Jimin tilts his head sideways just a little, and adds, “Not for you, anyway.”

He stands up, accepting a hand from Jeongguk, and brushes off the knees of his pants. “Clean yourself up before your company gets here, Baekhyun. And don’t think I’m going to forget this. You owe me.”

He grabs his coat off the hood of the car, tossing the pruner on top of the work bench, and heads for the garage’s man-door, Jeongguk on his heels.

They don’t speak as they cross the lawn, but once they’re settled in the back of Jimin’s car, Jeongguk asks, “Were you really gonna castrate him?”

Jimin snorts. “Fuck no. Don’t you remember that time in Seokjin’s lessons when I got past your defenses with a knife? I threw up at the sight of blood, and then immediately passed out.”

“That didn’t stop you from cutting me again the next time you saw an opening,” Jeongguk points out, and Jimin hums his agreement.
“I suppose you’re right.” Jimin shrugs. “Who knows, maybe I would have cut him, if I’d thought he was the one that released the photos.”

Jeongguk side-eyes Jimin, and Jimin sighs. “He was too shocked when I mentioned the article. Baekhyun’s not a good enough actor to pull off that kind of false surprise, Jeongguk. I just needed to make him feel talkative. Putting him back in our debt was a nice bonus, too.”

One corner of Jeongguk’s lips quirks up, and he settles back into his seat. “Maybe you’re the scary one, after all.”

Jimin smiles, amused. “And don’t you forget it, Jeongguk.”

Halfway back to the city, Jimin has a better idea than going directly to the address Baekhyun supplied him with. He pulls up Seokjin’s number, and presses ‘dial.’

“Boss, you know the club is closed today for a national holiday,” Seokjin greets him. “A national holiday that emphasizes eating every morsel you can get your hands on, and then eating a little bit more.” He pauses. “You can see why this holiday is important to me.”

Jimin grins.

“Sorry, Jin. I’ll make it up to you?”

“Better yet, you’ll make it short,” Seokjin replies. “Dinner is at one. You’ve got…three hours before I bail on you for the best meal of the year.”

“Three hours is more than I’ll need,” Jimin assures him. “I’m going to text you a name and an address. He’s a P.I., and the address is his office, so he might not be there today—”

Seokjin snorts a laugh.

“—but it’ll give you something to work with to find him. Call Namjoon if you need help tracking him down.”

“I’m not going to call Namjoon, Jimin. It’s Thanksgiving, and the man hasn’t taken a day off in almost a month. I’ll find him just fine on my own,” Seokjin says. “What do you want me to do with him when I do?”

“Bring him to the warehouse down by the river. Jeongguk and I will meet you there, so text me when you find him.”

“Will do, Boss.”

“Oh, and Seokjin?” Jimin adds, his mind catching up with his mouth. “Swipe any camera memory cards you see lying around and delete his hard drive. Quietly.”

Seokjin sighs. “Do I want to know why you’re asking me to do that?”

“Probably not,” Jimin replies cheerfully. “Have fun.”

Seokjin never disappoints.
An hour and twenty-three minutes later, Jimin and Jeongguk stand in front of a man who’s bound and gagged, and Seokjin hands Jimin a zip lock baggie with an external hard drive and three memory cards in it.

Jeongguk’s eyes light up when Jimin offers it to him. “A peace offering for your father, maybe? For the Baekhyun and Chanyeol files. Just delete everything about me from there before you hand it over, would you?”

“Does that mean I get to look at the pictures now?” Jeongguk says, reaching for the bag, and Jimin snatches it back, out of Jeongguk’s reach.

“On second thought, I’ll take care of cleaning it up,” Jimin replies. “Remind me in a couple days and it’ll be all yours.”

Jeongguk rolls his eyes.

“Not to be pushy, Boss, but you’ve only got me for another hour and a half,” Seokjin reminds them, and Jimin nods.

“Right! Down to business then,” he says, taking off his coat. Jeongguk removes his, as well, and hangs them from a convenient nail in the wall a dozen feet away. Jimin begins rolling up his sleeves. “What’s his name?”

“Choi Seungho. I found him sleeping off a hangover in a grungy apartment,” Seokjin supplies. “I searched there, too. That’s where I found the external hard drive. From the look of it, it’s a backup of everything I deleted from his computer in his office.”

“Choi Seungho, huh?” Jimin says, looking down at the man. “Well, Seungho, do you know what you’ve done to garner my attention?”

Unable to speak, the man stares at Jimin, and Jimin laughs. “No guesses? I’m sure you recognize me, though. You’re intimately familiar with my face, aren’t you?”

He crouches next to the private investigator. “What about him, Seungho?” Jimin asks, pointing over his shoulder at Jeongguk. “Do you know who he is?”

Choi’s gaze shifts to Jeongguk, and it takes a minute before his eyes go wide.

“Ahhh, there it is,” Jimin murmurs quietly. “I was waiting for you to catch up.” He studies Choi as Choi gawks at Jeongguk.

“Looks like he’s surprised to see us together, Jimin,” Jeongguk says.

Jimin follows Choi’s gaze and takes in Jeongguk’s nonchalant appearance. His posture is relaxed, his hands are in his pockets, his expression is unperturbed—he’s a perfect picture of calm and collected. Jimin knows it’s a lie.

Growing up with Jeongguk has taught Jimin how to read him, how to pick out his tell, how to see past the masks he wears. Jeongguk long ago smothered his nervous ticks—the tilt of his head when he’s not sure about something, the way he plucks at his hair when he’s feeling vulnerable, the way his knee bounces when he’s holding something back—but there’s one place Jeongguk shows emotion that he’s never been able to camouflage: his eyes. And even though Jimin’s a bit rusty from their time apart, some things never change.

Jimin looks into Jeongguk’s eyes now, and he sees a tempestuous mix of anger and excitement, a
calculating, cold chaos that’s waiting to be released.

Jimin grins. It’s good that they’re on the same page.

This man, Choi Seungho, has thrown people Jimin cares about—and Jimin himself—under the bus for his own gain. He’s endangered Taehyung by releasing his photo to the public, he’s damaged Jimin’s reputation, and there’s the potential for the feud between Jimin’s and Jeongguk’s families to rekindle over Jimin’s indiscretion.

On top of all that, Choi’s put the real estate deal at risk. If it falls apart because of friction between the Jeon and Park families, then all of Jimin’s plans will have been for nothing, and he will not let this go. He can’t. It’s too important. It’s the most important thing he’ll ever accomplish with his life, and Choi has f*cked with it.

He’s f*cked with Jimin—with people Jimin loves—and Jimin’s ready to f*ck him up in return. He picked an unnecessary fight with someone he’s unequipped to deal with, and now he’s going to pay.

Jimin knows that Jeongguk sees his own volatility reflected back in Jimin’s eyes because a small smirk pulls at Jeongguk’s mouth and he nods his head in Choi’s direction. He’s giving Jimin permission to take the lead again—not that Jimin needs his permission. But Jimin has always been more adventurous with the knowledge that Jeongguk has his back.

“Seokjin, would you please go get the two canvas bags out of the trunk of my car?” Jimin asks politely. “I’m not entirely sure we’re going to need them, but I think we’re probably going to want them,” he adds.

Seokjin nods, and heads back the way Jimin and Jeongguk had come in, his stride sure. Jimin grins his excitement at Jeongguk before turning back to Choi.

“Now. How much did they pay you, Seungho?” Jimin ask softly, “I’m curious how much my privacy is worth.”

Choi’s eyes jerk back to Jimin’s and he stills when he meets them. Jimin reaches out and tugs the gag out of Choi’s mouth so he can answer.

The man coughs a few times, and Jimin prods him. “Well?”

Choi’s answer is mumbled, his voice hoarse—presumably from yelling through the gag as Seokjin hauled him to the warehouse—but Jimin hears it.

His eyebrows climb in surprise. “Only $165,000?” He scoffs. “Explicit pictures that can’t be explained away, and you can’t even negotiate your way into a full two-hundred thousand? I’m disappointed. You’d make a terrible paparazzi.”

“What do you care how much I got for the photos?” Choi croaks. His eyes dart to Jeongguk. “It’s not like it affected your relationship.”

“Oh, but it has,” Jimin says. He laughs at the hilarity of it, the sound bouncing unnervingly off concrete floors and brick walls. “You see, I didn’t tell Taehyung that those pictures existed, so he’s going to be very unhappy when he learns what you’ve done. And Jeonggukie and I—well. We have yet to discuss what this means for us, publicly. Privately, as you’ve guessed, we’re still thick as thieves, but it’s our public image that’s most important, Seungho. And you’ve definitely affected that.”

Choi spits in Jimin’s face and says, “You f*cking rich boys are so fake. You sell yourselves to the
media for publicity like whores, so what the fuck does it matter if I sell you to the media?”

The smile drops off Jimin’s face, and he wipes Choi’s spit from his cheek. He looks at the wet on the pads of his fingers for a moment, then rubs it off on the front of Choi’s shirt before meeting his eyes. He leans in, crowding Choi’s space, and lets his fury free so Choi can see it. “I am a person, Seungho,” he hisses, “not a fucking commodity. If I choose to give something of myself away to the public, that’s my choice. You don’t get to decide that for me, and you definitely don’t get to decide that for Taehyung.”

Jimin’s gaze burns with anger—of course it does, all of him is burning with anger—and Choi shrinks back as much as he’s able with his hands and feet pulled behind his back and tied together. Seokjin’s footsteps approach, so Jimin yanks the gag back up, shoving the spit-soaked cloth between Choi’s teeth once more. He stands and turns in time to see Jeongguk take the bags from Seokjin and motion for Seokjin to head back outside again.

Seokjin looks skeptically at Jimin but Jimin meets Seokjin’s eyes, holding his gaze firmly with his lips pressed decisively in a tight line until Seokjin turns away to look at Jeongguk. “We’ll call you back in a little bit, Jin,” Jeongguk says quietly, and with one final wary glance at Jimin, Seokjin leaves.

When Seokjin’s out of earshot, Jimin’s smile returns and he claps his hands and rubs his palms together. “I was hoping that you’d be unrepentant, so that we could have a little fun,” he says as Jeongguk empties the first bag, setting a gallon of water, and a pair of nestled one-gallon buckets on the floor by his feet. Then he pulls a box of baking soda, a washcloth, two pairs of long rubber gloves, two pairs of safety glasses, a paint stir stick, and a pliers out of the bucket.

Jemin reaches for the other bag as Jeongguk separates the buckets and dumps a healthy amount of baking soda into one of them. He pours half of the water jug over it, then stirs the mixture with the paint stick to dissolve the powder. Satisfied that Jeongguk knows what he’s doing, Jimin pulls the contents of the second bag free of the fabric.

Choi’s eyes go comically wide when he sees the car battery in Jimin’s hands, and Jimin’s smile turns vicious as he sets the battery down.

“I feel like a broken record, saying it so many times today,” Jimin says idly, “but I like to really get to know someone before I have to administer a punishment. It makes it more effective if I can tailor it specifically to that person, you know?” He sighs, a little dramatically, and reaches for the gloves. He pulls on a pair, his right hand first, then his left, as he speaks. “But I don’t know you at all, Seungho? And that’s a bit of a problem, because I really need this lesson to stick.”

Choi begins struggling, wriggling backwards as best as he can across the concrete floor in an attempt to get away from Jimin and Jeongguk. Soft whimpering noises leak around the gag, but Jimin lets him squirm, reaching for the pliers and beginning to pull the caps off the vents on the top of the battery casing.

“I had to get creative with what I do know about you,” Jimin continues, “which is that you saw something you had no right to see, and then you shared pictures of what you witnessed with the rest of the world.” Jimin pulls the last ventilation cap off the top of the battery, then accepts the pair of safety glasses that Jeongguk is holding out to him.

“You profited personally from this action, likely making more money from selling two photos than you’ll make in…oh, say, four years,” Jimin says, slipping the glasses on. “Does that sound about right, Jeonggukie?”
“The average private investigator makes $40,000 a year, but if you look at Seungho, here…”

Jeongguk eyes their captive critically, “I’m guessing he makes less. Better round it up to five years just to be on the safe side.”

Jimin nods, “Five years, then—that’s a long time. Anyway, I thought, ‘How do I balance the scales after such a windfall?’ And it all clicked, just like that!”

Jeongguk’s pulled on his own set of gloves now, and he slides the safety glasses on with one smooth motion. He holds the empty bucket in place, and lets Jimin pour the acid from the battery into the bucket. Jimin’s careful to keep it from splashing as he pours—it’ll ruin their clothes if they get it on themselves—and he relishes the way Choi’s desperate noises rise in pitch as he takes his time with the battery acid.

When his task is complete, Jimin sets the battery casing to the side, and smiles at Choi. Jimin and Jeongguk drag him back to them, easily closing the eighteen-inch distance between them that Choi had managed to create.

Jeongguk lays a hand on each side of Choi’s face, and Jimin leans over Choi to catch his eyes. “You saw something you shouldn’t have,” he says slowly, savoring the revelation of his epiphany. “In fact, you make a living seeing things you shouldn’t…so what if you couldn’t see anymore?”

Choi screams through the blindfold, bringing Jimin abruptly back to the task at hand, and Jimin apologizes. “Sorry!” he giggles, grabbing the bucket of battery acid. “I got a little distracted. Anyway, as I was saying, what if you couldn’t see anymore? Then you wouldn’t be able to hurt anyone else the way you hurt Taehyung and Jeongguk and I. It’s the perfect solution, really, and you’ve got five years of your salary to fall back on until you can figure out what do with yourself, instead of peeping where you shouldn’t be.”

Choi screams once more, and Jimin straddles him, sitting on Choi’s torso and immobilizing him with his weight. He tugs the gag down and slaps his gloved hand over Choi’s mouth to keep him from swallowing battery acid, then lifts the bucket, and says, “Now, breathe out through your nose and hold still. I don’t want to ruin Jeonggukie’s shoes—they’re Italian leather, and that would be such a waste.”

He pours the acid over Choi’s face, slowly, aiming for the man’s eyes as the liquid streams over his features and puddles on the floor beneath him. Jimin shushes Choi soothingly as he works. “Just a little bit more,” he coos, carefully emptying the last quarter of the liquid into Choi’s eyes, and the man’s screams turn to pained, broken whimpers.

It’s satisfying as fuck.

“There,” Jimin says softly, upending the bucket and letting the last of the liquid drip into Choi’s eyes. “You did so well, Seungho! We’re all done.”

Jeongguk releases Choi’s head, and the man turns away as best he can. His limbs still bound and Jimin still seated on his torso, the most he can do is twist toward the concrete floor, but it’s a valiant effort to escape Jimin’s attention. “Hey, if it’s any consolation, you held up way better than Baekhyun—you know, the guy that hired you to photograph me? He pissed himself, and all I did was threaten him with a pruner.”
Jimin accepts the bucket of baking soda water and the washcloth from Jeongguk, and continues, “I can’t just pour this over your face—it’s a basic solution and will neutralize the acid, and I don’t want to undo all the good we managed today.” Jimin dunks the cloth in the liquid, wrings it out enough that it isn’t dripping, and drags it over Choi’s face. “But you shouldn’t have to deal with the itching on your skin. That’s just not fair, after you were so good throughout your punishment.”

He wipes the acid off Choi’s face with smooth, even strokes, and smiles down at Choi’s rapidly blinking eyes. “Your eyes still burn, don’t they?” he asks as he dunks the cloth again and brings it back to Choi’s forehead. Jimin wrings it out over his hairline, soaking his roots, and continues, “That’s the acid burning your corneas away. You’ll be fortunate if you retain any sight at all, after this.”

He finishes up with a quick swipe over each of Choi’s ears, and says, his voice full of malice, “Good luck trying to use a camera to ruin anyone’s life ever again, you selfish asshole.” Jimin drops the washcloth back in the bucket with the baking soda water, and stands, peeling his gloves off carefully and turning them inside out as he does.

Jeongguk hands Jimin his coat, and crouches to address Choi directly for the first time. His tone is matter-of-fact, any only his words betray the calm shell he wears. “You should know that I have friends everywhere. If I hear anything about this incident—even a whisper that makes me think you might be thinking about talking—I’m going to find you and take far more than just your eyesight. This is over, but only as long as you keep your mouth shut. You say anything about any of this to anyone—hospital staff, cops, the nosy neighbor lady across the hall—anyone—and we’ll pick up where we left off.”

Jeongguk puts his hands on his thighs as though to push himself up, but thinks better of it and pauses. “I’m kind of hoping you slip up, actually,” he adds. “Jimin got to have all the fun today, and I’d really like to have a turn.”

Choi chokes on a whimper, and Jeongguk stands, appeased.

“Sorry I hogged all the fun, Jeonggukie,” Jimin says, holding Jeongguk’s coat by the shoulders for him to slip on. “I promise you can have the next one.”

“Don’t worry about it. You’re good at this. If anything ever happens to me, I want you to be the one to avenge me,” Jeongguk replies, buttoning his coat and throwing his arm over Jimin’s shoulders. “By the way, what are we going to about the engagement? Publicly, I mean.”

Jimin sighs as they walk away from Choi. “The only thing we can do—we break it off. The real estate deal is far enough along that our fathers won’t be able to call it off, and if they try anyway, we convince them not to.”

Jeongguk snorts. “Right. That’ll go well.”

“I’m prepared to tell them whatever they need to hear to make sure it does go well, Jeonggukie. Now let’s get out of here. I’m hungry.”

They find Seokjin at the exit, and Jimin says, “Dump him back where you found him. Don’t mind the whining—he’ll get over it eventually—but maybe lay out a blanket you don’t like before you shove him back in your trunk? We doused him in battery acid, and I’d hate for your upholstery suffer for it.”

Seokjin sighs. “What about the mess in there? I assume you didn’t clean up.”
“Leave it for tomorrow, Jin,” Jeongguk says. “Doesn’t your wife make stuffing from scratch? You should get home before you miss it.”

“Wise words,” Seokjin grins. “She found a recipe for homemade cranberry sauce for this year, too. I might die of happiness.”

Jimin groans. “I love cranberries. If there’s any leftover, you should bring me some.”

“Not a chance, Boss. There won’t be anything left after I’m done with it,” Seokjin says as he slips back inside to deal with Choi.

Jimin laughs and calls ‘Happy Thanksgiving’ after him, then checks the time on his watch and wrinkles his nose. “So, I know I was supposed to have Thanksgiving dinner with your family, Jeongguk, but—”

“Oh, fuck that,” Jeongguk says. “I’m not showing up for an extended-family dinner after that article came out this morning. My cousins will never let it go, and they can suck a bag of dicks. I’m just gonna go back to my place and call Sunny. Get that over with, and then maybe put a pizza in the oven, or something. You can join m—”

Jimin’s phone rings, the shrill tone cutting Jeongguk off.

He knows that ringtone, and it’s not a good sign. His father knows he’s supposed to be with Jeongguk today, so the only reason for him to call would be—

“Ah, fuck, it’s my father,” Jimin swears, sliding the green ‘accept’ icon sideways. He lifts the phone to his ear. “Hello?”

It’s a shock to hear Martha’s voice on the other end of the call, rather than his father’s, but more shocking are the shaking in her voice and the words the tumble from her in a freefall. “Sir, your father—he collapsed, and he’s not— Home. You need to get home. Please, sir. Now.”

The last time—the only other time—that Martha fell apart was when Jimin’s mother had died, when the woman had suppressed her own grief and tried desperately to keep the household running by herself. She’d run herself into the ground in her attempt to handle everything herself, and Jimin had witnessed her breakdown in person.

Jemin can hear it again now. She’s frantic, upset and beside herself with worry, and he feels light-headed and dizzy, because he knows what that means.

He hears himself say, “I’m coming, Martha,” and then he turns to Jeongguk.

Jeongguk must see it all over his face, because he pushes Jimin gently towards his waiting car, and says, “Go. I’ll get a taxi. Call me if you need me.”

Jimin nods, scrambles into the backseat, and tells his driver to take him to the family estate. “Every fifteen minutes you cut off the travel time earns you a thousand-dollar bonus,” he says, and his driver pulls away from the curb in a way that lets Jimin know that he’s taken Jimin’s offer seriously.

Jimin doesn’t settle into the seat like he normally would for such a long drive. He’s too anxious to do anything but worry.

Jimin’s driver is several thousand dollars richer when Jimin pushes his car door open and rushes to
the front door of the family estate.

A young woman that Jimin vaguely recognizes opens the door, and Jimin, caught off guard, says, “Who are you? Where’s Martha?”

“I’m Dami, the cook? I’ve been working here a year,” the young woman replies. “Martha’s upstairs, with…”

Jimin doesn’t hang around to hear anything more. He runs up the stairs to his father’s suite, and pauses in front of the door to catch his breath. He’s got to slow down now that he’s here, or he’ll upset his father, and—

Jimin hears a soft cry from behind the door, and—no. Just, no. It can’t—

He abandons caution and shoves the door open.

Martha sits in a plush, high back chair pulled close to the side of his father’s bed, but she’s not leaning forward, grasping Jimin’s father’s hand for comfort.

She’s slouched, sunken back into the cushions with her hands over her face, and the crying sound that he’d heard through the door is coming from her.

His eyes slide to the figure tucked under the blankets, and he freezes. Everything freezes.

The air prickling against his skin feels like ice, and his blood turns to slush in his veins. His heart pounds, working overtime in an effort to keep Jimin upright and moving, but time has stilled and he’s taking in the motionless shape of his father, the waxy pallor of his skin, the underlying smell of soiled bedding, and Jimin feels nothing but cold.

Martha’s sobs have quieted in the moments he stood in the doorway, and she looks up at him as he takes his first steps into the room. His footsteps feel loud even on the carpeted floor, but he hears the sniffle, the clearing of her throat, and he forces himself to speak before she can.

“He’s gone?” Jimin asks, his subdued whisper loud in the silence of the room.

She nods, and her confirmation is the release his grief was waiting for. It crashes into him, and he gasps as the pain in his chest doubles, quadruples, clawing at him, latching on and trying to pull him under.

“Just ten minutes ago,” Martha says. “He was doing so well this morning, even asked for a full breakfast. The first one in weeks.” Her voice breaks and she pauses, trying to regain control over herself.

“I was too late,” Jimin chokes into the silence, guilt bubbling up and mixing with his overwhelming grief.

Martha pushes the chair back, and moves to him, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and pulling him into her. “He wasn’t alone, Jimin. I would never have let him go alone.”

And this time, when she bursts into tears again, Jimin joins her.

He was too late.

He was too fucking late.
Jimin doesn’t know how much time has passed.

At some point, Martha had gathered herself together and mumbled something about calling the authorities, and Jimin had slumped into the chair by his father’s bed. He sits there, his immediate tears dried, and feels like the eye of a storm.

Grief and guilt and regret rage around him, a steady whirlwind of emotions in his periphery, but now that the first wave of tears have passed a numbness has settled over him.

He tries to remember what it felt like when he learned he had a father. He tries to remember what it felt like when his father was pleased with him. He tries to remember what it felt like to be relied upon by the man he looked up to the most in this world.

He tries to figure out how to say goodbye.

In the end, Jimin just leans over his father, presses a kiss to the cool skin of his forehead, and leaves the room.

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Dinner is a happy, cheerful thing that fills Taehyung up with the love of his family and his mother’s excellent cooking reminiscent of better times in their family. Even his father, usually so burdened by the stress of providing for his family seems happier, able to smile and laugh as Hoseok teases Eunjin.

Taehyung is grateful for a lot of things this Thanksgiving, but the biggest is the fact that his family is going to be safe and secure away from this shit neighborhood.

He’s reminded again, on the way back to their apartment with leftovers packed for the next few days, that he owes Jeongguk profuse thanks, and Jimin an apology.

No matter the reasons for why he did it, Taehyung is glad that Jimin found somewhere else for his family to live.

“What the fuck,” Yoongi deadpans, slowing the car and pulling over out of traffic.

It takes Taehyung a moment to pull himself out of his thoughts to see what’s wrong.

“Holy shit,” breathes Hoseok from the passenger seat, his fingers laced with Yoongi’s between them. “Babe, what is that.”

“That,” Yoongi growls, “is what happens when the paparazzi find out who Taehyung is.” He manages to pull his phone out of his pocket without dropping Hoseok’s hand and begins dialing.

Taehyung stares, horrified, at the doors to their apartment building. There has to be at least fifty people gathered outside their apartment, cameras and microphones in hand, all apparently waiting for Taehyung to show up.

On Thanksgiving.

“What the fuck,” Taehyung echoes Yoongi, oblivious to whatever Yoongi is saying on the phone as he gets lost in a swirl of panic. “What do we do?”

“We take you somewhere they’ll never think to look for you,” Yoongi says, hanging up the phone and smoothly pulling back out into traffic, driving right past their building.

Taehyung doesn’t even have the presence of mind to ask where, although he shouldn’t be surprised
when—about twenty minutes later—Yoongi pulls up to a familiar building.

“I’ve got it from here,” Jeongguk says when he pulls open the back door of Yoongi’s car. He hustles Taehyung out of the car and into his building.

It isn’t until Taehyung is sitting on Jeongguk’s pristine white couch that he remembers his resolution to fix things with Jimin. Now it feels too late, if his guess as to why the press were outside his apartment is any indication.

“Fuck.”

Just when he thought things couldn’t get worse.

“What’s going on?” Taehyung asks, trying to breathe around the confusion clouding his mind. He doesn’t understand why everyone is interested in him, why there’re so many reporters following him suddenly.

“You haven’t talked to Jimin yet?” Jeongguk asks, eyes wide and a bit apprehensive.

“I was going to tonight,” Taehyung says, “before everything went sideways.”

Jeongguk pulls out his phone and dials, lips thinning in a grimace as he waits for the call to connect. His frown deepens as the call goes to voicemail. “Jimin isn’t answering his phone.”

“He’ll probably call back?” Taehyung whispers, pulling his knees up to his chest. Jimin always answers his phone, even if he’s dead asleep. Dread creeps under his skin, seeping into his blood and chilling him from the inside out.

Jeongguk looks doubtful.

“Youngguk, what’s going on?” Taehyung asks, putting a bit more steel into his voice in an attempt to get some answers.

Jeongguk blows out a heavy breath and runs a hand through his hair. “Okay, I’ll do Jimin a solid and explain things to you because he’s…busy right now.”

Taehyung nods, and Jeongguk starts talking.

“So, a while back something happened, and you can’t be mad at Jimin for the way it was handled.”

“Oh…” Taehyung edges, apprehension growing with Jeongguk’s serious tone.

“A few weeks ago, he received some very compromising photos of the two of you during an, uh, intimate moment in an attempt at blackmail.”

“Oh, fuck.”

“He spent a lot of time and effort taking care of it and making sure it didn’t touch you. He was trying to keep you clean and free, but circumstances beyond his control have prevented him from being able to do that.” Jeongguk reaches out and rests a hand on Taehyung’s shoulder in comfort. “That being said, it takes two to tango, and—”

“Motherfucker,” Taehyung curses, shrugging off Jeongguk’s hand and jumping up to pace across the room, anger evident with every step he takes. He can’t believe Jimin kept this from him, no matter
how good his intentions were.

Just like that, all his resolve to apologize evaporates under yet another betrayal of trust. “How could he,” he seethes, hands fisting at his sides as he continues to pace.

Suddenly, Jeongguk is in front of him, hands on his shoulders, eyes blazing with intent. “Okay listen, Taehyung.”

Taehyung shuts up.

“Jimin was trying to protect you, you dumb fuck. The world we live in is not nice to gentle souls like you, and the more Jimin can shield you from that the better off both of you are. We were raised in this shit, but you weren’t.”

“I was raised in Brooklyn, Jeongguk,” Taehyung fires back, anger dimming but not burned out yet. “I know how mean the world can be.”

Jeongguk shakes his head. “This is different. And,” he says, cutting off Taehyung’s protest as it forms on his lips. “You’re the idiot who had sex in front of a wall of windows,” he continues, getting back to the main point. “Jimin has done his best to mitigate the effect of this blackmail on your life, but he couldn’t anticipate everything. He did his best; now do your best and let it go.”

Taehyung takes a breath to protest, then wilts under Jeongguk’s firm stare. “Okay,” he concedes, letting Jeongguk steer him back to the couch. “So, what do we do now?”

“Now, we wait.” Jeongguk doesn’t look particularly pleased with this solution, something Taehyung can sympathize with. He picks up his phone again and stares at it, as if he’s using sheer willpower to get Jimin to call him back. “Where is he,” Jeongguk mutters.

Taehyung wonders the same thing.

An hour later and there’s still no word from Jimin and Taehyung is bored. He needs to think about something other than where Jimin is and if he’s in trouble or not.

“How did you two end up engaged, anyway?” he asks Jeongguk, boredom and a need for something to occupy his mind driving him to pry.

Jeongguk lifts his head from where he had been resting it on the back of the couch. “Jimin just asked me one day, kinda out of the blue, and I said yes.”

That’s simultaneously too much and not enough information. “What do you mean, ‘out of the blue’?”

“Out of the blue because up until that point our families hadn’t been on speaking terms for a year. We were barely friends anymore when he asked me.”

That’s simultaneously too much and not enough information. “What do you mean, ‘out of the blue’?”

“Out of the blue because up until that point our families hadn’t been on speaking terms for a year. We were barely friends anymore when he asked me.”

“Wait, you mean you guys haven’t always been friends?” Taehyung feels confused. Actually, he’s feeling a lot of things. He’s learned a lot in the last few hours.

“Mostly,” Jeongguk starts, settling deeper into the pillows of his couch and relaxing. “Something happened and a blood feud started between our families back when I was nineteen and he was seventeen. That feud lasted up until Jimin found me and proposed to me in an effort to fix things between our families. That was a few months ago, right before you showed up, actually.”
“Wait, what do you mean by a blood feud? What kind of families even do that?”

“Our families are different than you think,” Jeongguk offers up before falling silent. “I don’t know anything about what Jimin’s planning other than that,” Jeongguk says, looking at his phone for the twentieth time at least.

Taehyung lets the subject of their families drop, changing topic to a different concern weighing on him. “What are we going to do about the scandal?” He’d looked up the article on his phone, stomach sinking as he sees his face and parts of his body on full display in the pictures the tabloid had published.

He’d wanted to throw up, just a little.

“What do you mean? Nothing, really, until Jimin actually calls me back.”

“Doesn’t everyone think you’re still engaged though?” Taehyung asks. While he knows that Jimin and Jeongguk aren’t engaged anymore, the rest of the world was not privy to that development.

“Shit.” Jeongguk scrubs a hand down his face wearily. “I should probably fix that.”

“How?” Taehyung asks, curious.

Jeongguk smirks at him as he stands. “I know people,” he says, walking away to grab his laptop from the kitchen.

It takes Jeongguk exactly one two-minute phone call to set everything up. Taehyung doesn’t know if he’s impressed or terrified.

“Remember to stay quiet,” Jeongguk says, settling in his armchair with his laptop on his lap. “The last thing we need is them knowing you’re here with me.” He sets his mug of tea on the table next to him.

“Okay,” Taehyung says softly, falling silent as the sounds of a pending Skype call echo through Jeongguk’s loft.

“Hello?” greets a demure sounding voice.

“Hey Sunny,” Jeongguk greets. “It’s been a while, how are you?”

“I’m doing fine, Mr. Jeon, thank you for asking.”

“Please,” Jeongguk says, a charming smile stretching across his face. “My father is Mr. Jeon, call me Jeongguk. We’ve been through this before, Sunny.”

Taehyung rolls his eyes as Sunny giggles at Jeongguk’s charm, and makes sure Jeongguk sees him.

“I’m sure you’re a busy man, so I’ll get right to it,” Sunny begins. “In light of the recent news, how are you holding up?”

Taehyung watches as Jeongguk schools his face into a mask of careful neutrality. “I’m doing alright.”

Sunny makes a distressed sound. “It must be hard. All of us here at the magazine were rooting for the two of you. Have you talked to Jimin? Are you going to stay together?”
Taehyung watches Jeongguk summon emotion into his eyes, adopting a somber, stricken expression. He didn’t know Jeongguk was this good of an actor. Then again, he reasons, some of it is probably real emotion, just exaggerated.

“I have spoken with Jimin since the news broke. That’s in part why I agreed to speak with you. Jimin and I have decided to go our separate ways.”

“I see,” says Sunny. “And who broke it off?”

“I did,” Jeongguk says, letting a slight waver into his voice.


“I—” Jeongguk pauses, then looks directly at Taehyung. “I don’t think so. I’m pretty sure Jimin has already moved on from me.”

Well, doesn’t that make him feel guilty. He knows Jeongguk didn’t mean it to, but it does.

“I’m so sorry, Jeongguk,” Sunny says, sounding devastated. “Everyone is going to be sad to hear that.”

“I do want to say, and you can quote me on this, that I don’t harbor any ill-will toward Jimin. Our engagement is over, all plans are cancelled, and we are not together anymore.” He runs his hand through his hair, ruffling it slightly. “Sometimes people end up not being the right fit for each other, and ultimately that was me and Jimin. We had something good, but it wasn’t the absolute best thing for either of us.”

“But you always looked so happy together at events and in the press,” Sunny asks, sounding confused. “Was that not the case?”

Jeongguk shrugs. “We were definitely happy, but it’s always easier to put on the appearance of happiness in public, even if that’s not completely the case.”

“I see,” Sunny says. “Again, all of us are sorry for the way things have ended up, even though it sounds like you and Jimin have made your peace with a terrible situation, and we wish you the best moving forward.”

“Thank you, Sunny. I appreciate it.”

“Thank you for your time, Jeongguk.” Sunny says, before she ends the call.

Jeongguk heaves a sigh of relief as he shuts his computer. “I’m glad that’s done.” He gets up and picks up the untouched mug of tea on the side-table next to his armchair, walking over to the kitchen sink and dumping it down the drain. “I fucking hate tea.”

Taehyung can’t help the giggles the escape him at Jeongguk’s actions. “That’s so calculated, what the fuck?”

Jeongguk shrugs. “It’s all about perception, Tae.”

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The ambulance has come and gone, taking his father with it, and Jimin sends Martha and the household staff home. There’s no point in any of them staying here, now. There’s no one to take care of.
He heads for the liquor cabinet in his father’s study, knowing that he’ll find a bottle of bourbon there that’ll justify the numbness that he’s feeling. He shuffles down stairs and through hallways, tracing in reverse his father’s last steps, but when he arrives in front of the door to the study, he pulls up short.

The door is slightly ajar, and while his father may have left his study feeling unwell, he never would have left it open. He hears the quiet slam of a drawer being pushed shut, and he forces himself to focus. There’s someone intruding in his home—in his hour of grief—and Jimin is going to make them regret it.

He takes a deep breath, pushes the door the rest of the way open, and barges in. “What the fuck are you doing?” Jimin says, pouring animosity into his words.

The cook, Dami, jerks her head up at his outburst, halting her rifling through a stack of papers.

“Wait—you? What the hell?” Jimin spits, surprised. He isn’t sure who he expected to find, but it wasn’t her. “What are you doing going through my father’s things?”

Dami straightens, dropping her hands to her sides as Jimin steps nearer. Her mouth tightens into a thin line, her eyes hardening, and Jimin is once again hit by the sudden thought that she looks familiar.

It’s not that she’s worked for his father for the last year—Jimin’s hardly been at the family estate enough to know the new staff members, and when he had been here, the kitchen hadn’t been the place he’d spent his time—it’s the expression on her face that triggers his memory. He recognizes her from somewhere other than the kitchen, and he can’t place where.

“Why are you in my father’s office?” Jimin asks, his voice sharp.

“I… Your father said had our paychecks ready.” Her tongue darts quickly over her lower lip, and her eyes sink to the floor. “I know it’s bad form, but I need to refill my brother’s prescription tomorrow, and I don’t have enough—”

Her brother. Jimin’s frown lines furrow deeper into his forehead.

Her brother.

Jimin’s mind kicks into high gear, and suddenly her name clicks. Dami. Kwon Dami.

Fuck.

“You’re Kwon Dami,” he breathes, recognition dawning across his face.

Dami drops all pretenses and bolts for the door. Jimin lunges for her, snaking his fingers around her wrist and yanking her back. She turns, harnessing the momentum of Jimin’s pull, and slams her free fist into Jimin’s jaw.

The force of the impact sends Jimin backwards, and he stumbles over his feet. Dami chases him to the ground, raising her fist and slamming it into Jimin’s face again, and again.

“My brother said you’d be a pain in the ass,” she cackles. “But you’re just as defenseless as your father. Did you know? I switched out his medications, and nobody even noticed.” She smiles, the gesture a cold, spiteful thing, and pulls her fist back to hit him again.

Her words settle into Jimin, and as her fist comes down he feels—he feels—anger welling in the pit of his stomach. It surges upward, and Jimin realizes he’s had enough. He’s done with letting her
drive this fight. He’s done with letting her think she’s in control.

Emotions rush back into him like a river released from a dam, and he’s done.

He jerks his head to the side at the last minute, and Dami’s knuckles slam into the rug next to his ear. Jimin hits the inside of her elbow and she tumbles forward onto him. He presses his advantage, rolling them over and pinning her beneath him.

“Why?” he shrieks, his fist colliding with her cheekbone, fury spewing out of him at an uncontrollable rate. “Why would you do that?” He wrestles her arms beneath his knees, and grabs her chin, forcing her to look at him, and screams, “He was already dying! Why would you take him from me like this?”

“My brother will never forgive you for what you took from him,” she hisses, “and he won’t stop until both of you are completely alone.”

The thought is more than Jimin can handle, and he has to make her stop talking. He has to make her stop, so he funnels his rage and his fear and his grief and his guilt into his hands and he wraps them around her throat.

He squeezes, pressing down on her windpipe, forcing all of his crushing emotions through his grip. His fingers tighten, choking off her words at the source, stoppering the vitriol before she can spew forth any more. She struggles, kneeing him in the back, clawing at whatever skin her fingers can reach, thrashing under his weight, but he doesn’t let up.

He doesn’t let up until the light fades from her eyes and the fight leaves her limbs.

When he finally lets go, she isn’t breathing.

First, he panics.

He’s never gone this far before. He’s injured people before—he’s threatened and punished and hurt people—but he’s never killed someone. He’s never watched the life flicker out of someone’s eyes.

He’s never let his rage carry him so far.

It’s a rush he’s never experienced, and he’s terrified by how powerful it makes him feel.

He heads to his father’s liquor cabinet to dull the high.

Three shots of a very expensive bourbon later, Jimin feels a little steadier, but he has no fucking clue what to do with the corpse on the office floor.

He sighs, reaching for his phone, and dismisses the notification of a missed call from Yoongi in favor of returning the call from Jeongguk.

“Jimin, where have you been?” Jeongguk asks the second the call connects.

“At the family estate,” Jimin says, running his fingers through his hair. “Listen, I can’t really talk right now, but... just a theoretical question. If you had a body to dump, where would you do it?”

It’s silent on the other end of the call.
“Jeonggukie?”

“Yeah, I’m here, sorry,” Jeongguk replies hastily. “Ji—Ji—min, is everything okay?”

“Just tell me where, Jeongguk. I’ll catch you up when I get back into the city.”

“…The Hudson River. I’d weight it down and toss it in the middle of the Hudson. Ji—Ji—min—”

“Thanks, Jeonggukie. I’ll call you when I get home,” Ji—min says, pulling the phone from his ear. His thumb is hovering over the ‘end call’ icon when he hears Jeongguk speak.

“Just come to my place, okay? We’ve got some shit we need to talk about.”

Ji—min hesitates, then puts the phone back up to his ear and says, “Okay,” before hanging up.

He turns to Kwon Dami’s body, sighs, and gets to work.

Ji—min finishes tying the concrete blocks around her waist, and lifts her lifeless form up and over the back end of the boat. He watches as she disappears beneath the choppy waves, and then digs her phone out of his pocket. He scrolls through her contacts until he finds the one he needs, taking a moment to compose himself and remembering what he needs to accomplish.

Ji—min takes a breath, presses ‘dial’.

Her brother picks up on the second ring. “Dami, I thought we agreed you’d only call me if it’s an emergency,” he says.

“Well, if your sister’s body sinking to the bottom of the Hudson River doesn’t count as an emergency, I don’t know what would,” Ji—min replies.

“What the hell? Who is this?”

“You haven’t figured it out yet?” Ji—min laughs, and it sounds high and wild to his own ears. “I thought you were smarter than that.”

“Park Ji—min,” he seethes, anger slipping into his normally calm voice. “I didn’t think you had the balls to contact me directly.”

“Think again, asshole.” Ji—min counts the seconds in his head. He knows the phone call can’t last much longer. “You like fishing, right?” He doesn’t actually wait for an answer. “My father did. But he’s dead now, so your sister is, too. Good luck fishing her out of the river.”

“You fucki—”

Ji—min hangs up and powers down the phone, slipping it into his pocket, then restarts the boat’s motor and heads for shore.

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“—and that’s how I broke his arm when he was sixteen,” Jeongguk finishes, taking a sip of his drink while Taehyung laughs.

“You guys were terrible,” he wheezes. “But seriously, can you teach me some of that?”
Jeongguk looks at him, askance. “You want to learn Krav Maga?”

Taehyung shakes his head and takes another bite of the pizza Jeongguk had pulled out when they’d gotten hungry. “Nothing that intense. Just like, some basic self-defense in case—”

He breaks off at the sound of a passcode being entered into the keypad on the door of Jeongguk’s loft. They both turn, looking across the room at the door to see who’s entering this late.

“It’s probably—”

“Jimin!” Taehyung cries, dropping his pizza and scrabbling to get off the couch faster than his limbs want to move.

He stumbles across the room and straight into Jimin, wrapping his arms around Jimin’s shoulders and pulling him tight against himself. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

Jimin’s arms come around him slowly, hesitantly. “Taehyung?”

“I’m so glad you’re okay,” Taehyung whispers into Jimin’s neck. He almost apologizes for their fight, but he’s not ready to hash that out right this second and Jimin looks like he might need a second to process Taehyung’s presence here in the first place.

Jimin’s arms come around him more firmly, squeezing tightly. “I missed you so fucking much, Tae.”

“Jimin, what the hell is going on?” Jeongguk asks from his spot on the couch. “What happened at your father’s estate?”

Taehyung pulls away slightly, only to have Jimin yank him back against his chest and burying his face in Taehyung’s shoulder.

“What’s wrong?” Taehyung asks, alarmed, as Jimin’s shoulders begin to shake. Jimin just shakes his head, overcome with emotion and unable to speak.

Taehyung walks backwards and guides Jimin back onto the couch with him, arranging their bodies so that Jimin is sitting halfway in his lap, legs across Taehyung’s and his head pillowed against his shoulder.

“Jimin,” Jeongguk says softly as he scoots closer to them, reaching out to rest a hand on Jimin’s shin. “What happened?”

“My f-father,” Jimin chokes, fisting his hand in the front of Taehyung’s shirt. “He’s d-dead.”

“What?” Taehyung asks, shocked. He places a hand on Jimin’s trembling jaw and lifts his chin so that he can look into Jimin’s teary eyes. They’re filled to the brim with emotion that Taehyung can’t begin to separate.

“How?” Jeongguk asks, something off about his tone.

Taehyung cranes his neck to look at Jeongguk. He looks…worried, suspicious and confused all at once. Taehyung feels a coil of dread work its way into his heart because if Jeongguk’s worried it must be bad.

Jimin struggles to gain control of his breathing. Taehyung returns his hands to Jimin’s back, wrapping him up in his arms again and rubbing soothing circles into Jimin’s back.

“He was murdered,” Jimin finally spits out, his tears fading slightly with the rise of his anger.
“Somehow Kwon fucking Dami got onto the staff and switched out his pills.”

“What,” Jeongguk hisses, moving even closer to Taehyung in order to look Jimin directly in the eyes. Whatever he sees in Jimin’s eyes prompts him to ask: “What did you do, Jimin?”

“Killed Kwon Dami?”

“You did what?” Taehyung screeches, recoiling away from Jimin in disbelief.

“You did what?” Jeongguk echoes, significantly calmer than Taehyung currently feels given the situation.

“She killed my father—she said her brother wouldn’t stop until we were alone—fuck, do you know where your father is?” Jimin explains in a string of barely-connected thoughts.

“Fuck,” Jeongguk says in the same moment that Taehyung says: “You killed someone?”

“She attacked me first, Taehyung. It was self-defense,” Jimin soothes, trying to calm Taehyung.

Taehyung is still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that the man he’s in love with ended a life. He doesn’t quite understand how Jeongguk and Jimin are both so calm about this. He’s not sure he wants to understand.

“I need to go,” Jeongguk says, making to stand up. “Jimin,” he halts, leaning across Taehyung to place a hand at the nape of Jimin’s neck. “I’m so sorry about your father. Truly.” He stands and presses a kiss to Jimin’s forehead.

“Go,” Jimin urges, sniffing. “Check on your father. No sense in both of us losing our fathers.”

Jeongguk nods curtly and rushes out the door.

Jimin sighs shakily and turns back to Taehyung. “Are you okay?” he asks, like Taehyung is the one who’s just lost a parent and taken a life.

“I’m, uh, worried?” He pauses to think through his emotions. “Yeah, I’m worried.”

“Come on,” says Jimin, standing up. “Let’s go back to my place.”

“Okay,” Taehyung says, too dazed to do anything else but go along with Jimin, slightly relieved that Jimin has taken charge again, even if just for a moment. “Let’s go.”

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Jemin is relieved that it isn’t awkward at all when he and Taehyung step into his penthouse. He half expected it to be, with how much is still unsaid between him and Taehyung, but when Taehyung steps across the threshold, toes off his shoes, and hangs his coat, it’s like he’s home, and Jimin has never felt so at ease.

He hangs his own coat next to Taehyung’s, and turns to Taehyung wordlessly, reaching a hand out for him. Taehyung doesn’t hesitate to take it, but he says, “You know we still need to talk.”

Jimin nods. “I know. Let’s sit down.”

He leads Taehyung into the media room—it seems fitting that they resolve their fight in the same
room it took place—closes the blinds, and pulls Taehyung down onto the couch next to him.

He’s gathering his thoughts, trying to figure out what he needs to say, when Taehyung blurts out, “I didn’t mean what I said. About your mom. Especially—especially today, I need you to know that I could never have said that and meant it. I know how important your parents were to you, and I know how much you loved them. How much you still love them. And I—fuck. I’m rambling. I’m sorry. I’m just so, so sorry, Jimin.”

Jimin can feel his grief edging its way back in, and he dives for shelter in the safety of Taehyung’s arms. He takes deep, shuddering breaths, and fights back the tears. He’s had enough of those for one day.

“Thank you,” Jimin says into Taehyung’s chest. “I know you didn’t mean it.” He wraps his arms around Taehyung’s waist, and scoots a little closer.

“Did you really give all that money to relocate everyone in my building?” Taehyung asks, settling back into the cushions and tugging Jimin with him into a more comfortable cuddle.

“Yeah,” Jimin says. “I should have done it before you had to say something. This life…this life that my parents dragged me into isn’t good, Tae. I need you to keep me on the straight and narrow. I need you to tell me when I’m taking it too far, to keep me from crossing the line. I just—I need you.”

“You need me?” Taehyung asks, and Jimin can hear the way his breath catches in his throat. He sits up a little, facing Taehyung, and says, “Of course I need you. Tae, you’re the reason I’m sane, right now. You’re the reason my chest doesn’t feel like it’s caved in, the reason I can still breathe even with everything that happened today. You’re literally the only family I have left.” He reaches up, and drags his fingertips down Taehyung’s jawline. “You are my everything, Kim Taehyung.”

A small smile plays on Taehyung’s lips, and Jimin can’t help it. He leans in and kisses Taehyung, parting his lips and nibbling on that smile until it dissolves in the urgency of Jimin’s hunger. He shimmies upward, swinging his leg over Taehyung’s and crawling into his lap. He shapes his lips around Taehyung’s, pressing greedily for more, licking into Taehyung’s mouth with a need that he doesn’t know how to temper, leaning into Taehyung’s chest and wrapping his arms around Taehyung’s neck to pull him closer.

Taehyung responds with a groan, falling open with ease as Jimin closes the distance between them, and it’s good. It’s warm and familiar and comforting and good, and Jimin can’t get enough. Taehyung’s hands find their way onto Jimin’s body, one hand sliding up his hip and under his shirt to burn little caresses into Jimin’s skin, the other hand cupping Jimin’s face in the softest gesture of affection.

Jimin shivers under the conflicting touches, and slides his lips down along Taehyung’s jaw, tracing the sharp line to his earlobe. His tongue snakes out to toy with Taehyung’s earrings, and Jimin pulls at them gently with his teeth as he grinds his hardening cock down against Taehyung’s hips.

Taehyung shakes, a full-body shudder working its way out from his core to his limbs, and he peels Jimin off, pushing just gently enough to create a little space between them, and Jimin turns surprised eyes on Taehyung.

“Tae, what’s wrong?” Jimin asks. He fights the insecurity that wells up inside him—he buries it, because not everything is about him—but after everything that’s happened today, it’s hard. It’s hard to accept that Taehyung is pushing him away.
“I— I don’t know Jimin. I’m not really in the mood for— I don’t—” Taehyung sighs in frustration, and tries again. “What you did today—I’m still not okay with it.” Taehyung says, pulling further away, his head falling back onto the backrest of the couch. His hand falls away from Jimin’s hip, and Jimin feels the comfort he’d gained from Taehyung’s care begin to crumble.

“I’m not saying you were wrong,” Taehyung adds hastily, “I’m just saying—” He huffs another sigh. “I don’t know what I’m saying.”

No. Jimin needs this. He needs to feel like the things he’s done were for something. He needs to feel like he has something good left.

He needs Taehyung.

He struggles with his internal panic, pushing it away and scrambling for an answer, for anything that’ll keep Taehyung here, with his arms wrapped around Jimin.

He says the first thing that comes into his head, for better or worse.

“They punish me for it,” Jimin says, brushing his fingers up the nape of Taehyung’s neck and lifting his head just enough that he can meet Taehyung’s eyes. “If you think I did something wrong, then you’re probably right, and I need to be punished.”

Taehyung’s eyes go wide. “Punished? Jimin, I—”

“Please, Tae,” Jimin says, and hears more of his desperation in his voice than he’d like. “I’ll do whatever you want, whatever it takes for you to stay. Please, just don’t leave me alone tonight. I can’t—” Jimin chokes off his words before they can choke him.

“Shhh, okay. Okay, Jimin,” Taehyung says, worry lodging in his gaze. “I’m not going anywhere. I’m not gonna leave you alone, okay?” He wraps his arms around Jimin’s waist and tugs Jimin back against himself, and the tightness in Jimin’s chest loosens a bit as he tucks himself into Taehyung’s embrace.

Jemin takes a deep breath, pushing back the emotions crowding this moment and focusing on the feel of Taehyung’s arms around him.

“Just—I’m not sure about punishing—” Taehyung mumbles, and Jimin can feel the way he swallows hard against the idea.

“I think I need it,” Jimin whispers against Taehyung’s neck. “I think we need it, to put this…thing behind us.” Against the desire of every fiber of his being, Jimin pulls back to look Taehyung in the eyes. “We can’t let this sit between us. I can’t let it. I need you too much.”

Taehyung’s eyes soften, and he blows out a deep breath. “Okay. What, uh…what do you have in mind?”

Jemin considers. He knows what he wants most, and he doesn’t want to tell Taehyung because he doesn’t want it taken away, but punishment is most effective if it’s tailored to the person it’s meant for, so…honesty, it is. “I want to be close to you. I want to hold onto you with everything I’ve got and make you feel good. I want to show you what you mean to me.”

Taehyung looks at him blankly for the span of five heartbeats, and then says, “Uh…so I’m not supposed to give you those things? Because—”

Jemin chokes back a giggle at how lost Taehyung looks before throwing him a bone. He can’t come
up with his own punishment—that’s not how it works—but he can give Taehyung a hint. “The best punishments raise the stakes while denying what the person being punished wants most.”

It’s quiet for a few moments as Taehyung considers, and then he nudges at Jimin’s hips, sliding him sideways onto the couch cushion. “I’ll be right back,” he says, and Jimin’s curiosity furrows his brow.

A minute and a half later, Taehyung returns to the media room with a black box the size of a large shoebox in his hands, and Jimin’s eyebrows shoot through the roof.

“How did you find that?” he asks as Taehyung sets the box down and peels the lid off.

“Remember that day you left me cooped up in your bedroom all day and I didn’t have anything to do? I may have snooped a little bit.”

“Tae.” Jimin feels a blush creep up his cheeks.

Taehyung shrugs with a smirk. “I learned an awful lot about you from the contents of your closet, and even more from the box under your side of the bed.” He roots around in the box for a second then holds up a pink glass butt plug, the base of it shaped into a blossomed flower. “Pink and flowery, Jimin?”

Jimin’s blush completes its expansion across his features, and he says, “It was for a dare.”

Taehyung tries to hide a grin as he drops it gently back into the box. He peruses the other objects in the box for a second or two, and then looks up at Jimin. “Well, what are you waiting for? Strip.”

The way the word ‘strip’ rolls off Taehyung’s tongue, definitely more command than request, makes Jimin twitch in excitement, and peels off his clothes layer by layer, taking his time—not putting on a show, no, but just slow enough to be teasing.

Taehyung glances up from the contents of the box every few seconds, taking note of his progress, but doesn’t let his eyes linger, and it sends tendrils of frustration through Jimin. When he’s down to bare skin, he lays a tentative hand on Taehyung’s shoulder, but Taehyung removes it. It’s a gentle reprimand, making it clear that he’s not upset by the touch but definitely setting a boundary that Jimin isn’t supposed to cross again.

Nervous because he doesn’t know the rules, Jimin sits on the couch next to the box, and tucks his palms together between his knees, studying his hands as he tries to sort out where Taehyung is going with this. He doesn’t mean to hide himself with the gesture, but he can’t deny that he’s feeling a little self-conscious.

“What are the rules?” he asks.

“You don’t get to touch,” Taehyung says, “yourself or me.”

This punishment already sounds hideous and Jimin experiences a flash of regret for recommending it in the first place.

“You don’t get to look me in the eyes,” Taehyung continues, and Jimin cringes internally. “And you don’t get to come until I say so.”

Jimin swallows down his apprehension. This is so much more than he expected out of Taehyung, and he’s not sure it sounds like a good idea, after all—he feels too fragile to take on this many rules, but he’s the one that suggested they clear the air this way, so he sucks in a breath, and says, “We…
we should have a safe word for this kind of punishment.”

His words come out quiet and careful, and Taehyung nods and clears his throat. “Uh…you pick?”

Jimin has always used ‘mochi’ with Jeongguk, but something about using the same safe word with Taehyung as he did with Jeongguk doesn’t sit right, not when they’re trying to build something different. He casts his gaze around, looking for inspiration, and his eyes land on the embroidered snake on the collar of his shirt.

“Gucci,” he says on impulse. His eyes dart toward Taehyung’s, but he remembers in the last moment that he can’t look Taehyung in the eyes, so he drops his gaze to Taehyung’s throat instead. He watches Taehyung’s Adam’s apple bob as he agrees, watches his lips quirk up in an amused smile, and reminds himself that he can still look at Taehyung, still follow his expressions and body language to know how he’s feeling—how Jimin is making him feel—even if Jimin isn’t allowed to meet his eyes.

It’ll be enough.

“Lay down on your back,” Taehyung says as he moves the box to the floor, and Jimin obeys, making himself comfortable on the plush sofa. Taehyung walks over to the doorway and dims the lights. He doesn’t turn them off entirely—he’ll still be able to tell if Jimin breaks the rules and makes eye contact, and he’ll definitely be able to tell if Jimin touches himself—but it’s enough to set the mood.

Taehyung kneels on the couch between Jimin’s knees, and Jimin lets them fall open wide, drawing a pleased hum from Taehyung. Taehyung lets his fingertips graze over the taut skin of the joint, slowly dragging them up the inside of Jimin’s thigh. Jimin tingles under the caress, and he feels his cock stir again.

He closes his eyes, tucking his hand into the cleft between the cushion and the back of the couch and curling his fingers into the fabric as Taehyung teases him slow and steady. His fingers ghost along the crook of Jimin’s hip before they sink lower, tracing along his hardening cock with delicate strokes. Jimin shivers against the barely-there sensation, focusing on how it feels to have Taehyung’s undivided attention.

It’s something he never wants to take for granted.

Because his eyes are closed, he’s entirely unprepared when Taehyung’s fingers, gliding up and down his cock, are replaced with his tongue. He gasps at the warm, wet slide, Taehyung’s tongue caressing along the vein on the underside of his cock in one slow, wide stripe, and Jimin’s free hand jerks against the cushion beneath him, desperate to settle on the back of Taehyung’s head and push him down farther onto Jimin’s cock.

Jimin slides his hand underneath his lower back, palm down against the cushion and pretends he’s winding his fingers through Taehyung’s hair.

Taehyung’s mouth takes Jimin deeper, and he quivers as the head of his cock hits the back of Taehyung’s throat and Taehyung swallows around it. Jimin wants to look at Taehyung, wants to watch his cock disappear between Taehyung’s lips, but he’s afraid to look, afraid that he’ll catch Taehyung glancing up at him to gauge his reaction and accidentally break the rules.

Jimin is determined not to break Taehyung’s rules.

The audible snap of the lube bottle opening shakes his determination a little, and the first press of a
finger against his hole shakes it harder. Jimin hasn’t looked at Taehyung once, keeping his eyes closed and his head turned to the side to fight the temptation to watch Taehyung suck his cock, but when Taehyung’s mouth pulls away and is replaced with strong, agile fingers, Jimin allows himself to peek.

What he sees makes him groan.

It’s hot, Taehyung’s long fingers, slicked with lube, gliding up and down Jimin’s cock lazily as his other hand pumps a finger languidly in and out of Jimin’s hole, but the bulge in the front of Taehyung’s jeans is hotter.

Taehyung obviously wants Jimin, and it’s all Jimin can do to keep his fingers from releasing the couch cushions and reaching for Taehyung. All Jimin wants is to be wanted, to be needed, to return someone’s affection tenfold. To know that he’s not alone.

He snaps his eyes closed again, and swallows past the rush of emotions. He focuses on the way Taehyung feels inside him, the pleasant stretch as Taehyung pushes a second finger in to join the first. He focuses on the fact that Taehyung is here, that he cares enough about Jimin to push his own boundaries, to think up this punishment, as wretched as it is, for the sake of their comfort together. He cares enough about Jimin to be gentle, even as he adds a third finger and presses into Jimin’s prostate.

Jimin sees stars as Taehyung massages that sensitive spot, and none of them are as bright as the affection Taehyung is showing him.

The pad of Taehyung’s thumb caresses the head of Jimin’s cock, wiping away the pre-cum that’s beading there, adding to the overwhelming sensations that are driving Jimin insane, and he closes his eyes against them, squeezing them shut in an effort to stave off the orgasm that he can feel building in his gut.

When Taehyung’s teeth find the inside of Jimin’s thigh and bite down, both of his hands moving in a single rhythm that escalates at a dizzying pace, Jimin knows he’s about to break.

“Tae, I’m—” he gasps out, a distant part of his brain screaming the third rule against the tightening in his balls, “I’m gonna come—please, can I—”

The hand on Jimin’s cock immediately stops and pinches the base hard, and Jimin’s orgasm screeches to a halt before it’s begun. The sound that had been building in his throat bursts out of him, more of a sob than a cry of pleasure now that he’s been denied his release, but the fingers Taehyung has buried inside him don’t slow out of sympathy, not until Jimin has squeezed his eyes closed again and turned his face into the back of the couch, his panting evening out as the overwhelming urge to come passes.

Then Taehyung’s fingers slide free of Jimin’s body, and the grip on his cock eases, and Jimin is left empty for an uncomfortable stretch of time—only seconds, he’s sure, but even one second is a second too long—before something firm and cool presses against him.

The pressure only lasts for a moment before the head of the dildo pushes inside, and Taehyung doesn’t stop to let Jimin get his bearings.

He pushes the toy inside, and the glide is steady and slow, but unrelenting. Taehyung buries it fully inside Jimin in one smooth, unhurried, stroke, and Jimin’s mouth falls open in a thick groan.

Taehyung works the toy back and forth, his other hand idly stroking Jimin’s length as he fucks him
deep. It’s good—it’s fucking amazing, honestly—but it’s not Taehyung’s cock, and Jimin hates the way his body doesn’t care. He hates the way pre-cum pools on his abdomen, the way his breath catches in his throat as Taehyung rubs the head of the dildo against his prostate. He hates the way his orgasm begins to build again.

Taehyung fucks him slowly but insistently, the rhythm of the dildo’s strokes almost painfully leisurely and demanding, and it doesn’t take long at all for Jimin’s orgasm to grow and take hold.

He tries desperately to hold it back, to push it down, to keep it from taking over him, but Taehyung knows exactly how to work him up. Jimin whimpers as it nears, and this time Taehyung figures it out before Jimin can warn him.

He squeezes the base of Jimin’s cock again, tightly, and it hurts, how badly Jimin needs to come. He blinks against the tears welling in his eyes and tries to shove his pressing need away. He opens his mouth to beg Taehyung to just let him come, please, but before he can push words past his lips, Taehyung twists the grip of the dildo, and the vibrator embedded in its head hums to life.

Jimin’s cry echoes through the room as his back arches off the cushions, his fingers clawing against cushioned fabric and the tears in his eyes squeezing out through his eyelashes. He writhes and Taehyung grips his cock hard, holding back the orgasm that Jimin desperate needs to let loose.

“Tae, please, please,” he hears himself beg. “Please, n-need you, Tae. Want you so b-bad, it hurts—” His words come out a broken sob, and he wants nothing so much as he wants to break all three of Taehyung’s rules. He needs more than this—this half intimacy. He needs to wrap himself around Taehyung and love him properly.

Taehyung slides the dildo in with almost ruthless efficiency, and Jimin shakes with sensitivity, the particularly firm thrust against his abused prostate sending him into a full-body spasm as he sobs for release. Taehyung doesn’t expect the movement and he swears as the dildo slips in his hand, unintentionally twisting the vibrator’s control and increasing the speed.

Jimin gasps, tears streaking down the side of his face and catching in his ears, and he cries, “F-fuck, Tae, please. I c-can’t—” He hiccups, his breath coming in stuttering gulps, and manages one more disjointed ‘pl-please’ before Taehyung breaks.

“Gucci,” Taehyung pants. “Gucci, Jimin.” He abandons the punishment, turning off the vibrations and pulling the dildo out. He drops it carelessly to the floor, then cups his palm against Jimin’s cheek before sliding his hand around to the nape of Jimin’s neck. He keeps one hand tight around the base of Jimin’s cock—and thank fuck because Jimin still feels like he’s about to explode into tiny fragments of himself—and pulls Jimin toward him.

Jimin struggles against him for a moment before the word ‘Gucci’ properly sinks in, because he’s desperate not to make Taehyung mad at him for breaking the rules, but as soon as he realizes the punishment is over, he lunges upward wrapping his arms around Taehyung’s shoulders and sobbing into his neck.

“It’s over, Jimin, I’m sorry, I’m so, so sorry—” Taehyung says, hugging him as close as their awkward position allows. “I never want to hurt you, Jimin, never, I’m so sorry.”

Jimin shakes in relief at Taehyung’s words; he knows this—he knows—but he feels so removed from Taehyung’s affection. He knows it’s there, but he needs to feel it for himself.

Taehyung must sense Jimin’s fragility in the way his body shudders, because he lets go of Jimin’s aching cock and pulls him the rest of the way upright, settling back on his heels with Jimin in his lap.
Jimin clings to Taehyung, and Taehyung wraps his arms tightly around Jimin’s body as he presses soft kisses against Jimin’s temple. After a second, he asks softly, “What do you need, Jiminie? How can I make it better?”

And Jimin already knows the answer. “Need you close,” he says, trying to get control over the quiver in his voice, “Need to hold you.” He pulls away enough to make eye contact with Taehyung, the first since they began his punishment and the intensity, the rawness of emotion that he finds there, floors him.

Jimin feels like an addled mess, nerves sparking haywire throughout his whole body, but the passion and respect and devotion and fondness that he finds in Taehyung’s gaze grounds him. He feels alive and cherished and desired just as he is—the scattered ruin that he is—and his heart pounds in his chest.

He plunges forward, catching Taehyung’s lips with his own.

It’s sloppy and desperate, all teeth and tongues and sucking on lips. It’s everything Jimin can pour into the kiss, all of himself and then more, everything his missed about Taehyung in the week they’ve been apart, all of his fear and loneliness and regret, and it’s returned.

Taehyung pulls him closer, holds him tighter, like Jimin is too far away even with no space between them. His lips move on Jimin’s with a demand that Jimin’s never experienced from Taehyung before, and it’s hot. It’s hot as fuck.

Jimin breaks the kiss, pulling away and squirming backwards in Taehyung’s lap, his cock hanging heavily between them, his erection insistent now that Jimin can have what he wants. His hands dive for the button on Taehyung’s jeans, tearing it open and yanking the zipper down as he lifts his hips out of the way.

“Wanna ride you,” Jimin pants, and Taehyung groans, his lips diving frantically for Jimin’s neck. The open-mouthed kisses Taehyung places up and down the curve of his skin are hot and wet and the shaking in Jimin’s limbs resumes.

“Wanna come on your cock,” Jimin whimpers, pushing helplessly at the waist of Taehyung’s jeans in his frenzy. “Please, Tae—” he begs, and he doesn’t have to ask again.

Taehyung shifts sideways, swinging his legs out from beneath him and planting his feet on the floor, and Jimin moves with him, rising up on his knees as Taehyung lifts his hips off the cushion and pushes his jeans and boxer briefs down.

He only gets them halfway down his thighs, before Jimin is scrambling for the bottle of lube, practically falling sideways off Taehyung’s lap in his haste to fetch it from the box on the floor.

Taehyung catches him, his hands firm on Jimin’s waist as Jimin twists nimbly and sits back upright, victorious. He pops the cap open, squeezes lube into his hand, and barely waits for Taehyung to pull his shirt over his head before he has Taehyung’s cock in his hand. He slicks it quickly, and Taehyung shimmies forward to the edge of the couch, and Jimin—

Jimin can’t wait anymore. He lines himself up and sinks down.

A shared shudder rips through them as Jimin fully seats himself on Taehyung, and as soon as it has passed, Jimin gets to work.

He’s not entirely sure where the sudden steadiness in his limbs has come from, but he’s doesn’t care enough to actually wonder. He just lifts himself up and slams his ass back down onto Taehyung,
again, and again, and is grateful for his sexual endurance.

It doesn’t take long for Taehyung to start thrusting up into him as Jimin falls back onto Taehyung’s cock—as best as Taehyung can with his pants still caught around his thighs, anyway—and Jimin’s mouth falls open in a silent moan. It’s so good—he’s so full, Taehyung’s so perfect—and he chases their release with reckless ferocity. He winds his hands back around Taehyung’s neck as he bounces on Taehyung’s cock, twisting his fingers through the short hairs at the nape of Taehyung’s neck, and he doesn’t hold back when his silent moans turn vocal and breathy.

The force of their bodies colliding drives out sharp, half-formed cries that Jimin didn’t know he had in him, and Taehyung’s fingers dig into his hips, and Jimin needs it—he needs to be close in this most primal, intimate way—needs to feel Taehyung’s cum shooting into him, hot and insistent—so he bends forward, keeping their frantic pace as best as he can as he molds his lips to Taehyung’s and swallows Taehyung’s gravelly moans in a determined kiss.

Taehyung grips Jimin tighter, pushing up into Jimin and hitting his prostate with deadly accuracy, and Jimin sucks in a breath and stutters out, “L-love you, Taehyung,” against Taehyung’s lips. That’s all it takes, and then Taehyung is bucking up into him one more time, his release pouring into Jimin and pushing Jimin over the edge.

Cum splatters against their stomachs as Jimin shakes through his orgasm, and Taehyung wraps a hand around Jimin’s cock and strokes him gently through it, the rhythm of his hips faltering as he milks himself dry inside Jimin.

Jumin all but collapses onto Taehyung, and Taehyung’s hands slide up his bare back, rubbing soft circles into Jimin’s bare skin as they try to catch their breath.

They’re silent for a long moment, their ragged inhalations through scratchy throats the only sound in the room, and then Taehyung whispers, “Did you mean it?”

Shakily, Jimin pushes himself upright.

The high from his orgasm is making everything hazy, but Jimin is absolutely certain of his answer. “Yes,” he says, pressing his lips chastely to Taehyung’s. “I meant it.”

Taehyung swallows visibly and his eyes squeeze shut against the torrent of emotion sweeping across his features, and then he opens his eyes, meets Jimin’s gaze, and says, “I love you too.”

The warmth and softness and sheer happiness that Jimin sees in Taehyung’s eyes feels like a reflection of his own, and it feels like coming home.

Dozens of lazy, contented kisses later, Jimin and Taehyung peel themselves apart. Too tired to trudge back through the house to Jimin’s bedroom, they clean up quickly in the bathroom off the media room, drop the vibrator in the sink for washing later, and tug a blanket from the closet before heading back to the couch.

They pull on random pieces of clothing against the chill in the room on their way—Taehyung ends up ditching his jeans in favor of Jimin’s shirt, and Jimin pulls on his slacks—and then they curl around each other, and tuck themselves in under the blanket.

Satisfied and comfortable and sleepy, they fall into slumber twined together.
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW—Jeon Heir Jeongguk Ends Engagement Over Cheating Scandal

By Sunny Burss

Sitting down with Jeon Jeongguk over Skype feels like catching up with an old friend. Jeongguk, who insists I use his given name, relaxes in a cozy armchair with a steaming mug of tea close at hand. He smiles sweetly, if a little sadly, when I ask him how he’s doing. He claims to be doing alright, but it’s hard to say how much of that is simply bravado.

Only yesterday, news broke that Park Jimin, Jeongguk’s fiancé of about two months, was caught sleeping with another man. The leak was shocking, but until now, the future of the power couple’s relationship was unclear.
We can now exclusively confirm that Jeongguk has broken off their engagement. “I don’t harbor any ill-will toward Jimin,” Jeongguk says gracefully. “Sometimes people end up not being the right fit for each other, and ultimately that was me and Jimin.”

The marriage between Jeongguk and Park Jimin would have united two old, powerful families. The histories of the Jeon and Park dynasties are woven into the history of this very city. In preparation for the union, actions have been taken to merge many of the family businesses. How this new development will affect the relationship between the two families remains to be seen.

Jeongguk insists that the split was amicable, but it’s hard not to hold some resentment toward Park Jimin. The young business mogul, who burst onto the scene only a few years ago, has always presented an honest face to the public. He donates regularly to charities, and promotes a variety of local issues. The revelation that he also engages in
infidelity leads this reporter to doubt his character. How much of his public life is genuine, and how much is just for the cameras?

Little is known about Kim Taehyung, the man with whom Park was caught. The young bartender, who works at a New York club owned by Park, has been notoriously elusive since the story first broke. Attempts to contact him for comment on this story were met with silence. Whoever he is, his actions bear at least part of the blame for breaking up the city’s golden couple.

When reached out to for comment, a spokesperson for Park said simply, “Jimin is taking some time for himself, and appreciates your respect for his privacy.”

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“Jimin?” Jeongguk shouts from somewhere in his apartment. Probably near the elevator entrance, if Jimin’s hearing is correct.

He doesn’t bother answering, not with Taehyung wrapped around him snugly and asleep, an episode of house hunters playing softly in the background. Jeongguk will find them soon enough, and Jimin doesn’t want to wake Taehyung until he has to.

“Jimin?” Jeongguk calls again, nearing their location in the media room.

Jimin waits until Jeongguk peeks his head around the doorway, then lifts his hand in greeting and pointing to the still-sleeping Taehyung. “What’s going on?” he asks Jeongguk, voice hushed.

Jimin reaches for the remote and turns off the TV.

Taehyung stirs, blinking awake and yawning. “What’s going on?” he asks around the end of his yawn. “Jeongguk?” he asks blearily. “Why are you here? Is your dad okay?”

Jimin stretches and presses a kiss to Taehyung’s cheek. Even sleepy and confused, Taehyung is caring to a fault.

“He’s okay,” says Jeongguk, coming over and sitting down by their heads. “Jimin, we need to talk.”
Jimin groans as he works his way into a sitting position, rearranging Taehyung until his head is pillowed in Jimin’s lap so that Jimin can talk with Jeongguk. “What about?”

“Remember when you proposed? You asked me to trust you, and you said you’d explain when the time was right.” He pauses. “That time is now, Jimin. I need to know what the fuck is going on.”

Jimin idly runs his fingers through Taehyung’s hair and sighs. Taehyung traces small patterns on Jimin’s thigh with his finger.

Jimin’s not eager to explain, to lay it all bare, and in front of Taehyung, no less, but Yoongi’s words about being open with Taehyung resurface in his mind, and he knows Jeongguk is right. It’s time.

He eyes the scar on Jeongguk’s cheek as he takes a moment to collect his thoughts, and starts at the beginning—
that you're understanding when it takes us a while to post the next chapter. We promise we'll work on it as quickly as we can, but our physical and emotional health is something we won't compromise for the sake of speed. Additionally, we want to make sure the end of this story is as good as the lead in. You all deserve that.

Thank you, and we love you.
-Kiki and Callie

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter

Find Callie on Tumblr | Twitter | Discord
Inception

Chapter Summary

They ignore each other’s tears out of politeness as the urn passes to Jimin, and he wraps his arms around it carefully, cradling it against his body as he turns back to the quiet storm outside. It’s dwarfed by the storm inside, and as Jimin sits there, with a fist full of ashes and a heart that he can’t even use, all he can think is that this is the last time he’ll hold her so close.

Chapter Notes

okay, so we're finally back! sorry for the long wait--our travels are now complete, and so is this 29k word monster of a chapter, thank goodness. (when i read the word count for this chapter out loud to Kiki in our voice chat, she actually choked.) [I was eating a quesadilla from Taco Bell and wasn't ready -Kiki]

anyway, thank you for being so patient with us. y'all are wonderful human beings.

that said, we're probably about to make you cry. grab some tissues and a warm blanket to wrap up in, and enjoy. <3
-callie

PS, warning for underage sex: both participants are under the age of 18, and are consenting. just a fair warning in case you're squeamish.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His first night in his parent’s house is terrifying.

The house creaks and groans in unfamiliar ways, and it’s so big that Jimin is legitimately afraid he’ll get lost trying to find a bathroom. Jimin hardly sleeps, shifting restlessly on an unfamiliar, too-big bed, and as the minutes tick by, he feels smaller and smaller, and more alone.

In the morning, when his mother asks him how he slept, he doesn’t answer, not directly. Instead, he gathers his courage and says, “I want to see Taehyung.”

“Who?” his father asks, lowering his paper to look at Jimin.

Jimin swallows under the weight of his annoyance.

“My—my friend,” he says. “He lives—lived next door to me.”

“No,” his father replies curtly, lifting the paper to resume his reading and cutting off his intimidating gaze.

Jimin doesn’t look up again during the meal.
Afterward, when his father has left the table, his mother pats his shoulder consolingly and whispers an apology. “I can’t go against your father and let you see your friend, Jimin, but maybe you’ll meet him again someday.”

It seems like a pipe dream, but Jimin latches onto it, holding it in his heart as something precious.

At first, Jimin is afraid to touch her. He’s afraid that if he tries, if he reaches out to wrap his arms around her, that she won’t be real.

He’s had dreams like this before, dreams where he has parents—where he has a father and a mother who help him with his homework and come to parent/teacher conferences, who take him to movies and plan birthday parties and yell at him to turn the volume down on his video games.

When he gets these things—well, some of these things, because his father isn’t exactly like he’d expected—it doesn’t feel real. Especially because his mother is exactly like he’d expected.

She’s all that he’d dreamed of—what the exception that she attends parent/tutor conferences because he’s to be homeschooled until he’s caught up—and more.

She buys him a whole closet full of the nicest clothes he’s ever seen, invents a silly song to help him remember the names of all the extra forks at a place setting, and makes a game out of straightening his posture. It’s surreal, and he’s afraid if he reaches out to embrace this dream he’s living—to embrace her—that he’ll wake up and it’ll all be over.

It’s Jeongguk that helps convince him it’s real.

In the beginning, Jeongguk sort of ignores Jimin—a live-and-let-live policy, Jimin supposes. Jimin tries to stay out of his way, but their mothers are friends so they end up spending more time together than either of them expects, and Jeongguk’s indifference wears thin under the constant stream of smiles that Jimin wears.

Jeongguk’s the only one that realizes that Jimin’s smiles don’t reach his eyes, and with an exaggerated sigh, he takes it upon himself to fix that. The Jeongguk that Jimin met that first night with his parents—the Jeongguk that promised Jimin he wasn’t alone—resurfaces, and Jimin suddenly doesn’t have any free time to himself. Jeongguk is always there, helping Jimin with his lessons and teasing him over the smallest things, and Jimin’s new life starts to feel more familiar and less like an undeserved dream. A tightness that Jimin hadn’t realized he was carrying around begins to unwind, and Jimin slowly settles into his new home and his new role.

It’s four months after Jeongguk’s companionship becomes a constant fixture in Jimin’s life—and almost a year after he comes to live with his parents—when he hugs his mother for the first time. He doesn’t realize he’s going to do it until it’s done, and she looks just as surprised at the sudden affection as he feels, but he doesn’t let go of her, and she wraps her arms around him in return.

After that, he hugs his mom a lot.

“What are you doing?” Jimin asks, peeking around the corner into the kitchen. It’s a room he hasn’t been encouraged to visit, and with the household staff catering to his every whim in the year and a half since he returned to his parents—Martha, in particular can’t seem to get enough of spoiling him rotten—he hasn’t really needed to fend for himself, food-wise. He’s always dismissed the kitchen as the staff’s territory, so he’s surprised that his search for his mother has lead him here.
“I’m making lunch, Jimin,” she replies, and this makes Jimin pause.

It’s an obvious answer, with pans and ingredients spread across the stovetop and countertop around her, but he’s still caught off-guard by it. He’s never seen his mother cook before. He didn’t even know she knew how.

“But Martha does the cooking—” he says, and his mother laughs at his apparent confusion.

“She’s on vacation, Jimin, so it’s my turn.” She winks at him. “Do you want to help?”

“Uh—”

She laughs again, and pats the countertop just to her right. “Come on, then. I still have a bunch of ingredients to prepare, and I could use another set of hands.”

It’s been so long since he’s been made to help in the kitchen—and even then he was always on dishes duty, rather than being a part of the cooking process—but his mother gives him easy tasks with simple directions, and when she asks something more complicated of him, she demonstrates what she wants him to do.

They make a good team.

She shows him how to hold the knife—and how to hold his fingers out of the way—and starts him chopping a carrot into matchsticks size strips, while she busies herself with other ingredients. When he shoves aside the cut carrot and sets his knife down, she asks, “You ready for the pickled radish?”

“The what?” Jimin asks, his forehead crinkling in concern. He’s not sure he’s interested in any meal that has radishes in it.

“Yellow pickled radish,” she repeats, sprinkling a little salt over the carrots and mixing it in. “You can’t make kimbap without it.”

“Kimbap?”

“Kimbap,” his mother affirms. “It looks kind of like sushi, but it’s not quite the same.”

“Oh,” Jimin says, still not sure exactly what the end product will be. “Does it have raw fish in it?” He’s still not entirely sold on the idea of sushi.

“Nope. No fish at all,” his mother smiles. He watches with fascination as she rinses the cooked spinach under cool water and then wrings it out—*weird*—before adding, “I know you like beef better.”

Jimin flushes. It’s happening more and more lately, his mother knowing things about him without having to ask, and he’s still getting used to how it feels like they’re becoming a family.

“Um. So. The radish?” he asks.

“Right! The radish.” His mother sets aside the spinach, pulls a long slender yellow thing from its plastic packaging, and instructs him to slice it in long narrow strips the thickness of his finger. “It’s called ‘danmuji’ in Korean. Have you ever had it before?”

Jimin shakes his head no. “I mean—I don’t think so. Unless you’ve made it before?”

“Hmm,” she considers. “I don’t think I have since you came to live with us. Your father doesn’t care for it, so neither Martha nor I cook with it often. But he’s out of town today and it’s just you and me,
so I figured we could do something different.”

“What’s it taste like?” Jimin asks warily.

“Try it and find out,” she teases.

Skeptical, he chops off a tiny chunk and eyes it with suspicion. Hesitantly, he puts the piece of pickled radish between his lips and chews. His nose wrinkles up.

His mother laughs. “Not to your liking?”

“No, it’s okay,” Jimin says, assessing the flavor. “I just didn’t expect it to be kind of sweet.”

She smiles at him, proud he’s willing to try something new, and minces cloves of garlic to toss in with the spinach.

They work side by side, making small talk as they go. Jimin doesn’t pay particularly close attention to the cooking itself—just enough not to cut himself or ruin the food—and instead watches his mother as she slices and marinates the beef.

He’s lived with her for a year and half now, and he knows that her eyes narrow into crescents when she smiles widely, and that her nose wrinkles up when she laughs, and that her bangs fall into her eyes all the time and the tiniest flick of her head puts them back into place, and it’s all familiar by now but Jimin can’t get enough of it. He has a mother, and she’s beautiful.

“Oh, it’s time for the eggs. Can you crack three of them into that bowl?”

He jerks out of his reverie, reaching for the egg carton and doing as she asks, digging a piece of shell out of the bowl sheepishly when she isn’t looking. She shows him how to beat the eggs gently with a fork, how to pull the gloopy, stringy part of the egg out of the mixture.

His mother insists that he cook the eggs, and Jimin stare at them wide-eyed as they bubble slowly in the pan. He jumps for the spatula his mother holds out to him when she says it’s time to flip it. It wrinkles a little when he does, and trying to fix it with the spatula just tears the egg.

He blushes at his mistake, but his mother just laughs and ruffles his hair and tells him they’re going to cut it into strips anyway.

Jumin watches her stir-fry the carrots, and then the beef, and it smells amazing. His stomach growls loudly, and he ducks his head, embarrassed by how noisy it was, but his mother only grins in response.

He cuts the egg at her direction, quietly taking care to line up his knife so that the tear he’d made earlier became part of the cut, and then watches as she warms sheets of gim—it sounded more appetizing before he knew that gim means seaweed—over a burner.

She places the first sheet on a bamboo mat, and says, “Okay, your turn. Scoop a little rice onto the gim and spread it out— Good, just like that. Now use your fingers to get it all the way to the edge and even it out…great job.”

Jumin blushes under the weight of her compliments as he builds his first kimbap roll, pressing the meat and the vegetables tightly into the rice as he rolls the mat. He squeezes it carefully at first, afraid it’ll all come out the ends if he’s too rough, but his mother helps him roll it tight enough that it won’t fall apart, and then he’s repeating the process again, and again, making roll after roll, and Jimin is wondering just how many people he and his mother are cooking for.
There are ten rolls when they’re done, and Jimin watches his mother slice them into bite sized pieces—well, large bites, anyway—and place them into containers.

“We’re—we’re not going to eat them right now?” Jimin asks, surprised. His stomach gurgles again.

His mother laughs. “Not quite. We have to take a drive first.”

A little confused, he follows his mother to the garage, packages of kimbap in hand, and climbs into the car beside her when she pats the front passenger seat. The route she drives is familiar, even if he’s used to traveling along it in the backseat of a chauffeured vehicle, and he’s not surprised when she pulls into the driveway for the Jeons’ estate.

The Jeons’ head-of-staff greets them at the door, takes the containers of kimbap from Jimin, and leads them through the house and out onto the patio. “Mrs. Park and young master Jimin are here, Mrs. Jeon.”

The sun glares hotly off the surface of the pool, and Jimin squints against it, wondering where Jeongguk is. Maybe he’s inside?

“Oh, Jihye!” Mrs. Jeon says, smiling as she rises from her lounge chair and smoothly kisses both of Jimin’s mother’s cheeks in greeting. “I didn’t expect you and Jimin today. Make yourselves at home; I’ll just let Edwardo know that we’ll have two more for lunch—”

Jemin’s mother’s eyes sparkle with mischief as she speaks. “Don’t worry about it, Jeonghee. Jimin and I brought a little treat with us, and I’m sure Edwardo is plating it as we speak.” She rests her hand on Jimin’s shoulder lightly, tugging him into a side-hug. He’s just tall enough now that he has to lean down a little to fit there, under her arm. “Where’s Jeongguk today?”

Mrs. Jeon walks over to the edge of the pool, looking down at the bottom of the deep end and waves her hand in a ‘come here’ gesture, and Jeongguk bursts up from underwater, startling Jimin and his mother. Water splashes forcefully at the edges of the pool as he surfaces, but Jimin hardly notices. What he does notice is the way Jeongguk pushes his hair back from his face and gasps in oxygen, and the way the muscles in his arms and shoulders move fluidly under his golden skin as he does it.

Jemin watches as Jeongguk swims to the wall of the pool and places his hands on the patio tile. In one smooth move, he lifts himself up out of the water and twists to sit on the edge. The sun glints off streaks of water as it courses down his chest, and Jimin is surprised at how strong Jeongguk looks. For fifteen-and-a-half years old, Jeongguk’s biceps are well defined, and the planes of his stomach are toned and developed in a way that surprises Jimin. How had he never noticed before?

His mother catches him staring, and pokes him in the side. “Earth to Jimin.”

“Um,” he mumbles. “Sorry. I, uh, just didn’t know Jeongguk was so—” He stops without finishing his thought, unsure of what he’s trying to say, and looks away from his friend. He can feel himself flushing.

Wait—what? Why? He’s just—

“So athletic?” she suggests, amusement creeping into her voice and intensifying the crimson staining his cheeks. “He takes self-defense lessons. It’s good exercise, and it promotes a fit body just as much as a fit mind. You’ll be joining him in a couple weeks.”

“What?” His eyes jerk over to meet hers, and she grins.

“We should have started you sooner, honestly. You’ll have to forgive him, though, if he man-handles
you in your sparring sessions for a while.” Jimin fights the burn creeping toward the tips of his ears as his mind stutters over the word ‘man-handle.’ “He’s going to be ahead of you, so you’ll have to work hard to turn the tables and get the upper hand.”

Jimin swallows. “Right,” he says weakly.

“How long was I under this time?” Jeongguk asks as he pads around the pool to join them. He grabs a towel from a stack on his way past it, and starts scrubbing one-handedly at his hair.

“Sorry, sweetheart. I forgot to check the stopwatch. Jimin and his mother arrived, and I was distracted,” Mrs. Jeon replies.

Jeongguk huffs. “Helpful, Mother. Thanks.”

“Let us make it up to you,” Jimin’s mother says. “We brought lunch with us. And Jimin made it.”

“I didn’t make all of it,” Jimin says. It comes out a little more like a squeak than Jimin is okay with, and he clears his throat, and tries again. “I just helped a little.”

“Oh, I can’t wait!” Mrs. Jeon says. “It’s been forever since the last time Jeongguk cooked for me.”

“I just did on Mother’s Day!” Jeongguk splutters. “That was only two months ago.”

“Like I said,” Mrs. Jeon smiles, looping Jimin’s mom’s arm through her own and leading her to a chair at the patio table. “Forever. Jeongguk, be a dear and put the umbrella up, won’t you?”

Jimin and Jeongguk eat mostly in silence, their attention focused almost exclusively on the food, which is actually pretty good, as far as Jimin is concerned. An appreciative ‘not bad’ from Jeongguk makes Jimin look up from his plate, a piece of kimbap distorting one cheek as he shoves the food sideways with his tongue to mutter his thanks.

Jeongguk snorts, and pokes at his chubby cheek. “Don’t choke on that, chipmunk,” he grins wickedly, and Jimin’s cheeks flush with color again.

“Shut up,” he mutters around his mouthful. He ducks his head and chews carefully before stuffing another piece into his mouth.

Their mothers chat their way through the meal, and Jimin mostly tunes it out. The warmth of their voices is pleasant enough as background noise, and he’s preoccupied with inhaling his portion of the food. The insistent gurgle in his stomach finally quiets halfway through his third roll, and he finishes it in a show of teenage-boy-appetite strength before pushing back his chair and tilting his face up into the sun. It’s warm, and he’s full, and his mother’s laugh is sweet and high as she giggles with Mrs. Jeon, and then Jeongguk is poking his cheek again.

“You wanna swim?” he asks, and Jimin squints against the brightness of the day. Jeongguk is silhouetted against the sun, standing above him waiting expectantly for an answer. “I’ve got an old pair of trunks that’ll fit you. Probably,” he adds, his eyes dropping down to assess Jimin’s waistline.

Jimin squirms under his scrutiny, and turns to his mother for help.

“Mom?”

“Hmm?” she says, turning from her conversation.
“We want to swim,” Jeongguk says. “Are you staying long enough?”

“Jeongguk, don’t be rude. You can ask more politely than that,” Mrs. Jeon cuts in.

Jeongguk rolls his eyes.

“Is it okay?” Jimin asks quietly. “We don’t have to—”

“It’s fine,” his mother smiles, then turns to her friend. “As long as you don’t have any plans for the afternoon, Jeonghee?”

“No plans are as important as time with my best friend,” Mrs. Jeon replies. “Go find him a suit, Jeongguk. There are extras in the guestroom if you can’t find something that fits him in your closet.”

“Got it,” Jeongguk says, striding back toward the house. “C’mon, Jimin.”

“Thank you,” Jimin says politely, smiling brightly before he turns to follow Jeongguk.

“Ugh, that smile of his is so adorable,” he hears Mrs. Jeon say as he jogs to catch up with his friend. “I still can’t believe how much it looks like yours, Jihye, all squinty and cute—”

The door into the house closes behind him with a click, and Jimin lengthens his stride to keep up with Jeongguk.

Jeongguk doesn’t say much as they climb the stairs to his room, but once they’re inside it, with the door closed firmly behind him, the Jeongguk that likes to tease Jimin reemerges.

“So, you want a pair of jammers or a speedo?”

“What?” Jimin squeaks, his voice cracking. “N-neither!”

Jeongguk smirks. “All my old suits are from my competition days. I don’t have anything that isn’t going to cling to you like a second skin.”

Jimin’s face burns. “I’ll just— Um. Your mom said there would be extras in the guestroom? I sure I can wear one of—”

“Hmm, those’ll all be too big for you, shorty,” Jeongguk replies, amused. “They’ll fall right off those slender hips of yours, and then you’ll be showing off in detail everything you’re worried about keeping to yourself.”

“O-oh,” Jimin says, mournfully eyeing the regular swim trunks Jeongguk is wearing. He sighs. “It’s fine. I mean, I don’t have to swim—”

Jeongguk laughs. “Oh my God, it’s fine, Jimin. They’re not as bad as you think. Fuck, you’re so easy to tease.” He walks into his closet, and digs around in a dresser drawer until he comes back with a pair of spandex shorts.

Jimin eyes them skeptically.

“Well, go on. Take ‘em,” Jeongguk says, waving them in the air at Jimin. “They’re not going to bite you.”

Jimin snatches them roughly from Jeongguk and stalks into the bathroom to change.

He strips his clothes off slowly, glaring at the puddle of spandex on the bathroom counter as he does,
and huffs his annoyance. He steps into the jammers, wondering if he should just swim in his shorts instead. Surely Jeongguk has a pair of shorts Jimin can borrow to wear home that’ll be less embarrassing than this?

He sighs and pulls them up, fitting them over his waist and tugging at the front of them to settle them in place. He takes a breath, preparing for the worst, and then looks at himself in the mirror.

It’s not as bad as he anticipated.

The black material gives him the allusion of propriety even as it clings to his body, and the wavy, multi-toned orange and white pattern that stretches in a wide stripe from his hips, over his thighs, to just above the front of his knees makes him look slim. Sleek. Sexy?

Jimin reels it back. He’s not going there.

He’s not even gonna think that word while standing in his friend’s bathroom, dressed in a skintight swimsuit, while his friend waits on the other side of the door looking like a Greek god in swim trunks of his own.

No—No, no, nope. Jimin squashes that though even as something warm blossoms in his stomach. This is not happening.

He mutters at himself and slips his thumbs under the waistband, ready to tear the suit off and call the whole idea off, when Jeongguk knocks at the door.

“Did the spandex squeeze the life outta you, or what?” he asks, and Jimin jolts at how close his voice sounds through the door.

“I’m not gonna wear them,” Jimin says, his voice coming out high and laced with the panic that floods through him with every thud of his heart. Too close—Jeongguk is too close, and Jimin just needs to—

“Come out and show me, or I’m coming in.”

“No!” Jimin yelps. “Stay out, Jeongguk!”

“Oh, come on,” Jeongguk says plaintively. “It can’t be that bad. I wore them in public. In front of strangers.”

Jimin squeezes his eyes shut against that visual image, and focuses on sounding less…whatever he is. Awkward. And embarrassed. Lord, definitely embarrassed. Jeongguk wants to see him in these—

“Do they at least fit you?” Jeongguk asks.

Jimin’s reply comes out a croak. “Yeah.”

The door bursts open immediately, and Jimin yelps as Jeongguk invites himself in.

“Jeongguk! Get out! Get out!” Jimin screeches, but Jeongguk isn’t listening. He’s looking Jimin over. Slowly. With a critical eye.

Jimin covers himself with his hands, ignoring his naked chest in favor of protecting his lower extremities from Jeongguk’s gaze.

He feels like it doesn’t work. Jeongguk’s eyes travel the length of his body, taking in his appearance
slowly, thoroughly. Jimin feels like he’s about to die of mortification.

Jeongguk smirks a little as his gaze finally reaches Jimin’s. “Mm, not bad,” he grins appreciatively, his fingers reaching out pluck at the edge of the fabric resting on Jimin’s hip.

Jimmie’s brain seizes.

Jeongguk’s other hand comes out from behind his back, a pair of regular black and red swim trunks dangling from his grasp. “I found something else you’d probably prefer, though.”

It takes Jimin a moment to reboot and clear his mind enough to process Jeongguk’s offering, and then he’s blushing so fast and furiously.

“You jerk,” Jimin gasps. “You did this on purpose. You’re such a dick—”

Jeongguk burst out in laughter, and tosses the swim trunks in Jimin’s face. “Get changed so we can go swim, hot stuff.”

Jimmie shrieks as he yanks the trunks out of his face and flings them onto the countertop, turning back to Jeongguk with fire in his eyes.

Jeongguk is still laughing as Jimin shoves him unceremoniously backward, out of the bathroom, and slams the door shut.

As Jimin changes, he vows to shove Jeongguk under water and hold him there.

“Jimmie, watch closely. I’ll demonstrate with Jeongguk,” Seokjin says, and Jimin tries.

He tries to focus on the way Jeongguk steps forward and brings his plastic gun up to Seokjin’s forehead. He knows this is an important lesson. He knows that the status and wealth he’s lived with for the past year-and-a-half will someday make him a target. And he knows that guns are statistically a criminal’s first choice of weapon—not because they require so little knowledge to use effectively, unlike a knife, but because they’re overkill. Even in the hands of an amateur, they’ll be the strongest weapon in the room, every time.

Learning how to defend himself against one is a lesson he’s long since past due to complete.

He’s excelled at everything Seokjin and Jeongguk have thrown at him so far, from kicks to escaping chokeholds, and they may have gotten carried away with teaching him some of the flashier maneuvers. When his father took him to the shooting range for the first time two days ago, however, he noticed the way Jimin handled the gun—with too much hesitation and an overbearing sense of caution—and it had triggered his father’s temper.

‘Don’t you even know how to hold it?’ his father had asked, frustrated. ‘You’ve handled plastic guns in your lessons with Seokjin—it’s the same.’

Nervous at his father’s tone, and uncomfortable with the weapon in his hands, Jimin had just stared wide-eyed at his father. Because he hadn’t handled plastic guns in his lessons with Seokjin.

His father eventually had gotten this out of Jimin, had called Seokjin in a rage—what was Seokjin teaching Jimin?! He’d been going to lessons for two months now!—and Jimin has never seen Seokjin so subdued as he was when Jimin and Jeongguk arrived for this lesson.
Normally, their martial arts instructor was enthusiastic, energetic, and prone to goofing off with Jeongguk before the lesson started in earnest. Today however, Seokjin is quiet.

It’s distracting to think about—worrisome, even. Jimin has seen his father’s anger, and the ripple effect it has on the people it’s aimed at, and he doesn’t want that for Seokjin. He wants Seokjin to go back to being his usual carefree, humorous self.

“Jimin. Please pay attention,” Seokjin sighs, and Jimin startles.

“Sorry,” Jimin replies, bowing in apology.

Crap. He needs to focus, or Seokjin’s gonna get in even more trouble.

“One more time, then,” Seokjin says. “Hands flat together in front of you, palms out. Cross your thumbs. Duck under the barrel of the gun and push up with your hands against your assailant’s hands on the grip of the gun. At the same time, bring your right knee up into your assailant’s groin.” He demonstrates on Jeongguk, pausing the motion and backing away when he’s completed that step. “Let’s do it three times now,” Seokjin says, gesturing for Jimin to join him and Jeongguk on the mat. “Start slow, then we’ll speed it up.”

Jimin obeys, and he pulls his focus in on himself. He pays attention to how the actions feel, how his limbs respond, and he’s got it down by the time they’re practicing the first step it at full speed.

“Okay, next,” Seokjin says, nodding. “He’s going to step back after you’ve struck him, right? So be prepared to chase him a little bit. Step into him with your left leg, push your hands, and tip the gun into his stomach. From here, you want to yank the gun out of his grasp, and widen the gap between you,” Seokjin explains, walking through the motions. “Now you try,” Seokjin says. He points to his former place on the mat and Jimin moves to face Jeongguk.

His friend smirks at him, and levels the plastic practice weapon at Jimin’s face. “Slow first?”

This isn’t rocket science. It’s good to go through it slowly at first, to make sure all your limbs are in the right place and you’re training the proper memory into your muscles. But Jeongguk’s smirk is a challenge, and Jimin can’t let him win. He may be younger than Jeongguk, but Jeongguk can suck it if he thinks Jimin can’t keep up.

“Run it,” Jimin says, and then he strikes. He doesn’t wait for Jeongguk to process that he’s ready, that he’s moving. He just attacks, and only Jeongguk’s sense of balance keeps him on his feet as he responds instinctively to Jimin’s movement.

Jimin backs away with the gun in his own hands, and smirks at Jeongguk. Jeongguk’s eyes narrow.

“Hey! This isn’t the place for attitude,” Seokjin snaps, “So stow it! That was sloppy. Start over, and do it slow this time. Get it right, Jimin. C’mon.”

“Sorry,” Jimin responds once more, and settles into position. He grins innocently at Jeongguk, and begins the maneuver again, this time in slow motion.

Striding out of the dojo’s locker room and onto the practice mat, Jimin feels focused, ready to inhale today’s lesson and walk away stronger. That is, until Jeongguk trots up from behind and smacks Jimin’s ass on the way by, murmuring, “I’m gonna pin your ass to the floor so hard today.”

Color rises in Jimin’s cheeks, and he tells himself it has nothing to do with Jeongguk’s word choice.
and unsolicited touch, and everything to do with the challenge in Jeongguk’s voice. “You can try,” Jimin replies, cocky tone concealing the dryness in his throat. “You know I’m not gonna just take your shit, though.”

Forty minutes later, after warm-ups and instructions, Jimin is flat on his stomach on the mat, his right foot tucked into the back of his left knee and his left leg bent to lock it in place, his heel pushed up to brush against his ass. Jeongguk leans hard against his legs, pinning Jimin in place and radiating smug.

“What were you saying about trying?” Jeongguk murmurs against his skin, and Jimin shudders from the warmth of Jeongguk’s breath on his waist.

Jimin smacks the mat in irritation, and Jeongguk lets him up, and they square off again.

This time, Jimin lets Jeongguk past his guard intentionally, feigning a slip, and Jimin ends up in a chokehold. Perfect. Jimin gets his fingers around Jeongguk’s arm and lowers his stance. He twists to the side and rolls Jeongguk over his shoulder, throwing him onto his side on the mat. Jimin puts his knee into Jeongguk’s back, rolling him onto his stomach and twisting his arm behind his back, and says, “It’s 1-1, Jeonggukie.”

“I let you have that one out of pity, Jimin.”

Jimin snorts. “Prove it. Take the next three pins, if you’re so much better.”

Jeongguk takes the next three pins.

After the third time in a row that Jeongguk has laid Jimin out flat on the floor, squirming and unable to resist further, Seokjin claps loudly to get their attention.

“Jimin, you’re not trying hard enough to get out of the pin. Don’t give in—fight it. Escape and reverse the position.”

Jimin grinds his teeth. As if he hasn’t been trying.

They begin once more and this time, when Jeongguk ends up on his back, Jimin straddling him and pinning his wrists to the mat on either side of his head, Jimin smirks.

“You got something to say to me now?” Jimin says, practically oozing satisfaction.

Jeongguk bucks his hips up against Jimin’s ass in reply, and Jimin’s breath catches in his chest.

Oh, fuck.

Jimin desperately tries to hold onto the competitive atmosphere between them. He pushes aside the way Jeongguk’s t-shirt looks stretched over his chest, around his biceps; he ignores the sweat trickling down Jeongguk’s face, the dangerous gleam in Jeongguk’s eyes.

But he can’t evade the brush of Jeongguk’s crotch against his ass, the thickness of their sweatpants doing nothing to suppress the intimacy of the touch.

Jimin knows there’s nothing to it. Jeongguk is just testing the strength of Jimin’s hold, seeing where and how Jimin is vulnerable to counterattack. But as Jimin swallows past the unintentional side effects of Jeongguk’s actions, he sees Jeongguk’s eyes track the motion of Jimin’s adam’s apple. He sees Jeongguk’s lips quirk up to one side, and Jimin knows he’s fucked.
Well. He’s not fucked. And that’s the problem.

Jimin has come to terms with his orientation, but it’s not like he can let anyone else know. It’s not like he can date a guy, let alone experiment with or indulge in any kind of physical relationship. His parents will never approve; his father asks if he’s got a girlfriend on a regular basis—like he has time for that around all his extracurriculars and other lessons—and his mother teases him about how pretty the other girls are when she drops him off at school. They won’t approve of the fact that he likes boys, and so he’s never…done anything about it.

He’s pushed it down and kept to himself, been polite but distant with everyone—both boys and girls, for the sake of appearances and his sanity. Everyone but Jeongguk.

Jeongguk is the one person he allows himself to be close to, because not being close to him isn’t an option. Their mothers would never understand if Jimin were to pull away, and Jeongguk deserves more than that from Jimin.

After everything he’s done for Jimin, all the help with his lessons, the way that he made Jimin feel at home in this life of his when no one else did…Jeongguk deserves more from Jimin.

And he certainly deserves more than Jimin getting turned on by a routine move meant to break him out of Jimin’s hold.

Jimin tries to hide it. He leans farther forward, resting more of his weight on his arms, trying to put a little space between Jeongguk’s hips and his own, but Jeongguk’s been doing this longer than Jimin has, and he notices the shift.

He notices, and he moves quickly, sliding his right wrist down the mat toward his shoulder and his left wrist up, above his head. Before Jimin can even curse—because he’s shifted his center of gravity and his control over the hold is already broken, and he knows it—Jeongguk’s hips come up at an angle, his feet planted firmly on the mat as he forms a bridge with his body and topples Jimin to the floor. Jeongguk rolls with him, landing between Jimin’s legs with his hands on Jimin’s chest, and then he’s sliding his hands up Jimin’s body, and wrapping them around Jimin’s neck.

He doesn’t squeeze, not in earnest, but Jimin feels like his whole body is oxygen-deprived. Jeongguk’s got him locked in a compromising position, and all Jimin can think is that he likes it.

He likes Jeongguk’s hips forcing his open further, likes Jeongguk’s weight driving him into the floor, likes Jeongguk’s hands on his body, likes his fingertips pressing gently against the pulse in his neck. 

He’s lightheaded with how much control he feels Jeongguk has over him, and he wants more. He wants to see where it’s going and take it farther. He wants Jeongguk to grind his hips against Jimin’s ass again, and—

And it has to stop.

It’s Jeongguk.

This has to stop.

Gasping, his breaths coming in shallow pants that he can’t slow down, Jimin pushes against Jeongguk’s chest. “Off,” he wheezes, trying to twist to the side and hide his erection even as Jeongguk, surprised by Jimin’s response, lets up and leans back, releasing Jimin from his hold.

Jimin scrambles away, blocking out Seokjin’s protests and Jeongguk’s questions, and runs for the locker room. He’s done for today—done with this stupid sparring match, with being stupidly horny
—fuck, why won’t his boner go down?

He’s embarrassed, and ashamed, and his fucking dick is still raging for his best friend. Fucking dammit.

He’s sitting on a toilet, the stall door locked between him and the outside world, and still struggling to control his breathing when Jeongguk follows him. “Jimin?”

Fuck.

“Jimin, the fuck is going on? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Leave me alone,” Jimin spits out, fighting to control his arousal.

Jeongguk’s voice, low and just on the other side of the stall door, doesn’t help. “Fuck that. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Just my cock, ready for a good dicking, Jimin thinks sourly.

“Try again,” Jeongguk snorts.

“Nothing!” Jimin insists, irritation creeping into his veins. If Jeongguk would just leave him the fuck alone, Jimin could get control of himself, and sweep this whole nightmare under the rug.


“You want to know what’s wrong with me?” he yells. “I’m gay, okay? I’m fifteen, and I’m fucking horny. There! Now you know! So can I get a little fucking privacy so I can calm the fuck down?!”

A moment of silence stretches into two, and Jimin experiences an intense flash of panic. Holy fucking shit, what has he just done?

Then Jeongguk is laughing—laughing—and Jimin can’t believe it.

“Did that mounting with wrists pinned turn you on?” Jeongguk asks through his laughter.

Jimin can’t fucking believe his ears. He slams the bolt open on the stall door and swings it open mercilessly, staring, slack-jawed and appalled, at his best friend and the unabashed mirth on his face. There’s no way that Jeongguk is cracking sex jokes at his expense, when—

“You got a broner?”

“A what?” Jimin splutters.

Jeongguk looks knowingly at the front of Jimin’s sweats, and points his finger at the obvious bulge he finds there. “An unintentional boner due to bro,” Jeongguk deadpans, and Jimin can’t decide what he wants to hide behind his hands more—his hard-on or the mortification blossoming across his face.

“Usually ‘broners’ are a hetero thing, but I’m guessing you didn’t mean to be turned on by my sexy self.”

“Oh my God, Jeongguk. Please stop,” Jimin says, burying his face in his palms. Jeongguk already knows Jimin’s dick is up, so Jimin might as well try to hide how humiliated he feels.

“Why?” Jeongguk teases, and Jimin dies a little more.
“Because it’s you, you asshole! I’m trying not to— I can’t— Fuck, Jeongguk, I’m trying not to make this weird,” Jimin says, and Jeongguk laughs again.

“Dude, you’re making it extraordinarily weird,” he replies. “It’s fine.”

“It’s— it’s what?” Jimin squeaks in shock.

“It’s fine,” Jeongguk says again. “Boners happen, Jimin. Frequently. I’m over it.”

That takes a second to sink in.

“You’re not… disgusted? By me? By—” Jimin swallows and gestures at his lower region, “By this?”

“Why would I be? It’s kind of a relief, actually.”

“It’s what?” Jimin says again. There’s no way he heard that right.

Jeongguk shrugs. “I know what it is to get a boner for your bestie, man. I’m kinda glad I’m not the only one, to be honest.”

“I’m sorry,” Jimin says, his mind derailing in his disbelief. “Did you just say that you’ve gotten hard because of me?”

“Jimin. Do you seriously not know? I’m gay. I’m gay as fuck. And in case you hadn’t noticed, you’re hot,” Jeongguk says, and Jimin’s brain halts all activity for seven seconds as it reboots.

“You’re—”

“Into cock?” Jeongguk supplies. “I really am.”

“Well, fuck,” Jimin says, peering through his fingers at Jeongguk.

“Not lately, but yeah. I get when the getting’s good,” Jeongguk replies, raising one eyebrow in amusement.

“You’ve got to be shitting me,” Jimin says.

“Did you really think I would judge you?” Jeongguk asks, his voice turning sober.

Jimin squirms under the question. His erection is flagging now, thanks to Jeongguk’s shift in seriousness, but he feels like he’s sinking farther into his discomfort, rather than clawing his way out of it.

“I just didn’t want to make things weird between us,” Jimin answers lamely, hoping it’s enough to satisfy Jeongguk.

“Ehhhhhnn,” Jeongguk says gratingly, imitating the sound of a buzzer cutting off a wrong answer. “I don’t believe you. If this was just a boner between friends, you’d have used it to fuck with me. But you didn’t.” Jeongguk’s hands peel Jimin’s the rest of the way off his face, forcing Jimin to meet his gaze. “That means you’re not comfortable enough with your sexuality to joke about it yet. Which means there’s something left we need to talk about. So spill it.”

Jimin is silent, weighing his options. He can tell Jeongguk, and risk Jeongguk using it to tease him for the rest of eternity, or…

Or he can tell him, and hope that his friend knows that this topic is too sensitive to be made fun of
for. He’s already told Jeongguk that’s he’s gay, so half the secret’s out, and Jeongguk is gay, too.

Jeongguk is gay, too, and he may be the one person in the world that Jimin can discuss this with and get advice from.

“Jimin…”

“Do your parents know?” he blurts out, and Jeongguk’s forehead creases with the topic’s apparent change in direction.

“Uh…yeah,” Jeongguk answers. “They know. Is that what you’re worried about?”

“Just…people, in general, knowing, I guess,” Jimin says, gnawing on his lower lip. It sounds stupid when he says it out loud, but he’s been keeping this part of himself locked away for so long that the scariest thing he can think of is letting the outside world see what he’s kept hidden. Letting them see it, and then being judged.

Being judged and found wanting.

“Jimin,” Jeongguk sighs. “You gotta stop worrying about what other people think, or you’re never gonna be happy. You can’t let people dictate for you what your life will be. You have to stand up for yourself, and who you are.”

Jimin swallows.

“And if you need help with that, I’m here. I told my parents that I’m gay, and I did it alone. That doesn’t mean you have to. I’ll be there, if you want me to. When you’re ready.”

Jimin doesn’t really know what to say to that. This whole day has gone wildly different than he expected, and he feels so overwhelmed that he doesn’t even know how to respond to Jeongguk’s generous—more than generous—offer.

“Just don’t take too long getting there,” Jeongguk continues. “You may think it’s not so bad now, that you can keep going with the way things are and be just fine, but let me make one thing clear. Being yourself, without restriction, is liberating. It’s worth it, to just rip the band-aid off and come out.”

Jimin is surprised when Jeongguk pulls him into a hug, and it takes a moment to get use to the feeling of his friend’s arms embracing him tightly.

“I know your parents, Jimin,” Jeongguk says quietly in Jimin’s ear. “They’re not gonna take this as poorly as you think they will. They’re not gonna kick you out. They might even be supportive,” Jeongguk adds, pulling back just enough to smile at Jimin.

“Thanks,” Jimin says. His voice is scratchy, a little rough because—well, because this whole conversation has been rough—but he means it. The sincerity is there, and he knows Jeongguk can hear it.

“Now,” Jeongguk says, his eyes lighting up with a mischievous glint. “Do you need—how did you put it?—‘a little fucking privacy so you can calm the fuck down’ again?” He glances down, between them, where Jimin’s dick is kicking back to life where it’s pressed against Jeongguk’s thigh.

“Son of a bitch,” Jimin swears. “That’s the last damned time I let you fucking hug me.” He shoves Jeongguk backwards, and retreats back into the bathroom stall.
“Don’t take too long, Jimin,” Jeongguk teases, “or Seokjin is gonna send me back in here again to help.”

“Get the fuck out, you asshole!” Jimin yells.

“I want you to fuck me,” Jimin says, throwing a handful of M&Ms in his mouth and setting the bag back on the floor between them and picking up his controller again.

Jeongguk chokes on his cola, and tears his eyes from the video game on the screen in front of them to stare at Jimin. “Excuse you?” he says between coughs, and Jimin’s lips twitch upward a little.

He keeps his eyes aimed at the TV as he chews and swallows, but he watches Jeongguk in his peripheral vision, gauging his reaction. “I’m gay. You’re gay. We’ve both gotten hard because of each other. And I want to fuck.” Jimin shrugs. “That seems like simple math to me.”

Jeongguk’s character dies a noisy death on screen, but Jeongguk doesn’t notice. “Don’t fucking bring math into this,” he says, and Jimin takes pity on his kill-to-death ratio and pauses the game. He sighs, and turns to Jeongguk.

“What’s the problem?” he asks.

“Let’s start with the fact that you just propositioned me for sex,” Jeongguk replies, leaning forward, away from Jeongguk’s bedframe behind them. “A year ago, you had a meltdown in the locker room at the dojo because a routine defense against a pin turned you on. And now you’re asking me to put my cock up your ass?”

“And then pull it out, and then put it back in again. Repeatedly,” Jimin clarifies, and he almost giggles at the way Jeongguk’s mouth falls open a little. “Look, I’m sorry if this seems out of nowhere? But I’m horny as fuck, and ever since I came out to my parents I feel like I’m on lockdown. They keep me so fucking busy that I don’t have time to even think about finding someone to let off steam with, let alone to be in a relationship.”

“That sucks, Jimin, but how exactly does that lead to me fucking you?” Jeongguk asks, one eyebrow raised.

“You’re pretty much the only person I’m allowed to see,” Jimin says, tilting his head back against the mattress in frustration. “This is the only place they never hesitate to let me go. It’s like they think there’s no way you and I would get together.”

“Oh they don’t care if we do. Shit, can you imagine how excited our moms would be if we—”

“That’s not the point,” Jimin says hastily, cutting Jeongguk off. “Because we aren’t like that.”

“No, we aren’t,” Jeongguk agrees pointedly.

Jeongguk sighs and lets his head loll to the side so he can look at Jeongguk. “Sex doesn’t have to mean we’re dating, Jeonggukie. I just want to get laid. I want to know what it’s like. That’s all this is. We both like dick, and it’s convenient.”

Jeongguk is quiet for a long moment, and then he says, “Convenience, huh?”

“Yep.”
Another pause. Jimin quietly holds his breath, nibbling on his bottom lip as he waits for Jeongguk to decide.

“You do have a nice ass,” Jeongguk allows.

Jemin figures that’s as close as he’s going to get to agreement, so he doesn’t waste time. He sets his controller on the floor, pushes the bag of M&Ms out of the way, and swings his legs toward Jeongguk. Jimin straddles him in one fluid move, and Jeongguk’s hands automatically come up to Jimin’s hips, balancing him as he settles into Jeongguk’s lap.

Jemin wraps his fingers lightly around Jeongguk’s wrists, and tugs his hands farther down, until Jeongguk’s palms cup his cheeks. “So how do you feel about first dibs on this ass?”

Jeongguk still hesitates. “No romo?”

“Definitely not. Just a good dose of friendly fucking,” Jimin affirms, sliding his arms around Jeongguk’s shoulders.

Jeongguk’s hands idly squeeze Jimin’s ass. “It’d be your first time,” Jeongguk notes.

“And it wouldn’t be yours,” Jimin replies. “So you’re gonna wear a condom, and you’re gonna show me how good it can be.”

Jeongguk’s lips curve into a smirk. “Any other demands?”

“Yes, actually,” Jimin says. He licks his lips, nervous to ask for this next part, in case Jeongguk deems it too ‘romo’ for their forming arrangement.

Jeongguk’s eyes flicker to Jimin’s mouth, watching as his tongue smooths over the soft flesh, wetting it, and Jimin gathers courage from his blatant ogling.

“I’d like my first kiss to come before my first dicking,” he says, pushing the words out quickly before he can think twice about what he’s asking for. He’d always thought that his first kiss would be Taehyung, but—

Jeongguk’s gaze snaps back up to Jimin’s eyes, and Jimin adds, “Please?”

Jeongguk doesn’t reply—not with words, anyway. He slides his hands up, up, leaving a trail of shivers along Jimin’s body, and then they’re cradling Jimin’s jaw, and Jeongguk tugs him closer, and Jimin—

Jemin feels—

He doesn’t know what he feels. It’s a heady mix of overwhelming emotions, and he tries to pick them apart, to isolate them and identify each one, but he only gets so far as excited and nervous and yeah, okay, really fucking nervous before Jeongguk’s lips are hovering over his own. Jeongguk pauses there, millimeters away from Jimin’s first kiss, and Jimin’s feels a shaking start in the tips of his fingers.

“Are you sure about this?” Jeongguk whispers, his breath warm against Jimin’s skin “Last chance to bail out.”

Jemin curls his fingertips into Jeongguk’s collar to steady his nerves, and leans in.

It’s soft, is the first thing Jimin thinks, as his lips press against Jeongguk’s. And then Jeongguk’s
mouth opens, just the tiniest bit, and he licks along Jimin’s bottom lip, sucking it between his own, smoothing over it again and again with his tongue, and Jimin’s ability to think evaporates. It’s good—it’s warm and teasing and suggestive—and Jimin’s lips part around a breathy moan as he adjusts to the new sensation.

Well. At least, as he tries to adjust. Jeongguk doesn’t give him much time to find a new baseline and acclimate. He releases Jimin’s lip with a slow drag of teeth over plump, pink flesh, and pushes his way back in, seeking Jimin’s tongue with his own.

Jeongguk tastes sweet and tangy, of chocolate and cola, and when the kiss turns a little rougher, a little more demanding, Jimin pushes himself to keep up with the intensity of it, emulating Jeongguk’s motions and pressing further when he dares, sliding his tongue into Jeongguk’s mouth at his first opportunity and caressing the roof of his mouth in a slow glide. Jimin’s arms wrap around Jeongguk’s neck and tighten as he leans further into the kiss, pressing into Jeongguk as a fire kindles in his belly, and Jeongguk’s hands fall back to Jimin’s hips.

Jimin knows better than to waste such a golden opportunity, so he wriggles closer in Jeongguk’s lap, his breath stuttering as denim brushes against denim.

It’s an all new kind of friction, completely different from the wet crescendo of their kiss. It’s a bolt of lightning that streaks up Jimin’s spine and back down again, settling in his cock and demanding more, and Jimin doesn’t feel inclined to deny it. He splays his legs further and grinds his hips down against Jeongguk’s, fully this time, a pleased gasp escaping him as Jeongguk bites down harder on his lip and digs his fingers into Jimin’s waist.

Jimin’s head falls back as he works his hardening dick against Jeongguk’s, again and again, his pace picking up with every additional moment of contact. Jeongguk groans against Jimin’s neck and tries to bury the sound in wet, open-mouthed kisses just below Jimin’s pulse, and Jimin feels like the unhurried drag of Jeongguk’s tongue against his skin and the lazy suckling that follows it are a shot of adrenaline straight into his veins, aimed straight at his cock.

Jimin knows it hardly takes anything to get himself riled up, but Jeongguk seems intent on taking his time, on drawing out each flash of pleasure and turning it into something slow and meticulous. Jimin’s arms wind further around Jeongguk’s head, his fingers sliding into Jeongguk’s hair to hold him close, to pull him closer, because he wants more.

He’s not afraid that Jeongguk will stop, that he’ll slow and pull away and decide this is a bad idea, but Jeongguk refuses to speed things up, and it’s frustrating. A low whine burbles out of Jimin’s chest in protest when Jeongguk stalls Jimin’s hips with firm hands.

Jeongguk nips faintly at Jimin’s neck once more before he stills completely. “Eager much?” he says, his lips quirking and his breath ghosting against Jimin’s spit-slicked skin. A shiver racks its way through Jimin, and Jeongguk leans back, satisfied with the response he’s pulled from Jimin.

Jimin scowls, struggling to steady his breathing. “Shut up. I’m dying of lust over here,” he says, peeling Jeongguk’s fingers off his hips and pinning his wrists against the edge of the mattress behind Jeongguk.

Freed of Jeongguk’s restrictive grip, Jimin begins rutting against Jeongguk’s dick again, intent on picking up where he left off, and it doesn’t take long to work himself back into a frenzy. Jeongguk is just as hard as Jimin is now, and the rough friction of their clothes between them is a source of pleasure Jimin did not anticipate. Sweat pearls on his temple and his stomach, slowly streaking down his skin as he exerts himself, eager to chase the euphoria tightening in his gut. It feels good, so damn good and—
Jeongguk laughs, a light, overly amused sound that Jimin can feel radiating through his core as he grinds down hard against the bulge in Jeongguk’s pants, but Jimin ignores it, chasing another burst of pleasure.

“Dying, huh?” Jeongguk muses. “You never bought any toys to take the edge off?”

It takes Jimin a moment to register Jeongguk’s words through the building haze in his head, but when he does, his displeasure at the interruption slips past his tongue. He hasn’t dared to buy any toys for fear of discovery, but that is so not the point right now. “Just fuck me, Jeonggukie,” he growls, and Jeongguk snorts.

“I’m getting there. But unless you wanna get there too fast, and while you’re still in your pants, I suggest you take your time and let me do this right.” He raises one smug eyebrow at Jimin.

Jimin’s mouth curves down into a pout, but Jeongguk’s features are written in nothing but amusement as he whispers, “Come here,” and leans forward to catch Jimin’s lips with his own. He presses hard against Jimin’s mouth, licking deep and slow, and taking his damned time, and Jimin’s grip on Jeongguk’s wrists slacken. His hands freed, Jeongguk slips his fingers underneath Jimin’s shirt, smoothing over hot skin in a teasing, light glide, and just like that, Jimin’s irritation is gone, shattered and scattered under the renewed hunger that washes over him like a tidal wave licking at the shore. Jeongguk traces the lines of Jimin’s abs, then moves higher, rucking Jimin’s shirt up as he goes. Jimin’s breath catches in his chest, and he gasps around Jeongguk’s lips as his thumb glances over Jimin’s nipple.

Jeongguk smirks, and peels Jimin’s shirt the rest of the way off in one smooth, practiced motion. Jimin has no idea where his shirt lands, but it doesn’t really matter, not with the way that Jeongguk’s hands find their way back to Jimin’s skin and his eyes begin to undress Jimin the rest of the way.

Jeongguk’s movements are tortuously slow, but when Jimin meets Jeongguk’s gaze, he thinks that maybe he could be convinced to take his time and draw it out.

His eyes carry a naked intensity that has Jimin burning all over, and his fingers brush low over Jimin’s skin, then dip lower over Jimin’s crotch, opening Jimin’s jeans and grazing gently over Jimin’s erection through his boxers. Between the potency of Jeongguk’s stare and the delicateness of his touch, Jimin suddenly feels like a million pieces held together by melting glue.

“You wanted me to show you how good it could be, yeah?” Jeongguk asks, his fingers glancing over the wet patch in his underwear and tracing idle patterns that sink into Jimin’s bones, and Jimin can’t help the way he shudders under Jeongguk’s hands—under his words, and his gaze—another step closer to giving Jeongguk the control he wants.

Jeongguk’s smirk widens into a feral sort of grin, something wild and exciting that makes Jimin’s heart beat a little too fast, and it’s like Jeongguk can sense it, he can tell that Jimin’s teetering on the brink of submission, because he grinds his palm against Jimin’s cock and opens his mouth once more, pushing Jimin over the edge with a whisper.

“Get on the bed so I can fuck you right,” he rasps softly, and Jimin practically scrambles out of Jeongguk’s lap.

He shimmies out of his jeans as he goes, shedding them on the floor and crawling farther onto the bed. When he reaches the middle of the oversized mattress, he turns and looks coyly over his shoulder.

“Aren’t you coming?” he teases, his choice of words intentional.
Jeongguk’s eyes jerk away from Jimin’s ass, and, with a low growl, he pulls off his own pants in measured movements that convey a sense of control, but Jimin knows better. In the seconds that Jeongguk’s eyes were trained on his ass, Jimin saw the desire that simmered there, and while he may be willing to give Jeongguk control over the situation, Jimin is pleased to learn he has control over Jeongguk.

He smiles to himself as Jeongguk’s jeans hit the floor and he moves to join Jimin on the bed. Jimin twists in place settling on his back as Jeongguk approaches, and Jimin wonders just how far that control extends. In a fit of inspiration, Jimin pushes his boxers off his hips, freeing his cock as the cotton slides over his thighs. He pulls his knees to his chest to tug the underwear off the rest of the way, and before he can put his feet back flat on the comforter beneath him, Jeongguk is there.

Jeongguk is there, and his eyes are dark as they roam over Jimin’s naked flesh. He catches Jimin’s ankles in his hand, and takes in Jimin’s body.

His skin glistens with perspiration, golden and glowing, and Jeongguk soaks it in, tracing the lines of Jimin’s thighs to the swell of his ass and the stiffness of his erection. Jimin reaches lazily for his cock, biting his lip as he rubs his palm over the head, wetting it with precum, and then smooths his hand down his shaft.

After the roughness of their clothed grinding, the softness of his palm is bliss. Jimin’s eyes fall shut and his head tips back against the bed and his teeth dig into his lower lip as he strokes his cock, so he’s completely caught off guard when he feels a sharp slap at the underside of his ass cheek. His eyes snap open as he gasps against the sting of it, and he blinks away blind lust to find Jeongguk frowning at him.

“Did I say you could touch yourself?” he asks, and Jimin smirks slowly up at Jeongguk, dragging his hand back up and down his cock deliberately as he challenges Jeongguk’s stare.

“Did I need your permission?” he replies, goading Jeongguk.

It works, and Jeongguk leverages Jimin’s legs up to lift his ass off the bed and spanks him again.

It’s not a light touch, and the abrupt pain fades more slowly than the time before, leaving behind a burning ache that makes Jimin suck in a ragged breath.

Jeongguk notices.

“You kinky fucker, you **like** being spanked, don’t you?” he says, a mixture of surprise and delight dawning in his eyes. He lands one more intense blow on Jimin’s backside and Jimin squeezes his cock gently as he tugs his hand up, coaxing the next wave of precum to bead at the tip and spill down his length. A broken moan burbles up out of Jimin as Jeongguk rubs his hand over the redness sure to be blossoming on his ass cheek, and then Jeongguk is setting Jimin’s legs down, spreading them wide enough for him to fit between them, and forcibly pulling Jimin’s hand off himself.

Jeongguk pins both of his wrists by his sides, and leans over Jimin and says, “I’m gonna get the lube. If you touch yourself while I’m doing so, I’m not gonna put my cock in your ass, do you hear me?”

Jimin frowns, but nods.

“Be good, baby,” Jeongguk adds, releasing Jimin’s hands.

Jimin doesn’t move, not even so much as a twitch, even though the word ‘baby’ makes him ache to take his cock in his hand again and fan the flame in his belly with small, smooth strokes.
“Be patient, and I’ll make it worth your while,” Jeongguk says as he backs away from Jimin.

He only retreats as far as the nightstand to the side of the bed, yanking open the drawer and retrieving a bottle of lube and a square foil packet. Then he hesitates, and looks back over at Jimin.

Jimin is pressing his hands into the mattress in an attempt to keep his hands off himself, as requested, and he experiences a momentary flash of gratification at the flicker of pride on Jeongguk’s face.

Jeongguk turns back to the drawer and lifts out one more thing, a small black oval attached by cord to a palm-sized remote.

Jimin shivers.

“Since you haven’t indulged in any toys before,” Jeongguk says, closing the drawer and returning to the space between Jimin’s thighs, “and since you’re being a good boy and doing what you’re told, how about I reward you with a little treat, hmm?”

Jeongguk drops the condom and lube and vibrator off to the side, and his hands caress the inside of Jimin’s thighs soothingly as Jimin processes his offer, and when he manages a whimpered, “Please —” Jeongguk grins and pinches him lightly, fondly, on the meat of his inner thigh, in a spot just below the crook of his hip that makes Jimin’s muscles twitch.

“Don’t you worry, baby. I got you,” he says, and Jimin knows he does. He knows that coming to Jeongguk was the best decision he could have made, because he feels safe here, naked and spread before Jeongguk like a damned buffet. Safe and cared for.

As much as Jimin was thirsty for this moment, desperate to be fucked into the mattress with a reckless abandon, he was afraid of it, too. Anxiety, insecurity, hesitation—these are all things he can discard as easily as his clothes when he’s with Jeongguk. It’s always been that way.

While Jeongguk slathers his fingers in lube, Jimin abandons his inhibitions one-by-one, and when Jeongguk pushes the first finger into him, he’s ready.

He’s ready for the sting, the oddness of the sensation as his body adjusts to the intrusion, and he’s ready for the easy slide into pleasure as Jeongguk pumps his finger languidly in and out of his hole. It doesn’t take long for Jimin to ask for another, and Jeongguk is agreeable enough. He pushes a second finger in, and Jimin squirms, gasping, as Jeongguk aims immediately for his prostate.

The slow, steady stroke of soft fingers against that sensitive spot makes Jimin’s back arch off the bed, and if he wasn’t busy riding the blissful high shooting through his body, he’d retaliate against Jeongguk for the smug snicker that reaches his ears.

Jeongguk doesn’t relent after that, working Jimin right up to the edge before he backs down again, and Jimin doesn’t know if he hates him for it, or loves him. He stops caring about anything but the way Jeongguk is making him feel, stops absorbing sensory input aside from the squelch of lube and pressure of Jeongguk’s fingers and the curl of his own fingers into the bedding beneath him, and it’s a complete shock when the cold plastic of the vibrator settles against the heated skin of his cock.

Immediately, Jeongguk thumbs the toy on and Jimin’s eyes fly wide open, a shameless cry ripping from his lips as Jeongguk works it in slow circles around the head of his cock. He slides the bullet down Jimin’s length, pressing gently against the vein as he drags it back up the underside of Jimin’s cock, and Jimin feels good.

Jeongguk uses his distraction to press a third finger in, and the freshness of the stretch has Jimin’s breath catching in his throat.
He’s fingered himself before—he’s fingered himself *multiple* times before. But Jeongguk’s fingers are longer than his, if a little thinner, and his *knuckles*—his knuckles are more prominent, and Jimin feels full in a way he’s never accomplished on his own.

Jimin writhes as Jeongguk breaks him down, stroke by stroke, curling and twisting his fingers and toying with his cock. Jimin’s vision goes fuzzy at the edges as he approaches orgasm, but Jeongguk sees the tightening of his finger in the bedclothes and stops, pulling his fingers out and removing the vibrator from his sensitive flesh, and Jimin quivers into the void of sensation, a cry of frustration slipping from him.

“Shhh, baby, be patient,” Jeongguk murmurs as he rubs the pad of his thumb into Jimin’s hip.

“Please, just fuck me,” Jimin whimpers, uncaring about how he sounds. He’s *ready*. He wants Jeongguk’s cock, and isn’t afraid to say so. “Want you in me now.”

“Just one more time, baby, and then I’ll fill you up, okay?” Jeongguk soothes. “I promise, it’ll be better if you wait for it.”

And that sounds fucking good to Jimin. Okay, so coming *now* sounds good too, but he trusts Jeongguk. He asked Jeongguk to show him how good it could be, and if Jeongguk says it can still get better, then Jimin believes him. He blinks through the fog of his arousal, staring at the ceiling as he tries to steady his breathing, and forces himself to be patient.

He’s not entirely calmed when Jeongguk pushes his fingers back in, but Jeongguk is in charge, and —

And Jimin decides he likes it.

He kind of likes being taken care of, his only concern the way his body feels. He likes it, but he also wonders what it would be like to be the one in control.

Jeongguk massages his fingertips against Jimin’s prostate, and Jimin gives up thinking, dismissing the idea for another day.

The heat pooling in his gut is quicker to boil this time around, precum pooling obscenely on his stomach like he’s a damned faucet, and it isn’t long before Jeongguk is withdrawing again, leaving Jimin to whine over the emptiness he’s left to suffer.

It doesn’t last long. Jeongguk slips the vibrator inside Jimin, turning the intensity onto the lowest setting—a teasing buzz that’s both more and less than he’s ready for. It’s not enough to fill Jimin up, but when he lifts his head to see why Jeongguk’s not using his hands, he catches Jeongguk rolling the condom on, and *fuck* if that won’t get the job done.

Jeongguk is *hard*, his cock thick and heavy in its neglect, and Jimin spends a solid ten second cursing himself for making Jeongguk wear a condom.

*Next time*, he tells himself, vowing to make them both get tested. *Next time I’ll ride that raw.*

Jeongguk hisses a little as he slicks himself, his cock sensitive with the newfound attention, and Jimin smirks a little to himself as he lets his head drop back down to the bed, pleased that Jeongguk’s just as wound up as he is. He closes his eyes and concentrates on the vibrator in his ass, letting the stimulation melt him further into the euphoric puddle he’s beginning to identify as.

He opens his eyes when he feels Jeongguk’s weight shift on the bed. Jeongguk hovers over him, his features clouded with sex but his eyes piercingly clear.
“You ready, baby?” he asks, dipping down to kiss Jimin. He licks into Jimin, smoothing his tongue against Jimin’s, tugging on his lower lip as he pulls away. “You ready to come on my cock?”

“Yeah,” Jimin whimpers, his fingernails dragging lightly down Jeongguk’s sides. “Please, fuck me so good, Jeonggukie—”

Jeongguk doesn’t hesitate, after that.

He sits up and pats Jimin’s thigh gently, the word ‘up’ falling from his lips like a promise, and Jimin’s thighs shake a little as he lifts his hips. Jeongguk takes pity on him, sliding one hand down his thigh, squeezing softly when he reaches Jimin’s hip, and then slipping it beneath him to Jimin’s lower back, lifting to ease the burden on Jimin’s muscles.

It stings a little—not physically, but against his pride. Maybe he’s a little vain about his muscles, but Jimin likes to know that he’s stronger than people expect. The fact that his body’s acting fucked-out enough already that his legs won’t work properly rankles.

The irritation disappears as Jeongguk stuffs a pillow under his lower back, pulling Jimin’s hips toward his own and dragging the vibrator out by its cord. Jimin shudders at the quietude that settles in his bones and radiates outward, but he knows it won’t last long.

It’s finally time.

“Hold on, baby,” he says, and Jimin wonders exactly what he should hold onto—Jeongguk, the comforter beneath him—

The moment Jeongguk presses the head of his cock against Jimin’s hole—presses, and presses, easing himself inside so cautiously—Jimin realizes it’s his sanity he should be gripping with fierce desperation.

His mouth falls open and his groan echoes through the room, and Jeongguk pauses a moment.

“You okay?” he asks, wary, worried.

Jimin can hear the strain in his voice, the way he’s working overtime to stay in control, to keep Jimin’s needs primary in his focus, and gratitude rushes through Jimin in warm wave.

“Yeah,” he says. His voice comes out a croak, ragged and raw, but that’s the least of his cares, when Jeongguk is taking care to make sure the rest of him isn’t ragged and raw and that’s more than he could have ever asked for.

He wets his lips, and continues, “You can—” He swallows against the dryness in throat and tries again. “You can keep going—”

Jeongguk resumes his careful penetration and, with every inch he sheaths in Jimin, Jimin feels more and more like his nerves have been replaced with sparking wires. He knows he needs to relax to let the discomfort pass, but he’s so full, Jeongguk is so thick inside him, and he feels like a firework about to explode, like he’ll burst into flames and burn away from the inside out.

Jeongguk stills when he bottoms out, and Jimin appreciates the opportunity to adjust. It feels like an eternity before the burning ache begins to subside, and when Jeongguk asks, “You okay for me to move a little?” Jimin decides it’s now or never.

He nods quickly, before he can change his mind, and Jeongguk strokes his fingertips up and down the outside of his thigh once, twice, and then he’s stroking Jimin inside, pulling back halfway,
painstakingly slow, and pushing back inside just as gingerly, and oh—oh—

“Oh fuck,” Jimin babbles, because fucking wow the drag of Jeongguk’s cock inside him is so fucking amazing.

Jeongguk grins, and pulls out a little farther, pushes in a little faster, and the increase in pace letting Jimin relax fully into the pleasure, and he knows—he knows with certainty—that he is not going to regret this decision.

They take it slow a little bit longer, Jeongguk reaching down to wrap his fingers around Jimin’s cock as he works his hips, and it feels good, so fucking good as the heat pools in his groin, and Jimin wants more, he wants—

Jeongguk thrusts into him again, shallowly, and Jimin squirms, trying to roll his hips into Jeongguk’s, but Jeongguk grabs him firmly by the waist and pulls out.

“You offering to do some of the work, baby?” Jeongguk asks, and Jimin’s garbled answer is a combination of disappointment that Jeongguk isn’t fucking him stupid right now and willingness to do it himself, if that gets him fucked faster.

Jeongguk chuckles, pulling the pillow out from under Jimin’s hips and nudging him on one side. Jimin gets the picture and rolls over as Jeongguk tosses the pillow out of the way, and then Jeongguk is right behind him, his sweat-slicked skin pressed against Jimin’s ass as he grinds his cock between Jimin’s cheeks.

The heat of Jeongguk’s arousal sits against Jimin’s skin like flame, and it’s all he can think about. He rocks backwards on his hands and knees, eager, and shivers when Jeongguk’s palm smooths up his spine.

He presses down on Jimin’s shoulders, and Jimin gives in and lowers himself to his elbows, and, yeah, okay, the view from there is pretty damn hot. His own cock hangs stiffly between his legs, and the pool of precum on his abs begins to run down his stomach, chasing gravity and leaving Jimin feeling filthy. His cock twitches at that thought, at the slow trickle, evidence of his own arousal, across his skin. Behind him, Jeongguk’s thighs nestle between his, and Jimin can see the shift in his muscles as he leans back ever so slightly and lines his cock up with Jimin’s hole once more.

Jeongguk’s entry is smoother this time, a seamless thrust that Jimin can’t help but push back into. When Jeongguk pulls out, Jimin lunges backward against his cock greedily, and Jeongguk lets him. Jeongguk lets Jimin fuck himself on his cock, grinding his hips into Jimin’s randomly as Jimin takes full advantage, impaling himself as best he can, as fast as he can.

The angle is different in this position, the pleasure vibrating stronger under his skin now that Jimin is actively allowed to seek it, and it doesn’t take long for it to build, the brushes against his prostate frequent and electrifying. Jeongguk reaches around him and fists his cock, tugging in time with Jimin’s movement, and the orgasm that tightens in his gut spurs him on faster.

The closer he gets to it, the harder it is to chase, but Jeongguk seems to sense that it’s time, a sloppy “fuck” falling from his lips as he picks up Jimin’s pace as pushes it harder, his hips snapping into Jimin’s in an uneven frenzy, his hand on Jimin’s cock stuttering in its rhythm as they near the edge.

Sharp gasps from Jimin pepper between Jeongguk’s ragged breathing, becoming increasingly more vocal until Jimin comes with wrecked sob, his body shaking as he comes on the comforter beneath him, pleasure pulling him under with the force of a riptide. Jeongguk moans as Jimin tightens around him, and then he’s pulling out, yanking his condom off, stroking himself once, twice, and coming all
over Jimin. Cum splatters on his ass, slides down his spine, drips down his cheeks, and it’s the icing on the fucking cake.

“F-fuck,” Jeongguk stutters, his fingers slowing as the intensity of his orgasm wracks through him, and Jimin, through his own filthy, floaty haze, agrees.

Jimin collapses back to the bed, his strength spent—and he’s not at all salty about it this time—and they take a moment to soak in what they’ve done. After a minute Jimin realizes he’s literally soaking in it, his own cum smeared beneath him and Jeongguk’s pooling in the dimples at the base of his spine.

“You came on my ass,” he says wryly. Like hell he’d miss an opportunity to tease Jeongguk as good as this one is.

“Fuck. Sorry. I—” Jeongguk stammers, leveraging himself up and moving toward his bathroom to fetch a towel.

“’S fine,” Jimin concedes, uninterested in Jeongguk actually feeling bad about it. “I kinda like feeling filthy.”

Jeongguk freezes mid-step, and then laughs, resuming his quest. “Don’t think for a second we’re not gonna explore that next time, Jimin.”

Jimin smiles wickedly. “Next time, huh?” he calls, as Jeongguk disappears into the bathroom.

There’s the sound of a cupboard closing, then the faucet running, and when Jeongguk returns to the bed with a warm, wet washcloth, it’s with a smirk on his face. “Fuck yeah, next time. I fucking love your round, tight ass.”

He drags the washcloth along Jimin’s skin, cleaning up his mess, and Jimin waits until he’s almost finished, before saying, “Get tested and you can fuck me bare. Make me really filthy.”

Jeongguk freezes a second time, the washcloth hovering over Jimin’s right hip, and then Jeongguk spanks him. Hard.

Jimin jolts, a mixture of residual lust and shock forcing his hips to rock forward into the sticky mess beneath him, and he swallows back a groan.

“If you’re gonna fucking talk like that and make me hard again already—” Jeongguk starts, slapping Jimin’s ass a second time. He eases his palm in a slow circle gently over Jimin’s stinging skin, and Jimin peeks over his shoulder to watch it blossom pink as Jeongguk finishes his threat, “—then you’d better be ready to lie in the bed you’ve made, you little shit.”

Jimin snickers and rolls over, exposing his cum-slicked stomach. “Haven’t I already lain in it?”

Jeongguk bursts into laughter, and tosses the washcloth onto Jimin’s abs. “Clean yourself off, you brat. I’m gonna find us something to sleep in.”

Jimin sighs and gets to work, cleaning the last of his cum off his stomach as Jeongguk comes back from his closet with a fresh pair of boxers for each of them, and a pair of baggy, white t-shirts. He eyes the smudged stain on the comforter hesitantly, but Jeongguk waves him off, taking the washcloth and tossing it in the bathroom hamper, and mutters something about getting a new cover.

They dress quickly, and then Jeongguk disappears into the hallway in search of a linen closet. Jimin wriggles around and kicks at the sullied comforter until it’s rolled into an unceremonious mess on the
floor, and Jeongguk rolls his eyes when he closes the door behind him.

“You could have just stripped the cover off it,” Jeongguk says.

“What kinda fun would that be?” Jimin grins, squirming into place under the sheet.

“Little fucking shit,” Jeongguk mutters as he strips the soiled cover off the comforter and dresses it in the clean one. He tosses it back across the bed and then slides in next to Jimin.

Jimin curls into a ball, seeking warmth and sighing sleepily, and Jeongguk sprawls out under the covers. A comfortable silence settles over them, but Jimin can’t help but break it.

“Thanks for fucking me, Jeonggukie,” he mumbles. The last of the adrenaline that’s kept him from passing out sooner bleeds away, and he closes his eyes. “It was kinda amazing.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Jeongguk yawns. “Same to you. Now sleep, Jimin. No more fucking shenanigans until I’ve gotten at least six hours.”

Jimin smiles, content, and pulls the comforter up closer around his face. “I promise nothing,” he whispers.

Jeongguk hits him half-heartedly with a pillow and rolls over, and Jimin giggles lightly as he drifts off to sleep.

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“You look good.”

Jiyong turns away from the full-length mirror on his wall where he’d been adjusting his suit and looks at Seungri, who’s leaning casually against the doorframe with his hands stuffed into the pockets of his impeccably tailored pants.

“You look like an heir,” Seungri continues, eying Jiyong as he paces closer.

“I am an heir,” Jiyong says softly, winding his arms around Seungri’s waist. “I am the heir, in fact.”

“Yes, but today you look it,” Seungri says, taking his hands out of his pockets to gently cup Jiyong’s face. “You look well rested for once, instead of your usual ‘I haven’t slept in five days and I’m coming for you next’ vibe.”

Jiyong scowls and steps back, lightly swatting Seungri’s hands away. “Hey, you try being the heir to the Dragon clan.”

Seungri grins broadly. “No thanks, I’ll leave that to you.” He steps into the room and pulls the door shut behind him. “I could get used to you getting more sleep though.”

Jiyong quirks an eyebrow and adjusts the cuffs of his shirt, affecting calm. “Oh?”

“Especially if you’re sleeping with me,” Seungri says, slowly walking Jiyong back up against a wall.

“Experience has taught me that I get less sleep when I spend nights with you.” He rests his hands on Seungri’s chest, lightly pushing him away. It takes a significant amount of control to do so, but the ceremony is in an hour and he can’t afford to let Seungri distract him now. Later, though…

“Why sleep when you could be doing so many other things,” Seungri smirks, cocking his head to the side and regarding Jiyong with promise in his eyes.
“Other things like you?”

“Exactly.”

“Later,” Jiyong promises, running his hands over his hair for the fifteenth time and making sure each strand is in place. He’s dyed it a vibrant blue with pink tips for the ceremony. It’s completely against his father’s taste, but he’s already the heir and he’s known for his eclectic hair colors. At this point it’s more about his reputation than anything else, visibility and safety be damned. That’s why he has Taekwoon, anyway.

“I love this color,” Seungri says, reaching out to lightly run his fingers through the styled strands. “Makes you look sweet, like cotton candy.” His hand slips down, fingers scratching softly against the short hair of his undercut and pulling him in to press a soft, lingering kiss against his lips.

“Only for you,” Jiyong murmurs against his lips, winding his arms around Seungri’s neck and deepening the kiss. Seungri is one of the few he can be himself around, that he can drop the mask of the Dragon’s heir and just be himself. Quiet, calm, soft.

He wears his mask like armor, fully aware that if the wrong people knew just how soft and sensitive he really was they would exploit that. It would be very bad indeed if his enemies knew that the person they feared spent his evenings curled up with his fiancé and crying at dramas. But Seungri is safe. He always has been, and Jiyong think that’s probably what drew him to Seungri in the first place.

A knock at his bedroom door brings him out of the kiss and he pulls away. His relationship with Seungri isn’t taboo in any way—if anyone had a problem they wouldn’t dare mention it, either—but he doesn’t like other people seeing him with his guard down, and kissing Seungri lowers his defenses faster than anything else.

“You taste sweet too,” Seungri whispers against his cheek before stepping away from Jiyong, understanding like always.

Jiyong winks at him before stepping back to the mirror to smooth down his lapels and telling the person waiting outside to come in.

“They’re ready for you, Jiyong,” Youngbae says, poking his head in the room. “You look good.”

Jiyong jerks his chin upwards in thanks. “Let’s get this over with.” He walks out the door and through his house to the front door. He pauses for a moment, shuffling into his shoes and reaching out to tangle his fingers with Seungri’s before leaving.

Taekwoon is waiting outside next to his car, silently opening the door for him and Seungri and ushering them into the backseat as Youngbae takes the passenger seat. He’s especially fond of Taekwoon. He’s the perfect bodyguard; quiet, taciturn, deadly. He doesn’t love the fact that his position in this clan makes it necessary for him to have a bodyguard, especially when he’s well-trained enough to hold his own in a fight, but the added peace of mind is nice, especially when he’s with Seungri.

Seungri’s safety is the most important thing.

He steps aside and pulls his fingers out of Seungri’s, instead placing his hand on the small of his back to urge him into the backseat before following him into the car.

Taekwoon gets behind the wheel and pulls away from the curb, merging into traffic and heading for the venue Jiyong’s father reserved for this occasion. In the backseat, Jiyong entwines his fingers with
Seungri’s again. He’d never admit to being nervous, but he knows Seungri can see that he is by the gentle squeeze he gives his hand.

Sometimes he doesn’t know what he’d do without Seungri.

The ceremony is simple.

Actually, it’s boring as fuck, especially when Jiyong has already been running the clan on his own for the better part of a year. But it’s important for the clan to see his father officially hand leadership over to Jiyong, and their family has always relied heavily on ceremony anyway.

First there’s his father’s speech. A lot of ‘this is a family, we protect and defend our own’ and ‘Jiyong has been training his whole life to do so, has been raised by half of you and is friends with the rest of you’ which is all true, if not a bit redundant because they all lived it.

So Jiyong spends most of his father’s speech leaning on the table, his chin resting in the palm of his hand while Seungri plays with the fingers of his other hand beneath the table. Needless to say, Jiyong is more focused on the way Seungri traces light patterns against the inside of his wrist than he is on his father’s speech.

He blames Seungri entirely when he nearly misses his queue to stand and join his father. The old Kwon leader handing control of the Dragon clan to the younger Kwon. Jiyong feels a surge of pride in his own accomplishments and checks another thing off his list.

And then it’s over.

His right hand weighed down with the addition of the Kwon family’s signet ring, he steps back to the banquet table and takes his new place at the head, his father sitting off to his left, Seungri moving to the seat to his right.

Something settles in his chest, a sense that everything is as it should be blanketing him in contentment as he turns his thoughts towards the next goal on his list; marriage.

This is where he belongs.

Sometimes Jiyong feels like he’s constantly falling.

For a long time, he was constantly falling behind his father’s expectations, unable to meet the demands and intentions his family had of him.

For a long time, he was falling under the pressure of those expectations and losing himself in the stress of it, his mind and soul so burdened with the need to be perfect, always, and no longer knowing who he was.

And then he fell into Seungri.

Literally, at first. Years ago, when he was younger and struggling under the weight of aspirations he might never achieve, his father had sent him to a family friend to take time away from his responsibilities and he’d tripped right into Seungri.

He’s never quite recovered from that first fall.
And he loves it. He loves the way Seungri presses him back into the sheets, the way he sighs and shudders as Jiyong scrapes his teeth along the shell of his ear and mouths down his neck.

Seungri takes his time unbuttoning Jiyong’s shirt, leaving a trail of kisses down his torso as the release of each new button exposes new skin for him to explore. It doesn’t matter that they do this almost every night because no amount of time spent with Seungri is ever enough for him. Seungri sucks a bruise into the skin of Jiyong’s hip before working his way back up and Jiyong wonders—not for the first time—if Seungri hasn’t enchanted him somehow and his kisses are the spells he casts.

“I love you,” Seungri murmurs against his skin, lips tracing familiar patters against his collarbones as he sucks marks into his skin, licking over the marks and leaving gentle, teasing nips in his wake. Jiyong loves the way he collects marks from Seungri, his skin littered with pinks and purples that paint a picture of love, Seungri the artist.

Jiyong sighs as Seungri traces patterns into the skin of his ribs with his tongue and fights Seungri’s shirt off him so he can get at more skin. He needs to scrape his teeth along Seungri’s skin in the way he knows he likes and leaving marks in return that make it clear Seungri is his. He groans as Seungri grinds his hips against his, desperate to feel the heat of Seungri’s skin against his own.

“Off,” he growls, tugging at Seungri’s pants while trying to shimmy out of his own. He gives up on both accounts as Seungri leans back and kicks off his slacks before making quick work of Jiyong’s pants until they’re both fully naked. Jiyong groans in satisfaction as Seungri fits himself snugly against Jiyong’s hips like there’s no place he’d rather be.

Seungri begins rocking against him, setting a pace that Jiyong knows will escalate into a quick, rough fuck that will have him shouting Seungri’s name into the skin of his neck. But that’s not what he wants from tonight.

Tonight he wants Seungri to know, irrevocably, that Jiyong is so, so in love with him.

With a smoothness that comes from myriad experiences Jiyong rolls them over until Seungri is prone beneath him, settling over Seungri’s hips and pressing their chests together as he presses a deep, slow kiss to Seungri’s lips. He swallows the moan that slips from Seungri, his tongue chasing the sound around his mouth until he’s sure he’ll wake up with the taste of Seungri still on his lips.

“You’re mine,” he whispers against his lips, nipping at the plump of Seungri’s bottom lip and sucking it between his lips softly.

“Doesn’t this already say as much?” Seungri holds up his left hand, the ring on his fourth finger glinting in the low light.

Jiyong laces his fingers with Seungri’s pressing their hands down into the plush of the mattress. “I can never show you how much you mean to me.” Jiyong grinds their erections together and they both gasp at the sensation. Jiyong leans in to kiss him again, repeating the motion with his hips as he slips his tongue deep into Seungri’s mouth.

“And how do you plan on showing me tonight?” Seungri asks, pulling back slightly to look at Jiyong with half-lidded eyes.

Instead of answering, Jiyong swipes the lube from the nightstand with his free hand and opens it, coating the fingers Seungri holds up for him and guiding Seungri’s hand to his entrance, sighing as Seungri easily slips two fingers into him.

He doesn’t waste much time on prep, Seungri getting a third finger inside him quickly since he’s still
loose from their round earlier that morning. Still, he must pick up on Jiyoung’s desire for a long, slow
night because instead of removing his fingers he sits up, lifting Jiyoung with him and untangling their
fingers in favor of cupping his jaw and overwhelming Jiyoung with the slow intensity of his kiss, his
fingers still stroking languidly against his walls.

Jiyoung melted into the kiss, surrendering in a way that he would never allow himself to with anyone
other than Seungri.

His precious, precious Seungri.

He tangles his hands into the silky black strands of Seungri’s hair. He keeps trying to convince
Seungri to dye his hair bright red but Seungri refuses, unwilling to give up the natural softness of his
hair. Besides, Seungri always counters that Jiyoung’s hair has enough color for the both of them, an
argument Jiyoung is hard pressed to refute.

Seungri’s fingers find his prostrate and circle it gently, providing just enough stimulation to keep
desire and pleasure arching through Jiyoung, making his back arch and his breathing come in heavier
pants that Seungri swallows up as he explores Jiyoung’s mouth with his tongue.

Jiyoung reaches for the lube blindly, humming against Seungri’s lips when he finds it and pouring
some into his hand before reaching behind himself to slick up Seungri’s erection. There isn’t
anything new about this, it’s not something they haven’t done hundreds of times before, but there’s
still a sense of breathless anticipation in the seconds before Jiyoung slides down and takes Seungri into
him fully.

He’ll never get tired of the way they fit together. It’s effortless and easy at this point, and Seungri has
always, always been exactly perfect for Jiyoung, smoothing out all his rough edges and making it easy
to fall into him. Jiyoung loves Seungri, and he loves the way Seungri feels inside him.

“I know I tell you this all the time,” Seungri says against his lips as he slowly starts to lean back,
keeping Jiyoung pressed close to his chest. “But I love the way it feels to be inside you.”

Jiyoung hums into his mouth, tongue too busy memorizing the back of Seungri’s teeth to work out an
actual response, but he thinks he gets his agreement across with the way he rolls his hips back against
Seungri.

Seungri’s hands settle on his waist, gentle and soft as they linger and stroke love into his skin as
Jiyoung sets a slow, easy pace with his hips that leaves them both shaking and breathing unsteadily
with the intensity.

One of Seungri’s hands slides up the bare expanse of Jiyoung’s back, fingers winding into the strands
of his hair and tangling there, his other hand resting firmly on his lower back. Gently, Seungri pulls
away from the kiss, hips still moving languidly to meet Jiyoung’s.

“Do you know what I thought when I first saw you, all those years ago?” Seungri asks, biting his lip
as Jiyoung shifts down slightly, the fit deeper and tighter.

“What?” Jiyoung nuzzles into Seungri’s neck, leaving lingering kisses against the heartbeat he feels
there, finding comfort in the rhythm of a heart that beats for him.

“I thought,” Seungri says around a gasp as Jiyoung bites at the muscle of his shoulder, “that you were
the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen.”

Jiyoung shivers, and not just because Seungri is brushing his prostrate with every thrust. “I’m the most
beautiful thing anyone has seen,” he says confidently, sitting up and arching his back when the shift
in position makes the slide of Seungri inside him drag that much more against his prostrate.

Seungri’s laugh chokes off into a moan as Jiyong speeds up slowly, seeking after that delicious coil of heat that’s starting to build between his hips. Seungri moves his hips and suddenly the friction is so much better as Seungri’s hips move in rhythm with his own and each pull of his cock is drug out as long as possible.

And Jiyong is melting because he’s had lovers before Seungri and he’s had fantastic fucks before, but there’s something about a fathomless love being added to the cocktail of emotions swirling through him that makes sex with Seungri so much better than anything else he’s ever experienced.

Every single nerve feels like it’s on fire and the pace that they’ve set is bordering on torturous when Seungri grabs him tightly around the waist and flips them over without pulling out, and Jiyong rearranges his limbs so that the next time Seungri thrusts into him it’s in a smooth, agonizing glide. Jiyong is soft-spoken in nearly every aspect of his life, but the way Seungri fucks him draws out every sound and feeling until he’s expressing it in a constant litany of moans against the skin of Seungri’s neck.

“I love the sounds you make,” Seungri pants, hips quickening as the intensity builds for both of them.

Jiyong pulls away from Seungri’s neck, head falling back against the pillows as Seungri’s hand finds his and he tangles their fingers together on the sheets. Jiyong’s fingers reflexively tighten around Seungri’s with every slow thrust, his eyes caught in Seungri’s as he hovers above Jiyong.

Heat coils around them, between them, in every space where they exist, separate and together. “I love you,” Jiyong chokes, overwhelmed with emotion and desire.

Seungri presses his forehead to Jiyong’s and breathes, hips stilling for a moment before shifting slightly and changing the angle. When he slides back in the rub makes Jiyong’s back arch, his chest flush with Seungri’s as he gasps in pleasure at the new drag of friction as Seungri picks up his pace. Seungri’s other hand slides down the skin of Jiyong’s side until he’s grasping at his thigh, bringing his leg up around Seungri’s waist.

Jiyong brings his other leg up, squeezing Seungri’s waist between his thighs and encouraging him as he moves faster still. Seungri’s hand tightens around his and Jiyong’s eyes catch and hold on Seungri’s. It’s the kind of intimacy that makes Jiyong burn, every part of him belonging to Seungri, the feeling that they’re connected by more than their bodies.

Jiyong doesn’t believe in soulmates, but he thinks that if he did Seungri would be his.

He slides a hand up Seungri’s back, feeling the muscles shift and move beneath his skin as he shudders apart around and inside Jiyong. It’s the look in his eyes as he comes that has Jiyong falling apart after him, body tightening around Seungri inside him and making every wave of pleasure build off the last.

Seungri buries his face into Jiyong’s shoulder, lips brushing against skin damp with skin, gently collapsing against Jiyong as they both catch their breath. Jiyong can feel the wetness where they’re still joined, the way some leaks down his thighs as Seungri shifts them onto their sides, carefully and gently pulling out.

“I could do this with you every night, all night, for the rest of our lives and it wouldn’t be enough,” Seungri says, brushing a strand of damp, teal hair out of Jiyong’s eyes. He rolls off the bed, moving to the bathroom and coming back with washcloths that he uses to quickly clean them both before
sliding between the sheets and pulling Jiyong flush against him.

“I need to sleep sometime, Seungri,” Jiyong teases, feeling stretched and a little empty without Seungri inside him. He frowns and pulls Seungri tighter against him, arms snug around ribs and legs tangling together.

“Then sleep,” Seungri says, pressing a warm kiss to the back of Jiyong’s shoulder. He twines his fingers with Jiyong’s, a gesture that makes him smile fondly at the now-familiar brush of metal between his fingers as Seungri’s engagement ring rubs against the skin of Jiyong’s fingers. “I love you, my Dragon heir.”

“Leader, now,” Jiyong corrects, already feeling sleep pull him under.

“You’ve always been, and always will be, my leader.”

The whispered words come as Jiyong succumbs to sleep, a faint smile on his lips, perfectly content in the arms of the man he loves most in this world.

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Jeongguk’s new Aston Martin Vanquish is beautiful.

Except ‘beautiful’ doesn’t cover it. Exquisitely stunning, dazzlingly elegant, marvelously gorgeous—fucking pretty—none of these words describe the silver masterpiece that Jeongguk’s parents gifted him for his nineteenth birthday.

Jimin thinks that if you could see an orgasm, it’d look like this car.

And since he’s thinking about what orgasms look like…

Their mothers are settling in the parlor with a bottle of wine, and their fathers are headed to Mr. Jeon’s office where Jimin knows he’s got a bottle of scotch tucked in a desk drawer, and Jimin knows they’ll all drink themselves stupid and the Jeons will offer up guest rooms for the Parks and they won’t even notice that Jimin and Jeongguk have already disappeared, so Jimin waits until their parents are completely out of sight, and then he twists on his couch cushion and climbs onto Jeongguk’s lap, straddling him as he slides his arms around Jeongguk’s neck.

“Take me for a ride later?” he murmurs to Jeongguk, his lips curving up in a knowing smirk, and Jeongguk’s eyes narrow.

“We’re not having sex in my new car, Jimin—”

Jimin pouts. Cars like this are made to have sex in. It’s practically a requirement.

“No,” Jeongguk hisses. “Sex is messy, you little shit. I’m not staining my new upholstery just so you can say you were fucked in Bond’s car.”

Jimin’s pout transforms from his signature sultry plea into a displeased glower.

Jeongguk grins. “Doesn’t mean we can’t have sex before we get in the car, though.”

That’s a start, Jimin thinks. He leans in, sucking Jeongguk’s lower lips between his, worrying at it gently with his teeth, as he grinds his half-hard cock against Jeongguk’s groin. He releases Jeongguk’s lip with a soft pop and lets his smirk return.

“We’d better get started on that, then,” he says, lacing just enough innocence into his tone that he
knows Jeongguk won’t be able to resist.

“You little shit,” Jeongguk says again, lifting Jimin in his arms as he stands up and heads toward the staircase.

One fantastic fuck and an extremely well-deserved nap later (and then another quality fuck, because Jeongguk is weak and Jimin knows it), Jimin and Jeongguk sneak down the staircase, out the side door, through the atrium, and into the garage. Jeongguk twirls the new key fob on a ring around his index finger as they walk past his mother’s Jaguar and his father’s Ferrari, and neither of them can contain their grins as they slip into the Aston Martin.

It’s almost 3 am, and Jimin’s sure that the noise of the garage door opening will bring someone running, but it doesn’t, and then Jeongguk’s turning over the engine, and fuck if the beautiful car doesn’t sound orgasmic, too.

The Aston Martin purrs down the driveway, the well-oiled gate opening automatically, silently, as they approach it, and then they’re on the road, driving faster than Jimin has ever gone before and it’s fucking amazing.

He rolls down his window and leans out it, laughing his joy into the darkness of early morning as Jeongguk steers them steadily down the open stretch before them.

Before too long, though, stately residential straightaways turn into cramped city blocks, and Jeongguk slows now that he can’t see down the intersecting roads as easily. Jimin settles back in his seat, rolls up his window, and rakes his fingers through his windswept hair. He feels like a gooey mess, between his earlier pleasure and the adrenaline coursing through his veins now, and when Jeongguk rolls to a halt at a stop sign, Jimin doesn’t think. He just acts.

He stretches across the center console and pulls Jeongguk to him, kissing him hungrily, licking into his mouth and pushing his fingers through the hair at Jeongguk’s nape. Jeongguk indulges him, groaning into the kiss as Jimin’s tongue caresses his, his hand squeezing its way up Jimin’s thigh, and—

A horn blazes from an SUV behind them, and Jimin flips the driver off as they pull around Jeongguk’s car and speed off down the street. Jeongguk pushes him back into his seat, reaches past him for the seat belt, and pulls it across Jimin’s body, clicking the buckle in place.

“You little shit,” he says, his tone equal parts amused and irritated. “Stay put.”

“Fuck,” Jimin says. He was so close to changing Jeongguk’s mind about sex in the car, but noooo, some asshole had to be impatient.

Jimin goes back to pouting, but only for a little bit. The ride is so smooth, and as they merge onto the expressway and pick up speed again, Jimin closes his eyes and lets the velvet hum of the engine and the quiet murmur of rubber on asphalt lull him.

He’s entirely unprepared when the car hits them from behind.

Several things happen at once. Jimin’s eyes jerk open with the initial impact, his breath catching in his chest, and his heartbeat begins pounding in his ears as his hands scrabble for purchase on something, anything. Jeongguk swears as he slams on the brakes, trying to control the tailspin they’ve been thrown into, and Jimin forces himself to choke back his panic as they jerk back and forth across multiple lanes.
The brakes finally seem to catch on the pavement, and then they’re spinning around, facing the cars that had been behind them, and Jimin can’t contain the strangled noise that rips out of his throat as his bracing grasp on the door hand-hold slips and they crash sideways into the guardrail, rebounding back into traffic.

Jimin’s wrist ricochets painfully off the door, but he dismisses the blossom of pain when he hears the sharp crack of Jeongguk’s head slamming against his own window. Jimin thinks he yells Jeongguk’s name, but in the wake of Jeongguk’s injury, all other sounds feel like they’re struggling through deep waters to reach his ears.

Jeongguk sits there, stunned, for a precious two seconds, before he manages to shake it off enough to tap the gas gently, to get them out of the way of oncoming vehicles. Everything finally slows, and the side airbags finally deploy as they come to a stop.

Jimin scrambles to unbuckle his seatbelt, uncoordinated fingers slipping over the smooth leather as he tries to get past the shock of the accident. He meets Jeongguk’s eyes, relief flooding through him as he sees that Jeongguk is okay—the fucking idiot had buckled Jimin in, but not himself—and then Jimin sees the gash on Jeongguk’s cheek, and the blood that’s staining his skin red as it streams down his face. Jimin realizes, belatedly, that Jeongguk’s pupils are uneven, one blown wide and the other slightly constricted. He tries not to panic but, over screeching tires and crumpling steel, he’d heard Jeongguk’s head hit when they’d smashed against the guardrail.

Jeongguk had hit his head—hard.

What if— What if he had spinal damage? What if he had brain damage?

“Jeonggukie?” Jimin says. “Hey, Jeonggukie? You with me?”

“I’m okay,” Jeongguk replies sluggishly. “Dizzy. You?” His words come slow, and he’s slurring—that’s not a good sign.

“I’m just fine,” Jimin says, trying to keep the shaking from his voice. “I’m gonna call an ambulance, okay? Don’t move around, okay?”

Jeongguk doesn’t argue, just gingerly leans his head back against the headrest and closes his eyes. Jimin watches him nervously as he dials 9-1-1. The dispatcher is calm—exactly what Jimin needs to keep himself calm—as she coaxes him through question after question. What’s his name? Is anyone hurt? Is their car in danger of starting on fire? What happened to the other vehicle?

He keeps his cool until the dispatcher asks about the other driver, and then his eyes find the car that hit them.

It’s mangled beyond recognition.

It’s a ruined, twisted mess that Jimin’s eyes can’t sort out. He can’t tell which side is supposed to be up—can’t even make his brain see it as a car—until he tilts his head sideways and realizes that both the hood and roof of the car are smashed in, crunched flat like the vehicle was never anything more than a rectangular hunk of scrap metal.

There was a person in there.

A person.

“Oh fuck,” he gasps, “I’m gonna throw up—”
He manages to push his door open and lean out over the pavement before he vomits up Jeongguk’s birthday meal. Heave after heave wracks his body, until nothing’s left but bile and the image of the compacted car ingrained on the back of his eyelids.

Two hours later, sitting in Jeongguk’s hospital room, the steady beeping of Jeongguk’s heart rate monitor ringing in his ears, he picks at the brace on his right wrist and listens to the local news report the accident.

Jimin learns that the driver of the other car, a young man named Lee Seungri, died upon arrival at the hospital. He hadn’t even made it to the OR.

His parents turn the TV off when they and the Jeons sweep into the room, and that’s the last they let him hear about the accident.

***

Foreboding is a strange feeling.

It’s this itching, cloying, tight feeling just under your skin that makes you feel too big for your skin. Like something that you think you can ease away with a few well-placed scratches, but it’s never enough.

He’s been feeling it all day, this sense that something is wrong, or about to be. It’s late now, and he’s curled up on the couch in his living room doing some mindless work while waiting for Seungri to come home.

He shakes off the thought that Seungri should have been home hours ago with the rationale that he’s probably having a blast at whatever club his friends have chosen tonight and isn’t ready to come home yet.

He doesn’t think about the fact that Seungri hasn’t stayed out clubbing later than two in years, that he’s usually home by now and curling up next to Jiyong, his warm skin and soft breathing lulling him to sleep.

His phone rings quietly on the couch next to him and he snatches it up and answers it, expecting to hear Seungri.

“Jiyong?”

The second he hears Seunghyun’s voice he knows it’s bad. His brain helpfully tells him that Seunghyun is his family’s personal doctor. If he’s calling—especially this late—something is wrong.

“What is it?” he asks, trying not to panic. He closes his laptop and curls up tighter on the couch.

“Jiyong,” he says again, and his voice breaks on his name. “It’s Seungri.”

Jiyong experiences the horrible sensation of the ground falling out from under him despite his stationary position on the couch and tries to remember what his world looked like before it was shattered beyond recognition.
For two days after it doesn’t feel real.

Every sound in his empty apartment, every creak as the building shifts and settles, could be Seungri walking down the hallway, returning from work or a night clubbing and slipping between the sheets and pulling Jiyong close.

And the worst part, the worst part, is that he did not get to say goodbye.

He did not get to kiss Seungri one last time.

He did not get to comfort him or take his pain away as he lay there dying in agony, his body crushed and broken.

He was not able to hold him in his final moments and whisper how completely, utterly, hopelessly in love with him he is.

Jiyong did not get any of that, and it is not fair.

He wanders around their house—his house, now—desolate. He keeps feeling like he’s missing something, like something is lost and he’s searching for it only to remember, abruptly, that he’s missing his heart and he’ll probably never get it back.

Mornings are the worst.

Every day he wakes up and for three blissful seconds he doesn’t remember. It’s still too new for his brain to automatically empty a spot in Jiyong’s life that’s never been empty before.

One.

Jiyong stretches, a habit he’s always had to pull himself from slumber faster in the mornings. The sun warms his muscles as he does, making his skin feel soft and golden in the dawn air.

Two.

He sighs, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and reaching out for Seungri, never far away—especially not in sleep, needing to feel his skin, his warmth, his love.

Three.

His hand lands on cool sheets and he closes his eyes against the tears leaking from the corners before opening them again and turning his head to make sure that he’s really not there.

He’s not. Seungri is gone and he isn’t coming back.

It takes Taekwoon a week to approach him.

He’s never been one to talk, always seemingly content to stand in the background and watch, always protecting.

Jiyong wonders if he blames himself for Seungri’s death like he does. If he laments not being there to protect Seungri. But protecting Seungri was always his second priority.
“What do you need.” It’s not a question. The softness in Taekwoon’s tone as he speaks calmly into the dark of the living room startles Jiyong out of his dazed stare into nothing.

“What?” Jiyong asks, brushing away the constant wetness against his cheeks. He makes an actual effort to read the paperwork in his hands as Taekwoon steps closer.

“What do you need me to do?” Taekwoon sits down gingerly on the couch next to Jiyong, like any sudden moves will make him shatter.

Jiyong wonders if he wouldn’t shatter at the slightest touch. It feels like he would.

“Your job,” Jiyong sighs. He doesn’t have the energy to deal with this. He doesn’t have the energy to deal with anything anymore. “Just protect me, Taekwoon.”

Taekwoon falls silent, as he is prone to do. Jiyong watches him out of the corner of his eye, noting the way he uncharacteristically plays with his fingers, bottom lip caught between his teeth.

“I can’t protect you,” Taekwoon mutters, so soft Jiyong isn’t sure he even heard him correctly.

Jiyong sighs impatiently. He doesn’t have time for this and he honestly wants to be left alone so that he can go back to the sheets that still smell like Seungri and pretend, just for a few hours, that Seungri isn’t dead. “Taekwoon, you’re the best bodyguard I’ve ever—”

“I can’t protect you from a broken heart, no matter how much I want to,” Taekwoon interrupts. His eyes are flashing when Jiyong meets his gaze.

“Oh,” Jiyong breathes. He takes a deep breath and they both pretend not to hear it for the thinly veiled sob that it is.

“I can’t protect you from a pain that’s already happened, but I can try and help you heal?” Taekwoon’s voice is hesitant, soft and quiet in the dim light of the room. He’s always been soft spoken, and his light voice soothes over Jiyong’s aching soul and wraps it in warmth.

Jiyong pulls his knees into his chest and rests his cheek on his knees, looking at Taekwoon through slightly blurry vision. “I don’t think I’m ever going to heal from this.” The admission strips away any pretense Jiyong has been holding on to in the last week, and tears begin to streak down and wet the material of his sweats.

Slowly, Taekwoon edges closer to Jiyong on the couch until he’s sitting behind Jiyong’s curled form, his legs on either side of Jiyong. Taekwoon calmly and steadily wraps his arms around Jiyong gently easing him back until he’s resting against the firm muscles of his chest.

“Sometimes,” Taekwoon begins, resting back against the arm of the couch and encouraging Jiyong to relax into him. “It’s easier to bear something if you know you don’t have to do it alone.”

Jiyong is glad, suddenly, that Taekwoon is the only person he’s allowed near him since the funeral. If any of his other men had seen their leader like this—weak and crying almost constantly—he would lose the carefully crafted image he’s worked so hard to maintain. He’s more grateful to Taekwoon than he ever has been before and he allows himself to curl into his chest, to seek comfort in a body that’s warm and steady—if not the body he’s used to and still craves.

“Don’t leave me too,” Jiyong whispers into the skin of Taekwoon’s neck, fingers knotting in the fabric of his shirt. He shudders as too-thin arms come around him to hold him tightly, as if to keep him from breaking apart.
“I won’t,” Taekwoon promises, resting his cheek against the matted mess of Jiyong’s hair. “You’re not alone, Jiyong.”

Jiyong drifts into a light sleep, Taekwoon’s heartbeat lulling him into a doze that still leaves him aware enough to notice when somebody enters his apartment and starts talking to Taekwoon, their conversation hushed.

“How is he?”

Through the haze of fitful sleep Jiyong recognizes Youngbae’s voice and struggles to hear the answer.

“Grieving,” Taekwoon answers succinctly. “He’s calmer now than he has been.”

There’s silence for a moment, and Jiyong feels the feather-light brush of fingers against his forehead, no doubt Taekwoon sweeping hair off his face.

“Something needs to be done,” Youngbae says. “The men are getting restless. They’re unsettled that something like this has happened to one of our own—to Jiyong’s fiancé—and they want something to be done.”

“Let him sleep,” Taekwoon insists. “He’s lost the love of his life. He’s in no state of mind to be making those kinds of decisions when emotions are running so high. The last thing this clan needs is a war because of a misplaced sense of vengeance.”

More silence following Taekwoon’s words, in which Jiyong feels Taekwoon’s body curl around his in a protective gesture filled with affection. Jiyong wants to open his eyes, tell them both that he’s fine—or he will be—and that he knows what’s best for this clan. He wants to tell them that underneath his grief he can feel a cold, simmering rage brewing that’s screaming for retribution. But his eyes are heavy and it’s been days since he was able to sleep, and Taekwoon is warm even though he’s not the warmth Jiyong still craves with his entire being. So Jiyong says nothing, barely hearing Youngbae’s sigh of concession before sleep—true, deep sleep for the first time in days—claims him.

“You can think on this choice, Jiyong,” Taekwoon pleads. “You don’t have to decide anything right now.”

“I don’t need more time.” Jiyong shrugs Taekwoon’s hand off his shoulder. “I’ve had plenty of time to plan out exactly what I want to do.”

It’s been another week since he realized this simmering, cloying feeling waiting under his grief was a desire for revenge, to strike back and take from them everything that had been taken from him.

In the darkest moments of his despair he makes a decision, the kind of resolution that is going to change everything, with the kinds of consequences that will linger for years to come. But in the depths of despair he doesn’t care about any of those consequences when the very least he can do is make sure that Seungri’s death isn’t as meaningless as it actually was.

In the depths of his despair Jiyong makes a call and swears vengeance for the man he loved—his fiancé—and resolves that his death won’t be for nothing.
Kwon Jiyong makes a call and damning the consequences.

Taekwoon’s lips are pursed when Jiyong hangs up, disappointment radiating off him in thick waves.

“Are you going to leave?” Jiyong bites out, throwing his phone onto the bed and sinking down onto the mattress to rest his head in his hands.

If Taekwoon is going to leave he’d rather he did it now. Seungri’s already gone, and even though Taekwoon promised not to leave, Jiyong wouldn’t blame him if he did.

Seungri had always kept the monster within Jiyong at bay, had been there to round out and soften the sharpest edges. Without Seungri’s tempering influence, Jiyong fears succumbing to the darkness growing inside him daily.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Taekwoon reassures, sitting next to Jiyong on the bed. “I’m here for you; I always will be.”

Jiyong breathes in deeply, tilting and resting his head in Taekwoon’s lap. Taekwoon’s slender fingers play with the strands of his hair and Jiyong tells himself that he’s doing the right thing.

When the vase shatters against the wall it’s not nearly as satisfying as Jiyong hoped it would be.


The group of men assembled in front of him flinches at his tone, at the words flung their way with acid dripping from the syllables.

“We got the wrong car.” One of the men steps forward, starting to explain.

Taekwoon places a calming hand on Jiyong’s shoulder.

“The boys were supposed to be in that car. All the information we had indicated that they’d be in it, but something must have happened last minute and instead of the heirs it was Madams Jeon and Park.”

Jiyong seethes and tries not to lash out at his men. They’d done their job to the best of their abilities, everything going the way they’d planned, but sometimes fate had other ideas.

Jiyong had a long list of complaints to take up with fate—the first being Seungri’s unjust departure from this world.

“Leave,” he commands, watching as his men flinch away from him and rush to comply, scurrying out of his house.

“Maybe it’s for the best,” Taekwoon soothes once they’re alone. “They’re just boys, and no matter how awful it was, it was an accident.”

Jiyong hates him for saying it, even more so because he knows Taekwoon is right. And—

He pulls up short. Taekwoon is right. This is for the best. “You’re right,” Jiyong says, turning to face Taekwoon.

Taekwoon looks surprised, more so when Jiyong steps into him and wraps his arms around Taekwoon’s middle in an embrace. “This is for the best.”
“It’ll be okay, Jiyong.” Jiyong feels Taekwoon’s arms come around him, hugging him to his chest tightly and dropping a soft kiss to the top of his head. It’s easier to lie to Taekwoon when he doesn’t have to look him in the eyes, and he allows Taekwoon to hold him close as he hums a response while his mind spins.

He didn’t get the boys, but he got their mothers. It’s for the best. Now Jiyong knows they understand what it feels like to lose someone you love, and that dark, hungry part of him resolves to take and take and take until those boys have nothing left but the ashes of everyone and everything they once held dear scattered around them.

When Taekwoon finally leaves him later that night, he picks up his phone and makes one last call.

“Dami?” he says when the call connects. “I have a job for you, my dear sister.”

***

Sitting in the car next to his father on the way home from the funeral home, Jimin feels torn. The rain that splatters against the window and runs in rivulets down the glass pulls his tears down with it. They slide quietly down his cheeks, his grief as muted as the sounds of traffic on the road around them, and Jimin wishes he could roll the window down and let his tears and the rain mingle.

It’s calming, the normalcy of it. A drop streaks down the window leaving clarity in its path, and Jimin presses his forehead against the cold of the glass and wishes it was that easy.

It’s not.

Nothing will ever be easy again. Not now that his mother is dead.

He wants the pain to wash away as easy as puddles stream down gutter drains, but he’s afraid that if it does, it’ll take his mother with it.

His eyes slide sideways and catch on the urn in his father’s lap. It sits there in his periphery, more consuming than the world immediately in front of him, and he can’t help it when his voice tumbles from his lips in a reverent, broken whisper.

“Can I hold her?”

Jimin’s father looks over at Jimin, surprised at the shattering of the silence between them. His lips purse for a moment as his eyes drop to his wife’s ashes, and then he nods. It’s a curt thing, sharp and jarring as he struggles with his own tears, but Jimin can sense a softness in the way he acquiesces so easily.

His father’s hand caresses the urn lightly, a barely-there touch that could be mistaken for shifting its weight as he lifts it to hand to Jimin, but Jimin knows what it is. His father is a hard man, but the one person that could temper his words and gentle his gaze is sealed in his lap, and Jimin knows that he feels it too.

They ignore each other’s tears out of politeness as the urn passes to Jimin, and he wraps his arms around it carefully, cradling it against his body as he turns back to the quiet storm outside. It’s dwarfed by the storm inside, and as Jimin sits there, with a fist full of ashes and a heart that he can’t even use, all he can think is that this is the last time he’ll hold her so close.

There’s a notable change in the household now that Jimin’s mother is gone. Not just a lack of her
physical presence, but a tangible shift in the atmosphere that makes it less of a home and more of a house. It’s a tension that no one knows how to navigate and everyone’s afraid to break.

Jimin drifts through each day on autopilot, spending as little time outside his room as possible. Closing himself in isn’t quite a balm against the ceaseless pain in his chest, but it’s better than facing his father and seeing his own heartache reflected back on his father’s features.

He thinks hourly about texting Jeongguk. Once again, he’s the only person that Jimin knows that will understand what he’s going through, but his selfishness makes Jimin pause every time he reaches for his phone. He can’t justify bothering Jeongguk just because he feels alone. Jeongguk deserves time to grieve with his father even if Jimin’s father preferred to retreat into the solitude of his office rather than share his pain with his son.

In the end, it’s Martha that disrupts the fragile balance they’ve found.

It’s been a hectic day in the household as they prepare for Jimin’s quickly approaching birthday celebration—his seventeenth, but what does it matter? It doesn’t feel like there’s anything to celebrate—and Jimin can’t find his black suit. It’s the one that he wore to his mother’s funeral, and he can’t bring himself to set out a different one, when the idea of a birthday without his mother feels like another occasion to grieve.

He wanders the house searching for the misplaced dry-cleaning, but when he can’t find it, he looks for Martha instead. He finds her standing in front of the open refrigerator, an opened package of yellow pickled radish in her hands as she sobs, still packed grocery bags littering the countertop.

He doesn’t think about it. He takes the danmuji from her, placing it back in the fridge and closing the door, and then turns her petite form around to face him. She buries her face in her hands, and he wraps his arms around her shoulders and holds her as she cries.

Somewhere between the funeral and the forgotten groceries, Jimin’s tear ducts have spent themselves, and although his cheeks remain dry as Martha’s tears wet his shirt, his eyes burn in commiseration as they give in to their misery.

When they finally still, wearied and empty, Martha turns back to the bags of food, and Jimin silently helps put it away. They don’t say much between them, but they don’t need to, the silence companionable and reassuring. They make a good team, working side-by-side in the kitchen like Jimin used to with his mother.

Martha turns to Jimin and clears her throat when the job is finished, he words quiet even if her voice is a bit ragged. “Did you need something, sir?”

The ‘sir’ sticks in his ears, reminding him that as much as Martha is family, she’s not his mother. And Jimin remembers why he’s there in the first place.

“Um,” he hedges, a little afraid to give himself away. He doesn’t know why. It’s not like they didn’t just console each other in their sorrow. “I was just wondering— Is my black suit back from the dry-cleaning? It—it doesn’t feel right wearing anything else for the party, and I can’t— I can’t find it anywhere, so I thought maybe you would know…”

He stutters to a halt when he sees the wide-eyed horror dawn across Martha’s face, and she brings a hand up to cover her mouth.

“I forgot to pick up the dry-cleaning,” she breathes. “Oh, no. I’m so sorry, sir. I’ll go back out now and—”
“It’s okay!” he says. “You— You have to start dinner soon, right?”

She glances at the clock and her eyes fall shut as her mistake sinks in.

“So—so I can go get it,” Jimin finds himself saying.

Martha’s snap open and she stares at him uncomprehendingly, like the words he’s uttered are in another language.

“I mean, you’ve been so busy,” Jimin continues. “You’re—” he swallows against the lump in his throat and tries again, “You’re doing everything my mom used to, for—for planning the party and managing the staff, right? Plus your regular job. It’s—I get that it’s a lot. And we’ll get you some help,” he says, the idea rolling off his tongue before it hits his brain. “Maybe somebody to help with the cooking, and to run errands?” His brain catches up, and he adds, “And a raise—you know, if you want. To manage the house, I mean.”

Her eyes gloss over again, tears rising as he speaks.

“But in the meantime, let me help,” he says, his voice softening. “We don’t have to tell anybody. Especially not my father.” He pauses for a moment, and then finishes, “I—I kind of need to get out of the house anyway. I mean—”

He stumbles then, and lets his words die away. Martha steps toward him, and her hand rests on his shoulder for a moment, appreciating the recognition he’s given her, before she turns to the small table her purse sits on. She fishes the dry-cleaning ticket out of an inner pocket, and he takes it with a sincere, if weak, smile.

“Thank you,” she whispers, and his smile strengthens.

“Of course. I’ll be back before dinner,” he says, and for the first time since his mother’s death, Jimin doesn’t feel like he’s alone.

After Jimin’s suit is carefully hung in his closet again, and his father’s dry-cleaning is handed over to Martha for delivery, Jimin sits down to dinner with his father. As every meal has been lately, it’s a quiet affair. The noise of silverware against china rings loudly through the fog of grief that hangs over Jimin and his father, but that’s it really. There’s no conversation, no laughter. None of the happiness that used to exist at the dinner table when Jimin’s mother was there to permeate the room with bright smiles and idle chatter.

When the meal is cleared away, Jimin’s father withdraws once more to his office, and Jimin steels himself to follow. He helps Martha with the dishes first, to give his father time to open his bottle of bourbon and settle after the overwhelming silence of the dinner table, but once the kitchen is tidied, he doesn’t have any reason left to stall.

He heads towards his father’s office, trying to move with purpose and surety, because if there’s one thing he’s learned from his father over the years, it’s that confidence is key in every negotiation. He pauses just outside the door, takes a deep breath, twists the knob, and pushes it open.

“How could you not know?! You know everything, Jaekuk. You know before a pigeon shits, with enough warning to side step and stay clean,” Jimin’s father spits angrily.

Jimin immediately pulls he door closed again when he realizes his father’s on the phone. He should have knocked.
F*ck, he should have knocked, but—Jaekuk is Jeongguk’s father. Why is Jimin’s father yelling at Jeongguk’s? Why, after—

His heart racing, he slowly opens the door again, just by an inch this time, and listens. Eavesdropping is a terrible idea, but something in his gut screams that he needs to know that this is about.

“I don’t fucking believe you. I think you fucking knew it was going to happen,” Jimin’s father hisses. “Your wife may have just been a trophy to you, a womb for you put an heir in and then ignore as you pleased, but I loved mine. My family actually matters to me. My son—”

There’s silence in the office, and Jimin’s ragged breathing suddenly echoes in his ears.

Was that true? Did Mr. Jeon really think that way about Jeongguk’s mother? Did Jeongguk know?

But if he did—if this was true, then how could Jeongguk stand to be in the same house with his father?

Oh God, and Jimin hasn’t reached out to Jeongguk once since—

Jemin’s stomach roils abruptly, the meal he’d picked his way through less than an hour ago threatening to come back up.

“You will stay away from my family from here on out. Your son will stay away from mine, and your business dealings with my companies are over. We are through, do you hear me?”

Jemin can’t breathe.

“You come near my family again, and I’ll end you for what you’ve done.” Jimin’s father ends the call and tosses his cell phone on top of a pile of papers on his desk. He turns toward the window, gazing out into the emptiness of his mother’s flower garden as twilight settles, and Jimin should leave—he really should leave, right the fuck now, and pretend he hasn’t heard anything.

He should leave and call Jeongguk to make sure he’s okay, before his father can tell him directly that he’s not allowed to speak to his best friend anymore, but he doesn’t have the chance.

“How much of that did you hear?” he asks quietly, all the bite gone out of his tone.

Jemin swallows back the bile that’s risen in his throat, and pushes the door open. He steps inside the office, closes the door behind him, and says, “Enough.”

“I’m sorry, Jimin, but I don’t trust that man. He’d do anything to get ahead, to make another penny, and your safety is too important to risk keeping ties to that family now that your mother is gone.”

Jemin hears the soft quaver in voice, and he knows his father means well, but—“What about Jeongguk?” he asks, his words barely above a whisper.

“I can’t do anything for him. He’s an adult in the eyes of the law, and he’s lived with his father long enough to know how to take care of himself,” his father replies, firmness seeping back into his voice.

“But, Father—”

“No, Jimin,” his father says, turning away from the window and facing Jimin. His eyes are a cold steel, and Jimin feels pinned by an immutable force. No amount of wriggling will set him free. “Your friendship with him is a liability now, a way Jeon Jaekuk can manipulate you, and by extension, me.
You have to let it go.”

Jimin feels so sick, so twisted in knots and wrong, like his stomach’s in his throat and his heart has plummeted to his gut. Everything is backwards, broken, out of alignment and begging to be fixed, but he dares not disobey.

“Okay,” The word comes out hoarse, the sound of it reflecting the sudden weariness that washes over him, and his father nods, appeased. He holds his hand out for Jimin’s phone, and Jimin unlocks it and places it slowly in his palm, knowing what comes next, dreading it but helpless to stop it.

His father scrolls through his contacts, stops at “Jeonggukie,” and blocks and deletes the number.

“I’m trusting you, Jimin,” he says holding the phone back out for Jimin to take. “Don’t make me regret it.”

Jimin’s hands tremble as he takes the device, and he doesn’t look back as he leaves his father’s office.

Lying in bed that night, his inability to fall asleep unsurprising after so many restless nights, Jimin tries to sort through the day. It started off consumed by the knowledge that that he was short one important person in his life, and ended with him being short two important people in his life.

He squeezes his eyes shut against the stinging there, and clutches his phone a little tighter where it rests on his chest.

If what his father insinuated about Mr. Jeon was true, then Jeongguk has never been more alone, and Jimin feels like the worst person on the planet. He’s willingly walking away from their friendship—Jeongguk’s unconditional companionship, the certainty of his guidance, the uncomplicated sex, all of it—and at least he knows why.

Jeongguk won’t have any warning. Jimin will just be gone.

Just like their mothers.

Jeongguk deserves better than this.

Something breaks in him, and the sob that rips out of Jimin forces him to curl onto his side, his knees tucked into his chest as he cries.

Jeongguk deserves better.

He deserves a friend that will protect him in the same way he is willing to protect them, someone who can reciprocate fully and without restraint. He deserves someone better than Jimin.

The words ricochet back and forth in his head, as damaging as a volley of bullets, and Jimin struggles to pull himself together, to mend the tears in his heart and stop the tears that course out of him with every heartbeat.

Lately, his days have felt so wasted and his nights have felt like years, and now that he knows he’ll never be able to see Jeongguk again, the ghost of his friendship haunts him. Memories flood through him like a dammed river broken free, and Jimin sees Jeongguk help him onto his horse for his first lesson. He feels Jeongguk flick him between the eyes when he mixes up his Korean conjugations, and he hears the patience in Jeongguk’s voice as he walks him through it one more time. He smells
Jeongguk’s shampoo as he washes the chlorine out of his hair after an afternoon in Jeongguk’s pool, and he tastes the fizz of cola and the thickness of chocolate on Jeongguk’s tongue as he gives Jimin his first kiss.

He remembers the way he woke up the morning after their first time together, stiff and sore, and soothed by the warmth of Jeongguk curled tightly behind him, Jeongguk’s arm thrown over his waist. He remembers the way he felt—a lazy contentment that went beyond feeling sated, like everything was right in the world—and then he remembers Jeongguk’s words to him the first time they met.

You’re not alone.

Jeongguk’s always made sure that Jimin never felt alone, and now he’s abandoning Jeongguk in the way Jeongguk promised he never would.

He can’t do it.

Jemin won’t do it.

He scrubs his face clean of tear tracks, and sits up, a decision made.

Jeongguk deserves better than to be left alone, and Jimin is going to do everything he can to get to the bottom of this mess, to put them back together and restore things to the way they should be. He may not be able to bring his mother back, to save her from that awful day, but he can do something about losing Jeongguk.

He unlocks his phone, scrolls down his contacts list, and pauses in the Js, where Jeongguk’s name should be. Before he can think better of it, he switches over to his messaging app, thumbs open his text history with Jeongguk, now listed under ‘unknown number,’ unblocks it, and types out a short message.

I’m sorry. [Sent 01:43]

He presses send, watches as the message transmits, and is about to back out of the conversation when a response pops up. It’s simple, a single character, and the unexpectedness of it makes Jimin panic just the tiniest bit.

? [Received 01:43]

He chews on his lip for a moment, then replies.

Ask your father. [Sent 01:44]

He waits for the message to send, waits for Jeongguk to reply again, but he doesn’t. Everything is quiet, and Jimin’s stomach sinks.

He hates telling Jeongguk to talk to the man that used his mother and then dismissed her as easily as a broken toy, but it can’t be helped. Jimin has to keep his messages brief, because he’s sure his father will be keeping a close eye on their cellphone bill now, to be certain that Jimin is cutting ties with Jeongguk as ordered.

He’s already risking so much just by reaching out like this, and as Jimin types out one final message, he says a silent prayer that his father will overlook his need to say goodbye.

You’re not alone. [Sent 01:7]
He sends the message, closes the conversation, re-blocks Jeongguk’s number, and returns to his contacts list, this time scrolling past the Js with determination.

There’s only one way out of this mess, and that’s forward.

He dials Seokjin, and takes a deep breath as it rings.

“‘Lo?” a groggy, sleep-laden voice answers, and Jimin winces. He didn’t even think about what time it is—is it really that late?

“Seokjin?” he asks, his voice more tentative than he’d like.

“Yeah. Who is— Jimin?” There’s a pause, a rustling of bedsheets, a muted string of words, and then the phone returns to Seokjin’s ear. “Why are you calling at this hour? Are you okay? Where are you?”

As he speaks, adrenaline rushes into Seokjin’s voice, and Jimin winces at the implication in his questions.

“I’m fine,” he hurries to say. “I’m at home. I’m safe. That’s not why I’m calling.”

He can practically hear the way Seokjin slouches in relief.

“Then what’s going on?”

“Something…something’s come up,” Jimin hedges. “I need someone who can dig up information for me. Run errands and stuff. But, like—discreetly.”

Before Jimin can even ask his question, Seokjin interjects. “Forgive me for being blunt, but doesn’t your family already have someone who can do that for you?”

“I need someone outside my father’s connections,” Jimin says, swallowing hard, “and outside the Jeons’ network. I was hoping you would know someone, or could at least point me in the right direction.”

He holds his breath, and counts the seconds until Seokjin replies.

“If your father finds out—”

“He won’t!” Jimin cuts in.

“But if he does, where does that leave me?”

“Under my protection,” Jimin says firmly. He doesn’t know how far that sentiment will take them, but he’s tired of sitting by and letting everything happen around him. Surely his initiative will be valuable enough in his father’s eyes for him to choose to forget the how of Jimin’s actions.

“I’ve always been on thin ice with him, Jimin, because of that thing years ago when you started training with me, and he’s got connections. He could ruin me in seconds, and I’ve got rent to pay, a wife to take care of,” Seokjin says.

Jimin takes a moment to consider how to answer. It’s the least he can do, to show Seokjin that Jimin is taking his concerns seriously.

“I’m done letting my father dictate what I do, Seokjin. I’m done being controlled. And I’m done with letting him control the lives of people I care about,” he finally says, and Seokjin sighs on the other
“I know a guy. He’s a fixer, and he’ll do just about anything for the right price. Is that what you need?” Seokjin asks.

Jimin exhales shakily. “Yeah, maybe it is. How do I get in touch with him?”

“I’ll give you his number. His name’s Kim Namjoon,” Seokjin replies. He rattles off a phone number almost faster than Jimin can write it down, and Jimin buzzes with excitement and nerves.

“Thanks, Seokjin,” Jimin breathes. “I owe you one. Don’t ever let me forget it.”

“Oh, I won’t,” Seokjin chuckles. “And Jimin? Kindly look past the fact that Namjoon is a clumsy teddy bear. He’s really fucking good at what he does.”

Seokjin hangs up then, without waiting for Jimin to respond, and Jimin takes a moment to steady himself before typing in Kim Namjoon’s number and pressing send.

“‘Sup?” a smooth voice greets him. “How’d you get this number?”

“A—a friend,” Jimin says, startled by the brusque words that contradicts the man’s tone. “Kim Seokjin?”

“Oh!” The voice on the other end softens. “Jin! How is he?”

“Oh…grumpy about being woken at—” Jimin checks the clock, and cringes, “—two o’clock in the morning?”

“That sounds about right. You must need something big if he gave you my number instead of just hanging up.”

Jimin gnaws softly on the inside of his cheek. “First thing I need is to know that I’ve got the right number. Are you Kim Namjoon?”

“Oh, fuck, yeah. I am. Sorry. And you are?” Namjoon asks. There isn’t any curiosity in his tone, just business, and Jimin finds that reassuring.

“Park Jimin.”

“No shit? Park as in Park Enterprises?”

“Yes.”

“Can I call you Jimin?”

“I guess?” Jimin replies, caught off guard.

“Cool, cool. You can call me Namjoon,” he says clearing his throat gently. “So, Jimin, what’s got your panties in a bunch?”

Jimin’s jaw clenches a little.

“My mother, Park Jihye, and her friend, Jeon Jeonghee, were murdered two weeks ago, and my father insinuated that Jeon Jaekuk, Jeonghee’s husband, knew about it in advance. I need to know if he did.” Jimin takes a breath, and the pushes forward. “I need to know if he was behind it. If he wasn’t, I need to know who was,” Jimin says, a touch of anger slipping into his words. “And then I
need to find a way to turn the tables and make the person responsible pay.”

“Shit,” Namjoon says softly. “I guess that counts as something big.”

Jimin forces himself to unclench his teeth. “Can you help me, or not?”

“Probably, but I’m gonna need some reassurances. Murder isn’t anything to fuck around with.”

“What kind of reassurances?” Jimin asks warily.

“Money, for starters. A fuck ton of it. The only way to safely get that kind of information is to pay for it, and pay well. You got access to your daddy’s bank accounts?”

“I have my own accounts,” Jimin grits out, “but if that’s not sufficient, then yes, I can access family funds.”

“Good,” Namjoon says. “Second reassurance: I need to know you are who you say you are. I don’t work for free, and I don’t take on dangerous jobs like this without checking out my employer first. That sound fair to you?”

“I guess,” Jimin says for the second time that night. “Uh, when and where, exactly?”

“Hang on, lemme get my—ow. Fucking hell—Rapmon, why do you need to sleep under my feet?” Namjoon yelps. “Sorry! Sorry, just my damned dog—okay, I’ve got my planner, lemme just find a pen—”

Jimin hears Namjoon shuffling around, and then the sound of glass shattering. “Shit! Rapmon, no! Sit. Sit. Stay!” A pause, and then, “Oh, don’t give me that look, you big baby. I’m just trying to save you from yourself. It took half an hour to get all the glass out of your paws last time.”

Jimin pulls the phone away from his ear and stares at the call timer in disbelief as it continues counting up steadily. This must be the clumsy teddy bear thing that Seokjin mentioned.

“Okay!” Namjoon says. “I’ve got a pen!”

“Don’t you need to, uh, take care of…whatever is going on over there?” Jimin asks. “We can talk tomorrow to schedule—”

“Nah, it’s all good. I’ll get it in a second. This happens all the time,” Namjoon assures him. “What about eleven a.m. tomorrow?”

Jimin is supposed to be in his business management lessons with Jeongguk then, but he suspects that that’s about to change.

“Eleven a.m. is fine. I’ll meet you someplace in Manhattan?”

The last thing he wants is Namjoon coming anywhere near his father.

“There’s a café I like across from the Chelsea Market, if you’re buying lunch,” Namjoon replies, and Jimin rolls his eyes.

“Sure. I’ll meet you there at eleven.”

They don’t spend any more time on pleasantries, Jimin ending the call as Namjoon goes back to yelling at his dog to stay put, and Jimin falls backward onto his bed, his conversations with Seokjin and Namjoon rolling around in his head.
He may not be able to fix everything right away, and he may not be able to tell Jeongguk in person to trust him and be patient, that he’s going to fix things and end this forced separation, but this is a start.

He closes his eyes and finally feels like he’ll be able to fall asleep.

Jimin scrubs at the sleep etched across his features, chasing it away in the face of this momentous news. “Are you sure?”

“Positive. The last piece just clicked into place, and I found them. I have an address. Now the next step is yours,” Namjoon says, his voice tired over the phone. “Just like we talked about. I messaged a copy of the whole file over to you, and it should be there in twenty minutes, or so. If you need anything else from me, let me know, yeah? I’ll be at the club.”

“Thanks, Namjoon,” Jimin says, and hangs up. He blinks against the whirlwind of the last ten and a half months, pulls himself up into a sitting position, and tips his head back against his headboard. Amidst the last of his accelerated lessons, the opening of the club, his move from the family estate to a penthouse in Chelsea, and his father’s private announcement of his terminal illness, it’s a wonder that he and Namjoon had managed to make any progress with their investigation.

He’d been so busy that sleep had become a rarity—a luxury, even—and he’d turned to using makeup to hide the bags under his eyes. Then he’d turned to using makeup because it made him feel better, more put together and polished. When his eye makeup is done right, Jimin doesn’t feel like he has to smile. It’s not about being attractive—he knows he’s that—but more about the cracks in his mask being filled in and smoothed over. It’s a confidence thing, and Jimin needs all of that he can get, especially now that it’s his turn, and the show is about to begin.

Seokjin and Namjoon, both of whom have come to work for Jimin at his club in the last six months out of necessity of proximity, have done their parts, and now he needs to do his. And the first thing he has to do is talk to his father.

He lifts his phone out of his lap, opens his father’s contact, and presses the dial button.

It hardly rings before his father’s gruff voice flows through the speaker. “Jimin,” is all he says, but he says it with a weariness that makes Jimin cringe.

“Father, how are you today?” Jimin asks, his default greeting ever since his father told Jimin that he was sick.

“I’m fine. Just another day,” his father replies, huffing out a sigh that Jimin chooses to read as fond exasperation. “Did you need something in particular, or were you just calling to check on me?”

“Both, I suppose,” Jimin admits. “Can I swing by the house tonight?” A quick glance at his phone screen assures him he can be home for dinner if he moves quickly enough.

“For dinner? Or just for conversation?”

“Mm, both, if you’ll have me,” he says, throwing the sheet back and swinging his legs over the side of the bed. He stands and stretches, his free hand reaching toward the ceiling to loosen the crick in his back. “I’ve got something important I need to discuss with you.”

“Well, I can’t refuse my son at the dinner table,” his father replies, the wryness that would have made
his words amusing missing from his tone. Jimin ignores it.

“Haha, very funny,” he retorts. “It’s alright, then? If I come tonight?”

“I don’t have anything else scheduled,” his father says.

“I’ll see you in a couple hours, then,” Jimin says.

His father grunts his agreement, and ends the call.

Jimin hurries through his shower, chooses a pair of black slacks and a long-sleeve button-up with a gold ribbon embroidered up one side, selects the cross earrings his mother gave him for his sixteenth birthday from his jewelry box, and parts his hair down the middle, sweeping his fringe to either side of his forehead. Satisfied with his appearance, he takes a quick selfie for his social media, pressing a finger against his lower lip to obscure a pensive pout. He grabs a light jacket on his way out the door and the thick envelope left for him at the front desk, as promised, and then he’s settled in the backseat of his car, his driver navigating the late afternoon traffic with the ease of practice.

Jimin posts the picture with the caption ‘dinner with my dad, but I’ll see you at the club later tonight,’ and then sets aside his phone and retrieves the file of papers from the seat beside him. It’s everything Namjoon and Jimin have collected on the death of his mother, every lead they tracked down, and Jimin reads through it carefully, refreshing his memory.

It’s not an easy read. There’s copies of police reports—graphic ones, with crime scene photos and autopsy reports—mixed in with all the information Namjoon has collected, and while it’s not ideal reading just before a meal, it’s important that everything is fresh in his mind. As they approach the family estate, he shifts gears and focuses on exactly what he needs to tell his father, and how he should say it.

By the time dinner is finished, he thinks he’s ready. Maybe.

They retire to his father’s office, settling into the same spots as they always do on the plush leather sofa before his father turns his expectant gaze on Jimin. Jimin fiddles with the file of papers in his lap as he waits for his father’s permission to begin.

“So, what did you need to speak with me about?” his father asks, and although this is what he’s come here for, Jimin’s nerves, almost quelled by the familiarity of Martha’s cooking and the calm of the meal, flare up once more.

“I…have a confession to make,” Jimin says. He pauses, waiting for a reaction, but gets none. His father stares at him placidly, and Jimin suppresses a shudder. He hates that look on his father’s face, because he never knows what’s hiding beneath it.

Taking a deep breath, because there’s no turning back now, Jimin presses on. “Since that phone call between you and Jeon Jaekuk last October, I’ve been conducting an investigation into Mother’s murder,” he says. He speaks slowly, cautiously, but he’s not sure why. The speed—or lack thereof—with which he spits the words out won’t change what he has to say.

After a moment, his father says, “Go on,” and although Jimin can hear the tightness in his tone, he’s not yelling—not yet, anyway. And that’s a good sign.

“I’ve learned some things,” Jimin continues, aware of the double meaning behind his words. The time he’s spent working with Namjoon during the last year has forced him to grow up faster than any of his lessons ever did. “First,” he says, “I learned that Jeon Jaekuk did not have anything to do with her death. Second, he did not know in advance that it would happen.”
His father nods curtly, and says, glancing down at the papers Jimin holds, “I assume you have proof?”

“I do,” Jimin replies firmly. “I have proof of everything I’m about to tell you. I wouldn’t have brought this to you without evidence. I was thorough.”

“Good. Continue,” his father says. “I’ll read through the file when you’re finished.”

It’s Jimin’s turn to nod now, and he does so, gaining confidence from how smoothly this is going. “Their death was an accident,” he says, and his father’s eyebrows shoot upward. Jimin holds up a finger, forestalling his father’s question, and clarifies, “It wasn’t an accident that killed them, but it was an accident that they were killed. The people behind this weren’t aiming for them. It was supposed to be Jeongguk and me.”

The room is deathly silent as Jimin’s father absorbs this information.

“It’s why I hired Kim Seokjin as head of security at the club,” Jimin says. “He’s been acting as a bodyguard for me ever since we found that out.” He pauses, then adds, “I had Namjoon, the… investigator I’ve been working with, send that information to Jeongguk, too, as soon as we learned it. I wanted him to be safe, especially since his father was cleared of our accusations.”

Jimin’s father, visibly shaken, clears his throat and says, “Good. Ah, is there—”

“Yes, there’s more.” Jimin steels himself for the next part of this conversation. “The man that died in the car accident we were in just before—just before Mother was killed…he was engaged to the head of the Dragon clan. I’m sure you’ve heard of them?”

“The gang in Crown Heights?”

“Yes. The shooting was retaliation for Lee Seungri’s death.”

“Why haven’t the police acted on this if it’s true? There’s been no arrest, no indication that this information is valid,” his father frowns.

“Namjoon and I…our information didn’t always come from the most reputable of sources,” Jimin replies. “We double and triple checked everything, and we’re sure that it’s factual, but it’s not necessarily evidence that the police can act upon, not under usual circumstances anyway.”

“I see,” Jimin’s father says.

Jimin can hear the hesitation in his voice, the layer of caution that he’s built into those two words, and Jimin knows that he needs to move on, or risk losing his father’s tacit acceptance of his activities.

“Father, Namjoon and I have devised a way to make the Dragon clan pay for their crimes. It’s…it’s an elaborate set up, and it involves time and money and—and your permission to reestablish a relationship with the Jeons, both personally and professionally.”

“Jemin—”

“Father, I wouldn’t ask this if it wasn’t necessary. I could have come to you months ago with the information that the Jeons were innocent in Mother’s death. If my goal was to get my friendship with Jeongguk back, I would have done just that; I wouldn’t have waited and kept digging in dangerous places for answers I didn’t need.”

Silence sits between them, and Jimin forces himself to be still, to not fidget and to stay calm. He uses
the time to regulate his breathing, but when the thickening quiet between them only grows stronger, and his father shows no sign of cutting through it to reassure Jimin that he hasn’t overstepped his bounds, Jimin breaks.

Jemin breaks, and says, “Please, Father. This is for Mother. I’ve come so far already. Please trust me to finish it.”

His father’s face begins to soften, and Jimin breathes a little easier.

“Leave the file, Jimin, and go tend to your club,” his father finally says. “I’ll call you before the night is over.”

Hours later, when Jimin’s phone buzzes to life in his pocket, he scrambles away from his neat whiskey and contemplative silence, and dashes to his office.

When his father gives him permission to proceed, Jimin manages to hold back his tears until the phone call is over.

Afterward, if Hoseok notices when Jimin sneaks into the dancers’ dressing room to snag a makeup kit so he can fix his eyeliner, he’s kind enough not to say anything.

Jemin is nervous.

He’s so fucking nervous, and if it wasn’t all for his master plan to avenge his mother’s death, he’d feel like shit over the fact that his nervousness has overwhelmed the grief that should be forefront in his heart, especially today.

It’s the first anniversary of his mother’s death, and instead of spending it in her flower garden, treasuring the memories and love they built in the four, nearly five, years they had together, Jimin is sitting against the trunk of an oak tree in front of the Jeon family mausoleum, where Jeonghee’s ashes are entombed.

He’s waiting for Jeongguk, has been since six o’clock that morning, and as a brisk wind pushes through his hair he lets the prospect of seeing Jeongguk again keep him warm.

Jemin turns it all over and over in his head, trying to focus on everything he needs to say to Jeongguk, to reclaim what should never have been taken from him in the first place and to convince Jeongguk to go along with his plan, but his mind keeps returning to the thought that his mother wouldn’t be bothered if his whole day was spent here waiting for Jeongguk. She’d just be glad that the two of them had each other again.

It’s nine-thirty when Jeongguk arrives.

He doesn’t acknowledge Jimin’s presence as he steps up to the door and unlocks it, but Jimin doesn’t mind. Whether he’s seen Jimin and chosen to ignore him or just hasn’t noticed him there yet, Jimin is content to wait as Jeongguk pays his respects to his mother.

Jeongguk enters the mausoleum with a heaviness in his step and an enormous bouquet of purple hyacinth, white roses, rosemary, and baby’s breath cradled in his arm.

He stays inside with her for an hour, but Jimin doesn’t mind. He waits patiently for Jeongguk to
return to him, as he’s done for the last year.

When he finally reemerges, Jimin can tell exactly when Jeongguk catches sight of him. He freezes, one foot across the threshold of the mausoleum, and his posture turns tense.

Jimin stands slowly, brushing off the dirt and dew that clings to his pants, and then bends down to grasp the single yellow rose he’s brought with him. He picks it up gently, stares at it a moment, meditating on what it means, on what Jeongguk means to him, and then he takes a tentative step forward.

Jeongguk doesn’t move until Jimin stands two feet in front of him, the rose hanging from his fingertips at his side. Then he closes the mausoleum door and locks it, and turns to face Jimin.

“Hi,” Jimin says carefully.

“You disappeared overnight and ignored me for a year, and you want to start with ‘hi?’” Jeongguk says flatly.

“I’m sorry,” Jimin says immediately. He puts every ounce of sincerity that he can muster into those words, and hopes that Jeongguk will hear it.

Jeongguk stares at Jimin, unmoved, and says, “What, no excuses?”

“There is no excuse,” Jimin replies, offering Jeongguk the rose, “only an explanation.” He holds it between them, a tangible peace offering that encapsulates everything they were, everything they are, and everything he hopes they’ll be.

Jeongguk’s eyes drop to the flower, and Jimin holds his breath. It seems like forever before Jeongguk reaches out to take it.

“It better be one hell of an explanation,” Jeongguk says.

“Can I buy you a coffee?” Jimin asks.

“I’m not going anywhere with you until you tell me why you left the way you did,” Jeongguk replies, and Jimin nods his acquiescence. It’s a fair request.

“My father accused yours of knowing about the hit on our mothers before it happened, and letting it happen anyway,” Jimin says, and the lack of surprise in Jeongguk’s eyes allows the bitter wind to finally chill Jimin the way it’s been trying to for hours. “He didn’t give me much of a choice, Jeongguk.”

“You had a choice,” Jeongguk says sharply, pointing the rose at Jimin like an accusatory finger. “You could have found a way to sneak around him, or you could have flat-out disobeyed him. You chose to do as he asked and throw away our friendship. Own it.”

Jemin swallows, tries to dislodge the lump in his throat, and finds that he can’t. “But I did. I sent you that file, the one warning you that it was really supposed to be a hit on us, and—”

“That was you?” Jeongguk interrupts, shocked.

“Well. I mean, Namjoon sent it, but yeah. I hired him and we started looking into the murders, because I wanted to prove my father wrong. And Jeongguk—”

“Kookie,” he says. “Now that I’m employed in my father’s business, it’s Kookie.”
“Right. Kookie,” Jimin replies, faltering for a second before regaining his momentum. “Listen, I figured out who was responsible. And I’ve got a plan to get revenge, but I need you to make it work.”

“You…need…me,” Jeongguk says haltingly, disbelief written loudly across his face.

“Specifically, I need two things from you,” Jimin clarifies. “First, I need you to trust me.”

Jeongguk stares unblinkingly at Jimin, one quirked eyebrow in direct contradiction with the unamused frown that slides into place with Jimin’s request. “For the sake of my mother’s memory, I’m gonna pretend for a minute that I’m not still royally pissed at you and that you have my trust, but you’re going to have to show me you deserve it, long-term.”

“That’s fair,” Jimin replies, reaching his hand into his jacket pocket as he nods. “So…before that minute is up, here’s where the trust part comes in,” he jokes weakly, tugging a small velvet box free of his pocket lining, and opening it.

Jeongguk’s jaw and the yellow rose both drop to the ground at the same time.

“The second thing I need is for you to say ‘yes,’” Jimin says, lowering himself to one knee and presenting the thin silver band to Jeongguk.

Jimin takes a deep breath, and says, “Jeon Jeongguk, will you marry me?”

Complete shock washes over Jeongguk’s features, and Jimin feels it’s nearly an eternity before he musters a response.

Jeongguk turns and rakes his eyes slowly over the mausoleum behind him, and then dips his head quickly to the side. “I think I need that coffee now.”

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Taehyung wakes up to hushed conversation and the movement of Jimin beneath him.

He stirs, blinking awake and yawning. “What’s going on?” he asks around the end of his yawn. He looks around and his eyes fall on Jeongguk, standing in front of them where they’re lying on the couch in the media room of Jimin’s apartment. “Jeongguk?” he asks blearily. “Why are you here? Is your dad okay?”

Jimin stretches and presses a kiss to Taehyung’s cheek as Taehyung struggles to get his bearings. It comes back in pieces: the fight, making up with Jimin, talking with Jeongguk.

“He’s okay,” says Jeongguk, coming over and sitting down by their heads. “Jimin, we need to talk.”

Jimin groans as he works his way into a sitting position, rearranging Taehyung until his head is pillowed in Jimin’s lap so that Jimin can talk with Jeongguk. “What about?” he asks.

Taehyung blinks sleepily and tries to stay awake, not wanting to miss important information.

“Remember when you proposed? You asked me to trust you, and you said you’d explain when the time was right.” He pauses. “That time is now, Jimin. I need to know what the fuck is going on.”

Taehyung traces small patterns on Jimin’s thigh with his finger while Jimin runs his fingers through his hair, clearly thinking.

Jimin sighs, takes a moment to collect his thoughts, and starts at what Taehyung realizes is the
Jimin talks for hours. The story is long and full of heartbreak and trials, and Taehyung realizes that it’s mostly for his benefit. When he’d gotten to the part of the story where he’d lost his mother, Taehyung sits up and slides behind him, wrapping his arms around Jimin’s waist and pulling him tight to his chest.

None of them mention the shudders in Jimin's breathing, and Taehyung alternates between resting his chin on Jimin's shoulder and placing gentle kisses to the skin of his neck as he talks.

“So, why did you really propose?” Jeongguk asks once Jimin has more or less gotten to current events.

It’s a fair question, but Taehyung is too busy wrapping his head around everything that happened to Jimin after he left Taehyung to really register it.

“Because in order to get back at the people who killed our mothers, I needed your family’s resources.”

“What?” Jeongguk looks shocked and at a loss for words.

“You can’t be surprised that I had an ulterior motive,” Jimin says, incredulously.

“I’m not, I’m just—” Jeongguk pauses, runs his hands through his hair in distress. “Who killed them? How do you know?” His voice is a soft whisper, and Taehyung can see the pain behind his eyes.

Taehyung wonders if they’ve ever properly talked about their shared trauma. Safe in the hollow of Taehyung’s arms, Jimin takes a deep breath.

“What do you know about the Dragon clan?” Jimin's fingers are worrying at the blanket draped over their laps, his fingers brushing against Taehyung’s exposed skin as he twists his fingers in the fabric.

Jeongguk goes pale, which knowing what he knows about the Dragon clan, Taehyung can’t begrudge Jeongguk as the color leeches from his face. Jeongguk, who is scared of very few things.

“The Dragon clan?” Jeongguk asks, voice still barely above a whisper. “The one that’s been in the hands of the deadliest family in the gang world for the last three generations? The clan that singlehandedly took control of most of Brooklyn?”

Jinin nods.

Taehyung’s mind spins, starting to put things together with the new information and Jimin’s actions from the last few months. “Does this have anything to do with you getting the buildings my family lives in taken down? Because you found out that’s where the Dragon clan was operating?”

He’s grown up skirting the Dragons his whole life. His family paid rent to them. Taehyung always knew to not go near the apartment at the top of the building or the man with constantly changing hair colors who lived in it. Not if he didn’t want to end up where every other washed up high school flunky ended up in Crown Heights.

The Dragons already had control of his family’s home, no need to give them control over himself, too.

“…How did you know that?” Jimin turns in his arms to look at him.
“I live in Crown Heights, Jimin. Everyone knows where the Dragons are. The leader lives in my building.”

Jeongguk lets out a long string of curses as realization dawns for him. It’s blue enough that it even has Jimin looking at him in shock.

“I didn’t know you knew,” Jimin says, dumbfounded. “I thought you were—”

“Innocent?” Taehyung looks at Jimin steadily. “Not completely, Jimin. I took a job at a strip club, after all.”

Jemin and Jeongguk both gape at him for a few seconds. “I suppose you did,” Jimin finally manages. “Anyway, I knew that if I was going to get anywhere close to wiping them out I’d have to flush them out of hiding.”

“So you pitched the business plan to renovate the buildings—” Jeongguk begins.

“—in order to introduce enough chaos for me to rain down retribution.” Jimin leans back against Taehyung, who feels numb with the realizations of why Jimin did everything he did. It makes a lot more sense now. Jeongguk is silent beside him, soaking in the information.

“There’s more,” Jimin says, hesitantly.

Taehyung groans and Jeongguk scrubs at his face with his hands before saying, “Okay, what else?”

“Remember how I told you last night about the staff member I found who killed my father?” Jimin sounds more hesitant as he asks this now than he has this entire conversation.

Jeongguk nods. “Kwon Dami, right? She attacked you and you killed her in self-defense?”

“R-right,” Jimin confirms.

Taehyung gets the feeling that he doesn’t know everything about how she died. Jimin isn’t as good of a liar as he thinks he is.


“How did you…” Jimin trails off in confusion.

Taehyung shrugs. “I just told you I lived in the same building as the leader of the Dragons.” He gets the feeling they were only half listening to that part. “Everyone in our building knew to steer clear of boss Kwon if you wanted to stay out of jail or an unmarked grave.” Taehyung shrugs. “My family payed rent to the clan, all tenants did, since they owned the building.”

“Oh, fuck,” Jeongguk croaks out. Jimin still looks too shocked at Taehyung’s knowledge of the situation to talk yet.

“Let me just make sure I’ve got everything straight,” Taehyung begins, because he feels like he’s absorbed a lot of information and neither Jimin nor Jeongguk seem up to the task of summarizing. “Your mothers were killed in a hit by the Dragon clan?” He pauses until Jimin nods in confirmation, then continues. “And Jimin went on a secret mission to get justice, and towed you, Jeongguk, along until now when he told you everything about his plan. Part of which was getting the city to approve taking down the building that my family lives in, and by extension, the Dragon clan, in order to put
them in a vulnerable position.” He pauses, looking between them both. “Am I right so far?”

“Yeah,” Jimin says, sounding strangled.

“Then your dad died,” Taehyung tightens his arms around Jimin as he says this, offering comfort, “and you killed Kwang Dami, the older sister to Kwang Jiyong, current leader of the Dragon clan.”

“Jimin, what have you done,” Jeongguk says, aghast. “This is insane.”

“Jeongguk, he killed our mothers. Intentionally. To hurt us.”

“Yes,” Taehyung says, feeling more level-headed and calm than he thinks he probably should be, considering. “But why? What happened that would provoke and attack like that?” Taehyung pauses, thinking quickly. “Why start a war for no reason?”

In his arms, Jimin goes very, very still. “Taehyung, what do you know about Jiyong?”

Taehyung considers the question, digging up everything he’s seen just by virtue of living in the same building as the man for most of his life. He snaps his fingers when he remembers a particularly tense time in the building, right around the time he was sixteen.

“He was supposed to get married, but something happened to the fiancé, if I remember correctly. I think he died?”

Jimin bites his lip. “Jeongguk, do you remember the car accident we were in, when we were younger?”

Jeongguk is quiet for a moment before he loses what little color he’d regained. “Fuck. That’s just fuckin’ perfect. Are you shitting me?”

Jimin shakes his head solemnly.

“We killed the fiancé of the Dragon clan’s leader?” Jeongguk stands up and walks out of the room, returning a minute later with a bottle of whiskey that he takes a deep pull from as he sits back down. “Is that why you warned me my life was in danger? Because of a car accident?”

“You did what?” This time it’s Taehyung’s turn to react strongly. He doesn’t remember Jiyong’s fiancé very well, but he has a faint impression of someone he only ever saw smiling or laughing. He seemed like something good in a world of bad.

“I was an accident,” Jimin soothes, rubbing Taehyung’s forearm comfortingly. “He’s the one who retaliated by trying to kill us for something we never meant to do.”

“It doesn’t matter what happened!” Taehyung cries. “Getting revenge is only going to make the problem worse. Where will it end, Jimin?”

Jimin turns around to look Taehyung in the eye, body tense with anger, but it’s Jeongguk who speaks first.

“Taehyung,” he says calmly, evenly. “If we don’t put a stop to this, Jiyong will take everything we care about. Our mothers, Jimin’s father…my father if he can.” Jeongguk pauses, exchanging a look with Jimin. “You,” he says, looking at Taehyung.

Taehyung stills. He suddenly realizes why Jimin has been so paranoid about his safety, why he kept insisting that Taehyung stay away because it was dangerous. He didn’t know to what extent; that
he’d fallen in the cross hairs of Kwon Jiyong. The only way you get out of his sights is when you’re six feet under.

“I don’t think I have to tell you how ruthless Jiyong is,” Jimin says quietly into the somber room. “He’s not going to stop, Taehyung.”

Taehyung opens his mouth to argue before shutting it with a click of his teeth because he knows. He absolutely knows that Jiyong is ruthless, that he isn’t going to stop until he’s satisfied no matter what they do. So he quashes his protests and turns his thoughts to thinking of ways to keep the boy he loves safe and whole.

“What’s the plan, then?” He asks Jimin. If there’s anything he’s learned about Jimin in the last few months, it’s that he always has a plan. He’s always thinking.

Jimin nods, relaxes back against Taehyung, and says, “Okay, this is the plan—”

Chapter End Notes

okay, so...
Krav Maga defense against being mounted with wrist pinned...yeah, it's actually called that
Kimbap recipe
Jeongguk's Aston Martin Vanquish
Jimin's selfie
Jeongguk's bouquet and Jimin's flower for Jeongguk, with flower language meanings

Please don't be surprised if chapter 10 takes just as long as this chapter did. There's a lot to cover to wrap the story up, and polishing it is going to take us some time. Plus, you know, real life happens. We promise we'll be back.

<3

(EDIT 12/21/17: yes, we're still working on chapter 10! it's taking us a while because real life hit us both really hard this fall, but we're making good progress on it and we hope to have it out soon! thanks for your patience.)

i bet you all thought the jikook scenes were done for this fic...mwahahahahaha! my jikook heart can't be stopped, lol. (actually, it can. next stop, vmin happiness. but, you know what i mean.)
also, full disclosure: lyrics were borrowed from Allie X's "Need You" in the making of this chapter. you really, really should listen to it. i looped the hell outta this song when writting Jimin's grief & separation from Jeongguk. i may or may not have made myself cry.
-callie

I wrote all of the Jiyong scenes and that one Taehyung scene at the end. I love Jiyong with all my heart and no Jiyongs where harmed in the making of this chapter.
I also made callie fall in love with Taekwoon, which I count as a massive fluffling win.

-Kiki
Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter
Find Callie on Tumblr | Twitter | Discord
He ruined him, brought him down from a beautiful, bright place and buried him in filth, in lies and violence. Jimin’s been trapped here, in this illegitimate life that his father built, roped into extortion and physical violence and—and murder—caught in lie after lie, charming and bribing his way through any disruption to his selfish, destructive plans, until his whole world was one big mess, a tangled pile of misdeeds and sickening behavior, glossed over with fancy cars and expensive clothes and a multi-million dollar penthouse filled with multi-million dollar possessions, polished to look appealing and perfect, to look enviable, and—

To be this close to Jimin—to his brutality and his deceptions and his fucked-up upbringing—to still be standing here, in this room, after Jimin’s admitted to his corruption, after it’s become clear that everything Jimin touches will eventually rot—

Taehyung, a sweet, innocent soul—an angel if Jimin ever met one… To be standing here right now, Taehyung fell. Jimin is Taehyung’s own, personal Satan, and he pulled Taehyung down to his level, ripped that innocence away from him and spoiled him, spoiled his chance at a happy life, with no hesitation.

Chapter Notes

so, uh. hi.

we're back. *ahem*

check the updated tags for triggers. we're serious when we say this chapter gets hella intense in a bunch of different ways.

enjoy.

<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It’s officially the weirdest funeral Taehyung has ever been to. Granted, he hasn’t been to many, but there’s something about the funeral for Jimin’s father that feels…off.

There are more people than Taehyung thinks is strictly allowed by the fire code packed into the funeral parlor for the viewing. Everyone is immaculately dressed and there’s more wealth on display than Taehyung has seen in his life. And maybe it’s because everyone is more focused on maintaining poise and keeping decorum, but Taehyung is a bit taken aback by the lack of emotion displayed by everyone there.

Very few people are crying, although a few are noticeably teary. But everyone moves through the
room in careful steps, their voices hushed and joining the quiet murmurs. Taehyung stands quietly behind Jimin, stepping in to take business cards as they’re offered and making reassurances when Jimin’s voice fails him.

Jemin hasn’t cried once. Hasn’t even so much as taken a deep breath or looked upset the whole day, and Taehyung is starting to feel concern creep in.

He knows that Jimin was taken in by his father at twelve, that he wasn’t as close to his father as Taehyung is to his own, but to not have any kind of a reaction? To not get emotional over his father’s body lying cold in the casket to their left? Taehyung can’t imagine being this collected at his own father’s funeral, can’t imagine the effort it would take to stay composed in the face of grief like that, and yet Jimin is doing it effortlessly.

Something is wrong.

Taehyung tugs at the cuffs of the designer suit Jimin had poured him into and tries not to fidget in the clothes that are so expensive he barely dares to breathe in them. He fits right in with the opulence around him, which means he’s terribly uncomfortable, even in his own skin.

There’s so much finery around him, so much blatant wealth that he can’t help but feel like an imposter, even though Jimin has him by his side constantly, close enough that he could reach out and grab his hand but never actually touching Taehyung.

When Jeongguk comes through the line he walks straight for Jimin, not even giving the body in the casket a second look, and gathers him up in his arms. A line of tension in Jimin’s shoulders eases as Jeongguk hugs him, one that Taehyung hasn’t been able to get rid of all night, and he tries not to let jealousy surge hot and bitter on his tongue.

Jeongguk knows a part of Jimin’s life that Taehyung will never understand. It would be ridiculous to be upset over that…and yet.

“How are you holding up, Tae?” Jeongguk lets Jimin go and moves for Taehyung, placing a hand on his shoulder and squeezing.

“I’m fine,” Taehyung says, smiling softly and letting Jeongguk pull him into a brief hug. He allows himself to relax into Jeongguk’s embrace, welcoming the small amount of warmth that surges through him at the contact. This funeral has been anything but warm so far.

“Good,” Jeongguk replies, pulling away after a moment. “Stay strong, Tae.” He gives Taehyung one last squeeze before moving to talk with a group of older men a short way off.

Taehyung looks at Jimin, but Jimin isn’t looking at him, instead staring straight ahead with a blank expression, his posture straight and perfect.

He looks tense again, and Taehyung doesn’t know what to do.

***

Funerals are supposed to be carefully disguised messes.

They’re supposed to be a mixture of emotions, everything on the spectrum from fond reminiscence to inconsolable heartache. They’re supposed to be painstakingly built facades of acceptance, held together with shared love for the one that was lost and waterproof makeup. They’re supposed to be sad piano music and overly sweet flower arrangements and a photographic tribute to the vibrant life that the recently deceased left behind, featuring no less than three naked-child-in-the-bathtub pictures.
His mother’s funeral was like that. It was laughter choked off by sorrow and tears softened with smiles. It was regret that she hadn’t lived longer, and relief that the life she had lived was so full. It was respect from fellow socialites for her dedication to making the world a better place, and hugs from distant relatives that didn’t care that they’d never met Jimin before, and a growing wad of used tissues in his pocket, and bittersweet smiles topped with swollen red eyes, and while Jimin hated that his mother was taken from him so soon after they reunited, he’d loved how obviously clear her funeral made it that she was loved.

His father’s funeral was nothing like that.

It was dry eyes and stoic faces, empty words of condolence and business acquaintances that were only there to reassure Jimin that the arrangements they’d made with his father would hold until they could meet with him to reaffirm their business terms in person with him, and when would that be?

Taehyung stood at his shoulder, a quiet bastion of support throughout the entire affair, calmly taking business cards and pocketing them with softly murmured reassurances—“We’ll call you later this week to set up an appointment, thank you”—and if Jimin had had to do it without Taehyung, he might have gone crazy.

Jimin’s father’s funeral wasn’t a mess—it was a perfectly organized event that went off without a hitch, and he hated it.

The worst part was that Jimin, himself, was just as bad as the rest of them.

His eyeliner remained flawless, his lips kept their solemn line, his tone just as measured and respectful as the people who came for the funeral out of social obligation.

It was clarifying in a way he hadn’t expected.

He’d expected to be pained—to be a mess—but he hadn’t been. He’d been composed, if a little impatient for the ordeal to be over—for his father’s associates to leave him alone while he concludes his own business—but the overwhelming grief that he’d felt initially when his father passed was… absent.

At first, he’d thought it was just shock, assumed that melancholy and anguish would come in their own time, in the privacy of his own home, but now that he’s here, slumped uncaringly on the living room sofa in the most somber black suit he owns, he still doesn’t feel these things, and he wonders if he was wrong.

He wonders if he’s like the rest of the people who filled the church and paid their respects today.

He wonders if it wasn’t the man that he loved, so much as the idea of him. Of what he could have been.

Of what Jimin had wished, as a twelve-year-old boy, that he would be, before he learned the reality of his new life.

Jimin had given up on having loving parents in his life once before, when his grandmother had explained that it was just the two of them, and that she’d love him enough to make up for being all he had. He’d given up the hope he’d been harboring, and he’d faced forward determined to appreciate what he did have, and if he’d done it then, at the tender age of five, then he can do it again now.

He’ll be thankful for the time he’d been given with his parents, as unlike his childish dreams as it was, and he’ll face forward.
If he’s being completely honest with himself, it won’t make all that much difference in his current daily life, anyway.

Jimin stares at the ceiling for the third consecutive hour. Taehyung’s gentle breathing is steady on the pillow next to his, but the regular rhythm of his quiet breaths does nothing to soothe Jimin’s mind.

Now that he’s found some peace with the passing of his father, he’d thought he’d be able to sleep. He’d thought things could begin to go back to normal, that he’d be able to embrace life with Taehyung and focus on being happy, but he’s coming to realize that his father’s death wasn’t — isn’t — the only obstacle in the way of that goal.

The next layer to his insomnia, it would seem, is restlessness and a vaguely sick feeling growing in the pit of his stomach.

Irritated by the injustice of his situation, Jimin gives up on sleep and clicks the TV on, muting the sound immediately to keep from waking Taehyung. He settles on the news channel—he can’t help the sudden, compulsive need to know if they’ve found Dami’s body—and settles back to watch with the remote resting on his belly, his fingers poised over the buttons in case Taehyung stirs.

Soundless chatter and flashes of unimportant events aren’t exactly the distraction he’s looking for, but they’re better than nothing. At least, they are until the captions at the bottom of the screen spell out a home invasion gone bad, the intruder found dead in the home office—

He scrambles for the remote—it’s too much, too close to what happened with Dami and his heart begins to race in his chest but his fingers are shaking and he can’t change the channel fast enough, can’t click away before images of the scene, of an unmoving body lying on the floor under a sheet, are displayed in full HD in front of him—

And then all he can see is Kwon Dami’s face, sneering as she looked up at him from behind his father’s desk, her finger’s still rifling through his documents, and then everything skips forward to his fingers around her neck, her face turning red, then purple, then blue, her eyes glazing over with a lack of oxygen, but her anger—her hatred—refusing to fade away even as life slips from her grasp.

The visual leaves him shaking, his shallow gasps for breath an echoing cacophony in the quiet of the room. It’s gut-wrenching, unnerving in the way he can’t free himself from it, and his stomach roils as his brain rewinds the scene and plays it again.

He squeezes his eyes closed against the image of her digging through his father’s papers, knowing that it’s started at the beginning and he’s powerless to stop it, and he swallows down the bile that rises instinctively in his throat. He’d hardly had anything for dinner, brushing off Taehyung’s worried gaze as he picked at his food in hopes of making it look like he’d eaten some of it, and suddenly he’s grateful for his lack of appetite. She chokes, and he feels like he’ll choke, and then it begins again. And again.

The encounter loops mercilessly in his mind’s eye. It overwhelms him, the unending repeat of the way he’d beaten Dami into submission and then pushed farther, unrelenting, squeezing the breath out of her with both his hands, cutting off the vile hatred she spewed at him in vicious, cutting words, turning it into choked little gasps, a gurgling high in her throat as she struggles for air, and then a shuddering wheeze as her body gives up—

Fuck. He killed her.
He killed her. He’d ended a life.

He watched her eyes dull and felt her arms weaken, and still he—

Oh, god.

What was wrong with him?

He should have stopped.

He should have let go when she passed out and called the police. He should have dumped her unconscious body on the side of the road on the way back into the city. He should have left her on her brother’s doorstep, trussed and gagged with a note pinned to her jacket that read ‘it’s over.’

He should have done anything but let his anger and grief win over. He should have done anything but escalate the war.

God, he should have done anything but squeeze tighter and watch as she died.

Why didn’t he stop?

His gut churns as his mind plays through the fight again, the rage shared between them, the violence that intensified with every attack, the burning need he felt to just put an end to this whole mess, right then and there—

In the days since his father died—since she died—he’s been so busy, with funeral arrangements and emergency board meetings for his father’s company, and he’s managed to keep himself distracted, to keep this from happening sooner, but tonight… Tonight, after so many sleepless nights in a row, he’s tired and his self-control is shot. Tonight, all he can feel is the satisfaction that overwhelmed him as he won, now a hollow, repulsive thing that makes way for nausea and unease.

Fuck, he killed her. When did he become capable of that kind of—and right after what he did to that private investigator—

Self-loathing and disgust squirm in his stomach, fermenting, and bile rises again, sour as it burns its way slowly up his throat. Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck—fuck, he’s gonna actually be sick—

In a panic, he throws the covers off and bolts around the bed for the bathroom door, covering his mouth with one hand to keep from vomiting on the carpet. He lifts the toilet seat hastily, bile and the few morsels of food he’d managed to get down already rushing up his throat, and then he’s vomiting, the sickening, twisting in his stomach churning up more than he thought possible for him to expel in painful, nasty heaves.

The noise must wake Taehyung, because a wide, warm hand is suddenly there, rubbing up and down his spine, and Taehyung’s deep voice is murmuring softly in his ear. “Get it all out, Jimin. Let it all out. Don’t keep it inside—nothing’s going to get better if you do.”

Jimin heaves again, his stomach finally empty of everything but bile and guilt, but Taehyung just keeps running the flat of his palm over Jimin’s back, his low tones soothing in a way that Jimin desperately needs, and when Jimin finally sits up and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, it comes away wet with tears and snot as much as it’s wet with spit and bile.

More concerned with the mess in Jimin’s head than the mess on his face, Taehyung pulls Jimin into his lap, wraps his arms around him and tucks him against his chest. They sit there on the bathroom floor, limbs tangled, thoughts jumbled, and as Jimin’s eyes burn with a fresh wave of tears and
Taehyung’s whispered words continue to wash over him, Jimin realizes that maybe Taehyung is right.

Maybe he needs to let it out. Maybe he needs to get it off his chest. Maybe he needs to tell someone what he’s really done; maybe he needs to tell Taehyung. Maybe he needs to be honest with him and maybe he needs Taehyung to keep loving him regardless of it all.

Maybe he needs to know that he’s forgivable.

His lips fall open to let his secret free, but nothing comes out. Instead, he takes a shaking breath in an unsuccessful effort to quell a sudden rush of fear. What if Taehyung can’t forgive Jimin, let alone help him figure out how to forgive himself?

What if he can’t love Jimin after he learns what he’s done? What if he leaves Jimin?

With both of Jimin’s parents gone and his relationship with Jeongguk shifting once more into something unknown, Jimin can’t lose Taehyung.

He can’t be alone—he can’t.

So he forces a deep breath to clear away his impulse to come clean, and unfolds himself from Taehyung’s lap, standing and pulling Taehyung up with him.

“I’m going to brush my teeth,” he says, his voice a little hoarse. “Go back to bed, I’ll be there soon.”

“Oh kay,” Taehyung agrees softly. He doesn’t really look okay with it, which bothers Jimin. He doesn’t want Taehyung to worry at what’s beneath the surface. He can’t afford to let Taehyung think there’s anything serious eating at him not if he wants to keep Taehyung’s affection, so he compels a smile to twist his lips, and gently pushes Taehyung toward the door.

“Go on, baby. I’ll help you warm up the sheets in a minute,” Jimin says, clearing his throat and reaching for the toothpaste. “I feel better already. Must have been the shrimp at dinner made my stomach cramp up so bad.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung says, and he sounds unconvinced, but after a moment he pulls Jimin close enough to kiss his temple, and then goes back to bed as Jimin requested.

Jimin scrubs at his teeth almost viciously, determined to eject the memories and the guilt and the bile from his mouth simultaneously, and when he crawls back into bed, Taehyung is waiting for him. Jimin wraps his arms around Taehyung, tucks him close, kisses him softly, and shoves the rest of it away.

Taehyung is what matters. Taehyung is all that matters, and maybe if Jimin can focus on that—

Hours later, Jimin is still awake, but at least the flashbacks haven’t returned.

***

Jimin is sleeping, finally.

The past few nights have been rough, and Taehyung has woken up multiple times to Jimin either thrashing awake from a dream or rushing out of bed for the bathroom where he heaves up everything he’s eaten during the day.

Ever since that night—the one where Jimin came stumbling through Jeongguk’s door and admitted
that he’d just had to kill someone—Jimin has been…tense. If Taehyung hadn’t spent so much time watching Jimin he almost wouldn’t see it, but tension is there under Jimin’s quick smiles and tight eyes. Jimin has been tense and wrung out and tired, but so restless at night that sleep often evades him.

But, tonight, he’s sleeping. Taehyung cuddles close, an arm thrown across Jimin’s stomach, legs tangled, watching Jimin breathe deep and even. There’s a tiny furrow between his eyebrows that Taehyung instinctively reaches up to smooth away with the tip of his finger.

Jimin is sleeping, but Taehyung feels wide awake. He knows Jimin is lying to him every time he says he’s fine. He isn’t, and Taehyung thinks about all the lies Jimin tells every day.

Jimin is never convincing when he lies to someone else. Taehyung thinks back to the early days of their rekindled friendship and then relationship—hell, was that just a few months ago? It already feels like they’ve been together for years. He thinks back to the days when Jimin was keeping so many secrets from him, secrets that—in hindsight and with an effort to understand who Jimin has become—Taehyung has learned to see through. He can tell, now, when Jimin is lying. He can spot the way Jimin bites the corner of his lower lip after he tells a lie, like he doesn’t believe he’ll get away with it, and the way Jimin runs his hand through his hair when he thinks he’s pulled it off.

Jimin is bad at lying to others but he’s excellent at lying to himself, and that, Taehyung knows, is the most dangerous kind of lie you can tell.

Next to him Jimin stirs fitfully in sleep, and Taehyung moves closer, pulling their bodies flush against one another to comfort and soothe. Jimin needs sleep. He’s far too stressed and way too exhausted for Taehyung’s peace of mind, and if the circles under Jimin’s eyes get any darker Taehyung is going to be dating a zombie.

The days pass.

Jimin keeps insisting he’s fine and Taehyung keeps pretending he doesn’t feel Jimin tossing fitfully in his sleep, keeps pretending that Jimin doesn’t wake up half the nights they spend tangled together to rush out of bed for the bathroom, heaving until there’s nothing left.

Taehyung knows Jimin isn’t okay. He knows—somehow—that what happened in that office with Kwon Dami was more than Jimin lets on. Taehyung can tell that Jimin’s reactions to this are starting to look a lot like guilt, the kind of guilt that hints at more than what someone would feel over an act of self-defense.

Taehyung tries to comfort. Tries to hold Jimin tightly and keep the nightmares away, keep him surrounded in warmth and safety so that he can sleep through the night and maybe keep down food too. Taehyung wants Jimin to be happy, safe, and okay.

But as the nights wear on and Jimin doesn’t get better, as things only seem to get worse, Taehyung starts to feel like there isn’t anything he can do. He feels useless, and that’s maybe the worst part of all of this. There’s so much they need to talk about, so much that needs to be said, and a part of Taehyung is waiting until Jimin is more okay, until the dust has settled a bit.

Jimin doesn’t become okay, and Taehyung realizes that what happened with Dami wasn’t self-defense. He’s always been smart, and he’s always been able to read Jimin like a book, ever since they were kids. Time and years apart haven’t changed that.
But Jimin refuses to talk. He brushes Taehyung’s worry aside with murmured reassurances that “I’m fine baby, I’ll be okay,” and “Go back to sleep Tae, I just need a minute to calm down.” Taehyung wants to be there for Jimin, wants to help him heal and get past the reality of what he’s done, but he can’t when Jimin won’t let him.

Taehyung feels frustrated and useless, and he doesn’t know what to do about it.

***

“Jimin, what are you doing?”

“Jimin, wait—”

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Jimin, stop!”

“What have you done?”

“What have you done, Jimin?!”

He doesn’t know.

He doesn’t know how to answer the voices that float around him, a strong tenor, a lilting soprano. A rich baritone.

He doesn’t know what he’s done.

He can’t stop.

He’s trying—he’s trying. He’s trying, but his fingers are frozen in place, and he can’t peel them away.

He can’t peel them away, and every time he tries, they tighten further around—around—

He can’t see whatever it is he’s squeezing so tightly, but it’s soft, and it keeps giving under the pressure of his grip, and—

And it’s moving—it’s moving like it’s alive—and then it…isn’t.

It isn’t alive anymore, and the haze clouding his vision lifts, and he can see that it’s a person—a person—and—

And—

She stares back up at him, a familiar, aggravating face, her features twisting cruelly, angrily, even in death, and she opens her mouth, and that soprano voice is back, falling from her lips, wailing over what he’s done, and it doesn’t belong there.

That voice doesn’t belong there! It’s not right, it’s not right, it doesn’t belong there—

His heart pounds, gets caught in his throat, and he doesn’t know what to do, he doesn’t know how to undo what he’s done, he doesn’t know how to make that voice stop—

And then the face of the person beneath him shifts, it shifts, and it’s—
Oh, God, it’s—

It’s his mother.

It’s his mother’s voice sobbing brokenly over what he’s done, and—

Oh, God, it’s his mother—

Jimin bolts upright, his heart hammering so hard in his chest that he puts a hand over it to keep it from bursting out and racing away. He’s covered in a layer of sweat, and he’s shaking, his fingers scrabbling in the sheets for some kind of purchase, some kind of hold to keep him from sinking back into his nightmare.

He struggles against the heaving of his chest to even his breathing, to bring his pulse down to a rate that won’t kill him, and as the remnants of his dream finally slough off and the last of the adrenaline in his veins burns away, Jimin dares closes his eyes.

He dares to close his eyes, but she’s still there.

His mother’s face lingers on the back of his eyelids, haunting him, horrified by what he’s proven capable of.

He gasps out a tiny sob, a small, desperate, pained sound, quiet in volume but amplified in the silence of their bedroom, and he knows there’s more. He’s knows there’s more coming, so he slips a hand over his mouth to stifle the noise and flees quickly to the bathroom.

He slides the door shut, carefully, so, so carefully, to avoid waking Taehyung—

Taehyung, who’s voice he’d also heard in the cacophony of his dream. Taehyung, who’s so like his mother was. Who’s soft-hearted and full of love for every being on the planet, who can’t bring himself to kill a spider and enjoys cooking for his family because it’s a daily ‘I love you.’ Taehyung, who brightens any room as soon as he walks into it.

Taehyung would be so disappointed in him, so appalled by the way Jimin had handled the situations he’d found himself in—the situations he’d created. Taehyung would condemn Jimin for his violence. Taehyung will condemn him for it.

Taehyung will condemn him for it, and Taehyung will leave.

And really, that sounds like the worst thing that could possibly happen, but Jimin is coming to realize that all the nausea and insomnia, all the nightmares and guilt, mean that he’s condemned himself for his actions. And if he can’t live with himself—if he, himself, can’t live with what he’s done—then how can he hope for anything different from Taehyung? He can’t.

He can’t.

He doesn’t even want to. He can’t help that he does—that he does hope for Taehyung’s forgiveness—but he knows that he doesn’t deserve it.

He folds into a mess of limbs on the floor as his tears win out and, with his hands clapped over his mouth to muffle the noise, he cries and he cries and he cries, because he knows that he’s going to lose Taehyung.
Hours later—or minutes or days or seconds, he can’t tell—when his tears run out and exhaustion overwhelms everything else he’s feeling, he peels himself slowly off the floor, his muscles protesting stiffly as he strips to his bare skin and steps into the shower.

He knows he can’t wash away his guilt, he knows he can’t undo what’s happened, but he also knows that he has to erase the evidence of it. So, he turns on the water, shivers under the cold spray until he remembers he can adjust the temperature, and then he turns it hot. Hot, hot, hot, to disguise the puffy redness of his eyes. To burn away the remorse that simmers in his system.

It doesn’t work—he knew it wouldn’t—but standing there, under the water, everything becomes a little clearer.

It becomes clear to Jimin that he needs to talk to someone. He needs to talk to someone, to get this off his chest and start figuring out how to get past it. And as he tries to figure out who—who he could possibly talk to without putting himself at risk for recrimination, he remembers the third voice from his dream.

The strong tenor.

Jeongguk.

The more he thinks about it, the more he believes that Jeongguk will understand, and that’s all Jimin needs. Someone to listen and understand his choices, so that he can begin to understand them himself.

Jeongguk, who’s experienced the same loss, the loss of a parent at the hands of Kwon Jiyong. Jeongguk, who’s all-in with Jimin for vengeance. Who was raised the same way Jimin was, with the same principles and expectations.

Jeongguk, whom Jimin trusts.

Yeah… Yeah, Jimin needs to talk to Jeongguk. Jeongguk will understand.

Jeongguk will help him.

A knock at his office door as he’s trying to rub the exhaustion out of his eyes makes Jimin snap. “What.”

The door inches open a mere six inches, and Zitao’s eyes peer in at him. “Sorry to bother you, Jimin,” he says, “but the Vice-Chairman of the Board is calling again? He’s on line two.”

Jimin growls in irritation, but before he can yell at Zitao to stop pestering him about it and just hang up on the insufferable, stuffy, old bastard, the door swings quickly shut and Jimin is left with his annoyance and the incessant meddling of an eighty-five-year-old businessman who’s subtly angling for Jimin’s place at the helm of Park Enterprises, on the grounds that Jimin is too young and inexperienced to lead the company well.

The phone call is a tedious thing, a droning-on of a dusty, old voice about dusty, old ideas, and Jimin spends so much time rolling his eyes that they might as well lodge there, peering up into his skull in permanent exasperation. Finally—after the fourth time he stifles a yawn, throws his head back against the back of chair, and silently mouths the word ‘fuck’—he manages to shake the old man with the help of his ringing cell phone.
It’s Jeongguk, and Jimin experiences both relief and a fresh wave of annoyance.

“Do you need something,” Jimin says as he answers, his tone making it less of a question than his words suggest.

“Well, hello to you, too,” Jeongguk replies. “And how’s your day, sweetie?”

“Fuck off, Jeongguk. Seriously, I’m busy. What do you want?”

“The contractor called me,” he starts, and Jimin groans. “Apparently you also told him to fuck off when he called you about setting up the walkthrough with the demo team?”

“I have people for that, Jeongguk.”

“Jimin, Namjoon and Seokjin aren’t ‘people for that.’ And they’re fucking busy with other shit. You could have called me. You could have been polite,” Jeongguk says. “Hell, you could have told him that sea lions are actually blue and they’re plotting to take over the world, and it still would have been better than telling him to fuck off. We need to schedule that demolition, Jimin. We have a timeline to keep.”

Jimin sighs. “Fuck. Sorry. You’re right. But for the record, this is the other shit Namjoon is supposed to be busy with.”

“What’s going on?” Jeongguk asks immediately, a thread of wariness woven through his voice. “You’re apologizing again, and this time you’re sober.”

Jimin swallows hard. Moment of truth, moment of truth, moment of truth… “Jeongguk—” C’mon Jimin, you can do it. “There’s something that—I mean, can I—” His office phone rings again, and he stops mid-sentence. Seconds later, there’s another knock at his door. He swears internally; this isn’t the time or the place for this, not with Zitao and a dozen other employees in the building, Taehyung included. “No, never mind. I need to get back to work. Can you just put Namjoon in touch with the contractor?”

“Jimin.”

“I’m just tired, Jeonggukie,” he says, softening his tone to sound less irritated and more tired. It isn’t hard to do.

Well, the more tired part isn’t, anyway, not with the way he’s been sleeping—erm—not sleeping.

“Jimin—”

“Gotta go,” Jimin adds hastily as Zitao sticks his head through the door and points at the phone on Jimin’s desk. “I’ll talk to you later.”

He hangs up one phone, takes a deep breath, and then picks up the other.

It’s hardly 35 minutes later when Jimin’s door is pushed open again, and he looks up from the expense sheet he’s been trying to make sense out of, ready to ream Zitao out—he’d seriously meant it when he said one more interruption would mean Zitao’s balls in a pasta roller—metaphorically, of course—but before he can even make a noise of surprise, Jeongguk is closing the door firmly behind him and crossing his arms over his chest.
“Well?” he says, and Jimin knows he’s sunk.

“Well, what?” Jimin asks, hoping to delay the inevitable just a little longer. He’s not ready for this conversation.

“Don’t fuck with me, Jimin,” Jeongguk scolds, and Jimin glances at him just in time to catch his frown deepening. “Something’s going on with you and you’re doing the same thing that you did when Baekhyun went off script—you’re locking it away and trying to deal with it yourself when you could have help. So don’t sit there and play games with me. Talk to me.”

Jimin gnaws at the inside of his cheek for a second, and then gives in. He does want to talk to Jeongguk about it, and while the location and the timing is less than stellar, it looks like it’s time.

It’s time, whether he’s ready for it to be or not.

He sighs, leans back in his chair, and closes his eyes. He has to resist the sudden urge to rub them—they ache with exhaustion, but he’s got a full face of make-up on in an attempt to fool the world into thinking he’s fine—and when it passes, he opens them again, and Jeongguk is still there, so he says, “Okay.” It’s time. He’s ready to be done with the nightmares and the sickness that’s congealed in his stomach, and if talking to Jeongguk will help him move past all of that then maybe he’s more ready than he thinks. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Jeongguk echoes. He twists the lock on the door and settles in one of the chairs in front of Jimin’s desk, the frown on his face smoothing into something less angry and more concerned. It’s oddly reassuring.

“I…haven’t been sleeping,” Jimin starts quietly. He glues his eyes to the ceiling, “or eating, really. I mean. I can keep some stuff down, if I eat it early enough in the day, and keep busy afterward. And sometimes the nightmares don’t come right away, so I can get in a couple hours before—”

“Jimin, why?” Jeongguk interrupts, the crease in his brow tightening.

Jimin chews on his lower lip for a moment, and then, softly, the words tumble free. “I— I did something I shouldn’t have. I did something bad, Jeonggukie.”

Jeongguk’s name—the whole last sentence, really—is barely a whisper, but Jeongguk hears him. He hears what Jimin is trying to say.

“Wait—” Jeongguk says. “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because I need to talk to someone, and—”

“No— Jimin. I mean, why aren’t you talking to Taehyung about this?”

“What makes you think I haven’t?” Jimin asks, biding for time.

Jeongguk makes a face, twisting his features into an expression that says, ‘I’m not dumb, you fucker.’ “Have you?”

Jimin sighs. “Would you tell Taehyung? He’s not—”

“If he’s the man I left my fiancé for, then yes, I would. Before talking to my ex-fiancé about it,” Jeongguk interrupts pointedly. “So why aren’t you talking about this with him?”

Because Taehyung will leave him.
Fear swells in the pit of his stomach, and Jimin can feel it beginning again, the churning that preludes hanging over a toilet bowl while his insides heave outwards.

“Because I want to talk to you!” he snaps defensively. “You’ll understand, Kookie!” Jeongguk’s eyes harden at Jimin’s reversion to his “professional” nickname, but it’s intentional. Jimin needs Jeongguk to realize that Taehyung is not cut out for this confession, not the same way Jeongguk is. Jeongguk won’t turn away from Jimin for what he’s done because he and Jimin come from the same place. “Can’t I want to talk to my best friend when I—”

“Enough,” Jeongguk says, cutting him off. “You’re being selfish. Taehyung’s not as soft as I originally figured he was, and he’s certainly not dumb. He’s aware that you’re not sleeping or eating, isn’t he?”

Jemin wants to protest, but Jeongguk doesn’t give him the chance to answer.

“He knows something’s bothering you. And he took the revelation about the Dragons in stride, didn’t he? If he wants to stay by your side, Jimin, he’s going to have to be able to live with your actions just as much as you are. And you’re going to have to be able to open up to him.”

“No. I’m talking to you about this,” Jimin replies stubbornly. “I just need to get it out of my system, and then I’ll be fine. I can move on, and Taehyung won’t—”

Jemin stops abruptly as Jeongguk stands up. He doesn’t say anything. He just walks toward the door, unlocks it, and closes it again firmly behind him.

And Jimin just stares, wondering what just happened.

It’s only been two and a half minutes since Jeongguk left him alone in his office, but he’s still staring at the door, a little shocked that Jeongguk just…walked out on him.

Of course, he’s more shocked when Jeongguk returns…and then Jimin sees that he’s pulling Taehyung along behind him by the wrist, and his shock dissolves into anger.

“Jeongguk!” Jimin hisses, shooting up out of his chair. He rushes around his desk, trying to block Jeongguk’s entry—Taehyung’s entry—but he fails, Jeongguk pushing him backwards into a chair before turning around to close the door behind them all.

He locks it again, and Jimin sees Taehyung’s eyes go wide, and then Jeongguk motions for Taehyung to sit, and he does, looking a little unsure of what’s going on and a lot nervous about it.

“No one’s leaving this office until the two of you have talked. Taehyung, Jimin has something important he needs to tell you,” Jeongguk says, folding his arms over his chest and leaning back against the door. Jimin knows the action is casual intimidation, but knowing it doesn’t stop it from working. Especially when it’s paired with the thought of telling Taehyung—all. Everything.

But Taehyung doesn’t look intimidated. Instead, he looks relieved. His anxiety has clearly melted away, and instead it’s been replaced with determination and…anticipation? Fuck. Fuck, what does Taehyung think is coming next?

Fuck.

Jemin swallows hard, looks down at his hands, picks at his cuticles—anything to keep from meeting Taehyung’s eyes—but now that Jeongguk has given Taehyung a golden opportunity to pry into shit
Jimin doesn’t want him to see, Taehyung’s not going to let it go. He reaches for Jimin’s hands, stills Jimin’s fingers with his own, and waits.

Fuck Jeon Jeongguk.

“Jimin,” Tae says quietly, running the pad of his thumb over the back of Jimin’s hand. It’s gentle, and soft, everything that Taehyung is, and Jimin doesn’t want to ruin it. Jimin doesn’t want to ruin it, but Taehyung manages to find just the right words to break him down. “You can trust me.”

You can trust me.

Jimin can trust him. Jimin should trust him. Fuck, why is Jimin such a fuck-up? Why is he so busy worrying about Taehyung rejecting him, when all Taehyung has done lately is worry about Jimin’s sleeping and eating habits, about the bags under his eyes and the lies in his smile?

Jimin’s been avoiding it, ignoring the signs that Taehyung was seeing Jimin’s breakdown, regardless of how much Jimin tried to hide it, because he’s wanted to believe that his act was convincing, but he can’t now. He can’t ignore it now, with Taehyung’s fingers wrapped warmly around his own cold, clammy hands and his voice soft in Jimin’s ears.

You can trust me.

Jeongguk was right. Taehyung’s been amazing up until this point, taking each dangerous turn of events in stride, and giving way when logic dictates that Jimin’s plan, although risky and violent, is the only way through this mess.

Taehyung’s been tolerant and understanding so far, so maybe Jimin’s luck will hold just a little bit longer.

He takes a deep breath, pushes away his lingering fear, and hopes he’s not making the biggest mistake of his life.

“You can trust me.” He says, curling his fingers and tucking them between Taehyung’s. “Tae, I— I did something—something I shouldn’t have done. I could have— I could have stopped, and—”

Taehyung’s fingers loosen around his own, and Jimin’s instinctively tighten. He can’t let Taehyung let go. He can’t.

He glances up at Jeongguk with a sliver of hope that his friend will help him, that he’ll know exactly what to say to salvage everything, but there’s nothing there on Jeongguk’s face but expectation—the expectation that Jimin’s going to see this through to the end.

His heart sinks, and his eyes burn as his vision turns glossy and wet.

He doesn’t want to keep going, he’s afraid to push Taehyung any further, but he’s already said too much. He’s already started down this terrible path, and there’s no turning back. He can’t unsay what’s already been said, so his only choice is to push forward and hope that he can explain himself well enough that Taehyung won’t consider leaving. He blinks to clear his vision, but all it does is push twin tears down his cheeks.

“I could have stopped, and I didn’t. I should have stopped. I shouldn’t have—” His voice breaks as he spits out words, trying to find the right combination of them to make everything okay again. “But I was so angry. She— She killed my dad, Tae. She murdered him. She switched out his meds and—” His nose begins to run, and he sniffs. “It doesn’t matter, I shouldn’t have—”
“It wasn’t self-defense, was it,” Taehyung says. It’s a statement, not a question, and Taehyung’s hands feel as cold as Jimin’s.

Jin can’t believe what he’s hearing. He can’t bring himself to actually say the words, to admit out loud that he’s no better than she was—a cold-blooded killer with nothing but vengeance and anger flowing through his veins—but Taehyung is smart.

Taehyung is smart, and he knows what Jimin is trying to say.

Taehyung knows, and he’s still sitting here, holding Jimin’s hands. A flicker of hope ignites in his chest. “It— It started that way, but—” Everything shakes—his hands, his heart, the whole fucking room around them—“H-how—” Jimin takes a deep breath, pulls one of his hands free to scrub away the tear tracks on his face, and tries again. Tries to slip his hand back into Taehyung’s. “How did you—”

Taehyung shrugs, dropping Jimin’s hands and standing up. “It wasn’t hard to figure out, Jimin. Guilt’s been eating away at you ever since it happened. You’re easier to read than a book.” He steps away from the chair, then turns around and paces back. Puts his hands in his pockets and pulls them back out again.

Jin’s nerves begin to buzz again, and definitely not in a good way. “So—” Jimin starts, but he stops there, unsure of what to say next.

“What, Jimin?” Taehyung says. His voice feels oddly empty, like Jimin’s confirmation of what he already suspected has worn him out. “Just because I figured it out for myself doesn’t mean I’m okay with it.”

Jin’s brow creases in confusion. “But you’ve been worried about me,” he says, hardly able to swallow around the lump that’s suddenly lodged in his throat. “I— I know that you— How? How can you be worried about me and hate me for what I did at the same time?”

“I don’t hate you, Jimin,” Taehyung sighs. It’s a weared sound, a physical manifestation of exhaustion and melancholy that spreads through Jimin like a virus. It seeps into every one of his pores, weighs him down, makes his head feel thick and slow. Stupid. “I could never hate you. I could never hate you, Jimin,” Taehyung repeats, like he knows he needs to, to get it to sink in.

Jin doesn’t know whether he should feel relieved by Taehyung’s reassurance or concerned, because he can hear the ‘but’ coming a mile away.

“But that doesn’t mean I’m not going to need time to come to terms with what you’ve done. I…I think need some space, Jimin. To deal with it.”

And there it is.

There’s the drop of the other shoe, the inevitable moment that Jimin knew would come. And Jin can’t fight the wave of panic that sweeps over him, obscuring everything else.

“No—Tae, no, please—” he begs, his voice thickening with misery as tears spill down his face. He reaches for Taehyung—because he needs to touch him, to hold him, to know that they’re going to be okay—and he sees a moment where Taehyung considers it, considers giving in to Jin’s pain and taking him back—

And then Jimin sees Taehyung shrink away from that moment. Taehyung stands his ground, crosses his arms and tucks his hands in his armpits, and it makes him look so small, so fragile—so vulnerable—
And Jimin suddenly realizes that he did this to Taehyung. He made Taehyung react this way.

He ruined him, brought him down from a beautiful, bright place and buried him in filth, in lies and violence. Jimin’s been trapped here, in this illegitimate life that his father built, roped into extortion and physical violence and—and murder—caught in lie after lie, charming and bribing his way through any disruption to his selfish, destructive plans, until his whole world was one big mess, a tangled pile of misdeeds and sickening behavior, glossed over with fancy cars and expensive clothes and a multi-million dollar penthouse filled with multi-million dollar possessions, polished to look appealing and perfect, to look enviable, and—

To be this close to Jimin—to his brutality and his deceptions and his fucked-up upbringing—to still be standing here, in this room, after Jimin’s admitted to his corruption, after it’s become clear that everything Jimin touches will eventually rot—

Taehyung, a sweet, innocent soul—an angel if Jimin ever met one… To be standing here right now, Taehyung fell. Jimin is Taehyung’s own, personal Satan, and he pulled Taehyung down to his level, ripped that innocence away from him and spoiled him, spoiled his chance at a happy life, with no hesitation.

God, everything is so fucked up.

Jimin is so fucked up.

Taehyung is right to back away.

After all he’s been through, after everything that Jimin’s done to him, Jimin can’t stand the idea of Taehyung being hurt any more than he already is. So he retracts his hand, pulls back and forces himself to sober. He wipes the wetness from his face, takes a deep, shuddering breath to collect himself, and then nods.

“Okay,” he says, and his voice comes out hoarse, but mostly steady. “Okay.”

Taehyung doesn’t wait for him to say anything else, just turns toward the door, reaches past Jeongguk for the doorknob, and Jeongguk—who’s been so silent that Jimin’s practically forgotten he’s there—puts a hand on Taehyung’s shoulder.

It’s a gentle gesture, but it’s not one of comfort. It’s meant to pull Taehyung up short, and it does.

“Things may be different in here,” Jeongguk says softly, waving his hand to indicate the room, “and in here,” he adds, tapping Taehyung’s temple lightly, “but they haven’t changed out there.”

Jimin can see the exact moment when Taehyung processes Jeongguk’s meaning, when he remembers that Kwon Jiyong is still very much a problem on the horizon—a dangerous one. His shoulders tense, and his knuckles whiten around the doorknob, and he shuts his eyes against it, like it’s too much. A single tear slips down his cheek, and Jimin’s heart breaks even further, because of course Taehyung is in as much pain over this as Jimin is—

“I’ll have my car take you home,” Jeongguk says kindly. “But please take Seokjin with you. Let him keep you safe when you’re not here, okay?”

Taehyung nods dully, weariness written on his features, and Jimin is grateful that at least Jeongguk is thinking clearly, because as much as Jimin is loath to hurt Taehyung by keeping him close to keep him safe, he also doesn’t think that he could stand the thought of Taehyung being out there, unprotected and alone.
Jeongguk lets Taehyung open the door then and, as he opens it, Jeongguk stepping out of the way, Jimin’s mouth moves on its own accord.

“Tae—”

Taehyung pauses halfway out the door. He doesn’t look back, but he also doesn’t walk away, so Jimin lets the words tumble from his lips, a last-ditch effort to soothe Taehyung’s mind and save what’s left of them.

“Tae— I love you, baby. I really, really—” His voice cracks, and he clears his throat, pushing aside the regret that’s sticking there and trying to focus on the good still between them. “So take all the time you need, okay? I’ll wait as long as it—” Jimin chokes on the overpowering mix of love and sorrow surging through him, but he pushes through it. He pushes through the last of what he wants to say—what he has to say. “Just. Please—please know that I’m sorry. I’m so, so fucking sorry. If I could go back and change what I did, I would.”

Taehyung waits a moment longer, the only acknowledgement Jimin gets that he was listening, and then he leaves.

Jeongguk shoots a calculating look at Jimin, then turns to watch Taehyung’s quickly receding back, and says, “I’ll stay with him until Seokjin can get here and take him home.” Jimin nods dumbly, and Jeongguk adds, “Hey. It’ll be okay. He loves you a whole lot.”

Then he leaves too, closing the door behind himself, and Jimin stands, walks mechanically to the door, locks it again, and shuffles back around his desk. He crumples into his chair, buries his face in his hands, and wonders if the person he loves most in this world will still be able to love him tomorrow.

And it’s hardly a surprise when the tears rise again and he cries.

Long, exhausting, tedious hours later, when Jimin finally gets home, Taehyung’s shoes and coat aren’t by the door, and the corner of the closet—where Taehyung had started keeping some clothes—is bare, and Jimin wrestles with panic once more.

Seokjin, please tell me he’s safe [Sent 03:17]

The reply comes almost immediately, and Jimin is grateful.

I left him with Yoongi and Hoseok at their place, and I rung a promise from Yoongi that he won’t let Taehyung leave before I get there to pick him up for work tomorrow. [Received 03:18]

Thank you. I owe you a hell of a raise [Sent 03:18]

Don’t worry about it. I care about Taehyung’s safety too. [Received 03:18]

Uh. My wife says ‘yes, you do.’ [Received 03:19]

Good NIGHT, Seokjin [Sent 03:20]

He brushes his teeth, strips out of his clothes, and crawls into bed, curling up under the covers. The bed feels empty without Taehyung—the whole place feels less like home and more like his family estate, all vacant, extraneous space that lacks warmth and affection—and Jimin hates it.
He hates it enough that he makes himself a promise.

No more of that lifestyle for him. No more crooked morals or dubious acts. No more violence.

If Taehyung comes back to him—when Taehyung comes back to him, he corrects himself determinedly—then the person he comes back to will be someone he deserves. Someone better.

And although he’s finally come clean, Jimin can’t allow himself to sleep.

Instead, he lays there, awake, rolling his revenge plan around in his head, trying to find a way to alter it, to make it something Taehyung would approve of, and it takes him longer than it should, his brain sluggish with lack of sleep and run ragged by the onslaught of emotions he hasn’t been able to escape since his father’s passing, but finally it clicks.

Everything finally clicks, and even though the bed feels empty and his body struggles to warm the sheets by himself, he finally falls asleep.

He falls asleep, and, blessedly, he doesn’t dream.

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Taehyung doesn’t sleep that night.

After Seokjin had picked him up from the club, halfway through his shift—which had Yoongi spitting like a furious wildcat—he’d gathered up everything he had at Jimin’s apartment before asking Seokjin to take him back to his apartment with Yoongi.

It wasn’t for any one specific reason, mostly that he needed his clothes and he also needed space. He didn’t want to have to stay with Jimin right now, not when he didn’t know how to reconcile the Jimin he knows and the Jimin that just told him he’d murdered someone.

Murdered.

Taehyung drops the toothbrush in his hand, staring at himself sightlessly in his bathroom mirror with toothpaste foam in the corners of his mouth. It’s not the biggest shock in recent weeks, especially because he’s not stupid and he sort of saw this coming.

He gathers himself and finishes brushing his teeth, wanting to be in bed before Yoongi or Hoseok got home. Seokjin is sitting in his living room, making sure Taehyung stays safe until Yoongi comes home so that he’s not alone in his apartment, and Taehyung checks to make sure he’s comfortable before slipping into bed.

Where he doesn’t sleep, his mind too busy replaying everything that Jimin had said earlier in his office. His brain replays the moment when Jimin had tried to hug him, and his face when Taehyung had pulled away.

He wants to comfort Jimin, wants to tell him that everything is going to be alright, but in that moment Taehyung had realized something important.

He can’t prioritize Jimin’s needs over his own.

He knows he has to deal with the choice Jimin has made and the life Taehyung is agreeing to by being with Jimin. He needs time to figure out if he can live with Jimin like this, and that has to take precedent over giving in to Jimin, because if he just gives in, it’ll fester between them until they fall apart.
Taehyung doesn’t want them to fall apart, but that doesn’t make this forced separation of his own doing any easier to bear.

He misses Jimin, despite everything between them right now.

Taehyung feels…suffocated.

It’s not any one thing in his life, either. It’s a combination of a lot of things piling up, the most recent of which has been Seokjin following him everywhere and the fact that he doesn’t know how to feel about the conversation he had with Jimin.

It hurts, to cut Jimin out completely. He wants to talk to Jimin, hold him and be held in return, but he knows that he needs to sort through what he feels and thinks before he can. He needs to know where he stands on the things Jimin will have to do in his life because of the family he was born into before he can let himself go back, and to do that he needs space.

He mostly has space. Seokjin is as unobtrusive as possible.

If it were up to Jimin, Taehyung would never leave the relative safety of his apartment, which is rich considering it’s Jimin’s fucking spontaneous murder that’s compromised Taehyung’s safety in the first place, so Taehyung doesn’t feel like Jimin should have any say in the decisions regarding Taehyung’s well-being. He should have known Jimin would task Seokjin with haunting his every waking move. Even if Taehyung isn’t talking to him, he won’t turn away Jimin’s desire for his safety.

He can’t say he didn’t know what he was getting in to—Jimin warned him his life was dangerous and Yoongi had said as much too—but it’s one thing to know Jimin’s family was shady and another thing entirely to suddenly be dating a murderer.

Taehyung sighs softly and shakes away those poisonous thoughts. There’s no point in wishing for a different outcome; all he can do is move forward and decide what he can deal with and endure Seokjin breathing down his neck every step of the way.

Simple.

Regardless, Taehyung refuses to miss work over this mess. Yoongi would probably kill him with his bare hands if Taehyung didn’t come in each night. He’s gotten lazy now that he has help, and the strain of working the bar alone for a night would probably kill him.

So, Taehyung is being driven to work. He’s not allowed to walk like he usually does because apparently Jimin has missed the fact that he’s a fully grown adult. No, Jimin won’t let him go anywhere without Seokjin with him. He drums his fingers against his thigh and wonders how much this is costing Jimin.

The petty part of Taehyung hopes it’s a lot.

Anyway, this whole situation, in Taehyung’s opinion, really blows because he still doesn’t know how to reconcile the Jimin who has killed someone with the Jimin he’s been with over the past two months. He craves space, some alone time to organize his thoughts and figure out what he wants—what he needs—out of his relationship with Jimin and space is the one thing he isn’t getting.

So yeah, Taehyung feels suffocated.
The car draws up to the club and Taehyung bolts out of it and ducks into the alley to enter through the side entrance, Seokjin close behind him. Once inside and safe, Seokjin splits from him to go to his own office while Taehyung heads to the breakroom.

Taehyung takes a breath and sighs into the silence of the room.

Space. Quiet.

“Still have your guard dog, I see.”

Yoongi.

Taehyung sighs. “You’re my roommate, you already know this. What’s your point?” He turns and glares half-heartedly at Yoongi, daring him to make another sassy remark. Yoongi’s leaning casually up against the cubbies, arms crossed.

He smirks but holds up his hands in surrender. “Nothing, just an observation.”

Taehyung doesn’t bother to reply and hurries into his uniform, brushing past Yoongi on his way out.

All he wants is a little peace and quiet, completely alone.

He knows he’s not going to get it anytime soon.

“I’ll be fine.”

Seokjin grits his teeth. “You know Jimin isn’t going to be okay with this. Hell, I’m not okay with this.”

Taehyung pouts and looks up at Seokjin from under his lashes. “My family needs my help. They have so much to unpack and settle, and I could really use the break. I won’t leave their house unless you’re there to take me somewhere.”

Seokjin crosses his arms. “Don’t try and charm me, Taehyung. You’ve got nothing on my wife, and I don’t like this.”

“Relax, Jin,” Yoongi says, crossing the room to pat Seokjin’s cheek. “Me and Hope will be with him. We’ll keep him safe.”

Seokjin narrows his eyes. “That makes me even less inclined to go along with this.”

Hoseok makes a noise from where he’s sitting on the couch, sleepily looking at his phone. “Come on, Jin, it’s just for a few days. You can come and get us for work each day and drop us off. It’s not any different than Taehyung being here, where anyone could find him.”

“Yeah,” Taehyung chimes in, “nobody knows where my family’s new house is. It’s probably safer than here.”

Seokjin sighs, and Taehyung knows they’ve just won the argument. “Fine. But you two,” he gestures to Hoseok and Yoongi, “have to stay with him at his family’s house.”

Taehyung quickly pulls out his phone and texts his mom to tell her he’ll be coming to help her unpack and that Hoseok and Yoongi will be taking up the guest room in their new house. “Done,” he agrees.
Seokjin finally relaxes a bit and runs a hand through his hair. His roots are starting to show, and Taehyung wonders if he’ll keep it blond or change the color. “I’m going to have to tell Jimin about this, you realize.”

Taehyung nods and starts heading for his room to pack some clothes for his stay with his family. “I know, but you’re not going to tell him until after you’ve dropped me off at my parents’.”

It’s the perfect solution, really. He gets the space he needs from Jimin, he’ll get to spend time with his family and help them settle into their new house, and he’ll have Yoongi and Hoseok with him. His mom can cook for him and the only time he’ll have to see Jimin is when he’s at work. He can figure out how he feels about Jimin and if he can handle being a part of Jimin’s world.

Perfect.

“He’s not going to like this.”

Taehyung shrugs and grabs a few sweaters, several pairs of underwear, and his favorite jeans, stuffing everything into a backpack. “I don’t really care, Jin. I need this, and Jimin can deal. I’ll be perfectly safe.” He crosses the hall into the bathroom, grabbing his toiletries and shoving those into the backpack with his clothes.

“You’re so lucky I like you, kid.” Seokjin moves out of his way as Taehyung shoulders his backpack and heads down the hall to Yoongi’s room, peeking his head in to see Yoongi ready to leave.

“You’re not so bad yourself,” Taehyung says to Seokjin with a wink. “Now, I think we’re all ready to go, if you are?” He raises an eyebrow at Seokjin.

Seokjin looks around the hallway, a bit surprised to see Yoongi, Hoseok, and Taehyung looking at him expectantly, packed bags in hand with their coats and shoes on. “…You were planning this before I came to check in on you, weren’t you.”

Taehyung rolls his eyes. “Obviously. Can we go?”

“Did it even occur to you that I might say no?” Seokjin looks aghast, like he can’t believe Taehyung’s nerve.

Taehyung looks at Yoongi and Hoseok before looking back at Seokjin and blinking blankly at him, just like the other two are doing. “No. Who could say no to me?”

Seokjin throws up his hands. “Fine. Judas, let’s go before you cause any more trouble.” He herds them all to the front door.

“Oh, and Jin?” Yoongi pauses, the last one out the door.

Seokjin looks down at him expectantly.

“You’ll need to have someone come here twice a day to feed and walk Holly.”

Taehyung laughs and starts for the elevators, a weight lifting off his shoulders with every step.

***

“Okay,” Jimin says, settling at the kitchen bar next to Jeongguk.

“Okay?” Jeongguk asks, one eyebrow quirked upwards.
“Okay,” Jimin nods affirmatively. “You ready to put an end to this?”

“Yeah, but—didn’t we already go over the plan? Jeongguk says, amusement clinging to his lips in an unsubtle smirk. “Don’t get me wrong, your gung-ho attitude is precious, but isn’t this—” He gestures at the papers spread before them on the kitchen counter, the entire file on the Dragons and their role in the deaths of Jimin’s and Jeongguk’s mothers, in a mess of piles, information in the process of being sorted, “—a little excessive?”

“Nope,” Jimin says, his expression settling into one of determination. He reaches for a stack of papers and begins shuffling through it, sorting credible information from hearsay and inadmissible evidence. “We have a new plan.”

“Why?” Jeongguk asks flatly. “The old plan was just fine.” His eyes narrow as he watches Jimin work. “Is this about Taehyung?”

Jimin pauses, his fingers slowing as he stares past the papers in his hands. “And if it is?” He looks up at Jeongguk, and he knows there’s a vulnerability in his eyes, and etched across his features, but he doesn’t care. The only thing he cares about is Taehyung. So he’s going to do this the right way.

“No violence?” Jeongguk asks intuitively.

“No violence,” Jimin affirms.

Jeongguk studies him for a long, skeptical moment, then shrugs. “Okay.”

“Okay?” Jimin asks, a little surprised at how quickly Jeongguk gave in.

“Okay.” Jeongguk nods. “So what’s the new plan?”

“Baekhyun. I meet with him tomorrow,” Jimin replies. He hands Jeongguk a stack of papers. “So start sorting.”

“Baekhyun, huh?” Jeongguk muses as he starts flipping through papers. “Clever.”

“You’re not coming, Jeongguk,” Jimin replies immediately.

Jeongguk snorts, pulling apart a stapled packet and separating the pages. He raises one eyebrow. “Oh, I’m not?”

“No. I’ve…got a different errand for you. If you’re willing,” Jimin hedges, straightening the stack of papers in front of him needlessly.

Jeongguk grunts, looking away from the papers in his hands and directly into Jimin’s soul. “Let’s hear it, then.”

“Would you— Would you check on Tae? Tell him…tell him it should all be over in the next few days.” Jimin pushes his hand through his hair. “Seokjin says he’s getting…restless.”

Jeongguk sighs. “Yeah. Yeah, I can do that. But you owe me one, Jimin.”

“When don’t I?” he huffs, rolling his eyes. “Just hand me the papers by your elbow, you asshole.”

Jeongguk grins, and hands him the pile.

***
Taehyung is lying on his bed in his parent’s new house, listlessly, and listening to the faint sounds of Hoseok and Yoongi laughing in the guest room next to his. They’re so happy now, whatever fight or disagreement they had long since behind them, and Taehyung can’t quite bring himself to be around such domestic bliss. Which is why he’s still in bed when the doorbell rings at the perfectly reasonable time of two in the afternoon on a Monday.

There’s a thump on the wall Taehyung shares with Yoongi that he interprets as “go answer the fucking door,” and reluctantly he rolls out from under his warm blankets and shuffles to the door. With his parents both at work and his younger siblings at school, they’re the only ones in the house.

Whoever is at the front door must be impatient as fuck because they’re now knocking insistently at the door. Taehyung yawns, looks through the glass panel to the left of the door, and makes a small noise of surprise.

“You look like shit,” is the first thing Jeongguk says when Taehyung opens the door.

Taehyung thinks about saying something snarky back because it’s his day off and he can look however he wants, he really does, but his emotions are too tender, too volatile, and instead of a witty rejoinder all that comes out is a strangled sob that ends in a pathetic sounding whimper.

He does, in fact, look like shit. He has ever since he told Jimin he needed some space because he missing Jimin.

Jeongguk gives him a wide-eyed look of surprise. “Are you…crying?”

“No,” Taehyung sniffs, absolutely crying. “I’m fine.”

Jeongguk looks at him with concern for a moment before shaking himself and saying, “Yeah, okay, I’m taking you out for the day. You need a distraction.”

Taehyung doesn’t even argue, just nods solemnly and gets his shoes before following Jeongguk out of the house.

“This is the worst distraction I’ve ever seen.”

Jeongguk looks up at him through the fringe of his bangs, a deceptively cute smile on his face. “No, this is the best distraction you’ve ever seen.”

Taehyung gives him a glare and defiantly puts his noise cancelling earmuffs over his ears to muffle Jeongguk as he talks. He’s glad he did a moment later when Jeongguk turns down the lane and fires off three shots in rapid succession, the bullets piercing the target through the chest, neck, and head.

Taehyung still thinks Jeongguk’s idea to take him to a shooting range and teach him how to shoot a gun is the stupidest idea Jeongguk’s ever had. “In what world do I need to learn how to use a gun?” Taehyung asks when Jeongguk turns back around to face him, leaving the gun on the table facing down the lane.

Jeongguk cocks an eyebrow and gives him a flat stare. “Your boyfriend is currently about to wage war with one of the most dangerous gangs in New York City and you ask why you need to know how to shoot a gun?”

Taehyung feels stupid immediately. Jeongguk is absolutely right. Taehyung may not like the world Jimin is a part of, but despite his current feelings towards Jimin, Taehyung has no intention of letting
Jimin go. He needs space, but Jeongguk dragging him here today has made him aware of the fact that he’s going to learn what it takes to be safe with Jimin.

Still, “I don’t want to do this.”

Jeongguk levels him with a look. “Look, if you’re going to get past this—if you want to get past this—then you need to step into Jimin’s shoes. You need to understand how he was raised and where he’s been if you’re going to ever put this behind the two of you.”

Taehyung gets the feeling Jeongguk is talking about more than just shooting a gun. But he’s right. He needs to understand where Jimin is coming from, and if that means learning how to shoot a gun, so be it. It’s unlikely he’ll ever need to use this knowledge, but he supposes it’s better to be safe than sorry.

“Teach me what I need to know,” he sighs, his stomach twisting uneasily as Jeongguk smiles in satisfaction.

“You’re a natural.”

Taehyung knows it’s a compliment coming from Jeongguk, but he can’t help but feel slightly sick at the statement. He’s a natural...at shooting to kill. Not exactly what he wanted to hear. “Thanks,” he says dully.

Jeongguk places a hand on his forearm and uses his other hand to slowly take the warm gun from Taehyung’s hands. “Do you feel like you won’t panic if you have to use one?”

Taehyung nods confidently. “I don’t ever want to have to, but I won’t shoot myself by accident now.” In the hour they’ve been here Jeongguk had taught him the basics—how to load, aim, shoot, toggle the safety—and he’s gotten used to the weight and heft of the weapon and the way it feels to have it kick back when he shoots. His groupings are good too. It had taken a few times missing the target completely before he started getting marks on the paper, but he’d steadily improved until he was keeping his shots in little groups of two or three.

Jeongguk seems impressed, and Taehyung—oddly—feels better than he has in a few days.

“You know,” Jeongguk says later, when they’re in his car headed back to Taehyung’s parent’s house, “Jimin really cares about your happiness.”

“I know.”

“You’ve changed him. In ways I never expected him to change. I don’t think anyone could have made him want to change unless they were really special.”

Taehyung looks at Jeongguk, his profile lit by the late afternoon sun as they leave the city. He knows Jeongguk well enough to know he doesn’t say things like this often. That he’s serious and knows Jimin better than anyone else, himself included. “Thank you.”

Jeongguk nods once and they drift back into comfortable silence. Taehyung has a lot to think about for the remainder of their drive; of what he’s willing to sacrifice to keep the people he loves in his life.

By the time Jeongguk sees him safely back in his parent’s house, Taehyung has come to the realization that he would give almost anything if it meant he could keep the people he loved in his
“Jimin,” Baekhyun greets tersely.

“Baekhyun,” Jimin replies softly.

“What do you want?”

“Can we sit?” Jimin asks, gesturing at Baekhyun’s desk and the chair in front of it.

Baekhyun frowns at Jimin, probably trying to gauge Jimin’s mood, and Jimin lets him take his time. The nature of their meeting requires privacy, but he doesn’t want Baekhyun to think he’s in any kind of danger, behind closed doors with Jimin.

It’s not that kind of meeting. It’s not like the last time they spoke. Jimin made sure to go through official channels to get this meeting, concocting a story about soliciting charitable donations to fund additional programming for halfway houses, and even going so far as to confirm his appointment with Baekhyun’s secretary first thing in the morning. He wants people to know that he’s here—he wants Baekhyun to know that people know he’s here—so that he worries less about the hypothetical threat of Jimin’s presence and focuses more on the request Jimin’s about to make.

Baekhyun nods curtly, and walks back to his desk, sitting behind it. Jimin steps fully into Baekhyun’s chambers, closes the door behind himself, and then perches on the edge of the chair in front of Baekhyun’s desk.

“Well?” Baekhyun says, his voice tight. “Get to the point.”

Jimin cringes internally. He’d hoped Baekhyun would allow enough conversation for a gentler approach, but he’s honestly not surprised. If Baekhyun is uncomfortable and wants to get this over with as quickly as possible, then so be it. Just because Jimin’s swearing off violence doesn’t mean that he can’t let his previous encounters with Baekhyun work for him. It’ll be a lot faster if he does.

“I need to call in that favor from you,” Jimin says, keeping his gaze and his expression steady.

Baekhyun pales.

Jimin stands up long enough to toss the file in his hands in front of Baekhyun on his desk. “It probably won’t be that big a deal for you,” Jimin continues, seating himself again and crossing his legs in a show of casualness. “But it’s a big deal to me.”

Hesitantly, Baekhyun opens up the file, and starts flipping through pages. He reads for several minutes, his brow knitted, before pausing after a moment, and says, “This is—” Surprised, he looks up at Jimin.

Jimin works to keep his straight face.

“How did you get these?” Baekhyun asks. “You’re not supposed to have access to—”

“You don’t want to ask me that,” Jimin replies, his foot sliding back to the floor as he leans forward, his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped under his chin. “What you do want to ask me is ‘what do you want me to do with this?’”
Baekhyun stares at the papers in his hands, and then looks up at Jimin. The beginnings of wariness blossom anew in his eyes, and Jimin pushes forward before Baekhyun can sink into panic.

“You’re going to get a phone call for a meeting sometime in the next…oh, probably 18 hours, or less,” Jimin says, padding his estimated timeline generously. “Don’t say no when they ask.”

Baekhyun’s eyes widen impossibly further. “Ask what?”

Jimin stands up, straightens his suit coat, and shrugs. “For a chance at justice,” he replies. He walks towards the door, twists the knob, but pauses before pulling it open. “I know that what’s between us hasn’t been good,” Jimin says. “This is my chance to change that.” He tugs the door open and looks back over his shoulder at Baekhyun, who closes his mouth and drops his gaze back to the file in his hands.

“That’s your copy,” Jimin adds. “Think it over.”

He crosses the threshold, in more ways than one; he walks away from Baekhyun’s office without violence, without further threats, and without an answer, trusting—hoping—that Baekhyun will make the right decision.

It’s thrilling, and terrifying, and he doesn’t really like the lack of control that new-Jimin has, but he knows that Taehyung would be proud that new-Jimin exists at all, so he walks away, his stomach in knots, and tries to prepare himself mentally for his next meeting.

***

“We need to leave.”

“No.”

“Jiyong.”

“I said no, Taekwoon.” Jiyong resists the urge to lash out. Taekwoon doesn’t deserve his anger. He’s stayed with Jiyong this whole time, refused to leave his side even in his worst moments, and Jiyong can’t repay that kindness by taking out his hatred for the world on Taekwoon.

“Park’s man was here with a contractor. We can’t stay here and risk our entire operation. You know that.”

Jiyong does know that. He’s very aware. But he can’t just…leave. “I’m not leaving Seungri’s home. This place is all I have left of him.”

Taekwoon’s eyes soften and Jiyong wants to lash out at the pity he sees in them. He doesn’t want pity. He isn’t pitiful. He’s the leader of the most dangerous gang in New York and he is strong. Except in these moments when it’s just him and Taekwoon. When there’s nobody else to see the raw, gaping hole in his chest that Seungri left.

“Seungri wouldn’t want you to stay here and give up everything for his memory. He’d want you to take care of yourself, to stay safe, and keep your family—all of us who are still here and love you—safe too.”

It’s manipulative to phrase it like that, but Jiyong is self-aware enough to know that he wouldn’t have listened if Taekwoon had argued in any other way. But the words rip off the careful mask he keeps in place when he’s faced with the world and the grief of Seungri’s death washes over him again.
“Okay,” he cedes as tears fall from his eyes. “Start packing.”

Taekwoon gathers him in his arms for a moment and lets him hide in his shoulder until he’s composed himself again. Taekwoon makes a call, and minutes later dozens of his men are in his home, throwing things into boxes and gathering up the details of their operations—everything Jiyong has been running from his home—for transport.

It’s chaos and he numbly pitches in to help and direct his men as the mementoes of his life with Seungri are placed haphazardly into boxes.

He buries the hurt under the anger that simmers and builds towards Park Jimin and Jeon Jeongguk. If it weren’t for them, he wouldn’t have to give up this last piece of Seungri. If it weren’t for them, Seungri would probably still be with him.

His sister would still be with him.

Jiyong buries his grief under deep, burning hatred for the people who have taken away all vestiges of happiness from his life.

***

“Mr. Park?” a man asks, hovering at the edge of his table.

Jimin nods, picking up his coffee and taking a small sip. He gestures to the other side of the booth, and to the fresh cup of coffee sitting across the table from him and waits for the man to seat himself.

“I assume that Hollywood misrepresents how bad the coffee is in law enforcement offices, but I figured I’d be nice and get you a cup of the good stuff just in case,” Jimin says, resting his drink on the table between them.

“They’re not all that wrong,” the man says. He sticks his hand out. “Agent Mark Tuan. Nice to meet you.”

Jimin accepts the handshake, makes his grip as firm as he can, because fuck if his fingers aren’t trembling just a little bit. The thought crosses his mind that this FBI agent might know Kwon Dami is missing—might know she’s dead—might know that Jimin was involved—might know that Jimin is just as bad as Kwon Jiyong—

No. No, he’s not as bad as Kwon Jiyong. Jimin didn’t retaliate against two teenage boys who’d been in an accident that wasn’t their fault. Jimin didn’t lash out in cold blood. Jimin didn’t start a war.

And it sure as hell isn’t Kwon Jiyong in this out-of-the-way coffee shop, sitting across from a plainclothes FBI agent at great personal risk, about to present a non-violent solution to end that war. No, Jimin is nowhere near as bad as Kwon Jiyong is, and even if the FBI had the smallest bit of evidence that Jimin killed Kwon Dami, they’d be after the bigger fish.

Jimin takes a deep breath, wraps his hands back around his coffee in an attempt to busy them, and takes another sip to quell the last of his nerves. I’m fine.

He thinks it a second time—I’m fiiiiiine, dragging it out in time with his exhale—and this time, he makes himself believe it. He locks away his…transgressions with Kwon Dami, compartmentalizes his guilt and shame and fear, the anger and need for revenge that he should have buried long ago, before it ever got this bad, and focuses on the person he’s trying to become—someone Taehyung would be able to tolerate, maybe even be proud of.
“So,” Agent Tuan says, leaning back against the booth’s padded vinyl backrest. “How does a guy like you know anything about the Dragons?”

His voice isn’t loud, but his question is. Jimin reaches for the folder laying on the seat of the bench next to him, places it gently on the table, and spins it 180 degrees, slowly.

“How does a guy like you know anything about the Dragons?” Jimin says, “Kwon Jiyong.” He flips the folder open to the first page. Tuan’s eyes find the NYPD case number in the top corner of the page, and he quirks an eyebrow as he shifts his gaze to Jimin.

Jimin doesn’t give him time to comment on the documents that it’s technically illegal for him to have in his possession. Instead, he dives straight into his story, hoping to distract Tuan from his own minor culpability.

“Two years ago, Kwon Jiyong’s fiancé was killed in a car accident. Jeon Jeongguk and I were in the other car.”

Intrigued, the agent sits up, folding his arms and leaning on the table. “Go on,” he says, meeting Jimin’s gaze steadily.

“A week later, our mothers—mine and Jeongguk’s—were killed in a shooting,” Jimin says softly. He watches Tuan carefully as the man absorbs Jimin’s words, very aware that this is his one and only chance to hook the agent and assure the FBI’s help. “They weren’t the intended targets, though,” Jimin adds, turning the page to a copy of an eyewitness account, someone Namjoon dredged up miraculously in a shelter after learning that the perpetrators almost hit a homeless man as they fled the scene.

Tuan reaches for the folder, and starts turning pages, scanning them quickly and sinking deeper into the order of events detailed by Jimin’s evidence.

“You think that Kwon intended to hit you and Jeon instead of your mothers,” Tuan says, his tone a cross between impressed and amused. “What makes you think we don’t already know all of this?”

“If you knew it, you would have acted on it. Kwon is the leader of the most dangerous gang in New York City, and you wouldn’t let an opportunity like this slide,” Jimin says, masking the uncertainty he feels with bravado. He hopes they wouldn’t let an opportunity like this slide, anyway.

Tuan snorts. “A murder charge, even a high profile one like this, isn’t enough to take down the entire gang, kid. We wouldn’t risk our chance at building a bigger case for a couple of life sentences for thugs working under Kwon.”

“What if I knew of a way to negate a significant amount of that risk?” Jimin asks, baiting the agent. He resists the urge to push his fingers through his hair, focusing on staying cool and collected.

“Kid—”

“I’m sitting here, talking about the officially unsolved murder of my mother, calmly and rationally, two years after it happened. You can afford to grant me a little dignity and skip the demeaning nicknames,” Jimin says, sharper than intended.

Okay so maybe he’s not as collected as he could be. Jimin takes a breath, and opens his mouth to apologize for his tone, but the agent beats him to it.

“You’re right. I apologize, Mr. Park. But my point remains—”
“Did you know,” Jimin says, his tone idly inquisitive, “that the building that the Kwon Jiyong lives in was recently purchased and slated for demolition?”

The agent pulls up short. “…Yes,” he replies, guardedly.

“Did you know that the tenants have been informed of their eviction date, and there’s a very narrow timeframe for them to move out of the building?”

“Mr. Park—” Tuan begins, but Jimin cuts him off.

“My investigative team has been observing Kwon’s men, and I can tell you exactly what’s been moved, and where they’ve moved it to.”

Agent Tuan pauses, raises an eyebrow and says, “And?”

“Nothing,” Jimin replies.

“Mr. Park, I didn’t come here to be toyed with,” Tuan says, a note of irritation in his voice. “If you have information, share it.”

“No,” Jimin elaborates, “I mean that nothing has been moved. Everything’s still inside the apartment. And my man’s seen it. He accompanied the contractor on the pre-demolition walkthrough of the building just three hours ago, and he says the place is an absolute mess. He didn’t get inside, but he got a solid eyeful through the door. ‘Incriminating shit out in the open everywhere,’ were his exact words. They have…” He pauses for dramatic effect and checks his watch. “…36 to clear everything out the building. I would imagine that’d be chaos. It’d be a prime opportunity to catch them with their pants down.”

“Look,” the agent says, “even if we wanted to, even if arresting Kwon and his underlings could lead to a larger bust, we wouldn’t be able to hold them for the murder charges. Not with what’s here. A lot of this information and testimony is inadmissible, and we’d be hard pressed to make the charges stick. And that’s assuming we can get a warrant with it in the first place, which is highly unlikely.”

“I think you’re missing my point,” Jimin says, his lips twitching. “It doesn’t really matter if you can hold him for the murder charges. Use them as a gateway to find the evidence you need to prosecute whatever other crimes you want. As long as he goes away for a long time, I don’t particularly care what it’s for.”

“No warrant still means no access, Mr. Park,” Agent Tuan says, irritation working its way into his voice at the necessity of explaining the obvious.

Jemin reaches into his pocket, and pulls out a folded piece of paper, and slides it across the table toward Tuan. “This is the number for a sympathetic judge.”

Tuan takes the slip of paper hesitantly, as if it might bite him, and then turns his shrewd gaze on Jimin. “Your reputation is deceptive.”

“It’s not my fault if someone underestimates me,” Jimin shrugs.

“So, what’s in this for you? What are you after?” Tuan asks.

“Justice for my mother, and Jeongguk’s, isn’t enough?” Jimin replies in turn. “The removal of a threat to my safety isn’t enough?”

“You’re handing me the culmination of years of private investigation, and you’ve practically gift
wrapped it with a warrant,” Tuan says, skepticism written across his face. “You say you don’t care if the charges for your mother’s murder stick. Hell, you even bought me coffee. And there’s no catch?”

“Ah,” Jimin says. “Well. Now that you mention it, there is one thing I’d like to request of you.”

The agent’s face smooths into an expression of unsurprised displeasure as he waits for Jimin to go on.

“Jeongguk and I want to be there when you take him into custody. We want to see his face when he realizes that it’s over. That’s the reparation we ask for.” He slides a card across the table, a simple thing, with only his name and phone number printed on it.

Tuan picks his coffee up, deliberately, takes a long sip, eyeing the card where it sits on the table before him, and then says, “I’m gonna have to talk to my boss about it. And he’s going to want to think about it. We don’t let civilians past the yellow tape for a reason.”

“Well, don’t think too long. Thirty-six hours isn’t really a lot of time to get everything arranged, wouldn’t you agree?” Jimin replies. He stands, pulls his jacket on, picks up his coffee cup, and raises it in an abbreviated salute. “Call me when your boss has got his shit figured out.”

And for the second time that day, Jimin walks away from a meeting unable to predict or manipulate the actions of the person he’d just talked to.

It’s fucking unnerving, and he all he wants is to curl up in Taehyung’s arms and forget about it all.

It’s only been 17 hours since Jimin walked out of the coffee shop, leaving Agent Tuan to mull over the offer Jimin’s made him—only 17 hours since he went home, too restless to spend the evening at the club, too eager to see Taehyung, even if only from a distance—but he’s unsurprised when he gets a phone call from an unknown number, even if it wakes him up from an uneasy sleep with a shot of adrenaline and a wave of anxious energy.

“Park Jimin speaking,” he answers casually, trying to contain the thundering gallop of his heart in his chest.

“Park,” says a brusque voice. “Special Agent in Charge Im Jaebum of the FBI’s New York City Metro Gang Task Force. You met with Agent Tuan, my media liaison, yesterday.”

“Ah, yes,” Jimin says, working to maintain his outward cool. “Hello, Special Agent Im. What can I do for you?”

“You can stay outside my fucking police tape,” Im says, “but I’m guessing you won’t do that. If you found your way into the NYPD database, something tells me you’ll find out when our raid is scheduled and make a nuisance of yourself.”

He’s not entirely wrong.

“So…” Jimin hedges.

“So, I’m going to tell you when and where you and Jeon need to be to live out your damned revenge fantasy, and in return you’re going to do everything I say, when I say it, for your safety and for the safety of my men,” the agent replies coldly, “or I’m going to haul both your asses in and hold you for the full 24 hours I legally can, just for the hell of it.”
“Noted,” Jimin responds, a smirk playing at the corner of his lips. Very clearly, Special Agent in Charge Im Jaebum has never met the Park or Jeon family lawyers. Regardless, Jimin isn’t interested in distracting Im’s team during the operation and jeopardizing a positive outcome. He tells Im as much.

“Good,” the agent says. “You and Jeon need to come in to HQ for briefing and to sign a stack of waivers as thick as my cock.”

“When?” Jimin asks, ignoring the crudity of the agent’s words, his breath rushing out of him as he indirectly confirms that Jimin and Jeongguk will be allowed to be there.

“Now would be good. We’ve got a lot of shit to go over, and we’re going in tonight.”

“Tonight,” Jimin breathes in disbelief, struggling to process how close at hand his revenge—no, his justice—actually is.

“Did I stutter?” Im grouses under his breath. “Just get your asses in here ASAP, or I’m gonna leave you in a locked cell when we roll out.”

“We’ll be there within an hour,” Jimin assures him. “Thank you, Special Agent.”

“Don’t fucking thank me. It makes this too damned chummy, and let me be very clear, Park—we are not friends. You did some shady shit to bring me the intel you did, and I’m not going to forget it, regardless of how shit goes down tonight.” Im spits back at him, and then the call ends abruptly.

Jimin spends several precious minutes trying to figure out what the hell comes next, before settling on calling Jeongguk.

Yeah, calling Jeongguk sounds like a good idea.

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Two full days at his parent’s house with Yoongi and Hoseok has gone a long way toward settling his family into their new house. They’ve almost got all the boxes unpacked, and Taehyung suspects that even with the three of them returning to work today, he’s going to run out of an excuse to stay here and think. He can only claim the need for space for so long, and he’s beginning to really miss Jimin and despite everything…he’s starting to think he might know what he wants.

He thinks about it as he gets ready for work, as Seokjin ushers the three of them into a car and drives them to the club, up until the moment the four of them walk into the club and see the entire staff gathered on the main floor around the bar.

Seokjin immediately disappears, off to figure out what’s going on no doubt.

Taehyung follows Yoongi and Hoseok as they work their way through the dancers.

“What’s going on?” Hoseok asks one of his friends. Taehyung thinks her name is Momo?

She shrugs. “I’m not sure. Jimin posted a notice on our door that says there’s a mandatory employee meeting today. He even called in anyone who was off.”

Yoongi and Hoseok share a look that Taehyung doesn’t like. They stand together in nervous silence for a few more minutes until a piercing whistle echoes through the space, silencing the quiet hum of chatter instantly.
Taehyung shifts until he can see Seokjin, Namjoon, and Jimin standing at the front of the crowd, Kris and Zitao behind them in the shadows.

“Good afternoon, everyone,” Jimin says, loud enough for everyone to hear. Taehyung’s breath hitches in his throat because he’s missed Jimin so fiercely.

“Oh shit,” mutters one of the dancers off to Taehyung’s left. He thinks it might be Ilhoon. “He’s gone bankrupt.”

“Did we have a bet on that? I thought we predicted he’d fire Yoongi before he closed down the club,” says the dancer next to Ilhoon that Taehyung’s pretty sure is named Minhyuk.

Yoongi hisses at them to ‘shut the fuck up, shitheads’ before turning back to what Jimin is saying.

“Due to unavoidable circumstances, you’re all being sent home until further notice.” Whatever Jimin means by that, he doesn’t get the chance to clarify before the room breaks out in an uproar of voices.

“Quiet!” booms Namjoon’s voice, cutting through the noise.

“None of you are losing your jobs,” Jimin says, rubbing his forehead like he’s trying to soothe a sudden headache. “I don’t anticipate needing to keep the club closed for more than a day or two, but until you hear from me, Namjoon or Seokjin directly, you’re not to come in. You’ll all receive your usual pay for the days we’re closed, including a bonus to cover missed tips.” His gaze sweeps over the crowd, and Taehyung doesn’t think he imagines the way Jimin’s eyes hesitate when they meet his. “Questions?”

“Yeah, what the fuck?” Yoongi shouts at Jimin. “You couldn’t have told us this before I woke up and got here? I could be sleeping right now, Jimin.”

Jimin scowls at Yoongi. “Any actual questions?”

Taemin, their newest dancer, raises his hand timidly. “Why?”

Jimin sighs. “I’m not at liberty to discuss. It’s nothing that will affect any of you. I’m simply taking precautions.”

Taehyung immediately infers that this has something to do with Jimin’s plan and feels relief when the rest of the employees drop the matter without much of a fuss, quickly breaking off into groups to talk with each other or going home.

“Tae, may I speak with you for a moment?”

Jimin’s voice, low and close to his ear, startles him slightly and he turns around with a gasp, barely stopping himself from throwing himself into Jimin’s arms.

“I’m sorry for intruding on your space, but I need to ask something of you,” Jimin continues when Taehyung doesn’t say anything. He gently takes Taehyung’s hand in his and leads him to his office where Namjoon and Seokjin are already waiting.

“What’s going on?” Taehyung asks, suddenly nervous.

“I’m moving forward with the plan,” Jimin says, dropping his hand and moving behind his desk. Taehyung’s hand feels like it’s been seared with the imprint of Jimin’s fingers. “The raid is tonight, and I need you to promise you’ll stay with Seokjin at all times.”
“But—”

“I know it’s a lot to ask,” Jimin says, looking down at his desk instead of at Taehyung, “but I need to know that you’ll be safe tonight.”

“Nobody knows where we’ve been keeping him, Jimin,” Seokjin assures. “I’ve been very vigilant.”

“I don’t doubt you, Jin. It’s Kwon I worry about.”

“He’s a slippery one,” Namjoon agrees.

“Won’t you need Seokjin with you, though?” Taehyung asks, sounding a bit frantic to his own ears. He can’t lose Jimin. Not now, after everything. “Who’s going to keep you safe?”

Jimin looks into Taehyung’s eyes for the first time since entering the office together. “I’ll be with Jeongguk the whole time, and we’re just standing by while the FBI does most of the work for us.”

His expression is soft, his eyes asking Taehyung to trust him one more time. “You don’t need to worry about me.”

“But I do,” Taehyung whispers, and the emotion that surges between them is almost tangible at this point.

Jimin gives him a thin smile. “Seokjin, take Taehyung home and keep him safe.” It’s clearly a dismissal, but Taehyung isn’t ready, hasn’t said everything he needs to say. Seokjin begins to usher him out of Jimin’s office.

“Wait!” he says. Jimin and Namjoon both look up at him but Taehyung only looks at Jimin. “Once this is over, once everything is finished,” he hesitates, licking his lips, “can we talk?”

Jimin’s eyes fill with a million emotions Taehyung can’t hope to name. “Of course, Tae. I’d like that very much.”

Taehyung holds his gaze for one, two more beats before he allows Seokjin to turn him away and shuffle him back to the car, Yoongi and Hoseok joining them somewhere along the way.

His emotions are a riotous mess inside him. He doesn’t know what to do and ends up spending an hour locked in his room once they’re home, cycling through panicked breathing, gasping sobs, and absolute terror as he thinks about the possibility of losing Jimin.

Abruptly it’s all too much to handle and he feels stifled in his room, in this house, and he opens the window after grabbing his coat and sneaks out of his parent’s house like he’s some kind of rebellious rich kid.

He just needs some space. He needs the cold December air on his face to give him clarity to his thoughts and feelings. This neighborhood is safe. He’ll be fine. He has his cell phone with him and he won’t be gone long. A short half hour walk, to calm down and work through why he’s panicking so much.

As he walks the panic fades, leaving a dull, aching fear low in his gut. The bitter taste of dread on his tongue.

The terror at possibly losing the man he loves.

Fuck. He loves Jimin—like, really loves him. The once-in-a-life-time, this-is-it-for-him kind of love, and no matter what Jimin does, Taehyung realizes that that isn’t going to change. What else could
explain his fear of losing him? He loves Jimin, and he’s stuck here under lock and key like a princess while the man he loves is off fighting an actual, modern-day dragon, and there’s nothing he can do to help.

The only thing he can do is sit here and wait, stay safe like Jimin asked so that Jimin doesn’t have to worry about him, and he suddenly feels too exposed out in the open. He’s on a sidewalk in the middle of a residential neighborhood, but darkness has fallen fast as it does in winter when days are short and nights are long and he suddenly wants to be back home with his family.

He turns around and begins walking back the way he came, moving quickly in his haste to be warm and maybe cuddle with Yoongi and Hoseok. His siblings wanted to play a board game with him earlier, maybe he’ll pull one out of a box and—

“Well, you sure are a pretty thing, aren’t you?”

The voice behind Taehyung makes his blood run cold because he knows that voice. He heard it often when he was growing up.

It’s the voice of Kwon Jiyong.

He turns around and faces Jiyong. “What do you want?”

“You,” Jiyong smirks, and Taehyung has a second to panic before pain explodes behind his eyes and everything goes black.

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There’s a significant amount of paperwork for their impending ride-along. It’s a little ridiculous, Jimin thinks, but he’s ready to do whatever it takes to finish this.

Jeongguk sits next to him, filling out his own pile of waivers, and Agent Tuan sits across from them, a faint frown on his face. Next to him, the team leader, Agent Im, wears a full scowl. It’s clear that neither of them is pleased that he and Jeongguk are there.

As they finish the last of the forms, Im’s expression transforms from annoyance to business, and he signals the rest of the team to join them in the conference room. Five more agents file in, and Jimin and Jeongguk stand for introductions.

A lanky blond with curious eyes and a mischievous smirk introduces himself simply as “BamBam, demolitions.” Agent Choi, the team’s sniper, is soft spoken, and Wang, a beefy agent with a confident grin and the swagger to match it, looks like he might be trying to coerce Jeongguk into submission via handshake. Jimin desperately swallows back a grin at the almost-imperceptible petulance that twists Jeongguk’s lips, and greets the final two members of the team, an Agent Park who is of no relation to Jimin but seems amiable enough, and an Agent Kim that looks…familiar? Definitely familiar. Where has Jimin seen him before? Is he related to Taehyung, maybe?

Probably not. There are about a million Kims in New York City’s Koreatown. But then where does Jimin know him from? He could swear that he’s seen him before somewhere.

Jimin is distracted by his train of thought, but not so distracted that he misses the way Jeongguk’s eyes widen at Agent Kim’s name, the way he pauses before grasping Kim’s hand and shaking it firmly.

Shit.
Does Jeongguk recognize him too?

If so, the place that Jimin knows him from is probably…compromising. Which is a problem, considering the man is a federal agent.

Either that, or the agency is the one that’s compromised, which is also a problem, considering the secrecy of the raid tonight is the biggest advantage—the only advantage, really—that they have over Kwon’s gang.

Shit.

With a minute shake of his head, Jeongguk regains his composure, and Jimin decides to follow his lead. He clearly knows something more than Jimin does, and Jimin’s not interested in fucking things up by bumbling around unknowingly. There’s too much at stake for that.

“Sit down. I’ll make this brief,” Im says, and they settle quickly into seats around the table. “Mr. Jeon and Mr. Park are the individuals that provided us with the intel we’re using to make a move on Kwon Jiyong and the Dragons. They also were integral in…persuading the judge to give us our warrant.” Jimin ignores the pensive side-eyes that the junior agents on the team aim at him and Jeongguk. “They’ll be tagging along tonight—”

Objections break out around the table, but Agent Im doesn’t stop. “—in an observational capacity only,” he finishes, his voice raised over the ruckus. “This is non-negotiable, so get the fuck over it. Now.”

“JB—” Agent Park begins.

“I said ‘non-negotiable,’ Agent. The have been informed of their responsibilities, which are as follows: one, stay inside the van at all times. This isn’t some ‘cross the police tape in the heat of the moment’ bullshit. Leaving the van while the operation is in progress will result in their arrest, which all of you are authorized to carry out, should the occasion call for it. Two, obey any order given by any agent immediately. This is for your safety—and for theirs, since I’m legally bound to be concerned for it. We are not, however, responsible for their safety. They’ve signed waivers ‘n’ shit, and there’s zero culpability on any of our shoulders.”

The beefy agent, Wang, makes eye contact with Jimin and raises both his eyebrows in acknowledgment. Jimin raises his own eyebrows in return, and stares Wang down.

“Three, any interference on their part, and we pull out immediately.”

“Wait,” Agent Kim says, confused. “How exactly are they going to interfere from inside the van?”

“I have no fucking clue,” Im replies, his distaste blatant. “But they’ve got pull in unexpected places, and I refuse to underestimate their resourcefulness. Mark’ll be running the op from the van, but he’s not gonna have time to babysit their asses. If they do anything—anything—he’ll call everything off on the spot, so keep one ear open for his order.”

“Unnecessary, but okay,” Jimin says dryly.

“Not unnecessary,” Tuan says. “The threat of calling the whole thing off is our insurance, to make sure you and Mr. Jeon behave as promised during the op.” He leans forward, his arms crossed over his chest and his elbows on the table, and narrows his eyes. “I dug a little deeper into your methods, Mr. Park, and I don’t trust you. You’re conniving and sly and manipulative, and you don’t care about collateral damage. The end always justifies your means. I’m not about to let myself or my team fall prey to that pattern. So, no, it’s not unnecessary. You do what we want, and you get what you
want. It’s a simple exchange. I’m sure someone of your intelligence can understand that.”

Jeongguk tenses, and Jimin reaches out to steady him with a hand on his shoulder. “Rest assured that neither Jeongguk nor I would ever do anything to sabotage our chance at bringing Kwon to justice,” Jimin says smoothly, crafting his words carefully to be neither denial nor confirmation of Tuan’s accusations against his and Jeongguk’s characters, as if Tuan’s denunciation wasn’t anything more than an unfounded allegation unworthy of his attention.

He knows, without looking, that Jeongguk’s eyes are locked on Tuan right now—Jeongguk has never been one to back down from a challenge, especially one to his reputation—but Jimin intentionally dismisses it, and turns away from Tuan’s steady gaze, as if he’s unbothered. There’s a time and place for everything, and Jimin knows retaining his professionalism right now will serve him better in the long run, even if his body and mind are screaming for him to bolt out of his chair for the exit.

*Give them nothing to question, and then get the fuck out.*

“Carry on,” Jimin says, withdrawing his hand from Jeongguk’s shoulder to lace his fingers together idly in his own lap. He meets Agent Im’s eyes, refusing to falter now. They’ve come so far already. They’re so close.

Just a little bit longer, and then it’ll be all over.

“I don’t fucking trust them,” Jeongguk says as they walk out the elevator and into Jimin’s penthouse. They’ve got two hours before they have to meet up with Agent Im and his team again, and Jimin just wants to lay down for a minute, maybe quell the butterflies swarming nervously in his stomach with a short nap.

Too bad he’s got shit to sort out first.

“Of course you don’t,” Jimin sighs. He kicks his shoes off, wiggling his toes out of habit as he frees them. “They’re cops.”

“They’re assholes,” Jeongguk corrects. “Tuan didn’t need to be a prick about the insurance for our good behavior thing. Like we’re gonna fuck this up when—”

“I know,” Jimin agrees.

“Assholes, Jimin. Assholes.”

“Speaking of those assholes, where the fuck do we know Agent Kim from?”

“Uhh—”

“Don’t give me that ‘uhh’ shit, Jeonggukie. I saw the way you looked at him. You recognized him too, I know you did.” Jimin glances over his shoulder at Jeongguk and raises his eyebrows at the wide-eyed alarm he finds frozen on Jeongguk’s face. It’s been a hot minute since the last time Jimin caught Jeongguk looking so shaken. “So, what’s his story? Is he gonna be a problem?”

“Uhh—” Jeongguk repeats, trailing along slowly behind Jimin as he strides into the kitchen.

“Jeongguk,” Jimin says, irritated. He grabs a water bottle from the fridge and takes a small sip to
temper his annoyance—but just a small sip. He doesn’t think he can keep anything more substantial
down right now. “Don’t fuck with me right now. I’m a little on edge about this whole thing coming
together just right. I just wanna know we’re not about to be hauled in for our previous transgressions.
Or killed when the operation is ambushed.”

That seems to shake Jeongguk out of it. “Wait, what?” he says. “No. Jimin— He’s just— He’s
Sehun’s cousin. I’ve seen him at the salon, like, twice since I went there looking for answers about
what you were keeping from me when Baekhyun was blackmailing you. They, uh, go to lunch
together all the time, I guess?”

Fuck. Of course. Sehun has a picture of the two of them at his work station. With the number of
hours Jimin’s spent in Sehun’s chair, staring straight ahead at the mirror and the family photographs
Sehun’s surrounded it with, it’s no fucking wonder that Jimin recognized Agent Kim. What he does
wonder, though is—

“Why was that so fucking hard?” Jimin asks, taking another sip of water before grimacing at the way
his stomach churns and putting the bottle back in the fridge. “Wait—why have you been to the salon
so many times?”

“I got a haircut,” Jeongguk grouses. “And I was thinking about maybe dying my hair, so I went back
to— I just— I didn’t know Sehun’s cousin was a fed. The dynamic caught me off-guard, I guess.”

Jimin frowns, his eyebrows crinkling together. “I guess it is surprising? Sehun knows Junmyeon runs
some of our business through that salon.” His frown deepens. “Maybe I should talk to Junmyeon
about it…” he mutters.

Or maybe, a wild thought crosses his mind, maybe he should consider cleaning up the family
business. His father’s less-than-legal ventures have been…time consuming, at best, these last couple
of weeks, and he doesn’t really see how that’s going to get better once everything settles more
permanently under his leadership. If Taehyung really does want to talk, then maybe Jimin has a
chance at winning him back.

And if Jimin has a chance at winning him back, then the last thing he wants to do is babysit his
father’s previous arrangements into perpetuity. He wants to spend his time with Taehyung, proving
he can be worthy of Taehyung’s affection.

Jeongguk shrugs indifferently, his eyes distant as if he’s thinking about something else entirely, and
Jimin rolls his eyes and turns toward the media room. Maybe he can find something on TV to distract
himself.

He plops down on the couch and grabs the remote. HGTV blares at him, and he winces and thumbs
the volume down. Idly, he starts flipping through channels, looking for something to divert his
attention from the upcoming raid.

“Hey, Jimin,” Jeongguk calls from the hallway. He leans in the doorway a second later, his face
cleared of whatever thoughts had occupied him moments earlier. “Is your concealed carry still up to
date?”

“What? Yeah, but—” Jimin doesn’t get anything else out before Jeongguk disappears again. He
huffs and launches himself up off the couch again to chase after his friend. “Jeonggukie, what are
you— Dammit, seriously?”

He finds Jeongguk in his office, crouched in front of his safe, twirling the dial with confidence. After
a moment, it pops open, and Jeongguk shoots a look of disdain over his shoulder at Jimin. “Why is
Jeongguk reaches inside the safe and pulls out a small box. He stands and holds it out to Jimin expectantly.

“This is a terrible idea,” Jimin says immediately. “What the actual fuck, Jeongguk? Put it back.”

“No,” Jeongguk says stubbornly, walking over to Jimin’s desk and setting the box on it. He opens it with sure, but careful movements, and lifts the small pistol out of its velvet lining. He looks at Jimin expectantly and holds it out.

Jimin stomps over to his side. “Put. It. Back,” he hisses. Snatching the gun and settling it back in its case. He snaps the lid shut with finality. “We are not taking firearms to an FBI operation. That is the dumbest idea you’ve ever had.”

“Seems like the smartest one, to me,” Jeongguk says, pushing Jimin’s hands aside and opening the box again. “When was the last time you cleaned it?”

“Jeongguk,” Jimin says, pained. He pinches the bridge of his nose.

“Jimin,” Jeongguk parrots. “You don’t have to use it. You don’t even have to flaunt that you have it. You just need to take it with you. Do you seriously want to be within 100 yards of Kwon Jiyong without any protection?”

“Well. That is a good point.

“That’s not the point!” Jimin retorts. “The point is to do this the right way, without violence. I’m not taking that gun, Jeonggukie.”

Jeongguk’s expression darkens. “In what world is walking into Kwon’s neighborhood and not expecting violence the smart choice? Taehyung would be pissed at you if he knew you were being stupid about this. Fucking hell, Jimin.” He pauses for a moment, staring at Jimin as if trying to figure out how to get through to him. Finally, he says, “Look. Just take the gun. There’s nothing illegal about concealing a firearm on your person, since your license is up to date. We didn’t sign any paperwork about being unarmed during this idiocy. And just because you have it with you doesn’t mean you have to use it. The FBI has an insurance policy against us fucking something up—this’ll be our insurance policy against them fucking up.”

Jeongguk reaches down to his own pant leg then, pulling it up a good six inches and twisting his ankle coyly, touching his toe to the floor and lifting his heel. A holster is fastened there. It’s high quality, Jimin can tell by the materials it’s made of and the strap that runs up his calf, likely to connect to a harness just above his knee. Jeongguk’s favored handgun is already sheathed there, the matte finish of the metal polished to an almost-gleam.

Jimin glares at it a little.

“I got you one, too, so we could match,” Jeongguk says, his voice pitched in a fake giggle.
Jimin rolls his eyes. “You really don’t trust the cops, do you?”

“I don’t trust the assholes, Jimin. And Kwon’s one of ‘em.” He drops his playful manner along with his pant leg. “It’s better to be safe than sorry.”

Jimin sighs. “I’m not going to win this one, am I?” he asks, already knowing the answer.

“Nope,” Jeongguk says, popping the ‘p.’ “Nobody ever wins against my paranoia. Now—” He steers Jimin by the shoulders toward his desk chair and pushes him down gently into it. “Clean your firearm, and I’ll go grab your holster from my coat pocket.”

***

Everything is going according to plan until the police show up. Which, actually, puts a damper on Jiyong’s already foul mood.

“Boss,” Youngbae says, looking out the window, “what do you want to do?”

Jiyong runs through his options. They could run, scatter into the wind and maybe some of them will make it out. Or, they could fight. He thinks about his hostage in the next apartment over. He’ll use Jimin’s pretty little toy as leverage in this game they’re playing and keep his most important men alive in return for the boy’s life.

He can get himself and his most essential people out on that twink’s life alone.

“We’re going to give them hell,” Jiyong instructs, walking over to the window to speak lowly to Youngbae. “Get the grunts out in the halls to give us time to get out the most essential things. As soon as you hear gunfire you get the hell out of here. I’ll use the kid as leverage to get myself out.”

“What do you wanna do about him?” Youngbae jerks his thumb at the window, pulling the curtain aside so Jiyong can look out it.

What he sees makes his blood boil because right there, standing with a bunch of feds, is Park Jimin. The cops sided with the man who murdered his sister, his last living relative, and he is done playing nice.

Jiyong looks at Youngbae, at his men in the room looking at him, and makes the call.

“Kill them all.”

He waits only long enough for Youngbae to nod, knowing that Youngbae will make sure his command is followed out, before storming out of the apartment he’s in and into the empty one next door. He hears the faint sounds of whimpering coming from the back room, no doubt Jimin’s little bitch is coming to.

Jiyong clenches his phone in one fist and a gun in the other before relaxing his grip on his phone and looking down at the black screen. He can see his reflection in the surface, eyes wild with anger, his jaw clenched. He studies himself for a moment longer before waking the screen.

He has a call to make.

***

“I have your pretty little fucktoy. If the cops come in here, he’s dead.”

The words send Jimin spiraling into a thousand different emotions.
His mouth goes dry, his fingers start to shake, and the only thing he can think is *oh god, oh god*—*Tae—oh god, oh god, oh god*—

He doesn’t know what he expected when he answered his phone, the unknown number causing his stomach to sink as Special Agent Im glares at him for the interruption of Jimin’s ringtone. He didn’t know what to expect when he answered it, his voice surprisingly unsteady, but he didn’t expect Kwon Jiyong’s singsong-y tone, the faux lightheartedness that belies his words, and the anger that Jimin knows must be roiling beneath them.

“What?” he whispers, the word catching briefly in this throat and finally emerging scratched up and hoarse, as if it had to fight its way out.

“He’s a cute little thing, Jimin. I can see why you were drawn to him. He’s pretty when he cries, did you know that?”

He *does* know it—Taehyung is *always* pretty, and sadness-etched features and tear-laden eyes could never change that, even if they change the way Jimin’s heart aches for him—but visualizing Taehyung in Kwon’s clutches, crying…it doesn’t make Jimin ache in sympathy, the way he did when Taehyung cried in his bathroom over his family’s lost home. It makes him careen in fear, his stomach lurching into his throat for a paralyzingly long minute until he realizes—

Kwon can’t actually have Taehyung. Seokjin is with him, watching him. Seokjin promised he’d be safe.

Jimin laughs, an empty sound that leaves an acerbic taste in his mouth. “I don’t fucking believe you. If you’ve got him, prove it.”

There’s a shuffling sound, a pained whimper, and then coughing, like someone trying to reclaim their voice, before Jimin hears Taehyung speak.

“Jimin, please—”

His voice is raspy and dry, but thick with panic and desperation, and Jimin feels the fear return in a heavy wave. He chokes over a sob, “Tae? Baby? Tae, are you—”

“That’s enough of that,” Kwon cuts in, tone jovial, pulling the phone away from Taehyung. “I didn’t get to tell Seungri goodbye. I didn’t get to tell him I loved him one last time. So, you don’t get to, either.”

He’s going to throw up.

The holster strapped to his ankle suddenly feels leaden, the metal of the gun strapped there twice as heavy as it should feel, the weight of it burning against his leg.

Everything he’s done to keep Taehyung safe—everything he’s given up, every boundary he’s pushed, every line he’s crossed—everything he’s sworn off, everything he’s vowed to change—it’s all for *nothing*. It’s all for nothing, because Jimin has failed at the one thing he *had* to succeed at, and he feels himself crumpling under the weight of it.

Jimin is a failure, and he can only think one thing: *Taehyung deserves bett—*

A hand settles on his shoulder.

Startled, Jimin twists around to see who it is, and Jeongguk’s concerned eyes meet his.
He can hear that Kwon is saying something, something he should be paying attention to, something that affects Taehyung’s life, but all he can process is the support in Jeongguk’s gaze, the strength he’s offering Jimin, the hope that Jimin shouldn’t give up, can’t give up, and—

“I’m coming in,” Jimin interrupts Kwon. “I’m the one you want to hurt. I’ll trade myself for him, no fight.”

Kwon is quiet.

Jimin hopes.

“Sure, Park, why not?” he finally says, a note of irritation laced through his voice. “You have ten minutes to get in here, without the cops, before I put a hole in Taehyung’s pretty face.”

The line goes dead, and Jimin turns to face Jeongguk, seven somber faces staring from behind him, and exhales slowly. “Kwon Jiyong knows we’re here, and he’s got Taehyung. I’ve got 10 minutes before he kills him.”

“Fuck,” Im swears. “Okay, new plan. Suit him up.”

“What?” Tuan says. “He’s a civilian, JB.”

“And this is our one chance at Kwon, Mark,” he replies sharply. “I’m not letting it get away.”

“Fuck,” Agent Kim whispers.

“Fuck,” Agent Wang agrees, turning to grab an extra vest as Agent Tuan pulls Agent Im off to the side. Undiscernible arguments flow back and forth between them in hissed whispers, and Jeongguk squeezes Jimin’s shoulder, where his hand still rests, to pull his attention back.

“Jemin,” Jeongguk says again, and Jimin stops. “You’re upset. You’re not thinking clearly—”

“I don’t care, Jeongguk—”

“Let me finish, brat,” Jeongguk snaps. “Did he say you had to be alone?”

Jemin freezes, his brain stalling and he works to recall Kwon’s words. “…No,” he finally says. “No, he said…he said I had ten minutes to get there, without cops. He never said—” He realizes it then, what Jeongguk is getting at, and he can feel his eyes widen in surprise. “Jeongguk, no—”


“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” BamBam says derisively. “You guys got death wishes?”

“We’re more capable than you think,” Jeongguk says calmly.

“He doesn’t look capable,” BamBam replies coolly, pointing at Jimin. “He looks…a terrifying combination of freaked out and murderous.”
“And that’s why we need two bulletproof vests,” Jeongguk responds lightly. “I’ll keep him from murdering, I promise.”

“Fuck,” Kim whispers again.

Agent Tuan snatches the vests from Wang and stalks over to Jeongguk and Jimin, shoving them into their chests. “I don’t fucking approve of this.”

Jimin’s hands come up automatically, to catch the vest, and he drops his eyes to it, already pulling apart the velcro.

“I don’t care what you approve of,” Jimin says flatly. “I care about Tae, and I’m doing this whether you like it or not.”

“Wait,” Agent Park says. “This goes on first.”

Jimin looks up, confused, just in time to see Park holding out a wire.

“No,” he says immediately. “Absolutely not.” Jimin doesn’t want any record of their conversation to exist. What if shit goes sideways and he has to take things into his own hands? What if Kwon brings up his sister’s death?

“Not an option,” Park says. “If you’re going in wearing FBI vests, you’re going in wearing a wire.”

“This is the only way we let you in that door,” Im says, his expression fixed as he crosses his arms. “You agreed to do this our way.”

Jimin’s palms begin to sweat. The ways this can spiral out of control are multiplying quickly, and he can feel a throbbing ache beginning to grow in his temples, but he’s out of options.

“We’ll be listening. If shit gets out of control, say ‘milk’ and we’ll come in,” Agent Park says as he threads the wire under Jimin’s shirt.

“Milk? Are you serious?” Jimin asks, incredulous.

“You’re not gonna use that word otherwise,” Agent Choi shrugs. “T-minus four minutes and counting, guys.” He hoists his rifle. “I’m gonna get into position, but unless we know where he’s keeping the hostage—”

Taehyung, Jimin thinks irritably. His name is Taehyung—

—then you won’t be much help, we’re aware,” Im says. “Go.”

Choi steps out of the back of the van and takes off for the building across the street from Kwon’s apartment windows, and Jimin turns back to look at Jeongguk as Agent Park finishes velcroing him into his vest.

Agent Kim cinches the last of the fastenings on Jeongguk’s vest, and Im says, “Okay, let’s get them in place.”

The walk to the front of the building is maybe 30 feet, but it feels like it takes a century. Jimin wants to run—needs to run, needs to be at Taehyung’s side now—but Jeongguk only walks at a brisk pace, holding onto Jimin’s arm to keep him at his side.
“Don’t fucking show him you’re panicked,” Jeongguk murmurs steadily. “We’re gonna get Tae out of there in one piece, and then Kwon is gonna go away for a long fucking time. We’ve got him for kidnapping, now, on top of everything else. Everything’s gonna be fine, Jimin, but you’ve gotta keep a cool head, do you hear me? Follow my lead and don’t fuck around. Tae needs us to be careful, okay?”

His words sink in slowly, and by the time they’re pulling the front door of the apartment building open, his heartbeat has evened out, and his heart feels less leaden and more… prepared. He’s Park-fucking-Jimin, and he’s handled some crazy shit in his life, and so what if there’s one more fucked-up situation for him to deal with before he can retire from all this mess, before he and Taehyung can settle down in peace.

They walk into the front lobby, a ten-foot-by-ten-foot space lined with mail boxes and a single door—a stairwell entrance—and Jeongguk asks, “Okay, where to?”

Jimin freezes. “I have no idea.”

“You must be kidding me,” Jeongguk huffs. “You didn’t ask when you had him on the—”

He doesn’t get to finish his sentence, cut off by Jimin’s ringtone, and Jimin scrambles to answer it. “We’re inside—”

“I’ve fucking got eyes. In fact, they work well enough that I noticed you came in with a friend,” Kwon says, his voice tight with irritation. “I fucking told you no cops. Are you that bored with your toy, that you’re gonna use me to get rid of him for you?”

“No! No, it’s just Jeongguk. I didn’t bring any cops with me, just like you said. You didn’t say I had to come alone—”

“You think you’re so fucking clever, catching that little loophole, don’t you?” Kwon seethes. “Send him the fuck back outside. Now. His punishment will come later. This one is special, just for you.”

Jimin looks up at Jeongguk, eyes wide. He’s got to do this alone? “But—”

“If I don’t see him walking back to the shithole he crawled out of in the next ten seconds, your twink is dead,” Kwon answers flatly.

“You have to go back,” Jimin tells Jeongguk, twisting the phone away from his mouth as he pleads. “Please, Jeongguk—”

“What?” Jeongguk asks, his eyebrows climbing.

“He—he says this is just for me, and he’s gonna kill Tae if you don’t—”


“Please, Jeongguk, you have seven seconds to get back outside where he can see you—”

“Six. Five,” Kwon continues, sounding all too pleased with himself.

“Fuck,” Jeongguk spits, spinning on his heels and rushing toward the door. “Jimin—”

“Go,” Jimin hisses.

“Four. Three—” Jimin hears Kwon click the safety off and swallows down the bile that’s risen in his throat.
Jeongguk slams into the door, shoving it open and bursting outside. He takes off down the sidewalk, back the way they came from, and Jimin pulls the phone back up to his mouth. “Stop, he’s gone! Okay? He’s gone. You win.”

“Ooh, I do like the sound of that,” Kwon says, and Jimin can hear the grin in his voice.

“Where is Tae, Kwon?” Jimin growls, beyond done with this game. He’s been a teeter-totter of emotions, oscillating between panicked and pissed for the last ten minutes, but he’s startling to settle on the side of angry, and he’s grateful. Anger will let him be cold, calm. Clearheaded and calculating. And he knows he’s going to need that if he’s going to best Jiyong and get Taehyung and himself both out of there alive.

“Apartament 507. You have two and a half minutes to get here. I’d run, if I were you. The elevator’s shutdown because some asshole is about to demolish my home.”

“Two and a half minutes! You’re on the fifth floor!” Jimin says, already rushing toward the door into stairwell.

“Oh, come on, Park. Your marathon time was excellent. You know what? I bet you could do it in two minutes flat. Clock’s ticking. One-potato, two-potato—”

Jimin hears Jiyong hang up on him and swears. He slides his phone into his pocket as he takes the first flight of stairs two at a time, pulling himself up the steps by the handrail as much as he’s propelling himself forward with the strength in his legs.

Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—

He hugs the inside of the landing as he rounds the bend, and again, trying to pace himself. Thirty-eight, thirty-nine, forty. Trying to match his breathing to his stride. He keeps a steady count in his head, knowing he doesn’t have the time or energy to waste by pausing to check the clock.

His calves are burning by the time he reaches the stairwell exit onto the fourth floor, but he pushes through it, thoughts focused on the numbers streaming through his head—eighty-nine, ninety, ninety-one—He bursts onto the fifth floor before he registers that he’s arrived, glancing quickly at the placard on the wall to determine which way down the hallway he needs to turn.


He jogs quickly, watching the apartment numbers for 507, almost running past it in his haste. One-hundred-two. He slides to a stop, his legs screaming, and pauses only to pull his handgun from his ankle holster—eternally grateful he’d given in to Jeongguk’s paranoia and worn it, even if it seemed extraneous when he’d strapped it—and take a deep breath.

One-hundred-five.

When he tries the door, it’s unlocked.

Raising his gun, thumbing its safety off, he pushes the door open.

The door opens into an empty living room, an open kichenette to his left, a trio of closed doors off an alcove on his right. Kwon and Taehyung are nowhere to be seen.

Moving quickly, quietly, Jimin clears the living room. One-hundred-ten, one-hundred-eleven. He pushes the first door open—an empty bedroom—and then the second door—an equally empty bathroom—and then he hears a cry of pain from behind the third door. It’s muffled, but Jimin knows
It takes everything he has to keep from letting his anger take over. Without Jeongguk there to balance him, to keep him in check, Jimin can’t afford to be emotional about this. Taehyung can’t afford for Jimin to be emotional about this.

*One-hundred-fifteen.* He pushes the last door open, scanning the room quickly.

Kwon crouches in the far corner, facing Taehyung, a fetal pile of shaking limbs on the floor. He’s gagged, his hands and ankles are bound together behind his back, and a thin rivulet of fresh blood trickles down his temple. The sight of it has Jimin biting the inside of his cheek to control his temper—he’s fear—the two emotions squirming turbidly in his gut. He ignores them as best as he can and steps into the room, leveling his gun at Kwon Jiyong’s face.

It’s a solid move—his only move, really, considering the gun in Kwon’s hand is aimed at Jimin—but Jimin’s got to be careful, so careful, because Taehyung is too close to Jimin’s line of fire for his comfort. He can feel the cold sweat breaking out over his palms, and he tightens his grip on his firearm involuntarily.

“You cut it close, Park,” Kwon says smoothly, straightening to stand next to Taehyung. “Two more seconds, and—” He mouths the word ‘pow,’ pulling gun back gently, feigning its recoil when fired before steadily targeting Jimin once more.

“It was five fucking flights of stairs, asshole,” Jimin spits out, unable to stop the abrasive words from tumbling from his lips. Kwon’s eyes narrow in irritation, and fuck, he’s got to get control of himself. Taehyung’s safety depends on his ability to negotiate with Kwon. Jimin can’t provoke him further. Fuck.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Taehyung shifting, looking up at Jimin with wide, anxious eyes, and then he begins wiggling, struggling against his bonds.

*Fuck,* Jimin needs to keep Kwon’s attention on him, because if he sees Taehyung trying to… whatever Taehyung is trying to do, then he’ll—

“Ah, the things we do for the ones we love,” Kwon finally responds, his words whimsical in a way his tone definitely is not, and Jimin winces internally. “Too bad the love of my life is dead. I’m sure he would have talked me out of…this,” he adds, his features screwing up in mocking distaste as he waves his empty hand in a gesture to indicate their situation.

Jiyong’s eyes flash with anger. “You said ‘no fight,’ Park,” he hisses. “This doesn’t look like ‘no fight.’”

Jimin considers his next words carefully, but before he can say anything, Kwon swings his arm to the side, and lowers his weapon to point at Taehyung.

Taehyung freezes. Jimin freezes.

And Kwon—he smiles. It’s cold, a sadistically-pleased, baring of his teeth more than it’s an expression of happiness, and it sends the fear churning in Jimin’s gut into overdrive. *Fuck.* Kwon turns to study Taehyung, to take in the terror plain on his hostage’s face, and the smile widens.

“Hey,” Jimin says quickly, trying to divert Kwon’s attention away from Taehyung once more. He
raises the barrel of his weapon, raises his hands in surrender, and Kwon raises his gaze back to Jimin. “No fight,” Jimin says, struggling to make his brain function through the cloud of fervent desperation Kwon’s actions have triggered. “Just like I promised.”

He drops into a squat then, slowly, slowly, his thighs practically shaking with the painfully gradual movement after his exertion on the stairs, but he can’t go any faster, he can’t risk spooking Kwon into firing his gun, so Jimin grits his teeth and forces himself to move at a snail’s pace. When he’s finally sitting on his ankles, he extents his arm, haltingly, inch by inch, until his gun is resting on the floor in front of him.

He pulls his hand back just as carefully, leaving the weapon on the floor, and stands back up. When he’s upright again, his hands held still above his head, he reaches out cautiously with his foot, and kicks the gun gently toward Kwon. It slides better than Jimin expects on the cheap, worn-thin carpet, but it only has to travel of few feet. It comes to a stop just in front of Kwon, Taehyung’s eyes widening as he registers what Jimin has just done, and, just as Jimin hoped, Kwon swings his gun around to point it at Jimin again.

A panicked shout erupts from Taehyung, audible even around his gag, and he begins struggling again, more forcefully this time, but Kwon doesn’t seem to notice. His focus is narrowed to Jimin—Jimin, who was a victim of that fateful car accident as much as Kwon’s fiancé was. Jimin, who had the audacity, in Kwon’s eyes, to continue living happily. Jimin, who didn’t suffer enough with the death of his mother, or his father, to satisfy Kwon’s burning need for revenge. Jimin, who fought back and killed Kwon’s sister.

Jimin, who has presumed to find love, the same love that Kwon has been denied.

Jimin, who still stands a chance at finding a happily ever after.

Kwon’s smile twists with rage, with vengeance and deranged glee, into an ugly sneer, and as Jimin stares Kwon down soberly, he sees—out of the corner of his eye—Taehyung’s hands jerk, his legs suddenly straightening and his arms falling loose. His lips part in surprise, and Jimin—in the face of Kwon’s deadly hatred, Jimin wants to tell Taehyung that he loves him, that he’s always loved him, that he always will love him—but, instead, he does the only thing he can; he ignores whatever freedom Taehyung has managed to achieve so that Kwon won’t notice, murmurs ‘milk’ as carefully—as quietly—as he dares, and prays he’ll be fast enough to dodge the bullet that he knows is coming.

Jiyong thinks, for a brief, blissful moment, that it’s over.

He’s won.

He’s got a gun to Park Jimin’s head and a damn good reason to pull the trigger and he takes a second to soak it all in, to relish the moment Seungri’s senseless death is avenged.

His hand tightens around the gun, his finger twitches for the trigger, and he sees the bitch on the floor move. He freezes, sees Park standing as still as a statue in front of him, and slowly turns his head until he can look Park’s fucktoy in the face. The gun in his hand stays trained between Jiyong’s eyes, a dangerous mix of desperation and fear meeting him in the face of Park Jimin’s lover, and Jiyong thinks that if this is how it ends, at least he’ll be with Seungri at the end of it all.
Taehyung doesn’t think. He can’t, not when all he can see is the impossibility of Jimin dying right in front of him. He quietly scoots himself over so he can pick up the gun that Jimin had kicked away with his hands bound, but he barely sees himself do it. All he can see is the gun pointed at Jimin's head and he doesn’t think, just lifts his arms, and points the gun at Kwon and cocks it.

Kwon turns around to look at Taehyung at the sound of the gun cocking, his eyes widening in surprise when he finds a gun pointed at him and Taehyung doesn’t waste another second.

He pulls the trigger, a gentle pressure that makes the gun jump in his hand. One shot is all it takes to end a life, and Taehyung feels the numbness in his hand from the recoil, the splash of blood across his face as the bullet catches Kwon between the eyes, right where Jeongguk taught him to aim. He’s not a good shot, but he’s good enough to hit the mark when it’s only a few feet in front of him.

Except, this time, it wasn’t a paper target at the end of a lane. It was a living, breathing person, one that’s now crumpled next to him, blood pooling in a dark halo around its head. The gun slips from his hand, clattering to the ground and making him jump at the sound.

Taehyung remains frozen, unable to do anything except stare dully at the spreading stain of blood creeping toward him. He distantly hears Jimin calling his name through the ringing in his ears from the gunshot, feels hands tugging at his clothes and trying to pull him away, but he’s shocked to his core and unable to move.

He’s just killed someone.

What has he done.

The last thing he’s aware of before the panic hits is Jimin’s arms wrapping around him and pulling him in.

***

The gunshot that Jimin is expecting rings out, painfully loud in the empty room, and he does his best to lunge forward and down, out of the line of fire, just like Seokjin taught him all those years ago. He reaches forward as he moves, to push the barrel of Kwon’s gun up and away from himself, but—but it’s not aimed at him anymore, and Kwon…

Kwon is on the floor.

Red puddles between him and Taehyung, the old carpet too worn to absorb the blood, and it’s everywhere—everywhere—what happened? What— Is it—is it Tae’s?

Terrified, he jerks his gaze away from the pooling blood to look at Taehyung, and—and he’s not bleeding, he’s squirming backward on the floor, away from the blood seeping from the hole in Kwon’s head, away from the gun tumbling from his fingers—

Oh. Oh. Oh, fuck.

“Tae— Tae, baby, you’re okay, it’s okay—” Jimin soothes, stepping past Kwon’s unmoving form to scoop a shaking, hyperventilating Taehyung into his arms, holding him tight against his chest. “You were so brave, baby, I’m so proud of you, but it’s over now, yeah? Just breathe with me—good, slow now—in, and out, in—”

The banging of an apartment door being thrown open somewhere on the floor echoes through the apartment, and Jimin stills, his thoughts racing, because— Because Kwon hasn’t completely moved out yet. When Jimin had checked in with him earlier that afternoon, Namjoon had said that Kwon
was still living in the building, that his men had been swarming the building all throughout the
evening, hauling boxes and furniture away—

“Find where it came from!” a soft voice orders sharply. “You two, clear this floor. You two, go
down and—”

“Fuck,” Jimin hisses. “We gotta get outta here. Tae, baby— Baby, hey!” He grabs Taehyung’s face
to get him to focus, his fingers wrapping firmly under his ear to the nape of his neck, guiding
Taehyung’s terrified eyes to his own. “Can you stand up if I get this off of you?” he says, trying to
soften the urgency in his voice. He pulls Taehyung fully upright, leaning him against the wall so he
can pull at the fabric wound tight around Taehyung’s ankles, and picks at the knot, pulling at the tails
of fabric that had previously held Taehyung’s hands immobile.

The knot hardly moves, tightened by Taehyung’s previous struggles, but Jimin hears a pair of feet
pounding down the hallway, a pair of voices yelling back and forth to each other as they move from
apartment to apartment, and he works at it more frantically, feeding the fabric back through itself,
until it finally loosens, and then he scrambles at it quickly, the fabric letting go and falling away, and
then he’s pulling Taehyung up by his arms, steadying him on his feet. He twists to peer out the
room’s window, hoping to see a fire escape, but no, of course they’re not that lucky—but there—
There’s the FBI’s van? And it’s…quiet?

What the fuck, are they not responding? He needs backup, he needs help to get Taehyung out of here
safely—

“Milk! Motherfucking milk, you assholes! Didn’t you hear me? Didn’t you hear the gunshot?!
For fuck’s sake, we’re gonna die before you get off your asses! Kwon’s dead and his fucking goons are
—”

And then the van door opens, and bodies start pouring out of it, running for the apartment building’s
entrance, thank fuck—

The front door of the apartment they’re in bangs open, and Jimin’s head whips around at the sound.
“Shit. Tae, I need you to be very quiet, okay?” Jimin says, scooping up his gun from the floor and
ushering Taehyung quickly toward the bedroom’s door. He pushes him up against the wall, meets
Taehyung’s wide, wide eyes, and says, “Don’t. Move.”

He doesn’t have time to waste waiting for Taehyung to reply. Jimin turns to face the door, clicking
the safety back on as he stands ready—he’s not sure Taehyung can handle another death so soon,
and after the guilt that haunted him after Kwon Dami’s death, he’s not so sure he can handle it either
—and then he waits.

He doesn’t have to wait long.

The first of them steps into the room cautiously, sees Kwon’s body cooling on the carpet, manages to
get out a ‘Fuck!’ and then Jimin kicks him in the head, leaning to the side gracefully as his leg
extends, his foot catching the man under his chin. The man’s teeth clack together painfully loud, his
head turning to the side with the force of the impact, and when Jimin brings the butt of his gun down
on top of the man’s head, he crumples to the ground, stunned.

Jimin regains his footing just as the second assailant appears in the doorway, and he swings his small
pistol grip-first into the temple of the second man, sending him to the floor atop his companion, and
reaches behind himself to latch onto Taehyung’s wrist. Fingers find his instead, and Jimin grips them
tightly, lacing his own through Taehyung’s immediately and jerking Taehyung into motion behind
him.
“Run, Taehyung,” he hears himself bark out, and by some miracle, Taehyung does.

Jimin chances a glance over his shoulder as they scramble over the bodies lying over the threshold, and despite the wild, unfocused look in Taehyung’s eyes, he runs, clutches at Jimin and his instructions like it’s the only thing keeping him sane, and it while it worries Jimin—how is he ever going to get his Taehyung back after this? His sweet, unassuming, sassy Taehyung, that’d never hurt a fly—it also reassures him. A Taehyung that listens and follows Jimin’s directions, even if mindlessly, will be easier to protect that a Taehyung that’s outright panicking.

The living room window leads to the fire escape Jimin had been hoping for previously, but he bypasses it now. He’s only temporarily incapacitated the two gangsters that’d come after them, and he knows the fire escape won’t provide him and Taehyung with enough cover once the goons pull themselves together enough to give chase. He doubts that the FBI team will send anybody up the fire escape, either, and Jimin is counting on them to deal with Kwon’s men so that he can take care of Taehyung.

Their only option then, is the stairway that he’d come up, so he pulls Taehyung from the apartment, pausing only long enough to make sure the hallway’s clear before making a break for the stairwell door.

“We’re coming down the stairs, don’t fucking shoot us, but they’re gonna be behind us really fucking soon,” he says, hoping the wire he’s wearing will pick it up and help Agent Im’s team move more quickly to their position.

He leads Taehyung through the door and immediately starts down the stairs, practically running down them, but Taehyung stumbles and crashes into Jimin’s back, almost sending them tumbling down the last four stairs onto the third-floor landing. Jimin catches them reflexively, the heel of the hand holding his gun bracing against the wall, his other hand holding onto Taehyung tightly, his arm bent at the elbow and tensed against Taehyung’s weight.

“Careful, baby,” he says, hushed, well aware that their steps are already louder than they can afford to be in the echo-prone space. “We have to be—”

He cuts off when a door opens above them, an angry voice growling, “Don’t fucking let them get away!” Jimin hears several people start noisily down the stairs, and his heart sinks.

“Go, go, quickly now, love—” he whispers desperately, drawing Taehyung down the steps between them, past him, in front of him, putting Jimin—in his bulletproof vest—between Taehyung and their pursuers, trusting Taehyung to move when he’s been told to move. He rests a hand on Taehyung’s back to keep him grounded, to keep him going, to reassure him that Jimin’s right behind him—

Then the sound of multiple boots echoes up from the floors beneath them, and Jimin almost—almost—breathes a sigh of relief, but a gunshot explodes noisily from above, the bullet ricocheting off the inner handrail three feet away from them, and—fuck, fuck—

He and Taehyung scramble around the bend, hugging the outside wall of the stairwell in hopes of staying outside the gangsters’ line of sight, and they practically run into Agents Wang and Park, Im and BamBam right behind them—

Im grabs Taehyung’s shoulder, pulls Taehyung bodily past him, and Jimin scrambles to follow, to clear Wang’s line of fire. Then the agents behind Jimin are returning fire, slowing their pursuers, and Jimin and Taehyung are being handed off to Agent Kim and— And—

Jeonggukie?
“What—” Jimin starts to ask, the word coming out ragged around his rough breaths.

“Like I was gonna leave all the fun to you,” Jeongguk replies, urging Jimin and Taehyung ahead of him before turning back down the stairs himself.

“Yugyeom, get them out,” Im barks, and then Agent Kim is hustling past all three of them to lead the way, his gun raised as he takes the steps at a rapid clip.

“Stay close,” he says, his eyes constantly scanning their surroundings as they move. Jimin wraps an arm around Taehyung’s shoulders and focuses on guiding Taehyung down the steps, letting the agent, and Jeongguk, worry about their safety. They descend quickly, footsteps falling into a rhythm, legs moving robotically, passing landing after landing as they leave the sound of gunfire farther and farther behind, and Jimin thinks that maybe they’re home-free—

Agent Kim opens the door at the bottom of the stairwell, peeks out carefully into the lobby, and then pulls back. “Stay here. The front door’s propped open, and we didn’t leave it that way. I’m gonna check it out. Jeonggu—Jeon, keep an eye behind us.”

Jeongguk nods and faces back up the stairs, and Kim slinks quietly out the door. Jimin catches it before it closes fully, intending to soften the sound of the door closing, but before he can ease it closed, a volley of rapid-fire gunshots sound from the direction Kim has gone. Bullets zing around the lobby, ricocheting off mailboxes and hammering into drywall and tile, and Jimin sees the agent fall to the ground just inside the front door.

“Dammit! Jeongguk—” Jimin starts, ducking back inside, intending to—to— But he doesn’t have time to finish his sentence, to figure out what exactly he was about to do, because Jeongguk is peering past him, cursing, shoving him out of the way as he darts out the door toward the downed agent.

He grabs Kim by the shoulders, hauling him back toward the relative safety of the stairwell, and Jimin holds the door open for him. The agent is bleeding—profusely—from his thigh, a thick smear of blood marking his path along the floor. He’s pale, his face screwed tight in pain, and a thin sheen of sweat has broken out across his features.

Jeongguk is already stripping his vest off, ripping his dress shirt off without concerning himself over the buttons, and he tosses it at Jimin as he puts the vest back on. “Tourniquet. Pressure. Now,” he says, and he pulls his own gun from his ankle holster. “I’ll hold the shooter off.”

And just like that, he slips back out the door and into the lobby, creeping along the walls to maintain as much cover as he can.

“Dammit, Jeongguk!” Jimin swears, dropping to his knees and tying the sleeves of Jeongguk’s shirt tightly around Agent Kim’s leg, above the bullet wound. “That’s an automatic! Get your fucking ass back in h—”

The door clicks shut. Loudly.

Dammit!

What the fuck is Jeongguk doing?! He’s going to get himself shot, just like the damned agent did—

“No! Jeongguk! Jeongguk!” Kim shrieks, twisting on the floor, trying to push himself upright and wrenching Jimin abruptly out of his thoughts.

Gritting his teeth, Jimin does the only thing he can, and tackles the agent back to the floor, pressing
his hands against the injury.


“I can’t help him until after I’ve helped you, asshole!” Jimin snaps. “Hold the fuck still so I can stop the bleeding, and fucking radio for help, will you?”

Jimin looks down at the wound, grimaces at the amount of blood pumping from it, even with the tourniquet in place and his hands covering it, and decides he’s got his hands full, both figuratively and literally. He’s just going to have to trust Jeongguk to know what he’s doing. Jimin will never admit it out loud, but Jeongguk has always been better at combat—every kind of combat—than Jimin is. He can take care of himself.

Hopefully.

“Fuuuuuck!” Kim yells, panting shallowly around his pain and his anger. He lifts his hand, his fingers fumble at his earpiece, he toggles…something, and then gasps out through clenched teeth, “Agent d-down—auggh—on the first f-floor. Gunman just outside the front door of the b-building. Jeon is engaging to k-keep him from advancing. Youngj-jae—” Jimin presses harder against the flow of blood and Kim breaks off with a pained groan. “Fuck, that hurts.”

Agent Kim’s head falls back against the floor, and Jimin spends a precious second to glance at him. He’s pale, and sweating, and shaking, and he looks like he’s seconds away from passing out. Shit.

A panicked scrabbling sounds from behind Jimin, the sound of a body falling to the floor, limbs flailing for purchase, the squeak of sneakers and the slap of palms against tile as Taehyung backs away from Jimin and the expanding pool of blood that he’s kneeling in, and Jimin swears internally.

Taehyung.

Shit. Shit, shit, shit shitshitshit—

With Kim’s injury and Jeongguk’s fucking heroics, Jimin’s momentarily forgotten about Taehyung, and the effect the copious amounts of blood might have on him—

“Baby, are you okay?” Jimin asks, trying to keep his tone light, calming. Taehyung’s already more than freaked out, but there’s only so much Jimin can do for him right now.

He peers over his shoulder, hoping that he’ll be able to talk Taehyung down from whatever’s running through his head, but Taehyung’s twisting away, vomiting his emotions into the corner of the stairwell, and Jimin—

Jimin’s hands are a little busy, at the moment.

Shit.

“Tae—” he soothes, but he stops when Taehyung holds a hand up, palm out.

Another wave of sickness overwhelms him, and Jimin winces. Fuck, he wishes he could—

Taehyung heaves one more time, then spits, clearing his mouth of bile before wiping his lips on the shoulder of his shirt. “I just—” he says, his voice raw, “—needed to get that out.” He sits up, turns to face Jimin slowly. He’s not really all there; Jimin can see that the most distinctive parts of Taehyung, the most Taehyung parts of Taehyung—his softness, his naïveté, his innocence—are…somewhere else. Lost. But aside from the distance in his gaze, Taehyung’s expression is steel, and Jimin has
never been prouder.

“I need—” He pauses. Clears his throat. Crawls on his knees back toward Jimin, sits back on his heels when he’s at Jimin’s side. “I need to help. I need—to do something good.” Taehyung meets Jimin’s eyes, and Jimin can see the pain there that he’s working hard to hide. “Please, Jiminnie,” he whispers, and—well.

As if Jimin could say ever say no to Taehyung now, when he’s sacrificed such an incredibly valuable part of himself, when he’s crossed a line that he will never be comfortable with, and all to save Jimin, when Jimin was supposed to be saving him.

“Oh,” Taehyung says, his eyes widening. “Oh. Yeah. Yeah.” He breathes out heavily through his nose as he picks up the pace. Rather than pull the vest over Jimin’s head and take it off entirely—Jimin doesn’t want to take his hands off Kim’s injury any more than this maneuver will require—Taehyung unbuttons his shirt and readies it for Jimin to yank his arms hastily out of the sleeves one at a time.

“Agent—” Jimin starts.

“Yugyeom,” Kim cuts in, his voice breathy and weak. The fight seems to have...bled out of him. Pun intended? “Your hands—argh—are in a really intimate place. I think we’re on a first name basis by now.”

Taehyung giggles.

Jimin rolls his eyes, but the smile that curls his lips is automatic. A smiling Taehyung will do that to him, regardless of everything else. “Very funny. Okay, Yugyeom, this is gonna hurt like a bitch.”

“What’s new?” Yugyeom gasps out. “Just do it.” He moves his hands shakily over Jimin’s and applies gentle pressure.

They move quickly, but carefully, stripping Jimin’s shirt off arm by arm. Yugyeom still grinds his teeth, swallowing a cry of pain as Jimin’s hands lift one by one and the pressure against the wound shifts. Then Taehyung is balling the shirt up and pushing it over the injury, his own hands over Yugyeom’s and Jimin’s, wordlessly offering to take over.

Jimin looks up at Taehyung, his eyebrows raised in surprise, and Taehyung, his voice low and fervent, says, “This is something I can do. But I can’t bring Jeongguk back here. I don’t think I can—can go out there—”
Jimin watches Taehyung swallow hard, sees the courage it took Taehyung to say that, to essentially give Jimin his blessing to step into the line of fire, to put himself at physical risk for the sake of a friend even though Taehyung’s previous actions—his *sacrificial* actions—were meant to eliminate that risk, but he knows what Jeongguk means to Jimin, and maybe...maybe Jeongguk means something to Taehyung, too, after everything that’s happened. That’d be incredibly like Taehyung, to care for someone that his lover cares for. Or maybe his friendship with Jimin has nothing to do with it, and it’s just Jeongguk. God knows that Jeongguk wormed his way into Jimin’s life with startling ease, making himself someone indispensable, someone reliable and quietly caring...

Maybe he’s worked that same magic on Taehyung.

Whatever it is, Jimin doesn’t have time to contemplate the dynamics behind Taehyung’s words.

“What the fuck are you waiting for?” Yugyeom asks. “Go. *Please.*”

Jimin stops hesitating, stops thinking, and just...*does.* He pulls his hands from beneath Taehyung’s, wipes his hands clean—well, dry, anyway—on his pants, refastens his vest, and kisses Taehyung on the forehead. “I’m proud of you, Taetae. And I love you more than anything,” he says, his gaze locking with Taehyung’s.

“Don’t—don’t say goodbye,” Taehyung chokes. “You’re not allowed to—”

He cuts himself off, and Jimin tightens his fingers around his gun, picking it up off the floor where he dropped it before in his haste to stem Yugyeom’s bleeding. “Yes, sir,” he smiles. “B-R-B, then.”

Taehyung’s beginning sob is interrupted by a huffed laugh, the sound strangled but sweet to Jimin’s ears, and really, there isn’t anything more Jimin could ask for. He locks it in his heart, the music of Taehyung’s bittersweet happiness, and opens the door to dart out and join Jeongguk.

In retrospect, Jimin’s not really sure how it all ended.

He remembers a spray of bullets terribly close to his limbs, his head, and he remembers scrambling to Jeongguk’s side, pressed tightly against the wall next to the still open door.

He remembers Jeongguk being angry that he was there. He remembers Jeongguk pulling him close, the two of them squeezing tight into a space barely big enough for one. He remembers Jeongguk taking his gun from him, Jeongguk’s own weapon down to one remaining round. He remembers Jeongguk leaning recklessly close to the doorway, firing a single shot before jerking back hastily.

And he remembers the single, deafening shot, the loud crack of a rifle that felt close, so close. He remembers his panic, his frantic scrambling to yank Jeongguk back, to make sure his friend is okay, his hand slipping in fresh blood as he pulls Jeongguk toward safety—

He learns later that that final, ear-splitting gunshot had been the sniper, Agent Choi, putting their assailant down but, sitting on the curb across from the building Taehyung grew up in, with his arm wound snugly around Taehyung’s waist, with Taehyung’s legs draped over his lap and his head resting on Jimin’s shoulder, Jimin wonders if the details are important.

Jeongguk walks over to them, a weariness in his posture that almost masks his worry, as the first ambulance to arrive on site takes off with Yugyeom inside it, sirens and lights blaring. Jimin had needed to talk Taehyung into backing away so the EMTs could do their jobs, but they’d made a
point of telling Taehyung that he’d done a good job taking care of Yugyeom, that he and Jimin, together, had saved him from bleeding out before the FBI could clear the scene and let the EMTs in.

Jemin could feel, in the bonelessness of Taehyung’s snuggle, that those words had done a lot to make him feel better about the events that had transpired on the fifth floor, and he was grateful.

“They radioed ahead and they’re taking him straight into surgery as soon as they get to the hospital. As soon as Im’s done with us I’m gonna head over there and camp until wakes up,” Jeongguk says, letting out a loaded sigh and settling on the curb next to Jimin.

Jemin’s not sure why Jeongguk would feel the need to do such a thing, but Taehyung’s answer shames him into keeping his mouth shut instead of asking.

“Thanks, Jeongguk. Will you let me know? I wanna know he’s okay,” Taehyung says, sitting up a little, and Jimin can hear the genuine concern in his voice. Jimin’s has no idea what happened between Taehyung and Yugyeom when he left them alone together, but it shouldn’t matter. Taehyung’s reminding him once again that being a decent human being means caring about people in general, and not just the ones that have a lasting presence in his life.

“Of course, Tae,” Jeongguk nods, a tired smile tugging at his lips.

After years of compartmentalizing his life, and months of keeping them separate, it’s both weird and amazing to actually see his best friend and the love of his life getting along well.

Jemin brushes the thought aside and attempts his own moment of decency. “We’ll get him something as a get well. Does that sound good, Tae?”

Taehyung’s eyes light up, and Jeongguk rolls his own, but there’s amusement in both their expressions so Jimin must not have done too poor a job.

“Do you think we can find a teddy bear wearing an FBI vest?” Taehyung muses, and Jeongguk snorts.

Agent Tuan strides over then, a solemn expression on his face. “We need to get statements from each of you. Mr. Kim, do you think you’re ready to talk with us?”

Taehyung tenses in Jimin’s arms and reaches for Jimin’s hand, lacing their fingers together. He’s silent for a beat too long before he finally says, “Can Jimin come too?”

Tuan chews on the inside of his cheek for a moment, and then says, “Yeah. Two birds, one stone, I guess. C’mom.” He tips his head toward the van they’d prepped in, and Taehyung begins the process of unwinding himself from Jimin and standing up. “And Jeon—get that looked at while you’re waiting for your turn,” Tuan adds, gesturing at Jeongguk’s hand where it’s wrapped around his own arm, his fingers curled protectively over his bicep and the angry red divot in his flesh.

“It’s just a graze,” Jeongguk mutters.

Jemin smacks him on the back of the head as he stands, shooting Jeongguk a look pregnant with annoyance.

“Fiiine,” Jeongguk huffs.

He stands and makes his way toward the most recent ambulance to arrive before Jimin nods—satisfied that Jeongguk won’t be able to get out of receiving the medial attention he needs—and follows Tuan with Taehyung in tow.
It hours later when Jimin and Taehyung finally are allowed to go home. His driver is waiting just beyond the police barricades, and Taehyung doesn’t even protest when Jimin orders the driver to take them directly to Jimin’s penthouse.

“Can I call my family, though?” he asks, his voice small in the quiet of the car.

Shit. Taehyung’s family.

Jimin’s been so busy managing the situation in front of him that he’d forgotten the people that Taehyung had been with, before Kwon kidnapped him.

“Of course, baby. Let me dial Seokjin, okay?”

He wiggles his phone from his pocket, sees that he’s got half a dozen missed calls from Seokjin and a slew of progressively angrier and more worried text messages from Yoongi, and Jimin immediately feels bad that he didn’t think to call sooner. He presses send on Seokjin’s contact and then taps the button to put the call on speaker.

“Jimin—” Seokjin says immediately after the call connects. “I’m so sorry. When I found his phone on the sidewalk out front, I just— I’m so sorry. I should never have let Taehyung out of my sight—is he okay?”

“He’s fine,” Jimin answers. He’d made the conscious decision let go of his anger at Seokjin after he’d learned, during the FBI’s debriefing, how Taehyung had intentionally given him the slip. Staying mad at Seokjin for something that wasn’t his fault…it just suddenly had felt like it would take too much effort, and in that moment, Jimin had realized that he was tired of being mad. He’d spent years letting his anger and his grief dictate his life, and…yeah. He’s starting to understand that nothing good comes from that kind of negativity.

Seokjin lets out a long breath, and something clicks in Jimin’s head. “Wait—how did you know Taehyung was with me?”

“Jeongguk called me when, uh, you went in to…negotiate. With Kwon.” Jimin can practically hear Seokjin’s wince. “And again, an hour ago, to let me know none of you were hurt. But he said that Taehyung—that he—”

Jimin gives silent thanks that Jeongguk thought far enough ahead to call Seokjin in the first place, but he’s unsure how much Jeongguk might have told Seokjin, and with Taehyung listening, he knows he needs to cut Seokjin off before they stray into dangerous territory. “We’re a little worse for wear, emotionally,” he admits, and Taehyung’s eyes find his own as he continues, “but that’s not why I’m calling.” He clears his throat. “Uh…what, exactly did you tell Taehyung’s parents about his disappearance?”

Taehyung’s eyes widen at Jimin’s question, his lips parting in his surprise, and Jimin doesn’t know what answer Taehyung is hoping for, but he prays he gets it.

“That…” Seokjin hedges. “Jeongguk told me to keep the situation to myself. That everything would work out and then Taehyung could tell them only what he wanted to when it was all over. But, um,” he clears his throat. “Yoongi overheard my half of the conversation. I couldn’t keep it from him and Hoseok. And they’re not really happy…”

“My parents don’t know anything?” Taehyung cuts in, and if Seokjin’s surprised that he’s listening in on the call, he doesn’t let it show.
“No,” he replies, not missing a beat. “I told them that you called Jimin and he came to get you. That you’d finally decided you wanted to talk to him. I hope that’s okay?”

Taehyung makes an unhappy face. “They haven’t officially met Jimin. They don’t really know that we’re…” he trails off, and sighs. “I managed to keep them from that tabloid article,” he explains, “but this is better than the truth, I guess. Their worrying wouldn’t have changed what happened, and it’s not like they would have had a chance to say goodbye if I’d—”

Silence on the other end of the call makes Jimin feel for Seokjin.

He reaches toward Taehyung, strokes his thumb over Taehyung’s cheek, and says, “We’ll change that, baby. If you want them to know about us, I mean. I’d be honored to officially introduce myself to your family.”

A smile finally touches Taehyung’s eyes, and Jimin feels a little more at ease.

Seokjin must too. “Did you… Do you want to call them directly? Or would you like me to hand them mine for a minute?”

“Yeah, if you would. Um. My parents first? And then Yoongi and Hoseok, if they’re still there,” Taehyung requests.

The conversation with his mother goes as well as it can. Without giving details, Taehyung explains who Jimin is, and that they’d been getting close again, that they’d fought over something stupid that ate away at Taehyung, until he couldn’t stand it anymore. Shyly, he tells her that they’ve worked it out now, that he’d like them to meet Jimin again soon, and when she tells him that his phone’s screen is cracked beyond usability, he grimaces and says he hadn’t realized he’d even dropped it on his way to see Jimin.

She frets over how they’re going to afford to fix it, and he waves her off, assures her that it was his mistake and he’ll figure it out himself, that Eunjin and Jongkyu are outgrowing their clothes quickly and that her money is better spent on them.

He shifts the topic after that, makes noise about the time—which is well after midnight now—and tells her to get some sleep. That he’s just going to crash at Jimin’s place since it’s so late. He blushes as he says that, and Jimin is endeared all over again by Taehyung’s strength. That he’s managed to find a piece of his sweet, innocent self again and hold onto it is no small feat.

The conversation with Yoongi and Hoseok isn’t as smooth. Yoongi yells, and Hoseok cries, and Taehyung cries, and then Yoongi cries, and Jimin squirms in his seat as he listens to his employees—his friends? Taehyung’s friends, for sure—thank him for coming to Taehyung’s rescue in the same breath as they threaten to castrate him if anything like this ever happens again.

Jimin’s entirely unsure how Seokjin has managed to keep Yoongi and Hoseok’s side of the conversation from Taehyung’s parents, until Hoseok snuffles that they’re home, that Seokjin was driving as they talked, and then they ask when Taehyung will get there, which triggers another bout of Yoongi yelling when Taehyung admits that he’s staying with Jimin for the night.

Taehyung smiles through it, and even Jimin has to admit that he’s glad that Taehyung’s built such a strong friendship. Yoongi doesn’t yell for just anyone.

They finally hand the phone back to Seokjin after wrestling promises from Taehyung that he’ll make some time for them soon, and Jimin takes the phone off speaker to reassure Seokjin that he’s not fired. It seems to shock Seokjin that he’s still got a job after all of this, and Jimin makes a mental note
to take better care of his friends, so that they know they are friends, and not just employees.

They’re quiet, he and Taehyung, after they end the phone call. They don’t really have much to say, which Jimin thinks is kind of ironic, considering Taehyung’s request earlier that afternoon for them to talk when it was all over, but he supposes that words are insufficient, when Taehyung has found himself in nearly the same situation as Jimin.

Neither of them is proud of the violence they’ve committed. Neither of them saw another option in the moment. And neither of them knows how to come back from it.

Pieces of clothing drop slowly onto the floor. Steam rises where it hits the cold tile flooring. The steady hiss of water from the showerhead should be soothing, but the dried blood loosening on their skin stains it, and Jimin can see Taehyung’s guise of composure melting and washing away with it, swirling down the drain to leave him a shell of his former self, a hollow version of the Taehyung that’d stood before Jimin even half an hour ago.

He can see the weight of Taehyung’s actions settling on his shoulders, can see them bowing under the spray of water.

Jimin tries to steady Taehyung with gentle touches, lathered soapy hands smoothed over soft skin and fingers pushed tenderly through shampooed hair, but it’s his words that finally anchor Taehyung, pull his eyes from the floor to meet Jimin’s gaze.

“Taehyung,” he murmurs, voice barely louder than the noise of the shower. “Let me help you. Share it with me. I’m right here. I’m right here with you, baby.”

Taehyung breaks down then. He collapses into Jimin’s waiting arms, buries his face in Jimin’s neck, and sobs, his shoulders shaking as he lets it out.

“I w-was so scared. I thought I wasn’t g-gonna see you again, and then you sh-showed up, and it was so much w-worse,” he cries, and Jimin pulls him closer, holds him tighter, knowing what’s coming, “cause he w-was gonna k-kill you, and I j-just— I knew what I was d-doing, J-Jimin an’ I—”

“No, sweetheart. He died because he chose violence over forgiveness. That’s not your fault,” Jimin says softly, rubbing the flat of his hand up and down Taehyung’s spine calmly.

“But I’m the one that— Jimin, he was g-gonna—and all I could th-think was that I had to do something, that I c-couldn’t live w-without you, and that m-makes me no b-better than him—”

“Baby, you have to stop thinking like that,” Jimin says firmly, pulling Taehyung away just enough to look him in the eyes. They’re watery and red, and full of pain, and Jimin’s chest physically hurts to see Taehyung like this. “What you did is no different than what those FBI agents would have done. You saved my life.”

Taehyung ducks his head at Jimin’s words, but Jimin needs Taehyung to hear this.

“Listen, Tae,” he says, sliding his hands up Taehyung’s back, up his neck, to lift his face. “What would have happened if you hadn’t pulled the trigger? Kwon would have shot me, and then he
would have turned and shot you, because you'd have been a witness. We'd both be dead. You saved both of us. And you're nothing like him. He hurt people to feel better. You feel worse."

Taehyung’s tears finally slow, and he brings his hands up to cup Jimin’s face. Jimin turns his head just a little, just enough to press a kiss to Taehyung’s palm, and then Taehyung is leaning into Jimin, bringing them together again. Their kiss is hesitant, scarcely more than a brushing of lips, and Jimin lets Taehyung pull away after a moment, wraps his arms more tightly around Taehyung, until the water on their skin is the only thing between them.

Jimin presses their foreheads together, hugs Taehyung close, and says, “I’m so sorry I dragged you into this. When he called me—I was terrified I was going to lose you. I never want to feel that way again, and if that comes at the cost of Kwon’s death, then I don’t feel bad. I’m only sorry that I put you in that position, that it was you that had to save us. I would have pulled the trigger a thousand times if it meant that you never had to.” They kiss again, still chastely but more firmly, and Jimin says the five words that have been on the tip of his tongue all evening. “I love you so much.”

“I love you, too, Jiminie,” Taehyung whispers against his lips, his breath catching on a silent hiccup.

“I would do anything for you,” Jimin replies softly, “And I will always love you, no matter what.”

Taehyung’s lips twist like he might start crying again, but instead he dissolves the space between them. The need to reassure and be reassured settles heavily in Jimin’s chest, and when Taehyung presses another kiss to Jimin’s mouth, when Taehyung parts his lips and pulls Jimin closer, Jimin gladly deepens it. He tastes something different here between them, a layer of intensity and understanding that Jimin hasn’t experienced before, Jimin chases it, embraces it, ready to give Taehyung anything and everything he wants.

The kiss starts slowly, at first, lips sucking and tongues sliding, but it doesn’t stay that way long. Jimin can’t help it when he nibbles on Taehyung’s lower lip, tugging at it gently with his teeth, but Taehyung seems to like it. A groan catches in his throat, rumbles there as Jimin’s hands caress Taehyung’s neck, his chest, down his side to his waist where his fingertips instinctively grip Taehyung’s hips.

His cock begins to thicken, hardening with each pretty little noise from Taehyung, with the soft, wet sound of their kisses and the way Taehyung’s hands grasp desperately at Jimin’s warmth. Jimin doesn’t want to press the issue, doesn’t want to cheapen this moment of comfort, but he can’t help it. He can’t help the way Taehyung’s silky skin under his palms makes him feel alive, makes him glad to be alive.

Jimin can’t help the way he wants—needs—to revel in the fact that they’re both still here, safe and uninjured, that they made it through that awful violence unharmed, even if they’re not unscathed.

He can’t help the way he wants to fill the cracks in Taehyung’s confidence with his love and desire, the way he wants to build him up with tenderness and care, so that the guilt and abhorrence that cling to Taehyung fall away and aren’t able to reach him ever again.

He can’t help the way he wants to show Taehyung, with every fiber of his being, how much he’s loved, how much he’s wanted and cherished.

So, he tries to find balance. He ignores his growing arousal and pours everything he has into their kiss, into the way his hands move over Taehyung’s body. He fills his gentle touches with all the devotion and affection and comfort he can manage, and smiles between kisses as Taehyung succumbs to it. He sinks into Jimin’s attentive embrace, and, really, Jimin shouldn’t be surprised when it works so well. When Taehyung finally starts letting go of the stress and the anxiety of the
day and relaxes a little.

Well. Maybe more than a little, Jimin thinks, when Taehyung presses his body against Jimin and rocks his hips unconsciously, in halting little circles, against Jimin’s.

“Hey, baby—” It’s not that he wants to stop—God knows he doesn’t—but if Taehyung isn’t in a good place emotionally, then Jimin doesn’t want to take advantage. He just wants to take care of Taehyung, to remind him that he’ll be alright, that Jimin will be here with him every step of the way until he is alright. “Baby—” Jimin murmurs again around kisses, trying gently to pull Taehyung away, “Baby, we don’t have to— If you don’t want to——” He swallows thickly, and tries again. “If it doesn’t feel right, right now, we don’t have to do this——”

Taehyung moans at Jimin’s words, the sound caught somewhere between arousal and annoyance. He whispers into the column of Jimin’s neck, sending shivers up Jimin’s spine, “If you stop now I might scream. Please, Jimin— I want you, I need you. Don’t stop, please——”

And then the icing on the cake: he mouths lightly at Jimin’s neck and pulls Jimin closer, grinding his hips fully against Jimin’s.

Jimin can feel Taehyung’s cock brush against his own, and he moans, the friction just on the pleasant side of painful. He moans, and tightens his grip on Taehyung’s hips, and gives in.

Maybe Taehyung needs to revel a bit in the fact that they survived together, too.

“Yeah? Okay, baby. You just tell me what you want, yeah? I promise I’m gonna take such good care of you,” Jimin says, caressing his hands along Taehyung’s body once more, letting himself enjoy the subtle play of muscles under his skin, the smoothness of his trim waist and the swell of his ass.

Taehyung shudders delicately and gasps a little when Jimin squeezes lightly. His hips jump eagerly, and Jimin doesn’t wait for a verbal response, after that.

He reaches over, turns off the water, and slips out the shower stall long enough to snag a towel from the linen closet. He steps back into the shower stall, a blast of cool air painting Taehyung’s skin in goosebumps before he can shut the door behind himself. He towels Taehyung dry gently, rubbing away the last of the tension in his muscles before he scrubs the worst of the water out of his hair.

He dries himself hastily with the same towel. When he’s done, his skin is still dewy in some places, and his hair is still dripping a little, but he doesn’t care. He’s come to realize that taking care of Taehyung will always be more important than taking care of himself.

He drops the towel on the bathroom floor for later and takes Taehyung’s hand. He pauses long enough to bring Taehyung’s knuckles to his lips, to press a promise to his skin in the form of a kiss. Taehyung flushes prettily, and, satisfied, Jimin leads him to the bedroom.

He reaches over, turns off the water, and slips out the shower stall long enough to snag a towel from the linen closet. He steps back into the shower stall, a blast of cool air painting Taehyung’s skin in goosebumps before he can shut the door behind himself. He towels Taehyung dry gently, rubbing away the last of the tension in his muscles before he scrubs the worst of the water out of his hair.

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The sheets stick to his damp skin as they slip under them, and Taehyung giggles as Jimin struggles to pull the fabric up over his back. After a moment, he gives up on the sheets and abandons covering up—he’d much prefer to see Taehyung’s body, anyway, to see Taehyung’s pleasure as he feels it, and he’s more than capable of keeping them warm the old-fashioned way.

Taehyung reaches sideways, retrieving the lube from their nightstand before settling on his back. He drops the bottle on the mattress and reaches for Jimin, and Jimin rolls toward Taehyung. He presses himself against Taehyung, wrapping a leg around his and molding his front to Taehyung’s side, and obliges Taehyung with the kiss his lips are seeking. It’s both greedy and soft, searching for the depth
and intensity they’d found while in the shower, and Jimin’s relieved when it comes easily. He pushes away everything else—the weariness in his bones and the lingering ache in his chest—and focuses on this sweetness. On loving Taehyung.

He kisses Taehyung like he means it. He pushes his tongue into Taehyung’s mouth, smooths it over his palate and the back of his teeth. He slides it along Taehyung’s tongue in a slow caress, then pulls away to suck on his lip, before diving back in to do it again, and again. It doesn’t take long for their kiss to leave them gasping for breath, for heat to pool in Jimin’s groin again and harden his dick further, and it’s impossible to keep his hands from wandering to Taehyung’s erection. He grips it gently, drags his fingertips up its length lightly, teases the ridge at the base of its head, and leans back just enough to watch Taehyung shiver under the touch as he hardens fully. Taehyung’s hips jerk as his teeth latch onto Jimin’s shoulder, not biting enough to bruise or break skin, but the pressure makes Jimin’s fingers tighten imperceptibly in anticipation.

_God,_ the things Taehyung does to him.

“What do you want, sweetheart?” he murmurs in Taehyung’s ear, his voice low and ragged as his fingers continue their delicate stroking. “Do you want to fuck me? Or do you want me to fuck you?”

He’s surprised when Taehyung shakes his head, blushing. “Don’t wanna fuck,” he whispers, pulling back to meet Jimin’s eyes. There’s something in Taehyung’s gaze that reels Jimin in, makes him feel like nothing else matters, like nothing else will ever be as important to Taehyung as Jimin is, and that, paired with Taehyung’s next words, makes Jimin melt, whips his heart into a frothing frenzy, and pours him back out, into a pile of vibrating limbs and enthusiastic caresses.

“Want you to make love to me,” Taehyung says, and Jimin’s voice catches in his throat.

He’s putty. He’s putty, and Taehyung’s a master sculptor, shaping him and his future—and, as Jimin thinks about it, about the future that they have in front of them, he realizes he wouldn’t have it any other way.

He wants every touch between them, for the rest of their lives, to be the physical embodiment of the overwhelming affection lodged irrevocably in his chest. He wants this newfound intimacy, this earnest eagerness between them, to _stick_. He wants this sliver of goodness to always be there to temper the monotony of day to day life.

If they can always have _this_, then they can get through anything.

“I can do that,” he smiles softly. He leans into kiss Taehyung, and slides sideways, finding his place between Taehyung’s legs. He holds his weight on his elbows on either side of Taehyung, but keeps their skin contact, hungry for as much of Taehyung as he can get.

Jimin slinks lower and lower, his lips working over skin as he does. He leaves a trail of wet kisses in his wake, from Taehyung’s lips down his jaw, his neck, to his collarbone. He sucks a small hickey there before letting himself continue down Taehyung’s chest. He drags the flat of his tongue over Taehyung’s nipple next, seals his lips around the flesh and works his mouth until the flesh is perky and swollen, then kisses across Taehyung’s chest to repeat his results.

Taehyung’s fingers clutch at Jimin’s back as he alternates between sucking and licking, his breath stuttering and his chest rising and falling unevenly under Jimin’s lips. When a gasp catches in Taehyung’s throat, Jimin smiles and finally moves farther down, nipping at the softness of Taehyung’s belly before sinking his teeth a little further into the ridge of his hip.

“Jimin,” Taehyung manages to whine, his name a blatant plea.
Smiling against Taehyung’s skin, Jimin answers by moving his kisses lower, tonguing liberally over the crook of his hip. If Taehyung wants to make love, then Jimin’s going to do it properly. He lets his fingers trace lightly down Taehyung’s side as he works another mark into the skin there, then grips Taehyung’s hips tightly as he finally puts his mouth where Taehyung wants it.

He starts slow, with teasing licks and kisses along Taehyung’s shaft, then purses his lips around the head and sucking gently at the precum already beading there. Taehyung tastes strong and salty, but Jimin’s never really minded the flavor. He enjoys the weight of a thick cock on his tongue too much, enjoys the way his lips stretch around it and the eventual ache in his jaw as he pushes himself to bring his partner closer to completion. He loves the mess of spit and precum that stretches from his lips as he pulls back to breathe, and he loves glancing up to see his partner’s eyes rolling back in bliss.

He loves these things even more with Taehyung because it’s Taehyung. The desire to make Taehyung feel the best he’s ever felt burns brighter than his own lust, and his own cock is feeling increasingly neglected as he works his hands over Taehyung’s length instead of his own, but Taehyung’s pleasure—his happiness—will always be Jimin’s priority.

Jimin fists the base of Taehyung cock with one hand, rubbing the pad of his other thumb in soft circles over the vein on the underside of his cock, massaging as he works his tongue and lips rhythmically over its crown, sucking more firmly every time a little more precum wells at its slit. He wants to be relentless about breaking Taehyung down; he wants to overwhelm him with sensation so nothing but them can exist in this moment. A wave of satisfaction rushes through him when he has to bring his hand to Taehyung’s hip to keep him from thrusting into his mouth.

“Please, Jiminie, please—” Taehyung begs, and Jimin relents a little then, sliding his lips down Taehyung’s length, taking him in agonizingly slow. Jimin hums as he does, to ease Taehyung deeper, past his gag reflex, until Jimin’s nose is pressed to Taehyung’s skin, and then he swallows, repeatedly, his hands pinning Taehyung’s hips to keep him from bucking.

The breathy whines Taehyung’s been releasing as Jimin blows him change then into a full, throaty moan that goes straight to Jimin’s dick. Jimin feels Taehyung begin to tense under him, so he pulls off to breathe, relaxing his jaw for a moment as Taehyung struggles to collect himself.

“You close, baby?” he asks, his voice a little husky.

Taehyung nods, the motion oddly frantic for someone who’s so dazed.

“Do you want to come like this, or with me inside you?” he murmurs. He runs his fingers casually up and down the outside of Taehyung’s thigh, to help bring his focus back. “Or do you want both, baby?” he offers, a small smirk playing across his lips.

Taehyung shivers a little at the suggestion, blinking against the arousal that Jimin’s words clearly stir up. “Dunno if I can—come twice in a row like that,” he finally says, his voice hitching mid-response.

“Wanna find out?” Jimin replies. He lowers his mouth onto Taehyung’s cock again as he waits for an answer, sliding fully up and down it once before pulling off again to place shameless kisses along its length.

Taehyung groans, “Oh, fuck, yes. Please, Jimin your mouth feels so good—”

Jimin cuts him off before he can finish his sentence, enveloping him once more with renewed purpose. He doesn’t move fast, but he works steadily to rile Taehyung up again, to bring him to the edge again and tumble him over it. He teases and licks and hollows his cheeks, and sucks down
Taehyung’s cock like nothing’s ever tasted better, and he feasts on the sounds that pour out of Taehyung, the whimpers and the whines and the moans and the pleas, until he’s feasting on cum instead, Taehyung’s pleasure cresting without warning.

Taehyung’s mouth falls open as his orgasm short-circuits everything else, and Jimin’s mouth tightens, gently pulling the last of Taehyung’s climax from him, sucking and swallowing everything Taehyung offers him.

It’s satisfying and, for a moment, Jimin is content to lay there, to take in Taehyung’s blissful expression and the love pulsing through them in time with their heartbeats, to press slow kisses to Taehyung’s lips and to smile at Taehyung’s unfocused attempts to reciprocate. Because Taehyung is always beautiful, but there’s something about him tonight, something about the energy between them that really just—yeah, he’s stunning, and overwhelming fondness blooms so quickly in Jimin’s chest that it’s a little hard to breathe. As Taehyung comes down from his high and reaches for Jimin though, as he wraps lazy fingers around Jimin’s cock and tugs loosely, Jimin’s contentment wanes under renewed lust, and his breathing stutters for an entirely different reason.

“You’re not stopping there, right?” Taehyung whispers, his words voice roughened, and Jimin groans into his neck.

“God, not with you touching me like that,” he cedes, working to control his breathing. Taehyung’s grip twists a little, and Jimin takes a solid second to put his vocabulary back in working order. “Not unless you want me to.”

“Good,” Taehyung murmurs. His voice is softening, his body’s immediate response to orgasming the pliability of sleepiness, but his hand leaves Jimin’s dick and pats around on the bed until it comes up with the bottle of lube. He offers it to Jimin, a surprising alertness in his eyes despite his satiation. “You, sir,” he says quietly, tenderly, “have love to make.”

Jimin’s smile quirks upward on one side. “‘Sir,’ huh? I wouldn’t have guessed you like titles like that during—”

“Oh, for fucks sake,” Taehyung huffs, a blush breaking out across his cheeks as he waves the lube in front of Jimin’s face. “Just put your dick in my ass and move it around a little, will you?”

Jimin laughs lightly. He presents his fingers and wiggles them, leaning forward to peck Taehyung gently. “Fingers first, baby,” he says.

Taehyung snaps the bottle open, squeezes lube into Jimin’s waiting palm. It’s cold, and Jimin immediately starts slicking his fingers, rubbing them together to work the chill out of it. He lowers himself closer to Taehyung as he does, kissing him softly, deepening the kiss when Taehyung parts his lips. When the gel is warmed and his fingers coated, he reaches between Taehyung’s thighs and nudges them a little wider.

“Baby—are you ready—for part two?” Jimin asks between kisses. He touches the pad of his finger to Taehyung’s hole, not pushing, but caressing lightly—teasing.

Taehyung lifts his leg, wrapping it around Jimin’s waist and tilting his hips slightly, just enough to create a little pressure, and says “Please, Jiminie.”

And for the hundredth time since he and Taehyung reunited, Jimin realizes that saying ‘no’ to Taehyung is something he’s not really capable of. He presses his finger inside Taehyung, slowly, carefully, freezing as Taehyung tenses and gasps in sensitivity when he’s only knuckle deep.
“Tae, are you sure you wanna—”


Jimin leans into Taehyung and captures his lips again, pulling him into a kiss and lingering there before he moves his finger again. He kisses Taehyung lazily as he works him open. He takes his time, pumping slowly, adding a second finger when Taehyung squirms under him and begs for another. He smooths his fingers over Taehyung’s sensitive spot gently, and then with more determination as Taehyung’s breath stutters and turns pitched, and he pushes in a third finger when Taehyung’s hips begin stuttering in time with his moans, grinding down on Jimin’s fingers like he needs more.

Taehyung’s legs lock around Jimin’s waist reflexively, his muscle tightening rhythmically around his fingers with each graze against his prostate, and God, if it doesn’t make Jimin’s dick throb with arousal, because it’s gonna feel amazing when he finally gets to sink his cock into Taehyung’s—Taehyung, Taehyung, Taehyung.

He’s all that matters. This isn’t about Jimin’s pleasure—he can find that easily enough, as long as Taehyung is happy. That’s what Jimin wants—Taehyung to feel nothing but good. Jimin waits for Taehyung to be on the brink of falling apart a second time underneath him, his muscles quivering and his chest rising and falling rapidly as he pants, his cock so hard again and dripping precum—and only then does Jimin let himself think about his own pleasure.

“Tae—”

“Yeah, yeah Jimin, please, I’m ready, I’m—”

Jimin slips his fingers free, Taehyung letting his legs fall open wide and shuddering out a sigh at the sudden emptiness, and Jimin sits back long enough to grab the lube and pour a generous amount into his hand. He works it over his cock quickly, biting his lip against the cold slide of it on his heated skin. The sudden relief of his own hand overrides the chill and he gives in, pumping his hand twice before he catches Taehyung watching him, hunger smoldering in his eyes.

“You want this, baby?” he asks, letting his voice drop an octave and turn husky. He strokes himself again, slowing the tug of his hand up and down his shaft, sitting up on his knees to present Taehyung with a better view.

Taehyung chases the whimper that catches in his throat with his tongue smoothed over his lips in anticipation. “Yes—fuck—please, Jimin, need you inside me, need you, please—”

The slow slide into Taehyung is hot and tight and perfect, just like it always it. Taehyung urges him forward with his heels braced against Jimin’s ass, sucks him inside in one continuous thrust, but Jimin fights to keep it unhurried. He’s so on the edge and he’s afraid anything faster than a snail’s pace will push him beyond his control.

He groans lowly as he seats himself fully, deep in Taehyung, and he takes a moment to distract himself by wiping his hand clean of lube on the sheet. When he feels like he can breathe again, he leans forward, crowds Taehyung against the mattress, pushing his arms up over his head and bracing his elbows on either side of him. The shift in angle has them both shivering in anticipation, but he stays still when Taehyung wriggles under him, trying to get him to move.

“Slow, baby. Slow,” he murmurs. “God, you feel so good. You got me so riled up.”
Taehyung whines in response, ready for more, and a smile tugs at the corners of Jimin’s lips.

“I could come right now, babe, you’re so perfect, tight around my cock like this.” He pauses to kiss Taehyung, just a chaste press of lips, and then he whispers against them. “But I wanna love you so good, wanna draw it out—” He times his words with the slow drag of his cock as he pulls out, then pauses before sinking in again steadily, keeping himself from rushing after the surge of pleasure that comes with it. “Wanna make it so good for you, Tae. Wanna love you forever, baby.”

He kisses Taehyung again as he settles into a steady rhythm, trying to make the emotion tight in his chest tangible, and when he opens his eyes to meet Taehyung’s gaze, he catches a wetness streaking down the side of his face, from the corner of his eye to his ear, and—

Jimin immediately pulls out. “Baby, are you okay? Do you want to stop?”

“No, please,” Taehyung whispers. He wraps his arms around Jimin’s shoulders and holds him close, pulls him closer. “It—it feels good, I promise. I just—I love you, Jimin. So much.” Another tear streaks down his cheek, and he moves to wipe away the wetness. “I’m just—really glad we have a chance at forever.”

“Baby,” Jimin implores. “Hey, baby… It’s okay to feel that way, okay?” He smooths the pad of his thumb over Taehyung’s cheek, and smiles gently. “I’m really glad too, Tae.”

“Okay,” Taehyung sniffs.

“Okay?”

“Okay,” Taehyung says again, sounding a little surer. “Can you—please?”

“Oh. Oh. Yeah,” Jimin says. “Of course. Anything you want, babe.” He plants a purposefully messy kiss on Taehyung’s lips and reaches down to hook his arm under Taehyung’s waist and lift him just enough to change their angle. Then he lines himself up again and pushes his hips forward, his thrust smooth and his aim precise.

Taehyung’s mouth falls open under his then, a moan hitched in his throat as the head of Jimin’s cock brushes against his prostate, as his length keeps pressure against it, and Jimin doesn’t stop once he’s buried all the way in Taehyung. He pulls back again immediately, intent on building constant pressure, on pleasuring Taehyung until he’s mindless in his ecstasy, and Taehyung makes it so easy to set a solid pace, to fall into his own bliss with each fluid motion, with Taehyung’s breathy noises in his ear.

Each time he drives into Taehyung, Jimin feels his control slip just a bit more. Taehyung’s legs tense around Jimin’s waist and his fingernails dig into Jimin’s shoulder blades, and he likes it. He likes the way Taehyung clings harder to him with each thrust, the way Taehyung’s hole squeezes him tighter, like he’s clutching at Jimin’s cock, unwilling to let him go. He speeds up without really meaning to, chasing the building tension between them, and Taehyung writhes, twisting his hips up to meet Jimin’s, as Jimin rocks into him harder.

“Please, Jimin—” Taehyung chokes out. “Sh-show me you love me—please—”

And Jimin’s rhythm falters. He’s so close, his thrusts becoming shallower and jerkier, but he wants to Taehyung to come first. He needs Taehyung to come first—he needs to know that Taehyung feels good, that he’s taken care of, before he can allow his own release—so he lets go of Taehyung’s waist and reaches between them for Taehyung’s cock.

He’s wet. Like. Sloppy wet. Precum has run down his length and smeared all over his belly, and if
Determined, Jimin slicks his fingers with it just enough to soothe skin-on-skin friction, and grips Taehyung’s cock firmly. Taehyung’s hips jump as he spasms around Jimin’s cock, and they both groan, but Jimin doesn’t let up. He strokes Taehyung eagerly, matching the pumping of his hand to the snapping of his hips and mouthing disjointedly down Taehyung’s neck as Taehyung’s breath quickens, then catches in his throat, and then tumbles out of him in a broken, gasping moan.

Taehyung comes, his back arching off the mattress and his walls tightening impossibly around Jimin, and Jimin can practically feel himself shake with his own need to join him.

Taehyung shudders through his aftershocks, his fingers scrabbling weakly at Jimin’s wrist to get him to let go of Taehyung’s cock, and Jimin’s hand lands on Taehyung’s hip instead. He digs his fingertips in, slides his hand a little farther around the jut of Taehyung’s hipbone so that his nails scrape lightly over the swell of Taehyung’s ass, and he finally lets himself focus on how good he feels, how good Taehyung feels around him as he slides in and out, so wet and warm and needy as the peak of his pleasure makes him clench around Jimin, like his body wants nothing more than to coax Jimin to climax, and—

Jimm’s grip on Taehyung’s ass tightens as he pushes deep inside a final time, his fingernails pressing crescents into Taehyung’s smooth skin as his climax hits him hard, an explosion of ecstasy that keeps his hips rocking shallowly as his cum spills inside Taehyung.

He loses track of time for a little bit as he comes down, as his rutting slows and Taehyung’s gasps of pleasure turn sharp with sensitivity for the second time that night. He pulls out then, careful with Taehyung as he presses one more kiss to his lips, murmuring “I love you” into it. He sits back on his heels, swings one leg over Taehyung’s and toward the edge of the bed, and then his other, but when he moves to actually get off the bed, to go get a towel to clean them up with, Taehyung’s hand latches around his wrist.

“Stay with me,” he whispers, his voice hoarse and low.

“Baby, I’m just gonna get something to clean us up,” Jimin soothes. “I’ll be right ba—”

“No, please—” Taehyung’s fingers tighten momentarily, before he loosens his grip and lets his fingers slide down to intertwine with Jimin’s. “Don’t leave me.”

“Tae,” Jimin sighs, trying to ignore the heartache blossoming in his chest once more. He scoots back toward his boyfriend. “Baby. You’re gonna regret it in the morning when you’re covered in dried lube and cum.” He traces his thumb along Taehyung’s jaw as he speaks, trying to calm the disquiet emerging from the haze of his pleasure.

“I don’t care,” Taehyung whines. “The sheets are already a mess—can’t we just—”

Jimm doesn’t wait for him to finish his sentence. Without hesitation, he pulls the flat sheet free of the foot of the bed and uses one corner of it to wipe Taehyung’s stomach free of the mess they’ve made. He’s worked hard to erase the uneasiness in Taehyung’s eyes, and if making a ruin of his satin sheets is what it takes to keep it that way, then Jimin is more than willing.

Sheets are replaceable. Taehyung is not.

He wipes the skin along Taehyung’s inner thighs gently, smoothing over his sensitive hole with a fresh corner of the sheet to clear away the cum that’s dribbled out of him. When he’s finished, he
wipes himself clean and rolls the soiled fabric in on itself, tossing it to the floor. He pulls the comforter over them and tucks them in, the softness of the cotton comfortable against their bare skin.

Taehyung clings, and Jimin is happy to wind himself around Taehyung, to tangle their limbs together and hold Taehyung firmly against his chest. He runs his fingers through Taehyung’s hair, a slow, rhythmic scratching of his fingernails along the nape of Taehyung’s nape, and eventually the murmured words of affection between them grow lethargic, the weariness of the day heavy in their speech.

The last thing Taehyung says to Jimin in slow, sleep-slurred words before finally drifting off is, “Thank you for coming to save me.”

Jimin presses a kiss to Taehyung’s temple, and replies, “I will always be there when you need me, TaeTae,” and he’s not really sure that Taehyung heard him before he succumbed to slumber, but Jimin doesn’t mind. He’ll tell Taehyung again in the morning, and again in the afternoon, and again and again all the days after that.

They have time.

They have a future.

For now, it’s enough that Taehyung’s managed to find some semblance of peace, and to sink into sleep.

For all of these blessings, Jimin is grateful.

***

Jiyong raises the gun to Jimin's head and before Taehyung can raise the gun in his hand, Jiyong pulls the trigger.

Taehyung screams as Jimin collapses to the ground, his lifeless eyes staring sightlessly at Taehyung as blood seeps slowly from his forehead and—

Taehyung jolts awake, screaming. The blanket is choking him and he can’t move his limbs fast enough because it feels like there are weights tying him down and oh shit Jiyong still has him tied up he can’t breathe he has to move move run run run

“Taehyung!”

Jimin’s voice cuts through his panic, his scream dying in his throat as Jimin sits up and shakes him gently awake.

“Tae, baby, wake up, you’re safe!”

Taehyung forces his eyes to focus on Jimin’s panicked expression, the terrified twist of his mouth as he tries to pull rationality back into Taehyung. As he pieces together what’s happening through the slowly fading fog of his nightmare things begin to make sense. He couldn’t move his limbs because Jimin was tangled up with him, he wasn’t choking at all, and he’s not dead.

Jimin isn’t dead.

Taehyung reaches up for Jimin, wrapping his arms around his neck and pulling him down on top of him as tears begin to fall quickly from his eyes.
“I had a dream,” he chokes out between helpless gasps for air, “that I didn’t s-save you, that you d-died right in front of me.”

“Oh baby,” Jimin whispers against his neck, “baby I’m right here. You’re okay, I’m fine, we’re safe.” He runs his hands in soothing motions up and down Taehyung’s sides. “It’s over. It’s done.”

“I k-killed him, Jimin,” Taehyung sobs, trying to push aside the guilt that’s choking him, the sheer horror at being the cause for someone’s death, even someone as dark as Jiyong had become.

Jimin pulls back slightly to look into Taehyung’s eyes. “I know this is a lot right now,” he soothes, “but you’re gonna be okay. I’m right here. We’re both safe. We’re gonna get through this together.”

Taehyung doesn’t feel like they’re going to be okay, not completely, not yet, but he has faith in Jimin and he believes in their love. No matter how awful it was to take a life, he knows, deep down, he would do it again if it meant saving Jimin.

“O-okay,” Taehyung breathes, trying to steady his breathing and calm the tears still slipping from the corners of his eyes.

Jimin places a gentle kiss to Taehyung’s nose. “I love you, Taehyung.” He kisses his cheek. “Thank you for saving my life.” He kisses Taehyung’s fluttering eyelids. “You’re perfect, and I love every piece of you.”

Taehyung shivers, blinks, breathes. It will take time, it won’t happen all at once or easily, but—

Yeah, they’re going to be okay.

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“Jimin, I’m ready to go!”

Jimin, his hair dripping and his skin still dewy from the shower, shuffles from the bedroom into the living room, holding his robe closed. “I’ll see you later tonight, okay?”

Taehyung leans in to kiss Jimin, then pulls his coat over his shoulders. “Yeah. I still wish you were coming with me.”

Jimin smiles. “I do, too, baby. But I’ve got a meeting to take care of before the club opens, and I really can’t let it go any longer than I already have.”

Taehyung sighs. “Okay. I’ll tell Yoongi and Hoseok that you said hi, then.”

“Please do. Enjoy your—dinner? Breakfast?”

“Breakfast. They’re barely going to be awake when I get there, and I’m making French toast, so it’s definitely breakfast,” Taehyung confirms, picking his bag of groceries up off the floor.

“You’re taking your own ingredients?” Jimin asks, amused.

Taehyung snorts. “You haven’t witnessed Yoongi’s inability to grocery shop. I honestly don’t know how they haven’t starved.” He turns and steps out into the entry, pressing the call button for the elevator.

“Mm,” Jimin considers, following after him and leaning against the elevator’s frame. “Probably the same way I managed before I found you.”
“Takeout?”

“Takeout,” Jimin nods.

Taehyung’s endeared smile warms Jimin from the inside out. “Not anymore,” he murmurs, ducking down to kiss Jimin gently.

“Not anymore,” Jimin confirms.

The elevator dings, the doors open, and Taehyung steps inside.

“Hey,” Jimin says, leaning in and blocking the doors open. He lets his robe fall open long enough to reach up and cup Taehyung’s face, to pull him into a tender kiss and trail the pads of his fingers along Taehyung’s jaw and down his neck. “I love you,” he whispers.

And Taehyung’s soft blush melts him just a little bit further, sinks into his chest and stirs up a flurry of affection that Jimin is all too prepared to drown in.

“Love you too, Jiminie.”

He’s not particularly looking forward to this meeting. He doesn’t want to seem ungrateful for the assistance that Kris and Zitao have given him, especially since it was so last minute, but from what he’d overheard whispered in the back rooms of the club yesterday, their first day open again, he has every right to be.

They’ve been absolute nightmares to work for, neglecting their duties and abusing the generosity of the club. Jimin’s seen the way the dancers tread lightly around Kris, as if they’re afraid of him, both verbally and physically, and Zitao—from what Jimin’s gathered, the only reason his club has been properly staffed is because Hoshi’s been making the weekly schedule for both the dancers and the bouncers. And when he was on his way home last night, Jimin had caught Yoongi, who somehow happened to have the password to Namjoon’s computer, in the act of taking care of the club’s financials, tabs open for everything from ordering booze and stage makeup to submitting the week’s payroll. And they’ve been doing all of this on top of their usual responsibilities.

Jimin is pissed.

He doesn’t understand why no one told him, why they didn’t pick up a phone and let him know that his club—that his employees—were so at risk. What bothers him the most is that Kris and Zitao had acted like they had everything well in hand at the staff meeting Jimin had called the day of the FBI raid. Nobody had said anything. And Jimin hadn’t thought to ask.

Mostly he’s angry at himself. He should have seen that something was off and corrected it immediately, but with Kris and Zitao already in place, he thought he’d been safe to grant Namjoon and Seokjin a bit of paid time off after all they’d done for him. He thought he’d be able to get back to club ahead of them, straighten the little things that might have gone overlooked in their absence, and smooth the transition from Kris and Zitao’s management back to Seokjin and Namjoon’s.

Jimin’s not looking forward to this meeting, but it’s not because firing Kris and Zitao prematurely will be a painful process. No, this meeting will be difficult for the sole reason that Jimin will have to be civil about firing Kris and Zitao prematurely.
Once it’s done, once Kris and Zitao have been escorted out of the building and told to never come back—in polite words, because Jimin has a business to protect and a reputation to maintain—Jimin settles himself in front of his computer and starts putting things to rights. He works for three hours nonstop, and when he pauses a little before the club opens, Jimin appreciates Yoongi and Hoshi (and Namjoon and Seokjin) more than he ever has before.

He authorizes a thousand-dollar bonus to each of them while he’s thinking about it.

They’ve more than earned it.

The club is set to open in fifteen minutes, and everyone’s scrambling about, trying to finish last minute preparations, but Jimin doesn’t care if they open a little late tonight. He has something he needs to say.

He asks Taehyung to round up all the bouncers, and then pops his head into the dancer’s dressing room.

“Mandatory all staff meeting in two minutes out on the main floor,” he tells Hoseok, who’s hovering near the door, waiting for a spot at one of the mirrored vanities. “Find Hoshi and let everyone know, please.”

Surprised, Hoseok nods and Jimin goes back out to the front. He walks to the middle of the main dance floor, clasps his hands together in front of him in an attempt to keep from picking at his fingernails out of nervousness, and waits. It’s not long before his employees are gathered before him. Some look irritated by the interruption, some look nervous, but Jimin’s eyes find Taehyung’s, and he just looks…like he trusts Jimin.

Jimin intends to live up to that trust.

“I know you’re all incredibly busy right now as you finish your preparations before we open for the evening,” Jimin says, his voice raised slightly, “so I’ll keep this brief.”

The last of the quiet chatter in the room falls silent.

“I owe you an apology. The last…month, or so, has been a mess. I’ve been a mess. And I let my personal business get in the way of LIE’s business. I thought hiring Kris and Zitao as a temporary manager and head of security would allow me to utilize Namjoon’s and Seokjin’s skills elsewhere without worry, and I was wrong. Instead of me worrying about the state of my club, you were forced to, and for that I cannot apologize enough. You shouldn’t have had to deal with the working conditions that you did, and I am deeply indebted to you all for the way you conducted yourselves.”

Jimin pauses, noting the startled expressions on the dancers in the front row, and the approving ones on Yoongi’s and Taehyung’s features. He meets Hoseok’s eyes, and his stomach sinks a little further. “You put up with harassment. You endured additional, unscheduled practices—which you will be paid for retroactively—and you took on extra duties to make sure the club continued to run as smoothly as possible. You went above and beyond to protect this place from my poor planning and lack of diligence, and it will not be forgotten.

“Consider your quarterly reviews passed, and the raises that accompany them guaranteed,” Jimin says, holding up a hand to forestall the inevitable conversation. “Also, please know that Kris and Zitao have been escorted from the premises and asked not to return. Namjoon and Seokjin will resume their posts in a couple of days but, in the meantime, I ask that you come to me for anything
you need.” Jimin hesitates, then attempts a joke. “I’ll be taking over Namjoon’s usual place on the breakroom couch until he’s back.”

He’s met with light laughter, and he relaxes a little. “Seriously, though, I’ll be working in Namjoon and Seokjin’s stead for the next couple of days, so if you need anything, let me know. Thank you for your patience, and for your loyalty to this place. It means a lot to me.”

Jimin glances at his wristwatch and grimaces at the time. “And on that note, I’ll let you go. Who’s on the door tonight?” The dancers in the front of the group stand and start scurrying toward their dressing room, and Minho raises a hand. Jimin nods in acknowledgement and raises his voice to be heard over the commotion. “The doors open ten minutes late tonight, got it?”

Minho shoots finger guns at him and wanders toward the door, Hoshi nods his appreciation and dashes after the other dancers, Taehyung smiles proudly—and just like that, Jimin feels a little bit better.

It’s almost seven in the morning when Jimin finally quits for the day, pulled away from his computer by Taehyung’s insistent, “Jimin, you should probably shower and change before your board meeting—maybe get a little nap in?”

He crawls into bed with Taehyung when they get home, sets an alarm for an hour later and lets Taehyung curl himself around Jimin’s body, pulling him tight against his stomach and wrapping an arm around Jimin’s waist. It’s almost immediately too warm for Jimin, but if holding onto him is the best way for Taehyung to avoid his nightmares, then Jimin will happily shove his half of the blankets onto Taehyung to make it work.

They drift off quickly, and when the alarm goes off, Jimin groans wearily and squirms out of Taehyung’s hold. He trudges into the bathroom, steps under the hot water, and wills himself awake again. It takes longer than it should, and he vows to make coffee his next stop, his phone rings as he steps out of the shower. It’s not a number he recognizes, but he answers it anyway, anticipating it being someone from Park Enterprises calling to remind him of the time of the board meeting and confirm his attendance.

He’s wrong.

“Mr. Park, it’s Special Agent Tuan. How are you?”

Surprised, Jimin pulls his phone away and stares at the number on the screen for a moment, shakes himself the rest of the way awake, then presses it to his ear again. “Agent Tuan. I’m well. And you?”

“Yeah, I’m good. I, uh, learned something today that I need to share with to you,” Tuan says, cutting right to the chase. “You…should probably be sitting down for this.”

Naked and still dripping, Jimin doesn’t really have many seating options in the bathroom. “Go ahead,” he says, pinning his phone between his ear and his shoulder so he can wrap his towel around his waist.

“We got the ballistics report back from the raid. It matches up with the story you told us about Taehyung being tied on the floor, so there likely won’t be any further investigation.”

Jimin nods to himself, exhaling the last of his lingering stress.

“But that’s not all,” the agent continues. “The gun that the shooter out front of the building was using
—it was a match to a weapon from a prior case.”

Jimin’s breath catches in his chest, and his fingers slip as he tries to knot his towel. His voice comes out almost like a squeak. “What?”

“Mr. Park…it was your mother’s case. We got the gun that they used. And we have no way to prove it, but the guy that we took down is probably the one that was responsible. The Dragons are kind of notorious for not sharing their weapons.”

Jimin’s phone clatters to the floor.

His mother’s—his mother’s murderer—

It really is over. His mother, and Jeongguk’s—their murderer was likely the same gunman that pinned them in the entryway of the building, that shot Special Agent Kim in the leg and grazed Jeongguk’s arm with his automatic. And that gunman was dead. Agent Choi had killed him.

He was dead, and now—Now maybe their mothers could rest in peace, justice—or at least karma—finally delivered on their behalf.

He blinks out of his stupor, and bends to pick up his phone again.

“—Park are you still there?”

“Yes, I’m here. Sorry. That was…just a bit of a shock.” Jimin says. His voice feels woolen, thick and scratchy to his own ears.

“I told you to sit down,” Tuan grumbles. “Listen—I shouldn’t be telling you this. I’m breaking a minimum of three laws by doing it anyway. I don’t like you, but— For what you and Jeon did for Yugyeom…this makes us square. So this stays between us, got it?”

“I can’t not tell Jeongguk, Agent—”

“Us and Jeon, then,” the Agent relents. “But that’s it. Don’t make me regret this.”

“We won’t,” Jimin says. “Thank you. Really, thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I guess,” Tuan says, and hangs up.

Jimin stares past his reflection in the bathroom mirror, dumbfounded, his mind grinding away at the new information for who knows how long. When he forces himself back to the present, his hair isn’t dripping anymore, and his chest and arms are covered with goosebumps from air-drying.

He unlocks his phone, scrolls to Jeongguk’s contact, and presses send.

When Jeongguk answers, Jimin keeps it simple. “You need to come over. Now.”

“Jimin?” Jeongguk calls.

“Shh!” Jimin replies, quieter, “In here.”

Jeongguk follows the sound of his voice and finds him in the kitchen, staring into the open booze cabinet.
“We’re whispering because…?”

“Tae’s asleep,” Jimin answers.

“And you’re drinking at nine in the morning because…?”

“We’re drinking at nine in the morning,” Jimin corrects.

Jeongguk frowns. Jimin can’t see it, but he can hear it. “I’ll ask again—why are you drinking at nine in the morning?”

Jimin sighs, decides on a bottle of whiskey, grabs it and two tumblers, and turns to face Jeongguk. “Let’s go out on the terrace.”

Jeongguk’s frown turns to confusion. “Jimin, what is going on here? It’s like…twenty degrees outside. It’s fucking winter.”

“Then you’d better put your coat back on,” Jimin replies, walking past Jeongguk to fetch his own. He shoves his feet unceremoniously into a pair of fur-lined boots, and shrugs on the warmest coat he owns. He pauses for a moment, tosses an oversized throw blanket from the couch over his arm, and heads toward the door to the terrace. “You coming?” he asks over shoulder, and then he enters the stairwell, climbing the single flight of stairs up to the roof.

After a moment, he hears Jeongguk follow him and, reassured, Jimin pushes open the door out onto his terrace.

Jeongguk wasn’t wrong. It’s fucking freezing on the roof. The wind whips past, unhindered at this altitude but for the terrace’s railing, and everything’s coated in a fine layer of frost. He takes a moment to be grateful that they haven’t had a snow storm yet, and then sets down the alcohol and the glasses and the blanket and gets to work pulling kindling and firewood from its box and stacking it strategically in the firepit. It takes a couple minutes to get the fire to light and stay lit, but once it’s stable, he turns make himself comfy on the patio furniture and discovers that Jeongguk has absconded with his blanket. And his booze.

He’s curled in the corner of the couch, tucked fully under the blanket with all his limbs pulled inside, and while the two tumblers are still sitting on the end table next to him, the bottle of whiskey has mysteriously gone missing.

Jimin shuffles over and plops down next to Jeongguk, roughly tugging the edge of the blanket out from where it’s pinned under Jeongguk butt and pulling it over his legs and joining the cocoon. Jeongguk hisses at the rush of cold air that comes with him, but he doesn’t fight to keep the blanket to himself.

They sit there together for a while, letting their body heat begin to accumulate, watching the growing flames lick at the wood. The noises of the city below are thickened—muted—distorted as if underwater. Maybe it’s the distance between the street level and where Jimin and Jeongguk sit on the roof, but more likely it’s the incessant thrumming of Jimin’s thoughts, the hypnotic nature of the fire, and the patient quiet of Jeongguk next to him.

Jeongguk.

Jimin can’t keep the news to himself much longer. Jeongguk deserves to know, and Jimin knows that Jeongguk will be just as ill-prepared to hear it as he was, but—

But maybe he doesn’t have to be.
“You know,” Jimin says. “Whiskey would warm us up faster.”

“You’re not getting the booze from me until you tell me what the fuck I’m doing on the roof of your building in the fucking dead of winter,” Jeongguk replies smoothly, his tone void of the confusion and irritation he’d exhibited before they came outside.

Jimin sighs. He’d chosen the terrace for this conversation because he didn’t want to get lost in thought again. He’s counting on the cold to anchor him here, and the whiskey to dull the edges, but Jeongguk doesn’t know that.

“Do you think everything is finished?” Jimin asks. It’s a roundabout way to start the conversation, but he needs to build up to this slowly.

“Hmm,” Jeongguk humors him. “Maybe? Or maybe it’s just all beginning?”

“They kind of come together, don’t they,” Jimin says a little wistfully. “Beginnings and endings.”


“I…I got a phone call today, and I learned something that…I don’t know. I think it’s supposed to have brought me closure? But I just feel…riled up. Like it stirred the pot instead of letting it settle.”

“What was it about?”

“Our moms.” Jimin’s reply is soft, but Jeongguk catches it before the wind carries it away.

Jeongguk hums, then sits up a little, emerging from the blanket enough to twist open the whiskey and pour a generous splash into each of the glasses. He sets the bottle down on the table, hands one of the glasses to Jimin, and pulls the blanket back up over his shoulder. It sags just enough over his chest that he can lift his own glass to his lips and take a sip.

Jimin echoes the movement.

Silence follows as they let the whiskey warm them, and Jeongguk only speaks again when their glasses are emptied and refilled. “Go ahead, then.”

“The FBI got ballistics back on all the weapons in the raid, and one of them was the gun that was used to kill our mothers,” Jimin says. It hurts to say it out loud, hurts to acknowledge it and make it more real.

Jimin wonders why. The deed’s already done. It’s not like not finding the weapon there would have made anything better. If anything, confirming that the gun responsible was in the hands of the Dragons should be an improvement—proof that they were right, closure for their grief. Relief that the people responsible had paid for the violence that ended two lives and made such of mess of his and Jeongguk’s.

Instead, all that’s left is a burning hole in his chest, an ache that can’t be soothed away. A sharp, painful chasm that he’s not sure will ever heal.

“What does that mean?” Jeongguk finally asks. “I mean, I know what I think it means, but—what did they—”

“They have no way to prove who in the gang did it, but Agent Tuan said that the Dragons don’t really trade weapons amongst themselves, so they figure that the guy that did it—”
Jimin breaks off, unsure how to tell Jeongguk the rest.

He takes another sip of his whiskey, lets the heat of it in his throat burn away the last of his hesitation. He’s babied this conversation as much as he can, and all that’s left is to rip the band-aid off.

“It was the guy at the front door, Jeongguk.”

Jimin watches Jeongguk’s knuckles tighten around his glass. He watches him blow out an unsteady breath.

“Then it really is over,” Jeongguk says, his voice shaky. “We can put it to rest.” He takes a long sip of his whiskey, swallows it slowly, and then lets his head fall backward against the backrest of the couch. “We can let our mothers rest.”

“It still hurts, though,” Jimin sighs. “It doesn’t feel over. It wasn’t enough for him to take our mothers from us; he had to hurt Agent Kim, and he had to hurt you.” Jeongguk shifts a little under the blanket at that, and Jimin moves just enough that his arm isn’t pressing so firmly against Jeongguk’s still-healing wound.

Jeongguk takes a sip of his whiskey, contemplating, and then says, “He’s dead, Jimin. He can only keep hurting you if you let him.” He lets his head loll to the side and meets Jimin’s gaze. “You have to let it go. You have to let her go. Or it’s never going to stop hurting.”

“I don’t want to forget her,” Jimin whispers. “I’m afraid to.”

Jeongguk smiles at that. It’s a tired thing, brief and softened around the edges, but it manages to relax Jimin just a little bit. He’s not quite sure how.

“I don’t think it’s humanly possible for you to forget your mother. When you finally got her back—when you came back to live with your parents—do you remember how excited you were?”

“I remember how afraid I was, that I’d do something wrong and be sent away again,” Jimin murmurs. He swallows another mouthful of whiskey.

Jeongguk laughs, a full-bodied sound that catches Jimin off-guard. “Fear comes from being desperate to hold onto something that’s valuable to you,” he says, his lips quirking into a smile. He sits up a little. “Let me ask you this. What was the first thing your mother taught you?”

“To hold my chin up,” Jimin replies promptly.

“And what did she get you for your first Christmas together?”

“A mother/son spa day.” Jimin cracks a small smile. “God, the way I almost kicked that poor beautician in the face during the pedicure. It tickled so bad.”

“And what was the first thing you thought when you met her?”

Jimin has to swallow around the lump that forms in his throat, but he answers without hesitation. “That she was perfect. That she looked like she was going to be everything I wanted in a mom.”

“And in the years that she was here with you, did she live up to that?”

“You know she did,” Jimin says. His voice is quiet, but firm.

“Then how could you possibly forget all that?” Jeongguk asks softly.
Jeongguk is right.

“Letting go of the past, doesn’t mean you have to let go of her, Jimin. All it means is letting go of the pain that thinking about it makes you feel.”

Jeongguk is right.

He holds Jimin’s eyes, his gaze steady. Sure. “Don’t live in the past. Live in the present. Be here, with Taehyung. With me, and Seokjin, and Namjoon, and Yoongi and Hoseok, and everyone else that makes you happy. It’s okay to let your past shape you, Jimin, but don’t let it own you. Not anymore.”

It sounds easier said than done, but something clicks. Maybe it’s the booze, maybe it’s Jeongguk’s words, maybe it’s the timing. Maybe it’s all three. But he can do this. At least, he can try. He feels like he needs to, for his mother. She’d want that for him.

“Jeongguk, th—” His phone rings, cutting him off. Frowning, he squirms around until he can get his phone out of his pocket, and when he catches sight of the time and reads ‘Concierge,’ on the screen, he remembers. “Oh, fuck,” he says, scrambling to answer the call. “Hello.”

“Mr. Park, just a friendly reminder that your car is waiting for you, as you requested,” the attendant says.


Not ready.

Suddenly, it strikes him just how fitting that is.

Today has been too much. He feels emotionally unprepared for the board meeting he’s supposed to be attending. Which is really kind of funny, in an ironic way, he realizes, as he thinks back to all his interactions with his father’s company. In the last couple weeks, he’s felt nothing but unwelcomed and undervalued by Park Enterprises’ Board of Directors, but in retrospect, he realizes that most of what he’s been feeling is just…overwhelmed.

He hasn’t been at his best, stretched between his personal crusade for justice and his ascension to the head of his father’s company and his club. The condition he’d come back to find LIE in was evidence enough of that. And struggling through one night of putting LIE back together was enough to make him start thinking that maybe his father’s training and his private tutors weren’t enough to run a business successfully. And if just the management of LIE was enough to make him consider furthering his education, then how is he supposed to succeed at Park Enterprises?

Jeongguk’s words swim to the forefront of his brain then—Let go of the past. Let it shape you, but don’t let it own you. Be here. Be happy—and he wonders—

He wonders what it is that he really wants.

He spends precious seconds thinking about what he really wants, what he wants his future to look like. How he wants to live. Where he wants to seek, and find, happiness.

And he realizes—

“—ir? Sir, are you there?”

“Yes, sorry, I’m here. Please cancel the car and pass along my apologies to my driver. In fact…”
please tell him he can take the rest of the afternoon off, fully paid. I won’t be needing to go out again until my usual time this evening.”

“Very good, sir.”

“Thank you,” Jimin says, feeling unexpectedly light. He scrolls through his contacts until he finds the number for Park Enterprises’ executive-suite receptionist, and presses send.

“What are you doing?” Jeongguk asks, his brow wrinkling.

Jimin puts his hand over the receiver for a moment, says, “Letting go of the past and focusing on where I want to be.” He grins at the confusion that molds Jeongguk’s features. “Trust me,” he adds.

Jeongguk narrows his eyes at Jimin and takes another sip of his whiskey.

“Park Enterprises, how may I direct your call?”

“Hi. It’s Park Jimin. I was wondering…have the members of the board already gathered for the meeting?”

“For the most part, sir. I believe they’re only waiting on the arrival of one more person, and yourself, sir.”

“Okay, good. Can you put me through to the conference room they’re gathered in?”

“Of course, sir. Please hold,” she replies.

“Thank you,” Jimin manages to get out before the transfer tone beeps in his ear.

It only sounds twice.

“Hello, Mr. Park,” a dusty voice says, and Jimin recognizes it instantly as the Vice-Chairman’s. Subtle rustling noises in the background and a faint echo inform him that he’s on speakerphone—the receptionist must have let the board members know that it was Jimin calling. Well enough. This is a conversation that all of them should hear. “This isn’t the attendance we anticipated from you today, I must admit.”

“I understand that, sir, and I apologize for not doing this in person, but something came up and I’ll be unable to join you today.”

“I see,” the Vice-Chairman says. He sounds smug, like he’d predicted this outcome, but Jimin finds himself surprisingly unaffected by it.

Huh. Funny what a little perspective can do.

“I’m mostly just calling to let you know that I won’t be seeking the position of Chairman of the Board. In fact, I’m going to be taking a step back from the executive duties of Park Enterprises. I’ll be selling a portion of my stock in the company—not a lot, just enough of it to give up my controlling share.”

Jeongguk sucks in a sharp breath, his eyes widening in shock. “Jimin,” he whispers, “what are you doing?!?”

The dusty voice on the other end of the phone call is saturated in satisfaction. “Well, I’m sure we’ll be sorry to see you go,” the Vice-Chairman says. “We wish you all the luck in your future endeavors.”
“Thank you,” Jimin says, inserting as much sincerity into his words as he can. “And good luck to you in snagging that position as Chairman. I know how much you want it.”

Despite his shock, Jeongguk snorts.

“Ah,” the Vice-Chairman says, awkwardness suddenly flooding his tone. “Thank you…I suppose…”

Jimin chokes back a laugh. “Have a good day, ladies and gentleman.” He hangs up and turns to face Jeongguk. “I feel better already.”

“Are you drunk?” Jeongguk asks, nonplussed.


“I don’t fucking believe you,” Jeongguk says, shaking his head. “What are you even thinking right now?”

Jimin leans back against the couch again and tugs the blanket up where it’s slipped off his shoulder. “Just that I have happiness to find. A place to find, where I belong. Where I can be me and stop trying to fit myself into a role that somebody else shaped for me. A role that I’m realizing I don’t actually want.”

Jeongguk stares for a moment, then tosses back the last of his whiskey, reaches for Jimin’s and finishes that too, and then says, “Well, shit.” There’s a pause, and then Jeongguk adds, “If you’re done being crazy now, can we fucking go inside?”

“Oh, hell yes,” Jimin laughs. “Please. Before my balls fall off, would be great.”

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Taehyung wakes, and the day is new.

He stretches against sheets that are slightly too luxurious but are starting to feel like home nonetheless, and rolls over. Jimin is already awake, watching him with a soft smile. “Hi.”

“Mmmm, good morning, baby.” Taehyung lets Jimin wrap an arm around his waist and pull him closer. It’s easy, these days, to fit right alongside Jimin like he never left.

He relaxes into the sheets and feels grateful that he’s here, in this suspended moment, with Jimin. It’s been almost six months since everything ended. Half a year since he killed somebody to protect the things he loves. It’s been a time of healing, of a much-needed return to normalcy that grounds them both in the new life they’re building together.

There are still bad days. There are nights when Taehyung wakes up screaming, as he dreams for the hundredth time, that he wasn’t fast enough to pull the trigger on Jiyong and he watches Jimin die in front of him. But Jimin is always right there next to him to pull him into his arms and comfort him until the tears dry and Taehyung falls back asleep to the steady beat of Jimin’s heart against his ear.

There are times when Taehyung will walk into a room and find Jimin staring blankly into space, whatever he was doing forgotten as his hands shake and his breathing becomes quick and uneven in panic. Taehyung is never far, always swift to hold Jimin’s face steady between his hands and coax his breathing into a steady rhythm again, holding him until he stops shaking.

They’ve both learned how to be patient as they each heal in their own ways, in their own time, but
they’re healing, and each day is better than the last.

Their morning routine never varies much anymore. They shower together, sometimes getting distracted by each other for long enough that the spray turns lukewarm before they finally stumble out, then getting dressed.

Taehyung makes them breakfast nearly every morning, and if he doesn’t feel like cooking, Jimin has gotten very good at preparing cold cereal for the both of them.

Then they add the last touches to their hair before jumping into the waiting car and going to work together. Jimin finishes his afternoon coffee from his travel mug while Taehyung toys with the unoccupied fingers of Jimin’s other hand.

It’s a simple, easy routine, and after the craziness that happened six months ago, a much-needed routine.

They walk into the club together, and just like every morning they kiss briefly before Jimin walks back into his office and Taehyung heads for the bar to begin prep work.

Yoongi and Hoseok always manage to stumble in about halfway through Taehyung’s prep, and this morning is no exception. He watches them as Yoongi pulls Hoseok close and whispers something to him before kissing Hoseok deeply.

“Get a room,” Taehyung calls, loud enough to make Yoongi flip him off without breaking his kiss with Hoseok. Taehyung rolls his eyes as they break apart a moment later, laughing when Yoongi slaps Hoseok’s ass as he saunters away into the back.

“You know,” Taehyung begins wryly, “you’d think that since you’re living together now you’d do all of that stuff at home instead of at work where I have to suffer.” He tosses a rag at Yoongi so he can start polishing the glasses that were washed last night. “It’s like watching your parents make out.”

“Says the man who regularly gets caught in the supply closet with the boss.”

Taehyung opens his mouth, then shuts it. Yoongi’s right, he doesn’t really have a leg to stand on here. “I guess we’re both gross, then,” he concedes.

Yoongi snorts. “Maybe you are. Have you seen my boyfriend? He’s hot as fuck.” Yoongi’s eyes go a bit distant and dreamy, and Taehyung does not need to know what Yoongi is picturing right now. “I’m one lucky guy.”

Taehyung hums in agreement. “I’ll drink to that.”

They both go about their routine in silence for a moment, moving around each other easily after so many hours spent doing the same thing together.

“So, what’s next for you and Jimin?” Yoongi asks after a while, once they’re mostly finished setting up.

Taehyung shrugs. “I don’t know. He’s got the club, I’ve got this job.” He thinks for a moment. “I’ve been thinking about finding something else to do in my spare time, something that I can feel good about.”

Yoongi studies him for a moment, chewing on his bottom lip. “You’ve have a lot of great things going for you for someone who didn’t have a lot to begin with,” he finally says. “It would be cool if
you helped others get to where you are now, you know?”

Seokjin whistles as he walks through the club to open the front doors, and Taehyung rolls Yoongi’s words around in his mind as he cuts up some lemons as garnishes. It would be good, to help others achieve more, become more, than they think they can. To help others believe in themselves the way Jimin has done for him.

Yeah, with everything Jimin has his hands in, Taehyung can find something to do, some way to give back some of what he’s been so generously given and help rid the world of violence, even if it’s just a little bit at a time.

Seokjin opens the doors, and the first customers of the night begin to walk in.

His place here at LIE was only ever supposed to be a job, but the home that he’s found here—the family that he’s found here—he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Taehyung rolls up his sleeves and gets to work.

Chapter End Notes

WE OFFER OUR SINCEREST APOLOGIES TO EVERYONE THAT’S NOT BTS IN THIS FIC. Honestly, we love Bigbang and EXO and VIXX, and all the other people we used as characters. And we highkey feel bad about what we did to them. But by the time we knew how dark this was gonna get, it was too late, and we'd already written them in. So. We're sorry, and we love you, kpop idols. OTZ

it's done. BYE BITCHES
-Kiki

well, this was a hell of a ride. i'm sorry it took us so long to get here but, uh...happy 1-year anniversary? we love you very much.

*whispers* Jimin's engagement ring is the braided one in this couples ring pic

also, the music we looped like mad fools while we wrote this chapter

<3
-callie

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter

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Visionary

Chapter Notes

Surprise!!

You thought we were done, syke! One last little piece for you guys. Just, make sure you've read chapter 10 first otherwise this is mega spoilers. Also...for reasons, this will chapter read best on a computer screen, rather than a mobile device.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The New York Times, Society Section, January 16, 2018

A Visionary Love

By Caitlin Koffi

Entrepreneur and philanthropist Park Jimin announced his engagement to Kim Taehyung yesterday via Twitter.
He captioned the photo with “I think it’ll stick this time,” a sly allusion to his previous failed engagement to longtime friend and sometime business partner, Jeon Jeongguk, and a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement that, this time, he knows he’s made the right choice.

His candid recognition of his past is refreshing, especially when you consider the close friendship Mr. Park has maintained with Mr. Jeon, but it comes as a surprise to learn just how strong a friendship Mr. Kim has developed with Mr. Jeon, as well.

“Jeongguk came with me to help me pick out the ring,” Mr. Kim told us. “He’s been Jimin’s friend for a long time—they grew up together just as much as Jiminie and I did, and I felt his opinion would be valuable.”
Mr. Jeon, who happened to arrive at Mr. Park’s home while we were catching up, laughed at that. “Tae proposed with a ring pop. What he wanted to know was what flavor I thought Jimin would like best.”

Mr. Kim feigned an affronted expression in reply. “He helped me buy an actual ring after that, for the record.”

During the exchange between them, Mr. Park sat quietly next to Mr. Kim with an overwhelmingly fond expression. He held his fiancé’s hand throughout our entire conversation, a simple band of braided silver catching the light from its place on his fourth finger.

Mr. Kim’s family lived next door to a family friend of Mr. Park’s when he was a young child, and the two of them played together throughout their childhood before losing touch. They were reunited by accident when Mr. Kim came to work for Mr. Park as a bartender in his gentleman’s club, LIE, and, as they say, the rest was history.

When asked about their ideal wedding, Messrs. Park and Kim exchange soft smiles. “We want to keep it small,” Mr. Park tells us. “Just family and close friends.”

“But don’t worry!” Mr. Kim is quick to cut in. “We’ll have a public celebration. It’ll just be…a little unconventional for a wedding.”

“What Taehyung means is that we’re going to host a fundraiser, and our wedding registry will be comprised of donation levels,” Mr. Park explains. “We don’t need things—we’re blessed to have a very comfortable life, and we’d much rather do something to share our good fortune.” Mr. Park then takes a moment then to gaze lovingly at his fiancé before confessing, “It was Tae’s idea, actually. He’s an incredibly kind, giving person.”

As we learn more about Mr. Kim, it becomes increasingly clear that Mr. Park is correct on this account. In the year since they reunited and began dating, Mr. Kim has become increasingly more active in Mr. Park’s philanthropic lifestyle, participating in half a dozen major charity events and facilitating half a dozen more. His main goal seems to be fighting urban poverty here in the city, by working to improve living conditions in struggling neighborhoods and by creating and volunteering at an after-school work experience program for at-risk youth, all while continuing his full-time employment as a bartender.

When asked why Mr. Kim continues to work for Mr. Park, he responds seriously, “How am I supposed to lead by example if I don’t hold down a steady job? Financial security, and the relief that comes with it, is a luxury to the kids I see daily. If I want them to learn that it’s something they can achieve for themselves, then I need to show them how.” He grins playfully then. “Plus, I like working at LIE. My boss is pretty cool.”

Our final question of the interview is almost an afterthought, but we can’t resist asking: what flavor ring did Mr. Kim get Mr. Park?

“Oh, um,” Mr. Park smiles sheepishly. “Strawberry lemonade. It was symbolic—I really like sour fruits like lemon, and Tae’s favorite is strawberry, so—yeah. It was really cute.”

We couldn’t agree more.
Chapter End Notes

Guys, Cinny is the BEST. This is the second time she's done artwork for us and afjdkafjdlasfks. Her art is stunning, and you can check out more of it on her Twitter and Tumblr. Go send her some love for her hard work!

**PLEASE DO NOT REPOST HER WORK.** You can retweet from her account, so that she gets the credit and the overwhelming praise that she deserves for these masterpieces.

THANK YOU, CINNY, FOR CONTRIBUTING YOUR BEAUTIFUL ART. We love you dearly, you classy bro you. <33

And thanks again to all of you, for sticking with us to the end. We really love you guys. <3
-Kiki & callie

The End.

Find Kiki on Tumblr and Twitter

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Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!