"What did you say your name was?" says Yoongi, after an eternity of awkward silence.

"Jeongguk," says Jeongguk. "Um. My name is Jeon Jeongguk. I’m a freshman."

"Oh," says Yoongi. "Fucking hell."

(In which Jeon Jeongguk goes to college, makes some friends, and learns he’s got a lot of growing to do.)
Jeongguk meets Min Yoongi at exactly 3:47 a.m. on a Friday in late September. There is a series of events leading up to this, most of them involving Taehyung, a bottle of bottom-shelf vodka, Jeongguk’s very first college party, and an unexpected midnight rainstorm, but the end result—which is the important part—is that Jeongguk is sitting at Taehyung’s tiny kitchen table at 3:47 a.m. on a Friday in late September, sipping at a mug of black coffee in a pathetic attempt to sober up, when Min Yoongi walks through the front door.

At this point, these are the things Jeongguk knows about Min Yoongi:

- He is one of Taehyung’s two roommates.
- Unlike the other roommate (Park Jimin), Yoongi is rarely in the apartment.
- In fact, he’s so elusive that Jeongguk has managed to be friends with Taehyung for an entire month, and has hung out at Taehyung’s apartment upwards of ten times, without ever once catching even the slightest glimpse of Yoongi.
- This is because Yoongi is a) a music production major, b) a workaholic, and c) possibly a cryptid.
- The only traces of Yoongi in the apartment are a pair of shoes by the doorway, a bedroom door that always remains closed, and a set of really nice bluetooth speakers in the living room.
- Yoongi does not have a Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, but he does have a Soundcloud which is apparently pretty popular.
- Taehyung and Yoongi became roommates through a ”slightly shady” housing website. For the first three months of cohabitation, Taehyung honest-to-god thought Yoongi was out so often because he was a murderer or maybe a gangster. When asked why he didn’t investigate further, Taehyung said, “He keeps the kitchen really clean.”
- Min Yoongi is not to be fucked with.

Given all these facts, Jeongguk has spent the last month thinking Yoongi is probably, like, seven feet tall with the muscles of a power-lifter and the glare of a perturbed grizzly bear. The Yoongi in Jeongguk’s head is bald and covered in tattoos and carries around a switchblade and a pair of ninja stars, and his aura is so menacing that it hangs around him like a stink cloud in a cartoon.

But the guy who walks in the front door of Taehyung’s apartment at exactly 3:47 a.m. on a Friday in late September is approximately…none of those things.

Which is why Jeongguk, who is still hunched over the table in a half-drunken stupor, blurts out, “Who are you?”

The guy stops.

Looks at him.

“I’m Min Yoongi,” says Min Yoongi. “I live here. Who are you?”

Jeongguk nearly chokes on his coffee. He feels himself do a literal double-take, staring at the guy who is apparently Min Yoongi, Roommate #3, Possible Cryptid. The thing is, Min Yoongi is not actually seven feet tall. Nor does he have the muscles of a power-lifter, nor is he bald, nor does he have any tattoos (at least none that Jeongguk can see). There are no visible weapons on his person, and his grizzly bear glare is more of a confused squint, and he really doesn’t have much of a menacing aura at all.

In reality, Min Yoongi is…kinda short. He’s short, and sort of pale and skinny and all-around
delicate-looking, and he's wearing a black baseball cap and a huge black hoodie and a weird, lumpy scarf. His nose and cheeks are pink from the cold.

“I’m Jeongguk,” says Jeongguk. For some reason, it comes out a little breathy and high-pitched. “I’m, um, I’m a friend of Tae’s.”

“Right,” says Yoongi. “You’re the singer kid.”

“I also dance,” says Jeongguk, and promptly wants to brain himself on the kitchen table. “I’m double-majoring. Um, in both of those things. Because it was too hard to, um, choose.” Why is he still talking? What is wrong with him? Is it too late to barrel-roll across the living room and out of the fifth-story window? He takes a gulp of coffee and immediately regrets it, because now his mouth is filled with very hot black coffee. Whatever. It’s better than rambling.

Yoongi just nods. “That’s cool. Friend of mine is double-majoring in music production and astrophysics. He couldn’t choose, either.”

“Wow. He must be really smart.”

“He is.” Yoongi toes off his boots (he’s wearing fuzzy socks. Min Yoongi is wearing fuzzy socks in September, this is not a drill) and pads over to the kitchenette, pouring himself a glass of water. Then he looks at Jeongguk again. “…Are you drinking my coffee?”

“No,” says Jeongguk. “Yes. Maybe. It was just sitting there in the coffee pot? I thought it was—I didn’t think anybody would—I mean, it was sort of cold and gross—”

“How dare you,” says Yoongi mildly.

—and at the time I was like, a tiny bit drunk. I might still be a tiny bit drunk. For, um, full disclosure.” Jeongguk blinks at the table top, simultaneously horrified with himself and unable to shut the fuck up. “Tae’s already asleep and he said I could crash on the couch because of, um, the drunk thing, and so now I guess I’m invading your home and stealing your coffee. I am very, very sorry.”

He stands up, faces Yoongi, and bends at the waist in a deep bow.

What the fuck.

It’s too late to stop. Jeongguk is committed. He has committed himself to this fucking bow. He finishes and sits back down again, screaming internally. “Sorry again,” he mumbles. “For the coffee. And also for this entire interaction.”

When Jeongguk looks up, Min Yoongi is staring at him.

Yoongi’s got the coffee pot in one hand and an empty mug in the other, but he’s not pouring himself a cup. He’s just—staring. His mouth, which is soft and pink, is hanging open a little.

It’s not a great time to notice that Min Yoongi’s eyes are sharp and foxlike, dark and bottomless, but that doesn’t stop Jeongguk from noticing the hell out of it.

He can feel himself blushing. This night is rapidly turning out to be, like, seventeen nightmares rolled into one. Right here, right now, Jeongguk makes a vow to never again go partying with Kim Taehyung, and also to never again drink vodka, and also to do some research re: becoming a monk and living forever in self-enforced solitude. Just to cover all his bases.
“What did you say your name was?” says Yoongi, after an eternity of awkward silence.

“Jeongguk,” says Jeongguk. “Um. My name is Jeon Jeongguk. I’m a freshman.”

“Oh,” says Yoongi. “Fucking hell.”

“Holy crap, dude,” says Taehyung the second he opens the door to his apartment. “When was the last time you freakin’ slept?”

Jeongguk blinks at him. “What?”

“No offense, but you look literally dead on your feet. Like, you don’t even look like a zombie. Zombies are more alive than you are. You look like you died and then somebody tried to taxidermy your corpse but they did a really shitty job.”

“Thank you,” says Jeongguk.

“I’m serious. How long have you been up?”

“Not that long,” says Jeongguk, and then he passes out.

He wakes up on Taehyung’s couch (which Taehyung and Jimin both call the Sex Couch, which is disgusting in so many ways) what feels like five years later, disoriented and half-panicking and with no idea how the heck he ended up at Taehyung’s place at all. The last thing he remembers is pulling his second all-nighter in a row, and then he maybe went to the dining hall? For breakfast? And more coffee, he definitely drank more coffee, which in retrospect might not have been the best decision he’s ever made. In fact, now that he’s thinking about it, there is a distinct possibility Jeongguk stayed awake for 60 hours and then went to the dining hall and drank 3 cups of coffee on an empty stomach. Then he somehow dragged himself to Taehyung’s and arrived just in time to swoon like an Austen character on Taehyung’s doorstep.

He pulls himself upright, trying to make as little physical contact with the Sex Couch as possible. It’s still morning—his phone is dead, but the microwave clock tells him it’s nine a.m., so he lost about ten minutes. Outside the windows, the sky is pale and cloudy, gray with winter. The lackluster sunlight hurts Jeongguk’s eyes.

His head hurts.

His whole body hurts.

Maybe there’s a reason you’re not supposed to stay awake for 60 hours straight.

“So,” says a low, gravelly voice somewhere to his left. “You’re alive.”

Jeongguk whips around.

Min Yoongi is sitting at the kitchen table, eating a bowl of cereal and scrolling idly on his phone. He’s wearing glasses, which is a lot to process right now. Glasses and an oversized gray sweater. Does Min Yoongi own any clothes that are not oversized? Is he aware that Jeongguk is in a very vulnerable state right now and thus should not have to deal with this?

“Taehyung is currently running, and I mean that literally, to the corner store to buy vitamins, iron pills, and ssanghwatang for your dumb ass. I think you traumatized him.”

“What? How?”

“Well, you fainted—”

“I didn’t faint,” says Jeongguk, pouting a little. “I passed out.”

“Kid, the last time I saw someone swoon like that, I was watching *Pride and Prejudice.*”

“You—you were here the whole time?”

“I was standing directly behind Taehyung when he opened the door. So. Yes.”

Jeongguk grabs the nearest pillow and shoves his face into it, Sex Couch germs be damned. “*Aaaaaagh,*” he whisper-screams.

“The whole thing was very dramatic,” says Yoongi. “Taehyung and I thought you were dead.”

“I wouldn’t just *die* on your *doorstep,*” says Jeongguk, pulling his face out of the pillow. He gives Yoongi a scandalized look. “That would be so awful.”

“You mean for us?”

“Yeah! You would be stuck with my body.”

“We could use you as a doorstop.”

“I dunno,” Jeongguk says, thinking it over. “I’d probably be too heavy to just move around like that. I’m mostly muscle. In swimming pools I sink like a rock.”

Yoongi coughs. “That’s—that’s fascinating.” He fiddles with his phone, gazing intently at whatever’s on the screen. “So you—work out a lot?”

“Yeah, four or five days a week. I started just doing it to build up flexibility and core strength for dance, but now I really like it.”

“Cool. Cool, that’s cool.”

“I guess,” says Jeongguk. He’s not really sure why this conversation is happening, but it beats talking about how he fainted in front of Min Yoongi. “It’s just a fun hobby. Really satisfying and stuff. Like, in the beginning I was just this scrawny little weakling. I could barely handle the ten-pound weights. And now I could probably bench press you.”

Yoongi chokes on his cereal. He spends a good ten seconds hunched over with his back to Jeongguk, and when he straightens up again his face is bright red.

“Are you okay?” says Jeongguk. “Do you need some water?”

“Nope,” says Yoongi. “No, just—stay where you are. Don’t, uh, don’t move.” He gives Jeongguk a short, wide-eyed look, and then seems to curl in on himself a little. His face is still flushed from the coughing fit. “Don’t get up, okay? You’ll probably just faint again.”
“Hyung,” Jeongguk complains.

“No whining. You sit there until Taehyung gets back. The hell did you even do to yourself, anyway?”

Jeongguk clamps his mouth shut.

Yoongi’s eyes narrow behind his glasses.

“Kid,” Yoongi says. “What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything!”

“People who look like you don’t just go around fainting for no reason.”

“What does that mean?” Jeongguk asks. “What kind of people do I look like?”

“I—,” says Yoongi, and then takes a huge bite of cereal and chews for a long time and washes it down with a long sip of coffee. “I just meant, you know. You look like you eat your Wheaties.”

“My Wheaties?”

“Your protein shakes. Your veggies. Whatever.”

“Oh.” Jeongguk contemplates that for a moment. He hugs his legs to his chest and rests his chin on top of his knees, watching Yoongi through his eyelashes. He doesn’t want to admit it, but even that slight movement makes his head feel a little woozy again. All of his limbs feel like bags of water.

“Jeongguk,” Yoongi says, softer this time, and Jeongguk realizes this is the first time Yoongi has ever said his name aloud. “C’mon, kid. What’d you do?”

“I pulled two all-nighters in a row,” Jeongguk mumbles. “I had three papers due, plus I’m taking this calculus GE and I just don’t get what we’re learning right now, but there’s a midterm next week so I had to study and honestly I still don’t get it? But I have to study more, but I don’t know how to start studying because I don’t even know what I don’t know. So first it was the papers and then calculus and also a friend of mine needed help with her studio project but she could only meet up at like, midnight last night. Because midterms. So I did that and then I got coffee and then I think maybe I went to the library but I don’t really remember. Then I submitted my papers and then this morning I went to the dining hall and had more coffee and then I came here. And. Yeah.”

“That was really stupid,” says Yoongi.

“I know.”

“When was the last time you ate? Coffee doesn’t count.”

“Um…maybe yesterday afternoon.”

Yoongi glares at him.

“I know it was stupid,” Jeongguk says into his knees. “I just. I had to get everything done.”

Silence. Half of Jeongguk wants to look up and see what Yoongi’s face is doing; the other half is perfectly content to keep his eyes squeezed shut. It’s dumb, and irrational, but it feels like Yoongi is mad at him and Jeongguk really, really can’t handle people being mad at him, especially if they’re older, especially if, like Yoongi, they are cool and self-assured and everything Jeongguk is not. It’s
so dumb. Yoongi is a senior and they’ve only met a handful of times and most of those meetings consisted of one of them passing the other on the way in or out of the apartment. There’s no reason for Yoongi to give a crap about him, let alone get mad over Jeongguk being an idiot, but—

“Hey,” says Yoongi. “Hey, I’m sorry. That was harsh. I wasn’t…I wasn’t trying to say that you’re stupid. I mean, shit, I’m not exactly the poster child for making healthy choices.”

Jeongguk cracks one eye open. Yoongi is frowning, but less intensely than before. He’s sitting on the edge of his chair. Like maybe he was about to get up and then decided against it.

“Tae said you’re a workaholic,” Jeongguk says before he can think it through.

Yoongi’s mouth quirks on one side. “That’s putting it mildly. I’ve never fainted——”

“Passed out.”

“—swooned like a Victorian noblewoman in a corset, but I’ve come pretty close.”

“It’s not fun.”

“No, I guess not. Taehyung should be back soon. Do you want anything to eat before that?”

“To be honest, I don’t really know if I can eat right now,” Jeongguk says. “I feel like all my organs were replaced with sad helium balloons.”

“Sad helium balloons?”

“Like helium balloons a week after the party happens? When they’re just sort of half-deflated and floating around a couple inches above the floor.”

Yoongi nods. “I see. That makes sense.” He picks up his cereal spoon and then puts it back down again with a clink. “Do you wanna watch Netflix?”

“Yes,” says Jeongguk.

So that’s what they do. Yoongi joins Jeongguk on the couch, leaving the middle cushion’s worth of space between them, and sets up his laptop on the coffee table. They watch The Great British Bakeoff, which is how Jeongguk learns that Yoongi is weirdly knowledgeable about patisserie but doesn’t really care for sweet things in general, and Jeongguk tells Yoongi about the time he tried to make a cake for his older brother’s birthday but he forgot the baking powder so really he just made a very thick, glutinous chocolate slab.

“It was his 18th birthday,” Jeongguk says, “and I essentially made him an edible tombstone.”

Yoongi laughs.

He’s got a laugh like a cat hacking up a hairball: wheezing and raspy and more breath than anything else. It seems like the kind of laugh that is not so easily earned.

Jeongguk’s always liked a challenge.
(When Taehyung gets home with the vitamins and the iron pills and the ssanghwatang, he finds Jeongguk and Yoongi on the couch with slightly less than the middle cushion’s worth of space between them. *The Great British Bakeoff* is still playing in the background, but it’s on mute. Jeongguk is fast asleep. Yoongi is just sitting there, not doing much of anything at all.

Taehyung catches Yoongi’s gaze. Raises his eyebrows.

“Not a word,” says Yoongi.)

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**[UNKNOWN NUMBER]**

hey jeongguk
this is yoongi

**jeongguk**

oh!!
hi hyung
how did you get my number??

**min yoongi**

tae

**jeongguk**

oh duh lol
cool
did you need something?
or like
i don’t know haha

**min yoongi**

you mentioned being stressed about calculus

**jeongguk**

ah
yeah i have a midterm coming up and i’m so screwed :(((
i’m usually ok at math but this one topic is just like killing me :((((

**min yoongi**

okay well
my best friend is a math tutor in his spare time

**jeongguk**

!!!!
really????
i didn’t know that

**min yoongi**

yeah
his name is namjoon
he’s the music prod/astrophys double major
he’s really smart. good tutor too.

jeongguk
oh wow
do you think he would be able to tutor me??
i would pay him of course
but my midterm is next week so i understand if he doesn’t have an opening

min yoongi
nah, i already talked to him.
he’s free today and thursday afternoon, plus all of sunday

jeongguk
omg
are you serious????

min yoongi
yeah
here’s his number

[CONTACT SHARED]

jeongguk
holy crap hyung
you’re AMAZING oh my god
thank you so much???
wowowow i owe you my life
and my gpa

min yoongi
it’s not a big deal
should’ve mentioned it the other day

jeongguk
dude no
thank you so much, seriously
pls pls let me buy you a coffee or w/e to repay you

min yoongi
i don’t think you should be allowed within 50ft of coffee anymore
clearly you cannot be trusted

jeongguk
that’s rude >:(
it was ONE TIME and i learned my lesson
i’ve been getting 6-8 hours of sleep every night since

min yoongi
good.

jeongguk
how can i repay you if not in coffee
do you want food?? i’ll buy you a meal

**min yoongi**
you don’t have to do anything
it was no trouble

**jeongguk**
but i WANT to do something
i really, really appreciate the help
i’ve been freaking out for days now
this is maybe tmi but i lose my scholarship if my gpa falls below a 3.5 and i was starting to get…legit concerned, so
really. thank you.
:)

**min yoongi**
oh
it’s okay
glad i could help

**jeongguk**
the only thing you could do to help me more is let me buy you a meal.
plsssssss hyung

**min yoongi**
okay okay fine
i like lamb skewers

**jeongguk**
!! me too!!!! :D
(but don’t think i don’t notice you picking something cheap…)

**min yoongi**
¯\_(ツ)_/¯

**jeongguk**
sigh
when are you free?

---

They meet two days later, and Jeongguk spends entirely too much time choosing his outfit beforehand. He sends some mirror pics to Taehyung and Jimin out of desperation, which is regrettable.

**group chat: “les tres musketeers”**

**lizard boi**
1. ok obviously go with outfit #2, those jeans make ur butt look Incredible and also everyone knows it’s impossible to NOT look hot in a gray henley
2. wear ur black bomber over top. ur welcome
3. ARE U GOING ON A DATE????????????????

the smolest
yeah outfit 2 for sure
wait
*are* you going on a date???
omg!

lizard boi
he hasn’t responded, it’s totally a date
im crying our son is all grown up

the smolest
this is so bittersweet
do you think he’ll still visit us? now that he’s an adult?

lizard boi
of course he will, we raised him right
im literally so proud rn
wait kookie who is it tho
who is ur hot wednesday night date

jeongguk
it’s not a date.
and i’m not telling you guys anything

lizard boi
if it ACTUALLY wasn’t a date you would tell us who it was
outfit panic + secrecy = ITS A DATE

the smolest
very clever, tae

lizard boi
thank u jiminie

jeongguk
there’s definitely a flaw in your logic somewhere

lizard boi
bitch where
…………lmao i see jeongguk has conveniently forgotten how 2 read

the smolest
he’s probably just busy

lizard boi
mm yeh

the smolest
because he’s on a date

lizard boi
bc he’s on a d
OH

the smolest
OH

lizard boi
wow we rly are soulmates tbh i love us <3

the smolest
i love us too <3

jeongguk
i need new friends.

He goes with Outfit #2 and puts his black bomber jacket over it, even though this thing with Yoongi does not even begin to approach date territory. It’s only happening because Yoongi did Jeongguk a favor and Jeongguk doesn’t like owing people, so he’s gotta balance the scales.

He may or may not also wear his thickest-soled boots so he will appear a tiny bit taller than he actually is.

It’s not a date.

People like Min Yoongi (cool, owns a form-fitting leather jacket) do not date people like Jeon Jeongguk (uncool, frequently eats convenience store ramen for breakfast), and that’s totally fine. They’re just going to get cheapass lamb skewers and eat them probably in awkward silence, and then Yoongi will make some excuse and flee the scene and Jeongguk will wallow in his misery and then go home to play Overwatch.

He runs a hand through his hair, makes a face at his reflection, and leaves his dorm.

Outside, the city is alive and teeming. The sidewalks are packed with groups of college kids laughing and shouting to each other; the streets are choked with bumper-to-bumper traffic, taillights a glowing red blur. It’s November. A cold snap. The air smells like cigarettes and snow.

Jeongguk loves Seoul.

He loves the dirty of it.

He loves that half the people here are young and hungry, just like him. They all migrated here, clawing out a space for themselves in a fast, glamorous city. They’re all chasing something. They’re all wide-eyed and kind of starved.

Just like him.

A couple blocks off campus there’s a wide alley with a night market and a pop-up ramen bar. Jeongguk can smell fried fish cakes and grilled meat from half a block away. And—shit, there’s Yoongi. He’s standing under a streetlamp, hands in his pockets. He is wearing a puffy coat and a scarf and a beanie with a pom-pom on it. His body language reads disgruntled, because it sort of
always does.

Jeongguk is helpless.

He pretty much jogs the last half-block until he’s tapping Yoongi on the shoulder. Yoongi twitches and blinks up at him for a long moment, as if Jeongguk startled him out of something much quieter and deeper than just zoning out.

“Hey,” says Jeongguk, and flicks the pom-pom on Yoongi’s hat. “I like your hat.”

Yoongi grimaces. “It was a gift from Tae.”

The hat is pastel pink and looks handmade. “I kinda figured.”

“He went through a phase. I’m just glad he didn’t knit me a onesie.”

“Was that…on the table?”

“You’ll see for yourself, soon enough. Jimin starts wearing his as soon as it gets cold.”

“To be fair,” says Jeongguk, “I’m sure it takes a lot of skill to knit a onesie.”

“It also takes a lot of skill to be an opera singer. That doesn’t mean I want to sit through an opera.”

They’re walking now. Across the street with a wave of people, most of them headed for the night market. The smell of meat and fried things is even stronger now, along with the sound of muffled pop music from the ramen bar and a hundred different voices laughing and talking.

The market is crowded, even on a Wednesday. It’s much warmer here with all the smoke and heat from cooking food, and the aisle between the two rows of vendors is narrow enough that Jeongguk finds himself bumping into Yoongi with every other step. Like he’s a socially awkward salmon following a cuter, more experienced salmon upstream.

“Here,” says Yoongi, after they’ve found the lamb skewer stall and are holding two skewers each, “let’s find a place to sit.”

“Oh,” says Jeongguk.

Maybe he doesn’t do such a great job at keeping the surprise out of his voice, because Yoongi squints at him. “Unless you want to leave,” he says slowly. “You paid, so like, feel free to—”

“No!” Jeongguk says. “No, I don’t have any plans. I can stay. I was just—yeah. No, it’s fine, I can totally stay.”

“Cool,” says Yoongi.

“Cool,” Jeongguk echoes.

Helpless.
Two lamb skewers each turns into three, though Yoongi insists on paying for the third ones. Then sitting on the curb turns into walking slowly through the market, sharing a bag of candied peanuts, which turns into leaving the market and walking all the way to the quieter residential streets on the northern edge of campus, where there are apartment buildings and cheap student housing and not much else. They finish off the peanuts somewhere between eight and nine p.m., but they don’t stop walking. Jeongguk balls up the greasy paper bag and tosses it up in the air, catching it, playing a little game, and they don’t stop walking.

Because they also kind of can’t stop talking.

It started with music. They were just sitting there on the curb, polishing off their lamb skewers in the predicted semi-awkward silence, and then Jeongguk blurted out, “Those speakers in the living room —those are yours, right?”

And Yoongi said, “Uh. Yeah?”

And Jeongguk said, “I’m so jealous.”

And Yoongi smiled.

It turns out they actually have a lot in common. Not with their tastes in music—Yoongi likes gangsta rap and old school hip-hop, Jeongguk is an unapologetic Top 40 slut—but with their passion for it. Yoongi, Jeongguk learns, is not just a producer, composer, and lyricist. (God.) He’s also a freaking rapper, and in his own words, he does “pretty okay” in the underground circuit. Which, in Yoongi-speak, means he’s lowkey famous.

Jeongguk is getting well-acquainted with Yoongi-speak.

In return, Jeongguk tells Yoongi about how he got into singing, how he came up here from Busan, and about how he’s been considering a minor in music production to go along with his double major in Dance and Vocal Performance. They go along in that vein for like forty minutes, and then Yoongi mentions this obscure experimental electropop album that Jeongguk 1. listened to months ago, and 2. genuinely enjoyed, and they’re off again, and then that turns into quoting their top 5 favorite lyrics, and that turns into playing Marry, Fuck, Kill, and then at some point they find a tiny, janky-looking playground with a swingset and a cracked slide and one of those mini-carousel death trap things, and they sit in the swings and push slowly back and forth, and they keep talking.

Then it’s midnight.

“Shit,” says Yoongi, checking the time on his phone. “What the fuck. When the fuck did that happen.”

Jeongguk checks his own phone and is greeted with 78 new text messages, all of which are from Taehyung and Jimin. A quick scroll tells him that the messages start out teasing him about his “date” and then grow increasing frantic (Jimin) and lecherous (Taehyung) as the hours passed by without a response.

the smolest
JEONGGUUK!! i do not appreciate being ignored!
please at least respond with a single letter so i know you’re just getting laid and i don’t have to worry about reading police reports in the morning :(
lizard boi
i hope u know u will have to tell me Everything about tonight, boy
EVERYTHIGN
im talking length, girth
p.s. hope ur not dead

jeongguk >> group chat: “les tres musketeers”
i’m not dead
sorry for worrying you
will let you know when home

His phone starts vibrating immediately, but he puts it back on silent and stuffs it in his pocket.

“I should probably head back,” he says.

Beside him, Yoongi nods. Yoongi’s gloved fingers are wrapped around the swing chains, the toes of his boots scuffing the half-frozen ground. His nose is pink and shiny, his cheeks flushed. Bits of bleach-blond hair are sticking out from under his hat.

He looks small and soft and chilly and not at all like anything Jeongguk was expecting, or was prepared for.

“Yeah,” Yoongi says in his raspy voice, “yeah, me too. Didn’t realize it was so late.”

“Class in the morning?”

“Work.”

“Where do you w—?” Jeongguk starts, and then realizes he’s about to begin a whole new conversation, so instead he just swallows the question. “Well. I’ll walk you home. I think we’re pretty close to your place?”

“’S like two streets down,” says Yoongi. “You don’t need to walk me, what the hell.”

“You’re small and you’re wearing a pink pom-pom hat. I feel like you need an escort.”

“Fuck you entirely,” says Yoongi. “I carry pepper spray.”

“Do you really?”

Yoongi huffs, reaches into his coat pocket, and pulls out a tiny can of pepper spray. “Do you want a demonstration of how this works?” he asks. “Or do you wanna stop playing white fuckin’ knight?”

Jeongguk pouts at him. “I just wanna make sure you get home okay.”

“I am not going to let someone four years younger than me walk me home like I’m some kind of damsel. No. Absolutely not. I have a shred of dignity, kid.”

“Then how about I happen to walk in the same direction as you for totally unrelated reasons, and we can keep talking about Cubase?”

Yoongi glares at him for a long moment.

Jeongguk gives him a cheeky grin.
“…Fine,” says Yoongi, kicking at the frozen mulch. “Have it your way. Christ, you’re a brat.”

“Yup,” says Jeongguk. He takes a flying leap off his swing and sticks the landing like an Olympic gymnast, doing a goofy little pose with his arms in the air. When he turns around, Yoongi is looking at him. “Come on, dude. My hands are cold.”

“Don’t call me dude, you gross frat boy,” says Yoongi. “How are they just now cold? We’ve been outside for five hours.”

“I was distracted!”

“Dumbass,” says Yoongi, but he slips his own gloves off and insists that Jeongguk wear them for the walk home.

They talk about Cubase.

And Yoongi’s current obsession with the London hip-hop scene.

And Jeongguk’s classes, because Yoongi is familiar with a bunch of his professors and can offer pointers on how to make friends with the crusty ones.

Finally, they reach Yoongi’s building. Yoongi pauses as he fumbles with his keys, the glow from the streetlamps turning his eyelashes golden, lighting up the darkness of his eyes.

Jeongguk realizes with a sick sort of thud that he really, really doesn’t want this night to end, at least not like this: with the two of them standing a polite three feet apart, Yoongi’s scarf pulled up to cover his mouth. If Jeongguk had his way, he would step forward and tug the scarf down, whisper his goodnight into Yoongi’s mouth. But tonight, Jeongguk is not going to have his way. He knows that, and it’s fine, but it does make his stomach hurt a little bit.

“Thanks,” he says, as they linger outside the entrance to the building.

Yoongi glances at him. “For what?”

“I dunno. Hanging out with me, I guess. It’s cool talking to someone who—gets it. The music thing. I mean, obviously Jimin dances and Tae’s into everything but…yeah. Just. Thanks.”

“Yeah, kid,” says Yoongi after a short pause. “Anytime. You, uh, you have my number, so….”

“Cool.” Jeongguk smiles and punches him lightly on the shoulder. Yoongi makes a fake-hurt noise and staggers backward, pretending like he’s been mortally wounded, but his dark eyes are glittering.

There’s a moment.

There’s a moment where Yoongi should say, “Okay, well, see ya,” and Jeongguk should reply, “Yup, goodnight,” and they should part ways.

Instead, Yoongi just sort of—goes still. He’s still clutching at his shoulder where Jeongguk’s knuckles brushed against his coat, and his keys are in the other hand, but he’s not going for the door. He’s just standing there, his eyes flickering over Jeongguk’s face and then to the sidewalk and then up again.

If it were anyone else, Jeongguk would probably just go for it. Step forward and curl his hands around Yoongi’s face and tip his chin up and kiss him. If it were anyone else—

But it’s Yoongi. It’s Yoongi, and he lives with Jeongguk’s best friends, which means that if
Jeongguk fucks this up (because there’s literally no way Yoongi’s thinking of kissing Jeongguk right now, and also maybe Yoongi’s not even queer? Who knows, he’s chill with Taehyung and Jimin but that doesn’t necessarily mean—), if Jeongguk fucks this up it’ll be awkward and horrible forever and besides, Yoongi calls Jeongguk kid and keeps making a point of mentioning their age difference and—and there’s a very good chance this whole thing is just, like, Cool Older Brother hanging out with Bratty Younger Brother. Because Yoongi is nice like that.

If it were anyone else…but it’s not anyone else. It’s Yoongi. And Jeongguk is Jeongguk.

So he just says, “Have a good night, hyung,” and then he leaves, eyes on the ground, unable to look at Yoongi’s face.

Halfway home, he realizes he’s still wearing Yoongi’s soft, warm gloves.

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Jeongguk’s first-ever college dance show comes in early December, the week before winter break. At this point in his life Jeongguk’s performed in over two dozen shows (he did dance and theatre in high school, plus some chorus and a capella performances) but he still gets nervous. He still worries, in all the weeks leading up to opening night, that he 1. isn’t good enough, 2. hasn’t practiced enough, and 3. will fuck up the choreography so bad that the entire audience laughs at him and boos him offstage, possibly while throwing literal tomatoes.

It could happen.

“No, it really couldn’t,” says Taehyung, not even looking up from his textbook. “First of all, people don’t just carry around bags of rotten tomatoes, it’s 2017. Second of all, you are definitely good enough, that’s why you’re in the show, and you have definitely, definitely practiced enough. If anything, you’ve overpracticed.”

Jeongguk stares at him, horrified. “Overpracticing? Is that a thing? Can that happen?”

“No! I mean, maybe. I don’t know. But not to you. Also, third of all, you’re not gonna forget anything. You’ve got this, my sweet little garden gnome.”

“Little? We’re the same height.”

“Well, I’m older.”

“That’s irrelevant!”


Jeongguk puts him in a headlock.

Five minutes later, that’s how Yoongi and Jimin find them.

“You know, I should be surprised,” says Yoongi, taking in the scene from the doorway. (Jeongguk is on the floor, Taehyung sprawled across his lap and flailing helplessly.) “But I’m not surprised. I
feel nothing right now. That’s so sad.”

“Jeonggukie, please don’t actually kill Tae,” says Jimin, trailing in after Yoongi. “He still owes me a month of laundry.”

Jeongguk releases Taehyung, who scuttles away to hide behind Jimin. “He started it.”

“And I’m finishing it,” says Jimin. “No killing Tae until after New Year’s.”

“Thank you, darling,” says Taehyung, and bites Jimin’s ear.

Gross.

“Gross,” Jeongguk tells them. He leaves them in the living room and heads down the narrow hallway to the two bedrooms. One of them has an open door, through which he can see Taehyung’s art posters and DVDs and general organized chaos and, on the other side of the room, Jimin’s neatly made bed, dance trophies, and stuffed animal collection.

The other door is closed. Jeongguk knocks. A second later, Yoongi calls out, “C’mon in.”

Yoongi’s bedroom isn’t anything special. It’s neat, minimalist, no posters on the walls or clutter on the floor. There’s a bed, a bookshelf full of CDs, a mini keyboard in one corner. The only messy thing in here is Yoongi’s desk. It’s covered in notebooks, composition books, a bunch of balled up papers. Torn-out pages covered in Yoongi’s spiky handwriting. Headphones, a laptop, a hard drive, another pair of headphones, a metronome, an ancient tape recorder. If Jeongguk were sappy (or poetic) he’d say Yoongi’s desk looks like the inside of Yoongi’s head.

But he’s not sappy (or poetic) so he doesn’t say that. He keeps it to himself.

“Hi,” he says, and flops onto Yoongi’s bed.

Yoongi, who is sitting up against the headboard, takes his earbuds out of his ears and squints at Jeongguk. “I don’t recall saying you could sit on my bed.”

“I’m not sitting. I’m lying down.”

“Even worse.”

“But hyung,” Jeongguk whines, rolling over onto his back and peering up at Yoongi upside down. “There’s nowhere else to sit if I wanna hang out with you.”

“Sit on the floor,” says Yoongi, but his mouth is curving up at the edges. He passes Jeongguk one of his earbuds. “You heard this before?”

Jeongguk scoots closer and takes it and listens.

This is usually what happens when he and Yoongi hang out together, just the two of them. They go get lamb skewers or ramen or McDonald’s, and they sit on the curb (on a bench, in the car, in a corner table, on Yoongi’s bed, on the floor in Jeongguk’s dorm room) and share earbuds and listen to music. Sometimes they talk, sometimes they don’t.

It’s weird, maybe, but it works for them. And now it’s gotten to the point where Jeongguk craves their quiet little hangouts, and if they don’t see each other for a few days he misses this. Misses Yoongi: his steady presence, his rasping voice, his calloused hands. The way he talks about music. The way his eyes close when he listens to it. The way he sways into Jeongguk, sometimes, if he
really likes a song.

Today, it’s jazz. Not usually Yoongi’s thing, or really Jeongguk’s either, but he can see why Yoongi likes this song. It’s slow, modern, a deep bass and some electronic notes layered under the singer’s soft, crooning voice. Jeongguk scoots up even further so his head is right beside Yoongi’s thigh. He concentrates on the song, letting his eyes fall shut.

“I like this,” he murmurs, and he’s not just talking about the song—but Yoongi doesn’t have to know that. “Who is it?”

“Friend of mine,” says Yoongi. His voice is softer than usual. “Shin Suran. She’s a grad student.”

“She’s amazing.”

“Mm.”

Somehow, Jeongguk falls asleep.

He’s not really sure how or when it happens. All he knows is that one moment he’s lying there on Yoongi’s bed, listening to jazz, and the next moment he is waking up. Or sort of waking up: drifting, floating on dark water, a new song playing from somewhere far away.

“Oh my god,” someone coos. Jeongguk hears it as if through a long, echoing tunnel. “Oh my god, Tae, get your phone. This is so cute.”

“Shut up,” hisses Yoongi from directly above Jeongguk’s head. “Shut up, don’t you dare—”

“They’re cuddling!”

“We are not cuddling! Shut up!”

“Jiminnie? What’s going—ohmygod,” says Taehyung. “Oh my god, this is our Christmas card photo. This is the best thing I’ve ever seen.”

“For the love of god, shut up,” says Yoongi. “Don’t fucking wake him up, you little shits.”

Jimin snorts. “He’s dead to the world. His face is like, in your ass.”

“It is not!” Yoongi whisper-yells. “He’s the one who—he turned sideways, I don’t know, he just sort of—like, nuzzled—”

“He nuzzled his face into your ass?”

“It’s my hip, and shut up.”

“Well, I have photographic evidence,” says Taehyung. “So much photographic evidence.”

“I will throw your phone out the window.”

There’s a little pinging noise.

“No worries,” says Taehyung. “I just emailed them to Jimin.”

Yoongi sucks in a breath. “I hate you both so much.”

“It’s not our fault you decided to spend your afternoon cuddling with Jeonggukie.”
“In bed, no less,” says Taehyung. “Like a couple of harlots.”

“Shut up shut up shut up,” says Yoongi. “He’s gonna wake up, shit.”

Jeongguk, for the record, is still drifting and doesn’t feel like waking up. He’s super comfortable right now. Yoongi’s bed is ridiculously soft, his comforter is all fresh and clean-smelling, and Jeongguk’s face may or may not be pressed up against Yoongi’s thigh but he’s not even gonna worry about it. Everything’s chill. There’s a distinct possibility that Jeongguk’s wrapped his arm around Yoongi’s waist, like, in his sleep. Like a koala. It’s chill.

“You should pet his hair,” says Taehyung. “He loves when we pet his hair.”

“I’m not petting his hair,” says Yoongi. “Go away forever.”

“Fine,” sings Jimin, “but you better be nice to us. Don’t forget, we got photos.”

“Are you blackmailing me right now?”

“No,” says Taehyung.

“Yes,” says Jimin.

“A little,” says Taehyung.

“Leave,” says Yoongi, and then there’s the sound of Jimin cackling and the bedroom door closing behind them.

One beat. Two. Jeongguk drifts. The earbud is still partway in his ear, and he can hear an R&B song playing. It’s not something he recognizes, but it’s pretty.

A touch at his forehead. Fingertips. Slowly, hesitantly, Yoongi’s hand slides into Jeongguk’s hair. Jeongguk keeps his breathing steady, keeps his eyes closed, and after a long moment, Yoongi begins to run his fingers through Jeongguk’s hair.

It’s gentle. Yoongi is gentle, almost awkward, like he’s never really done something like this before. Even half asleep, Jeongguk can tell that Yoongi’s movements are measured instead of unthinking or casual. He skritches his fingernails lightly across Jeongguk’s scalp, and it feels really, really good. Jimin and Taehyung weren’t lying. Jeongguk loves having his hair petted.

Yoongi scratches above his ear a little—like he’s petting a dog, which, sure—and Jeongguk sighs and nudges up into it. His arm tightens around Yoongi’s waist.

Yoongi’s fingers go still. It sounds like maybe he stops breathing. But Jeongguk doesn’t want the touching to stop, so he pretends to be deeply asleep. Lets his body settle even more into Yoongi’s bed.

It takes a while for Yoongi to unfreeze, but finally he begins to run his fingers through Jeongguk’s hair again, slow and tentative and still kind of awkward. Jeongguk finds himself drifting further and further away, until finally his whole brain goes quiet.
Three days later: the dance show.

The Dance Show. In Jeongguk’s head, it’s capitalized. He starts panicking roughly 48 hours beforehand and keeps panicking while he’s waiting backstage, in the wings, in costume, his eyes lined with kohl, his mouth tinted red. He panics as he watches the first number and the second. He panics every time he catches a glimpse of the audience: the entire auditorium filled with parents, siblings, groups of college kids here to support their friends. Taehyung is out there somewhere. He’s here for both Jimin and Jeongguk. At this point Kim Taehyung is probably Jeongguk’s best friend, but he’s never seen Jeongguk dance before. (Not seriously, at least; not sober.) Jeongguk really really wants to be good tonight.

Panic.

Onstage, the junior year ballet students leap flawlessly into their final pose. The music ends with a single strain of violin. The audience claps; the second number has just ended; it’s time.

Panic.

The stage lights go dark. Slowly, the ocean-rush of applause fades into silence. It’s the kind of silence that thrums with anticipation. Everyone is waiting for the music to start up again. Everyone is waiting for the next dance.

Panic.

A single drumbeat.

Jeongguk’s cue.

He steps onstage, and all the panic just—disappears.

“MY SON,” someone yells, and Jeongguk laughs. Two seconds later, Taehyung is barreling through the crowd and flinging himself into Jeongguk’s arms.

They’re in the foyer of the auditorium for the post-show kiss-and-cry. Parents everywhere. Bouquets of red roses. Like Jeongguk, most of the other dancers have changed back into their regular clothes but are still wearing full faces of thick, glittery stage makeup, their hair twisted up in fancy buns or slicked back with product. It’s always weird to look and feel so half-transformed.

Jeongguk hugs Taehyung back, and then hugs Jimin, who has appeared at Taehyung’s side. Jimin is wearing more makeup than Jeongguk: red eyeshadow, dark contours on his cheekbones, his foundation all streaked and shiny with sweat.

“You did such a good job!” Jimin says, ruffling Jeongguk’s hair. “I saw the mod number you did with Hoseok! You guys were incredible!”

“I wept,” says Taehyung. He presses a single red rose into Jeongguk’s hands. “No, don’t give me that look, I always bring flowers for Jimin and I’m sure as heck gonna bring flowers for you. My two babies. You’re both so talented, I literally wept. Look at my eyes. They’re still bloodshot.”
“Shut up,” says Jeongguk, but he’s grinning so hard that it hurts. He’s still riding that post-show high, heart pounding, his whole body warm and loose and the best kind of sore. Everything went okay, he keeps thinking; everything went okay, he didn’t fuck up, there were no rotten tomatoes, and now it’s over and now he can go to class tomorrow morning and learn new things and start preparing for the next show. His ears are ringing with the sound of applause, like rolling thunder. He’s sweaty and starving. It’s awesome.

“You good to head out, Jeonggukie?” says Jimin. “Tae always takes me for milkshakes after a show.”

“Yup, if Tae’s paying.”

Taehyung pinches Jeongguk’s cheek. “I am paying just this once, you talented bastard, because you have made me so very proud.”


Jeongguk drops his rose.

He scrambles to pick it up and then straightens up again, face burning. “Um,” he says, “Um, so, Yoongi’s here? Since when is Yoongi here?”

“Of course Yoongi’s here,” says Taehyung. “He always comes to our stuff.”

“He’s very supportive,” says Jimin.

“Cool,” says Jeongguk. “Cool cool cool cool cool. Awesome. So, uh, where is he? Right now, currently?”

“Bathroom,” says Taehyung. “I think he needed to splash some water on his face.”

Jeongguk frowns. “Is he sick?”

“Oh honey,” says Jimin.

“He’s not sick,” says Taehyung. “He’s just—oh! Over here, hyung!” He hops up and down, waving his arms, and—yup. That’s Yoongi, worming his way through the crowd toward them. He’s ditched the usual all-black-baggy-sweater-and-ripped-jeans combo for something a little bit nicer but no less devastating: black trousers and a button-down, a black leather jacket over top. His hair is messy, finger-combed.

“Hey,” he grunts when he reaches them. To Jeongguk, he says, “Nice job tonight. You were good.”

Jeongguk ducks his head, biting back another grin. “Thanks, hyung.”

“I don’t have flowers for you,” says Yoongi. “But to be fair, nobody actually informed me that you were also in the show. I thought it was just Jimin.”


Taehyung wiggles his eyebrows at Jeongguk. “You should’ve seen Yoongi’s face when you came onstage. I thought he was gonna have a stroke.”

Yoongi elbows Taehyung in the ribs. “Anyway,” he says loudly as Taehyung whimpers in pain, “sorry. For not having flowers.”
“No!” Jeongguk yelps. “No, oh my god, seriously, don’t worry about it. I didn’t even know you were gonna be here. I wasn’t expecting it, like, at all.”

“That appears to be a theme.”

“Well.” Jeongguk runs a hand through his hair, even though it’s all sticky with sweat and product. He’s nervous, and he’s not even really sure why. “Are you coming to milkshakes with us, hyung?”

“Oh.” Yoongi blinks a little. “Sure, I guess.”

“That’s interesting,” Taehyung jumps in. “Jimin, didn’t Yoongi tell us he couldn’t stay out late tonight because he has a project due tomorrow?”

“That he did, Taetae.”

Yoongi coughs. “I finished it already.”

“Interesting,” Taehyung says again.

“Are you sure you wanna come with us, hyung?” says Jeongguk, peering down at Yoongi. “You don’t have to go, I don’t wanna make you lose sleep or anything.”

“I’m fine,” says Yoongi. “Taehyung is just an idiot. I want a milkshake, take me to the milkshakes.”

They take him to the milkshakes. Jeongguk gets Oreo and Yoongi gets chocolate espresso and they end up splitting both of them, eating messily with spoons. Yoongi gives Jeongguk both the maraschino cherries and makes a face when Jeongguk eats them, so Jeongguk sticks a finger in the whipped cream and wipes it on Yoongi’s cheekbone.

“I’m going to kill you,” says Yoongi.

Jeongguk laughs in his face.

Taehyung leans across their table and takes Jeongguk’s hands in his. “Jeonggukie,” he says solemnly, “you have no idea the power you wield.”

“I’ll kill you too,” says Yoongi.

“You still have whipped cream on your face,” says Jimin, taking a photo. “So cute.”

Jeongguk tugs Yoongi closer, throwing one arm around his shoulders. It’s not something he’d usually do, even though they’ve gotten a lot closer over the last couple months, because Yoongi can be very prickly about physical contact and also Jeongguk is shy and not very good at being gentle. But tonight he’s show-drunk and adrenaline-high and the milkshakes are amazing and he’s happy, and so he tugs Yoongi closer and holds up his phone and says, “Take a selfie with me.”

The first selfie doesn’t turn out so great, because Jeongguk is a blur of motion and Yoongi’s face is slack with surprise. But the second one—in the second one, Jeongguk is grinning with his whole face scrunched up, and Yoongi is smiling too, teeth showing. The lighting in this diner is terrible and Jeongguk is wearing thick stage makeup, kohl and mascara smudged around his eyes, so it’s still a weird photo. But. Good-weird.

After they’re done taking the photo, Jeongguk doesn’t take his arm off Yoongi’s shoulders.

The four of them stay at the diner for a long time, finishing their milkshakes and talking about the show and then just talking. The old-fashioned clock on the wall ticks toward midnight, one a.m.
Eventually, Jeongguk’s arm falls from Yoongi’s shoulders to wrap around the small of his back, but neither of them pull away. They just sit like that, with Yoongi tucked into Jeongguk’s side, their thighs pressed together below the table. Whenever Jimin or Taehyung crack a joke, Jeongguk finds himself turning sideways, laughing into Yoongi’s hair.

When they finally clear out of the diner at two a.m., sleepy and fading, Jeongguk wants very badly to keep his arm around Yoongi for the whole walk home. (**Home** as in: Yoongi and Jimin and Taehyung’s apartment. **Home** as in: not the place where Jeongguk actually lives.)

He **wants** to keep holding Yoongi.

He can’t, though. He doesn’t.

---

**Jeongguk**

hi where are you

**Yoongi-hyung**

studio

why

you okay?

**Yoongi-hyung**

jeongguk?

**Jeongguk**

oh yeah lol i’m fine sorry!!

i’m here let me in

**Yoongi-hyung**

here

what

?

**Jeongguk**

hurry up grandpa the food's getting cold

**Yoongi-hyung**

i swear to god

"You're supposed to be in class," Yoongi says the second he unlocks the door to his dusty closet of a recording studio, deep in the bowels of the radio station just off campus. He steps aside to let Jeongguk in, frowning. "It's Monday. You have Voice right now."

"Professor cancelled on us," Jeongguk shrugs. "He said he got food poisoning from bad sushi."

"So he was hungover."
"Oh, for sure." Jeongguk plops down on the floor and unloads the bag of takeout he'd brought: fried chicken and kimbap and the pickled radishes that Jeongguk hates and Yoongi loves. He tosses Yoongi a pair of chopsticks without looking and snorts when he hears them clatter to the floor.

"Dick," says Yoongi. "Don't just throw things at my face. I won't catch them."

"I would've caught 'em."

"Yeah, well, we can't all have the reflexes of—"

"Of?"

"Of, like, Serena Williams or something."

"Serena Williams?"


Jeongguk laughs through a mouthful of fried chicken. Yoongi joins him on the floor, sitting cross-legged, his pale, bony knees showing through the holes in his jeans. He's looking particularly soft today in a huge hoodie that swallows his thin wrists, his hair light and feathery over his dark eyebrows. He's wearing his dorky glasses, because Min Yoongi exists to make Jeongguk's life even more difficult and confusing than it already is.

"Why'd you bring me food, anyway," Yoongi mumbles, even as he grabs a piece of chicken. "You trying to bribe me or something? What did you do?"

Jeongguk pouts. "I've never done anything wrong in my whole entire life."

"That's just blatantly false."

"Well... once, when I was like five or six, I accidentally took a book home from the library without actually checking it out. I started crying as soon as I realized and made my mom take me back so I could confess. We got there like two minutes before closing and even the librarian was just like, 'Dude, calm down.'"

"Holy god."

"To be fair to five-year-old me, this was like a week after there was this big scandal at my dad's office and one of the partners ended up doing time for embezzlement. I'd literally just learned that 'doing bad things equals going to jail.'"

"Oh no," says Yoongi, chopsticks frozen halfway to his mouth. His lips are twitching like he's trying hard not to laugh. "Shit, poor five-year-old Jeongguk."

"Deadass, I thought the police were gonna come break down the door. Like, I remember looking around my room and trying to figure out how much stuff I could fit in my little backpack."

"You were gonna run away?"

"No no," says Jeongguk. "No, I just wanted to bring my action figures and Pokémon cards to jail with me. So I wouldn't get too bored."

This time, Yoongi cackles out loud. That raspy, choking-cat laugh. Jeongguk ticks a mental box and stuffs his cheeks with kimbap so he won't grin too big. They eat quietly, splitting the chicken and the
Jeongguk and Yoongi munch kimbap,Yoongi crunching on his gross radishes, and they speak only to summarize their respective weeks in the way of people who already know pretty much everything about what the other is up to on a daily basis. For Jeongguk, it's class, practice, gym. For Yoongi, it's class, work, studio, and the occasional wrangling of Taehyung and Jimin.

When they're done eating and Jeongguk is stuffing the empty bags and cartons into the trash, Yoongi says, "Can I test something out on you?"

"Sure," says Jeongguk, trying not to look too excited. They've only just recently progressed to the level of friendship where Yoongi shows Jeongguk the stuff he's working on before it's finished. It feels like a new thrill every time, a new secret passed between them. Back in Busan, Jeongguk once helped his uncle renovate an old house. His job was to strip the paint and paper from the walls, layer by layer: floral wallpaper, white paint, yellow paint, striped wallpaper, green, gray, robin's egg blue, fifty years of different colors. Sometimes being friends with Yoongi feels like stripping paint. Putting in the work to reveal each new and lovely color.

"C'mere." Yoongi pulls the extra chair over so Jeongguk can sit beside him in front of the computer. He opens up a file and watches the screen while it loads, bars of blue and green and purple popping up on the screen. The light from the computer washes over his face, making him look paler and more delicate than usual. "Okay, so, keep in mind that it's really rough—"

"I know, hyung. You tell me every time."

"It's really rough, like probably not even halfway done, and everything kinda falls apart at the end because something's missing but I can't figure it out, and I've tried like forty different things and nothing works. But. Yeah."

Jeongguk fits the headphones over his ears. "Quit talking and let me listen."

"The mouth on you," Yoongi complains, but hits PLAY.

It's slower than usual, that's the first thing Jeongguk notices. Yoongi's music tends to be fierce and loud, his basslines deep, his beats like war-drums. This one isn't like that. It's slow and dreamy, effects sliding from Jeongguk's right ear to his left. When the chorus hits, it's with a sweeping orchestra, high-pitched violin, building the song into something sweet and soft and powerful all at the same time.

There aren't any vocals yet. And Yoongi wasn't lying—it really is rough, and it really does fall apart at the end. But Jeongguk can already tell that this song is gonna be beautiful in a way that Yoongi tends to avoid. This song is not fierce, or jagged, or furious, or pained, but it's intense. And it's beautiful.

When the track ends, Jeongguk reaches out wordlessly and plays it back from the beginning.

This time, he focuses on actually giving Yoongi some feedback. He closes his eyes and makes note of the awkward bits, the sound effects that don't feel quite right, the weird little off-beat right before the first chorus. He's nowhere near as good at composing and producing as Yoongi, but he can at least pick out the most obvious issues.

The song ends for a second time. After a long moment, Jeongguk opens his eyes.

Yoongi is looking at him.

He's got his chin propped up in one hand and his dark, dark eyes are fixed on Jeongguk's face.
"You were humming," he says quietly.

Jeongguk blinks. "Was I?"

"Yeah."

"Well. It's a really good song."

Yoongi wrinkles his nose. "It's a first draft at best."

"It's really good, hyung. Are you gonna write lyrics?"

"Already did. I was thinking about having Suran do the vocals. Like, the chorus."

*You talk about her a lot,* Jeongguk nearly says. He stops himself before saying it aloud, but the thought still happens, and it still makes him feel a little scraped-out and nasty inside. *Are you dating her? Do you like her?* And then, darker and more poisonous: *She's so talented. She writes her own songs. She's a better singer than I am. She's older.*

"Dude, that would be awesome," is all he says. "She would kill it."

"Mm." Yoongi fiddles with the headphone cord for a second, eyes downcast. His eyelashes are so pretty, and Jeongguk is so gay and so very screwed. "But, you know, she's like. She's really busy."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Grad school stuff and all."

"That's too bad," says Jeongguk, not sure where this is going.

"So like, there's a chance she won't have time to record with me for a while."

"Do you have a deadline? Are you worried about missing it?"

"No, this isn't for school. It's just—," Yoongi breaks off and makes a face like he's annoyed at himself. "It's just. Like, I might have to look for another vocalist."

"Okay," says Jeongguk slowly.

Yoongi is staring at him.

There is Something going on, but Jeongguk is not sure what that Something is.

"Do you want me to ask around in the Vocal department?" he tries. "I know a few girls who sound kinda similar to Suran, if you were going for—"

"I want you to do it."

"—the same kind of vibe—wait, what?"

"Just if Su's busy," Yoongi says quickly. "Like. If she can't make it in, maybe you could do the vocals. If you—if you wanted."

Now Jeongguk is the one staring.

Yoongi twists the headphone cord around his index finger until the tip goes white. "It's just an idea," he says. "I just thought of it two seconds ago, so it's not a big deal if you don't wanna, or if you don't
have time. I just—you sing, and I need a singer, so. One plus one equals two. Or whatever."

"Please don't bring math into this," says Jeongguk. "I hate math."

"Right. Right, no math."

"You'd really let me record for you?" He's aware that he probably looks way too starry-eyed, but he can't help it. The initial surprise is fading into something warm and pleased and *preening*. "You'd be okay with that?"

"I—yes."

Jeongguk feels his mouth curl into what must be the biggest, dumbest grin. "Is it bad to say that I hope Suran's too busy?"

"No," Yoongi breathes. "I mean, what? I don't know. What?"

"I don't wanna steal work from her. But—*god*, hyung, I'd really like to do the song with you. If you promise it's okay."

"I promise it's okay."

"Yeah?"

"Yes."

"Shit," says Jeongguk, still grinning. He reaches out and prays the headphone cord from Yoongi's hands, carefully unwinding it from Yoongi's index finger and watching the blood rush back in. It's mostly just an excuse to touch him, because right now Jeongguk wants to touch him like he wants to keep breathing. "Shit, hyung, even if it doesn't work out—I'm honored. Seriously."

"Don't be honored," Yoongi mumbles. "Don't be—it's just a demo track—"

"It's not!" Jeongguk says. "It's a song that you made, and it's awesome, and one day when you're super famous I can say that I, Jeon Jeongguk, once recorded vocals for the great Min Yoongi, AKA the greatest cultural icon of South Korea—"

"Oh my god, shut the fuck up."

"—and everyone back home will be so jealous." Jeongguk laughs, giddy. "Ahh! I'm excited."

"You've got it all wrong," says Yoongi. He's staring resolutely at his lap, where Jeongguk is still playing with his fingers. "Dumbass kid. It's you that'll be super famous, and I'll be the one telling stories about that one time I got Jeon Jeongguk into my recording studio."

"Don't tease," says Jeongguk. He turns Yoongi's hand over and pokes at the center of his palm, where the lifeline runs deep. "I was being serious."

"So was I."

"That's corny, hyung."

Yoongi splutters. "You started it!"

"Maybe."
"Definitely."

Jeongguk laughs again. He feels like a brimming rain barrel. "Can I chill here for a while?" he asks. "I won't bother you, I swear. I'll just do my homework and if I make any noise you can kick me out."

"Yeah," says Yoongi. "Stay."

jeongguk >> yoongi-hyung

hi from the metro

yoongi-hyung

why
jeongguk
um bc i sent it on snapchat but you didn't respond
just making sure you saw it

yoongi-hyung
and again i ask
why

jeongguk
bc i look cute?
I'll have you know that jimin & tae both screenshots this one so >:(

yoongi-hyung
you want me to screenshot your selfies?

jeongguk
it's 2017 hyung thats how we show affection these days
i screenshot all of yours

yoongi-hyung
you do?

jeongguk
yes! bc i'm a good friend! don't you see the notifs???

yoongi-hyung
i only open snapchat like once every 2 weeks and i don't understand how anything works

jeongguk
oh my god why are you literally an octogenarian

yoongi-hyung
wow
that's a big word for a 3rd grader

jeongguk
YOU KNOW FULL WELL IM ALMOST 20

yoongi-hyung
i can't read suddenly i don't know

jeongguk
ok i don't understand how u clearly know what a meme is and how to use it and yet you don't know how to work snapchat

yoongi-hyung
meme?
i was quoting you

jeongguk
what

yoongi-hyung
When does Jeongguk realize it?

Circle one.

a) They're taking a drive. Well—Yoongi is driving and Jeongguk is sitting in the passenger seat, the December-white world smearing by outside the windows, radio blasting a song neither of them recognize. Jeongguk is singing along anyway. They're an hour outside of Seoul proper, cutting through the foothills of the snowy mountains. They are not going anywhere in particular. They just wanted to drive. The sky is gray, the trees black and bare, but Yoongi's sweater is pale blue. It's the most color Jeongguk's ever seen him wear, and it's nice. They end up driving up and down the
twisting mountain roads for nearly four hours without speaking. When they get back into the city and 
Yoongi drops Jeongguk off at his dorm, it takes everything in him to actually get out of the car.

b) New Year’s Eve. Jeongguk is in Busan with his family in their tiny apartment in a city that smells 
like the ocean even at the heart of winter. He's told his parents all about Taehyung and Jimin, and 
also about his other friends: his non-weird, non-intense friends that he chats with before class and not 
really otherwise. He hasn't mentioned Yoongi. Doesn't quite know how to quantify him. On some 
level, he's afraid to say Yoongi's name aloud. He's afraid that his parents will hear it in his voice; that 
his brother will see it on his face. At midnight, as his parents watch the global coverage of the New 
Year on TV and Jeonghyun pours champagne, Jeongguk's phone lights up. It's Yoongi. The 
message says, happy new year, kid. Jeongguk texts back, i'm not a kid anymore! i'm a year older 
now!! with a bunch of angry emojis. Yoongi replies, happy new year, jeon jeongguk. And then, 
almost ten minutes later: miss you.

c) Winter break ends, a new semester begins, and Jeongguk once again goes partying with Kim 
Taehyung. The result: it's two a.m. and they are plastered, dragging each other up the stairs to 
Taehyung's apartment, and Jeongguk is half frozen because he managed to lose his jacket at the 
house party. His teeth are chattering. Time slips and now he's inside the apartment and Taehyung is 
gone and Yoongi is there. Yoongi. "Hyung," Jeongguk's saying, and he tries to sit on the couch like 
a functional person but instead winds up directly in Yoongi's lap, but that's fine, it feels good. He 
shoves his cold nose into Yoongi's neck. "Hi, hyung," he says happily. "Hi. Hi, I'm drunk." And 
someone (Jimin?) says, "Oh my god, Kookie, babe." Yoongi is tense and silent beneath him. 
Jeongguk pulls back. He sees Yoongi's eyes catch on something at the base of his throat, and then 
Yoongi clears his throat and murmurs, "Tae. Get him some water." Everything is soft and warm and 
floaty. Jeongguk hides his face in Yoongi's shoulder and closes his eyes and then, in the morning, he 
wakes up alone on the couch. The sunlight hurts. He pukes in a trashcan on the way back to his 
dorm and later finds a dark hickey on his collarbone. Ew. He sort of remembers making out with a 
rando at the house party, but mostly he just remembers falling into Yoongi's lap and breathing him in, 
in, in.

d) In the studio, just the two of them. This has somehow become a regular occurrence. Yoongi's at 
the mic for once, Jeongguk at the controls, the glass partition between them. Yoongi is supposed to 
be rapping, but they both lost focus twenty minutes ago and now they're just fucking around. 
Jeongguk pumps a love ballad into the recording chamber and Yoongi sings along ridiculously, his 
whole face screwed up, lurching back and forth like a drunk when he goes for the high notes. He's a 
fucking terrible singer. The song hits a crescendo and Yoongi just fucking 
yells into the mic, so loud 
that Jeongguk yanks the headphones away from his ears for a second. When he puts them back on, 
his whole head is filled with Yoongi's laugh.

e) All of the above.

- group chat: “les tres musketeers”

the smolest
hey kookie are you by any chance texting yoongi right now?

jeongguk

uh
why

lizard boi
LMAO OMG I WAS WONDERIGN

ejongguk
???

the smolest
no reason, we're just in the library right now and he keeps smiling at his phone

jejongguk
oh
haha
well its me, i guess

For a few weeks in February, Jeongguk tries to stop thinking about Min Yoongi—or, more accurately, The Min Yoongi Situation, which Jeongguk has decided is totally hopeless. It's fine. He's busy with class and practice, and all his free time is dedicated to studying or working out or playing Overwatch. He's not pinning. There is one (1) time when Taehyung catches Jeongguk lying face down on the floor of his dorm room, but that's like, 95% about his upcoming Bio test.

Maybe 75% about the test.

Definitely at least 50% about the test.

(Jeongguk is a weak bitch.)

But he tries his very, very best to avoid thinking about Yoongi. He goes to class. He studies. He works out. He plays Overwatch. He talks to people that are not Taehyung, Jimin, or Yoongi. He does not fantasize; he does not wallow. When Jeon Jeongguk tries his very, very best at something he's usually pretty good at it. Maybe he's actually getting a handle on this whole unrequited-crush thing.

(Because it's just a crush. Really. It is.)

Then, on a Tuesday evening in late February, he gets a text.

the smolest
hey. have you seen/talked to yoongi today?

jejongguk
nah been in class all day
why

the smolest
okay.
well i don't want to freak you out

Jeongguk begins to freak out.

**the smolest**

but he's been? off? for a few days now, and this morning it seemed particularly bad?
and i just got home and i'm not sure where he is, and he's not answering his phone.
i don't think he's actually in danger, i just wanna make sure he's okay.

**jeongguk**

ok so, constructive criticism, maybe next time LEAD with "i don't think he's actually in danger"

**the smolest**

SORRY i'm just worried :

**jeongguk**

it's ok
just left class, ill call him & check the studio

**the smolest**

kay. i'll let you know if he comes home
tae gets off work at 7, i'll have him ask around as well
he knows some of yoongi's other friends

**jeongguk**

kk

Outside the lecture hall, the sky is purple with twilight. The winter air smells like wood smoke from
the kilns next door in the ceramics yard. Jeongguk hurries across the quad, racking his brains for
where Yoongi might be. Where he might go.

**jeongguk >> yoongi-hyung**

heyy where are u?

[JEONGGUK >> YOONGI-HYUNG - MISSED CALL]

He calls the radio station, but the receptionist tells him that Yoongi didn't reserve studio time today.
Jeongguk pauses under a streetlamp and thinks.

Not answering his phone + not at the studio = Yoongi doesn't want to be found.

So where does he go when he doesn't want to be found?
"Oh," Jeongguk says aloud. "Shit. Of course." He sends a quick text to Jimin and then shoves his phone into his pocket and begins to—not run, because this isn't Love Actually and he's not racing to the airport before Yoongi gets a one-way ticket to New York or whatever. But he's also not not running, because this might not be Love Actually, but Jeongguk is still worried, and kinda-sorta-maybe in love, and fundamentally a little melodramatic.

He's breathing hard by the time he skids to a stop outside a tiny, old-fashioned record store a few blocks off campus. The girl behind the counter shoot him a look when he stumbles (crashes) (flails) through the door, and Jeongguk gives her his best I'm a normal person! smile. Tries to look a little less wild-eyed.

He heads straight for the back of the store, making his way through the shelves of discount vinyls. He remembers: Yoongi likes this place because 1. it's close to campus, 2. the listening stations are supposed to have a half-hour time limit but it's not enforced, and 3. the employees "actually know their shit." Yoongi said once (just once) that sometimes he spends entire afternoons here rifling through the records, and Jeongguk remembers. Jeongguk remembers.

Yoongi.

There he is.

Nobody else is using the listening stations. It's just Yoongi, blond hair/black hoodie/bulky headphones, slumped over in a chair with his backpack at his feet. The turntable spins lazily behind him. His eyes are closed. Which is good, because it gives Jeongguk a moment to catch his breath, to shush his shrieking heart, to text Jimin: found him.

Then he walks right up to Yoongi and pokes him in the cheek.

Yoongi flinches with his whole body. His eyes fly open and he makes an honest-to-god hissing noise, like a fucking startled cat, and then his gaze moves from Jeongguk's outstretched hand all the way up to Jeongguk's face. He stares.

"—the fuck?" he says.

"You weren't answering your phone," says Jeongguk.

"It's on silent," says Yoongi. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"You weren't answering your phone," Jeongguk repeats, slower this time.

Yoongi stares for a second longer and then pulls his phone out, wincing at the notifications. Jeongguk sees missed texts and calls from himself, Jimin, Taehyung, Namjoon, and someone named Hoseok. "Well," says Yoongi, a little defensive, "it's on silent. What's the deal, anyway? Did something happen?"

You were sad, Jeongguk doesn't say. Instead he drags another chair over and sits down beside Yoongi, knees brushing. He points at the turntable. "Whatcha listening to?"

"Dunno," says Yoongi. He looks bleary-eyed, like he just woke up from a long, heavy sleep. "Some R&B thing. Why are you here?"

"To see you."

"How did you know I'd be here?"
"Lucky guess."

Yoongi narrows his eyes.

"You mentioned this place once," says Jeongguk. "I thought maybe—yeah." He's definitely blushing. "Um, anyway, Jimin was worried. He said you seemed, like, off."

Yoongi bristles. "I'm fine."

"Okay," Jeongguk says easily. "Can I sit here?"

"You already are."

"With you, I mean."

"Not like I can physically eject you from the store."

"I honestly can't tell if that was a dig at me for being a muscle pig or a self-dig at you for being weak," says Jeongguk.


"He was worried."

"Well, first off, he doesn't fucking need to be. Second off, he shouldn't have gotten you involved."

That hurts, and Jeongguk doesn't hide it fast enough. He rears back, his skin going all hot and prickly with embarrassment.

Yoongi curses under his breath. "Sorry," he says. "Shit, Jeongguk, I didn't mean it like that."

"But I like the things you say."

"You shouldn't."

"Why not?"

Yoongi makes a disgusted sound. "Because I'm your hyung and I said so."

"But you just told me not to listen to the things you say."

No response.
"You've created a paradox," Jeongguk whispers, and Yoongi does that muffled throat-clearing noise he does when he's trying not to laugh at something. Jeongguk grins and then grins even wider when Yoongi's other arm comes up to wrap around his back.

"Your nose is like an ice cube, brat."

"It's cold outside!"

"Don't you own a scarf?"

Instead of answering, Jeongguk shoves his cold nose further into Yoongi's neck. Yoongi smells so good, he always smells so good, kind of sweet-floral and kind of woodsy. (Blackberries and bay leaves and cedar, according to the bottle of cologne in Yoongi's bathroom. Not that Jeongguk noticed or Googled the brand name later.)

"You shouldn't have left class," Yoongi chides.

"Someday, hyung, you're gonna realize that you can't tell me what to do."

"I realized that ages ago."

"So why do you keep trying?"

"Someone has to be the voice of reason around here, and it's sure as hell not gonna be Jimin or Tae."

"Why can't I be the voice of reason?"

"You?" Yoongi scoffs. "God no. You're a force of chaos."

Jeongguk wriggles happily in the circle of Yoongi's arms. "I like that."

"You would," says Yoongi, but his voice is so soft, and so fond.


(After that, Jeongguk learns more about what Yoongi calls the Bad Days. Yoongi doesn't like talking about any of it, but through a series of super casual but leading questions and also a very enlightening conversation with Jimin, Jeongguk manages to collect the following pieces of information:

1. The Bad Days happen a lot less frequently than they used to, but they still happen, and they will probably always happen.

2. Sometimes Yoongi just needs space. Sometimes he says he needs space but actually he needs someone to drag him out of bed and make him Do Things. Sometimes he says he needs space but actually he needs someone to curl up next to him in bed and Not Do Things, together.

3. The Bad Days are Bad, but they're also just Days, and they always end.


5. Driving helps.)
In March, Jeongguk lets himself into the apartment with his spare key to find Yoongi standing in the kitchen with his duvet wrapped entirely around him. He looks like a cute boy burrito. His hair is baby-bird tufty and his nose is all red, and he barely glances up when Jeongguk pokes his head into the kitchen.

"Oh no," says Jeongguk, trying not to laugh. "Are you sick?"

Yoongi glares at him. "No, I am not. And don't say that word."

"What, sick?"

"Shh," Yoongi hisses. "The germs will hear you and feel validated. And then I really will be you-know-what."

"I hate to say it, dude, but I think you already are."

"No. I feel fucking fantastic. I'm the pinnacle of health."

"Really? Because from here it looks like you're about to fall over."

"I'm making tea," says Yoongi.

They stare at each other.

"...Are you sure?" says Jeongguk. "Hyung, do you think you're like, moving around right now? Because you're not. You're just standing there like a creepy murder-ghost in a horror movie and it's freaking me out."

"I'll murder your ghost," says Yoongi, and then coughs for like a solid minute.

"Okay," says Jeongguk soothingly. "How about you murder me later, after you take a nap?"

Yoongi sniffs. "'M not sick."

"No, definitely not. Why don't you go sit on the couch for a second and I'll make you some tea?"

"You're not supposed to take care of me. I'm the hyung."

"Well, that's just dumb. Everyone should take care of everyone. Who cares if I'm younger?"

"I do," Yoongi mumbles. "I should."

Jeongguk rolls his eyes. "Go sit on the couch, hyung. Unless you wanna stand here making tea for another hour."

"The lack of respect is appalling," says Yoongi, but he shuffles over to the couch and collapses onto it, landing face-first on the cushions.
Jeongguk busies himself with filling the kettle and ransacking the cupboards for boxes of tea. While he waits for the kettle to boil, he figures he might as well poke around to see if Yoongi has more than a single box of pasta to his name, which he probably *doesn't*, because even Taehyung—who subsists on ramen and honey butter chips—takes care of himself better than Yoongi does. Jimin is the only one in this apartment who touches a vegetable more than once a week.

...Actually, there's a can of chicken soup in one of the cupboards. It's probably not that good—it's the generic brand 1000-won stuff—but if he can find some spices, Jeongguk can totally make this work.

The sink is filled with dirty dishes, though. And the counters are sort of cluttered. If he's gonna be making soup, he'll need to clean up a little.

He glances over at the couch. Yoongi's eyes are closed. He's curled up in a ball with his wrists tucked between his knees like a little kid.

"Yoongi," Jeongguk says softly, and Yoongi doesn't stir.

Jeongguk looks at him for a moment, just to look. Then he takes the teakettle off the burner and rummages around for a pot instead.

Thirty minutes later he's loaded the dishwasher, wiped down the counters, and managed to make the canned soup taste almost homemade. He gets the kettle going again and fixes Yoongi a cup of hot tea with honey.

"What're you doing?"

He looks up. Yoongi is standing there in the doorway to the kitchen, still wrapped up in his duvet. His eyes are swollen from sleep and there's an imprint of the couch cushions on his left cheek. Jeongguk wants to eat him whole.

"What does it look like I'm doing?"

Yoongi glances around suspiciously. "Did you...clean?"

"Yeah." Jeongguk shrugs. "Had to, I needed some counter space."

"Counter space?"

"For the soup. Hey, go sit down again. You seriously look like you're gonna keel over. I'll bring everything over to you, okay?"

Yoongi stares.

"Oh, and I'll get you some water," says Jeongguk. "You should be drinking lots of water. Gotta stay hydrated."

"What the hell," Yoongi says weakly. His cheeks are bright red.

Jeongguk frowns. "Do you have a fever?"

He closes the distance between them and brushes Yoongi's sweaty bangs away from his forehead, resting the back of his hand against Yoongi's skin. It's a testament to how sick Yoongi is that he doesn't shove Jeongguk away; he just goes very still, so still that maybe he's not even breathing.

"...You're not too warm," Jeongguk murmurs. "But go sit down, hyung. I'll take care of you."
Two things happen at once.

1. Yoongi looks up, and

2. Jeongguk's hand drops.

And suddenly Jeongguk is cupping Yoongi's face in one hand while Yoongi blinks up at him, lips parted in surprise.

Most days, Jeongguk forgets that Yoongi is almost three inches shorter than him—and much smaller in general, skinny where Jeongguk is muscular. Yoongi's aura is so commanding, his low, raspy voice so captivating, that he seems bigger than he actually is. But right now, with their faces (their bodies) so close together, with Yoongi so soft and quiet, with Jeongguk's fingers brushing Yoongi's jaw, Jeongguk is hyperaware of the size difference between them. The way Yoongi is tilting his face up to look into Jeongguk's eyes.

Yoongi's eyes are huge. His cheeks are flushed, his breathing shallow.

"Why are you still here?" he whispers. "Shouldn't you be in class or something?"

"My only class was an eight a.m.," says Jeongguk. He takes his hand away from Yoongi's face and clears his throat. "I can leave if you want. But, you're sick? Someone should be taking care of you?"

"I don't need anyone to take care of me. It's just a cold."

"Everyone needs taking care of, dummy."

Yoongi pushes at his shoulder. "Hey."

"Sorry," says Jeongguk, rolling his eyes. "Now go sit on the couch. Don't make me pick you up and carry you over there."

Yoongi doubles over with a spontaneous coughing fit. Jeongguk hovers around him worriedly with a glass of water until it's over, and then Yoongi finally sits on the damn couch and allows Jeongguk to tuck him in and bring him the soup and tea and another glass of water and some cough medicine for good measure.

"Who knew you were so fussy," Yoongi complains. "You're worse than Jimin."

"Drink your tea," says Jeongguk.

For the rest of the afternoon, it stays like this: Yoongi dozing on the couch, Jeongguk sprawled out on the floor with his homework. (If he takes a quick break to take out his sketchbook and capture the way the afternoon sunlight is falling across Yoongi's sleeping face, well, nobody has to know.) He finishes his homework and even studies a little bit extra, and then there's nothing to do but watch Vine compilations on YouTube.

He could probably just go home, but—he doesn't want to. He doesn't want Yoongi to wake up alone. It's just a cold, but still. It sucks being alone when you're sick.

Around five, Jeongguk looks up to find Yoongi watching him through sleepy, half-lidded eyes.

"Hi," says Jeongguk. "How do you feel?"

"Like roadkill," says Yoongi. "Are you drawing?"
Jeongguk glances down at his sketchbook. "Sort of."

"Can I see?"

No, Jeongguk wants to say, because half of this book is filled with Yoongi's everything: his dark eyes, his nose, his soft pink mouth, the curve of his jaw, his fingers, his flat palms, his collarbones, his profile. Jeongguk didn't have room for an art class this semester, so he draws on the metro, in the evening, between classes, and he always sets out to draw the things around him (the people around him) (the people around him who are not Min Yoongi) but he always comes back to the same thing.

"Yeah, you can see," he says, "but just this page."

He braces himself for the inevitable joke. Oooh, what are you hiding in there? Are you drawing something dirty? Why can't I see the rest?

But Yoongi just takes the sketchbook, looks at the one page—Jeongguk's doodles of birds, books, an old woman on the metro, a random face—and then passes it back to Jeongguk. "You're good," he says. "You're—really good. Guess that's not surprising."

Jeongguk shrugs.

It's not talent. He doesn't like when people assume it's talent. He just works hard.

"You work really hard, don't you," says Yoongi, and now it is Jeongguk's turn to go still. "You know, the first time we met, and you said you were double majoring in Dance and VP, I thought you were fucking crazy. Still do, honestly. Don't know how the fuck you do it. Double major plus regular classes, plus all that muscle pig shit, plus art, plus the time you spend with Tae and Jimin. I dunno. Just. I'm sure you've got loads of people telling you this, but. I see you? I guess? You work hard, Jeongguk. It's really cool." He frowns. "How much cough medicine did you give me?"

"A double dose," says Jeongguk.

"Well, I feel fucking stoned—oh my god, are you crying?"

"No," says Jeongguk, right as the first tears brim over and his whole face crumples. He buries his face in his hands.

"Oh fuck," says Yoongi. "Fuck, Jeongguk, please don't cry. I mean, you can if you want. You can—feel your feelings. But I wasn't trying to say that you're not talented, I just meant—I don't know. It was stupid. I'm sorry."

Jeongguk sniffles loudly.

"Shit," says Yoongi in a weird, high-pitched voice, and then there's a rustle of movement and suddenly Yoongi's hands are wrapping around Jeongguk's wrists. "I'm sorry," he says again. "You can insult me back if you want. Or you can drop honorifics for a month. Six months. Do you wanna hear about my fear of hedgehogs? It's really irrational and embarrassing."

"Hyung, no," Jeongguk manages, his throat thick with tears. "I'm not upset. I'm really, really happy."

"—What?"

"I feel so validated," Jeongguk practically wails. "Oh my god. That was so overwhelming." He sniffles again and peeks out from behind his fingers. Yoongi's face is a hilarious mixture of shock
and concern and total confusion. "Sorry. It's just like, it's been a long week and I haven't slept much and that was so nice to hear."

"Oh my god."

Jeongguk wipes his eyes on his sleeve. "Can I still drop honorifics?"

"Absolutely not," says Yoongi, and finally releases Jeongguk's wrists. "What the hell, I thought you were having a breakdown. I thought I'd damaged you psychologically."

"Sorry! That was just so nice!"

Yoongi scowls. "I'm always nice."

"You are," Jeongguk agrees. "But like, usually you're kinda tsundere about it."

"Usually I'm not drugged."

"I didn't drug you! It was just a little extra cough medicine. Because you're sick."

"Still counts," says Yoongi. His sleepy eyes flicker over Jeongguk's face, and then instead of going back to the couch he just settles down on the carpet right next to Jeongguk, curling up on his side with his head pillowed on one arm. "Can't believe you cried."

"Can't believe you flipped out so hard when I did."

"Fuck off," Yoongi mumbles, no heat to it. His eyes are closed again.

- 

f) This moment, right here.

g) And this one.

h) And all the moments after and before.

- 

Yoongi falls asleep quickly.

Jeongguk watches him until he starts to feel a little creepy about it, and for that reason doesn't take out his sketchbook and draw Yoongi's soft, slack face. But if he wants to draw it later, he'll be able to. He's got it memorized.
In April, with one month left in his freshman year and one month until Yoongi graduates, Jeongguk begins to freak out.

It begins when he realizes he hasn't drawn anything but Yoongi's hands for going on three weeks and worsens when he wakes up from an apparent fugue state to find himself halfway through making a Spotify playlist called "sad love songs for 2 a.m." which is mostly Troye Sivan and then obviously some Taylor Swift, because she might be a snake but she gets him. By mid-April Jeongguk is nearly vibrating apart with the knowledge that he is screwed. His half-assed attempt to stop thinking about The Min Yoongi Situation was a complete failure. Jeongguk thinks about him all the goddamn time. During class, during practice, on the metro.

At night.

He doesn't think about sex stuff. Jeongguk has never been able to sexually fantasize about a real human being without imploding with guilt and an irrational terror that they'll somehow read his mind and think he's gross.

He just likes to fantasize about Yoongi holding his hand. Or lying next to him in the dark, in Jeongguk’s tiny dorm room bed, the earbuds stretched between them.

It's terrible. Music has been ruined for him. Jeongguk can't discover new songs without thinking Would Yoongi like this? and he can't listen to old songs without wanting to make Yoongi a playlist, make him a fucking mix CD like it's 2006, write up some fucking liner notes with explanations for each song. This one makes me think of staring out the school bus window, eighth grade, six-thirty a.m., and it was winter so the sun didn't rise till later and everything was dark and purple and heavy. This one makes me think of dance practice. This one makes me think of summer rainstorms beating down on my auntie's tin roof. This one makes me think of walking alone through the streets of Seoul. This one makes me think of you. They all do.

Min Yoongi has turned Jeongguk into a music major who can't listen to music.

Min Yoongi is destroying his life.

The worst part is that it's so hopeless. So pathetically hopeless. Yoongi is going to graduate, he's going to graduate and move out of Tae and Jimin's place and start working full time. Everything's already planned. After his lease ends in June, Yoongi is moving in with a grad student he met through Namjoon. He's also managed to score a post-grad assistantship at one of the biggest record labels in Seoul, because of course he has. He starts work literally the week after graduation.

He is starting a new life.

And it's amazing, it really is. Jeongguk may just be a dumb kid, but he's so proud of Yoongi. He'll tell anyone who listens that Min Yoongi is going places.

He's going places.

Jeongguk is not going with him, and that's fine. All it means is he needs to—get over this. For real this time.
His name is Yejun.

He is tall, taller than Jeongguk by a good two inches, and built like a brick shithouse. He's got thick dark hair and he's a junior Business Admin major and his family is apparently loaded. Jeongguk knows this because it's pretty much all Yejun talks about. He couldn't be more different from Min Yoongi if he actively tried, which means he's perfect.

For their first date, Yejun is taking Jeongguk to a club in Gangnam. This was organized entirely over Tinder, so Jeongguk is mostly just hoping that Yejun actually is a twenty-one-year-old from his uni and not some creepy catfishing rando. Jeongguk would rather not get murdered tonight, especially because he's putting in effort to look hot.

jeongguk >> group chat: “les tres musketeers”
help what do i wear to a club
in freakin gangnam

lizard boi
uhh well depends on what u want 2 happen there
why??

jeongguk
ugh just
is this ok

[IMAGE SENT]

the smolest
yeah that's super cute!!
very club appropriate, good job

lizard boi
i showed yoongi the photo and he said u look nice
well first he said "why are u showing me this" but yknow

jeongguk
haha thanks yoongi-hyung
but is my face ok too??

the smolest
your face is always very cute don't worry

lizard boi
who are u trynna impress lmao

jeongguk
well i have a date

lizard boi
dsfkljkl’ Mn
; a

jeongguk
...?

lizard boi
sorry haha
yoongi was still looking over my shoulder
coast is clear now

the smolest
tae
jeez

lizard boi
i know hah fuck

jeongguk
uh?

the smolest
never mind
who's your date with???

jeongguk
dude from tinder lol

the smolest
???? since when are you on tinder?????

jeongguk
idk like a week ago

the smolest
wait so you don't know this guy at all? are you sure he's not a catfish?
you're meeting at the club right?
like he's not picking you up in his car?
DO NOT GET INTO A CAR WITH A STRANGER JEON JEONGGUUK

jeongguk
i won't omg im not 5
we're meeting at the club

the smolest
okay well also make sure to keep an eye on your drink AT ALL TIMES
oh my god
TAE BACK ME UP HERE
TAE

lizard boi
yah actually ill be back in a hot sec gotta deal w somethin real quick
jeongguk dont get murdered
ok brb

the smolest
well you heard your father
Jeongguk
ill do my best

He ends up sticking with ripped jeans and a white T-shirt, which is pretty much what he wears every single other day of his life, but whatever. He looks good. Dateable. Jeongguk throws on his bomber and checks his hair in the mirror to make sure it's the exact right amount of I-woke-up-like-this artfully tousled, and then he heads out to meet the taxi.

(He tries not to think about how the last time he was this nervous over his appearance, he was about to meet Yoongi for lamb skewers.)

(It was the best date of his life and it wasn't even a date.)

(Don't think about him.)

The club is more high-end than anywhere Jeongguk's ever been, though to be fair his only previous experience with clubbing is limited to the shitty cheap ones around his uni. He realizes that this place is too rich for his blood the second he gets out of the taxi, but by then it's too late, Yejun is expecting him, he can't bail now. Still, it takes almost twenty minutes just to wait in line and get past the bouncer.

Yejun
You here yet?

Jeongguk
yeah im here

Stepping through the doors just makes it even more apparent that Jeongguk is not the target demographic of this place. The club looked big from the sidewalk, but inside it's huge: dance floor the size of a basketball court, DJ playing from a glass balcony overlooking the crowd, private booths and roped-off VIP areas around the edges of the floor. The actual bar is gleaming chrome, probably thirty feet long, five bartenders spinning bottles in the air and fucking—lighting drinks on fire, Jeongguk doesn't even know. One look at the dance floor tells him that this club is filled with the kind of young hip beautiful people you see on TV shows but not in real life. Everyone is dancing under the neon lights, everyone is grinding and tossing back 20,000-won cocktails, everyone is sweaty and glittering and dressed in designer labels.

He is so, so out of his depth.

Occasional partying with Taehyung aside, Jeongguk's idea of a fun Friday night is like, board games. Drunk Pokémon Go. His T-shirt is from the clearance rack at Lotte Mart, he doesn't belong here.

He's already beginning to regret this.
He worms his way through the crowd, heading for the bar. It's hard to see anything; down in the pit it's dark even with the flashing lights, and there are fog machines pumping thick gray smoke over the entire floor. The DJ is playing the sort of generic thumping EDM that Yoongi despises—don't think about him.

There's a crush of people in front of the bar, but it doesn't take Jeongguk long to spot Yejun. The dude's wearing leather pants and a silk shirt, hair slicked back, silver in both ears. He's really hot, maybe even better-looking in person than on Tinder, so that's awesome. That's a good thing.

"Hey," Jeongguk says, coming up behind him. "Song Yejun?"

Yejun turns around. Recognition flares in his eyes and he gives Jeongguk a pretty obvious once-over, gaze flicking from Jeongguk's head to his feet, lingering on his chest. Then he smiles. "Yeah. Jeon Jeongguk?"

"That's me." Jeongguk shifts, nervous. He has to speak loudly to be heard over the music, and he's not super great at being loud around people he doesn't know. "Um, sorry I'm late, the line outside—"

"It's always crazy on weekends. Here, lemme get you a drink."

Yejun flags down one of the bartenders and orders for both of them. He gets a round of shots first—"To take the edge off, you know?" he says, winking, and maybe this will be okay, maybe it'll even be fun. Maybe Yejun is nervous too. Jeongguk tosses his first shot back and then his second (vodka, sharp and medicinal, nasty, no chaser) and then Yejun orders them a couple Old Fashioneds. "My favorite," he says, pressing the cold glass into Jeongguk's hands. "Yo, let's find a table."

All the big circular booths are taken, but there are a few smaller tables scattered around near the bar. Yejun leads the way, pulling Jeongguk behind him. They slide into a mini-booth just big enough for two people, shiny red leather with no cracks, no stuffing spilling out, and Yejun puts one hand on Jeongguk's thigh.

Oh.

It makes Jeongguk a little uncomfortable. He's relieved when Yejun doesn't do anything else, just keeps one hand on Jeongguk's thigh and the other on his drink. It's fine, it's chill. This is not something to get anxious over. Yejun clearly does this all the time.

Jeongguk finishes his drink in three swallows, wincing at the taste—like whiskey mixed with cherry cough medicine. As soon as he sets down the empty glass, Yejun orders another round.

There's small talk. It's kind of hard to follow? Jeongguk is warm and his stomach feels weird and his head is floaty from—what, two shots and two drinks now? Three drinks? Yejun is good at flagging down the servers. There are three glasses in front of Jeongguk, nothing left but melting ice and twists of orange.

"Your profile said you're a music major," says Yejun. "That's dope. What kinda stuff do you do?"

"M a singer," says Jeongguk. "And, um, and a dancer. I also do some—"
"You look like a dancer," says Yejun. He leans in, eyes glittering. He really is good-looking, and he's probably spent close to 80,000 won on their drinks alone. Jeongguk feels bad. Should he get the next round? He doesn't really want another drink, but he doesn't wanna be a bad date or whatever; doesn't wanna make Yejun spend too much money. "You've definitely got the body for it," says Yejun. What is he talking about? Oh, dancing. "How about you show me some moves?"

"Okay," Jeongguk says slowly. "Uh, like right now?"

Yejun snorts. "What else are we at a club for?"

Right. Right, jeez, Jeongguk is so dumb. He lets Yejun tug him out of the booth and onto the dance floor, into the sweaty mess of bodies, into the fog and the purple lights. It's about ten degrees warmer here than by the bar. Almost too warm. The music pounds up through Jeongguk's feet and bounces around inside his chest like a bullet, ricocheting off rib and lung. Shitty house music, bad EDM. Jeongguk moves to it anyway. Usually he'd be more embarrassed, but it's easier when he's drunk. And he is drunk.

He rolls his body and Yejun slots up behind him, hands on Jeongguk's hips. It feels okay, Jeongguk decides. Yejun is tall and strong and he's a pretty good dancer even if most of what he's doing is just sort of grinding on Jeongguk from behind. Everything is moving faster than Jeongguk expected, in terms of Yejun's arms snaking around his waist and one hand pushing up under his shirt to touch his stomach, but it's probably normal. They're in college.

This is normal.

The last time Jeongguk was this drunk, he ended up ditching Taehyung to make out with a rando and then later he fell into Yoongi's lap and tried to fill his lungs with enough Yoongi-smell to last him for weeks. It didn't work. Or maybe it did. Maybe he's been breathing nothing but Yoongi all this time, and that's why he's here tonight.

(Don't. Think. About. Him.)

"You're hot," Yejun is mumbling in his ear. "You're really fuckin' hot, Jeongguk, you know that? Thought no way you'd be this hot in person, but damn."

"Thank you," Jeongguk says. He's not sure if Yejun can hear him over the music. "Um, you too."

"Yeah?" Yejun turns him around so they're facing each other. His eyes are so dark, his mouth curved up, his skin glistening with sweat. It's weird being smaller than him, having to look up into his face. "You think I'm hot?"

"I mean—yeah, I—"

Then Yejun is kissing him.

Jeongguk's brain doesn't really register what's happening for at least ten seconds, and by then Yejun's tongue is already in his mouth. Yejun's tongue is cold from the drinks and tastes like cough medicine and orange peel. He licks at Jeongguk's tongue, at his teeth and the roof of his mouth; he grabs Jeongguk's face in both hands and holds him still.

Jeongguk tries to kiss back, but it's so much. His head is being forced backward from how hard Yejun is kissing him, and he can't move or change the angle because Yejun is gripping his skull. Yejun's tongue just keeps pushing into his mouth. It feels like being eaten.

He shoves at Yejun's shoulder, trying to communicate that he needs to take a breath, but Yejun
doesn't even seem to feel it. He's got his thigh between Jeongguk's legs now. Surely this is too much PDA? This isn't a gay bar in Itaewon, they're going to get in trouble. Maybe that's why Yejun picked a place like this. Maybe if you're rich enough nobody cares who you kiss in the middle of the dance floor. Jeongguk's heart is beating so fast he can feel it in his temples and his ears. The alcohol is sloshing around inside him, making his hands slow and clumsy. He wants to pull away but Yejun won't let go of his face.

Finally Yejun breaks the kiss, mumbling something against Jeongguk's mouth. When Jeongguk shakes his head, I can't hear you, he repeats, "Let's get outta here, c'mon, I'll call a taxi. My place is close."

"I—," says Jeongguk, but he's being kissed again, horrible and sloppy and bad-wet, spit all over his chin. Yejun's hands paw at his chest, at his hips—at his ass, grabbing it roughly, fingers digging in hard enough to bruise. Jeongguk wrenches away, stumbles backward—bumps into a girl and her friends, who give him dirty looks—and Yejun grabs his wrist and reels him in, kissing and biting at his neck, too hard, too wet.

"You're so hot," Yejun repeats, breathing it into Jeongguk's ear and then grabbing his ass again. "So fuckin' sexy, look at you, look at this tight little body you got. Shit. Let's get the fuck outta here, yeah?"

"I, I don't think, um, I think I'm—," he stutters over his words like a fucking idiot, cut off every two seconds by Yejun's mouth. "I—think I'm too drunk—"

Yejun laughs. "You only had like three drinks."

"And—and shots—"

"Can't hold your liquor? Don't bullshit me. Body this thick, I know you can handle yourself."

Jeongguk feels dizzy and sick and he can't tell whether it's because of the Old Fashioneds or because of Yejun's nasty tongue. All he knows is that this doesn't feel good, this isn't fun, he doesn't want this, he wants to go home. "I think 'm gonna head out."

"Nah, you're not." Yejun bites at his jaw. "You said it yourself. I'm hot, you're hot, together we're hot. Don't you wanna have some fun?"

This was such a mistake.

This was such a fucking terrible idea.

"Bathroom," Jeongguk chokes out, managing to wriggle his way out of Yejun's arms, and then he escapes. He pushes through the crowd, other people's sweat smearing on his clothes and hands, and somehow finds the men's room hidden away in a dark corner of the club, thank god no line. He practically throws himself into an empty stall, the door clattering shut behind him, and sits down heavily on the toilet. His stomach roils so violently that for a second he thinks he might throw up. But it passes, leaving nothing behind but drunkenness and humiliation, thick and hot, like a layer of grease inside him. He's so stupid. God, what the fuck was he thinking.

His eyes sting. His vision blurs enough that he can't read the Sharpie graffiti on the stall door. Hands shaking, Jeongguk takes out his phone.

The line only rings twice before someone picks up. "Lo?"

"Tae," Jeongguk bursts out, and his voice cracks. "Tae, I'm sorry, I don't know what to do, the guy
is really—he keeps—and I don't like it and I'm, I'm really drunk—"

"Whoa whoa whoa," the person on the other end says. Which is when Jeongguk realizes it isn't Taehyung. It's Yoongi, he somehow called Yoongi. Oh, god. "Jeongguk? The hell is going on?"

"Hyung." Jeongguk curls in on himself, pressing the phone to his ear. "I'm so sorry. Did I wake you up? What time is it?"

"It's midnight, I was awake," says Yoongi. "Jeongguk, what's going on? Where are you?"

"In a, in a club. In Gangnam. 'M on a date. But," he squeezes his eyes shut, voice lowering to a whisper. There's someone washing their hands in the bathroom sink and he doesn't want them to hear. "Hyung, I don't like him, he kept—um, touching me, and—and he wouldn't stop—"

There's a rustling sound from Yoongi's end. "Okay," he grunts, "okay, Kook, where are you right now?"

"Bathroom."

"Okay. Do you remember the name of the club?"

"Um. Um, I—I think maybe the Diamond?"

"Okay. Thank you. Can you do something for me?"

Jeongguk nods and then remembers he's on the phone. "Yeah."

"Stay right where you are, okay? Just stay in the bathroom until I get there."

Get there? "No," says Jeongguk, "no, you don't have to come get me, I'm sorry, I was just panicking —"

"You did the right thing, Kook," says Yoongi, low and soothing. "Just stay there. I'm gonna come pick you up, okay? Gimme twenty minutes."

"Hyung—"

"I'm serious, Jeongguk." More rustling noises, the sound of a car door slamming, the rumble of an engine starting up. "I'm gonna hang up now so I can drive, but I want you to stay in the bathroom. And call me back if anything else happens. Okay? Jeongguk?"

"Okay," Jeongguk whispers.

"Twenty minutes," says Yoongi.

The line goes dead.

Alone in the bathroom stall, so miserable that he feels sick with it, Jeongguk hunches over himself. He's not teary-eyed anymore, just so, so embarrassed. As the minutes lurch past, slow and woozy, he begins to second-guess himself. Was Yejun really that bad? Should Jeongguk have made out with him, gone home with him, gotten this shit out of his system? Was it a dick move to push him away like that? Should Jeongguk go back and apologize before he leaves?

The only reason he doesn't move is because Yoongi told him to stay put. Yoongi told him to stay put, so he stays put, sitting on the cold toilet seat, listening to other men piss and shuffle around and wash their hands. The music is loud in here, too, a frenetic synth buildup to a bass drop that takes
way too long to come.

Nineteen minutes, and Jeongguk's phone buzzes.

eyongi-hyung
i'm outside
you still in the bathroom?

jeongguk
yea,h

yoongi-hyung
do you need me to come get you?

jeongguk
no
be rjiht out

He drags himself upright, swaying on his feet the way you do when the drunkenness hits you all over again. It takes a couple tries to unlatch the stall door, and then he stumbles out—and immediately catches sight of his reflection in the huge mirror over the sinks.

Oh, Jesus Christ.

Jeongguk looks like a fucking wreck. His hair is messy, his eyes bloodshot, his mouth swollen and red, and—fuck, fuck, Yejun left fucking tooth marks on his neck, dark hickeys and literal tooth marks, like Jeongguk is a bone he was gnawing on. Jeongguk presses his fingers to one of the bruises and winces at the twinge of pain. God. He's never looked more fucked up. He can't even fix it; Yoongi is waiting outside and Jeongguk doesn't want to inconvenience him any more than he already has.

Bracing himself, he leaves the bathroom. House music and hot air hit him in a wave, the smells of sweat and fog machine smoke and booze and cologne, and he has to pause for a second to get his bearings. Exit, okay, the exit is over there. He skirts around the dance floor, past the shiny bar and the circular VIP booths, past all the beautiful people having a beautiful time. He doesn't see Yejun anywhere. Maybe he found someone else to fuck around with.

He slips past the bouncer and then he's out, clear, the night air stinging-cold like a slap on his flushed cheeks. He takes a deep, shuddering breath, taking the coldness inside him, and looks around for—

"Jeongguk," says Yoongi, coming forward up the sidewalk, blonde hair hidden under a beanie, wearing his favorite army-green coat, lights from the club painting his face neon red, and at the same time—

"Jeongguk," says Yejun from behind, and a hand wraps around Jeongguk's arm. "What the fuck?"

Jeongguk flinches, turning to face Yejun. "I'm sorry," he starts, "I don't feel well—"

"So you're just ditching? What the fuck is your problem?" Yejun tugs him forward, fingernails digging into Jeongguk's bicep. "Did you just want me to pay for your drinks, is that it? You just find dumb fucks on Tinder and let 'em get you drunk without giving them anything in return?"
"No," Jeongguk says loudly, "no, I never asked you to pay, you just kept ordering—"

"Why the fuck did you think I asked you here, huh? We fucking met on Tinder, did you think we were gonna get married? Why would you even come here if you didn't wanna fuck?"

"Let go of me," Jeongguk snaps, but his voice comes out weak and shaky. "I'm going home."

"You fucking—"

"Get off him."

And Yoongi is stepping between them, an entire head shorter than Yejun but furious, his face carved from marble. He puts both hands on Yejun's broad chest and shoves him, sending Yejun reeling backward.

"Don't fucking touch him," Yoongi snarls. He's still standing in front of Jeongguk, incandescent with anger. Min Yoongi is not to be fucked with. After all this time, Jeongguk finally understands why.

"Don't touch him, don't even fucking look at him. Fuck off before I make your life really fucking difficult, you understand me?"

"What, is he your bitch boy?" spits Yejun. "Or are you his? Showing up on command like a fucking guard dog when five minutes ago Jeonggukie over here was gagging for my dick?"

"Okay, yeah, you've got five fucking seconds to clear out," says Yoongi. "Five—"

"Hyung," Jeongguk murmurs, "hyung, Yoongi, don't—"

"—four—"

Yejun advances on them, mouth twisted into something toothy and ugly. "He's not even worth the cost of his fucking drinks. I hope you know that, guard dog. Your bitch boy's nothing but a fucking cocktease."

"Three two fucking one," says Yoongi, and punches him.

A strange thing happens. It doesn't look like that strong of a punch—the angle is off, and Yoongi's hardly a seasoned street fighter—but Yejun howls, grabbing his face and staggering backward. When he straightens up, Jeongguk can see blood under his hands, fresh and dark, like a nosebleed but in the wrong spot.

The Jeongguk looks down and sees that Yoongi's got his car keys poking out from between his knuckles. Like homemade freaking Wolverine claws, holy shit.

"Run," says Yoongi. "Jeongguk, we've gotta get outta here before the fucking bouncer calls the cops, run—"

They run. Yoongi grabs Jeongguk's wrist with the hand not holding the car keys and pulls him in a sprint down the sidewalk, around the corner, another half a block down until finally, both gasping for breath, Jeongguk's stomach churning, they come to a stop in front of Yoongi's old Corolla.

"Get in," Yoongi says, glancing behind them. Nobody's there—they left Yejun on his knees in front of the club, clutching at his bloodied cheek. "Jeongguk, are you gonna puke?"

"No. Maybe." Jeongguk bends over, taking great gulps of cold air. "N-no, 'm good."

Yoongi opens the passenger door for him and helps him in, then circles around to the driver's side.
As he passes in front of the windshield, Jeongguk catches a glimpse of his face, lit up yellow by the streetlamps. Yoongi's eyes are wide, his jaw clenched, his lips pressed into a hard line. He slides into the driver's seat and shoves the keys into the ignition but doesn't turn the engine on. Just sits there, hunched over the wheel. His hands are shaking.

Now that they're safe and the adrenaline is beginning to leech out of his system, the full impact of what just happened hits Jeongguk like a baseball bat to the freaking skull. He covers his face with both hands, so full of horror and self-hatred that he can't even breathe, it's like his lungs have become the ruined lungs in anti-smoking ads, choked with thick black tar. Tonight was supposed to be about getting over Min Yoongi. Instead he's made Yoongi come rescue him, once again proving that Jeon Jeongguk is nothing but a dumb kid (not even worth the cost of his fucking drinks, Yejun sneered) who will never, ever have a shot at being anything but Yoongi's roommate's annoying friend. And—Yoongi punched Yejun, oh god, he punched him with his car keys and drew blood—

"Your hand," Jeongguk whispers from behind his own hands. "Your—your hand, lemme see it."

He leans across the center console and carefully pries Yoongi's fingers from the steering wheel. His knuckles look okay. Nothing is bruised or swollen; the keys must have taken the brunt of the punch. Jeongguk turns Yoongi's hand over in his own, so gentle, aware that it probably hurts like hell to punch someone even if you do have brass knuckles.

"What're you doing," Yoongi says quietly. He still hasn't taken his forehead off the wheel. He still hasn't looked at Jeongguk, not once.

"I used to do taekwondo," Jeongguk says, equally hushed in the silence of the car. "Punching someone doesn't work like, um, like in the movies. You can break your hand easy."

"Didn't break my hand."

Right. Jeongguk takes the hint and pulls away, flushed with shame.

Yoongi must be so pissed at him.

He lets the silence stretch out for another unbearable minute before he finally breaks. "I'm so, so sorry," he whispers, hiding his face against the car window. The glass is cool and damp with condensation, soothing his overheated skin. "Yoongi, I'm so sorry. I can't believe you had to see that. I can't believe I called you. I swear, I meant to call Tae, I was just so—so freaked out, I must've—"

"Jeongguk."

Jeongguk's mouth snaps shut.

"I'm not mad at you," Yoongi says evenly. "Not even a little. But Jeongguk, you have bite marks on your neck." His knuckles turn bone-white on the steering wheel. "I'm trying to take deep breaths and find my fucking zen before I go back there and ruin the other side of that shithead's face."

Jeongguk is stunned speechless.

"Not mad at you," Yoongi repeats. "Glad you called me. Fuck. 'M really glad you called me."

"I wasn't just using him for drinks," says Jeongguk. For some reason, he needs Yoongi to know that. "I—I don't do that kind of thing."

"Jesus, kid. I know you don't. Even if you did, it's no excuse to touch you like that." Yoongi straightens up, scrubbing a hand over his face. "He didn't...he didn't do anything more 'n leave his
fucking dental records on your neck, did he? Like. He didn't...?"

"No. He, um. He kind of—groped me a bit. Um, like, touching my—yeah. But that's all."

Yoongi takes a deep breath through his nose.

"Hyung?" Jeongguk says softly.

"Yeah?"

"Can we go home?" The word *home* makes his eyes burn again, makes his throat go thick. "Um, I'd really like to—take a shower."

"Yeah. Shit, yeah, of course." Yoongi turns the keys and the car lights up, a spaceship dashboard, all glowy and blurring through Jeongguk's tears. "Yeah, Jeongguk-ah, let's get you home."

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After he's taken a long, scalding shower with the water hot enough to turn him pink all over, and after he's brushed his teeth three times and rinsed with mouthwash twice, and after he's accepted hugs from a stricken-looking Taehyung and a quietly murderous Jimin, and after Taehyung has lent him a pair of sweatpants and a soft, oversized sleep shirt—after all that, Jeongguk pads down the little hallway to Yoongi's room. The door is cracked open. Yoongi is sitting on the edge of his bed, staring down at his hands. He hasn't even taken off his boots or jacket.

"Hyung?" Jeongguk says. "Can I come in?"

Yoongi nods.

Jeongguk slips inside, closing the door behind him. He walks over and sinks down onto the bed beside Yoongi, a few careful inches between them.

"Can I sleep in here tonight?" he asks softly.

Yoongi blinks, maybe surprised, but nods again.

So Jeongguk lets himself tip sideways, stretching out on the side of the bed closest to the wall. Yoongi gets up for a minute to change into his pajamas and brush his teeth, and then he's back, tugging the blankets up to cover Jeongguk's body, climbing into bed beside him. Turning off the light. The darkness settles over them like another blanket, heavy and warm. They are facing each other: Jeongguk with his back to the wall, Yoongi with his back to the room, curled toward each other like parentheses, or like cupped hands.

"Yoongi-hyung," Jeongguk whispers into the quiet. "Thank you."

"No," Yoongi says roughly. "Don't thank me. I'm sorry for making you think I was pissed at you. I wasn't. And I'm—I'm sorry I hit him. Heard you tell me not to. Didn't listen."

"It's okay. I...," Jeongguk bites his bottom lip. "I think he deserved it."

"He did. Absolutely he deserved it, he deserved more than that. But. Don't forgive people who don't listen to your words, Jeongguk-ah. I should've listened to you."
"Hyung."

"Seriously."

Yoongi's hand hovers over Jeongguk's face, a black shape in the darkness. It takes a moment for Jeongguk to realize he's waiting for permission to touch. So Jeongguk nudges his head up against Yoongi's palm, and Yoongi lets out a shivering breath and runs his fingers through Jeongguk's wet bangs, brushing them out of his eyes. His fingertips run from Jeongguk's temple to the curve of his ear, impossibly sweet, so sweet and tender that it hurts, it aches, it is a sharp thing caught in Jeongguk's throat. This boy in front of him is such a sweet, kind boy, even when he talks mean and punches hard and disappears into his own head. Even when he rolls his eyes and takes refuge in record stores and raps like he's fighting the whole damn world. He raps like he's fighting the whole damn world but he runs his fingers through Jeongguk's hair just as gently and awkwardly as he did the very first time, in this same bed, earbuds tangled between them. It hurts to love him this much. Jeongguk is too small to fit all this big love inside him.

He closes his eyes when Yoongi's thumb traces over his cheekbone.

"Always call me, Jeongguk-ah," Yoongi murmurs into the soft space between them. "Okay? Can you promise me that?"

"Okay," says Jeongguk. "I promise."

"Good."

"But—but you have to promise too," says Jeongguk, and he doesn't even know what he's saying, it doesn't even make sense, but it feels important. "You have to call me too. Or—Tae, or Namjoon, or anyone, I guess. But you have to call. Promise me, hyung."

They stare at each other. It's dark enough that Jeongguk can't make out most of Yoongi's features, but he can still see those sharp, pretty eyes.

"Okay, kid," Yoongi says eventually. "I promise."

"Thank you," Jeongguk breathes.

Then he scoots forward and presses his face into Yoongi's chest, nose all shoved up against Yoongi's bony sternum. Jeongguk burrows as close as possible, pushing their bodies together. Twisting his fingers into the front of Yoongi's T-shirt. He breathes in, filling his lungs with Min Yoongi, and wants absurdly to laugh at himself. It's not so easy to quit something this good.

Yoongi's arms wrap around him, pulling him even closer.

With Yoongi's hand stroking his spine and Yoongi's chest rising and falling under his cheek, Jeongguk feels so safe. He sleeps.

In the morning, there are two extra bodies in Yoongi's bed. Jeongguk wakes up with Taehyung's hair in his mouth, and Jimin has somehow managed to wedge himself into the tiny gap of space between Jeongguk and the wall to plaster himself up against Jeongguk's back. It's a veritable puppy pile.
Taehyung is asleep, but Jimin is awake; Jeongguk can feel his eyelashes fluttering. And Yoongi, who is trapped under Taehyung's noodly body, is wide awake.

Jeongguk can't help but crack a smile when he sees the look of pained resignation on Yoongi's face. Taehyung cuddles people like the Kraken cuddles pirate ships. There's no escape.

"Hi," Jimin whispers into Jeongguk's shoulder blades, and Yoongi's eyes immediately flick over to Jeongguk's face. "You awake, Jeonggukie?"

"Yeah," Jeongguk whispers back. As if sensing his voice, Taehyung rolls over—nearly elbowing Yoongi in the nose—and flings one arm over Jeongguk's waist, snuffling in his sleep like a big dog.
"When did you guys get here?"

"Well, the current time is ass o'clock," Yoongi answers for Jimin. "So, sometime before that."

"You love and adore us," says Jimin.

Yoongi grunts.

They go quiet again after that. Now more awake than not, Jeongguk blinks in the gray morning light filtering in around the edges of Yoongi's blackout curtains. It can't be much later than seven a.m. He lies there, all warm and cozy between Taehyung and Jimin, and lets himself remember, slowly and in small pieces, what happened last night.

Then he focuses on the sound of Jimin's breathing, how it grows slow and heavy with sleep. He focuses on the weight of Taehyung's arm across his ribs. And he focuses on the way Yoongi looks in the morning, half conscious, his blond hair paler and his skin peach-gold.

Every so often, Yoongi cracks one eye open and glances over at Jeongguk. Every single time Jeongguk looks back at him steadily till Yoongi looks away.

They all surface for good around ten-thirty, and Yoongi insists on making breakfast. Which really means going out to the corner store and buying breakfast, because everyone in this apartment in a terrible heathen with no basic life skills, except of course Jimin, but then again a kale smoothie and a chunk of plain salmon is not exactly Jeongguk's idea of a hearty Saturday morning meal. So.

Jeongguk tags along with Yoongi to the corner store. He's not sure why, but right now the idea of leaving Yoongi's side even for ten minutes makes him anxious. So he scampers along downstairs and out into the fresh morning, teasing Yoongi by walking ahead and then making a show of waiting for Yoongi Of The Short Legs to catch up with him only to run away again, cackling. Yoongi's eyes are glaring but his mouth is smiling, so it's okay. And when they get to the corner store it's Jeongguk's job to carry the basket and Yoongi's job to put things in it, and Jeongguk whines a little about being used as a pack mule but really he doesn't mind because he likes feeling useful, and he likes walking together with Yoongi under the buzzing fluorescents, watching Yoongi deliberate over store brand vs. name brand even if the price difference is like, 500 won.

He keeps humming under his breath and Yoongi keeps shooting him little looks but doesn't tell him to stop, so Jeongguk does not.
It feels weird, being this—happy? content? hyperactive? the morning after a bad and scary thing happened to him. Maybe he should feel worse than he does. Maybe he should feel angry or gross or sad. He does feel all those things, but it's sediment. A thin vein of dark mud in the riverbed. Most of him is water, crashing, racing forward, happy to be okay and here with Yoongi buying kimbap and banana milk on a nice April morning.

In the snacks aisle, an old woman stares at Jeongguk for a long time with a pinched, narrow look on her face. It's not until Yoongi is tugging him away, shooting a dirty look over his shoulder, that Jeongguk remembers his neck is still covered with bruises and bite marks.

He feels less happy after that.

But Yoongi buys him shrimp snacks and Naruto gummies and a can of fancy vanilla coffee, and Jeongguk smiles at him, small and shaky but still there, and Yoongi squeezes his shoulder.

When Jeongguk gets anxious, his heart shrivels up into a wrinkled thing like a dried plum. Sometimes it's hard to breathe life and swelling color back into it again. Sometimes it's not very hard at all.

"A feast!" Taehyung says grandly as Jeongguk dumps the grocery bags out over the kitchen table. Kimbap, banana milk, apple fritters, fat little clementines because why not. "Bless you, my sons." At Yoongi's look, he corrects himself. "My son and my tiny, tiny grandpa."

"Height joke, how original," says Yoongi. "How come you never tease Jimin about being short?"

"Because I'm scared of Jimin," says Taehyung.

"Because I'm not short," says Jimin at the same time. "I'm a growing boy."

"You're twenty-one."

"I'm a late bloomer."

"Actually, some men do keep growing until they hit twenty-seven or so," says Taehyung through a mouthful of fritter. "One day Jimin could conceivably tower over us all."

Jimi sticks his tongue out at Yoongi. "That's right."

"Don't hold your breath," says Yoongi, sharing a look with Jeongguk over the carton of banana milk. "I think you're stuck down here with me forever."

There are worse places to be, Jeongguk thinks.

Kim Namjoon is a lot of things (brilliant, dorky, super nice, someone who can be trusted with your
"You're my hero," Jeongguk tells him, collapsing face-first onto his calculus textbook. "I would die for you, like, without hesitation. I would take eighty-seven thousand bullets for you."

"Thanks," says Namjoon. "But it's really not a big deal."

Jeongguk stares up at him. "Hyung, I think I actually understand logarithms now. Trust me, that's a big deal. You're a gentleman and a scholar, literally, and I would fistfight a Category 5 kaiju for you."

"I appreciate that, Jeongguk," says Namjoon, even though he clearly has no idea what a kaiju is. "And I'm glad I could help, but you should also give yourself some credit. You've obviously been studying hard. You're gonna ace your final, I promise."

Kim Namjoon: gentleman, scholar, wingless angel. A majestic redwood of a man. Jeongguk is maybe a tiny bit in love with him.

"Hyung," he says before he can talk himself out of it, lifting his head off his textbook. "Can I ask you something?"

"Go for it," says Namjoon.

Jeongguk glances around. Finals are next week so the library is pretty packed, but all the students sitting at the study tables around them are wearing headphones or are totally focused on their books and laptops. Nobody's paying any attention to Jeongguk and Namjoon. Which, yeah, it's not like anyone would actually eavesdrop, but still. Jeongguk is paranoid. He feels awkward enough asking for Namjoon's advice on something unrelated to calculus.

He looks back at Namjoon, who is waiting patiently for him to speak.

God. This is so weird. But Jeongguk is pretty used to being weird.

"Okay," he says, squaring his shoulders. "How do you get more mature?"

"Mature? Like—in general, as a human being?"

"Yes."

"Huh," says Namjoon. And this, this right here is why Namjoon is the best: he's not laughing. He's just leaning back in his chair and adjusting his glasses and taking Jeongguk's question very seriously, like they're equals. "To be honest, I don't know if I'm the person to ask," he says. "I don't feel very mature like, 90% of the time. I make a lot of mistakes, and I always try to learn from them, but I'm definitely still growing. Just like you."

Jeongguk groans. "That was the most mature thing I've ever heard."

"Okay, okay. Well." Namjoon drums his fingers on the tabletop, thinking. "I guess...I guess growing is like, the main part. And I don't just mean growing older—you can't control that. I mean growing in the things you can control. Like learning from your mistakes, and paying attention to the people around you and how you can help them, and having empathy for people who are different than you. And being cognizant of your life? Like, really making an effort to experience things actively instead of passively."

"What do you mean, actively?"
"I mean, like, assuming you don't die in a freak accident at twenty-five, you're looking at a good eighty years on this planet. Those years are going to happen to you no matter what. You can't control that. The only thing you can control is your awareness of them. You can make the choice, every single day, to be conscious of the world around you and the people living in it. You know? Like, you can absolutely just let those eighty years happen to you, safely and quietly, without letting things affect you or letting yourself affect things. But you can also make the choice to be an active participant in your own life. Even though it means you are going to make a mess and fuck up sometimes and possibly hurt people and open yourself up to being hurt. Even though it's hard and scary and embarrassing. The only way to truly experience the beautiful things is to truly experience the terrible things."

"Oh," says Jeongguk.

"So yeah," says Namjoon. "I try really hard, every single day, to exist with awareness. I try to be honest about my emotions. I try to admit when I'm wrong, even though I hate being wrong, and then I try to do better in the future. I try to be open with people, because I think the world would be a better place if everyone was more open with each other, and like, be the change you wish to see or whatever."

They're quiet for a moment. Jeongguk fiddles with the string of his hoodie.

"Does that make sense?" Namjoon says eventually.

"Yeah," says Jeongguk. "It really does."

The next day, Jeongguk meets Yoongi at the radio station. It's finally time to start recording vocals for the song Yoongi is producing, the slow lovely one that sounds like swells of ocean.

He picks up coffee on the way, an americano for Yoongi and a caramel latte for himself, because—well, because the things beneath his skin are buzzing and the air feels weighty and static like a storm is coming and he needs some liquid courage but it's a Wednesday morning so that liquid is gonna have to be coffee.

Also, he didn't sleep much last night.

Inside the station Jeongguk says hello to the receptionist, who recognizes him at this point and doesn't make him sign in, and heads down the hallway to Studio B. His stomach feels weird, but it's not the normal anxiety-weird. More like pre-show jitters. It feels like his stomach is a lump of clay on a potter's wheel, spun around and shaped by invisible hands.

He stops in front of the door to Studio B.

Takes a deep breath.

Knocks.

Two seconds later, Yoongi's opening the door.

"I smell coffee," he says. "Did you bring me coffee?"
"Yup," says Jeongguk, stepping neatly around him into the cramped, dusty studio. "Decaf cinnamon bun latte with two pumps of vanilla, right?"

"I know you're only saying that to antagonize me, but the word 'decaf' is not permitted in my studio. I will kick you out."

"First 'hella,' now 'decaf.' This is an infringement upon my rights."

"Your vocabulary is an infringement upon my happiness," says Yoongi, making grabby hands for the americano. "Give."

Jeongguk passes it over and takes a seat by the keyboard. Yoongi sighs, wrapping his hands around the hot paper cup. (His extremities are perpetually cold, even in May. Poor circulation.) He takes a sip, eyes closed, and Jeongguk uses this moment to stare at him desperately, with intent, committing to memory every single aspect of this Min Yoongi: the messy hair, the dark roots, the flush in his cheeks, the redness of his knuckles. The way his fine-boned self is swallowed in a black hoodie. The headphones around his neck, the scuffs on his Docs, the rips in his jeans. He's beautiful, and his heart is beautiful, and he's worth the terrible things. He is.

"So for today I figured we'd just record a rough guiding track," says Yoongi, rolling his chair over to the main monitor. "Something to sing along to when you're recording for real. It'll be really lowkey, no pressure, just getting used to the song and the process. Sound good?"

Jeongguk opens his mouth but nothing comes out.

He clutches his cup of coffee, suddenly paralyzed.

The pause goes on for too long and Yoongi glances over at him. "Yo. Earth to Jeongguk-ah. Guiding track, yes or no."

"Um," Jeongguk forces out, "um, hyung, I—have to, um, I have to—before we start, I...," he loses the ability to look at Yoongi and instead hunches over, putting his coffee on the carpet by his feet. "Hyung."

"Jeongguk-ah?"

He shakes his head. Oh god, he cannot cry right now. He refuses to cry. Jeon Jeongguk is going to do this with dignity, goddammit. He can cry all he wants when he gets home, he can eat ice cream from the carton and bury himself in takeout and video games, but not right now.

"Hey," says Yoongi, soft and worried, and then his boots appear in Jeongguk's line of vision; he's dragged his rolly chair over so he's right in front of Jeongguk. "Hey, kid, what's wrong?"

"Kid. It's becoming increasingly obvious that Jeongguk will not make it out of this with his dignity or his heart intact, and there's a not-insignificant part of him that wants to quit now, cut his losses, keep his mouth shut and continue living quietly. But there's another part of him—the stupid part, the reckless part, the part responsible for every bone he's ever broken and every brave thing he's ever done; the part that made him leave Busan for Seoul and take up a double major and introduce himself to a guy named Kim Taehyung—there's another part of him that says live loud, make a mess, fuck it up, get hurt, grow, and Jeongguk is making the choice, he's making the choice.

"I'm not a kid," he says, still hunched over, curled up tight like a roly-poly bug. "Hyung, I'm not a kid."
"Jeongguk-ah—"

"Please don't talk for a second," Jeongguk interrupts. "Please just let me get through this, and then you can talk. Okay?"

A faint rustle as Yoongi nods.

"I need to say something before we start doing the song," says Jeongguk to his kneecaps. "It really can't wait, because music is supposed to be honest and I haven't been honest, I haven't been honest with you for a really long time, and—and I want to fix that. And, um, do better in the future." He swallows hard. "Um, okay, so. I'm just gonna—yeah."

He wants to look up at Yoongi. He wants to see Yoongi's face. But he can't move right now, he cannot physically move, so he keeps staring at the ugly gray carpet and Yoongi's beat-up oxbloods.

"Yoongi-hyung," says Jeongguk, loud and clear, "I like you. I really, really like you. And I wanted to tell you because, um, honesty and personal growth and stuff, but also—I wanna make it clear that I don't expect anything from you. It's fine that you don't like me back, it really is. I want to keep being friends. If you need some space after this I totally understand and I won't be upset if you'd rather have Suran do the vocals, but if you're not too uncomfortable around me I would love to still do the song together. Because it really is a great song and I already memorized the lyrics. Um. Okay, I think that's everything. In conclusion, I like you so much. The end."

He takes a short, gasping breath, because he said most of that in a rush without breathing at all. The noise is sudden and too harsh in the ringing silence. Jeongguk squeezes his eyes shut, bracing himself for the painful bit.

Fingertips under his chin. Jeongguk raises his head, but he doesn't even get a chance to look at Yoongi's expression before Yoongi is leaning in, pressing their foreheads together, cupping Jeongguk's face with both hands.

"You like me?" he rasps. "You like me, Jeongguk-ah?"

"Y-yes?" Jeongguk says, shaky breath against Yoongi's lips. He doesn't understand what's going on, Yoongi's face is so close, their noses are brushing. "I like you, I'm sorry."

"Jeon Jeongguk," says Yoongi, "holy fuck, kid, I fucking love you."

Jeongguk jerks away. Yoongi lets go of him instantly, hands falling to his lap, but his wide, shocked eyes are still zeroed in on Jeongguk's face. His chest is heaving; he looks wild.

"I don't," says Jeongguk, "I don't, um."

Yoongi's face screws up almost like he's going to cry, but that's not right, why would he cry. "Jeongguk-ah," he says, and his voice cracks on Jeongguk's name. "I am neck-deep in love with you, what the fuck."

"What—"

"I've been writing about you for months," says Yoongi. "I wrote a song about your eyes and I wanna see you dance to it, I wanna see you do everything, oh my god, literally fuckin' everyone knows I'm in love with you, Tae and Jimin have been giving me endless shit."

"What," Jeongguk gasps out, "what, what, are you joking, please don't—please, hyung, this is really mean—"
"I'd never be mean to you," Yoongi says. "Not for real. Jeongguk-ah."

Jeongguk shakes his head hard. He's overwhelmed, halfway to panicking. He doesn't understand.

"Jeongguk-ah, can I touch you?"

"Okay," Jeongguk whispers.

This time, Yoongi holds his face so gently. His fingertips brush the hinge of Jeongguk's jaw; his thumbs rest on Jeongguk's cheekbones. The callouses on his palms are the lightest kind of rough on Jeongguk's skin.

"I wasn't gonna say anything," Yoongi murmurs. He meets Jeongguk's eyes and his mouth twists into something self-deprecating. "After—you know, that night—I figured the last thing you needed was another fuckin' guy all over you."

Jeongguk's eyes widen. "You wanna be all over me?"

"Emotionally," Yoongi clarifies. "In an emotional sense. Um."

They stare at each other. Jeongguk isn't sure whose face is more red. It actually might be Yoongi.

"I—I also want you all over me," Jeongguk tells him. "Emotionally."

Yoongi coughs. "Okay."

"Okay," says Jeongguk. Then he frowns. "You're not like him, hyung. You know that, right? You're not like him at all. I trust you, I know you're not gonna hurt me. I—I love you."

"I thought you said you like me."

"Well, that was before. I was younger then. I didn't know you were gonna say it back."

"Then you're dumb," says Yoongi, his dark eyes flicking across Jeongguk's face. "You're really dumb, Jeongguk-ah," he breathes, so sweet and quiet with love, and it sounds like you're beautiful, you're incredible.

"Please kiss me," says Jeongguk.

Yoongi leans in.

The last time someone kissed Jeongguk it was horrible and forceful and too hard, too wet, and the hands framing his face were only there to keep him from running. Here, with Yoongi, it could not be more different. Yoongi leans in slowly. His hands on Jeongguk's face are so careful, like he is handling something precious. Like he's resting his fingers on piano keys, feather-light, in the moments before he begins to play. The potential of pressure; the potential of music. Jeongguk closes his eyes.

The first kiss is barely a kiss. Just Yoongi’s lips brushing over the corner of Jeongguk’s mouth, lingering for half a moment, pulling away. Not too far away, though—he’s still close enough that Jeongguk can feel the flutter of his breath, hear the click of his throat when he swallows. Then Yoongi kisses the other corner of Jeongguk’s mouth, thumbs smoothing over Jeongguk’s cheekbones where the heat is, the flush of pink. This time, he only pulls away long enough to take a breath before leaning in again, pressing a soft kiss to Jeongguk’s bottom lip, taking it into his mouth and releasing it warmer and wetter. In Jeongguk’s mind, his mouth now holds the shine of Yoongi’s
kiss, a fucking pearl.

“Yoongi,” he murmurs, curling his fingers into the front of Yoongi’s hoodie. “Yoongi, kiss me for real.”

“Yeah,” says Yoongi dreamily, and finally fits their mouths together.

Jeongguk sighs shakily into the kiss, overwhelmed with the fullness of Yoongi’s mouth under his own, the shape of it, the flicker of breath. He doesn’t move for a second, everything inside him realigning in the wake of this strange and stunning knowledge: this is how Min Yoongi kisses, this is how he tastes, this is how his palms feel against your skin when he is holding you. Then Jeongguk presses forward, turning the kiss into something firm and purposeful. He works their lips together, kissing Yoongi’s mouth over and over, closing the distance between them again and again and again. Yoongi kisses him back. He kisses Jeongguk’s chin, his ear, drops kisses all over his face and then moves down, down, down to press his open mouth to the column of Jeongguk’s throat, oh god. Jeongguk tosses his head back, gasping up at the ceiling. Yoongi’s mouthing at his pulse point and it feels so good, so good, Jeongguk is making little noises, he can’t help it, he’s shivering all over, thank fucking god the studio is soundproofed. He tugs at the collar of Yoongi’s hoodie and Yoongi takes the hint, surging up to catch Jeongguk’s mouth again, kissing him hard. Jeongguk parts his lips at the first press of Yoongi’s tongue, opening up for him, rolling their tongues together—

They topple sideways off their chairs.

“Oh,” Jeongguk gasps, back hitting the floor, and Yoongi lands on top of him, elbows planted on either side of Jeongguk’s head. “Oh, hyung.”

Yoongi stares down at him, breathing hard. His face is flushed, his lips swollen. Jeongguk probably looks the same.

“I don’t think I can record today,” Jeongguk blurts out.

“…What?”

“I—I don’t think I’ll be able to calm down.”

“Same,” says Yoongi. His voice is even rougher than usual, almost hoarse. Jeongguk did that. “Don’t really wanna take my hands off you for the next twenty-four hours, if we’re being honest.”

Jeongguk nods so hard that his head swims a little. “Good plan.”

“Hell,” says Yoongi, and lowers his head to kiss Jeongguk again, slow and dragging. They kiss like that for several long, lazy moments, and then Yoongi pulls back far enough to meet Jeongguk’s eyes. “You okay?” he asks.

“Yeah,” says Jeongguk. He grins up at Yoongi, his whole face crinkling with it, big and dumb. The shock has begun to fade into a brilliant golden happiness, glowing inside him like Christmas lights. “Are you okay?”

Yoongi laughs his beautiful choking-cat laugh and then presses his mouth to Jeongguk’s forehead, his eyelids, the tip of his nose. “I am fucking wonderful, Jeon Jeongguk,” he says, and laughs again. “Never been better.”

“That’s cheesy.”

“Yup. Do you like it?”
“I do,” Jeongguk whispers, and drags him down again.

jeongguk >> group chat: “les tres musketeers”

[IMAGE SENT]

lizard boi
wait
W A IT
DOES THIS MEAN

the smolest
OMG???

lizard boi
ASKJFLAKSJFLKASJFL;KASJFL;KAJSD
KLASJFLJARNFFJ
SJDJLSNN
SDN L

the smolest
STOP I’M CRYING YOU GUYS LOOK SO HAPPY

lizard boi
JS FLSLN
SND DSAH;’LKS
SLFJFNJLDJG
F LJ

the smolest
I THINK YOU BROKE TAE

lizard boi
YES HELLO IS THIS THE LOUVRE??? YEAH U GUYS CAN GO AHEAD AND THROW THE MONA LISA IN THE GARBAGE BC I HAVE A PHTOTO OF JEON JEONGGUGK KISSING MIN YOONGI ON HIS ACTUAL FACE AND THATS THE ONLY ART HUMANITY NEEDS

the smolest
JEONGGUK I’M LITERALLY CRYING
JEONGGUK

lizard boi
IM ?>?? GONNA EXPLXODE

the smolest
JEONGGUK WHERE DID YOU GO
ARE YOU BUSY MAKING OUT WITH YOONGI

lizard boi
I BET HE IS
UGH
U GET A PASS JUST THIS ONCE MY FRIEND

the smolest
BECAUSE WE LOVE YOU
AND WE VALUE YOUR HAPPINESS!!

jeongguk
hahaha
thanks guys

the smolest
HE LIVES

lizard boi
JEEOBNGUJKK
MY SWEET BABY
ARE U HAPPY??

jeongguk
yeah
yeah, i really am.
:)

[End]

End Notes

(yoongi's post-grad roommate is seokjin and that's the story of how jin and joon get married)

my twitter
edit: jeongguk's "sad love songs for 2 a.m." playlist now exists. enjoy.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!